

house-party was supposed to gather in full strength at lunch. On the day after the "Game" had been started there were, however, some notable absentees. Waldo Plubley, for instance, was reported to be nursing a headache. A large breakfast and an "A.B.C." had been taken up to his room, but he had made no appearance in the flesh.

"I expect he's playing up to some character," said Vera Durmot; "isn't there a thing of Moliere's, '*Le Malade Imaginaire*'? I expect he's that."

Eight or nine lists came out, and were duly pencilled with the suggestion.

"And where are the Klammersteins?" asked Lady Blonze; "they're usually so punctual."

"Another character pose, perhaps," said Bertie van Tahn; "'the Lost Ten Tribes.'"

"But there are only three of them. Besides, they'll want their lunch. Hasn't anyone seen anything of them?"

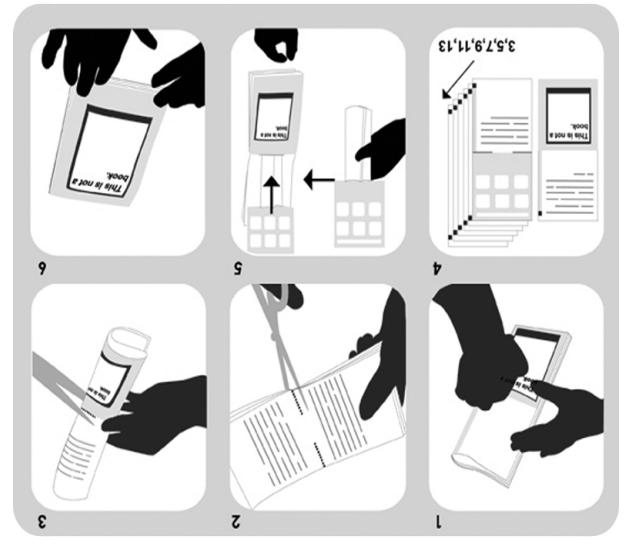
"Didn't you take them out in your car?" asked Blanche Boveal, addressing herself to Cyril Skatterly.

"I hope you've come full of suggestions for Christmas," said Lady Blonze to her latest arrived guest; "the old-fashioned Christmas and the up-to-date Christmas are both so played out. I want to have something really original this year." "I was staying with the Mathesons last month," said Blanche Boveal eagerly, "and we had such a good idea. Every one in the house-party had to be a character and behave consistently all the time, and at the end of the visit one had to guess what every one's character was. The one who was voted to have acted his or her character best got a prize." "It sounds amusing," said Lady Blonze. "I was St. Francis of Assisi," continued Blanche; "we hadn't got to keep to our right sexes. I kept getting up in the middle of a meal, and throwing out food to the birds; you see, the chief thing that one remembers of St. Francis is that he was fond of the birds. Every one was so stupid about it, and thought that I was the old man who feeds the sparrows in the Tuileries Gardens. Then Colonel Pentley was the Jolly Miller on the banks of Dee." "How on earth did he do that?" asked Bertie van Tahn.

And by way of emphasising his annoyance at the prospect he sent Waldo's pillows flying to the top of the wardrobe. "But why no tails?" asked Waldo, whose teeth were chattering with fear and rage and lowered temperature. "My dear boy, have you never heard the ballad of Little Bo-Peep?" said Bertie with a chuckle. "It's my character in the Game, you know. If I didn't go hunting about for my lost sheep no one would be able to guess who I was; and now go to sleep! weeps like a good child or I shall be cross with you." "I leave you to imagine," wrote Waldo in the course of a long letter to his mother, "how much sleep I was able to recover that night, and you know how essential nine uninterrupted hours of slumber are to my health." On the other hand he was able to devote some wakeful hours to exercises in breathing wrath and fury against Bertie van Tahn. Breakfast at Blonze's was a scattered meal, on the "come when you please" principle, but the

A Touch of Realism

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"He laughed and sang from morn till night,"
 explained Blanche.

"How dreadful for the rest of you," said Bertie;
 "and anyway he wasn't on the banks of Dee."

"One had to imagine that," said Blanche.

"If you could imagine all that you might as well
 imagine cattle on the further bank and keep on
 calling them home, Mary-fashion, across the
 sands of Dee. Or you might change the river to
 the Yarrow and imagine it was on the top of you,
 and say you were Willie, or whoever it was,
 drowned in Yarrow."

"Of course it's easy to make fun of it," said
 Blanche sharply, "but it was extremely interesting
 and amusing. The prize was rather a fiasco,
 though. You see, Millie Matheson said her
 character was Lady Bountiful, and as she was our
 hostess of course we all had to vote that she had
 carried out her character better than anyone.
 Otherwise I ought to have got the prize."

"It's quite an idea for a Christmas party," said
 Lady Blonze; "we must certainly do it here."

Sir Nicholas was not so enthusiastic. "Are you
 quite sure, my dear, that you're wise in doing this

thing?" he said to his wife when they were alone
 together. "It might do very well at the Mathesons,
 where they had rather a staid, elderly
 house-party, but here it will be a different matter.
 There is the Durmot flapper, for instance, who
 simply stops at nothing, and you know what Van
 Tahn is like. Then there is Cyril Skatterly; he has
 madness on one side of his family and a
 Hungarian grandmother on the other."
 "I don't see what they could do that would
 matter," said Lady Blonze.
 "It's the unknown that is to be dreaded," said Sir
 Nicholas. "If Skatterly took it into his head to
 represent a Bull of Bashan, well, I'd rather not be
 here."
 "Of course we shan't allow any Bible characters.
 Besides, I don't know what the Bulls of Bashan
 really did that was so very dreadful; they just
 came round and gaped, as far as I remember."
 "My dear, you don't know what Skatterly's
 Hungarian imagination mightn't read into the
 part; it would be small satisfaction to say to him
 afterwards: "You've behaved as no Bull of Bashan
 would have behaved."

"Oh, you're an alarmist," said Lady Blonze; "I particularly want to have this idea carried out. It will be sure to be talked about a lot."

"That is quite possible," said Sir Nicholas.

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Dinner that evening was not a particularly lively affair; the strain of trying to impersonate a self-imposed character or to glean hints of identity from other people's conduct acted as a check on the natural festivity of such a gathering. There was a general feeling of gratitude and acquiescence when good-natured Rachel Klammerstein suggested that there should be an hour or two's respite from "the game" while they all listened to a little piano-playing after dinner. Rachel's love of piano music was not indiscriminate, and concentrated itself chiefly on selections rendered by her idolised offspring, Moritz and Augusta, who, to do them justice, played remarkably well.

The Klammersteins were deservedly popular as Christmas guests; they gave expensive gifts lavishly on Christmas Day and New Year, and Mrs. Klammerstein had already dropped hints of her

intention to present the prize for the best enacted character in the game competition. Every one had brightened at this prospect; if it had fallen to Lady Blonze, as hostess, to provide the prize, she would have considered that a little souvenir of some twenty or twenty-five shillings' value would meet the case, whereas coming from a Klammerstein source it would certainly run to several guineas.

The close time for impersonation efforts came to an end with the final withdrawal of Moritz and Augusta from the piano. Blanche Boveal retired early, leaving the room in a series of laboured leaps that she hoped might be recognised as a tolerable imitation of Pavlova. Vera Durmot, the sixteen-year-old flapper, expressed her confident opinion that the performance was intended to typify Mark Twain's famous jumping frog, and her diagnosis of the case found general acceptance. Another guest to set an example of early bed-going was Waldo Plubley, who conducted his life on a minutely regulated system of time-tables and hygienic routine. Waldo was a plump, indolent young man of seven-and-twenty, whose mother had early in his life decided for him that he was unusually delicate, and by dint of much

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The question came in a chorus of indignant bewilderment.

"That would be telling what our characters are meant to be," said Vera.

"Didn't I warn you?" said Sir Nicholas tragically to his wife.

"It's something to do with Spanish history; we don't mind giving you that clue," said Skatterly, helping himself cheerfully to salad, and then Bertie van Tahn broke forth into peals of joyous laughter.

"I've got it! Ferdinand and Isabella deporting the Jews! Oh, lovely! Those two have certainly won the prize; we shan't get anything to beat that for thoroughness."

Lady Blonze's Christmas party was talked about and written about to an extent that she had not anticipated in her most ambitious moments. The letters from Waldo's mother would alone have made it memorable.

Transcribed from the 1914 John Lane, The Bodley Head edition by David Price,

coddling and home-keeping had succeeded in making him physically soft and mentally peevish. Nine hours' unbroken sleep, preceded by elaborate breathing exercises and other hygienic ritual, was among the indispensable regulations which Waldo imposed on himself, and there were innumerable small observances which he exacted from those who were in any way obliged to minister to his requirements; a special teapot for the decoction of his early tea was always solemnly handed over to the bedroom staff of any house in which he happened to be staying. No one had ever quite mastered the mechanism of this precious vessel, but Bertie van Tahn was responsible for the legend that its spout had to be kept facing north during the process of infusion.

On this particular night the irreducible nine hours were severely mutilated by the sudden and by no means noiseless incursion of a pyjama-clad figure into Waldo's room at an hour midway between midnight and dawn.

"What is the matter? What are you looking for?" asked the awakened and astonished Waldo, slowly recognising Van Tahn, who appeared to be searching hastily for something he had lost.

"Looking for sheep," was the reply.

"Yes, took them out to Slogberry Moor immediately after breakfast. Miss Durmot came too."
"I saw you and Vera come back," said Lady Blonze, "but I didn't see the Klammersteins. Did you put them down in the village?"
"No," said Skatterly shortly.
"But where are they? Where did you leave them?"
"We left them on Slogberry Moor," said Vera calmly.
"On Slogberry Moor? Why, it's more than thirty miles away! How are they going to get back?"
"We didn't stop to consider that," said Skatterly; "we asked them to get out for a moment, on the pretence that the car had stuck, and then we dashed off full speed and left them there."
"But how dare you do such a thing? It's most inhuman! Why, it's been snowing for the last hour."
"I expect there'll be a cottage or farmhouse somewhere if they walk a mile or two."
"But why on earth have you done it?"

"Sheep?" exclaimed Waldo.
"Yes, sheep. You don't suppose I'm looking for giraffes, do you?"
"I don't see why you should expect to find either in my room," retorted Waldo furiously.
"I can't argue the matter at this hour of the night," said Bertie, and began hastily rummaging in the chest of drawers. Shirts and underwear went flying on to the floor.
"There are no sheep here, I tell you," screamed Waldo.
"I've only got your word for it," said Bertie, whisking most of the bedclothes on to the floor; "if you weren't concealing something you wouldn't be so agitated."
Waldo was by this time convinced that Van Tahn was raving mad, and made an anxious, effort to humour him.
"Go back to bed like a dear fellow," he pleaded, "and your sheep will turn up all right in the morning."
"I daresay," said Bertie gloomily, "without their tails. Nice fool I shall look with a lot of Manx"