## diffusions=n=rator

## Saki (H H Munro)

Laura

.ebnemA "You are not really dying, are you?" asked

Tuesday," said Laura. "I have the doctor's permission to live till

.ebnemA "But today is Saturday; this is serious!" gasped

Saturday," said Laura. "I don't know about it being serious; it is certainly

"Death is always serious," said Amanda.

".fi finerrant to warrant it." all that sort of thing when circumstances have of it. I've been petty and mean and vindictive and haven't been very good, when one comes to think I bnA .meinegro newer organism. And I good in the life one has just lived, one suppose. You see, when one hasn't been very I ,bnih some thing. An animal of some kind, I going to leave off being Laura, but I shall go on "I never said I was going to die. I am presumably

.ylitsed ebnemA bisz "Circumstances never warrant that sort of thing,"

"Egbert is a circumstance that would warrant any "If you don't mind my saying so," observed Laura,

.....

"There's been so little water in the stream lately," objected Amanda; "it seems hardly sporting to hunt an animal when it has so little chance of taking refuge anywhere."

"One would think you wanted to shield the beast," said Egbert.

"Perhaps it will go elsewhere now there are no more fowls left," suggested Amanda.

"It's a case of necessity," said Egbert; "once an otter takes to that sort of thing it won't stop."

"On no account! You can't dream of such a thing!" exclaimed Amanda. "I mean, it wouldn't do, so soon after a funeral in the house."

"I shall get the otter hounds to come here at the earliest possible moment," said Egbert savagely.

Disregard for mortuary convention was carried to further lengths next day; during the absence of the family at the funeral ceremony the remaining survivors of the speckled Sussex were massacred. The marauder's line of retreat seemed to have embraced most of the flower beds on the lawn, but the strawberry beds in the lower garden had also suffered.

remains."

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one ought to show respect to one's own mortal Lulworth; "it's a nice point in etiquette how far "It's her own funeral, you know," said Sir

funeral was over," said Amanda in a scandalised

went out to superintend the strengthening of the

Egbert was too agitated to eat any breakfast, and

Amanda looked quickly and furtively across at Sir

down to the stream at the bottom of the garden;

feet all over the place, and we followed the tracks

"No," said Egbert, "there were marks of webbed

"Sounds more like a polecat," said Sir Lulworth.

knowledge how to be as devastating as possible

fowls singled out for destruction; it almost seems

expense over. My best flower bed and my best

carnation bed that I've been to such trouble and wen tedt fo elbbim edt ni tder newe

"Was it a fox, do you think?" asked Amanda.

leice the brute that did the deed had special

"I think she might at least have waited till the

voice.

ruhorth.

poultry yard defences.

"." avidently an otter

".emit no estar short space of time."

"How could you?" exclaimed Amanda.

"Anyhow, he needn't have gone on about it for the entire evening and then have said, 'Let's say no more about it' just when I was beginning to enjoy the discussion. That's where one of my petty vindictive revenges came in," added Laura with an unrepentant chuckle; "I turned the entire family of speckled Sussex into his seedling shed the day after the puppy episode."

"They chased his young broods of speckled Sussex and drove two sitting hens off their nests, besides running all over the flower beds. You know how devoted he is to his poultry and garden."

"Oh, I daresay the wrongness has been on my part," admitted Laura dispassionately; "he has merely been the extenuating circumstance. He made a thin, peevish kind of fuss, for instance, when I took the collie puppies from the farm out for a run the other day."

"I don't see what's wrong with Egbert," protested Amanda.

honour, and endure him: I haven't."

amount of that sort of thing. You're married to him -- that's different; you've sworn to love,

> ".mาit pretended to be laying at the time, but I was "It came quite easy," said Laura; "two of the hens

"Inabicce ne sew ti theuodt aw bnA"

with a love of fun. An otter, perhaps." γlevil bne inceele printeele printeele printeele bad sort in my way, so I think I may count on of some kind. On the other hand, I haven't been a lemine ne od llede I .meinegro rowol e ni od lliw grounds for supposing that  $m\gamma$  next incarnation "You see," resumed Laura, "I really have some

.ebnemA bies ",'netto ne se uoy enigemi f'nes I"

angel, if it comes to that," said Laura. ne se em enigemi neo uoy esoqque d'nob I ,lleW"

.1'nbluoo 942 .1n9lie sew ebnemA

"-- angit svelte figure -rise to the fly you've been dangling before them; having to wait for hours till they condescend to to fetch the trout in their own homes without the year round, and the satisfaction of being able enjoyable, "continued Laura, "salmon to eat all "Personally I think an otter life would be rather

"how dreadful to be hunted and harried and "Think of the otter hounds," interposed Amanda;

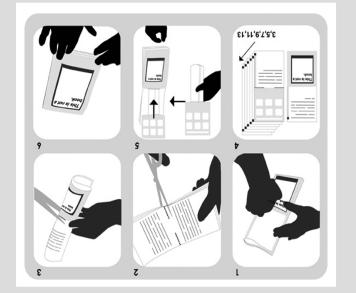
.spnil991 hopelessly inadequate to express his outraged os sew ageugnel s'hadg∃ ;dguage was so "What little beast?" asked Amanda, suppressing a

spluttered Egbert. ", Nubian beast of a naked brown Nubian boy,

.lli ylzuoines zi ebnemA won bnA

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Saki (H H Munro)

Laura

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"Insanity? No, I never heard of any. Her father lives in West Kensington, but I believe he's sane on all other subjects."

"She had an idea that she was going to be reincarnated as an otter," said Amanda.

"One meets with those ideas of reincarnation so frequently, even in the West," said Sir Lulworth, "that one can hardly set them down as being mad. And Laura was such an unaccountable person in this life that I should not like to lay down definite rules as to what she might be doing in an after state."

"You think she really might have passed into some animal form?" asked Amanda. She was one of those who shape their opinions rather readily from the standpoint of those around them.

Just then Egbert entered the breakfast-room, wearing an air of bereavement that Laura's demise would have been insufficient, in itself, to account for.

"Four of my speckled Sussex have been killed," he exclaimed; "the very four that were to go to the show on Friday. One of them was dragged

"The little beast has thrown all my clean shirts into the bath! Wait till I catch you, you little --"

When Amanda had recovered to a certain extent from her attack of nervous prostration Egbert took her to the Nile Valley to recuperate. Change of scene speedily brought about the desired recovery of health and mental balance. The escapades of an adventurous otter in search of a variation of diet were viewed in their proper light. Amanda's normally placid temperament reasserted itself. Even a hurricane of shouted curses, coming from her husband's dressing-room, in her husband's voice, but hardly in his usual vocabulary, failed to disturb her serenity as she made a leisurely toilet one evening in a Cairo hotel.

"What is the matter? What has happened?" she

"Rather fun with half the neighbourhood looking

Saturday-to-Tuesday business of dying by inches;

and then I should go on into something else. If I

should get back into human shape of some sort;

had been a moderately good otter I suppose I

probably something rather primitive -- a little

brown, unclothed Nubian boy, I should think."

"I wish you would be serious," sighed Amanda;

As a matter of fact Laura died on Monday.

her uncle-in-law, Sir Lulworth Quayne. "I've

asked quite a lot of people down for golf and

"Laura always was inconsiderate," said Sir

"She had the maddest kind of ideas," said Amanda; "do you know if there was any insanity

fishing, and the rhododendrons are just looking

Lulworth; "she was born during Goodwood week, with an Ambassador staying in the house who

"you really ought to be if you're only going to live

"So dreadfully upsetting," Amanda complained to

on, and anyhow not worse than this

asked in amused curiosity.

finally worried to death!"

till Tuesday."

their best."

hated babies."

"Rather. A fine she-otter. Your husband got rather badly bitten in trying to 'tail it.' Poor beast, I felt quite sorry for it, it had such a human look in its eyes when it was killed. You'll call me silly, but do you know who the look reminded me of? My dear woman, what is the matter?"

> "Good gracious!" fumed Egbert, "I'm not thinking about sport. I want to have the animal killed as soon as possible."

Even Amanda's opposition weakened when, during church time on the following Sunday, the otter made its way into the house, raided half a salmon from the larder and worried it into scaly fragments on the Persian rug in Egbert's studio.

"We shall have it hiding under our beds and biting pieces out of our feet before long," said Egbert, and from what Amanda knew of this particular otter she felt that the possibility was not a remote one.

On the evening preceding the day fixed for the hunt Amanda spent a solitary hour walking by the banks of the stream, making what she imagined to be hound noises. It was charitably supposed by those who overheard her performance, that she was practising for farmyard imitations at the forth-coming village entertainment.

It was her friend and neighbour, Aurora Burret, who brought her news of the day's sport.

"Pity you weren't out; we had quite a good day. We found at once, in the pool just below your garden."

"Did you -- kill?" asked Amanda.

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