

F+

(F-plus)

A Fun Farce of a Fantasy Film Fit for the entire Freakin Family!

by

Brett Paufler

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this is part of my
Broken Stories Unfinished Dreams
series

And as such, I never expect to finish it.

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###

Chapter 1 Peas Porridge

###

*Peas porridge hot,
Peas porridge cold,
Peas porridge in the pot
Nine days old.*

##

Paint the scene!
A fantasy adventure!
The depths of a dungeon!
Lava all around!
While Frank the Fearless Fighter...

“Stop playing with your food!”

###

The artsy transition, it can make or break your story: from lava to bubbling pea soup in a stainless steel cauldron (call it a pot) in one smooth effortless motion.

Frank (one of our leads) pauses to write the idea down in a notebook next to the stove before moving to adjust one of the many cameras capturing the action.

But one can get mired down in details. So, best to pull back a little and realize we are in a suburban kitchen. It's a nice kitchen. We know this because there are two separate ranges, both are in use, and filled to capacity with boiling pots: peas porridge the lot.

*Peas porridge hot,
Peas porridge cold,
Pear porridge in a pot that's going to take a chisel to clean
that sucker out,
When it gets to be nine days old.*

###

Frank is the father, the aforementioned Fearless Fighter (as symbolized by the sinking bits of ham in the pea soup). He has been spending the day perfecting his recipe.

*Peas here,
Peas there,
In this room,
There be peas everywhere!*

At the kitchen table his son Filbert reads a cheap knock-off of a Dr Seuss book.

*I do not like peas porridge hot.
I do not like peas porridge cold.
When you place 'that @#%!'* in front of me,
I'm going to toss the lot.*

* Though in truth, Dr Seuss may have opted for “green soup” in lieu of the forgoing. I guess there’s a reason his books sell better than mine.

###

Frank is married.
“Ahem!”
I’m sorry, wrong emphasis.
In a moment of weakness, Francine married frank.
“That’s better.”

Francine is sitting at the kitchen table. Of course, that doesn’t do the situation justice. Francine is wearing an evening gown -- some designer original. It’s blue. It’s sparkles. It’s amazingly clean considering the abandon with which young Filbert has been throwing food about the room.

But this is not the only odd thing about her appearance. No, I’m not talking about the jewels woven into her hair. (I’m going to have to assume that they’re fake). Nor her timeless beauty. (If she wasn’t married... if I wasn’t married... ah, but why tease ourselves thinking of that which cannot be) And though all of these things

catch the eye (nay, delight the eye with wild abandon), it is the fact that her chair (wooden, kitchen, boring, mundane) is haphazardly elevated high off the floor by a disorganized stack of books (light romances, mainly, but a few of my old titles mixed in as well as she said there weren't no better use for them) all forming a sort of imperial throne from which she can survey her kingdom, feed her son, and issue such royal decrees as the smoke in the distance might seem to require -- e.g. "You best not be burning my steak."

*Peas porridge hot,
Peas porridge cold,
If you know what's good for you,
You'll cook me a steak... with grilled onions... sautéed
mushrooms... along with a small salad... cheese on the side... fresh
rolls... green beans... oh, and one of those lemon meringues pies
that you do so well for desert...*

*Oh, and don't give me that look,
There's a reason I married a cook.*

###

Time for some action.
Or rather...
"A-a-a..."
"Action, everybody. Action."

The front doorbell rings, or that is to say, living in one of the those upscale houses with the four-car garage, swimming pool and barbecue pit in back complete with husband like material who is currently attending to the smoke and flames that emanate forthwith, the Fredericton's (as this fanciful family destined for fame and surplus toy merchandizing shall be called) also have one of those annoying alarm systems, so rather than ring, the front door goes, "The front door is now open," as Felicia enters the room.

My word, but that's a ghastly sentence. Bet you're glad you didn't have to diagram that sucker in 7th grade.

Meanwhile, the front door does its bit by saying its next line, "The front door is now closed," which means Felicia is now home from school.

Walking into the room (yeah, it's going to be another one of those sentences), Felicia hardly notices the place...

*That peas porridge on the floor,
That is going to smell,
When it gets to be nine days old...*

Her father out back battling the barbecue blaze as if he was trying to foreshadow some future showdown with a fire breathing dragon (and hey, wouldn't that be fun if he was), or her mother pretending to be Queen of all Suburbia, but rather than noticing any of this (because, hey, what's strange or out of normal there), Felicia tosses her backpack onto the floor, as she makes her way over to the stove, sticks her finger inside one of the big pot, takes it out, licks it clean, and asks (yes, in all seriousness, she asks), "So, what's for supper?"

Kids.

"P-p-p..." her father begins, as he walks back inside.

Of course, I probably should mention that he places a perfectly prepared plump-and-juicy portion of premium steak before Francine as he says this, so it shouldn't be too surprising (leastwise, not to me) when Felicia says, "Great! Steak."

"No, peas," her mother corrects.

"But?"

"You get peas."

"But?"

“P-p-p-peas,” Daddy-O exclaims merrily as he plops down a generous portion of green goop before her.

“But I like steak?”

“Probably should have thought before you decided to be Daddy’s Girl.” And then, in response to Filbert tossing the latest bowl of...

*Peas porridge,
I can't stand this stuff
And I'm not eating it anymore*

... onto the floor, Mommy-O coos sweetly, “Don’t worry, mommy will share her steak with you.”

“This is just great. Just great. The perfect end to the perfect day.”

“Glad to hear it, sweetheart.” I guess sarcasm is lost on some folks. “Oh, this steak is wonderful.”

###

But I do believe someone said something along the lines of (and here I quote), *The perfect end to the perfect day*. Well, a statement like that just sort of begs the question, “So, how was your day?”

And a question like that (after a statement like that) just sort of begs a flashback sequence that goes something along the lines of (and seriously, can’t you just see the wavy lines):

First day of school, 7th Grade, Felicia -- sort of good looking, sort of hot, can you say that about a thirteen year old? Whatever, point is, she takes after her mother. And she was trying out a new look: that Goth thing, that Emo thing, that whatever you call that thing with that dark hair, dark eyes, dark clothes, and lots of makeup... and if you included a dark heart, then once again, one

might point out how she takes after her mother, but sadly (or happily) in this, Felicia does not.

Anyway, first day of school: Hello World!

Slam! Pushed into a locker.

Push! Books on the floor.

Girls gossiping, boys ignoring, standing in front of the class while they find her a seat, "Sorry, we're full up."

Seventh Grade! Don't talk to me about 7th Grade.

And flashback over, her mother, not a care in the world, waving it off, fanning her mouth, have I mentioned that steak, so juicy, so rich, "You don't like school don't go."

"What?" This was definitely not the reaction she was expecting. "But I want to go!" There are her dreams of being a world famous playwright, business executive, or exotic animal veterinarian (possibly all three). And then, it's been way too long since we've had a flashback, don't you think?

So, grab on tight, because I don't know about you, but those wavy lines make me dizzy.

After school chess club and his name is Bobby (so dreamy), "Checkmate! I win!" Isn't he cute when he loses.

And there you have it -- over and out -- the shortest flashback sequence in the history of literature to commemorate the shortest relationship in history.

"But I like school."

"It's good to like things, dear. Now, eat your peas. I hear they've got calcium in them or something, good for the bones. You like bones, don't you dear. I know I do. This steak is great, honey."

###

No school, perhaps never again, why you may ask, as Felicia most certainly does.

“F-f-f...”

“Fired,” Francine replies. And let’s face it. Frank’s a bit of a stutterer. “Your dad was fired, today.”

And just between you and me, can we forgo the wavy lines, this time? Excellent...

Dad’s at the office -- feet on the desk or working hard -- and his boss pokes his head through door, “You’re out of here, Frank! Pack your things and get out!”

“Grandpa fired dad?” Felicia asks in disbelief.

And you know, you try to move a plot along, try to just get is somewhere, anywhere, off square one, and someone is always getting in your face. “I can’t believe grandpa would fire dad?”

And by way of explanation, Frank starts in with his, “F-f-f...”
But seriously, who has time for that?

“Fed up, your grandfather was fed up and fired your father.”

So, you know the score, aftermath of a business meeting, gramps is wiping his mouth with a napkin (hence the fed up reference, thought I’d just point that out in case it was too subtle... or just stupid on my part for you to even notice), as he turns to Frank and says, “I’m full Frank, completely fed up,” no mind that no one talks like that. “And just so we’re clear, no sense in coming into work tomorrow.”

“Why would gramps fire dad?”

“F-f-f...”

“F-f-f,” Francine says mockingly. “Come on, out with it. You were a fool, foolhardy, freewheeling with the company financials? There best not have been a fun loving fling with a

female... whatever. What else starts with an 'F'? Come on, help me out kids."

But in the pause, daddy dearest manages to get it out, "Film. Fantasy film."

And therein, we flip back to the office, grandpa shaking his head, full of mirth, "Sure, Frank. Take all the time you want for this film project of yours. Just ask if you need someone to say, 'A-a-action,' for you."

"So, you weren't actually fired?"

"N-n-n..."

"No, that's right. You won't be drawing a check, bringing home any money, or contributing to society. But you know what else, honey, darling, love, you know what else that means..."

"H-h-h..."

"That's right, honor. You have none. Home, say bye-bye. Say, bye-bye, Filbert."

"Bye!"

"Honor, home, self respect, children, your father has none," the queen she has spoken.

"I can't believe you," but then, Felicia perhaps can. "Dad, why do you marry her?"

"L-l-l..."

But seriously, who has time for that. "Mom, if that's the way you feel, why do you marry dad? Why did you even date?"

"L-l-l..."

"Loser? That you're a loser, honey? And I felt sorry for you, don't be ridiculous. Laughing at you, maybe. But feel sorry?"

"L-l-l..." and it is the fifties, maybe sixties, who knows? Who cares? Did they even have the decimal dating system back then to keep track of such things? And Frank is dressed in his suit and tie, looking sort of smashing, if I do say so myself, but even across the span of time, he is still stuttering, "L-l-l..."

And Francine, breathtakingly beautiful, I mean, she's breathtakingly beautiful now, but then, even more so, painfully so... it would break your heart. And she's kissing Frank on the lips. Well, putting her finger to her lips, telling him to "Shsh" as she presses that very same finger against Frank's lips which is probably how they kissed back then, as she says, "Don't say anything. I'll talk for you." And from there, they enter the party.

"It was a blind date," Francine explains in the present.

But back to the past and while we're there, if you're big on montages, this would be a good place (nay, great place) for one, endless parties, Frank -- the strong silent type -- and Francine doing all the talking, the star of the show, center of attention, loving it all. "And then, she said..."

After hours, cut to a park bench, late at night, under the moon, sharing her dreams, telling Frank how it will be, "Now, I think we should have two children, three's too many, but one would get lonely. Oh, and a boy and girl. First the girl..."

And then they are sitting at counter, soda fountain, one of those fifty's diners things, Frank pointing at the menu, "Double bacon cheeseburger, not with your heart, Mister," and turning to the waiter, "He'll have the salad, light vinaigrette. But I've got to admit, that burger looks good..."

And then on a sunny day, having a picnic, "This is nice. I like this. Do you like this? I could just lay in your arms forever." And of course, Frank, still stuttering away, "L-l-l...", while high in the sky, a stunt pilot skywriter, doing its thing, "I love you. Marry me."

Flashback to present, "I l-l-love y-y-you."

"I still say you were saying look and just got lucky with that whole skywriting thing."

"So, you two really were in love?"

And here, I believe (yes, I do sincerely believe) it is time for one more flashback to pull it all together, a church chapel, wedding bells, Francine, more than a little pregnant, holding her belly, Frank smiling at her side, “I-I-I...”

“Oh, for the love of Pete. He did. He does. Now, give me that ring. It better be the one I wanted, Mister, or there will be H-E double hockey sticks to pay.” But it was. And it is. No matter what she might say to the contrary.

Still, I do believe we were in the middle of a conversation when all this flashback business started.

“Oh, right, that reminds me,” Felicia all but says. Or rather, more specifically, she says, “But that doesn’t explain why I can’t go to school tomorrow.”

“Oh, doesn’t it?”

“H-h-h...”

“That’s right, honey. Spit it out.”

“H-h-h...”

“Or maybe you’d like me to do it for you?”

“H-h-h...”

###

In the alphabet book of knowledge:

H stands for House.

H stands for Home.

H stands for Honor and Happiness,

And sometimes even for Hero, I am told.

“H-h-h...”

“Oh, great, spill the beans, why don’t you?”

“H-h-h...”

“I thought we agreed to keep it a secret until the last minute.”

“H-h-h...”

“And now she knows, the cat’s out of the bag, might as well tell her everything now.”

“H-h-h...”

“Hawaii, sweetheart. We’re moving to Hawaii. Yes, I know, but we have to,” and here, Francine is talking to Filbert, but perhaps that was obvious from the use of the word ‘sweetheart’ in the foregoing. “I’m sorry, darling, but the law is very clear on this. Unless we sell you sister into slavery, we have to take her along with us. Speaking of which, Rapunzel, I believe it’s your turn to do the dishes.”

“What?”

“H-h-h...”

“Help. Yes, yes. Your father will help you. Or are you saying you need help, dear. This isn’t one of those desperate cries for help we hear so much about in the news lately, is it? It would be so embarrassing if it were. And here me, sipping my wine not a care in the world.”

###

Frank, dad, p-p-pops is doing the dishes.

Felicia mostly sits on a stool, watching, occasionally getting up to dry something off and put it away.

“So, you weren’t fired?”

“F-f-f...”

“You doing a film?” The cameras and/or extraneous video footage used throughout should evidence enough of that.

“And we’re not really losing the house?”

“H-h-h...”

“We’re just going on trip to Hawaii. I wonder what it will be like.”

Come to think of it, I wonder, too...

Flash forward (or backward, I think it was last week), Felicia is at the beach. OK. It's the neighborhood playground. But they've got sand there, so it's the next best thing.

Well, it's sort of cold... overcast... a bit rainy. She's actually wearing a raincoat. And when Bobby walks by, it's sort of hard to explain.

"What are you doing?"

"Um, it's sort of hard to explain."

See what I mean.

"F-f-f..."

"Oh, right. This is my father, Frank. He's pleased to meet you. Any friend of the family and all that."

"You're weird."

"Thanks. I mean, you meant that as a good thing, right?"

"You're doing it wrong," Momma F calls out from across the divide of time -- and/or the kitchen table where she is sitting. So I guess, that means it is her turn.

No sandy pretend beach playground for her. A cool breeze blowing through her hair, catching her dress, emerald inlay, Japanese influence, Kimono silk, off the shoulders, slit up the side, dazzling, glamorous, and before her, shop after shop after shop.

"You're going to go shopping?"

"Butt out of this, kiddo. Let me assure you, you are not part of my dream vacation."

But although, Francine may be able to evict her daughter from her fantasy, the small child at her side refuses to yield, sticky ice cream cone in hand, smearing his face...

"OK. No. No. No. I love you, Filbert. Yes, mommy does. But mommy needs some time to herself. She's earned this. And as for you, Felicia, dream all you want to about wild times on the beach. You do realize that you will be babysitting the entire time?"

"What? Dad?"

“S-s-s...”

“Sorry, dear. He’s saying sorry, dear, sayonara, tough s...”

“S-s-sherbet for dessert, anyone?”

But what I think he would rather say is that he intends to sift through sand searching for seashells by the seashore or something similar to that -- all the better if it begins with an ‘S’.

Like, “S-s-shipwreck,” Frank offers.

And since everyone else had their flash-forward fantasy sequence, so should he, walking along the beach, metal detector in hand, searching for treasure, striking it rich, and at the press release photo shoot, a bathing beauty on either side...

“That better be a double image refraction of me, my darling. Just saying,” Francine says, so obviously, she’s good for her word, “You better be using a double take of me in that take, t-t-to g-g-get m-m-my g-g-good side or you’ll find out that you lost it all in the divorce settlement.”

And here, Francine does in fact take over his fantasy, stepping into the lime like, photo bulbs flashing, a cute hunk, sailor man model on either arm...

“Mom!”

“Dadda!”

“S-s-son!”

“Daughter. Yes. We’re a happy family. And now that we’re done with that, we leave in the morning.”

“Tomorrow!”

“Yes, tomorrow. And I hope you’re not developing one of those speech impediments where you repeat everything I say. I know you hang on my every word, but very unbecoming -- very unbecoming. Oh, and before I forget. Don’t bother to pack. They’re not going to let you take much through customs.”

“Hawaii. You said we’re going to Hawaii.”

“Yep, that’s the plan. But your father made the reservations, so who knows where we’ll end up.”

Care for a flashback on that? I know I do.

“H-h-h...”

“Where, sir?”

“H-h-h...”

“Helsinki, sir?”

“H-h-h...”

I’ll take ‘World Cities that Start with the Letter H for \$1000,
Alex.

“Hamburg? I hear it’s really nice this time of year. Maybe a
bit cold, but if you wear a coat...”

“H-h-h...”

“OK. Here we are. Huntsville, Hong Kong, Ho Chi Minh,
don’t they have like a world famous trail there or something?”

“H-h-h...”

“Sir, maybe you’d rather just use our website. We’ve got a
nice portal...”

And speaking of portals, later that night...

Well, actually, first they have to pack.

So, hold that thought -- the one about portals.

In the meantime...

“So, we’re really going to Hawaii, dad?”

“Y-y-y...”

“I better go pack.”

And so she does.

Now, if Felicia was a normal girl... she wouldn’t be starring
in a movie, have an evil step mother as a mom, a dad that stuttered
profusely, or be encouraged to skip the entire 7th Grade because her
father was a having a midlife crisis.

So, she’s not normal.

She dresses sort of weird.

She wants to get a tattoo -- a tattoo!

And has already pierced her ears! I know, shocking!

Anyhow, one might be tempted to overlook all this, what with her good grades, generally sweet demeanor, etc., etc., etc.

But let's face facts, she's probably a witch, probably takes after her mother, and that's probably part of the basis for the friction between the two.

Probably...

And seriously, don't even be asking, "Is she a good witch or a bad witch?" All witches are bad, just look at her mother...

Wow!

I'll say it again. Wow!

"Turn that camera off!"

"S-s-s..."

"Take your time apologizing after you turn the camera off."

OK. So, mom, she's packing a string bikini and not much more; Felicia, quite a bit more.

Felicia takes down her suitcase -- faux fur leather. I actually was in an antique store the other day that specialized in old suitcase and they had a beautiful one there made out of Sea Lion Leather or something. It was a thing of beauty. Reminded me of dragon hide (so, yeah, that's probably going to get Felicia into a spot of trouble before long). Anyhow, if you enjoyed this book so much that you're wondering how you can say thanks, buying me that sucker might be a good place to start.

Anyhow, during the aside, Felicia opened the suitcase and proceeded to cram it full. Now, it isn't that big. One of those briefcase size things, actually. All the same, it's amazing what you can get into one of those things if you sit on the top...

OK. That's not working.

Jump on the top...

No, that's not working, either. Going to need some back up for this.

"Dad!"

And the two of them finally get it closed with a little help from Filbert.

“W-w-w...”

“Everything, dad. I’m taking everything,” which includes, I might add, her Sony Walkman, or if you like your stories a bit more modern, her iPhone, or if you like your stories a bit more modern still, the spare gold disc she uses as a backup for all of her thoughts, dreams, and memories -- a thumb drive, if you will, for her prefrontal implant -- all in a much more manageable, size.

Yeah, I think that’s enough foreshadowing. Oh, wait. I stand corrected. Time to cut back to mom.

Francine sits at her dressing mirror -- three way, with lights all around, sort of like a movie star might. In the background, Frank packs his cameras and other gear. Or maybe he’s just sloppy in his work as he sets up the next shot.

Either way, Francine looks, well, hot. Frank is a lucky guy. Francine knows how to wear a nightgown, slip, whatever you call that those see semi-through things, not quite revealing, but not really there, “Oh, this old thing. Let me put on a robe.”

And then, “Frank, I forgot my purse, downstairs. Would you be a dear.”

Not really a question...

And as soon as he leaves, the lights go dark, spotlight on his wife, as she gazes into the mirror, “Mundane One, Mundane One. Can you hear me Magical Land Two,” and as she speaks, Gramps slowly comes into view in the mirror, smoky and dark, beady squinting eyes, like he going over some tricky business contract, about to put the screws to the competition.

“Nothing wrong, I hope.” It’s almost a threat.

“Glad to see you to, dad.”

“Everything going as planned? No slip ups?”

“I appreciate the vote of confidence. And things are well with you?”

“Jeopardy’s almost on.” I’m feeling lucky. Pretty sure I’ve got the inside scoop on that whole Cities that Begin with the Letter H category. Clara is going to be surprised tonight, so, “Make it snappy. What’s on your mind?”

“I was just going...”

“Too slow! Tell it to the mirror!” And he is gone.

“I was just going to tell you that we are all looking forward to seeing you tomorrow. And how I’d appreciate it if you’d just play along, but I guess you already got that memo.”

And Frank, whistling happily to himself as he trots back into the room, “D-d-d..”

“Dad? Oh, same old, same old. Sends his love. Said he was looking forward to playing his role, happy to give my Evil Step Mom character all the back story she could possibly need.”

And if witches could cry, I do believe this is where the camera would zoom in and catch a tear forming in the corner of her eye.

Ah, but witches can’t cry, everyone knows that. So holding it back, stifling the tear, Francine asks, oh, so innocently, as she shifts her nightgown shawl thingy in the most provocative of ways, “So, tell me again, Mr. Director. Why are there so many cameras in here? And what does an aspiring actress need to do to land a starring role?”

Lights out!

And action!

We might have to cut that last part -- sort of unprofessional if you ask me. But other than that:

It’s a wrap!

###

###

END CHAPTER 1 - PEAS PORRIDGE

###

###

OUTLINE -- PROBABLY DON'T NEED ANYMORE

Pots - Peas

Dad

Peas

Dad Cooking

Mom, steak, feeding baby

Daughter Home

Tell me I don't (no good school story)

But I want (fun school story)

Why no, Father, Frank, lost job

Fired scene

Lose home, house, home, honor, respect,

Hi,

Party

Love, Look, airplane

Marriage, pregnant

hawaii

Beach Daydream

Mom Daydream

Filbert Daydream

Babysit, Why

Lunch, nothing personal, business business, get the

check

Gramps do That

Mean, cruel, vindictive -- King, Petty Tyrant

Anyway, leave for Hawaii in the morning

Gramps, crystal ball excellent

Don't bother packing, custom
Haw'iii, come on, say it, three times fast, or one time slow
Helfast, Belfast, just make it for Hawaii

Oh, I know it spits and sputters here and there, but overall, I'm quite pleased. I have to wonder why I stop so often these days, can hardly get a story out: my get up and go must have got up and went. Or the line between funny and stupid is astonishingly thin; and having never made a dime...

My confidence wanes.

And yes, as I woke up this morning, it was hard enough just getting out of bed, much less tapping out anything on the keyboard. Perhaps I am suffering from depression. Or perhaps, I know how long a book takes; and so, if it doesn't seem golden from the start, I stop, and move on to better things.

And here, months later, no intention of rewriting it, editing at the lowest level, well, I read it carefree, with no thoughts or concern, the words guiding my mind. And I must say, I enjoy the walk down memory lane.

*Should I have written more?
Shall someday I shall?*

Brett 12-10-14