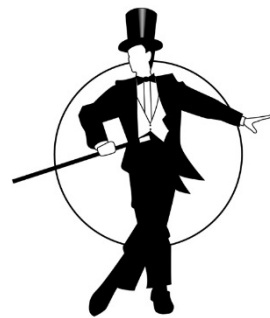


A Passing Fancy

Patricia Walker



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A PASSING FANCY

By Patricia Walker

CAST

FANCY: 40s-50s, owner of Fancy's Fancies, a gift shop

LUCILLE: 40s-50s, church choir director

CHICK: 40s-50s, schoolteacher, excellent at typing and shorthand

NANCY: 60s-70s, homemaker, wife of Charlie

KATHLEEN: 60s-70s, homemaker, reader of tea leaves, wife of Gordie

BEN: 40s-50s, owner of the hotel

HARRY: 40s-50s, owner of the local weekly newspaper

RUFUS: 40s-50s, up and coming lawyer, works for Charlie

CHARLIE: 60s-70s, lawyer about to retire, husband of Nancy

GORDIE, 60s-70s, proprietor of the Prairie Dog Hill Emporium, husband of Kathleen

Place

A very small town named Prairie Dog Hill, somewhere in the Midwest.

Time

A patriotic holiday, sometime during the first decade of the 20th century.

SCENE: One continuous scene

Setting: A clearing just off the town square. A patriotic celebration is going on in Prairie Dog Hill, and a few people have wandered away to this quieter spot. There are a picnic table, some benches, a couple of stumps or apple crates pulled up to a taller stump or crate that serve as a "table" and "chairs" for checkers, and a small table and two chairs, or any other configuration of chair and table space, that can serve as a "booth" for reading tea leaves. All songs are in the public domain and can be found in various songbooks. Lyrics are included in the text, some with minor changes to fit the situation.

At Rise: All ten characters come in (from different directions) singing a medley. CHARLIE and GORDIE set up a checkerboard. Dialogue is generally among small groups of characters. The focus switches from one group to another.

OPENING MEDLEY

(A medley of: "In the Good Old Summertime," "Yankee Doodle Dandy," "Let me Call You Sweetheart," and "You're a Grand Old Flag." Solo lines are indicated; generally, all characters sing some part of several songs as determined by the director/music director.)

ALL (song: "In the Good Old Summertime")

In the good old summertime, in the good old summertime,
Strolling through the shady lanes with my baby mine.

HARRY

I hold her hand and she holds mine

LUCILLE

and that's a very good sign

RUFUS, GORDIE (song: "Yankee Doodle Dandy")

I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy, A Yankee Doodle, do or die

BEN, HARRY, CHARLIE

A real live nephew of my Uncle Sam

KATHLEEN

Born on the Fourth of July

NANCY

I've got a Yankee Doodle sweetheart

FANCY (song: "Let Me Call You Sweetheart")
Let me hear you whisper that you love me too.

GORDIE, KATHLEEN, NANCY, CHARLIE
Keep the love-light glowing in your eyes so

CHARLIE (song: "Yankee Doodle Dandy")
She's my Yankee Doodle joy

BEN (song: "Let Me Call You Sweetheart")
Let me call you Sweetheart

GORDIE (song: "You're a Grand Old Flag")
You're a Grand old flag,

RUFUS
You're a high-flying flag

CHICK
And forever in peace may you wave.

GORDIE, HARRY, RUFUS, BEN, CHARLIE
You're the emblem of the land I love

NANCY, KATHLEEN, FANCY, LUCILLE, CHICK
The home of the free and the brave

ALL
Ev'ry heart beats true for the Red, White and Blue

HARRY (song: "In the Good Old Summertime")
She's my tootsie wootsie

ALL (song: "You're a Grand Old Flag")
Never a boast or brag.

RUFUS, GORDIE (song: "Yankee Doodle Dandy")
Oh I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy

ALL (song: "You're a Grand Old Flag")

Keep your eye on the grand old, eye on the grand

Keep your eye on the grand old, eye on the grand

Keep your eye on the grand old flag.

(Music ends)

CHARLIE: Not as hot as it usually is this time of year.

GORDIE: Boy howdy. *(Insert Spring, Summer, Fall, depending on which patriotic holiday is being celebrated)* _____ in the Midwest generally saps the juice right out of you. *(beat)*

You ready to have the pants whupped off you.?

CHARLIE: What? By you?

GORDIE: None other.

CHARLIE: You got two bits you want to lay down on that?

GORDIE: *(fishing in his pockets)* I speck I can find a quarter.

NANCY: *(looking over at the two)* You boys trying to gamble over there?

CHARLIE: Who?

GORDIE: Not us. *(hands back out of his pockets)*

(The focus switches.)

LUCILLE: *(pointing toward the town square they've just left)* That was fun. The band sounds really good this year.

CHICK: Must be the new lead trumpet player.

LUCILLE: Why do you say that?

CHICK: Oh, come on, Lucille. It's no secret you've been keeping company with Harry Bennet.

LUCILLE: Oh. *(beat)* So we haven't been all that discreet, huh?

CHICK: And why should you be? You're both single people in the prime of life. You're entitled to all the happiness you can find with each other.

LUCILLE: Do you really think so, Chick? I've always tried to maintain a certain, well, decorum as the mayor's widow. I didn't want to set tongues wagging.

CHICK: Everybody knows you were a good wife to Herb for 27 years. But he's been gone now, what, five years?

LUCILLE: Six and a half, actually.

CHICK: Need I say more?

LUCILLE: Thanks, Chick. Your encouragement really means a lot. I haven't felt like this since Herb and I were courting 30 years ago. I'm a middle-aged woman and I feel like I'm nineteen again.

CHICK: My goodness gracious. You sound like you might be head over heels.

LUCILLE: Truth be told, Chick, I am. That is exactly what I am.

SONG: I'M JUST WILD ABOUT HARRY

(Every song has a solo part sung by the character listed, and then all other characters or certain selected characters join the second iteration.)

LUCILLE

I'm just wild about Harry and Harry's wild about me.
The heavenly blisses of his kisses fill me with ecstasy.
He's sweet just like choc'late candy and just like honey from the bee.
Oh, I'm just wild about Harry and he's just wild about me.

CHICK

Hey! She's just wild about Harry

LUCILLE

and Harry's wild about me.

CHICK

The heavenly blisses of his kisses fill her with ecstasy.

NANCY

He's sweet just like (*spoken*) choc'late candy?

LUCILLE

And just like honey from the bee.

CHICK

Oh, she's just wild about Harry

LUCILLE

and he's just wild about me.

NANCY

Yes, he's just wild about,

CHICK

Cannot do without,

NANCY, CHICK

He's just wild about

LUCILLE , NANCY, CHICK

Meeeeeeeeeeee / (*harmony*)

(*Music ends*)

LUCILLE: (*singing*) He's just wild about me!

CHICK: (*hugging Lucille*) Oh, Lucille, I'm so happy for you.

LUCILLE: Um, while we're on the subject of happiness, do you and Rufus Brown have any major plans? Not that it's any of my business, you understand.

CHICK: We've talked a little. He's only just now getting on his feet in his new profession, so he's been a tad cautious.

LUCILLE: Cautious? Rufus Brown? Are we talking about the same person?

CHICK: I know. It sounds odd, doesn't it? Everybody sees him as a little impulsive.

LUCILLE: A little impulsive. If you looked up “impulsive” in the dictionary, you’d see a picture of Rufus Brown. So, what’s it all about, this caution? Not that it’s any of my business you understand.

CHICK: Well, he enjoys working in Charlie Windsor’s legal office. Apparently, Charlie’s thinking about retiring.

LUCILLE: I’ve heard Nancy mention it.

CHICK: Rufus says Charlie’s willing to let him take over the law practice and is giving him a rent-to-buy option on the office building. Rufus says he’s never owned property before; he’s always rented.

LUCILLE: But you’ve talked a little? About...?

CHICK: Well, before Charlie offered him the rent-to-buy, Rufus was talking like he was ready to settle down. Wife, house, picket fence, the whole bit. Now that being a property owner is a real possibility – well, actually, a probability – he seems a little nervous. Hence, this uncustomary caution.

LUCILLE: Yes, I can see that. Where do you stand in all this? Not that it’s any of my business, you understand.

CHICK: Let’s just say I’m still feeling very kindly toward Mr. Brown’s attention. I’ve been widowed for fourteen years, and I never thought I’d find love again.

LUCILLE: It’s kind of fun being nineteen again, isn’t it?

The focus switches to the checker game. Nancy joins Chick and Lucille. They pantomime conversation.

GORDIE: So you’re really going to do it this time, eh?

CHARLIE: I reckon.

GORDIE: You made noises about it two years ago, but nothing came of it.

CHARLIE: That was before Rufus Brown showed up. He was postmaster over in Jackrabbit for years, and upped and decided to go to law school down at the state university.

GORDIE: Just like that?

CHARLIE: Just like that. Graduated about a year and a half ago and got his diploma privilege right away. He has a strange sense of humor and some newfangled ideas, but I think I'm willing to trust him. He'll take care of us right well.

GORDIE: What newfangled ideas does he have that you don't like?

CHARLIE: Well, for one thing, he thinks we should get one of those telephones in the legal office.

GORDIE: What's wrong with that? Telephones aren't exactly new, you know.

CHARLIE: And just how many telephones are there in Prairie Dog Hill?

GORDIE: Only two that I know of. One in the bank—

CHARLIE: Right next door to the legal office.

GORDIE: And one in the hotel.

CHARLIE: Right across the street from the legal office. Now why should I pay good money for a machine that can only call the bank or the hotel when I can walk out of my office and be in either one of those places in less than one-minute flat?

GORDIE: Well, Charlie, Prairie Dog Hill isn't the only place in the world, you know. You could call out to other towns.

CHARLIE: Do you have any idea what that would cost? No, siree, the telephone's just not going to catch on in a small town like this one. Mark my words, it's just a passing fancy. Next thing you know, he'll be wanting to petition the council to bring electricity into town.

GORDIE: Well, I should hope so!

CHARLIE: Passing fancy. Mark my words. (*makes a triple jump on the checkerboard*) You should be paying more attention to your game than listening to the ladies gossip and worrying about telephones and electric lights.

GORDIE: Dang.

(The focus switches to Ben, Rufus, and Harry, in a cluster off to the side.)

BEN: Rufus, was it hard going to law school at your age?

RUFUS: The work wasn't all that bad. A lot of reading, analyzing, figuring things out. But the hardest part was being in classes with 22 and 23-year-olds. Made me cringe to think of how full of myself I must have been at that age.

HARRY: Weren't we all? Weren't we all? I don't know that I could concentrate long enough at my age to read and analyze and figure things out. My hat's off to you. You've probably got, what, ten or fifteen good years to work as a lawyer if you want to?

RUFUS: If I want to.

HARRY: Ben, didn't I see a notice come across my desk to go out in next week's paper that you're looking for a hotel manager? You expecting so much summer business it'll take two of you?

BEN: I wish. *(beat)* No, don't talk this around town yet, but there's a strong likelihood I'll be leaving Prairie Dog Hill for a while. My brother-in-law's in poor health and my sister wants me to come home and take over the family hotel chain back east.

RUFUS: And you're going to do it?

BEN: Yeah. It's family, know what I mean? *(they nod)* I haven't quite decided if I can hire a local manager here or if I'm going to have to sell out altogether.

HARRY: Geez, that's tough. You've been running that hotel for more than 20 years.

BEN: Yep. Twenty-two.

HARRY: I'm going to hate to see you go. *(they do some sort of man thing: a punch on the shoulder or the like)*

RUFUS: I'm thinking someone else might hate to see you go. You figuring to leave Miss Fancy?

BEN: Lord, I hope not.

RUFUS: Ah. Serious plans?

BEN: You could say that. *(pulls ring box out of his pocket and shows them the engagement ring)* She is one fine woman. And the best thing that's ever come into my life. But I haven't mentioned marriage yet. She had a bad experience in her first marriage, and I've been courting her kind of slowly, you know?

HARRY: Does she know you have to leave?

BEN: We've talked about it. She knows I have to go back east at some point, but I haven't said exactly when. When I try to tell her how important she is to me, she changes the subject and says we should talk about this later. So I don't push.

RUFUS: How much time do you think you have?

BEN: Not much, I'm afraid. If my family needs me before Fancy's ready to hear me out...well...I don't know what my choice will be.

(The focus switches to Kathleen and Fancy sitting at a table drinking tea from cups.)

KATHLEEN: *(Fancy nods to questions and follows every direction)* Your tea's almost gone? Now swirl your cup three times. See how the leaves are sticking to the sides? Now turn your cup upside down into your saucer and take a couple of breaths. Do you feel nice and calm? Okay, now turn your teacup right side up and talk about what you see.

FANCY: Oh, the leaves are spread out all around the inside of the cup. That happened when I swirled? *(Kathleen nods)* And I can see some shapes. Look, does that look like a butterfly to you?

KATHLEEN: It does. And a butterfly usually suggests overdue happiness. What does that say to you?

FANCY: Interesting that it's the first shape I picked out. In the past few months, I've seen some happiness come into my life, and, yes, it was long overdue.

KATHLEEN: When you moved here several years ago and opened your shop, you seemed so very unhappy. Your face had forgotten how to smile.

FANCY: Yes, I was in a bad situation for too many years. It's behind me now, thank goodness.

KATHLEEN: Then let's see what's ahead of you. What else do you see?

FANCY: This little blob over here looks like a bridge. I can make out the floor of the bridge and the rails.

KATHLEEN: Yes, I see it, too. A bridge suggests a life-changing event. Or maybe a person. Or maybe the person brings about the event. We need to look at the shapes nearby for some explanation.

FANCY: Here's a heart.

KATHLEEN: Yes, and as you can imagine, a heart generally suggests love. Romance.

FANCY: I don't think I'm ready for romance, Kathleen. Maybe we should move on.

KATHLEEN: You may not think you're ready, but the tea leaves say otherwise. They suggest a life-changing event involving romance. What else do you see near the bridge?

FANCY: Well, on this side there's a broom.

KATHLEEN: Mm-hmm. A new home or a new era in your life. I'm going to talk to you as a friend now, Fancy, and not a reader of tea leaves. You said you were in a bad situation for too many years, and it certainly left its scars. But it's behind you now, is that right? (*Fancy nods*) Your tea leaves say you may be poised for romance and a new environment, but you seem reluctant. Doubtful. Would it help if you talked about the problem from your past?

FANCY: It might. Are you sure you want to hear it?

KATHLEEN: I'm a good listener. Try me.

END OF FREEVIEW

You'll want to read and perform this show!