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".near to have something really original this year." I .too bayed ooth so played out. I guest; "the old-fashioned Christmas and the Christmas," said Lady Blonze to her latest arrived "I hope you've come full of suggestions for

".9zirq 6 voted to have acted his or her character best got every one's character was. The one who was and at the end of the visit one had to guess what a character and behave consistently all the time, good idea. Every one in the house-party had to be said Blanche Boveal eagerly, "and we had such a

.9znold ybsl biss ",gnisums sbnuos fI"

Pentley was the Jolly Miller on the banks of Dee." sparrows in the Tuileries Gardens. Then Colonel and thought that I was the old man who feeds the of the birds. Every one was so stupid about it, one remembers of St. Francis is that he was fond out food to the birds; you see, the chief thing that getting up in the middle of a meal, and throwing "we hadn't got to keep to our right sexes. I kept "I was St. Francis of Assisi," continued Blanche;

.ndbT "How on earth did he do that?" asked Bertie van

.....

".q99dk

of the wardrobe. prospect he sent Waldo's pillows flying to the top And by way of emphasising his annoyance at the

temperature. were chattering with fear and rage and lowered "But why no tails?" asked Waldo, whose teeth

".uoy weeps like a good child or I shall be cross with Vgasie to guess who I was; and now go to sleepy go hunting about for my lost sheep no one would my character in the Game, you know. If I didn't Little Bo-Peep?" said Bertie with a chuckle. "It's "My dear boy, have you never heard the ballad of

".dilaber are to my health." know how essential nine uninterrupted hours of sleep I was able to recover that night, and you course of a long letter to his mother, "how much "I leave you to imagine," wrote Waldo in the

.ndeT nev sitnså teniege vant wakeful hours to exercises in breathing wrath and On the other hand he was able to devote some

the "come when you please" principle, but the Breakfast at Blonzecourt was a scattered meal, on

A Touch of Realism

Saki (H H Munro)

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

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

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

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

pencilled with the suggestion.

Malade Imaginaire'? I expect he's that." Eight or nine lists came out, and were duly

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

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.

10

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

"It's quite an idea for a Christmas party," said

Lady Blonze; "we must certainly do it here."

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."

"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

"One had to imagine that," said Blanche.

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

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

A Touch of Realism Saki (H H Munro) created on: Wed Mar 5 15:54:27 2008

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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 Sahn 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.'"

SI

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

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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.

* * * * *

"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."

Dinner that evening was not a particularly lively

affair; the strain of trying to impersonate a

self-imposed character or to glean hints of

"That is quite possible," said Sir Nicholas.

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.

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

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"Looking for sheep," was the reply.

"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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

"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

the prize; we shan't get anything to beat that for

Jews! Oh, lovely! Those two have certainly won

The question came in a chorus of indignant

bewilderment.

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

meant to be," said Vera.

"That would be telling what our characters are

.obleW bemieloxe "?qeed".

giraffes, do you?" "Yes, sheep. You don't suppose I'm looking for

in my room," retorted Waldo furiously. "I don't see why you should expect to find either

went flying on to the floor. in the chest of drawers. Shirts and underwear night," said Bertie, and began hastily rummaging "I can't argue the matter at this hour of the

.obleW "There are no sheep here, I tell you," screamed

".befatibe os ed 'if you weren't concealing something you wouldn't whisking most of the bedclothes on to the floor; "I've only got your word for it," said Bertie,

'min nomun was raving mad, and made an anxious, effort to Waldo was by this time convinced that Van Tahn

".eninrom "and your sheep will turn up all right in the "Go back to bed like a dear fellow," he pleaded,

tails. Nice fool I shall look with a lot of Manx "I daresay," said Bertie gloomily, "without their

".oot immediately after breakfast. Miss Durmot came "Yes, took them out to Slogberry Moor

you put them down in the village?" Blonze, "but I didn't see the Klammersteins. Did You and Vera come back," said Lady

"No," said Skatterly shortly.

"But where are they? Where did you leave them?"

. Vimits. "We left them on Slogberry Moor," said Vera

miles away! How are they going to get back?" "On Slogberry Moor? Why, it's more than thirty

".ashed off full speed and left them there." pretence that the car had stuck, and then we "we asked them to get out for a moment, on the "We didn't stop to consider that," said Skatterly;

".'nod inhuman! Why, it's been snowing for the last "But how dare you do such a thing? It's most

".owt no elim a klaw yeht if endewemoe "I expect there'll be a cottage or farmhouse

"But why on earth have you done it?"

