

## The Watch in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*

*We Have Always Lived in the Castle* tells the story of the orphaned Merricat and Constance, two wealthy sisters living in their Blackwood Manor along with their ill uncle. The folks of the town both fear and scorn the Blackwoods both for the wealth they have and the belief that Constance killed her family by poisoning the sugar bowl. Merricat and Constance's deceased father owned an expensive watch, which becomes a talisman nailed to the tree by Merricat, stolen by Charles, and then eventually returned to Merricat. The watch is an essential symbol in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, representing the power dynamic in the Blackwood family, the psyche of Merricat, and wealth.

During his life, the Blackwood patriarch wore his expensive watch as a symbol of his wealth and status. Merricat ended his life and took his watch for her own, reclaiming the power that she had not had growing up and becoming somewhat the leader of the family. Though Constance cooks and cleans and is a parental figure for Merricat, Merricat is the one who goes into town to shop, having to deal with the townspeople's harassment. Additionally, Merricat is able to speak her mind and make up her own rules while Constance is easily swayed and stepped on. After taking the watch, Merricat nails it to a tree as a talisman in order to protect her and her sister. Merricat gives the watch tremendous power in reflection of the power she has given herself; the power to decide who lives and who dies, as well as being the protector of the house. After their cousin,

Charles arrives at the Blackwood manor in a con to take their money for his own, Charles steals the watch from the tree and yells at Merricat about it, once again creating the past. Once again, her father's ghost as she calls him, Charles has taken the position as the house patriarch and scolds Merricat the way her father used to. With the watch, the power has transferred over to Charles. However, when Merricat breaks and steals the watch back as Charles is beginning to have his authority revoked, the power returns to her.

In the novel, there is a place where Merricat fantasizes about being the most beloved child when her family was still alive, her family showering her in affection and never scolding her. However, the reader knows that this is not true. Merricat was mostly overlooked in the family, and seemingly when she has noticed it was because she was in trouble. On the night her family was killed, Merricat had been sent to her room without dinner. This leads to the question: if Merricat hated her father enough to kill him, why did she keep the watch and hold on to it as sort of a sacred item? It can be inferred from Merricat's strong desire for her family's love that she keeps the watch as a treasure because she still fantasizes about having a loving father. Because she killed her family, she can control them by only remembering what she wishes about them and making up new narratives about her family.

Additionally, the watch represents the wealth of the Blackwood family as its ownership and condition always directly correlates to the condition of the family. When the watch is in Merricat's hands, she is free to bury money and valuables, as well as smashing valuable items when she is mad. However, when the watch belongs to Charles or her father, the house is under strict patriarchal rule, with the accumulation of

wealth being one of the main goals, as well as the return to a strict upper-class household. However, at the end of the novel when the watch is broken and returned to Merricat and Charles runs away during the fire and riot, the girls are back in control of the Blackwood's wealth. Charles and the townspeople could not move the safe, and so the money was no longer being threatened by outside sources. Wealth plays a large part in the novel. It is the reason the townspeople hate the blackwoods and destroy their belongings, the reason why Charles inserts himself into Constance and Merricat's lives, the reason why the blackwood family fought frequently, and why figures like Helen associate with the Blackwoods. At the end of the novel when the Blackwood Manor burns and the townspeople rush in to destroy the Blackwood's possessions, only when the illusion of grandeur has gone do the townspeople apologize for their wrongdoings and send the sisters food. By this time, the sisters no longer use money, surviving off of their vegetable garden and then townpeople's food gifted at their doorstep and wearing sheets and men's clothes. Though they still have their wealth in the safe, they no longer live even close to how they were expected to live as a wealthy family. The sisters live by no one's standards, keeping each other happy while being their own leaders and pleasing no one.

The watch goes with the running theme in the book of objects having significant power. Merricat buries and hangs powerful items to protect her and her sister, breaks dishes significant to the family in bursts of anger, and possesses the watch in order to gain power over her family. Possessions in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* represent a larger picture: the anger and separation between the Blackwoods and the Townspeople which is only mended upon the destruction of the Blackwood's items, the

power dynamic in the family, and the use of talismans, as well as used to gain a better understanding of Merricat.