

Fairweather Friends

By Dwayne Yancey

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DEDICATION

For Trina

STORY OF THE PLAY

Lord Liverpool, a chauvinistic proprietor of a 19th century London newspaper, must deal not only with a wife who's a suffragette and a daughter who seeks own career, but with an old school rival out to embarrass him. The plot concerns a series of dispatches being penned by an adventurer in Africa, which have made *The Herald* a popular newspaper. Unbeknownst to Lord Liverpool, however, the dispatches are actually being written by his wife Athena, who seeks a literary career. Their daughter Calliope, suspecting something is amiss, goes to work for the new rival newspaper to expose the fraud. This upstart rival paper is run by Lord Needleham, who takes great delight in one-upmanship against his old schoolmate. In fact, Needleham still refers to Lord Liverpool as "Pudding" in front of Liverpool's staff including a saucy maid and put-upon butler. There's plenty of humor in this British drawing room comedy!

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 m, 3 w)

LORD EDWIN LIVERPOOL: The chauvinistic proprietor of
The Daily Herald.

LADY ATHENA: His more liberal-minded wife.

CALLIOPE: Their precocious daughter.

LORD REGINALD NEEDLEHAM: A haughty old schoolmate
who now has started a rival newspaper, *The Examiner*.

LUCY: The saucy maid.

FENWICK: The put-upon butler.

ACTOR: A colorful fraud.

SETTING

England, in the late 1870s.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: We are in the drawing room of Lord Liverpool, the proprietor of a London newspaper, The Daily Herald. From offstage, we hear LORD LIVERPOOL, delivering very precise instructions to Lucy, the maid.)

LORD LIVERPOOL: *(From offstage.)* Watch the top now—don't break the top—those things are expensive—all right—now we're going to make a turn—to the right—no, wait, my right, your left—watch the vase! *(SFX: We hear a crash, and the sound of the vase breaking.)* All right, you'll need to clean that up.

LUCY: *(From offstage.)* I can't see where I'm going!

LORD LIVERPOOL: *(Entering, holding a glass of Scotch whiskey in his hand.)* You're a servant—you don't need to see where you're going—just turn when I tell you to turn—ah, not quite yet— *(SFX: We hear another crash, and the sound of another vase breaking.)* Oh, well, matching set now. All right, now, in you go.

(LUCY enters, carrying a large palm or other piece of shrubbery. The vegetation engulfs her.)

LUCY: Is there any important glassware in this room?

LORD LIVERPOOL: *(Raising his glass.)* Only my Scotch glass.

LUCY: Good. Let me go ahead and smash it now. Helps prevent an accident later.

(LUCY grabs the glass, steps back into the hallway, and heaves the glass away. SFX: We hear it breaking, and then we hear FENWICK, the butler, shout in pain.)

FENWICK: *(From offstage.)* Ow! Hullo!

LUCY: (*Shouting.*) Dreadfully sorry! There are bandages in the pantry! (*SHE turns to Lord Liverpool.*) What are you looking at?

LORD LIVERPOOL: But I wasn't finished!

LUCY: Neither am I! Got any more glassware you need to get rid of?

LORD LIVERPOOL: Look, just put the thing over there.

LUCY: (*Toting the tree.*) Apparently now I'm the gardener as well as the maid!

LORD LIVERPOOL: Just think—at this very moment, Captain Fairweather is probably crouching behind a palm tree just like that in the heart of deepest Africa—spying on a pride of lions or a tribe of hungry cannibals. Doesn't that just send a shiver up and down your spine?

LUCY: (*Setting down the palm.*) Oh, is that what it was? I thought it was a slipped disc.

LORD LIVERPOOL: (*Viewing the palm in the location where Lucy has put it.*) Oh, that won't do at all. How about over there?

LUCY: Does it matter?

LORD LIVERPOOL: Of course it matters! When Captain Fairweather leaps out of the bush to confront danger itself we don't want him to leap onto the davenport, now do we?

LUCY: (*Pointing away from the sofa.*) Well, just have him leap over there.

LORD LIVERPOOL: (*Pointing to the sofa.*) But what if he leaps over there?

LUCY: Then he'll confront the davenport.

LORD LIVERPOOL: My point exactly! I want this party to be precise in every detail! If the account in *The Daily Herald* says Captain Fairweather leaps to his right/left, then my Captain Fairweather must leap to his right/left, as well!

LUCY: Then why don't you have it in Africa and invite the real Captain Fairweather himself instead of some cheap imitator?

LORD LIVERPOOL: Oh, that's where you're wrong. He's not cheap at all. I had to pay a pretty penny for this fellow tonight. An actual actor! A highly-trained Shakespearean, too.

LORD LIVERPOOL: (*Cont'd.*) His letter of reference said he had once played Yorick in a production of *Hamlet*, mind you, so you know he's the real thing.

LUCY: I think all we really know is he must be unemployed.

LORD LIVERPOOL: Well, I did say he was an actor.

LUCY: True.

LORD LIVERPOOL: Just think: All over Britain tonight, from Land's End to John O'Groats, from Anglia in the east to Ireland in the west, well, maybe not so much the Irish—maybe somewhere about Holyhead or Snowdownia—but wherever they may be tonight, Her Majesty's subjects on this sceptered isle will gather to honor the great Captain Fairweather, African explorer extraordinaire, and special correspondent for *The Daily Herald*.

LUCY: I'm sure someday there'll be a great debate over which one should get higher billing on his tombstone.

LORD LIVERPOOL: In great country houses and in humble East End pubs, they will clutch to their breasts the latest issue of *The Herald*—my *Herald*.

LUCY: Going to be awfully hard to read it if you hold it there.

LORD LIVERPOOL: "All the news that our advertising can afford to pay." Lord Liverpool, proprietor.

LUCY: There's a slogan that makes the heart go pitter-pat.

LORD LIVERPOOL: Not since Stanley went in search of Livingstone has England been so captivated—so enthralled—

LUCY: So blinkered.

LORD LIVERPOOL: -- by tales of dangerous discoveries in the heart of Africa! They say grown men actually wept when Captain Fairweather got swept over Victoria Falls—and lived to tell the tale.

LUCY: I thought the fact he was telling it first person sort of gave it away from the start.

LORD LIVERPOOL: They say women fainted when they read his account of wrestling a lion bare-handed on the Serengeti.

LUCY: I was rather pulling for the lion, myself.

End of Freeview

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