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SHIRLEY JACKSON

author of LIFE AMONG THE SAVAGES

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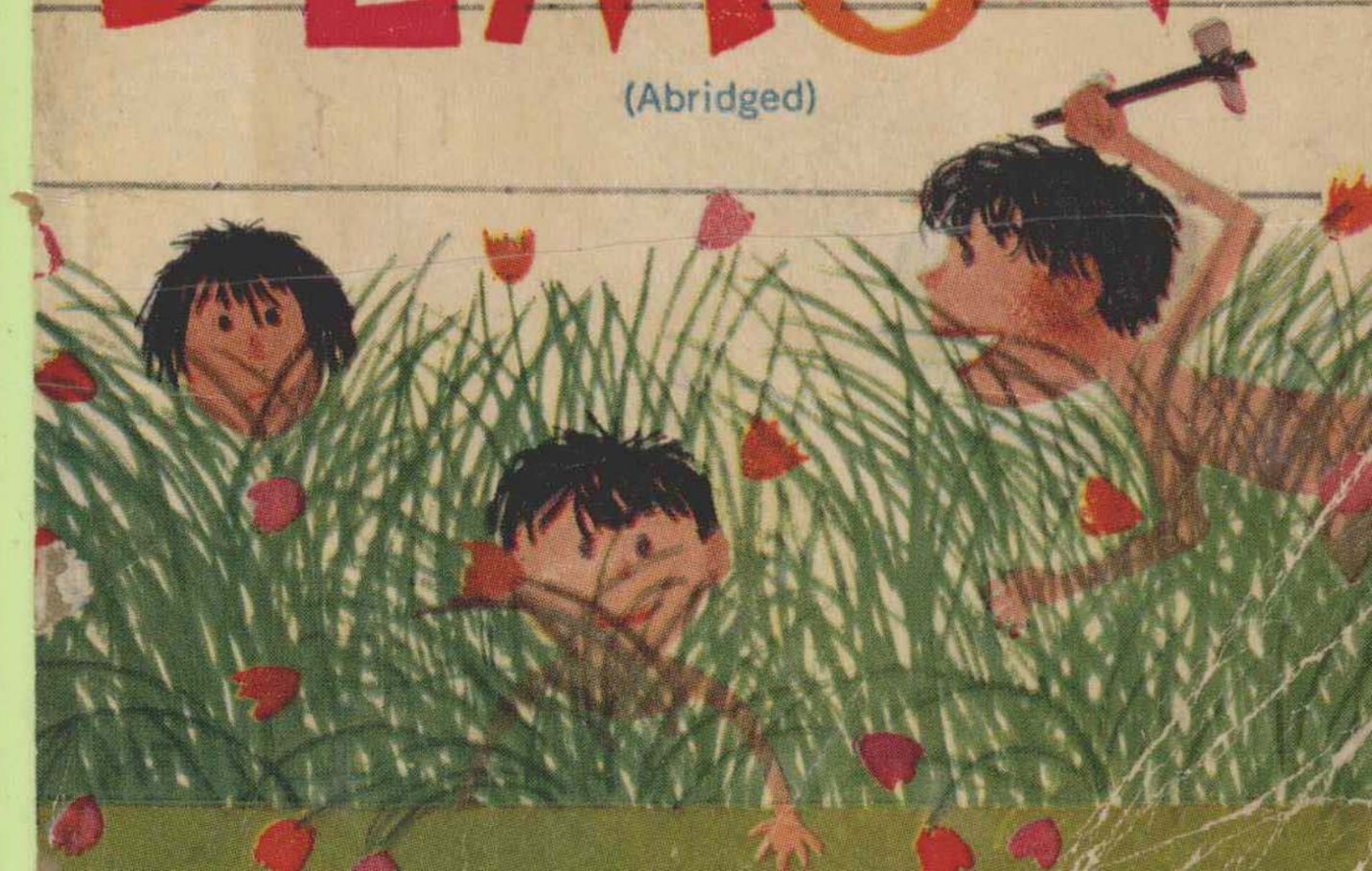
RAISING DEMONS

(Abridged)



RAISING DEMONS

by Shirley Jackson

BALLANTINE BOOKS • NEW YORK

For Louis Scher

Some of the material in this book appeared in *Woman's Day* magazine under the titles "The Sneaker Crisis," "Worldly Goods," "The Clothespin Dolls" and "Lucky to Get Away," and is reprinted by permission, and a section known as "An International Incident" was first printed in *The New Yorker* magazine.

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I conjure and command you, O Demons, all and so many as ye are, to accept this Book with good grace, so that whensoever we may read it, the same being approved and recognized as in proper form and valid, you shall be constrained to appear in comely human form when you are called, accordingly as the reader shall judge. In no circumstances shall you make any attempt upon the body, soul, or spirit of the reader, nor inflict any harm on those who may accompany him, either by mutterings, tempests, noise, scandals, nor yet by lesion or by hindrance in the execution of the commands of this Book. I conjure you to appear immediately when the conjuration is made, to execute without dallying all that is written and enumerated in its proper place in the said Book.

Conjuration from the Grimoire of Honorius

shadows

The four "savages" are rapidly growing int
"demons" and the family expands into a larg
white house. A delightful chuckle-filled retur
visit to Shirley Jackson and her four energeti
offspring who keep their parents embroile
in one hilarious domestic cris s after anothe

One demon experiments with magic spells an
the others are just as troublesome as ever, bu
their mother's sense of humor saves the da

A BOOK FOR THE LADY OF THE HOU
*(Children will kindly refrain from reading th
book)*

Lady, you have only yourself to blame if you bring t
book home and fail to hide it from the rest of your fami

ONE

I DO NOT NOW have the slightest understanding of the events which got us out of one big white house which we rented into another, bigger white house which we own, at least in part. That is, I know we moved, and I think I know why, and I know we spent three pleasant months in a friend's summer home, and I am pretty sure we got most of our own furniture back. What really puzzles me, I suppose, is how a series of events like that gets itself started. One day I went to clean out the hall closet and the next thing I knew we were trying to decide whether to have all four phones put on one line, or leave them all different numbers and list ourselves four times in the phone book. We decided wrong, by the way. What with the phone starting to ring for Laurie at eight in the morning and for Jannie about noon and for Sally in the early afternoon and every now and then—a high, uncomfortable voice, stammering and usually hanging up unexpectedly—for Barry, we know now that we should have left the four phones separate. We should have listed three of them for the children and kept the fourth one private, giving out the number to the two or three people who either have no children of their own or are still optimistic enough to try to telephone their friends.

We had rented the big white house for nine years. Sally had been born while we lived there, and so had Barry, and the kitchen needed repainting. The stairs and the walls and the positions of the light switches and the crack in the glass of the front door had all become affectionate and familiar to us. Laurie knew the bike routes to everywhere in town from the house, Jannie could cross the street to play with a friend, Sally had slept in Jannie's old carriage on the front porch, where Barry now slept, the shadows of the pillars moving slowly across the the plaid

carriage robe. All the millions of things we possessed as a family were inside the house, but, inexorably, there came one shocking moment when we discovered that the house was full.

I went, one spring morning, to clean out one of those downstairs half-closets, which begin as very practical affairs, meant to be the resting place for wet boots and umbrellas, and end up as containers for ice skates and then hockey sticks and then tennis rackets and then, by the most logical of extensions, baseball gloves and football helmets and basketballs and riding boots and jackets left behind by visiting children. I had picked up a big cardboard carton at the grocery, and into it I put the baseball gloves and the football helmets and the riding boots and the tennis rackets and the basketball. I put the carton at the foot of the back stairs, so I would remember to take it up the next time I went, and I put clean newspaper on the floor of the closet and went and got all the wet boots from the corner of the kitchen and the spot inside the front door and the back seat of the car, and I lined the boots up in the closet and derived an enormous satisfaction from closing the closet door tight for the first time in months.

Later when I went upstairs I took the carton with me. There was no room for it in the bedroom shared by my two daughters. There was no room for it in the bedroom of my older son, and certainly no room for it in the tiny room where the baby lived. There was no room for it in the attic where we kept sleds and garden rakes. There was no room for it in the attic where we kept trunks and boxes of things I meant to give away someday. I knew there was no room for it in the garage because I had tried a day or so before to put the snow tires in there and had finally to put them in the cellar, consequently there was no room in the cellar because I had barely been able to squeeze in the snow tires. I was not going to leave a carton of football helmets and a basketball in the bedroom which my husband and I shared, particularly since there were already sixteen cartons of books in the corner next to my closet, and I could not leave it in the upstairs hall because there were nine more cartons of books lined up along that wall. Anyway I knew if I left a carton of baseball gloves and football helmets and a basketball right out in the front

hall it would only be a day or so before I had to gather them all up again from the living room and the kitchen, and I would probably have to put them all back into the hall closet and then the door would not close again.

With a certain feeling of bewilderment, and a strong sense of the inevitability of fate, I took the carton back downstairs and put everything directly back into the hall closet, and of course the door would not close. I could not find anywhere to put the empty carton, so I took it outside and left it for the garbage man.

A day or so later I decided to put away the winter clothes in moth balls, but the closet I have always used for winter storage was full of boxes holding the baby's clothes and gifts people had sent him, because there was no closet in the small room where we put the baby. It occurred to me that I could put the winter clothes away in a trunk in the far attic, but when I finally got the attic door open I discovered that the trunk was full; my husband had cleaned his filing cabinet and when there was no place to put the papers and correspondence and clippings which were too important to be thrown away but not of any immediate usefulness, like our old college yearbook and the copy of our marriage license, he had carried them up in the laundry basket and put them all away in the trunk in the far attic. I thought that I might buy a cardboard closet to put the clothes away in, but there would be no place to put a new closet, since both the attics were full, unless I put a closet in the baby's room and moved the baby's things out of the moth closet and then put the winter clothes in the old moth closet, but then there would be no place to put the baby, because there was only just room enough in his little room for his crib, and I had to take him in on the girls' bed to dress him.

We had three more attics, but one of them was full of old lumber and bricks left over from the various additions that had been built onto the house, and one of them was full of bats, and the last could only be reached by climbing through a trapdoor in the ceiling of the next-to-the-last attic and even if I could get past the bats and through the lumber and bricks I did not think I could keep taking the baby up and down through a trapdoor.

That night at dinner my husband remarked that he wished he could get to his place at the dining room table

without having to squeeze so past the buffet; either he was putting on weight, he pointed out, or I had moved the table. I said that now we had the baby's high chair in the dining room because there was no place to put it in the kitchen I could not possibly have the dining room table any farther away from the buffet because if there were any less space around the kitchen doorway I would not be able to get in and out at all, and no one would get any dinner. My husband said why not give all the children their dinners around the kitchen table, thus making considerably less congestion and confusion in the dining room at dinnertime, and I had to explain that if I put chairs for all the children around the kitchen table at dinnertime I would have to go around through the study to get from the stove to the sink, and Laurie added indignantly that that was a fine thing, that was to expect him and the girls to eat in the kitchen and let the baby eat in the dining room.

After dinner Laurie had a friend in to watch television, so my husband and I had to sit in the study. Jannie came in to read in the study because the boys asked her please kindly to let them alone while they were seeing the western movie; Sally was asleep upstairs with the lights out so Jannie could not read in bed, and the light in the dining room was not good enough to read by. With three of us in the study someone had to sit in a straight chair, so thought I might as well get some mending done and let Jannie have the comfortable chair with the reading light. When I went to get my sewing basket I found that it was full of walnuts the children had brought home. They had not been able to find any place to put the walnuts until we decided what to do with them, so they had put them in my sewing basket, which was already pretty full of socks. Later, when I went upstairs to look at the baby I perceived, seeing almost for the first clear time, that both sides of the staircase were lined with things—books, sweaters, dolls, boxes of crayons—which had been put there temporarily and then left because there was no place else to leave them. I came downstairs and went into the study and stood in front of my husband until he put down his book and looked at me.

"We have too much stuff," I told him. "Dolls and hockey sticks and winter clothes and walnuts."

"I thought there seemed to be more around than usual," he said.

"There is no more room in this house," I said. "We cannot fit in one more thing. Not one."

Jannie lifted her head. "Ninki is going to have kittens again," she said.

"Well, she can't have them here," I said. "There isn't an inch—"

"Last time she had them in the green living room chair."

"When I went by a few minutes ago there were four or five jackets and a pile of library books on that chair," I said.

"Start asking people now if they want kittens," my husband said. He picked up his book again. "Return the library books," he added, with the air of a man settling a petty domestic problem.

"We have got to get a bigger house," I said.

"Don't be silly," my husband said, reading. "There *is* no bigger house."

"A new house?" said Jannie. "Can I have a room of my own?"

When I went down to the grocery the next morning the grocer said he heard we were thinking of moving. We'd been in the old Fielding house quite a while now, he said; perhaps now we were aiming to buy? He *had* heard, just by accident, that Mrs. Wilbur wanted to sell that big place on upper Main Street. It would be good for us to be living on upper Main Street, because then the kids could walk to school, not to mention being right in the school district so Sally could get into the kindergarten. While I was out with the car, he said, I ought to go on up Main Street and take a look at the big house from the outside. "You'll know it by the gateposts," the grocer said.

When I went into the post office the postman said he heard we were thinking of moving. While we were about it, he suggested, we ought to think of getting a house closer in to town. Then we could get our mail in a postbox in the post office instead of having to wait for Mr. Mortimer to come round with the rural delivery, because now that Mr. Mortimer was getting on, and particularly since the day Mr. Mortimer's car skidded and went into the ditch, which they hadn't been able to get parts for it be-

cause it was so old, well, the postman said, it must be something of a trial to us not to be getting our mail till three, four o'clock in the afternoon. Did I know that Millie Wilbur was thinking of putting that big house on the market? The one upstreet, with the gateposts? Wouldn't hurt the price of eggs to have a look at it.

Mr. Cunningham in the gas station said he heard we were thinking of moving, and that big white house with the gateposts would be a good buy if you knocked some off Millie Wilbur's price.

Feeling that I was in the grip of something stronger than I was, I drove slowly on up Main Street. The house with the gateposts was unmistakable, particularly since the left-hand gatepost leaned at a sharp angle inward toward the driveway. I saw maple trees, and a wide lawn, and a barn almost as big as the house. I could almost see our children running on the lawn, swinging from the trees, playing in the barn. I did not notice the sagging front steps or the flaking paint.

When I came up the hill toward our own house it looked small and overstuffed. I carried the groceries in and put them on the kitchen table and then went into the study to speak to my husband.

"I understand we're thinking of moving," I said.

"We are not," he said.

"Millie Wilbur's putting the big old house with the gateposts on the market."

"We are not interested. You may tell Millie Wilbur."

"Must be twenty rooms in that house. And a barn. Trees. Two gateposts."

"I'm sure whoever buys it will have plenty of space. Now I am working," said my husband.

The phone rang, and when I answered it, it was a lady who introduced herself as a Mrs. Ferrier. She understood we were thinking of moving. I said we were not and she said oh, that was fine, because her husband had just been transferred to our town and they had been getting pretty desperate about a house. I said we were not moving and she said they were ready to take just about *anything,* and when could she come and look around our house? Because, she said, they were living at present with her cousin, all three children, and they were getting so desperate they really didn't care what they got, so long as it was a roof

over their heads. I said it was our roof and we planned to keep it over our own heads, and she said would it be all right to drop around tomorrow? I said no, and she said about three, then, and thank you and goodbye.

I still had the extraordinary feeling of inevitability, which I began to identify as the same feeling as I get when I try to stop my car on an icy hill. Before I could get back to the kitchen the phone rang three more times. The first was a local real estate agent, who had heard that I had been looking at the big old house with the gateposts. He was sure I was going to like the inside of the house even better than the outside. The second call was from Mr. Gore down at the bank, who thought that before we went any further on this deal we ought to understand the principles of the mortgage; he said he would be up to see my husband that evening. The third call was from Mr. Fielding, our landlord, who understood that we were thinking of moving.

I avoided going into the study, because I knew that my husband would ask me who had been on the phone. I went into the kitchen to open my groceries and get out the vegetable soup for lunch, and I decided that I had better make a potato pudding for dinner, since then my husband would be agreeably full of potato pudding by the time Mr. Gore came from the bank.

When Jannie came home from school that afternoon she said that her teacher had put it into the class news that Jannie's mommy and daddy were going to get a new house and Jannie would walk to school instead of taking the bus. A girl named Carole lived just past the big white house with the gateposts, and Carole passed the big white house every day on her way to school and Carole said it was a very nice house except the people living there were mean and wouldn't give candy on Hallowe'en. Laurie came home late, because he rode his bike to school and on his way home had detoured to have a look at the new house. He reported that it looked pretty good and he had met a very nice lady standing on the side porch and she had asked him lots and lots of questions. He repeated this to his father at dinner, although I made strenuous attempts to interrupt, and his father looked up from the potato pudding to say what kind of questions, for heaven's sake? Laurie said oh, like how much furniture we had, and when

we planned to move and things like that, and Laurie added that he had told the lady lots of furniture, and pretty soon. My husband took another piece of potato pudding and remarked mildly to me that I should caution the children against this kind of silly talk with strangers, because that was the way rumors got started, and rumors were harder to stop than they were to start.

Although I told my husband afterward that I believed it was only a coincidence, Mr. Gore from the bank and the real estate agent arrived together. I showed them into the study, closed the door, sent Jannie to read in our bedroom, turned the television set down very low, and went out to wash the dinner dishes.

That, so far as I can recollect, is the first stage of how we happened to start to buy a big white house with two gateposts. After about an hour my husband came out of the study to get the cigar humidor, and a little later he came to the study door and asked if I would get out some more ice. I decided that I might perhaps look officious if I went barging into the study while the men were talking, so I stayed thoughtfully in the kitchen, and finally cleaned all the pantry shelves, thinking of Mrs. Ferrier coming tomorrow. When I heard the front door close, I waited a few minutes and then went timidly into the study.

"Company gone?" I asked, through the smoke.

"Yep," said my husband.

"Any news?" I said.

"Why, I don't know," said my husband. "Were you expecting news?"

I counted to ten. "I thought you might have been talking about the house," I said.

"What house?" my husband said.

"I thought," I said carefully, "that Mr. Gore, and the real estate agent—"

"Bill," my husband said. "Fine fellow."

"I thought you might have been discussing our possible purchase of the house now owned by Mrs. Millie Wilbur. It is a big white house, about halfway up Main Street past the railroad station. It has two gateposts, the left-hand one slightly askew."

"Askew," said my husband appreciatively. He thought.

"Wrong side of the tracks," he pointed out. "Didn't tell me *that.*"

"It's the right side of the tracks, actually," I said. "I mean, all the big nice old houses are on out there. We're on the wrong side of the tracks *now,* really."

"Depends which side you're *not* on," said my husband acutely. "Well." He nodded and took up his book.

"But what about the house?"

"What house?"

"I am going to bed," I said.

"By the way," he remarked, as I opened the study door. "One more thing about that house. Seventeen people living there."

"What?"

"Seventeen," he said firmly. "Four apartments. One downstairs front, one upstairs front, one downstairs back, one upstairs back, one downstairs front, one upstairs—"

I closed my mouth. "You mean," I said after a minute, "there are four separate apartments in that house? Four kitchens? Four bathrooms? Four—"

"One upstairs back, one upstairs front, one downstairs—"

"Four telephones?"

"One downstairs up."

When I went to see the house with the real estate agent the next morning I learned more about it. There were three acres of land, on which we might someday put a swimming pool, or a tennis court, or a miniature golf course, or a garden. The barn was two stories high, suitable for a summer theater or any number of square dancers. The house had been divided up into four apartments about six years back, and could be un-divided by the removal of beaverboard partitions. (It occurred subsequently to both my husband and myself that what we should have done was put all four of our children, and their possessions, into one apartment and leave the partitions in, but by then it was too late.) There was no wall to go with the gateposts. There were four separate entrances to the house, and the agent assured me that there were indeed four separate kitchens, four separate bathrooms, four separate telephones, and garage space in the barn for four cars.

The agent had keys to two of the apartments, and we

went gingerly into the downstairs front, tapping at the beaverboard behind which lurked the downstairs back, and marveling at the wallpaper, which had green funeral urns and laurel leaves. We went outside and out the entrance to the downstairs front and around the corner and in the entrance to the downstairs back, where a little dog yapped at us so persistently that we took only the most perfunctory glance at the rooms. The wallpaper there was of purple rhododendrons with many leaves. We went out again and around another corner of the house to the stairway which led up to the upstairs back apartment. We could not get in, but by craning our necks could get a glimpse of the wallpaper, which seemed to be orange and black birds. Then we went around another corner of the house and came to the entrance to the upstairs front, which was actually the main front door of the house, although we could not get in, and could only guess at the wallpaper; I subsequently discovered that it was a multicolored geometric pattern.

We were just getting into the agent's car to go home when the lady who lived in the downstairs front came home and invited us in again. She had been packing, she said. She had been after her husband for six months to move to Schenectady where her sister lived, and news that the house might be sold had been enough to give him a final push. I asked her if she had done her own decorating—the wallpaper, for instance—and she said certainly not, and one of the big reasons in favor of moving was that the wallpaper was beginning to get on her nerves, not to mention the downstairs back, because, although she had never been one for gossip, since once people started telling tales about their neighbors you never knew where you were, she knew for a fact that the downstairs back were behind on their rent since last fall and the upstairs back never got along with anyone and she wouldn't be a bit surprised to hear that they were separating the way she yelled at him. The upstairs front were very nice people and she had never heard a word against them from anybody, although she must say if anything would help this blessed wallpaper drive her out it was that radio going going going all day long. Also they were most ungracious about the clothesline and she wouldn't put it past them to have cut it the day her wash fell down.

We backed out, nodding, and got into the agent's car again. I looked back at the house as we drove off and it seemed enormous; next to the barn was what looked very much like a berry patch.

When Mrs. Ferrier stepped inside our front door at one minute before three that afternoon it was perfectly clear to me without hesitation that we were not going to become fast friends. She stood just inside the door, looking around. She looked at the hall closet, half closed, at the flotsam and jetsam lining the stairs on both sides, and at the wallpaper in the hall, which was the cabbage rose design we had chosen with Mr. Fielding nine years before. She closed her eyes for a minute and then, with me following, went on into the living room, where the library books still sat on the green chair and someone had left a jacket on the television set. "Nice large room, if it was fixed up," Mrs. Ferrier said. In the dining room she tapped the table thoughtfully, perhaps looking for termites, and pulled back a curtain to see if the room overlooked the road, glancing briefly at the dust on the windowsill. In the study she nodded to my husband, turned completely around once, and then remarked that we seemed to be making no practical use of the space in our house. "This room would be *much* larger," she said, "if you took out all those books."

Mrs. Ferrier thought the master bedroom should have faced west, and she barely put her head inside the smaller bedrooms. "They would be much larger," I told her, "if we took out the beds."

Mrs. Ferrier fixed me with her cold eye. "If you took out the beds where would you sleep?" she wanted to know, and I followed her meekly downstairs.

"Well," she said, at the front door again. "How soon can you be out?"

"Good heavens," I said, "I haven't any idea of—"

"It shouldn't take you more than two or three weeks to pack. Most of this stuff I suppose you'll be throwing away; be sure to get a man to carry it off; I don't want it all piled around back or something. I'll stop in someday next week to measure for the curtains. That little bedroom at the head of the stairs will have to be enlarged. Say it takes you a month to get out—I'll have the carpenters here on the first of May."

"I hardly think—"

She smiled at me, which did not make me like her any better. "I thought someone had told you," she said. "I was a Fielding before I married. I told the family that it was a pity to have the old family house falling apart in the hands of strangers; we owe it to the town, after all, to have Fieldings living here. So we are coming home again." She sighed nostalgically, and I unclenched my fingers from the stair rail and said as quietly as I could that I was sure the villagers would be dancing in the streets when they heard that the Fieldings were coming home again. "Good-bye," I added firmly, opening the front door. "I'll see you in a day or so, then," Mrs. Ferrier said, and of course I did not push her down the front steps.

We bought the big white house, at last, by merely signing our names on a piece of paper. Mr. Gore and Mr. Andrews down at the bank arranged the financial transference with an almost invisible maneuver of figures on a card. When my husband asked if we could borrow our money right back again and use the house as security, everybody laughed.

I stopped in at the grocery that afternoon to tell the grocer that we had bought the big white house with the gateposts and he told me a story about a fellow he knew who had rented for twenty years, saving money, until at the end of twenty years he had twenty thousand dollars in the bank, and he bought an old house planning to make it over and now, six months later, he was five thousand dollars in debt. I asked him if he had met Mrs. Ferrier and he said she had been in the store a couple times. "She takes after the Birminghams," he said, "from East Hoosick when old Delmar Fielding married the youngest Birmingham girl and the Fieldings first got into real money." I said I wished the Birminghams had stayed in East Hoosick, and he said a lot of other people had wished the same thing ever since the oldest Birmingham girl had got herself into the Prohibition party and went around making speeches.

He gave me a dozen cartons and I went home and began halfheartedly putting things into them. I took all the overshoes and skates and football helmets out of the hall closet and put them into a carton and put the carton in the hall by the front door. I took all the things off the stairs and