

NOTES FROM: *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, by Shirley Jackson

SUMMARY: Ever since coming out in 1962, the last novel of Shirley Jackson has been well-received by critics, and I just joined them! This book takes you *right in* and draws you into a mood of agoraphobia, an intimation of social isolation, and an empathetic awareness of what mental illness *feels like* to the sufferer.

The novel is told from the perspective of Mary Katherine Blackwood, an 18-year-old who was just 12 years old when her parents, brother, and aunt were murdered by poisoning in their own home, where she now lives with her sister and her uncle Julian.

She's now shunned by the whole town – her whole family is almost unanimously reviled by the townspeople – and they rarely leave their stately home, located between the village and the highway.

Her sister, Constance, is an agoraphobic who was acquitted of the murders, and their uncle Julian is an invalid who is barely holding on to his sanity and powers of recollection as he tries to piece together the evidence of the murder for a book he's planning to write.

Mary Katherine senses from a far way off that an uncertain *change* is coming and that their peaceful-though-uneasy existence in their “castle” is about to come unraveled.

“A pretty sight, a lady with a book.”

“In a few minutes she would ask me to set the table for the three of us in the dining room, and then after dinner it would be night and we would sit warmly together in the kitchen where we were guarded by the house and no one from outside could see so much as a light.”

“On Sunday morning the change was one day nearer.”

“We learned, from listening, that all the strangers could see from outside, when they looked at all, was a great ruined structure overgrown with vines, barely recognizable as a house. It was the point halfway between the village and the highway, the middle spot on the path, and no one ever saw our eyes looking out through the vines.”