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# THE DEVIL'S STAR

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

BY

F. J. NEWBOULT.

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# THE DEVIL'S STAR

Produced at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, by Mr. Douglas Gordon, October 19, 1914.

FRED FAWTHROP (Proprietor of the  
"Traveller's Rest") . . . . . *Herbert Lomas.*  
LIZZIE FAWTHROP (his wife) . . . . . *Hilda Bruce-Potter.*  
LORD MILBANK . . . . . *Grendon Bentley.*  
MR. PORRITT . . . . . *Charles Groves.*

The Scene is the kitchen of "The Traveller's Rest."

## NOTE ON THE DIALECT.

No attempt has been made to indicate the vowel-pronunciation characteristic of the West Riding, as this would only puzzle and confuse the general reader. There are a few words and expressions, however, which it seemed essential to introduce, and of these a glossary is appended:—

- "All of a twizzle"—Trembling with excitement.
- "As it lights"—As it happens.
- "Bahn" (bound)—Going. "Bahn to"—About to.
- "Cod"—Pretence, deception.
- "Choose how" (pron. *chewzah*)—However, no matter how.
- "Fettle"—Order. "I' right tettle" means in good order, and to "fettle up" is to clean and make tidy.
- "Gawmless"—Senseless.
- "Nobbut" (not but)—Only.
- "Navy"—Canal. The navy (labourer) is so called from his being employed on navigation works.
- "Sitha" (see thou)—Look you.
- "Summat" (somewhat)—Something.
- "Ta'en badly"—Taken ill.

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*It will be noted that the dialect is not at all essential to the play, which will be equally effective if Fred and Lizzie are given the common speech of the district in which the performance takes place.*

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## THE DEVIL'S STAR

*The first action opens at a little after ten o'clock on a Friday morning of midsummer, in the kitchen of "The Traveller's Rest," Redbeck Bottom—a country inn a few miles from Woolford, in the West Riding. The room extends the full width of the house, and serves also as sitting-room and bar. To the right is an old-fashioned window, slightly bowed, and furnished with a window seat. Against the wall behind it stands an old oak bureau. Beyond this again is a door, now wide open, showing on what, when closed, is its outer side, an enamelled plate with the legend "Private." It leads to an entry, from which there is another door to the bar-parlour. A narrow slit of the open outer doorway shows also a glimpse of country road, with a hawthorn hedge in the background. The fireplace, near the middle of the rear wall, which divides the kitchen from the bar-parlour, has an open range of the kind common in the West Riding. It has a high stone chimney-piece, on which are a few tawdry ornaments, the most conspicuous being a china dog. To the left of the fireplace is a high oaken settle, partially screening the bar, which occupies a recess. A brass rod carries heavy crimson curtains, which may be drawn across the bar, and the window is similarly furnished. A door on the left of the bar leads to the stairs, and the back-door is on the extreme left at the rear. In front of it an oaken dresser with plate-rack stands against the wall. There is a circular table near the window, and a larger square table in the middle of the room, both covered with table-cloths of*

figured material in red and blue. An easy-chair stands to the right of the fireplace, and several smaller chairs are placed near the tables. There is a polished steel fender before the fireplace, and in front of it a tab hearthrug.

(FRED FAWTHROP is standing in the doorway, pipe in mouth. He has on neither coat nor waistcoat. His sleeves are rolled up, and his shirt neck-band is turned back, exposing a muscular neck and throat, and something of a hairy chest. This is seen as he turns and enters the kitchen. He has a ruddy complexion, with a stubby ginger moustache, and yellow hair cut very short. This adds to his rather beefy appearance, and accentuates a certain air of stolidity, which is to some extent relieved by the shrewd lines about the eyes, and the good-humoured but resolute mouth. As he comes in, he buttons his shirt at the neck, and puts on a collar, which he takes from the table, and a waistcoat.)

FRED (calling). By Gow! But it's 'ot, lass, this mornin'. There isn't a breath o' wind.

LIZZIE (from the yard at the back). Tha's left a nice mess i' this yard.

FRED. Deng it! I thought there was summat I'd forgotten! An' I've washed mysel' now.

(PORRITT enters the lobby, looks in at the door, and glances round sharply as if in search of something.

He is a little thick-set man, clean shaven, with puffy cheeks and small, restless eyes.)

LIZZIE (still in the yard). I wish I could forget my work, an' someb'dy else do it for me.

FRED. Hére, hod on a minute. I'll clear up for tha, i' two twos.

(He throws off the waistcoat again, and begins to unbutton the collar. In the meantime, PORRITT has come into the room, still looking about. His eyes rest on the bureau.)



PORRITT. Good morning, Mr. Fawthrop. Very hot to-day, isn't it?

FRED (*turning, one end of his collar loose*). Mornin'. (*He takes stock of PORRITT deliberately.*) Ye seem to know my name.

PORRITT (*with a clevering laugh*). Funny, isn't it? I suppose you can't guess where you met me before?

FRED. I was just studyin'. I seem as if I sort o' knew t' face, but—

PORRITT (*with rather offensive familiarity*). Don't stir up the sawdust, old chap. If you don't want your name known, you shouldn't have it on the sign. I'll have a glass o' beer, please, and a bit o' bread and cheese. (*He comes forward, and sits at the table by the window.*)

FRED (*puzzled*). Have it on t' sign? (*Smiling.*) Aw, I see. I'd forgot about t' sign. (*He goes to draw the beer.*) Ye'll find it a bit cooler i't' next room. We have to keep a fire in here, choose how hot it is.

PORRITT. Oh, I'm all right here. . . . If I'm not in your way.

FRED. Nay, ye'll none be i't' road. Just suit yoursel' an' ye'll suit me. (*He brings a loaf and a cheese.*)

PORRITT. You'll do a nice little trade here, I'll be bound.

FRED. Nobbut middlin'. I fancy there'll be more i't' pigs an' pou'try nor i't' pub. But we haven't right sized it up yet—we've nobbut just comed. (*He completes his toilet.*) Don't ye belong to this part, then?

PORRITT. Not far off. (*He looks round the room as he eats, and his eyes rest on the bureau.*) That's a nice bit o' furniture you've got there.

FRED. Which is that? (*He follows PORRITT'S look.*) Aw, t' burrew?—It's right enough for what it is.

PORRITT. May I look at it? (*Without waiting for a reply he gets up, and goes to examine it.*) Um-m.

Do you know, it quite takes my fancy. P'r'aps you wouldn't care to sell it?

FRED. Nay, I don't reckon to deal i' old furniter. If I solded it, I s'ould ha' to get another, an' I don't want to bother.

PORRITT. Still, I suppose if it were worth your while—— (*He appears to be excited, though doing his best to hide it.*) Lid comes over, doesn't it, and makes a writing table? (*He lets down the lid, and begins trying the drawers.*)

FRED (*sharply*). Let them drawers alone!

PORRITT. Sorry, I'm sure. I wasn't thinking what I was doing. Well now, Mr. Fawthrop, how much would tempt you? I just happen to be wanting something of the kind, and this has quite taken my fancy. What shall we say?

FRED (*eyeing him with distaste and suspicion*). I don't want to sell.

PORRITT. Now, I won't stick at a pound or two.

FRED (*showing his temper*). I don't want your brass. I shan't sell it.

PORRITT. Well, don't lose your temper.

FRED. Nay, I didn't mean to speak sharp, but when folk won't be telled——

PORRITT (*with a constrained laugh*). Well, I suppose I am a bit stupid. If a thing takes my fancy I can't rest till I've got it. - Now come, you could easily get another that would answer your purpose just as well.

FRED. So could you, if it comes to that.

PORRITT. No, that's just the point. I take a fancy to a thing, and nothing else will do. Silly, I dare say, but it's the kind of man I am. You'll say I might get one made just like it; but there'd be sure to be some little thing that wasn't quite . . . And it wouldn't have the mellowness, the—the . . . Come, now, be reasonable. I'll give you—Shall we say five pounds?

FRED. No, I'm sure we shan't.

PORRITT. Well, fix a price, then. I don't want you to lose by it. P'r'aps you've paid nearly that. And there'll be the carriage, and one thing and another, and hunting up something to take it's place.

FRED. It cost me thirty-five bob, if tha wants to know.

PORRITT. By Jove, you got it cheap! Well, add that to the five pounds, and the odd shillings for carriage. I'll give you seven pounds for it.

FRED (*turning away, and speaking with decision but complete good humour*). It's no use, I shan't sell.

PORRITT. Stop a minute, stop a minute. Don't be in such a hurry. Really, I don't see why—If I make it worth your while, what does it matter whether you have this bureau or another?

FRED (*without attempting to disguise the mockery*). Well, ye see, I've ta'en a fancy to 't, an' naught else'll do.

(PORRITT *stands leaning against the bureau in great agitation. He takes out a handkerchief and wipes the sweat from his forehead.*)

PORRITT. Look here, I'll give you ten pounds for it, cash down. I've the notes in my pocket.

FRED. I shan't sell.

PORRITT. Twelve.

FRED (*shaking his head, and turning*). Is there aught else ye want, sir?

PORRITT (*taking out his purse, and paying for the beer*). Then I can't tempt you?

FRED (*taking the money*). Thank you. No, I shan't sell.

PORRITT (*going to the door very reluctantly*). If you'd say what you'd take—I'll make it—(*he pauses for effect*)—I'll make it TWENTY POUNDS!

(*Without answering, and apparently quite indifferent, FRED shakes his head and goes off towards the back*

door. PORRITT, watching him, suddenly loses control of himself. His face becomes purple with rage. He shakes his fist at FRED, and goes off, cursing.)

PORRITT. Damn you for a bloody stupid fool!

(FRED turns, and stands for a moment staring after him. He lifts his hand to his head, and scratches it thoughtfully. Then he walks over to the bureau, and inspects it, shaking his head slowly from side to side.)

FRED. Well—I'll—go—to—sea! (After a pause, calling.) Lizzie!

LIZZIE (calling from the yard). I'm busy, what does ta want?

FRED. Come here wi' tha. It's summat special.

(LIZZIE comes in from the yard. She is in working deshabelle, wearing a coarse harden apron and a mob cap. She is younger than her husband, and much quicker in speech and movement. Her features, like her speech, are a little inclined to sharpness, but the effect of this is redeemed by the rotundities of a trim figure, and by a general air of serenity, born of confidence in herself. Her arms, mottled pink, are bare to the dimpled elbows. FRED'S manner to her exhibits a combination of greedy affection and a teasing humour.)

LIZZIE. Well?

FRED. Just thee take a good look at that there burrew.

(He takes her by the shoulders and leads her towards it. She stoops quickly, eluding his grip.)

LIZZIE. Don't be silly, Fred. I want to get done.

FRED. There's naught silly about it, I'll tell tha. When I telled tha what I'd gi'en for that there burrew, tha said I'd more brass nor wit, didn't ta? Has ta changed thy mind?

LIZZIE (struck by his tone, seriously). Well, tha

knows, Fred, we haven't much aforehand if aught were to happen, an' thirty-five bob's thirty-five bob. S'pose tha was laid up for six month, as tha was afore, that there thirty-five bob 'ud come in handy.

FRED (*with relish*). Aye. An' a bit more 'ud come in handier, wouldn't it? How much does ta think I've had bid for that there burrew?

LIZZIE (*eagerly*). More nor tha gave?

FRED. Aye. A deal.

LIZZIE. Twice as much?

FRED. Guess again.

LIZZIE. Five pound?

FRED. Try doublin' it.

LIZZIE. I don't believe tha has.

FRED. Has what?

LIZZIE. Had ten pound bid for that thing.

FRED. I've had twenty pound bid for 't, lass.

LIZZIE. *Twenty pound!* An' tha didn't take it?

FRED (*with sharp decision*). No. An' if he'd bid me twenty thousand I shouldn't ha' ta'en it.

LIZZIE. Whatever does ta mean, Fred?

FRED (*explaining with much satisfaction in his own shrewdness*). It's as plain as t' nose o' thy face, 'at if yon chap'll gi'e twenty pound for 't, it's worth more. He comes in here actin' t' gentleman, an' reckonin' to take a fancy to 't. Now, is there aught about that there burrew 'at a gentleman 'ud take a fancy to?

LIZZIE. Well, I don't know, Fred. When I used to go to help at Mr. Horsfall's, I've heard 'em tell o' givin' a deal more nor that for old oak.

FRED. Old oak be blowed! Yon isn't old oak, not what they call old i't' furniter line. An' there's no carvin' nor naught.

LIZZIE. Fred, didn't t' auctioneer say 'at it had come from Milbank Hall?

FRED. Aye, but I took no notice of him. They tell t' truth now an' again, does them chaps, but not o' purpose. But we'll talk about that at after.

Let me get on wi' my tale. He comes swankin' in, an' he says, "Good mornin', Mr. Fawthrop." I says, "Ye seem to know my name." "Aye," he says; "if ye don't want folk to know your name, ye shouldn't put it on t' sign."

LIZZIE. But it *isn't* o't' sign, Fred. Yon painter never turned up.

FRED. I know. That's t' point. Now, how did yon chap know my name? An' *didn't* know, mind ye, 'at we'd nobbut just comed to t' place? He's been to t' auctioneer, has yon chap, after t' burrew, an' askin' who'd gotten it. I left my name an' address wi't' clerk. Now then, this is t' point, sitha. If he'll go to all that bother about a bit o' old furniter, it means 'at he knows summat. An' if he'll gi'e twenty pound, it means 'at it's worth happen as much again, if we knew what he knows. An' I'm bahn to find out. As much again! Why, t' chap was all of a twizzle. If I'd led him on, he'd ha' offered—there's no tellin' how much. When he saw it was no use, he was that put about, he could hardly ho'd hissel'. He started swearin' an' cursin' at me.

LIZZIE (*eagerly*). Have ye looked inside?

FRED. No. It's just as it come. All I did was to take t' drawers out, an' let t' lid down, to make sure 'at it was i' right fettle. There was naught inside 'at I seed, but if there was it's there yet.

(*They begin to examine the bureau.*)

• FRED (*suddenly drawing off*). Gow! Aw, I'd nearly forgot! I've to see yon agent this mornin', an' I've missed one train, foolin' wi' yon chap. (*Looks at his watch.*) I've just time to catch t' tea fifty-two. I'll tell tha what—I'll call at t' auctioneer's while I'm i't' town, an' see if I can make aught out. An' then when I get back, we'll turn all t' drawers out, an' have a right look at it.

LIZZIE. An' what if yon chap comes again?

FRED. Tha mun put him off. (*Takes his hat from a peg behind the door.*)

LIZZIE. Well, get back as sharp as tha can, then. I'll ha' t' dinner ready for a bit afore one, that'll gi'e tha time, won't it?

FRED. Aye, I can manage by then. Well, take care o' thysel'. If I thought he'd come again I wouldn't go. Happen he'd turn awk'ard if tha were by thysel'. I'd sooner lose twenty pound nor thee, tha knows, lass. (*Fondling her.*)

LIZZIE. Go on wi' tha. I know how to deal wi' men.

FRED (*with admiration, but not without a suspicion of distrust.*) Tha does, lass. Well, bye-bye.

LIZZIE. Pip-ip. Don't be late for t' dinner.

(*He goes out. She follows him to the door, and stands awhile looking after him. A carter enters the further room, and she serves him at the bar. This done, she goes to the bureau, opens the lid, and begins carefully to examine the interior.*)

(CURTAIN.)

(*The second action opens at one o'clock. LIZZIE is laying the table for dinner. She is evidently very much excited, and runs to the door at frequent intervals to look down the road. Potatoes are steaming above the stew in a double-decker pan on the fire. In her excitement she takes a tureen from the dresser, and runs to the door with it in her hand.*)

LIZZIE (*half aloud*). - Nay, I must be going dotty.

(*When all had been prepared for dishing the meal, she again goes to the door, sees FRED coming up the road, and has the meal served as he comes in, panting and mopping his face.*)

LIZZIE (*speaking as soon as he comes in*). Well, has ta fun' aught out?

FRED. Nay, let a chap get his breath. By Gow, that swells grand! (*He takes his hat and coat off, and sits to the table.*) It's right 'at it came from Milbank.

LIZZIE. Did ta ask him?

FRED. I'd no 'casion. I'd no sooner got into t' shop nor he says, "Aw, Mr. Fawthrop," he says, "ye mind that burrew I selled ye? I've had two chaps wantin' it, an' wouldn't be satisfied till I telled 'em who'd gotten it." "Aw," I says, "is there summat special about it, like?" "Well," he says, "I reckon it'll be 'cause it belonged to Lord Milbank." It seems he was a what's-ta-call-it— one o' them 'at collects things. An' half lunny, an' all.

LIZZIE. Why, tha knew that, Fred. There's all sorts o' tales about him.

FRED. I take no notice o' thy tales. But he says, does t' auctioneer, 'at if it gets out 'at a thing belonged to a connysewer they can get any price for it, very near. "I was surprised that went so cheap," he says, "but ye'll have them two chaps to see ye, an' I think I ought to have a bit o' commission," he says. I didn't let on 'at one of 'em had been.

(LIZZIE remains silent, and FRED realizes that this is unusual.)

FRED. Has yon chap been again?

LIZZIE (*half under her breath*). No.

FRED (*looking at her anxiously*). Lizzle, what's up? What—why doesn't ta speak?

LIZZIE (*unable to hide her excitement*). Get thy dinner, an' I'll tell tha at after.

FRED (*looks round at the bureau, then at LIZZIE, then puts down his knife and fork*). I won't eat another bite till tha tells me what's t' matter wi' tha.

LIZZIE (*breathless*). There's another man been. A right swell. Happen twenty-five or so, an' right nice-lookin'. An' tha should ha' seen t' way he went



on, like—same as if I were t' duchess, an' he were t' footman.

FRED (*rallying her*). I can see I'd better ha' stopped at home.

LIZZIE (*colouring*). Tha knows there's nob'dy but thee, Fred. If tha art a gert, awk'ard, clumsy, blunderin', nincumpump. (*The last sentence is added as she recovers from her momentary confusion, with the realization that FRED must be put in his place.*)

FRED. All right, go on wi' thy tale.

LIZZIE. Well, he comed in an' asked if tha were in, an' I said tha'd be back for t' dinner at one, an'—— (*She hesitates.*)

FRED. Well? Go on. Did he bid tha aught for it?

(LIZZIE *nods.*)

FRED. How much?

LIZZIE (*in a half hysterical whisper*). Fifty pound!

(FRED *lays down his knife and fork, pushes back his chair, turning it over in the act, and goes to the bureau. LIZZIE follows him.*)

FRED. What did ta say?

LIZZIE. I said I couldn't say naught, he'd better see thee. An' he said he'd call again about two.

FRED (*looking at his watch*). An' it's half-past one now.

(FRED *begins a thorough examination of the bureau, LIZZIE assisting him. She is so excited that she cannot keep still, and her hands tremble as she pulls out the drawers one by one. Several times she essays to speak, but checks herself. They take out all the drawers, and turn them upside down on the floor. Then they let down the lid of the desk.*)

FRED. There'll be one o' them secret drawers, I'll bet.

(*He tries the partitions, knocking to see if they sound hollow, and pulling and prodding without result.*)

LIZZIE (*speaking as if the words were forced out of her*). There's a bit—o' room—to spare at t' back. But let's get our dinners an' then——

FRED. I'll get to t' bottom o' this afore I do aught else. What was ta sayin' ? Where ?

LIZZIE. Let me try.

(*FRED stands aside, and she feels inside the desk. There is a sharp click.*)

FRED. That's it ! We've fun' it. (*He pulls out a small drawer.*) Damn ! It's em'ty !

LIZZIE (*turning away to hide her confusion*). P'r'aps someb'dy's fun' it afore us.

(*FRED, without answering or noticing her, goes off at the back.*)

LIZZIE. What are ta bahn to do ?

FRED (*returning with a hatchet*). I'm bahn to smash t' damned thing up.

LIZZIE. What for ? Nay, Fred ! An' we've fifty pound offered for it !

FRED. If there's aught in it, I'll find it, an' afore yon chap comes. If there isn't, I'll swin'le nob'dy wi' 't.

LIZZIE. What does ta mean wi' thy swin'le ? It isn't swin'lin' when ye nobbut take what folk offers.

FRED. I'm bahn to smash it up, I tell tha.

(*He raises the hatchet ; she holds his arm.*)

FRED. Now, it's no use, Lizzie. I'm bahn to smash it up. Get out o't' way.

LIZZIE (*resigned*). Well, ye must take it out at t' back, then. I won't ha' t' mess of it here. I never seed such a stupid chap as tha art.

FRED. Well, get ho'd an' we'll lift it out, then.

*(She helps him to carry the bureau and the drawers out at the back.)*

FRED. Ho'd on. It'll do there. If we take it right out in t' yard, an' aught rolls out, it might pop down t' grate. *(With recovered good-humour.)* Now, I'll clear up t' mess, lass.

LIZZIE *(returning to her dinner)*. Aye, that's what tha says. But when it comes to *doin'*, tha's a train to catch.

FRED *(calling from the back, in the intervals of chopping)*. Did ta see that bit i't' paper *(chop)* about a chap 'at took t' hatchet to t' wife *(chop)* 'cause she were al'ays naggin'? *(chop)*. They brought it in *(chop)* just *(chop)*ifiable *(chop)* homicide. Tha wants to mind how tha talks to t' man wi't' hatchet.

LIZZIE. Fred, I wish tha'd come an' finish thy dinner first.

FRED. I'll finish this afore I finish aught else.

LIZZIE. Well, but tha knows tha can't eat cold stew.

FRED. I care naught about it.

LIZZIE. Will ta have a cup o' tea when tha's done?

FRED *(chaffing her)*. Aye, thee make a cup o' tea, lass. It'll be a nice excuse for tha.

LIZZIE. Softhead!

*(The chopping goes on. LIZZIE clears the table, puts the kettle on, and lays the table again for tea. While she is so engaged, PORRITT comes in. He appears to have been running, and is sweating profusely.)*

PORRITT. 'Afternoon. Mr. Fawthrop in?

LIZZIE. Fred! You're wanted.

*(FRED drops the hatchet with a growl, and comes forward.)*

PORRITT. 'Afternoon, Mr. Fawthrop. *(He pulls out,*

*his watch.*) You haven't sold it, have you? (*Looking round for the bureau.*)

FRED. No, I haven't sold it, but—

LIZZIE (*interrupting*). We've had fifty pound bid for it.

PORRITT. Fifty pounds? It's a lot o' money for an old bureau. And it didn't tempt you? (*FRED shakes his head.*) Well, I'm in great haste. I've no time for haggling. I'll give you seventy-five. Cash down. Take it or leave it.

FRED (*slowly scratching his head*). It's a sight o' brass. I wouldn't like to sell ye 't, an' ye to rue it at after. Happen ye'd like to have a right look at it afore—

PORRITT (*cutting him short*). My good man, I've seen all I want to see, and I've no time to waste. Seventy-five pounds. Take it or leave it. (*Pulling out his watch again.*) I'll give you twenty seconds to decide.

(*While PORRITT is speaking, LORD MILBANK comes in. He is a fine, athletic-looking young man, tall and dark, clean-shaven, with aquiline features. His manner is easy, confident, and rather languid, and he speaks with a slight drawl. He is wearing a light grey tweed walking-suit.*)

FRED (*quietly*). All right. I'll take it.

MILBANK (*cheerily*). Good morning, Mrs. Fawthrop.

PORRITT (*half-audibly*). Damn and blast the— (*He controls himself with an effort.*)

MILBANK. Ha, Porritt! Then I suppose I'm too late. Am I intruding?

FRED (*to LIZZIE*). Is this t' fifty pound man?

LIZZIE (*to FRED*). Aye. (*To MILBANK.*) Good afternoon, sir. Won't you sit down? (*She goes to the easy chair near the fire, gives the loose cushion, which is rather tumbled, an expert shake of adjustment,*

and indicates it to him. He bows, smiling, but remains standing.)

FRED. Well, sir, ye're too late or not, as it lights to turn out. This gentleman's just bid me seventy-five, an' I've said I'd take it. He seems i' a bit of a hurry, or else——

PORRITT. Too late, my lord. It's mine. Now, Mr. Fawthrop, I've got a cart at the door. Let's finish the business, please. If you'll show me where it is, I'll pay you the money, and then we can——

FRED (*pointing out at the back, and standing aside to give PORRITT a clear view*). It's there, sitha!

(*There is a moment's pause, in which PORRITT realizes the situation.*)

PORRITT. You damned swindler! Where's the diamond?

(*He darts forward, and begins to rummage among the chips. MILBANK, who has been watching the proceedings with an air of easy nonchalance, becomes suddenly alert. He springs after PORRITT, seizes him by the collar, and jerks him back into the middle of the room.*)

MILBANK. Hands up! Spread your fingers out! (*PORRITT struggles, but obeys.*) Now, you stand over there. (*Pushes him towards the window.*)

PORRITT. You've got nothing to do with it. Damned interfering! You get out!

MILBANK (*with his usual easy drawl*). What do you say, Mr. Fawthrop? Must I get out, or may I stay for the kill? I don't want to interfere.

FRED. Stay an' welcome. I want naught but fair play.

PORRITT. Fair play! It's a put up job between you. Where's the diamond?

FRED. Now, look here. I'm about sick o' this. Tha comes in here, wantin' to buy yon burrew. I telled tha what I'd gi'en for it—thirty-five bob.

Tha bid twenty pound for it, an' I wouldn't take it. This gentleman bid me fifty—isn't that so? (To MILBANK.)

MILBANK. Quite right, Mr. Fawthrop.

FRED. Was there aught said about any diamonds?

MILBANK. Not a word.

FRED. Nor I've heard naught about any. Tha comes in again. I telled tha—at least, Lizzie did—'at we'd had fifty pound bid for it, an' tha bid seventy-five. I telled tha it was a sight o' brass, an' tha'd better take a right look at it first, an' tha said tha hadn't time. Now, there's nob'dy wants to swindle tha. I won't ho'd tha to thy bargain. If tha wants it, it's there. I'll gi'e tha twenty seconds to decide.

(*He pulls out his watch, with a ludicrous exaggerated imitation of PORRITT'S manner.*)

MILBANK (to LIZZIE, *pulling out his cigar-case*). You don't mind my smoking, Mrs. Fawthrop?

LIZZIE (*flurried and flattered*). Not at all, your lordship.

MILBANK (*handing his case*). Will you have a cigar, Mr. Fawthrop? I think you'll like them.

FRED (*taking one*). Thank you, sir.

LIZZIE (*whispering to FRED*). It's "my lord."

PORRITT (*in a state of great excitement*). Will you give me your word that you haven't taken anything out—

MILBANK. If you'll take my advice, Mr. Fawthrop—don't. And if it will fortify your resolution at all, I'll give you seventy-five for the heap of chips as it stands. I don't want to come in edgeways, you know. It's Porritt's bargain. But if he cries off, I'm on.

PORRITT (*sneering*). Oh yes, we're sportsmen, aren't me? And while I'm getting the cart round, who's going to watch the pile? What's to prevent any of you from getting it while my back's turned?

FRED. What sort of a cart have you? If it's

a horse an' cart, Lizzie here'll lead it round to t' back door for ye, an' ye can lift t' stuff on yoursel', bit by bit, as ye like, an' there'll nob'dy interfere wi' ye. Now, is it on or off? 'Cause t' time's up, an' I've gi'en tha a deal longer nor we said.

(PORRITT *looks with suspicion from one to another.*

LIZZIE *turns away, and busies herself with the tea-things.*)

PORRITT. If Mrs. Fawthrop'll say that she hasn't

MILBANK. Porritt, you're incorrigible. Where the devil did you learn the game, man? You can't put your money on when the ball's stopped rolling.

LIZZIE. If he wants me to say——

MILBANK. Now, *please*, Mrs. Fawthrop.

FRED. Lizzie, shut up wi' tha. (*Consults his watch again.*) Time's up, Mr. Porritt.

PORRITT (*in desperation, before FRED has finished speaking*). It's on!

FRED (*to MILBANK*). How's that, umpire?

MILBANK. Really, it's for you to decide, Mr. Fawthrop. I'll be glad to step in, if you rule Porritt out, but I want to be fair.

FRED (*to PORRITT*). Well, now then. It's on, if tha likes. Take him t' cart round, Lizzie, lass.

(LIZZIE *goes out at the front, and is presently heard bringing up the cart at the back. Meanwhile PORRITT advances to the table, and pulls out a leather pocket-book. His hands tremble so that he has difficulty in counting out the notes. He clutches them, and rushes off to guard his property, when he hears LIZZIE at the back door. MILBANK keeps an alert watch on his movements. When LIZZIE has come in, the purchase is completed, and FRED gives a receipt for the money.*)

FRED. Thank you. Now, ye can do what ye like wi' 't. An' I hope ye find summat.

(PORRITT goes off at the back without reply, and during what follows he can be heard occasionally, loading his cart with the fragments of the bureau.)

MILBANK (*seating himself at the table*). Well, I suppose you're just dying of curiosity, aren't you, Mrs. Fawthrop?

LIZZIE. Well, I should like to know—(*with sudden suspicion*)—Fred, d'you think them notes'll be all right?

MILBANK (*laughing*). Oh, I say! What a business woman! I beg your pardon, Mrs. Fawthrop, but really, you know, you've done rather well out of it.

LIZZIE (*seriously*). That's just it.

MILBANK. Oh, thank you! Then I suppose I should have been suspected, too?

LIZZIE. I didn't mean that, my Lord, but you see——

FRED. Askin' your pardon, sir, but we don't know who are are, nor Mr. Porritt neither.

MILBANK. No, of course you don't. I suppose that's why you haven't asked me to have a cup of tea with you, Mrs. Fawthrop?

LIZZIE (*fluttered*). If you'd like a cup, my lord——

MILBANK. It makes things easier—doesn't it?—when you sit round a table to talk.

(LIZZIE makes the tea, and they all sit at the table.)

MILBANK. I dare say you'll have heard of old Lord Milbank?

FRED. Him 'at died a bit sin'? They said he was wrong in his head, didn't they?

MILBANK. He was my father.

LIZZIE (*in shocked protest*). Fred! (*Whispering*.) Tha might ha' guessed that, gawmless!

FRED. Aw, I'm sorry. I didn't——

MILBANK. Not at all. They did say so. But now, what does it mean, Mrs. Fawthrop? If it means "gawmless" (*with a mischievous glance at*



FRED) I never knew a man less so than my father. But if it means that he did all kinds of outrageous things that nobody else would ever dream of doing—he did. He was a great deal misunderstood, but it was all his own fault. Lots of people believed that he had a harem up at the hall—I dare say you'll have heard that, too.

LIZZIE (*colouring*). I've heard 'at he was a bad man.

MILBANK. Yes, just so. His own sister believed it. She wouldn't come to visit him. She's rather strait-laced, my aunt Miriam. Well, there wasn't the least bit of foundation for that story.

LIZZIE. People 'at sets them tales about, I wish they had what I'd give 'em. (*Indignantly.*) An' his own sister!

MILBANK. Yes, but she didn't set it about, you know. I fancy he contrived somehow to do that himself. Anyhow, he liked it. He said it kept off the fools.

FRED (*anxious to get to the point*). He was a connysewer, wasn't he?

MILBANK. He had that reputation too. In jewels, chiefly. He had a strong-room built in the library, and we used to have burglar alarms about once a week. The old chap would come down in his dressing-gown, call all the servants up to search the house, and unlock the strong-room, and go through all the packages to see that nothing was missing. Then everybody went back to bed again. My father had a queer little chuckling laugh, like this—"He-he-he-ck!"—with a catch at the end. I can't imitate it properly—it was a beastly sort of noise. And when he'd had us all up in the middle of the night, searching the cellars and corridors, and he'd counted up the packages and made all the fuss he could, he'd toddle off to bed again, cackling. . . . What delicious pastry this is, Mrs. Fawthrop—but of course you'll make it yourself.

LIZZIE (*highly flattered*). It isn't up to t' usual

this week, my lord, but if you like it there's plenty more i't' cellar.

MILBANK (*helping himself*). Delicious! . . . We were rather disappointed with those jewels. There was an inventory attached to the will, and they were all there, but when I had them valued—well, they were not worth anything like what I expected. They were all there but one; and that was the famous one. It was a blue diamond that my father had brought from India when he was a young man.

LIZZIE. Is it——?

MILBANK. Yes.

FRED (*whispering, with a nod towards PORRITT*). Hadn't ye better speak a bit lower?

MILBANK. Oh, he knows all about it. That's why he's here. He was our butler. Well, the will was the queerest thing you ever heard of. The estate came to me, of course—it was entailed. And my mother's money—he had only a life interest in that. But the rest was scattered about in thousands for all sorts of wrong-headed schemes. Ten thousand pounds is to be spent in experiments in growing the opium poppy under glass.

FRED. I think folk weren't far out i' what they said. Couldn't ye upset it?

MILBANK. The will? I don't think so. I wouldn't if I could. You see, it's exactly the sort of will I should have expected him to make. He gave his reasons, you know. "Being of opinion that the cultivation of the opium poppy damns the souls of those who engage in it, I desire, for the credit of the English name, that we should rather undertake our own damnation than that of our Indian fellow-subjects." He-he-he-ck! The cackle wasn't put down in black and white, but it was there. I wake up in the night sometimes, and think I hear it. (*LIZZIE shivers.*) Rather horrible, isn't it? But—well, the old guy. was always a trump to me, and his money shall be wasted as he wanted it to be.

FRED (*scandalized at the "waste o' brass" which this involves*). I'd upset that will, if it were me.

MILBANK. Yes, but he wasn't your father. However, to come back to the diamond. There was a codicil about it, dated a few days before his death. Porritt witnessed that codicil. It read like this: "My intentions respecting the jewel known as the Devil's Star, together with the secret of its whereabouts, will be found in a sealed envelope deposited with my solicitors, Messrs. Sharp & Pluckett. It is my will that the envelope shall be opened on the day six calendar months after my death, or if that day be a Sunday, then upon the next following day." He-he-he-ck. Well, of course, we were all agog last Tuesday when the envelope was to be opened. We had a family meeting in the library, we locked the door, but when we were half-way through I remembered Porritt. We'd had trouble with Porritt before. There he was at the key-hole, and I sacked him on the spot. Well, old Pluckett broke the seal, and read the thing out. "The blue diamond known as the Devil's Star will be found in the secret drawer of the oak bureau, which stands at the end of the first floor corridor in the left wing of Milbank Hall. I bequeath it to the first finder, and much good may it do him." You don't believe it, I suppose, but when old Pluckett had finished reading I heard the pater's "He-he-he-ck" as plainly as ever I heard anything.

FRED. An' yon's t' burrew?

MILBANK. That's it. We cleared it out along with a lot of other old rubbish only a fortnight ago.

FRED. *Was* there a blue diamond? Happen it was all a cod.

MILBANK. Oh yes, there was one. I've seen it many a time. My father used to bring it out to show people as a special favour. He'd make them stand at the far side of the room, and then he'd open the case and let them see. He quarrelled with

old Pelmanby—the Marquis, you know—because he wouldn't let him take it in his hands. Pelmanby said it was an insult, and the governor laughed in his face. "Pelmanby," he said—I was in the room at the time—"better men than you have sold their souls for this little trinket. There's blood on it, man. I wouldn't be alone in the room with you now for all the jewels in creation." Pelmanby went black in the face with passion. "Frank," says the gov., "ring the bell—quick—he'll murder me for it. He-he-he-ck." And Pelmanby strode out of the house in a fury. "He-he-he-ck!" It's queer. I thought I heard it now.

LIZZIE. Oh-h!

MILBANK. I hope I haven't frightened you, Mrs. Fawthrop. It does get on one's nerves.

FRED. Well, my lord, I don't mind telling you 'at I found a secret drawer in that burrow, but there was naught in it.

MILBANK. Oh, I daresay. The usual thing, in the desk at the top?

FRED. Aye.

MILBANK. And when you were chopping it up?

FRED. I was at it when he came in. I don't think there's room for any more drawers i' what I left, but I wouldn't swear to it.

MILBANK. Well, you may be right, but I knew my father pretty well, and I think the joke would have been too simple for him at that. It's my opinion that somewhere among those chips that Porritt is messing about with now is the Devil's Star. As long as there's a piece of wood left big enough to hold it, there's a chance. Porritt will find it if it is there; and I tell you candidly if I knew for certain that he hadn't found it yet, I'd give him five hundred for the chips as they stand.

FRED. By Gow! Then it'll be worth happen a thousand?

MILBANK. It's worth—anything. There isn't

another. A thousand's nothing in the price of a thing like that.

(LIZZIE gets up, her face very pale, and goes to the fireplace. The others also rise, and stand looking off to where PORRITT is still busy among the chips.)

FRED (*whispering*). He doesn't look as if he'd fun' aught.

MILBANK. He wouldn't. The sulkier he looks——

(MILBANK stops speaking as PORRITT comes forward smiling.)

PORRITT. Well, good afternoon, Mrs. Fawthrop. Good afternoon, gentlemen.

THE THREE. Good afternoon.

(PORRITT goes out at the back, and is heard leading away the cart.)

MILBANK. Now I wonder if he has found it.

LIZZIE (*as if the words were forced out of her*). I wonder.

(CURTAIN.)

(The third action opens the same evening, at a few minutes before closing time. The voices of exhilarated men are heard from the bar parlour. LIZZIE is busy at the bar, washing up glasses, by the light of a small hand-lamp placed on one of the shelves in the recess. A larger and more ornate reading lamp stands on the centre table in the kitchen. The heavy red curtains are drawn before the window, and PORRITT, who enters stealthily by the front door, is easily able to conceal himself completely in the recess made by the curve of the window.)

FRED (*within*). Na, chaps. It's just on ten.

(He comes out of the bar parlour, and stands in the entry, looking out. The men file out slowly, talking as they go.)

FRED. Aye, I fancy we s'e have it fine for a bit.

A MAN. Has ta heard about Bill? He's backed three winners.

FRED. Tha never says? Some folk has all t' luck. Good-night, lad. Good-night, chaps.

*(The church clock is heard to strike ten. The last of the men go out, and FRED locks and bolts the door. He comes into the room, stretching himself and yawning. He takes a pipe from the mantelpiece, fills and lights it, and sits down at the fireside, drawing his chair well back, though the fire has almost died out.)*

FRED. Have I to come an' dry for tha, lass?

LIZZIE. I've just finished.

FRED. Come an' sit tha down then, a bit.

LIZZIE. In a minute.

*(She turns out the little lamp, and draws the curtains before the bar. Then she moves about aimlessly, glancing furtively at FRED. He sits quite still, staring into the dying fire. She comes up behind him, and puts her hands on his shoulders, coaxing.)*

LIZZIE. Fre-ed.

FRED *(with an air of guarded serenity)*. Well?

LIZZIE. Will ta promise not to be vexed if I tell tha summat?

FRED. It depends what it is.

LIZZIE. I daresn't tell tha if tha doesn't promise.

FRED *(his jealousy aroused)*. Is it about yond young swankie?

LIZZIE. Tha great softhead!

*(Standing behind his chair, she takes his face in her hands, and turning it upward she kisses his forehead, his cheeks, his lips, and, with a low laugh, half-loving, half-teasing, the end of his nose. He pulls her round on to his knee.)*

FRED. Well, what is it then?

LIZZIE. Fred—I—— (*She cannot go on.*)

FRED. Tha what?

(*She stands up and stands by the fire, agitated.*)

FRED. Lizzie, whatever's up wi' tha? Tha's been queer all t' day.

LIZZIE. Fred, it's—it's yon diamond.

FRED. Nay, Lizzie, I thought tha had more sense.

LIZZIE. Fred, if we'd fun' it, it 'ud be ours, wouldn't it? I mean by t' law?

FRED. What's t' use o' talkin' about that? I don't believe there is a diamond.

LIZZIE. Well, but *if*——?

FRED. Aye, I reckon it would. Whatever are ta gettin' at?

LIZZIE (*dry-lipped*). Fred, I've fun' it. It's under t' pot dog.

(*FRED jumps out of his chair, lifts up the china dog on the mantelpiece, and takes out a packet.*)

LIZZIE. I fun' it i' t' secret drawer while tha were out, an' I didn't tell tha 'cause——

FRED (*opening the packet*). 'Cause what?

LIZZIE. I were 'fraid of tha sayin' it didn't belong to us, or tellin' them chaps 'at we'd fun' it. I was going to sell it first, an'—but—— Isn't it a beauty?

(*FRED has opened the packet, and is holding the jewel between his finger and thumb.*)

FRED. It is that. By gum, Lizzie, tha'rt a deep 'un. (*His tone is of grudging admiration, with a shade of mistrust.*) An' tha had it there all t' time, an' tha let me take yon chap's brass for a bundle o' chips!

LIZZIE. He didn't, Fred. He paid for t' chance. An' I thought, if there were aught wrong about t' diamond, t' brass 'ud come in.

FRED. Well, I'm not going to give him his brass

back. Not to yond. But I shan't keep it. I'll send it back to t' infirmary. All but for t' thirty-five bob 'at I paid for t' burrew.

LIZZIE. Well, I reckon tha'll do as tha likes, whatever I say. But t' diamond's ours.

FRED. It's *thine*, lass.

LIZZIE (*catching her breath*). What does ta mean, Fred?

FRED (*reading*). "I bequeath it to the first finder."

LIZZIE. Fred, tha doesn't think I meant to keep it from tha? Tha doesn't think—(*sobbing*)—Fred, it's *thine*! Fred, Fred, if it were worth a million I'd throw it i' t' navy afore it should come between me an' thee. (*She breaks down completely.*)

FRED (*touched*). Lass, tha's gotten a fool for a husband. (*Kissing her.*) Hush then. 'Course it won't come between us. Tha shall be t' grand lady afore folk, but tha'll be t' same old Lizzie when we're by wersel's. Don't take on, lass. I were nobbut a bit vexed at tha hiddin' it an' sayin' naught. (*He consoles her to good purpose.*)

LIZZIE (*after a pause*). Fred, what shall we do wi' 't for t'-night? Had we better take it upstairs wi' us?

FRED. It'll be safest where it was. There's nob'dy knows we've got it, an' if they did, t' last place they'd look for it 'ud be under t' pot dog.

(*He straightens out the wrapper on the table, and folds it carefully over the diamond. LIZZIE stands with her hand on his shoulder.*)

LIZZIE. "And much good may it do him." Fred, it sounds like a curse. (*She shivers.*)

FRED. Never thee mind about that, lass. We'll find someb'dy 'at likes them sort o' curses, and we'll sell 'em it. When tha gets t' brass tha'll find a way o' dealing wi' 't, I'll be bound for tha.

(*He replaces the package under the pot dog.*)



LIZZIE. Fred, we'll be right rich.

FRED. Aye. Tha ought to ha' wed a swell, Lizzie. An' tha could ha' done if tha hadn't been a fool. What will ta do wi' me now, like? Tha'll wish many a time 'at thy awk'ard gawmless husband were out o' t' way.

*(His tone is jocular, but with a touch of anxiety. LIZZIE detects that note.)*

LIZZIE. So that *was* it! That *was* what tha were thinking! Fred, we'll live just how tha likes an' where tha likes. But if tha'rt ta'en badly as tha was afore, tha won't ha' to go to t' infirmary an' happen die i' t' workhouse at t' finish.

FRED *(unsteadily at first)*. I'm not bahn to be ta'en badly, lass. I'm bahn to try t' rest cure. What does ta say to a trip on t' Mediterranean? We never had a right honeymoon to start wi', tha knows. We can ha' one now.

LIZZIE. Fred, I'll never keep aught from tha again, not a minute. I fair ached to tell tha when tha started choppin' it up.

FRED. It's happen as well tha didn't.

LIZZIE. Oh, Fred! Then it's all right?

FRED. Aye, lass. Let's go to bed.

*(He takes a candle from the mantelpiece, and lights it.)*

LIZZIE. I don't feel as if it was safe, leaving it there.

FRED *(teasing)*. Some folk swallows 'em. What says ta? It's t' safest way.

LIZZIE. Go on wi' tha! Softhead!

*(She turns the light out, and they go upstairs, For a little while the room is in complete darkness, except for a very faint glow from the dying fire. Then a shaft of moonlight streams in, as PORRITT opens the curtains and comes out from his hiding place. He steals softly towards the mantelpiece, watching the stairway door; that is why he stumbles against a*

chair, and in trying to right it overturns it upon the fender with a loud crash. He rights it at once, and then steps swiftly back a pace or two, and stands perfectly still. There is a moment's silence. He then steps cautiously forward again, reaches the mantelpiece, and is seen to fumble there awhile. The stairs creak. He runs to the door, but finding the bolts too stiff to be at once opened, darts back to his hiding-place and draws the curtains, shutting out the light. FRED comes in from the stairs, and peers about. He is in shirt and trousers.)

LIZZIE (*from the stairs*). Is there aught ?

FRED. I can't see naught.

(*He strikes a match. PORRITT opens the curtains slightly. He is holding a pistol.*)

PORRITT. I have you covered. If you move I fire. I only want to get away quietly.

LIZZIE (*screaming as she rushes into the room*). Help ! Murder ! Police ! Fire !

(*The match goes out. FRED suddenly dashes forward, head down, and seizes PORRITT. The pistol goes off. They roll on the floor.*)

FRED. Get a light, Lizzie, quick.

(LIZZIE lights a candle, but while she is doing so PORRITT frees himself, leaving his coat in FRED'S hands, and rushes to the back door, which he opens. He goes out. LIZZIE runs to FRED, who gets up, looking a little dazed, and rubbing the back of his head.)

LIZZIE. Are ye much hurt ?

FRED. He copt me a nasty crack over t' head wi' t' pistol, but it's naught. It just stunned me for t' minute, an' then he was off.

LIZZIE. Has he got it ?

FRED. Not he.

LIZZIE. Have you looked ?

(She runs to the mantelpiece, and lifts up the china dog.)

LIZZIE. It's gone!

(FRED, with a curse, runs to the door. The curtain falls as he is fumbling with the lock.)

(CURTAIN.)

(The fourth action begins about eleven o'clock on Sunday morning. Some Sabbath changes have been made in the appearance of the kitchen. The steel fender has been replaced by a gorgeous affair in black and bronze, with elaborate fittings, and even the oven door has been changed for a more resplendent one, with silver-plated hinges and latch. There is a crimson hearth-rug, made of worsted healds, and the Sabbath table-cloths are of embossed plush. FRED is sitting alone at the fireside, reading a Sunday paper. There is a loud knocking at the front door. FRED goes to open it, and ushers in LORD MILBANK.)

MILBANK (speaking as they come in). I got the note you left, of course. Sorry you missed me. I was away all day—didn't get home till after midnight. Motoring. Lucky I didn't make it a week-end.

(He sits on the settle. FRED resumes his chair.)

FRED. Well, I thought happen ye'd know where to find him.

MILBANK. Oh yes, there'll be no difficulty about that.

FRED. Well, now then. We'd best be movin'. (He gets up.)

MILBANK. Don't be so damned energetic, man. There's no hurry. And I've come more than six miles. I've a legal claim to reasonable refreshment.

(FRED gives an impatient growl.)

MILBANK. It's all right. I know where he is.

Now, if you'll talk this thing over quietly, Mr. Fawthrop, I think we can come to something: but if you won't, I wash my hands of it.

(FRED moves to the bar.)

FRED. Well, I reckon ye'll have to have it your own way. What's it to be?

MILBANK. Scotch, please.

(FRED produces two glasses, a bottle of whisky, and a jug of water. They each mix a glass. MILBANK pulls out his cigar-case.)

MILBANK. Have a cigar. Mrs. Fawthrop not in? I say, what a devil of a woman it is—I beg your pardon.

FRED (with an attempt at manners). Don't mention it. Nay, she reckons to go to t' church of a Sunday mornin'. I'm a Chapel man mysel', an' there isn't one about here.

MILBANK. By Jove, what a good idea! I never thought of that, though I've an aunt who's a Plymouth sister. However, to come to business.

FRED. Na then.

MILBANK. Porritt went straight to London, of course. He has a sister, a widow, who keeps a pub. in Camberwell. And he was there yesterday. (Hides a yawn with his hand). But I don't think—(takes a sip of whisky)—I don't think finding him will be the worst of it, Mr. Fawthrop.

FRED (with heat). It won't if he's selled t' diamond while we're foolin' about here.

MILBANK (with exaggerated composure). It won't if he has the diamond in his pocket.

FRED. I don't see what ye mean. If I once lay my hands on that chap, I'll forgive him if he gets off again.

MILBANK. He sent me this wire yesterday.

(He hands FRED a telegram. FRED reads it with amazement.)

FRED. Well, he must be barmy ! I reckon ye've set t' police on ?

MILBANK. No, I've done nothing. I got it at the same time as your note.

FRED. Well, if you'll excuse me, my lord (*with a sarcastic emphasis on the title*), I think it's time I knew where we stand. Which side are ye on, like, if it's a fair question ?

MILBANK. Don't talk nonsense, Mr. Fawthrop. What do you think I'm here for ? Now you see what he says. (*He reads the telegram.*) "Have found the D. If buyer, wire Croft's." He's found it, you see. Among the chips. In the bureau you sold him. You remember what I said ?—that I'd give five hundred for them on the chance.

FRED. Aye, but I can swear, an' so can Lizzie, 'at that there diamond were under t' pot dog on t' mantel, at after he'd ta'en t' burrew away wi' him. (P)

MILBANK. Wait a moment. Then he says, "If buyer." He wants me to buy. Now you'll find if you think it over that if I were to side with Porritt, as you were good enough to suggest, we should have a rather strong position. You see, all that happened after I left you would be a made-up tale of yours. Porritt has the diamond. He has the copy of the codicil that it was wrapped in, and he has your receipt for the price he paid for the bureau. No magistrate would commit him on the strength of a tale like yours. That's what he relies on.

FRED (*walking about the room excitedly*). Never mind about t' magistrate. Let me get ho'd o' him, an' I'll commit him—wi' my boot toe. I'll either ha' that diamond or I'll take it out of his bones !

MILBANK (*with an air of pained rebuke*). I can't be a party to any violence, Mr. Fawthrop.

FRED. I'll be hanged if I can make you out, any road up.

MILBANK. Well, you see, I want that diamond.

I want to keep it in the family. And there seems to be a chance of getting it cheap.

FRED (*clenching his fists*). Aw. So ye're bahn to——

MILBANK (*quietly, enjoying the situation*). I'm a buyer, Mr. Fawthrop. But I prefer to buy from you. That's why I want you to get it. But I haven't much faith in your method. Now, if you'll sit down quietly, and behave yourself for five minutes, I'll tell you my idea.

FRED (*reluctantly*). Well, na then. (*He sits down.*)

MILBANK (*sipping his whisky*). We must reconstruct the crime. We'll suppose that when Porritt got to London he went to a dealer. Well, it's dangerous to buy things like that from the first man that comes along. The dealer would want to know how he came by it. If Porritt showed him the codicil, he would either wire me for confirmation, or he'd tell the police, and they'd wire. Things haven't got so far. My theory is that Porritt's been frightened. He wouldn't have come to me if he could have sold it in London. We're not exactly bosom friends.

FRED. Aw, there'll be plenty o' folk i' London, I s'd think, 'at 'ud take it an' ask no questions.

MILBANK. No doubt. But perhaps they'd want all the plunder. There it is, anyhow. He thinks he can do better with me.

FRED. Well, it doesn't sound to sense, to my thinkin'. But there's t' telegram. An' what's to be done then?

MILBANK. Do you know, I'm rather expecting him down.

FRED. I wish *I* was.

MILBANK. Well, we shall see. Anyhow, I didn't want to miss him if he came, so I left word for them to send him on here.

FRED (*sarcastically*). Aye, an' he'd come, wouldn't he?

MILBANK. I think so. My shover is a pretty

stiff chap, and there's a footman or two, and——

FRED (*grinning*). I see. I hope you telled 'em 'at ye wouldn't ha' no violence.

MILBANK. Mr. Fawthrop, I'm afraid I forgot to mention it. But then they know me.

FRED. An' if he doesn't come?

MILBANK. I don't really expect him till to-morrow, but you know he'll be nervous till he gets rid of the thing. He won't want to hawk it about, and he'll be anxious to know whether I'm to be squared or not. If he doesn't turn up before morning, I propose to wire, making an appointment. Now, it's for you to choose—— Hello! What's that?

(*A motor is heard to draw up at the front. There is a knocking at the door.*)

FRED (*as he goes to open the door*). I'll leave it to you, my lord.

MILBANK. Right. Keep cool.

(*FRED opens the door, admitting PORRITT, a chauffeur, and a groom.*)

MILBANK (*to the chauffeur*). Ah, you found the way all right, John? Well, perhaps you'll wait a few minutes outside. Close the door, please.

(*The two servants go out.*)

FRED (*to PORRITT, with dreadful sarcasm*). Now, Mr. Porritt, take a chair, an' make yoursel' at home. We were nobbut just talkin' about ye.

(*PORRITT, who seems perfectly at ease, sits down at the table.*)

PORRITT. Good morning, Mr. Fawthrop. Good morning, my lord. I suppose you got my wire. I should have preferred to see you privately, but— (*with a shrug*)—it doesn't matter.

MILBANK. Yes, I got your wire. But you see, Porritt, I'm in a difficulty. I understand you have

the diamond. Perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me how you got it.

PORRITT (*with a slight, but perceptible sneer*). Not at all. I might never have found it if I hadn't overheard what you said to Mr. Fawthrop.

MILBANK. Ah-h? What was that?

PORRITT. I think you said that you wouldn't give up the search so long as there was a piece of wood left big enough to hold the diamond. "Porritt will find it," you were good enough to say. And I did. It was a very neat piece of work. A little drawer let into the wood at the side.

MILBANK. Dear me, how interesting! And do you know, I've been listening to a cock-and-bull story about your stealing the diamond from Mr. Fawthrop. He says it was under the china dog on the mantelpiece.

PORRITT. Oh, is *that* why I was brought here with a guard? But, my lord, you heard Mr. Fawthrop say that he knew nothing about a diamond.

FRED. All I said was 'at there were nothing i' t' bargain about a di'mond.

PORRITT (*with a keen glance at FRED*). Mr. Fawthrop, if ever this business were to come before a court, my lawyer would draw such a queer tale out of you, that nobody 'd believe a word of it.

FRED. He'd get naught out o' me but t' truth.

PORRITT. Quite so. That's what I mean, of course. But it would sound so *very* much stranger than fiction. (*To MILBANK, changing his tone.*) You see, my lord, my cards are so strong that I can put them down on the table.

MILBANK. A remarkably strong hand, Porritt. I said as much to Mr. Fawthrop before you came in. And yet you don't go "solo." You come to me. That's the puzzling part of it, Porritt. Really, it looks fishy, you know. Why take the diamond to London at all? Or if you do, why bring it back? I suppose you *have* brought it back?



PORRITT. Well, to tell the truth, my lord, the man I had in my mind was a bit awkward to deal with.

MILBANK (*with a glance at FRED*). H'm. I guessed as much, Porritt. A crook, I suppose? Wanted to beat you down to nothing? Talked about risk and so forth, as if you were a thief?

PORRITT. Suppose we come to business.

FRED. Hear, hear.

MILBANK. Very well. What's the price?

PORRITT (*with a furtive glance at him*). Shall we say two thousand?

MILBANK (*sharply*). No, I don't think we will. I should prefer to take a trip down to Woolford police station with you. You don't bluff me, Porritt, and we may as well cut this thing short. I buy from Mr. Fawthrop if he'll sell. I wouldn't pay *you* a cent. But if he likes to pay you back what you paid him for the bureau——

FRED. Aye. I'll gi'e tha that. All but for t' thirty-five bob 'at I paid for it mysel'. I'm not goin' to lose by it.

MILBANK (*hiding a smile*). Quite so. That's natural. Let me see, that will be seventy-three pounds five shillings. It's a low price for the Devil's Star, Porritt, but it's the best we can offer. There's a flaw in the title-deeds, you see.

PORRITT (*after a moment's hesitation*). I'll take five hundred.

MILBANK (*rising*). John!

PORRITT (*quickly*). Wait a minute.

MILBANK. Very well. (*To JOHN, who has opened the door.*) Stay outside, John. Sorry. It's a mis-fire. (*JOHN retires.*) I don't want to hurry you, Porritt, but it isn't the least use making offers. We don't give sixpence more than I said.

PORRITT (*after a long pause, sulkily*). Let's see your money:

(FRED goes to the till in the bar, and returns with a

*bundle of notes and a bag of gold. PORRITT produces a packet. FRED counts fourteen five-pound notes on to the table, adds three pounds from the bag, and a half-crown, a two-shilling piece, and sixpennyworth of coppers from his pocket. The exchange is made by LORD MILBANK, who carefully examines the diamond before handing the money to PORRITT.)*

MILBANK. John! (JOHN appears in the doorway.) You needn't wait, John, I shall walk.

(JOHN goes out. The motor is presently heard driving off. PORRITT has been slowly bestowing the money, smiling to himself, FRED watching him with growing irritation. PORRITT stands hesitating awhile.)

FRED. Na then, lad, is there aught else tha wants 'Cause to tell tha t' honest truth, I'm none that fond o' thy comp'ny.

PORRITT. I only thought it might save you a little trouble, Mr. Fawthrop, if I told you that I've had the thing valued. (He moves to the door, and, as he is going out, turns with a grin.) It's your father's best joke, my lord. The Devil's Star is—*paste!*

(He goes out, closing the door after him. The two stare at each other in silence. Suddenly, and quite distinctly, is heard the sound of an old man's chuckling laugh—"He-he-he-ck!")

MILBANK (starting up). Did you hear it?

(FRED nods. The sound is repeated. MILBANK goes to the door, and throws it wide. It lets in the brilliant light of a summer noon, but there is no one there.)

(CURTAIN.)

*Continued from second page of cover.*

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