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Everything is treated as absolutely normal and unremarkable. It is clear through the story that both Constance and her sister Merricat love each other, but this is the only connection between them. The story is told from the perspective of Merricat, who is a very mischievous entertainer, ensuring that they will never come calling again, deliberately drawing attention to, the sugar bowl on the sideboard, the heavy silver sugar bowl. It is a family heirloom; my brother prized it highly. 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? 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, you'll poison me. Merricat, said Connie, would you like to go to sleep? Down in the boneyard ten feet deep!! can't help it when people are frightened, says Merricat. I always want to frighten them more. Something else has to give. Into this mix, another little provocation arrives. A long-lost cousin, the smooth-talking, gold-digging Charles Blackwood arrives on their doorstep. He flatters Constance, has designs on her, coupled with a greedy interest in the Blackwood family estate, and does not attempt to conceal the fact. Merricat thinks 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 put it into his mouth and strangle himself. Despite his attempts to quash her, Merricat uses her best and most compelling cat and mouse techniques. We have a sense of impending doom, I was thinking, I could turn him into a fly and drop him into a spider's web and watch him tangled and helpless and struggling, shut into the body of a dying buzzing fly. I could wish him dead until he died. I could fasten him to a tree 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 eyes the left saw everything golden and yellow and orange, and the other eye saw shades of blue and grey and green; perhaps one eye was for daylight and the other was for night. If everyone in the world saw different colors from different eyes there might be a great many 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 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 isn't 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 Jackson's premature death in 1965. All Shirley Jackson's 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-Semitism and 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 Jackson's 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 gentile 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 January 22, 2023 Creepy 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 demons when your neighbours can turn into a bloodthirsty mob at any time? May 2, 2008 Ah 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 grown 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 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, 2021 Such 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 I'll 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 didn't intend to steal family fortune but he's 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 (she's 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 a murderer? Their uncle's 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. I'm so delighted to read it on this special horror week! And I highly recommend all the horror/gothic thriller fans if you haven't 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. The plot is ripe with symbolism and art, but also just as juicy as your favorite page-turner. There are few 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. 4.75 July 11, 2021 Nie wiem skąd ta powie zbiera tak same opinie. Czuję, że jakbym siedziała w lesie, przy ognisku, słuchając opowieści obcego mi człowieka. 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