Buttonville---Population 2,005

PATRICIA SYLVESTER

The calendar in Grandpa's general store, filling station and grocery reads 1939. His store is the first you see when you come into Buttonville, a town right in the center of the United States about a mile from Sugar Crossing and running along side of Catfish Creek. You can't miss it for, as you enter, there's a sign saying "Buttonville --- Population 2,005 (They crossed out the two and changed it to five when Mrs. Blanchy had the town's triplets, Minnie, Winnie and Sam, Jr.). As you leave, there's a sign reading "Come again when you can stay longer — B.Ville Chamber of Commerce". You'll come right in on Main Street. It goes straight to the town square where all the stores except Grandpa's grocery are located and where, not the court house, but the Buttonville Button Factory stands. The factory occupies the entire great square except for the corner across from Peabody's Picture House and the Buttonville Ice Cream Parlor. On this corner is old Mrs. Biddle's house. It is a big yellow place with a long side porch and a wide front porch. There are two pointed towers stuck, one a few feet higher than the other, on either side of the house. The factory heads gave up long ago trying to buy this land. Mrs. Biddle likes to be in the heart of things. If people want to know anything at all about the town they always go to her. She is the source of most of the news that goes in the Wednesday Morning Gazette which is delivered every Friday evening. When you knock on her door, Mrs. Biddle will drop the curtain on the front window back in place and come to the door just as if she didn't know who was there. If you're a stranger, after she's brought you sasafras tea and ginger cookies, she'll always get out her button string to show you. She has on it every style of button made since the factory began, and they are all coat buttons, for the factory manufactures only overcoat buttons.

Starting with the very first button Mrs. Biddle will tell you the story of the town. Mr. Peter Adams (his family is the first button) lives in the large white house on the hill at the north end of the street which runs parallel to Main Street. His great grandfather was one of the town fathers and founded the factory. Mr. Adams has three towers on his house and a prominently situated two car garage where he keeps all the old license plates, tire tubing, a woodcutting machine (he makes wooden buttons as a hobby), bicycles, lawnmowers, etc., in fact he keeps everything but his cars in the garage. He wants people to see them, and they are always parked in
The vice-president and secretary-treasurer of the factory, Peter Adams III and James Adams live in the second largest houses in town, on either side of their father’s home. Peter Adams, the fourth, is now in love with Mrs. Biddle’s niece, Sally Thomson. Mrs. Biddle says that if Sally has sense enough to say “no”, three times before she says “yes”, they will probably get married. Mrs. Biddle would like very much to have an Adams in the family.

Peter drives the three blocks down to Sally’s house every night at seven. Her home is very much like all the others on the north side of the town. It is a yellow bungalow with a half side porch. There are spirea bushes and petunia window boxes in front and a big flower bed in back. The rear border of the flower garden is made up of tomatoes and bean vines, and Mr. Thomson’s irregular patch of corn and onions, which ruin the whole bed because he just throws the seed and gets onions in the roses and corn all through the delphinium. He won’t let Mrs. Thomson plant them because she doesn’t like corn and onions and they won’t grow for her and besides he doesn’t like a bed so neat. There is an old tire swing hanging from a large maple tree and Billy’s red wagon is overturned on the best zenia plant.

Most of the people in the north part of town have the job of watching over the people in the south part of town who operate the button machines. The houses in the south part of town are small and bursting with children. They have narrow front and back yards and some of the yards have a tree or flowers in them. On a whole they are neat and clean-looking though a bit barren.

All these southsiders go to the Methodist church and all the northsiders to the Presbyterian. Mrs. Biddle alternates between them, going to one Sunday morning and to the other on Sunday evening, she always eats at the Methodist though, because they have the most and the best food.

All week, except on Sunday, the men of Buttonville spend most of their day at the factory and the women spend most of theirs at home cooking and gossiping over the clothes line. There are no fences except the one between Mrs. Murphy’s and Mrs. McGinty’s houses. Every fall, Mrs. Murphy throws all her rotten tomatoes into Mrs. McGinty’s yard and Mrs. McGinty’s throws all her rotten apples into Mrs. Murphy’s; other than that they have nothing to do with one another.

In the evenings almost everyone drives to Sugar Crossing or Granville unless they want to see some of their friends from those towns, in which case they go to the Buttonville Ice Cream Parlor or the Peabody Picture House. Morning and evening, and even on Sundays everyone laughs and jokes with everyone else (except, of course, Mrs. Murphy and Mrs. McGinty). Oh, they are sad at funerals, but then most everyone lives to be very old and there aren’t many funerals. In fact, there are so few that Mr. Johnson, the undertaker has to run a filling station and grocery store to make a living.

The only thing new in Grandpa’s grocery is the calendar with a picture of a girl in a bathing suit sitting on a rock holding a parrot. The date on the calendar reads 1942. The sign which you see as you enter town says, “Buttonville — Population 700.” Driving on up a funeral Main Street you come again to Mrs. Biddle’s. She drops a tattered curtain as you knock and rustles to the door in her black taffeta. You come in and sit down, and she sinks with a sigh in the chair by the window.

Though his wife is dead, Mr. Adams
still lives in his three towered house. The grass has grown tall in front of it. Mr. Adams has to walk to the factory now. His sons have moved away and the empty windows of their houses stare blankly at an unpeopled street. The Thomson's bungalow like most of the rest is forsaken. Billy Thomson's wagon his rusted and broken brown stalks are all that remains of the zenia bed. Mr. Thomson dug up his onions when he left. The Thomson's didn't even put a "For Rent or For Sale" sign in the front yard.

Mrs. McGinty who lives three houses from the Thomsons, has had the fence taken down between her yard and Mrs. Murphy's. She went over herself and picked up all the apples she had thrown into the others yard and sent roses to Mrs. Murphy's funeral. For Mrs. Murphy like many of the town's people died from the shock. Mr. Johnson, the undertaker, had to give up his filling station and grocery because he had so much business.

However he is the only one who prospered by the fatal event. Most of the stores in the town square are closed. The Peabody Picture House still has a faded advertisement for a show popular in 1941 hanging partly torn from its "Now Showing" board. Though a great many of the people on the south side are still living in Buttonville they can't afford to go to a motion picture. Mr. Adams doesn't pay the laborers much and so they've let their roofs sag, their yards become mud and dirt and they seldom have curtains at their windows which are frequently patched with paper. The workers go grumbling to work each day in the fourth of the factory that is still running and pack buttons in boxes labeled "Klever Kiddies Clothes."

Mrs. Biddle has the buttons for the children's clothes added to her string. Just before they start she has a neatly clipped headline glued on the last overcoat button which reads:

Smart Style Dictates Zippers for Overcoats.

Flamingos

LUCY KAUFMAN

Far through the jungle, bird cries mark night's end.
Eastwardly the sky is streaked with pink,
and near the water's edge black orchids bend beneath webbed-feet, as white flamingos drink.

Deep among the spindling silent stalks which border banks surrounding the lagoon wet reeds stir, and a tall flamingo walks infringing on the sleep of afternoon.

Flamingos showing silver in the night fly far above the jungle toward the west, and following a star's transluscent light at length reach home, and white flamingos rest.