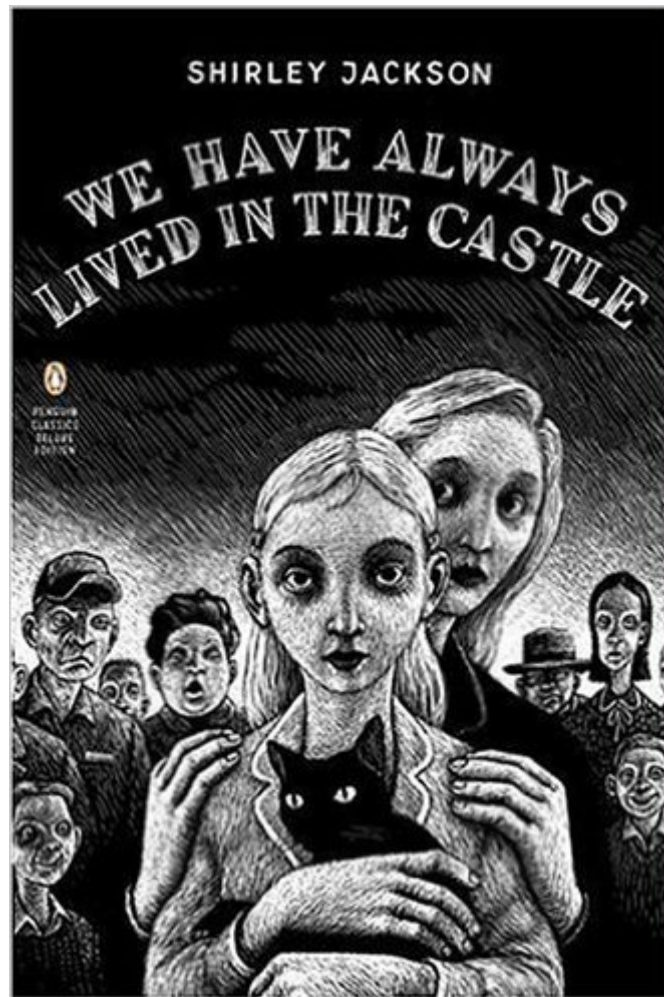


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# We Have Always Lived In The Castle (Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition)



## Synopsis

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 a new introduction by Jonathan Lethem. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

He pressured me into reading this book. "No, no," I objected, "I know about this Shirley Jackson; she's the one who writes those scary books. I'd like to sleep tonight, thank you." Finally I gave in and picked it up. I didn't put it down until I had read the last word, and then only for long enough to get a glass of apple juice and demand to know why there wasn't more of it. Two weeks later, as I was reading it for about the ninetieth time, he suggested perhaps I ought to get some sleep, or some fresh air, or at least, if it wasn't too much to ask, a different book. "Fine," I snarled, "I'll try this *HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE*." But that's another review, and I still haven't gotten around to why I loved this book so much. It's been said, I believe, that Shirley Jackson was incapable of writing a bad, or poor, sentence. More accurate, I think, would be to say that she cannot (could not) write an

imperfect one. Every word of every sentence on every page of *WE HAVE ALWAYS LIVED IN THE CASTLE* drew me in, captivated me, and made it impossible for me to not believe everything I was reading. It was as if, while reading the words of Merricat Blackwood, I was her; her "madness", if that is the word for the way she thought, felt, and acted, consumed me and I thought as she did. I cannot imagine a more magical book, a more fascinating story. I urge you to read this book if you care one shred for literature. It is, truly, a masterpiece.

I am a big fan of Shirley Jackson. I first became interested in her after stumbling across a collection of her short stories, and since then, I have been hooked. *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* is my favorite Shirley Jackson novel. *The Haunting of Hill House* has generated much more speculation and interest world-wide than did *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, but in my opinion, there is much more to be said for this book. There is much more to this novel than it seems when you first start reading it. Many things throughout the book will appeal to you, and simultaneously tear your heart in two, like the villager's hatred of Merricat (the narrator and main character) and their horrible, shameful treatment of her. This is a complex novel. It is not for everyone. It is a difficult read, because if you aren't into the book, then you won't understand what's going on. It reminds me of J.D. Salinger's. His books, especially if you've read his short stories, are to be puzzled over, yet never completely understood. The story is about Merricat and Constance, two sisters who live isolated on the edge of town at Blackwood Manor. They seldom venture out of their home, and when they do are subjected to abuse at the hands of the villagers, who particularly enjoy throwing rocks at Merricat and calling her names. Readers come onto the scene of the story years after a poisoning during supper at Blackwood Manor, which killed most of the family. For years Merricat, their uncle, and Merricat's older sister Constance have lived in solitude until Charles, a distant cousin, comes calling. He plays upon Constance's desire for a normal life, telling her how unnatural her life is at Blackwood Manor, while at the same time displaying to the reader a strong interest in the family fortune. Merricat sees him as a threat to her lifestyle of comfort and solitude, away from those who revile her and her family. Merricat is also disturbed by the way Charles seems to be tantalizing Constance with visions of how her life could be if they left Blackwood Manor. Suddenly everything important to her is threatened. I felt particular sympathy for the character of Constance. She was locked in a world she couldn't get out of. She loved her sister Merricat, (even though Merricat was strange and a bit crazy) and didn't want to desert her, but at the same time, as demonstrated by her quickness to come around to Charles's way of thinking, she wished to have a normal life. She didn't want Merricat to be so wild, and she strove for normalcy at every turn. She

was constantly doing motherly activities like baking and cleaning, and generally taking care of everyone around her. What I liked most about the book was that it left me with the same feeling I got from reading Jackson's famed story "The Lottery". It leaves you with that kind of horror at humanity "The Lottery" did with such deftness. All this book needs is someone who is willing when he or she sits down with it to take the time to figure out what's REALLY going on here, and to understand the characters and their plights. If you read this book, go into it with an open mind. You will be rewarded for it. This novel is not for everyone. But it may be for you.

I think I am just about the only person out there who had not read Shirley Jackson's, *We Have Always Lived in a Castle*. Well, now I have, and this 146 page book left me feeling a bit unsettled. Creepy, atmospheric and beyond clever, this is one book that will leave some of you scratching your head when you get to the end. In brief, Merricat, as she prefers to be called, begins narrating this story in this way: "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, and 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." From the opening paragraph, I thought something is very strange about Merricat. She is eighteen and acts like a child. She is extremely superstitious, believing in signs and burying items in the ground to secure the property. She is also very protective of her sister. She lives with her sister and Uncle Julius, who on the surface appears to have some sort of dementia. The three of them live in a secluded mansion, and never leave the house, except for Merricat who ventures into town for necessities about twice a week. It is clear that the townspeople fear and dislike the remaining family members. The Blackwoods avoid the neighbors, preferring the security of seclusion. They even avoid the few who are friendly. Cousin Charles arrives on the scene, interested in money that may have been left behind, and although he is an unlikable character, he is the only one who seems to be somewhat normal. How the other family members died is revealed as you read on. So where is this story going? Well, before long it is very clear that Merricat is emotionally disturbed and not a reliable narrator, and that everything is not as it may have appeared early on. For a 142 page book, this one took me several days to complete as it was creepy, really kept my brain engaged searching for clues, and in the end left me wondering about Shirley Jackson, and what her life was like. I know that I will be interested in reading more by this fascinating author. Don't Miss This One!

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