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*Title:* The Raffle

*Date of first publication:* 1928

*Author:* Edward Plunkett (Lord Dunsany) (1878-1957)

*Date first posted:* Jun 2 2013

*Date last updated:* Jun 2 2013

Faded Page eBook #20130611

This eBook was produced by: Delphine Lettau & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

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# THE RAFFLE

Drawn from:

## Seven Modern Comedies

*By*

**Lord Dunsany**

G. P. Putnam's Sons  
London & New York

### DRAMATIS PERSONAE

SIR JAMES ELFORD, *a business man who has bought a place in the country.*

MISS ELFORD, *his sister.*

THE REV. JOHN BIFFINS.

THE DARK STRANGER.

THE BISHOP OF SAND AND MURROW.

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## THE RAFFLE

*SCENE: The smoking-room of Sir James Elford's house in the country. Ground floor, with French windows opening on to garden, in which a garden-party or church bazaar is raging. Amongst papers on his table lies a folded legal document (about four inches by ten), which turns out to be a bond payable to bearer, value £2,500. The bond that is laid there later is similar in size and shape.*

BIFFINS. The raffle will be announced, Sir James, by the ringing of a bell.

MISS ELFORD. Oh, that will be an excellent way, Mr. Biffins, an excellent way.

BIFFINS. Yes, we have a little hand-bell of a rather attractive note; a gift, you know, a gift from dear Mrs. Muldron.

MISS ELFORD. Dear Mrs. Muldron. Such a helpmeet to the dear bishop.

BIFFINS. Yes, they both arrived looking so well. They are in the garden now, partaking of a little strawberry ice.

SIR JAMES. Well, look here.

MISS ELFORD. Oh, I *hope* they are enjoying it. So nice of them of share in our simple pleasures.

BIFFINS. Oh yes, his lordship expressed himself as very well satisfied with the strawberry ice. Very ...

SIR JAMES. Look here.

BIFFINS. Oh?

SIR JAMES. Look here. I've got the bond here. You'd better have it.

BIFFINS. Oh, not yet, Sir James, not yet. A few little preparations yet. A few preliminary arrangements.

SIR JAMES. Well, it's here when you want it.

BIFFINS. Very well, Sir James. Very well.

MISS ELFORD. And my little tea-cosy. The humble receptacle. That is quite ready too.

BIFFINS. Ah, Miss Elford, humble no doubt, as becomes us all, and yet in its way as acceptable as the great sum that it will contain. In its way perhaps even inestimably worthier than £2,500.

MISS ELFORD. Oh, Mr. Biffins.

BIFFINS. I will make the necessary preparations, and arrange for the ringing of the bell.

[*Exit.*

SIR JAMES. Well, how a sane business man can promise £2,500 worth of good bonds for a silly bazaar as I've done ...

MISS ELFORD. Oh, James.

SIR JAMES. ... As I've done, passes my comprehension. If indeed I *am* sane!

MISS ELFORD. James!

SIR JAMES. Yes, I think that listening to Biffins' maunderings unhinged my intellect, until I was easy fruit for a shrewd fellow like that bishop.

MISS ELFORD. James. Really!

SIR JAMES. Yes I. A man with a certain repute in the city. Looked on as a pretty hard-headed man, and watched pretty closely on the Stock Exchange to see how I think things are going. And do you know what I am?

MISS ELFORD. James, you're heated.

SIR JAMES. Do you know what I am? I'm a mug.

MISS ELFORD. You're heated now. But you've given liberally. Liberally, James. And your reward will be elsewhere, if you don't spoil it all by a fit of temper.

SIR JAMES. Temper, indeed. Well, it's done now. There's the damned bond.

MISS ELFORD. What, James?

SIR JAMES. Well, there's the bond. It's worth £2,500, payable to bearer. It's there. I've pencilled £2,500 on the outside so that you will know. Don't go and pick up the wrong bit of paper. I rather hope you will.

MISS ELFORD. You must think me very careless, James.

SIR JAMES. Well, who am I to call people careless when I've given away good securities for £2,500, for you to put under that damned tea-cosy and raffle.

MISS ELFORD. James!

SIR JAMES. Yes, it *is* a damned tea-cosy. I was wrong about the bond; but it is a damned tea-cosy. Fancy putting good securities under a damned thing like that and raffling them.

MISS ELFORD. James, I shall leave you.

SIR JAMES. Yes, leave me to my folly.

MISS ELFORD. I will. You had earned your reward by this, and you're throwing it away with both hands.

SIR JAMES. I wish I could if I could get my £2,500 back. And I wish Biffins was with the Devil!

MISS ELFORD. James, you are in a mood that is open to the very worst influences.

[*Exit.*

SIR JAMES. Well, let them come. Let them. . . . Hullo.

*Enter the Dark Stranger.*

DARK STRANGER. Your garden-party is so delightful, Sir James.

SIR JAMES. Oh? I'm glad.

DARK STRANGER. One of the most delightful I've ever attended.

SIR JAMES. Oh, I——

DARK STRANGER. One can hardly tear oneself away from it to come in here.

SIR JAMES. Oh? You, er? You came over with the bishop?

DARK STRANGER. Well, no. Er, no. No, not with the bishop.

SIR JAMES. Mrs. Muldron invited you, I expect.

DARK STRANGER. Well, no. No, in the end she didn't.

SIR JAMES. But I don't think I quite remember you.

DARK STRANGER. No, Sir James. And the fact is you didn't invite me.

SIR JAMES. Really?

DARK STRANGER. Well, not exactly. No, it was business that brought me.

SIR JAMES. Business?

DARK STRANGER. It often does.

SIR JAMES. I don't think I quite understand what you want with me.

DARK STRANGER. If you want nothing with me, Sir James, I will go. But I came to make you an offer of £2,000 in a matter of business.

SIR JAMES. Oh, business. Do sit down. (*Dark Stranger sits.*) Will you have a cigar?

[*Dark Stranger accepts it and lights up.*]

DARK STRANGER. Well, I hope you'll forgive me coming in like this. But business always attracts me. And as I have a perfectly sound offer to make I took the liberty....

SIR JAMES. Don't mention it. I'm delighted to see you, delighted. You find that cigar all right?

DARK STRANGER. Perfect.

SIR JAMES. I don't mind saying that it's a great relief to me to be talking with you after Mr. Biffins. He gets on my nerves.

DARK STRANGER. It was about him that I came.

SIR JAMES. Oh, really?

DARK STRANGER. Yes. Well, you see, I am a collector. I'll ask you to bear in mind, Sir James, that most collections are very silly. I mean people collect luggage labels and, well, anything.

SIR JAMES. Yes. Yes, of course.

[*He lights a cigar too.*]

DARK STRANGER. And other people's collections always seem silly *whatever* they are. I mean to say that my collection is not interesting like yours. But my offer is sound enough. Two thousand in cash.

SIR JAMES. What do you know of my collection, may I ask?

DARK STRANGER. Nothing. I only mean that other people's collections always seem absurd compared to one's own.

SIR JAMES. Yes, *I* see. And what do you collect?

DARK STRANGER. Souls.

SIR JAMES. I beg your pardon?

DARK STRANGER. Souls.

[*Knocking ash off into ash-tray in matter-of-fact way.*]

SIR JAMES. I don't quite follow.

DARK STRANGER. I collect souls. And I've come to offer you two thousand pounds for the soul of the Rev. John Biffins.

SIR JAMES. You collect souls? Who are you?

DARK STRANGER. Haven't you guessed?

SIR JAMES. Well, I suppose I have.

DARK STRANGER. Then I thought that between ourselves we ought to be able to arrange a matter of business.

SIR JAMES. You said two thousand?

DARK STRANGER. Yes.

SIR JAMES. But Biffins' soul doesn't belong to me.

DARK STRANGER. Aren't you squire here?

SIR JAMES. Yes—oh yes. But you know things aren't what they were.

DARK STRANGER. Aren't you in with him a good deal?

SIR JAMES. Yes, damn him. I am. Too much.

DARK STRANGER. I expect you could persuade him.

SIR JAMES. I don't see how.

DARK STRANGER. Well, he persuaded you.

SIR JAMES. Oh, about the raffle? Well, it was the bishop that got that out of me.

DARK STRANGER. Couldn't you try?

SIR JAMES. I'd like to. Damn it. I'd like to. Only....

DARK STRANGER. Only what?

SIR JAMES. You mentioned two thousand pounds.

DARK STRANGER. Yes.

SIR JAMES. Well, you see, he's the sort of fellow who'd set a lot of *store* by his soul.

DARK STRANGER. You think two thousand's not enough.

SIR JAMES. As a price, as a price for the actual goods, no doubt it would be enough. I don't say it wouldn't. The question is whether he'd take it.

DARK STRANGER. I should think you could persuade him to take a good deal less.

SIR JAMES. I'm afraid not. There's a very small margin for profit. Why don't you persuade him yourself?

DARK STRANGER. I thought an intermediary would ensure better results. And as you are the squire, Sir James, I naturally came to you. If the offer doesn't appeal to you, I will go for a walk amongst your guests, and apologize for having encroached on your time.

[*He prepares to rise.*]

SIR JAMES. Wait a moment. I should like to do business with you. I quite appreciate the offer. Only the probable margin of profit seemed to be so small, on account of his setting so much store by it.

DARK STRANGER. Well, well, Sir James; you were thinking of asking me two thousand five hundred.

SIR JAMES. How did you know what I was thinking?

DARK STRANGER. That is my job.

SIR JAMES. Very well. I was.

DARK STRANGER. Well, shall we call it two thousand five hundred, Sir James?

SIR JAMES. Well, all right. I never liked to stand out for too much. One makes much better connections by satisfying everybody. I ... I ...

DARK STRANGER. Quite so. We part very good friends. Now that is the bond I suggest. You see he parts with all rights here or elsewhere in the following goods or commodity, that is to say his soul, to you absolutely, in consideration of...; well, that is your affair, and I hope you make a good profit.

SIR JAMES. Thanks. Well, naturally, I'll try. But I'm afraid it won't be very large, on account of the store he sets by it. But never mind.

DARK STRANGER. Well, you'll see what you can do with him. Then he signs it there, and then you merely sign this brief footnote re-assigning all rights to me in consideration of two thousand five hundred pounds.

SIR JAMES. Yes, I see. I'll have all that made out. When shall I see you?

DARK STRANGER. Oh, I'll drop in.

SIR JAMES. Thanks so much. You're going now?

DARK STRANGER. Just for a stroll amongst your guests.

SIR JAMES. I'm afraid you'll find a Church Bazaar rather dull.

DARK STRANGER. Oh, I rather like them.

SIR JAMES. Well, I'll do what I can then.

DARK STRANGER. Thank you so much.

SIR JAMES. Well, good-bye.

DARK STRANGER. Good-bye.

*[Goes out smoking jauntily.]*

SIR JAMES. H'm ... H'm ... Well, I'll get back some of my two thousand five hundred anyway.

*Enter Biffins.*

BIFFINS. You wanted to see me, Sir James.

SIR JAMES. No.

BIFFINS. Oh, but a gentleman just came up to me and said you did. I mean a gentleman with a most charming manner, very charming indeed. I do not think he can have wilfully misled me.

SIR JAMES. Oh, yes, of course. Yes, I do.

BIFFINS. I didn't think he would have misled me.

SIR JAMES. No. Well, Mr. Biffins, I am a business man, as you know.

BIFFINS. Oh yes, Sir James, and a very generous one. I'm sure we've all had cause to know that since you came here.

SIR JAMES. Well, anyway, I'm a business man.

BIFFINS. Oh yes, Sir James. In the city. Of course.

SIR JAMES. So I'm going to make you a business offer.

BIFFINS. Yes, Sir James?

SIR JAMES. I hope you'll treat it as such.

BIFFINS. Oh, certainly, Sir James.

SIR JAMES. Purely as a business matter.

BIFFINS. As you wish, Sir James. Certainly. As you wish.

SIR JAMES. Because; well, because it *is* a business matter; and that is all about it.

BIFFINS. I understand, Sir James.

SIR JAMES. Well, the fact is, you see; the fact is, I have my cheque-book here, and I was thinking of offering you a thousand pounds for your soul.

BIFFINS. For my soul, Sir James?

SIR JAMES. Yes, a thousand pounds.

BIFFINS. Oh, I couldn't, Sir James, I couldn't. With all the respect in the world, I really couldn't. Oh, it would be, it would be a dreadful deprivation.

SIR JAMES. But look what you could do with a thousand pounds.

BIFFINS. Oh, I know, Sir James. It's very liberal of you indeed. Very liberal. But really, I couldn't.

SIR JAMES. You only have to sign this. Just sign it here, and I give a cheque for a thousand.

BIFFINS. Oh no, Sir James. I don't think you understand how much it means to me. I really feel I couldn't.

SIR JAMES. Well, then, I tell you what. I tell you what. I'll give you twelve hundred and fifty.

BIFFINS. It's a great sum, Sir James, but even for that ... I really have the greatest compunction.

SIR JAMES. Now look here, Mr. Biffins. Am I the squire or am I not?

BIFFINS. Oh yes, Sir James. Oh yes.

SIR JAMES. Well, very well. Do you refuse to do business with me?

BIFFINS. Oh no, Sir James.

SIR JAMES. Well, that is what it amounts to.

BIFFINS. I didn't actually refuse, Sir James. I only said I had great compunctions. And so I have, the very greatest compunctions.

SIR JAMES. Well, *I* had the greatest compunctions when the bishop asked me for that two thousand five hundred. (*Points to it.*) But he got over my compunctions and talked me round. It seems rather hard that *my* compunctions should be treated as amounting to nothing; but, the moment I try to do a bit of business with one of you on my own, all these compunctions are put in my way.

BIFFINS. Oh, but Sir James, I can't *help* having compunctions.

SIR JAMES. Nor can I. But I put mine aside to amuse the neighbourhood. And now you won't treat me in the same way.

BIFFINS. Well, Sir James, if you put it like that....

SIR JAMES. And look what you could do with twelve hundred and fifty pounds.

BIFFINS. Oh, yes, I know. But I still have the greatest compunctions. But to oblige *you*, Sir James, only to oblige *you*.

SIR JAMES. All right, then, you sign here. Just read what you're signing while I write the cheque.

BIFFINS. It's only to oblige you, Sir James.

SIR JAMES. Yes, I know. You see you just part with all rights in your soul, to me absolutely. That's all you do, and I've made out this cheque to you for one thousand two hundred and fifty pounds.

BIFFINS. Thank you, Sir James, thank you. I feel I still have great compunctions. But thank you very much. (*Sir James gives cheque.*) Thank you. And now I must really go and arrange for the raffle.

SIR JAMES. Very well. My sister will bring you the security whenever you're ready, and her tea-cosy.

BIFFINS. Oh yes. Of course the tea-cosy. Especially the tea-cosy. (*Goes to door.*) Ahem. I was thinking; I fear I must inform the bishop of this. I feel I must tell the dear bishop.

SIR JAMES. The bishop? Good Lord! Don't tell a soul.

BIFFINS. Oh, I feel I must tell the bishop.

SIR JAMES. Tell the bishop? What ever for?

BIFFINS. Oh, I feel I must.

SIR JAMES. Well, I wouldn't.

BIFFINS. Oh, I feel I ought.

[*Exit.*

SIR JAMES. Hum! That'll make trouble. Meanwhile this is worth two thousand five hundred to me. (*Writes on outside of bond in pencil, saying aloud.*) Two thousand five hundred. (*Looks out of window.*) Good Lord, he's telling him. (*Steps are heard running.*) Running!

[*Bishop appears in doorway a bit blown. Sir James*

*throws the bond on to table, where it falls more  
or less on top of the other one.*

BISHOP. Sir James, I have just heard Mr. Biffins' dreadful story.

SIR JAMES. Oh yes. Well, I did a bit of business with Mr. Biffins.

BISHOP. Business, Sir James! A shocking transaction.

SIR JAMES. Well, of course in business one may sometimes do a deal that doesn't look all it should, if it gets out. But what did he want to blurt it out for?

BISHOP. It was his duty, Sir James, to tell me of this most shocking transaction.

SIR JAMES. Well, I am a good deal out of pocket over this bazaar, and I felt I was entitled to get a little back by a business deal if I could.

BISHOP. I am pained, Sir James; I am inexpressibly pained. Nor can I conceive how it is possible for you to make anything whatever by this extraordinary and very painful joke.

SIR JAMES. As a matter of fact, someone has offered me a considerable sum for this very stuff.

BISHOP. For this very stuff, Sir James? My comprehension may be weak, but it fails to follow you.

SIR JAMES. For Mr. Biffins' soul.

BISHOP. His soul? A considerable sum? Who? Who offered you this?

SIR JAMES. Well, he seems to be the fellow you preach against.

BISHOP. The fellow I... Oh! And in a Christian country. May I *ask* you, Sir James, how ever you found yourself able to do what you say you have done?

SIR JAMES. Well, Bishop, if you had a sister like mine, she'd drive you to it.

BISHOP. Oh! How dreadful.

SIR JAMES. I see how it looks to you, Bishop. But then, you see, I'm a business man, and a deal is a deal to me. I don't mind giving money away if I've got to; but I never go back on a deal.

BISHOP. I am inexpressibly pained.

SIR JAMES. But I'm prepared to meet you, Bishop. What do you say to three thousand five hundred? Three thousand five hundred pounds and Biffins' soul is yours.

BISHOP. You ask me to buy this poor man's soul from you?

SIR JAMES. I give you the option.

BISHOP. Are you aware of the dreadful nature of this traffic that you propose?

SIR JAMES. Well, to me it's business. I thought you might be glad of the opportunity.

BISHOP. So I would. So I would. I would welcome anything that would enable me to save that poor man from his folly.

SIR JAMES. Well, three thousand five hundred is my price. I hope we shall agree on it.

BISHOP. That is my difficulty.

SIR JAMES. Well, Bishop, I'm sure that I've named nothing you can't afford.

BISHOP. That is not quite the point.

SIR JAMES. No?

BISHOP. No. You see, I've been a bishop for some years now. And I necessarily have a certain amount of experience. And if I were to begin, only to *begin*, to pay more for anything than its reasonable value, I should in a very short while have nothing left, like any other spendthrift. A bishop *cannot* give reckless prices.

SIR JAMES. I make a small profit, of course, in everything that I touch. But I don't think that "reckless prices" is a phrase fairly describing the price that I ask of anybody.

BISHOP. Now, Sir James, I am a very busy man and necessarily I acquire a certain amount of experience, just as you do yourself.

SIR JAMES. Oh, certainly.

BISHOP. Well, then, between ourselves, strictly between our two selves. *Is* the soul of Mr. Biffins worth the price you are asking?

SIR JAMES. Well, I didn't say it was, quite. I naturally have my profit.

BISHOP. Can you conscientiously say that your profit would be a reasonable one?

SIR JAMES. Well, it's all a question of supply and demand. You seemed eager to get it, and I should have thought it was worth that to you.

BISHOP. No, no. There are innumerable demands on a bishop's purse. He cannot afford to pay fancy prices for anything.

*[Mr. Biffins is heard with his silly bell, ringing up and down the garden. Both men listen to him. Somehow the noise seems to convince Sir James that he is asking too much.]*

SIR JAMES. Well, shall we say three thousand?

BISHOP. No, no, I cannot give so much for....

*Enter Miss Elford.*

BISHOP. ... for the matter in question.

MISS ELFORD. Oh. I will not disturb you a moment.

*[She runs up to tea-cosy, takes bond from the table, and runs out archly.]*

SIR JAMES. Well, Bishop, I can't take less. It would scarcely leave me a profit.

BISHOP. I cannot. I cannot pay three thousand pounds for the soul of Mr. Biffins. My position compels me to consider prices as carefully as you would. And I cannot, I cannot in anything, go so far beyond its intrinsic value.

SIR JAMES. Well, I'm sorry. I'm sorry I cannot meet you and I'm sorry for Mr. Biffins. But I cannot appreciably reduce my demand and leave myself any considerable increase over what I shall get for that. (*Points to table where he threw bond.*) One can't let sentiment enter into business.

BISHOP. No. I understand that.

SIR JAMES. But I thought you might put up three thousand pounds to save Mr. Biffins.

BISHOP. No, no, I cannot make exceptions. I cannot give more than things are worth just because I am a bishop. Quite the contrary. If once I made an exception everyone would take advantage of me.

SIR JAMES. It's not so very much.

BISHOP. Now, Sir James, a diocese requires as much *savoir faire* as perhaps any business.

SIR JAMES. Oh yes, I grant you that.

BISHOP. Well then, as two men of affairs, *is* the soul of Mr. Biffins worth what you're asking for it?

SIR JAMES. Well. Well, no. But you know, Bishop, we business men, we don't ask what things are worth, we ask what we think we can get.

BISHOP. Yes, and I as a bishop of a very large diocese, with many demands on my purse, go very carefully into every demand; and where I make purchases I do so only at reasonable prices.

SIR JAMES. Well, what would you say was a reasonable price, Bishop? I won't spoil a deal for the sake of a hundred or so. What would you say was reasonable?

BISHOP. A thousand pounds.

SIR JAMES. Impossible.

BISHOP. Not a penny more.

SIR JAMES. It would be sheer loss to me.

BISHOP. I couldn't give more than a thousand for Mr. Biffins' soul.

SIR JAMES. We cannot meet then?

BISHOP. No.

SIR JAMES. It seems hard on Biffins.

BISHOP. Nobody would give such a price for it.

SIR JAMES. Then there seems nothing to be done.

[*Bishop sadly shakes his head.*]

*Enter Biffins running and skipping, hugging the tea-cosy.*

BIFFINS. Oh, I've won it, I've won it. My lord, I've won it.

BISHOP. Control yourself, Mr. Biffins. I congratulate you. Two thousand five hundred pounds will mean a great deal. But control yourself.

BIFFINS. Oh, my lord, it wasn't the two thousand five hundred. It was my soul. Oh, the joy of it. The joy of it. Look, my lord, look. (*He shows the Bishop the bond that he had signed.*) You see, my lord, you see, it has two thousand five hundred written on it in pencil; but it isn't that, my lord, it isn't that. It's that bond that I signed, that I told you of.

BISHOP. Let me see.

[*He takes it. Sir James looks over his shoulder.*]

SIR JAMES. Why? What? (*He rushes to table.*) She's taken the wrong one and raffled it.

BISHOP. Yes, that's it.

BIFFINS. Oh, the inexpressible joy.

CURTAIN

[The end of *The Raffle* by Lord Dunsany]