

A FALLING OUT

by Christine Kallman
(excerpt)

Characters

PHIL DOOLEY	Acts as puppeteer “Sheriff Ruff” on a TV program for kids at a small local TV studio; lives with his Aunt Elma. Male age 24.
ROCHELLE DOOLEY	Phil’s sister; high school senior, age 18.
AUNT ELMA	Aunt to Phil and Rochelle--she raised them. Writes a column for the local newspaper. Age 52.
TOM DECOUX	Peace activist & university student. Male age 20.
SERGEANT MCKENZIE	Best friend and military buddy of Phil’s deceased father; suffering from multiple health problems. Male, age 51.
NUSSMAN	Phil’s boss and station manager. Male, age 45.
WEXMAN	Cameraman at the station; likes to stir things up. Male, age 32.
Walk-on roles:	
MISS KITTY	Woman dressed somewhat like the Miss Kitty puppet.
PESKY PEDRO	Man dressed somewhat like the Pesky Pedro puppet.

Setting

October 1962. A small city in southeast Iowa. In Elma's living room, in a small local television studio, on farmland near an armaments plant, and in Elma's expansive back yard next to a cornfield. The settings do not have to be fully realized. Projected images may be used to depict some of the historic events and character memories referenced in the script. If used, the images should be projected onto a textured backdrop and will appear somewhat darkened or obscured, sometimes barely visible. The back yard scenes are open, clear, and mostly bare with emphasis on the sky. Sometimes a moon is called for, or suggestion of a moon.

Historical Notes:

The town of Gladfield, Iowa and its armaments plant are fictional. However, an actual armaments plant exists in Southeast Iowa. The Iowa Army Ammunition Plant (IAAP) manufactured explosive components for nuclear weapons and performed the final assembly of the weapons during the years 1949 to 1975. There is no indication that any protest or unrest took place at the IAAP in October of 1962, or any time for that matter (although in recent years workers of that era have come forward to try to gain compensation for radiation-related illnesses). However, during the Cuban Missile Crisis many protests took place across the country by groups such as Women Strike for Peace and SANE (National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy). At the University of Minnesota, professors who organized a march were the target of raw eggs and verbal abuse from some in a crowd of 3,000.

SCENE ONE

Monday, October 22, 1962. In Elma's expansive back yard bordering on a cornfield. ROCHELLE lies on her back looking up at the sky. PHIL, with his ukulele, sings a simple folk song.

PHIL

ONE BIG MOON LIGHTIN' UP THE SKY
 SPREADIN' ITS TUNE BOTH FAR AND WIDE
 ON THIS LAND HERE AND ON THE OTHER SIDE
 HANGIN' UP THERE TO BE OUR GUIDE
 I GOTTA ADMIT WHEN I'M IN YOUR BIND
 I GOT NOTHIN' BUT LOVIN' ON MY MIND
 SO SHINE YOUR BEAM ON THE GIRL I'LL FIND
 YOU ONE AND ONLY MOON

PHIL, cont'

PEOPLE OF EV'RY SINGLE CREED
 EAST AND WEST AND IN BETWEEN
 LIKE THE TIDES, ARE PULLED BY YOUR GRAVITATION
 TO HEAVENLY BLISS AND EARTHLY ELATION
 A COUPLE HIGH IN THE HIMALAYA
 SWOONS TO THE LIGHT THAT'LL SOON CONVEY A
 GLOW ON THE LOVERS OF KAMEHAMEHA
 YOU ONE AND ONLY MOON

Cut to black. Lights up on Elma's living room, a simply furnished room with couch, chairs, TV, and a small desk with a typewriter. There is a small U.S. flag in a stand on the desk. Displayed are some memorabilia from the WWII military service of Elma's brother (Phil and Rochelle's father).

(ELMA enters with the evening newspaper. She is immaculately dressed, as usual. From a hidden place she takes an ashtray and some cigarettes and lights up. She unfolds the newspaper, looking for something.)

ELMA

Sunny Side . . Sunny Side . . [finding the column] Here. [reading] "Keep on the Sunny Side. Hello Neighbor! Say, the other day I was driving home from a little shopping trip to Davenport--" What?! Can't we get a decent proofreader down there?! [correcting and going on] *Davenport*. "So I was coming into Gladfield from the north. And you know there's a little rise right before you get to town, then you come up over the ridge and see our little burg sitting just as nice as you please in a sea of cornfields. I stopped my car on the spot and got out to take a look. It was so beautiful, so peaceful, just like the Promised Land must have looked to Joshua when he got the first peek at it. Was Joshua the first into the Promised Land? Help, Pastor Loftenacher! Anyway, I was thinking how our little town is just the picture of peace. From the fire station down at the end of Main Street all the way out to the Army Munitions Plant, things were as calm as could be. We're just peaceful folk, aren't we? Do you know that every letter that is canceled in the Gladfield Post Office is stamped with the words, 'Pray for Peace'? Hope you all have a peaceful week. Signed, your neighbor, Elma Dooley."

(ELMA'S phone rings. She looks at it but doesn't pick it up as it rings several more times.)

(Cut to black. Lights up on PHIL in the KWUD television studio. A cheap backdrop of plywood, paneling, etc., with crude letters KWUD-TV hung on it. This is a very low-budget operation. PHIL is wearing part of his costume as Sheriff Ruff for his kid's show "Frontier Funtime.")

PHIL

(continuing the same song)

SHINING BRIGHT AND STEADY LIKE THE WAX JOB ON MY CHEVY
BLOOMIN' LIKE CLOVER, LIKE THIS REFRAIN RUNNING OVER AND OVER
AND OVER

NUSSMAN

(off)

Dooley! One minute to air time!

(PHIL ceremoniously puts on his western hat and dog ears. He is also wearing a vest and sheriff's badge. PHIL picks up two puppets. One is a kitty-cat dressed as an attractive frontier woman (Kitty). The other is a scruffy and nasty-looking "Mexican" coyote with a sombrero and poncho, droopy mustache, and eye patch (Pesky Pedro). PHIL will speak for both puppets, and speaks himself as Sheriff Ruff.)

PHIL

(as Kitty; stereotypically frightened female)

Oh Sheriff Ruff! Help me! Help me! That nasty old villain Pesky Pedro is after me again!

(as Pesky Pedro, with a stereotypical "Mexican" accent)

You gave promise, Senorita.

(as Kitty)

Promise? What promise?

(as Pesky Pedro)

Last night. Under the moon. You no remember?

(as Kitty)

He's lying!

(as Pesky Pedro)

You the one lyin' . . . down, that is!

(as Kitty)

Help! Sheriff Ruff!

(as Sheriff Ruff)

I'll save you Miss Kitty!

WEXMAN

(having entered soon enough to hear the above)

Hey Dooley. Smutting it up for the little boys and girls?

PHIL

It's a warm-up. What do you know about going on air?

NUSSMAN

(entering)

On camera Wexman!

(WEXMAN exits.)

We do the intro then cut right to the taped commercial. Five . . . four . . . three . . two . . . one . . . roll 'em!

(NUSSMAN exits. Lively Western music. PHIL brightens up for the camera and makes the puppets dance to the music. Canned laughter, slapstick, bells and whistles inserted at appropriate places.)

PHIL

(in his friendly good-but-dim-witted Sheriff Ruff the dog voice)

Hello boys and girls and welcome to Sheriff Ruff's Frontier Funtime coming to you from Gladfield, Iowa! This afternoon we're gonna have lots of fun in the Old West with Sheriff Ruff and all the gang! Today Pesky Pedro makes friends with the Comanches and tries to stake a claim on Farmer John's best farmland! But Sheriff Ruff, guardian of the right, takes care of Pesky Pedro and those pesky Indians. Ruff! Ruff! So stay tuned!

(Cut to black. Radio dance music WWII vintage, then lights up on ELMA's living room, where ELMA is smoking.)

RADIO ANNOUNCER VOICE

We interrupt this program to bring you an important message from President John F. Kennedy. The President will be speaking to us about the frightening developments taking place in Cuba. So stay tuned. *And* . . remember to smoke York Imperial Size Cigarette. York is longer than any other leading cigarette, so York travels the smoke farther, to improve smoking taste. York has no filter . . York uses its new length *instead* of a filter!

(ELMA flips off the radio, hides her cigarettes, and turns on the TV. Cut to black. Lights up on KWUD studio. PHIL and NUSSMAN and WEXMAN. NUSSMAN holds a news brief in his hand.)

NUSSMAN

Okay, Dooley. Let's try your chops on the real stuff.

PHIL

What is it?

NUSSMAN

Just over the wire. You're gonna read it on the air. I gotta run next door, try to find out more.

PHIL

Wait--

NUSSMAN

I'll be right back.

(NUSSMAN exits. The commercial comes to a close as PHIL studies the news brief.)

WEXMAN

(exiting to camera)

Don't panic, Dooley. Only twenty thousand viewers coming your way. Three . . . two . . . !

(PHIL is on air. PHIL stares, panic-stricken, into the camera for an extremely uncomfortable length of time. Then in a stage whisper:)

WEXMAN, cont'

Dooley! Say something!

PHIL

Uh . . . say . . . uh . . . say . . . [looking at the news brief] . . . Uh, the President . . . the President the President!

(Lights to black. Lights up on ELMA's living room. ELMA switches on the TV. Projection of JFK's TV address. Note: This is cut from the full length of the actual address, as per the video at americanrhetoric.com.)

JFK VOICE

Good evening, my fellow citizens: This Government, as promised, has maintained the closest surveillance of the Soviet military buildup on the island of Cuba. Within the past week, unmistakable evidence has established the fact that a series of offensive missile sites is now in preparation on that imprisoned island. The purpose of these bases can be none other than to provide a nuclear strike capability against the Western Hemisphere.

(Cut to black. Lights up on TOM outside ROCHELLE'S school. Same day. ROCHELLE enters with her school books.)

TOM

Hey! Do you want to help save the world from being destroyed by fanatical governments in a nuclear holocaust?

ROCHELLE

Maybe.

TOM

(handing her a flyer)

There's a protest Thursday night at the Army Munitions Plant.

ROCHELLE

Why?

TOM

Because they're fuckin' makin' nukes there, that's why!

ROCHELLE

Are you from the University?

TOM

Yep. You should come. It's gonna be a happenin'.

ROCHELLE

What do you mean they're making nukes?

TOM

Nuclear warheads. Like the kind that are flying in planes over our heads all the time. The kind that are pointed at innocent people in the Soviet Union.

ROCHELLE

I know what nukes are. I just didn't know they were making them here.

TOM

They don't want people to know.

ROCHELLE

We've been having drills at school. God I hate those. You have to get down under your desk on the filthy floor. My dress is always sliding up my legs.

TOM

Those drills are worthless. But we're gonna make 'em listen. We're meeting out at the county park this afternoon to plan our strategy. You should come!

ROCHELLE

I'm on my way to my accordion lesson.

TOM

If this breaks out there won't be any accordions left to play.

ROCHELLE

Plus, I don't have any way to get to the park.

TOM

Here's my car. Hop in.

(ROCHELLE and TOM exit. Lights down, then up on KWUD studio.)

NUSSMAN

(to PHIL)

I need someone who can read the stinkin' news briefs!

PHIL

Sorry Mr. Nussman.

NUSSMAN

You can do better!

PHIL

You're right. I hope you're right.

NUSSMAN

I'm tryin' to help you. The sponsors are getting tired of the kid's show.

PHIL

I'm working on some new material.

NUSSMAN

Things are heatin' up. People are gonna want special features. Civil defense, that type of thing. It's a crisis, damn it!

PHIL

If you'll tell me what you want, I'll try to do it.

NUSSMAN

Better yet you figure out what I want and just do it.

(Lights to black. End scene.)

SCENE TWO

(Later that evening. Lights up on ELMA'S front room. PHIL is lounging in front of the TV. He has the puppets on either hand. We hear sounds of *The Rifleman* show.)

PHIL

(as Miss Kitty, to the TV)

Lucas McCain, you're the handsomest man in the world. And the kindest.

(as Sheriff Ruff)

And the best shot with that rifle. [makes shooting sounds]

(as Miss Kitty)

I hope he doesn't take on that old scoundrel who wandered into town!

(as Pesky Pedro)

He will. Rifleman can't stand to look weak.

(as Miss Kitty)

Pow pow! Get him Lucas! You show him!

(as himself)

Not yet. It has to be set up proper. In *our* show Pesky Pedro--that sneak!--will doublecross Sheriff Ruff and help the stranger.

(as Pesky)

That what we did last week.

(as himself)

Oh. You're right. Then-- the stranger will abduct Miss Kitty and Sheriff Ruff will rescue her.

(as Miss Kitty)

That was the week before!

PHIL, cont'
(as himself)

Dad blast it you're right!

(ELMA enters. She has some bags of groceries. Her anxiety is evident at first, before she is able to hide it.)

ELMA
Phil! Phil! . . . Rochelle? . . . Where is everyone?!

PHIL
Aunt Elma! What is it? I'm here!

ELMA
Oh Phil! Where is Rochelle?

PHIL
I don't know.

ELMA
She should be home by now. Her lesson was over hours ago.

PHIL
Don't worry. She's alright. I read your column. Nice job. Just one typo. Daven-

ELMA
I saw it! [beat] Thompson Market was a madhouse. Everyone is stocking up. I dropped off a bag for the Fitzpatrick's and for poor Mrs. Day. She can't get out you know, with her leg. Let's get some news.

(ELMA turns the TV channel. Projection of 1962 Newsreels part 6.)

TV ANNOUNCER
Meanwhile the United States continues to reinforce its Cuban base at Guantanamo Bay, the naval depot that Castro wants the U.S. to give up. These marines have been assigned the job of protecting the base against any Cuban threats that might arise during the present crisis. They'll be on a 24-hour alert, our first line of defense. . . .

ELMA
Do you think Kennedy will invade Cuba?

PHIL
I have no clue.

ELMA

Will it come to war?

PHIL

How should I know?

TV ANNOUNCER VOICE

. . . Here for example is a medium-range ballistic missile base that has been labeled by these specialists. Suddenly the veil is torn from the Russian secret. Another photo revealed a surface-to-air missile assembly depot designed to supply the offensive sites. Russian technicians rip through heavy jungle growth to carve out air strips for high performance MIG-21 jets, a plane easily capable of strikes far into the United States. . . .

ELMA

You must realize-- Gladfield is certainly targeted.

PHIL

Why?

ELMA

Our munitions plant.

PHIL

You mean-- we could get blown up?!

ELMA

We'll be just fine. I don't think anything is going to happen. Anyway we'll stock our fallout shelter.

PHIL

We have a fallout shelter?

ELMA

Of sorts. The root cellar. Where I keep the canning jars and preserves. It has thick cement walls and I'm going to have a ventilation pipe put in. I'm sure we won't need it. But it's good to be prepared.

(ELMA looks again at the coverage on TV, then moves away. PHIL turns the TV to *The Rifleman* and sits down to watch.)

What we need in this day and age are some heroes.

PHIL

What did you say Aunt Elma?!

ELMA
(a little louder)

I said we need a hero!

PHIL

I can't hear *you*, either!

(ELMA turns off the TV.)

ELMA

Heroes! Like FDR . . . and those gallant men who fought for us in Europe and the Pacific! So many people are fooled by Kennedy.

PHIL

I voted for him.

ELMA

You voted for Kennedy?!

PHIL

Nineteen Sixty. "A Time for Greatness."

ELMA

The Bay of Pigs fiasco was no time of greatness. Mrs. Roosevelt says what Kennedy needs is less profile and more courage. But I suppose he'll do alright. Whatever happens, we should support our President.

PHIL

Can I please watch the end of *The Rifleman*? I need some ideas for my show tomorrow. How about this? [as Kitty] Help! Help! The sky is falling!!

ELMA

Phil, please! It's too much.

PHIL

Yeah I know. I'm thinking of quitting the station.

ELMA

Don't tell me that. Not now.

PHIL

I can always get a job at the plant.

ELMA

Think about your dad. He didn't give up. And here's the medal to prove it. I know it's a lot of work. But just keep at it. Things always work out. Where is Rochelle? Phil, would you go over to Mrs. Cran's and see if she knows where Rochelle is?

PHIL

How in the world would Mrs. Cran know where Rochelle is?

(Short pause. PHIL is watching the T.V. show. ELMA walks toward the door.)

Don't go, Aunt Elma. Rochelle will be here soon.

ELMA

Last night I had a dream. [beat] I was out on a long pier. There was a huge ship there, sitting in the night. And every deck was lit up bright with lights--you wouldn't believe the lights! And as I stood there, the captain of the ship came along and asked for my ticket. I said, "I don't have a ticket. I'm not going on any ship, no sir!" And he looked at me with a terrible sneer. Then I saw Rochelle climbing up the gangplank onto the ship. I called and called to her, but she couldn't hear me. And I couldn't move--you know how it is in dreams--so I couldn't get to her. They took the gangplank up and the ship pulled away!

END EXCERPT

www.christinekallman.com