

Mrs. Winemiller
3 Pages

MRS. BUCHANAN. (*To Rev. Winemiller.*) I wanted to have five sons but only had one. But if I had had fifteen I don't think it would have been reasonable to expect that one of the lot would have turned out *quite so fine!*

ALMA. Your mother is proud as a peacock.

MRS. BUCHANAN. Don't you think it's excusable in a mother?

ALMA. Not only excusable but . . . your cup is empty, John, do let me—fill it!

MRS. BUCHANAN. Don't make him tipsy! John, your shoes *are* damp, I can tell by just looking at them! (*Declining eggnoq.*) Oh, no, no more for me, I have to climb some more chimneys! —That sounds like Grace! (*Mrs. Winemiller is heard descending the stairs, imitating Alma's shrill laugh.*)

REV. WINEMILLER. (*Anxiously.*) Alma, I think your mother is—

ALMA. (*Gasping.*) Oh, excuse me! —I'll see what Mother wants. (*She rushes out. Mrs. Buchanan touches the minister's arm.*)

MRS. BUCHANAN. Oh, such a tragedy, such a terrible cross for you to bear! Little John, I think we had better go, now, the reindeers must be getting restless. (*John sneezes. She throws her hands up in terror.*) I knew it, I knew it, I knew it! You *have* caught cold!

JOHN. Oh, for God's sake!

MRS. BUCHANAN. John! (*John sneezes again.*) That settles it, you're going straight home to bed! (*Mrs. Winemiller rushes into the parlor. Alma follows her.*)

ALMA. Father, Mother insists on remaining downstairs. She says that she wasn't ready to go to bed.

MRS. WINEMILLER. (*Excitedly.*) I have found my letter with the address on it. It's Seven Pearl Street in New Orleans. That's where Albertine is with Mr. Schwarzkopf and the Musée Mécanique. Oh, such a lot of news in it!

REV. WINEMILLER. Yes, I am sure. But let's not discuss the news now.

MRS. WINEMILLER. (*To Mrs. Buchanan.*) Have you ever been to the Musée Mécanique?

MRS. BUCHANAN. Long ago, Grace, long ago I—had that pleasure . . . (*She touches her lips nervously with her lorgnon.*)

MRS. WINEMILLER. Then you know what it is? It's a collection of mechanical marvels, invented and operated by my sister's—husband! —Mr. Otto Schwarzkopf! Mechanical marvels, all of

them, but, then, you know, when everything's run by mechanics it takes a mechanical genius to keep them in good condition all of the time and sometimes poor Mr. Schwarzkopf is not in condition to keep them all—in—condition . . .

MRS. BUCHANAN. Well, this is a mechanical age we live in . . .

ALMA. Mother, Mrs. Buchanan has brought her son with her and we are so eager to hear about his work and his—studies at—Johns Hopkins.

JOHN. Oh, let's hear about the museum, Miss Alma.

MRS. WINEMILLER. Yes! That's what I'm telling you about, the Museum! —of mechanical marvels. Do you know what they are? Well, let me tell you. There's the mechanical man that plays the flute. There's the mechanical drummer—oh, such a sweet little boy all made out of tin that shines like a brand new dollar! Boom, boom, boom, beats the drum. Toot, toot, toot, goes the flute. And the mechanical soldier waves his flag, waves it, waves it, and waves it! Ha ha ha! —And oh! *Oh!* —the loveliest thing of all—the mechanical bird-girl! Yes, the mechanical bird-girl is almost the biggest mechanical triumph since the Eiffel Tower, according to people who know. She's made of sterling silver! Every three minutes, right on the dot, a little mechanical bird pops out of her mouth and sings three beautiful notes, as clear as—a bell!

REV. WINEMILLER. Grace, Mrs. Buchanan remembers all of that.

MRS. WINEMILLER. The young man *doesn't!* I don't believe he's seen the Musée Mécanique.

JOHN. No, I've never. It sounds very exciting!

MRS. WINEMILLER. Well, lately, I personally think they have made a mistake. I think it was a mistake to buy the *big snake*.

JOHN. A mechanical snake?

MRS. WINEMILLER. Oh no, a real one, a live one, a boa constrictor. Some meddling maddie told them "Big snakes pay good." —So Mr. Schwarzkopf, who is not a practical man, a genius without any business sense whatsoever—mortgaged the whole Museum to pay for this great big snake! —So far, so good! —But! The snake was used to living in a warm climate. It was winter. New Orleans *can* be cold! —The snake seemed chilly, it became *very stupid*, and so they gave it a *blanket!* —Well! —Now in this letter I've just received today—Albertine tells me a *terrible* thing has happened!

JOHN. What did the big snake do?

MRS. WINEMILLER. Nothing—just *swallowed his blanket!*

JOHN. I thought you were going to say it swallowed Mr. Schwarzkopf.

MRS. BUCHANAN. Oh, now, Little John, *bush*, you bad boy, you! (*She touches her lips with the lorgnon.*)

MRS. WINEMILLER. Swallowed its blanket!

JOHN. Did the blanket disagree with it?

MRS. WINEMILLER. Disagree with it? I should say it did! What can a stomach, even the stomach of a boa constrictor, do with a heavy blanket?

JOHN. What did they do about the—situation?

MRS. WINEMILLER. Everything they could think of—which wasn't *much*. . . . Veterinarians, experts from the—zoo! —Nobody could suggest anything to. . . . Finally they sent a telegram to the man who had sold them the snake. "The big snake has swallowed his blanket! What shall we do?" —He'd told them big snakes pay good, but *dead* snakes—what do they pay? —They pay what the little boy shot at! —Well! —Do you know what the man that sold the snake to them wired back? —"All you can do is get on your knees and pray!" That's what he replied.

MRS. BUCHANAN. Oh, now, really! How cruel!

JOHN. Ha ha ha!

ALMA. (*Desperately.*) Mother, I think you—

JOHN. And did they pray for the snake?

MRS. WINEMILLER. They prayed for the big investment! —They should have stuck to mechanics in the—Museum—but somebody told them that big snakes pay good . . .

ALMA. Mother, it's past your bedtime. You go up to bed and I will bring you a slice of delicious fruitcake. Won't that be nice?

MRS. WINEMILLER. Yes! —if you really bring it. (*She starts hurriedly off, then turns and waves to the company.*) Merry Christmas!

REV. WINEMILLER. She is—well, as you see . . . she's . . .

MRS. BUCHANAN. Yes! A little disturbed right now. All the excitement of the holiday season. Little John, we must be running along, don't you think? Big John's waiting for us.

JOHN. I've just persuaded Miss Alma to sing us something.

MRS. BUCHANAN. Oh! (*Insincerely.*) How nice! (*Alma is at the piano.*)

ALMA. Would you care for something profane or sacred?

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