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Jump to ratings and reviewsShirley Jackson's beloved gothic tale of a peculiar girl named Merricat and her family's dark secret. Taking readers deep into a labyrinth of dark neurosis, We Have Always Lived in the Castle is a deliciously unsettling novel about a perverse, isolated, and possibly murderous family and the struggle that ensues when a cousin arrives at their estate. This edition features an afterword by Jonathan Lethem. Genres Horror Fiction Gothic Mystery Audiobook Thriller Book Club 8830 people are currently reading 401519 people are currently re recent years. She has influenced such writers as Stephen King, Nigel Kneale, and Richard Matheson. She is best known for her dystopian short story, "The Lottery" (1948), which suggests there is a deeply unsettling underside to bucolic, smalltown America. In her critical biography of Shirley Jackson, Lenemaja Friedman notes that when Shirley and Richard Matheson. She is best known for her dystopian short story, "The Lottery" (1948), which suggests there is a deeply unsettling underside to bucolic, smalltown America. In her critical biography of Shirley Jackson, Lenemaja Friedman notes that when Shirley and Richard Matheson. She is best known for her dystopian short story, "The Lottery" (1948), which suggests there is a deeply unsettling underside to bucolic, smalltown America. In her critical biography of Shirley Jackson, Lenemaja Friedman notes that when Shirley Jackson, Lenemaja Jackson's story "The Lottery" was published in the June 28, 1948, issue of The New Yorker, it received a response that "no New Yorker story had ever received." Hundreds of letters poured in that were characterized by, as Jackson put it, "bewilderment, speculation and old-fashioned abuse." Jackson's husband, the literary critic Stanley Edgar Hyman, wrote in his preface to a posthumous anthology of her work that "she consistently refused to be interviewed, to explain or promote her work in any fashion, or to take public stands and be the pundit of the Sunday supplements. She believed that her books would speak for her clearly enough over the years." Hyman insisted the darker aspects of Jackson's works were not, as some critics claimed, the product of "personal, even neurotic, fantasies", but that Jackson intended, as "a sensitive and faithful anatomy of our times, fitting symbols for our distressing world of the concentration camp and the Bomb", to mirror humanity's Cold War-era fears. Jackson may even have taken pleasure in the subversive impact of her work, as revealed by Hyman's statement that she "was always proud that the Union of South Africa banned The Lottery', and she felt that they at least understood the story". In 1965, Jackson died of heart failure in her sleep, at her home in North Bennington Vermont, at the age of 48. Displaying 1 - 30 of 31,499 reviewsApril 4, 2023Bizarre, strange, haunting, sinister, disturbing, twisted, foreboding, suffocatingly claustrophobic, leaving you with the ever-growing sense of unease. What else can I say about this book to give it justice? This is a chillingly terrifying story that has nothing to do with the things that go BUMP in the night. No, it's the odd terror that comes when things go BUMP in the mind. And the most terrifying things are those that are left unsaid, that creep up at you from behind the printed lines, just hinted at and left for your own brain to chillingly realize. My name is Mary Katherine Blackwood. I am eighteen years old, and I live with my sister Constance. I have often thought that with any luck at all, I could have been born a werewolf, because the two middle fingers on both my hands are the same length, but I have had to be content with what I had. I dislike washing myself, and dogs, and noise. I like my sister Constance, and Richard Plantagenet, and Amanita phalloides, the death-cup mushroom. Everyone else in our family is dead. Behind the events of the story is the mystery of the Blackwood family, rich New England landowners who are quite well-aware of their presumed class-snobbish superiority over the inhabitants of the members of the Blackwood family were poisoned by arsenic in their food. Three are left: Uncle Julian, left crippled by the poison, hanging on to the remnants of his mind, obsessed with the tragedy of the day of the murder; Constance, an agoraphobiac trapped in the narrow confines of her domestic universe, cooking for the remnants of her family with a strained chirpy attitude - a young woman who was also the cook on the day of the fateful arsenic poisoning, who now serves as a link between her diminished and scorned family and the rest of the world. For a careful reader, the identity, it's about the implications of it. And that's what gives it a real punch. I am going to put death in all their food and watch them die. This is never about the implications of it. strange little family survives without ever deviating from their strict routines, remaining shut off from the outside world until one day an unexpected arrival threatens the fragile stability - of the family and of Merricat's mind. And the events that follow lead to the scariest and saddest ending presented in the most chillingly subtle way possible. I would have liked to come into the grocery some morning and see them all, even the Elberts and the children, lying there crying with the pain of dying. I would help myself to groceries, I thought, stepping over their bodies, taking whatever I fancied from the shelves, and go home, with perhaps a kick for Mrs.Donell while she lay there. I was never sorry when I had thoughts like this; I only wished they would come true." Our narrator, Merricat Blackwood, is not a character you can easily forget. She is written with such persuasion that the pages come alive with her bizarre voice of a seemingly adult woman forever trapped in neverending childhood, in the world of twisted magical reality of strange rituals and special objects and strict routine that can never be changed, or else. "On Sunday morning the change was one day nearer. I was resolute about not thinking my three magic words and would not let them into my mind, but the air of change was so strong that there was no avoiding it; change lay over the stairs and the kitchen and the garden like fog. I would not forget my magic words; they were MELODY GLOUCESTER PEGASUS, but I refused to let them into my mind."And the scariest thing of all to me was how more and more enthralling Merricat's voice became with every magic words; they are methods, but I refused to let them into my mind."And the scariest thing of all to me was how more and more enthralling Merricat's voice became with every magic words; they are methods, but I refused to let them into my mind."And the scariest thing of all to me was how more and more enthralling Merricat's voice became with every magic words; they are methods, but I refused to let them into my mind."And the scariest thing of all to me was how more and more enthralling Merricat's voice became with every magic words; they are methods are more and more enthralling Merricat's voice became with every magic words; they are methods are more and more enthralling Merricat's voice became with every magic words; they are methods are more enthralling Merricat's voice became with every magic words; they are more and more enthralling Merricat's voice became with every magic words; they are methods are more enthralling Merricat's voice became with every magic words; they are more and more enthralling Merricat's voice became with every magic words; they are more and more enthralling Merricat's voice became with every magic words; they are more and more enthralling Merricat's voice became with every magic words; they are more and more enthralling Merricat's voice became with every magic words; they are more and more enthralling Merricat's voice became with every magic words; they are more and more enthralling Merricat's voice became with every magic words; they are more and more enthralling Merricat's voice became with every magic words; they are more and more enthralling Merricat's voice became with every magic words; they are more and more enthralling Merricat's voice became with every magic words; they are more and more enthralling Merricat's vo her side despite all the implications that it carries, despite reason suggesting otherwise, despite knowledge of what's going on. And that's when you realize the magnetic pull Merricat has, holding her little world together in the ways that suit her - little world it may be, but it's wholly her own, steadily holding against anything that can be perceived as a disturbance, an interference, a threat. And the words of her little game in the summerhouse take on a new resonance. Bow your heads to our beloved Mary Katherineor you will be dead. I found this book deeply disturbing in its deceiving simplicity, and scarily engrossing - the book written by an oddball ostracized agoraphobiac obsessed with food and trapped in her own little universe by the last years of her life. Shirley Jackson's Constance and Merricat, securely huddled in their own little corner of the world, not accepted but feared and left alone, the heart of legends and superstitions - was it in a way a cry for help or an unattainable dream? I don't know, and I think I sleep better precisely because I don't know.Unflinching 5 stars and a shudder at the seemingly so innocent of an ending: Oh Constance, we are so happy. Also posted on my blog. September 14, 2020 This book is a masterpiece. It is short and spare and written in crystal clear prose, yet so evocative that it is richer in nuance than most good novels twice its size. It is so good I could kick myself for not reading it years ago, yet so mythic I am convinced I have known it always, like a tragic folktale or a chilling childhood dream. And yet, for all its grimness, it is essentially a comedy: darkly, transcendently, funny. The Blackwood sisters 28-year-old
Constance and 18-year-old Mary Katharinelive in a big old house on the outskirts of town. They are fitfully persecuted by the locals, who are convinced one of them is a murderer: their whole family with their black cat Jonasare living together in deliberate tranquility, when long-lost cousin Charles arrives on their doorstep, barely concealing his interest in the lovely Constance and the Blackwood family estate. The narrative voice of Merrycatnickname for Mary Katherineis perhaps the most distinctive thing about the novel. Deceptively childlike, obsessed with omens, magic words, and lucky days, Merrycat is nevertheless a clear and sharp-eyed observer of the day-to-day events of her world. Her naive shrewdness speaks to us like Huckleberry Finns, her quirkiness charms us like Holden Caulfields, yet she possesses a distance, a reserve, that is all her own. Those of you who read novels like autobiographies will find tantalizing tidbits here. The local village resembles Jacksons North Bennington, Vermont, a place Jackson always felt treated her family as outsiders (college eggheads, Democrats, atheists, Jews) and provided her the inspiration for her notorious early success, The Lottery." The two sisters were inspired by Jacksons two daughters, the placid and cautious Constance by Joanne and the superstitious and daring Merrycat by Sarah. But of course Jackson drew on herself for inspiration too, particularly from her fascination with witchcraft and sympathetic magic and her persistent, crippling agoraphobia. And Cousin Charles resembles her husband, in his critical comments about the housekeeping and his continual concerns about money. (Although husband Stanley was a literary critic, his wife Shirley was the literary cash cow of the family, and he once calculated precisely how much money was lost whenever his wife wasted her valuable time composing a letter to a friend.)Perhaps what I like best about the bookbesides the dark humor, and the voice of Merrycat of courseis its sweet and sad conclusion. After the destruction has passed and gonea climax which reveals the full impact of the novels titlewe witness a family rebuild an old life out of love, and even glimpse a little human compassion for a change. It is the twilight happiness of Shakespeares Winters Tale and The Tempest, the kind of happiness Lear and Cordelia might have enjoyed, if they had lived. Here is the novels famous first paragraph, which gives you a good idea of Merrycats distinctive voice: My name is Mary Katherine Blackwood. I am eighteen years old, and I live with my sister Constance. I have often thought that with any luck at all I could have been born a werewolf, because the two middle fingers on both my hands are the same length, but I have had to be content with what I had. I dislike washing myself, and dogs, and noise. I like my sister Constance, and Richard Plantagenet, and Amanita phalloides, the death cap mushroom. Everyone else in my family is dead.October 20, 2024Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh, no, said Merricat, youll poison me.Merricat, said Connie, would you like to go to sleep?Down in the boneyard ten feet deep!A common trope in American horror films is to include children singing a song that, at first, is seemingly innocent but sinks into a chilling cacophony that gnaws at the nerves with a haunting sadism. We watch children, young and naive, signing and spinning in a corn field bathed by an autumn dusk; the cliche works because it is an image that we welcome through our front door for its familiar and idyllic pastoral sentimentality only to discover an intangible fear clawing out from which the maggots of urban legends crawl forth and every town has one. There is the house on the corner children dare one another to touch, the homeless man we hear bears a horrific curse, the school basement where we are told a student once hanged themselves and still roams about (two of the imagination, yet occasionally there is a seed of truth. Shirley Jackson's We Have Always Lived in the Castle focuses on the subjects of the urban legend seed, and holds the reader captive in their reclusive reality. The reader however, will not wish to leave this literary bondage and will likely find themselves sitting up flipping pages late into the evening. Two young woman and their ailing uncle are the sole occupants a mansion set off from the town, the sole survivors of a family poisoning that reverberates through the town with rumors and speculative fear. Castle is a chilling late-night walk through the haunted forests of human consciousness, a gripping psychological horror ripping through the idyllic American classic feel of the novel to expose the Gothic terrors that drench the New England landscapes.We always fear what we dont understand. What makes Castle work so well is its familiarity and its warmth, an unexpected aspect to this chilling portrait of misanthropy. The novel humanizes the subjects of the townsfolks fear and revulsion, and it does not be townsfolks fear and revulsion. reader into this world without making them feel ill at ease through her style, a familiar embrace of tone and structure which recalls the small town American classics. It seemed to follow the format of a book you would read for high school literature, opening with a riveting first chapter that quickly yet eloquently set all the pieces in play while feeding you exposition hidden in the sugars of plot and leaving you gasping with questions you cant wait to have fulfilled. Then it is followed by a second, lengthier chapter where an overarching conflict is introduced, typically through a minor conflict is introduced. school classics that immediately opens your heart to the book, but not just in structure but the plot, setting and characters as well. Harper Lees To Kill A Mockingbird is the first to come to mind. Like Lee, Jackson tells her story from the viewpoints of a young, tomboyish girl and wraps her tale within the folds of local politics and society. Here we have Mary Katherine, or Merricat as she is often referred, a girl of eighteen akin to a feral cat. Her and her sister Constance are embedded in the locals as filth except hers is one of violent hatred. I would have liked to come into the grocery store some morning and see them all, even the Elberts and the children, lying there crying with the pain and dying. I would then help myself to groceries, I thought, stepping over their bodies, taking whatever I fancied from the shelves, and go home, with perhaps a kick for Mrs. Donell while she lay there. I was never sorry when I had thoughts like this; I only wished they would come true. Merricats opening chapter is unabashedly honest, but doesnt quite read like a confession but more as matter-of-fact. Like a catit is fitting that Merricat is always accompanied by a loyal and almost-too-human cat as if it were a childrens novelMerricat is the sort to look you straight in the eye while she destroys the furniture. Which she will do time and time again out of spite."I can't help it when people are frightened," says Merricat. "I always want to frighten them more."Merricat has many reasons beyond her better-than-thou upper-class upbringing to sadistically sneer at the townsfolk. They hate her and her older sister, reviling Constance for allegedly getting away with mass murder, they hate their family for former wounds caused by the snobbish and cruel father, and they take their disregard for the company of villagers, being said to eat children among other things. The sisters are a symbolic repression of women and all things not aligning with the social norms of any age, damned into either shame or blissful solitude as rumors take wing and transform into hellish mythical beasts. Poor strangers, they have so much to be afraid of. By a ge, damned into either shame or blissful solitude as rumors take wing and transform into hellish mythical beasts. Poor strangers, they have so much to be afraid of. By a ge, damned into either shame or blissful solitude as rumors take wing and transform into hellish mythical beasts. Poor strangers, they have so much to be afraid of. By a ge, damned into either shame or blissful solitude as rumors take wing and transform into hellish mythical beasts. Poor strangers, they have so much to be afraid of. By a ge, damned into either shame or blissful solitude as rumors take wing and transform into hellish mythical beasts. Poor strangers, they have so much to be afraid of. By a ge, damned into either shame or blissful solitude as rumors take wing and transform into hellish mythical beasts. Poor strangers, they have so much to be afraid of. By a ge, damned into either shame or blissful solitude as rumors take wing and transform into hellish mythical beasts. Poor strangers, they have so much to be afraid of. By a ge, damned into either shame or blissful solitude as rumors take wing and transform into hellish mythical beasts. Poor strangers, they have so much take wing and transform into hellish mythical beasts. Poor strangers, they have so much take wing and transform into hellish mythical beasts. Poor strangers, they have so much take wing and transform into hellish mythical beasts. Poor strangers, they have so much take wing and transform into hellish mythical beasts. Poor strangers, they have so much take wing and transform into hellish mythical beasts. Poor strangers, they have so much take wing and transform into hellish mythical beasts. Poor strangers, they have so muc focusing on the sisters and viewing the world through Merricats childish and imaginative mind, we gain a unique perspective are the well-to-do well-wishers that feign friendliness towards the sisters. Both sides of this coin are seemingly innocent moments cloaking something sinister. When the disgust of the townsfolk reaches a violent climax, the sisters are further forced out from society towards a perspective that most brilliantly colors the social portrait. For
her any deviation from her comfortable normality is seen as threateningand Merricat feels imbued with magical powers that ward off such demons. All our land was enriched with my treasures buried in it, thickly inhabited just below the surface with my marbles and my teeth and my colored stones, all perhaps turned to jewels by now, held together under the ground in a powerful taut web which never loosened, but held fast to guard us. An old book nailed to a tree, for example, becomes a totem of power to her. When it falls so does her feeling of security. She is the wild human consciousness repressed and full of animalistic defensiveness. It is fitting that Jackson would choose New England as the setting for her novel, a novel that if it werent for the mention of cars could be set in nearly any New England as the setting for her novel. chilling tale told in the American wilderness. It is also reflective of the obdurate beliefs of a conservative catholic New England that so threatened Jackson and her Jewish husband that Jackson developed extreme agoraphobia. While out on my delivery route, I listen to a lot of NPR. This fall the Diane Rehm show did a segment on Jacksons The Haunting of Hill House, a quintessential literary haunted house novel that I so loved in college. Comically, and much to the chagrin of the guests agreed that We Have Always Lived in the Castle was Jacksons strongest work of fiction (which places it even higher for them than her short story The Lottery, which is a staple of any American college students required literature courses). I immediately made an unofficial stop to a used bookstore I'd recently discovered (I have a least one bookstore for route that I rotate through) and purchased a copy of Castle. It did not disappoint. It was a fine friend to have riding shotgun amidst the landscapes disrobing themselves of their fall colors that passed outside my van windows every day. Castle is an exquisite psychological tale of trauma and terror that your heart is sure to welcome in and grow fond of as it hides its dagger behind its back.4/5There had not been this many words sounded in our house for a long time, and it was going to take a while to clean them out. Guest Judy Oppenheimer, author of Private Demons: The Life of Shirley Jackson, added that her favorite of any Jackson book was Life Among the SavagesLiving With the Savages, Jacksons memoirs about raising children. You can listen to the entire segment here. May 4, 2024If there is a better opening paragraph in all of literature, please tell me about it. December 10, 2020Halloween is just around the corner and it's time for some spooky books - but which ones are worth your time? Check out this BookTube Video for answers! What you think you think you know, you don't Several years ago, someone poisoned the sugar bowl at the last Blackwood family dinner, resulting in the death of nearly every family member. Only the two sisters (Merricat and Constance) and their ailing uncle (Julian) remain on the secluded estate but they are not the same as they once were. Since that fateful day, each remaining member has become... slightly unhinged... much to the gossiping villagers horror and delight. Merricat has a wistful, gentle insanity; Constantly obsessing over discovering what happened during the last Blackwood dinner. Everyone in the village wonders, constantly, which one of them could have done it? Then a mysterious cousin comes into town - with shrouded motives and a pushy personality. Merricat decides she must get rid of him before he discovers who killed the Blackwoods but how will she accomplish this with suspicious villagers crowding in at all sides and his own stubbornness to contend with?Bizarre and haunting throughout - the writing is beautiful and the story is riveting. I was absolutely swept into this story - I absolutely loved the way the author managed the characters. All of their personalities shifted subtly during the story - each one becoming more and more disturbed, which (of course) sucked me deeper into this story. I could not find out who was the killer and the more I read, the less I wanted to know. The ending came upon me like a horror creeping in the night. This is definitely one I'd recommend!Audiobook CommentsRead by Bernadette Dunne - she was absolutely perfect. Her haunting voice breathed life into this novelYouTube | Blog | Instagram | Twitter | Facebook | Snapchat @miranda readsNovember 17, 2023Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, youll poison me.Merricat, said Connie, would you like to go to sleep?Down in the boneyard ten feet deep!I dont really have a good reason to begin with that quote, other than the fact that Im obsessed with it. Its up there with the Boggis, Bunce, & Bean poem from Fantastic Mr. Fox in the global rankings of Creepy Rhymes Chanted By Neighborhood Children In Reference To Nearby Monster-People. The difference between this book and Fantastic Mr. Fox, besides the hundreds of obvious ones, is that our heroes ARE those monster-people. And not, you know, a group of talking animals so adorable and charming it was legally mandated Wes Anderson had to adapt it into a movie. Or something. A similarity between this book and likely the only one other than the above rhyme - is that both are wonderful. This is so creepy, and atmospheric, and beautifully written. Reading this is an intense experience, often uncomfortable, oddly addictive, and counterintuitively I felt sad when it was over. I love Merricat and Constance and Uncle rituals and old house and manners of speaking. Shirley Jackson really said men are trash and thats that on that. Relatedly, I have made up my mind to read every Shirley Jackson book I can get my hands on. Also this cover is gorgeous. Bottom line: This is very much my aesthetic. (No one correct me on my grammatically incorrect use of the word aesthetic - Im using it in the hip cool slang way. Thank you.)-------tbr reviewthe rumors are true: i did whisper-shout YES to myself when i found a copy of this in a used bookstore4-and-a-half-stars beautifully-written classics December 20, 2022I hate you, Shirley Jackson.I HATE YOU!!I mean, I know you're dead and all, but still. . . I want to drive to your haunted house in Vermont and throw rocks at your windows. I want to smash every pumpkin, carved, by your front door. I want to hold a sance in your bedroom to summon your spirit, then I want to pull those ugly ass bobby pins from your hair, rip those ugly ass dated glasses off your nose and pull that ugly ass cable knit sweater over your face.And then. . . I think I want to make out with you.Or make out with this book. I never wanted it to end.I want to make a giant bonfire out of every shitty, worthless book I've ever read, to provide the light to read and re-read and re-re read and re-read this book. I could wish him dead until he died. I could fasten him to a tree and keep him there until he grew over his mouth. I could bury him in the hole where my box of silver dollars had been so safe until he grew over his mouth. I could bury him in the hole where my box of silver dollars had been so safe until he grew over his mouth. Jackson sance: All Hallows' Eve, Hill House, Vermont (USA). . . Midnight. Bring your bobby pins, bitches. 60-from-the-1960s a-buck-and-change favorite books February 3, 2018My favorite Shirley Jackson novel. A masterpiece of unreliable narration and of the eerie relationship between childishness and horror. I'm now re-reading this for a December group read, so I thought I'd update this review as I go.A lot has already been written about the masterful opening paragraph of this book, so I'll focus instead on the opening? It's anything but that. Shirley Jackson uses this mundane task to show the intense hostility between the Blackwood family and the town, as well as to show Merricat's rather unusual character. She's childish and playful: "I played a game when I did the shopping. I thought about the children's games where the board is marked into little spaces and each player moves according to a throw of the dice.... The library was my me." Until at last she reaches the sanctuary of her home.It's a sanctuary that's as much magical as physical: "I had to put down the shopping bag to open the lock on the gate; it was a sign saying PRIVATE NO TRESPASSING and no one could go past that." And then she sees the most important person in her life, her sister Constance, and her Uncle Julian--the last surviving members of her family.***But almost immediately, that sanctuary is violated. Helen Clarke and Mrs. Wright come to tea, and we see Merricat fretting over what this will do to Constance, whether she's strong enough for visitors. There's a jealousy in Merricat that reminds me of the jealousy Eleanor has regarding Theodora in The Haunting of Hill House--a subterranean feeling that comes out in flashes of anger, like when Merricat smashes the milk pitcher in the kitchen. The scene with Helen Clarke and Mrs. Wright is also notable for its comedy--how everyone keeps dancing around the subject of the family deaths, except that Mrs. Wright can't help herself, she really wants to know, and Uncle Julian is more than happy to oblige by giving a quided tour of the dining room. Shirley Jackson has quite a comic touch here, though it's all undergirded by Merricat's ill-feelings toward these visitors and the recognition of the horrifying tragedy that befell her family.***Shirley Jackson expertly ratchets up the tension by having Merricat sense something impending: "A change was coming, and nobody knew it but me." What's wonderful about this is that it raises the tension level even as you wonder whether something really is coming or whether she's just living in her own imagination. It also allows for some domestic scene-setting and banter with Uncle Julian without losing the narrative drive. I love when Merricat chooses three special protective words, thinking that
"so long as these great words were never spoken aloud no change would come." She then writes the first word in jam on her toast and eats it--thinking that makes her "onethird safe"!***The change, of course, is cousin Charles, who arrives without much explanation and basically moves in. It's clear right away that he's a gold-digger, and you can sense Merricat's rising anger and panic as he threatening to marry Constance. She employs her childish form of "magic" to try to ward him off or get him to leave, but nothing works, sending her spiraling into extremes. It's clear that Merricat thinks of him as the enemy when she watches him walk into town and talk easily to all the townsfolk who've been bullying her. He's one of "them," in her mind, and at that point the battle lines harden.***One of the subtle mysteries of this book concerns the relationship between Merricat and Uncle Julian. My GR friend Nancy first pointed out, in a group discussion, that they don't really interact, except that Merricat keeps saying to herself that she ought to be nicer to him. I thought this was quite a profound insight, so I read the passages again more closely and noticed the same oddity. Uncle Julian savs at one point that Merricat is dead, and then when Uncle Julian dies, Merricat hardly seems upset at all. In fact, she seems rather relieved, claiming that now she and Constance can start over again. Clearly there's something odd going on between them. My guess is that Merricat feels jealous of Uncle Julian, that she really wants Constance all to herself. [Spoiler alert to the end] Perhaps this is also a clue to the motivation behind the central crime--that it was really driven by Merricat's jealous desire to have her sister all to herself. And Constance herself gives herself to Merricat's superior power, gives up any hope of having her own life. She cries as Charles leaves for the last time and says: "Merricat, I am so happy." gothic unreliable-narrator Melissa Dog/Wolf Lover MartinJanuary 27, 2020 You will be wondering about that sugar bowl, I imagine. Is it still in use? You are wondering; has it been cleaned? You may very well ask; was it thoroughly washed? This book is looney tune. I'm not even sure about some things on this book. (Of course no one will read this so it's a mute point) So Constance, Merricat, and Uncle Julian live in the home together with all of their land enclosed. The rest of the family were killed. Merricat is the only one that leaves to get groceries and books in town where she is picked on by everyone. I loved her macabre thoughts of all the said people being dead. She had a lot of different macabre thoughts through-out the book. The book was just so strange and I enjoyed that, even though it made me feel crazier than I am! They had some jerk uncle that showed up trying to find their fortune. I was hoping he was going to meet a macabre end himself. But alas, he did not. And I'm a bit confused at the ending. Hopefully someone can help me out. Either way, I enjoyed the book Mel January 19, 2015In The Haunting of Hill House, Shirley Jackson's group of misguided investigators discuss the idea that some houses are inherently born evil, and are destined to be haunted from the moment they're built. We Have Always Lived in the Castle explores the opposite idea: how a home becomes a haunted house. One of the many, many fascinating things about this book is the way it could have opened with someone - a stranger to the village, most likely, who didn't know the story - viewing the ruined Blackwood house. The house stands by itself behind a fence, and the townspeople still tell stories about the family who lived there once, and what happened there. The only ones who approach the house are children, on a dare, who run up to the front steps and sing, "Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea? Oh no, said Merricat, you'll poison me." The stranger asks around about this apparently-haunted house, and eventually, through flashbacks, its entire terrifying history is revealed. Another writer could have been just as good. But Shirley Jackson is no ordinary horror writer, and she approaches the story of Blackwood House, and the people who lived there and made it what it was, in a straightforward way. She tells the story as it happens, not as a flashback, and we are able to watch the transformation of Blackwood House, and its inhabitants, in real time as the book unfolds. haunted. It's a ghost story without ghosts - or, more accurately, a story of how a person becomes a ghost. Our view into this house with her older sister Constance (who is so severely agoraphobic that she can't venture past the yard) and her Uncle Julian who is confined to a wheelchair and not quite in his right mind. Mary Katherine is responsible for taking care of what's left of her family, and she takes her job as protector very seriously. She's devised a series of talismans to guard the house against the townspeople, who she views as the enemy. But someone is coming to disrupt the routine that Mary Katherine has carefully created, and the intrusion will have horrible and far-reaching consequences.GOD, Shirley Jackson does creepy so well. Mary Katherine, in addition to belonging in the Unreliable Narrator Hall of Fame, is also responsible for giving us one of the best opening paragraphs in literature, when she introduces us to her life thusly:Myatherine, in addition to belonging in the Unreliable Narrator Hall of Fame, is also responsible for giving us one of the best opening paragraphs in literature, when she introduces us to her life thusly:Myatherine, in addition to belonging in the Unreliable Narrator Hall of Fame, is also responsible for giving us one of the best opening paragraphs in literature, when she introduces us to her life thusly:Myatherine, in addition to belonging in the Unreliable Narrator Hall of Fame, is also responsible for giving us one of the best opening paragraphs in literature, when she introduces us to her life thusly:Myatherine, in addition to belonging in the Unreliable Narrator Hall of Fame, is also responsible for giving us one of the best opening paragraphs in literature, when she introduces us to her life thusly:Myatherine, in addition to belonging in the Unreliable Narrator Hall of Fame, is also responsible for giving us one of the best opening paragraphs in literature, when she introduces us to her life thusly:Myatherine, in addition to belonging in the Unreliable Narrator Hall of Fame, is also responsible for giving us one of the best opening paragraphs in literature, when she introduces us to her life thusly:Myatherine, in addition to belonging in the Unreliable Narrator Hall of Fame, is also responsible for giving us one of the best opening paragraphs in the Unreliable Narrator Hall of Fame, is also responsible for giving us one of the best opening paragraphs in the Unreliable Narrator Hall of Fame, is also responsible for giving us of the best opening paragraphs in the Unreliable Narrator Hall of Fame, is also responsible for giving us of the best opening paragraphs in name is Mary Katherine Blackwood. I am eighteen years old, and I live with my sister Constance. I have often thought that with any luck at all, I could have been born a werewolf, because the two middle fingers on both my hands are the same length, but I have had to be content with what I had. I dislike washing myself, and dogs, and noise. I like my sister Constance, and Richard Plantagenet, and Amanita phalloides, the death-cup mushroom. Everyone else in our family is dead. The slow reveal of what exactly happened to the rest of the Blackwood family and why is masterfully done, and Jackson reveals just enough information to keep us from getting frustrated, while still keeping some things hidden (admittedly, the identity of the murder is a lot more interesting than the who). It's very important that we see the entire story through Mary Katherine's eyes specifically, because as I said, she's not a reliable narrator. "Unbalanced" is putting it lightly, and I could write an entire fucking dissertation on what Mary Katherine kas keeping her prisoner? Constance knows that Mary Katherine killed the rest of the family, and sometimes it seemed like Constance was afraid of Mary Katherine, and being nice to her just because the threat of being poisoned was hanging over her head. It's very subtle, but it comes through most clearly when Constance was trying to calm Mary Katherine down without actually ordering her around, because she was afraid that her sister would react violently. I don't know - Mary Katherine is endlessly fascinating, and I still can't be totally sure what was real and what was real and what was real and what was in her mind. Nobody does slow-burn, are-ghosts-real-or-are-the-monsters-people, is-this-real-or-am-Icrazy horror like Shirley Jackson. This book is brief, strange, purposefully vague, and terrifying. If you thought haunted-house stories don't need prequels, read this and see how wrong you were. February 6, 2024 3.5/5 stars "Bow all your heads to our adored Mary Katherine." This book is brief, strange, purposefully vague, and terrifying. If you thought haunted-house stories don't need prequels, read this and see how wrong you were. February 6, 2024 3.5/5 stars "Bow all your heads to our adored Mary Katherine." This book is brief, strange, purposefully vague, and terrifying. sisters, Mary Katherine and Constance, who reside in isolation with their uncle Julian. Branded as outcasts due to a haunting silence surrounds the unspoken horrors of their history. What chills the most is Mary's unraveling inner monologue, progressively unhinged and deeply disturbing with every turn of the page. A tale where silence speaks volumes, and Shirley Jackson's narrative skills lived up to its acclaim. The magnetic pull of the story hooked me from the very first page, and despite my best efforts, the book refused to be set aside a testament to its
well-crafted and addictive nature. It's the kind of tale that etches itself into your memory, leaving an indelible mark. While the plot twist may have been somewhat anticipated, the brilliance lay in the execution. Jackson's writing style, with its inherent suspense and nuance, kept me on a perpetual edge. The real standout, however, was Mary's inner monologue a descent into unhinged thoughts that managed to maintain a distinct and eerily childlike quality. It's this unique blend that has not only piqued my interest in exploring more of Jackson's works but also ensured that the haunting echoes of this tale linger long after the last page. Overall if you're in search for a book that not only grabs you from the start but also takes you on a haunting rollercoaster ride? Well, this might just be the perfect catch for you. Get ready for a journey that combines suspense with a dash of eeriness, ensuring you're hooked from beginning to end October 6, 2014Just another homicidal paranoid-schizophrenic proto-hippy 18 year old girl-child who lives with her older agoraphobic/social-phobic sister and dementia-sufferer wheelchair-bound uncle in an isolated house. Its not an uncommon situation. I know three similar cases here in Nottingham, and I could have told Cousin Charles Blackwood, who turns up crudely attempting to prise the purported family fortune from the sisters wayward limbs, that he neednt have bothered. His blundering honking outside-world male sensibleness will just come apart in his hands; he has no chance against a homicidal paranoid-schizophrenic proto-hippy 18 year old girl-child. August 22, 2015I truly expected to enjoy this book that has been described as creepy, sinister, unsettling and disturbing, but I honestly found it none of those things. Very little happens beyond going through the motions of Constance and Merricat's daily lives. There is a single revelation and it is extremely anticlimactic, making me instantly not give a damn the moment it appears. I did not find it eerie or interesting... just lacking in everything. I enjoyed Jackson's The Lottery and Other Stories much more. October 30, 2023The storytelling in 'Castle' is superb, haunting, unnerving and captivating. However, the story itself less so. While very good it is not brilliant and not very original. Whether you love it or hate it, this book will get under your mind. Its like a scab you know you shouldnt scratch but you want to. This book was very predictable yet couldnt put it down. It was unoriginal but I was still engrossed in everything it had to offer, from the characters to the plot and themes. Pervasive, haunting, strange, evil, and disturbing. The Plot The 'Castle' is occupied by the young female protagonist in the story, Merricat. We meet her in the opening pages but now I will let Merricat introduce herself to you ... "My name is Mary Katherine Blackwood. I am eighteen years old, and I live with my sister Constance. I have often thought that with any luck at all, I could have been born a werewolf..... I like my sister Constance. I have often thought that with any luck at all, I could have been born a werewolf..... I like my sister Constance. Constance is charged with poisoning and murdering her entire family. Tried and acquitted, the two sisters now live with an ailing uncle who suffers from the effects and trauma of that time. They live in isolation apart from the effects and trauma of that time. The castle, where she lives is also the subject of much folklore since their father sequestered the estate away from use by anyone but his family. Gates and fencing were erected to ensure they remained secluded. After an accidental fire which leaves the Castle virtually uninhabitable, and looting by the neighbours, the lives of the two girls takes an even more peculiar turn. Review and CommentsThis is storytelling at its best. The writing style is simple but macabre that helped create such a creepy, sinister, and troubling atmosphere from the opening pages to the last. So no its not horror as we know it, but frightening, evil and disturbing - absolutely. As for Merricat. A vulnerable teenager or a clever lunatic?. A ghost or a girl living in a dream world albeit it a dark fairytale she will do everything to protect? Merricat had me spooked and questioning whether this girl was pure evil, cunning, psychotic or just odd, but you do know she is behind much of the evil in the story and yet she remains calm, watching, and observing, and when you hear the words... I am going to put death in all their food and watch them die. Then there is no doubt that it was not Constance who laced the sugar bowl with arsenic. To fully appreciate this story is to get inside the mind of Merricat - or try to. Her mind will take you to less comfortable places - ominous, chilling and pretty scary without the horror. A very subtle piece of writing in fact, but with an inescapable unease and then you realise the monster is the child come young adult. Meet the not so innocent but merry 'Merricat'. Adina (notifications back, log out, clear cache) November 6, 2023I cant believe its almost 5 months since Ive read this gothic mystery and I still havent written about it. Ive previously read The Lottery by Shirley Jackson but, although disturbing, I thought the premise was a bit too surreal to make a lasting impact on me. In this case, however, the plot was perfectly carved, paced and in sucked me in. Although I guessed what it actually happened from the beginning, I still enjoyed the gradual reveals and the gothic atmosphere. I will try not to give away too much of the plot. Two sisters and their sick uncle live together in a house at the edge of a village,. It soon transpires that the whole family was poisoned a few years previously and the oldest sister, Constance, was the main suspect. All the remaining members of the family are deeply scared by the event and the village is scared of them. The novel is narrated by the youngest sister and switches between their strange life in the present and details about the events which happened six years before. It is a an excellent novel, which keeps one invested in the story. Highly recommended. fantasy-sf us w_the-practice-of-fictionAugust 16, 2020A.K.A.: Grey Gardens by William Faulkner. Are these unfortunate souls dead or alive in their domestic limbo? Oh, this is one delicious yarn with plenty of turns--with a terror that comes to us only by the Literary Mistress of the Dark Herself, Shirley Jackson. The luxurious morbidity, the Harper Lee Goth cynicism of the book, it is all an absolute delight. I am truly beginning to think that all of her books are like this one--simply the classiest horror of ALL TIME. February 12, 2020The least Charles could have done, Constance said, considering seriously, was shoot himself through the head in the driveway. Have you ever tiptoed down a hall in a dark house late at night, not sure if you really heard that bump in the driveway. night? That is what reading this novel was like, in all of the best ways possible. Shirley Jackson is a renowned master at the macabre, the unnerving, the Gothic genre, and this work puts her talents on full displayin HD. Most have read "The Lottery," whether forced by the classically inclined high school English teacher or for the pure love of the unusual, and here you will find the same masterful foreshadowing, biting eeriness and haunting cruelties found in a small-town community. As my Grandma used to say, You can always count on those small-town characteristics in a manner that left hairs raised on the arms and resonance echoing at the finish of each chapter. We Have Always Lived in their small town after an incident at their family dinner table six years before that left half of their family poisoned to death, one sister on trial for murder and the other in an orphanage. The women go about their lives, hardly ever even leaving their ailing, eccentric uncle who loves to talk about what happened and their loyal cat, until one day a cousin comes a knocking and their lives are forever changed. It slowly becomes apparent that Merricat (Mary Katherine) is not 100% mentally stable, as she believes she has fantasies about how her dead family members should have treated her before they died, and she harbors obviously sadistic and murderous feelings towards the townspeople who tease and abuse them. I would have liked to come into the grocery store some morning and see them all, even the Elberts and the children, lying there crying with the pain and dying. I would then help myself to groceries, I thought, stepping over their bodies, taking whatever I fancied from the shelves, and go home, with perhaps a kick for Mrs. Donell while she lay there. This story had an aspect of urban legend to it, the makings of it and the effect that it has on those who hear it, who believe it. Jackson wove the tale so beautifully that I didnt even realize how engrossed in their lives a sign of truly good writingId become until the cousin started changing the sisters routine and poking his nose around in that way that is uncomfortable for readers invested in the protective bubble of recluse-ness, while simultaneously being an exploration of mans nature to fear and hate what we do not, ourselves, understand. It was also social commentary in that delicious way that only Southern Gothicism can offer (though this novel has no clear mention of place, it is widely believed to have been set in Vermont, making it technically not Southern Gothic, though every other aspect of it is every bit that genre): it tore back the layers on the small town where everyone knows your name, on the myth of genteelism, courtesy, manners, and community that we all think of from this era of writing (Castle was originally published in 1962). What does it mean to be an outsider in a town like this, in a town where there is no degree of separation between any? In a town that needs a common enemy to unite over in
gossip and violence alike? Because, you see, every bully loves a weaker kid, and theres nothing more cruel than the mob mentality turned against a common enemy. Dont believe me? Then you havent read "The Lottery." Castle was everything Id hoped itd be as a lover and writer of this genre. It was the macabre dressed in politesse that made you think twicea skill extremely difficult to hone and, thus, all the more laudable when it is the oddity of family unity and where those bonds can take you, for better or for worse; it was the sharp little dagger of lines like the one above and the what really-happened-there aspect of the dinner-table happening. It did happen. I remember that it happened Eerie. Easily five stars! *****FOLLOW ME HERE:Goodreads | Twitter | Instagram | Get a Copy of My Book | Book Editing, Author Coaching, Submit Your Book to Me full-review gothic oh-where-have-you-been-all-my-life February 26, 2019High Gothic ArtHawthorne, Poe, Lovecraft, and even James: Jackson is in their company when it comes to the Gothic genre. She writers like revealed at just the right continuous pace; and there is plenty to reveal. No gimmicks, no spiritualist allusions, no unlikely situations: Jackson puts later writers like Stephen King to shame with her talent and wit. Someone is a homicidal maniac, but which of the Blackwood sisters is it? The traumatized and agoraphobic Constance, or the obsessive-compulsive and more than slightly mad Mary Katherine? Or perhaps its the wheelchair-ridden Uncle Julian who fades in and out of dementia? The victims had their own problems, genetic as well as domestic; who knows but they did each other in. An accident is a possibility - perhaps the ancestors left some lethal matterial around. Then again, the villagers are not a very stable bunch; nor for that matter are the ladies of the local gentry who have more than a morbid curiosity in the family Blackwood. When the sinister cousin Charles come to visit, the question becomes more than academic. The village itself is part of the mystery. How did it arise as what keeps it going economically? What is the finest house in the village, which should be owned by the Blackwoods, now a junkyard? There is no uncertainty that the village has some distinctive mores: In this village the men stayed young and did the gossiping and the women aged with grey evil weariness and stood silently waiting for the men to get up and come home. Jackson piles on the complexity at the same rate that she reveals the situation. For every question answered, two more are posed. The first person narrator might be either insane or acutely insightful. Its a technique guaranteed to keep the readers interest. Its also a technique which creates a narrative world amazingly efficiently. The questions of the reader are the things the characters themselves are concerned about. The stance of each, his or her position in the puzzle, is who they are. Little further description is necessary. Strangely, how they fit with other is enough for the reader to imagine what they look like, how they dress, what the landscape is like. For example, lackson characterises the entire village was of a piece, a time, and a style; it was as though the people needed the ugliness of the village, and fed on it. She adds nothing but a terse negative formula: whatever planned to be colorful lost its heart quickly in the village. Nothing more is needed. She provokes participation by the reader who fills in the descriptive gaps like the eye automatically interprets perspective. This is more than genre horror or fantasy. Jackson writes literary fiction. This is her masterpiece.Petra in Hawaii doing hulaOctober 7, 2019I'm an outlier here, I didn't think much of the book, The Lottery. The author writes well - good atmospheric scenes and well-drawn characters but the plots are just so unoriginal and the characters with variations are nothing new either: we've all read them in many novels before. Two sisters, one is definitely bat shit crazy if not psychotic, and one is all caring and maternal, and a crazy uncle live together in a mansion surrounded by vast gardens and a giant locked gate. One of the sisters poisoned the entire rest of the family. Is it the normal one or the really crazy one? Well, yeah, it was the really crazy one. The uncle lives in the past and goes on about the murder that he is going to write about one day. They are hated by the villagers. Into their life comes a cousin, he's after the money in the locked safe. There's a fire. The sisters are even more isolated in their burned-out shell of but back comes the cousin for a last go at getting the money. They kill him, they bury him in the garden. They go on with their crazy, isolated life. Maybe they even have a suicide pact. So I tried to read the book yesterday, but I couldn't get through it and downloaded the film instead. All very atmospheric and great acting, but what was the point of it? Nothing happened! And the great confession at the end of Who Really Did the Murders was obvious right from the beginning. So there you go, I'm unimpressed. Meh.2019-100-reviews 2019-read fiction March 11, 20253/3/25: Reread for my Spring 2025 YAL class; lively, fun exchanges about this book that I would share except they constitute spoilers. Just: different opinions about the ending, different assessments of characters. I love talking about books. The class was basically introduced to Shirley Jackson, whom they mosty love!10/31/23: Happy Halloween, (which for horror fans in general or Shirley Jackson fans in general or Shirley Jackson, whom they mosty love!10/31/23: Happy Halloween, (which for horror fans in general or Shirley Jackson fans in general or Shirley Jackson fans in general or Shirley Jackson fans in general or Shirley Jackson, whom they mosty love! conjunction with my having just read The Shirley Jackson Project, a comics tribute collection edited by Robert Kirby. 10/7/21: Always a great read, with an amazing main character, though in this discussion we troubled the issue of her reliability as a narrator. Of course she is unreliable, in many respects, but can we trust her version of the story in any respect? I think we can. I also read an essay that contended that Constance and Mary Katherine are different aspects of Shirley Jackson's personality. I also read more about Jackson's psychopathology, her agoraphobia, her hatred of the working class townies from North Bennington where she and her husband lived, antipathies that make their way out in this novel and in "The Lottery."9/17/18: Third read for my Fall 2018 YA course, and what has emerged as one of my favorite books of all time. This time I noticed all the food references more than ever. We eat the spring and the summer and the fall. We wait for something to grow and then we eat it. I'm going to put death in all their food and watch them die. And loved the strange lyricism of Merricat's deft observations. Are Merricat and Constance really happy in their choices of isolation, or are they cases of arrested development, of stasis, of the opposite of "coming-of-age" and maturation that we expect in a YA novel? You get to choose, I think. I'll say that, isnce the is a sufficient case here that these women need just a leetle bit of help in the mental health arena.9/12/17: I read this in March of this year for a course I was teaching and read it again for my fall YA course. A memorable tale of gothic suspense by Jackson, the author of the much anthologized, exquisitely perverse short story, The Lottery" (1948). Castle is Jacksons last book, often described as her masterpiece, featuring two of the best sister acts in American literature, Constance and her sister Mary Katherine, or Merricat, who says things like this: On the moon we wore feathers in our hair, and rubies on our hands. On the moon we had gold spoons. And, to her sister, Constance; Oh Constance, we are so happy. Who often replies, "Silly, silly Merricat." But truly un-merry Merricat also says things like this, about the people of the town: I'm going to put death in all their food and watch them die. Six years ago, several of the Blackwood family were poisoned, from arsenic sprinkled with sugar on a bowl of blackberries. Constance, who was in the kitchen, was and still is widely suspected of the crime, of which Merricat simply says: Fate intervened. Some of us, that day, she led inexorably through the gates of death. of us took very little sugar. Merricat's distinctive narrators voice joins those of Scout and Holden Caufield as unforgettable teen main characters in American literature. At turns creepy, delightful, dark, with a touch of black humor, the book also features Constance, Merricat's caretaker sister, weirdly hilarious Uncle Julian, and greedy Cousin Charles who comes to live in the castle for a time. I was intrigued by the tension between the townies and the Blackwood family holed up in their dark gothic mansion. I loved the strangely sweet conclusion, colored as always by Merricats strange witchy habits: All our land was enriched with my treasures buried in it, thickly inhabited just below the surface with my marbles and my teeth and my colored stones, all perhaps turned to jewels by now, held together under the ground in a powerful taut web which never loosened, but held fast to guard us. A masterpiece, revealing more riches at every reading.best-books-ever books-loved-2017 eng-240-spr-17 February 11, 2025My name is Mary Katherine Blackwood. I am eighteen years old, and I live with my sister Constance. I have often thought that with any luck at all I could have been born a werewolf, because the two middle fingers on both my hands are the same length, but I have had to be content with what I had. I dislike washing myself, and dogs, and noise. I like my sister Constance, and Richard Plantagenet, and Amanita phalloides, the death-cup mushroom. Everyone else in my family is dead. So begins Shirley Jacksons final novel We
Have Always Lived in the Castle. And what a beginning it is! It gives us pause and a frisson of unease runs through us. What on earth is this going to be? It is certainly very odd. Assorted facts seem to have been thrown at us. The first two sentences lull us into thinking that this is an intimate record by a young womanperhaps rather an introverted person boosting her confidence. Suddenly we are thrown off kilter by the next sentence. Wishing to be a werewolf? A fantasist then ... or perhaps aspiring to be creative. Making an impression? Writing for a possible future audience? And a sardonic tone, had to be content with what I had. She has a dark sense of humour, then, unless ... (the disquieting thought strikes us) is this deadpan? Is she actually serious? This idea stays with us as we read her dislikes, which confirm our ideas that she is self-absorbed to the point of being obsessional. She reports her likes equally succinctly in her next sentence, thereby revealing to us that she must be intelligent to know the Latin name of a mushroom. (Either that, or have the sort of quirky brain which memorises lists.) But what a strange example to give: the death-cup mushroom. For show, again, perhaps? Perhaps she is a rather immature 18 year old: precocious but still slightly awkward, isolated, and in a dream world of her own. And the final sentence both confirms all our earlier thoughts and immediately opens a whole extra can of worms. What? All dead?! Are we meant to take this literally? Could it explain why this person is so odd, so self-absorbed? Is she perhaps very troubled or has even by now lost her sanity? Or does she have a different take on reality, is disturbed by a brain disorder such as autism, so that her perceptions are different take on reality. chosen those specific words conveys that this is not a remote historical fact; she does not say died long ago or before I was born. Perhaps then, it was a recent tragedy and she does not have the same emotional reactions as you or I.So is it a fantasy or a reality? Or is she a ghost, and we are reading a different sort of book? These were my first impressions, and others will doubtless have similar ones. The author has controlled our reactions very neatly here. We cannot make any sense of what we have read, and have to read on, to find out more. We are intrigued, and committed to reading the story. We have completely lost sight of the fact that this is a narrator, (probably what literary types) what literary types of what we have read, and have to read on, to find out more. We cannot make any sense of what we have completely lost sight of the fact that this is a narrator, (probably what literary types) what literary types are intrigued. call an unreliable narrator) in a work of fiction. Although we feel very distanced from her, and we do not trust her, we feel close to her, since we are reading what amounts to her diary. We have been well and truly hooked. We settle down for a riveting read, and hope the rivets are not set in some instrument of torture. Many Katherine Blackwood lives with her older sister Constance, their black cat Jonas, and their Uncle Julian, who is infirm in body and sometimes also his mind. They are the last surviving remnants of a grand old American family; the rest of the dynasty has been wiped out. A crime occurred six years ago, and a great inheritance is at stake. This is surely a staple of many golden age mysteries. So, what we want to know now is, who put the arsenic in the sugar bowl? (We are more used to cosy mysteries than ... whatever this is.) The Blackwood family, odd and eccentric, live in virtual solitude in their family home, a huge rambling, tumbledown edifice. Set apart, it is perched aloof on the outskirts of a small village in Vermont. The sugar bowl? inhabitants of the village resent and perhaps fear the Blackwoods, yet they continue to treat them with a reluctant brooding respect, because of their great wealth and power. If we are to believe the narrator, the entire village believes that Constance was guilty of a heinous crime, for which she should pay the price. Constance, now twenty-eight years of age, ventures no further than her garden in the grounds of the great house, never setting foot inside the village for fear of reprisals. The sisters grow their own food and are fairly self-sufficient, We eat the spring and the summer and the fall. We wait for something to grow and then we eat itAll the Blackwood women had taken the food that came from the ground and preserved it, and the deeply colored rows of jellies and bottled vegetables and fruit, maroon and amber and would stand there forever, a poem by the Blackwood women. Constance appears to get great joy from her domesticity, and in caring for and nurturing her younger sister. There is a sense of order, of tradition. We learn a history of domestic values and collection of paraphernalia, such as china, linens, paintings, furniture and ornaments, and of following timeold routines by which the sisters feel secure. We dusted and swept under tables and pictures and rugs and lamps, but we left them where they were; the tortoise-shell toilet set on our mothers dressing table was never off place by so much as a fraction of an inch. Blackwood wife moved in, a place was found for her belongings, and so our house was built up with layers of Blackwood property weighting it, and keeping it steady against the world. Yet sometimes it is necessary to venture into town, to collect essentials, Fridays and Tuesdays were terrible days, because I had to go into the village. Someone had to go to the library, and the grocery; Constance never went past her own garden, and Uncle Julian could not. This hated chore falls to Constances younger sister, the 18-year old Mary Katherine, who views the villagers with disdain. They seem almost a different species, mere puppets in her world. Mary Katherine, we learn, is usually called Merricat. Mischievous and malevolent in equal parts, even this nickname of merry-cat is itself an apposite contradiction. Merry combined with cat. Arrogant, catlike, she watches the stolid, stubborn, lumpish villagers, and despises what she sees, inventing vicious fantasies, I never turned; it was enough to feel them all there in back of me without looking into their flat grey faces with the hating eyes. I wish you were all dead, I thought, and longed to say it out loud. The people here are less than nothing to her. Looking down with contempt, and despising them, It was as though the people in the village had real faces that I knew and could hate individually; JimI always thought about rot when I came toward the row of stores; I thought about burning black painful rot that ate away from inside, hurting dreadfully. I wished it on the village.Unsettled and deeply suspicious, we follow Merricats wanderings into the village, I would have liked to come into the grocery some morning and see them all, even the Elberts and the children, lying there crying with the pain of dying. I would help myself to groceries, I thought, stepping over their bodies, taking whatever I fancied from the shelves, and go home, with perhaps a kick for Mrs. Donell while she lay there. I was never sorry when I had thoughts like this; I only wished they would come true. I am walking on their bodies I am going to put death in all their food and watch them die. Why such sadistic violence? Why such sadistic violence? Why such sadistic violence? Why such sadistic violence? just a little?Perhaps the village was really a great game board, with the squares neatly marked out, and I had been moved past the squares, with only one move to go to reach home. Merricat views her home then as a sanctuary, and we now have a hint of even more deeply ritualistic behaviour she has invented to keep herself safe. Merricat is a troubled young woman, and not only by obsessional behaviour. She feels the need to mark the boundaries of the Blackwood land with fetishes and totems: talismans, which she believes will protect what is left of her family from the outside world, the box of silver dollars I had buried by the creek, and the doll buried in the long field, and the book nailed to the tree in the pine woods; as long as they were where I had put them nothing could get in to harm us. All our land was enriched with my treasures buried in it, thickly inhabited just below the surface with my marbles and my colored stones. all perhaps turned to jewels by now, held together under the ground in a powerful taut web which never loosened, but held fast to guard us.Merricat is fiercely protection, and so long as these great words were never spoken aloud no change would come. I was resolute about not thinking my three magic words and would not let them into my mind, but the air of change was so strong that there was no avoiding it; change lay over the stairs and the kitchen and the garden like fog. I would not forget my magic words; they were MELODY GLOUCESTER PEGASUS, but I refused to let them into my mind. And some at least of these rituals are known to Constance. Perhaps it is a shared fantasy, this recurring theme of living on the moon we had gold spoons. On the moon we had gold spoons. On the moon we have everything. Lettuce, and pumpkin pie and Amanita phalloides. We have cat-furred plants and horses dancing with their wings. All the locks are solid and tight, and there are no ghosts. And Constance herself has her own chosen rituals, although these rituals may seem less strange because they are so common. A tablecloth may have to be spread just so. Only one specific set of cups and saucers should be used for certain visitors. The clock on the mantelpiece may have to be set at just that particular angle. Do these types of rituals remind you of anyone? Sometimes, more kindly, they are termed routines. The cosy chintz, and the clutter of china feel unsettling. Rather than reassuring, they smother, and convey an entire history of
female oppression. Not here the horrors of slavery, or of a male dominated hierarchy. This is a subtler sort of oppression, often imposed by females on other females. Usually the perpetrators are those to whom such histories and rituals are overwhelmingly important females.

Everything is treated as absolutely normal and unremarkable. It is clear throughout the story that both Constance and her silly Merricat love and care deeply for each other. Into this haven of slightly weird tranquillity, come at first some visitors, sympathetic, well-meaning Mrs. Clarke and her nervous friend. Constance plays both host and mischievous entertainer, ensuring that they will never come calling again, deliberately drawing attention to, the sugar bowl. It is a family heirloom; my brother prized it highly. You will be wondering; has it been cleaned? You may very well ask; was it thoroughly washed? In common with the visiting ladies, we are aware that Constance washed up the sugar bowl before the police arrived, on the pretext of there having been a spider in it. Merricat had been sent to her room before supper, so had no pudding. Constance took no sugar. And Uncle Julian only took a little sugar, so although he had been poisoned along with the rest of the family he survived, albeit with ailing mental and physical health. Uncle Julian in his lucid moments also views these visitors as a great source of amusement, playing his own daring pranks. It is difficult to tell when he is dissembling. Does he realise that Merricat still lives with them or not? Not surprisingly the visitors are keen to get out of this madhouse, and the eccentricities they have viewed are fuel for yet more cruel rumours and reciprocal teasing. Over their six years of isolation, a mythology has grown around the three surviving Blackwoods, and whenever Merricat ventures out, she is greeted with taunts and jeers by the children, who relish repeating their cruel chanting rhyme, Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, youll poison me.Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Connie, would you like a cup of tea?Oh no, said Merricat, said Con Into this mix, another little provocation arrives. A long-lost cousin, the smooth-talking, gold-digging Charles Blackwood family estate, and does not attempt to conceal the fact. Merricat think he spoils the neatness of their lives. She hates him with a vengeance, I disliked having a fork pointed at me and I disliked the sound of the voice never stopping; I wished he would put food on the fork and mouse techniques. We have a sense of impending doom, I was thinking, I could turn him into a spiders web and keep him there until he grew into the trunk and bark grew over his mouth. If he was under the ground I could walk over him stamping my feet. And yet, I was wondering about my eyes; one of my eyesthe leftsaw everything golden and yellow and orange, and the other was for daylight and the other was for new colors still to be invented. For me this was the high point of the book; it is very strange indeed. And thus the stage is set, as the author has deliberately ratcheted up up the tension. All the way through this unsettling tale, we have felt the approaching storm a confrontation between the Blackwoods and the villagers, who would only need the slightest little push to become a crazed and violent mob, driven wild and egging each other on by group hysteria. Breaking furniture, throwing rocks, terrifying the inhabitants so much that one dies. The pressure mounts towards this inevitable climax; one which is simultaneously inevitable and shocking. But who has been persecuting whom? Are there any murderers here? Any psychopaths? All we see is sociopaths, if that, and even then is it possible that so many characters could each be a sociopath? The author isnt telling. I can guarantee that you will not guess the ending of this tale. Nor, probably, will you guess some of the fallout. We Have Always Lived in the Castle was published in 1962. three years before Shirley Jacksons premature death in 1965. All Shirley Jacksons works include aspects of her own deeply troubled life. Her biographer has suggested that Merricat and Constance reflect two aspects of herself, although the author said that they were fictionalised versions of her own daughters Sarah (Merricat) and Joanne (Constance). Even her husbands continual concerns about money seem present in the fortune-seeking cousin, Charles. There is a repeated theme of persecution of people who exhibit otherness in many of her stories. The setting of We Have Always Lived in the Castle is said to be recognisable as North Bennington, Vermont (which was also said to inspire her early successful story, The Lottery). This is where Shirley Jackson and her husband Stanley, a literary critic and professor in North Bennington, felt treated as outsiders. Democrats and atheists, they sensed also anti-intellectualism. In another novel too, The Haunting of Hill House, the main characters live in a large isolated house which stands alone not only physically, but also socially and ideologically, from the inhabitants of the nearby town. All of Shirley Jacksons stories seem to be imbued with an atmosphere of strangeness, a pervasive unease, a sense of intimacy and evil. Despite the sisters love and devotion, the overwhelming sense is of claustrophobia. The author herself suffered from agoraphobia and other nervous conditions and these greatly inform a lot of this story. It is scary, mysterious, horrifically creepy, and freakishly weird. Shirley Jackson was fascinated with witchcraft and dabbled with sympathetic magic. Yet there is no supernatural element here, save the echoes of violence and emotion which become imprinted on the places where we live, and may be sensed by those of a nervous disposition. The language is precise, well-observed and deceptively simple. Every single sentence has a place, a reason for being there. There is probably another layer, something implied or significant, rather than a simple description of what happens. Depending on your tastes, you may find it either entrancing, or unsettling. By the end of the book, we know most of the facts, but there is no one way of making sense of them. We are drawn to a psychological explanation, but the author offers us none, nor does she imply a moral judgement. We are not even sure whether the ending we have read is happy or not. The lasting feeling I have from the book is of claustrophobic small-town America. And possibly being force-fed fusty fudge, by a gentil lady with coiffured hair and a malevolent smile. We Have Always Lived in the Castle to me feels very American. It is steeped in a sense of venerated old money, parallel but different from the aristocratic upper classes of England. This is hard for a non-American to feel as intuitively. The so-called castle too, is nothing like an English person would assume. Perhaps this is why I prefer The Haunting of Hill House, even though We Have Always Lived in the Castle is generally regarded as her best novel. Nor is this a horror novel in any modern sense. There is a chilling creepiness, but these cobwebs are doused with honey.ghost-horror-supernatural kindle read-authors-i-IJanuary 22, 2023Creepy gothic atmosphere and mentally unstable characters prove that you don't need monsters to get a good horror. Humans are the most terrifying creatures of all. And why be frightened of ghosts or demonsters to get a good horror. when your neighbours can turn into a bloodthirsty mob at any time? May 2, 2008Ah Merricat, silly Merricat, I do believe I love you. I'm drawn to interestingly insane women, and though of course you would poison me in the end, what a maddening and mysterious time I would first have. You are high on my list of literary loves. At least ones I dare speak of. What I found so wonderful about this novel was the consistency of Merricat's insanity. Too often an author will distill the essence of insanity into the chaotic, and this is rarely a truism. Insanity is more often an overly-demanding focus, a hitch in a character, a mannerism that has growth as a cancer. Merricat (who I cannot help but to picture as beautiful, with long and lustrous black silken hair---despite all stated references to the contrary)loves to be left alone (that is, alone with her sister Constance and her Uncle Julian) and she loves her superstitions. Her superstitions. Her superstitions I found charming, and the lengths she will go to in order to remain alone, well, that is the crux of this novel. Merricat, silly Merricat, one day I will go into the village and distribute much-needed and much-deserved vengeance on your only somewhat illusory tormentors, and then I will go off (I dare not approach your house---such is forbidden) to await you on the moon. November 4, 2021Such a gothic masterpiece and I finally read it! Why do I wait too long and why on earth I watched its semi-satisfying movie adaptation from 2018 at first! Did I expect to watch some brilliant adaptation like Haunting of Hill House? Somewhat I did! But from now on I swear Ill only read the book at first! What do I love about this book so much instead of slow burn tension and gothic, bleak, ominous vibes of the castle is impeccable character development. As far as I see the characters are based on the authors real family: two sisters are inspired by her own daughters and greedy uncle Charles who returns back to steal family fortune is based on her husband (of course his husband was not greedy and he didnt intend to steal family: two sisters are inspired by her own daughters and greedy uncle Charles who returns back to steal family fortune is based on her husband (of course his husband was not greedy and he didnt intend to steal family fortune but her so concerned about money and his way to control the household by criticizing the maids are similar) Two polar opposite sisters bounding is powerful. Merrycat (nickname for Mary Catherine) is only 18, protective, quirky, bold sister who is keen on superstitions, magic, omens (shes reflection of 15 years old me) as 28 years old Constance is more reserved and cautious. Once upon a time: they were family of seven till one day one of them poisons the others. Now the sisters are the only ones left and townies are suspicious about their motives, gossiping around, pointing fingers to them. Is one of the sisters murderer? Their uncles sudden arrival will change their secluded life, revealing the secrets they shared for years! This book is the best Halloween read choice and one of the greatest works of marvelous Ms. Jackson. Im so delighted to read it yet! October 22, 2019 This book was my first exposure to Shirley Jackson and, perhaps consequently, holds an abnormally large portion of my heart. The Haunting of Hill House is probably better, and "The Lottery" is perhaps the best 20 pages of prose ever written, but I find myself daydreaming of We Have Always Lived in the Castle the most. I'm not going to describe plot because I went into it knowing nothing and liked it that way. If you absolutely need to know, read the description--but also know that it won't do it justice. No description can account for characters this expertly developed, a setting this crisp and haunting. Like "The Lottery," Jackson uses every word to propel the story to its startling and delicious conclusion. Nearly 60 years later, you would think her prose would feel a bit dated. But not at all. It could be a classic assigned for school, or it could be a just-released pop novel. Jackson's secret, I think, is that she has the rare ability to blend art and beauty with accessibility. Her characters are brooding and abnormal, yet somehow just like all of us. books that I feel are truly must-reads. Like, your life will not be complete without experiencing them. This is one of them. April 11, 2024 And we held each other in the dark hall and laughed, with the tears running down our cheeks and echoes of our laughter going up the ruined stairway to the sky. 'I am so happy,' Constance said at last, gasping. 'Merricat, I am so happy.' I told you that you would like it on the moon.We Have Always Lived in the Castle by Shirley Jackson is a chilling and atmospheric masterpiece that lures readers into a world of mystery, isolation, and psychological intrigue. Set in a secluded mansion inhabited by the enigmatic Blackwood family, the novel follows the lives of sisters Merricat and Constance as they grapple with the aftermath of a tragic event that left the rest of their family dead. Jackson's prose is hauntingly beautiful, drawing readers into the twisted minds of her protagonists with a sense of unease and foreboding. Through Merricat's unreliable narration, the novel explores themes of madness, superstition, and the destructive power of societal judgment. As the tension mounts and secrets are revealed, readers are kept on the edge of their seats, eagerly turning pages to uncover the truth behind the Blackwood family's dark history. We Have Always Lived in the Castle leaves you with a sense of dread and a pervasive atmosphere of menace that makes it a deeply unsettling and unforgettable read. Jackson's exploration of the human psyche and the nature of evil leaves a lasting impression, cementing her status as a master of the macabre. Highly Recommend. 4.75July 11, 2021Nie wiem skd ta powie zbiera tak sabe opinie. Czuam si jakbym siedziaa w lesie, przy ognisku suchajc opowieci obcego mi czowieka. To raczej ta powie z kategorij niestandardowych, ale warta poznania. Displaying 1 - 30 of 31,499 reviewsGet help and learn more about the design, edit descriptions of this character

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