



# The Red Lamp

*Mary Roberts Rinehart*

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## **The Red Lamp** Mary Roberts Rinehart

William Porter has just inherited Twin Hollows, an isolated lakeside estate shrouded in mystery and doom. But William and his wife aren't easily swayed by ghost stories and whispered rumors. Until a shadowy apparition beckons to them from the undying glow of a red lamp. Is a stranger with a deadly purpose trying to frighten them away? Or are they being haunted by a chilling warning from the grave?

## **The Red Lamp Details**

Date : Published October 1st 1997 by Kensington (first published 1925)

ISBN : 9781575662138

Author : Mary Roberts Rinehart

Format : Paperback

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Adult Fiction, Thriller, Mystery Thriller

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# From Reader Review The Red Lamp for online ebook

## Ryan says

HY·PER·BO·LE ?

[hahy-pur-buh-lee]

noun Rhetoric .

1.

obvious and intentional exaggeration.

2.

an extravagant statement or figure of speech not intended to be taken literally, as “to wait an eternity.”

That is the definition of hyperbole as provided by Dictionary.com. I think there needs to be a whole section added that discusses the over the top nature of book synopses. It may not even be a bad idea to have a special section set aside for mystery novels. I don't think there is a genre that lends itself to it more. Now I'm not suggesting that The Red Lamp doesn't live up to the tension and suspense of the synopsis, because it does. I just can't help but chuckle every time I read the back cover of a vintage mystery novel.

Narrated by Professor William Porter, The Red Lamp is an interesting twist on a haunted house mystery. The Porters had inherited Twin Towers, a massive estate sitting right on the water, when William's uncle passed away. Despite Jane's visions and feelings of apprehension, she decides to spend the summer at the estate, though not in the main house. They will stay in the guest house, while they rent out the house itself. Jane never quite feels comfortable, though she soldiers on.

It doesn't take long for things to start going wrong though. A red lamp, used by an infamous medium, is seen glowing from the windows of the main house. Cattle, then humans, are being brutally killed in the area. At each scene a strange symbol is left, a symbol that points to the paranormal, and back to William Porter. The professor is at the top of the suspect list, at least on the list of living suspects. With the aid of a trusted few, William is forced to clear his own name, and get to the truth of the eerie happenings.

I'm still trying to figure out what I think of this one. As you know I love Mary Roberts Rinehart, probably to a fault. I have yet to be completely unhappy with one of her books, and can normally find a redeeming quality in her writing. There is a lot I liked about The Red Lamp. The mystery itself has just enough tension in it, that I found myself not wanting to put the book down. The atmosphere, which I think Rinehart is a true genius at creating, is brilliant. The fear floats through the air and keeps the characters in a reactionary stance. It's hard for them to keep a solid footing, when the action and emotions keep pushing them over.

What I'm not so sure about is the combination of the supernatural with a human murderer. I'm almost left with the impression that I would have preferred a ghostly or demonic killer, or for the supernatural elements to be explained away as something solidly set in the real world. What Rinehart gives us instead, is a mixture of the two that I'm not sure really worked. The strengths of the book saved it for me, but part of me thinks The Red Lamp could have been so much better.

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## Ronald says

read some time in 1990

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### **Jennifer says**

This was such a fun read for me. Written almost 100 years ago, it is a mystery set in an old home by a bay with a professor, ghosts, and murder. It is written in journal entries and because of that the mystery unfolds slower than a modern day mystery, with the story slowly unfolding day by day. At times the pace was maddening, but probably no more than any other mystery where you just want to know how it is going to end. It was well written and I can't wait to pick up one of her other mysteries!

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### **Jonathan says**

Ummmm.....did you ever sit across from someone who never gets to the point, and has to tell you every little tiny detail of every little thing? And after a while you just don't care, you just want escape? That was the pace of this book. Irritatingly slow in the revelation of the culprit. At the beginning of the last chapter, when she has led you on so many wild goose chases that you don't care about, and then left most of the book unresolved, she writes this "synopsis", instead of writing it into the plot of the book. "Okay, here's what happened..."- not very graceful writing. She even says at the beginning of the chapter something like "...so and so's solving of the murder left some very interesting items for discussion"..or something like that. No kidding, and it's about time! The psychic stuff was kind of interesting, and there were some scary moments in the book, but you get over being scared about half way through, after you stop caring. Plus, it was one of those books where you figure out a main portion of the solution way early in the book, but you keep getting "barraged" sp? with red herrings. I had to force myself to finish this book. Rinehart is usually pretty good. She is the "Had I but known" School of mystery writing. Had I but known, I wouldn't have read this.

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### **David says**

This book got on my reading list by a convoluted route: my sister read a review of a book about a guy who reviewed mystery novels back in the first half of the 20th century (the golden age of mysteries, some would say), and the review included a list of his favorites. So my sister decided to read some of his favorites, and she gave this one to me after she read it. Now that I have read it, I see why it would have made the list. I was almost immediately caught up in the tension, and hated to put the book down after a while, I so wanted to know what was really going on. But it was not just a page-turner, I enjoyed reading it, even as I was eager to get to the end. Part of the fun is that the crimes are solved, but some spooky elements remain unexplained at the end. The style will not be for everyone, but if you like a good old-fashioned mystery novel, you might find this a good read.

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### **Nancy Boyd says**

A great mystery! I especially appreciated the narrator being an English literature professor - the "inside jokes" and nods to the profession, as well as a terrific grasp on the psyche of those in the profession, made it even more fun to read.

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## Bev says

If you read the back of the book, you would suspect that *The Red Lamp* by Mary Roberts Rinehart is a bit gothic in nature. Perhaps a young woman in danger or Had-I-But-Known book. See for yourself:

Jane wanted to leave Twin Towers the moment she arrived. She had a strange feeling about the old mansion, a chilling apprehension of doom that followed her through the creaking halls like a death shadow. The others thought her fears were groundless--until they felt the evil iridescence of the Red Lamp, and realized how terrifyingly right she was.

But then you read the book and you find out this isn't a woman-in-danger book. The story isn't really about Jane at all. It's a man in danger. And, as a matter of fact, it's a Professor in danger. Which anyone who knows me would think would immediately make my interest in the book go up dramatically. It did. For about twenty pages. Maybe. The trouble is Professor William Porter does so much of the damage himself. As the detective Greenough tells him, "you'll have to admit that you've seemed to go out of your way all summer to get into trouble!" So, what is the trouble, you ask?

Well...Professor William Porter has inherited Twin Towers from his Uncle Horace. Uncle Horace died from what was declared natural causes--a simple heart attack. Or was it? Was he literally scared to death by earthly agents or...perhaps by supernatural forces? Twin Towers had been rumored to be haunted. There are tales of a red lamp that glows in its windows at night. And when the red lamp glows, things happen. Things that no one can explain.

Jane is Professor Porter's wife. She comes into the story only peripherally. Jane, it seems, has a bit of the mediumistic quality about her. She had a "vision" the night Uncle Horace died and warned Porter that she had seen his uncle dead on the library floor of Twin Towers--before the phone call came confirming her premonition. Throughout the book, she has these little moments of supernatural vision...just enough to give the story a shove when it's lagging a bit. As the blurb mentions, when the idea of going to Twin Towers for their summer holiday is broached, Jane doesn't want to go. She won't give a solid reason...but she refuses to stay in the house. So she and Porter along with their niece Edith and her beau go to the grounds of Twin Towers, but stay in the Lodge (Jane, Porter & Edith) and Halliday (the beau) in the boathouse.

It is decided that they will rent the main house out and they do so--to an elderly, infirm gentleman and his secretary. In the meantime, a madman seems to be on the loose. First sheep are killed--their throats expertly cut--and then a young deputy is killed and a young woman disappears. The locals seem to believe that the red lamp has called up some kind of demon that is terrorizing the countryside. Greenough is brought in to get to the bottom of things and Porter becomes convinced that he is the main suspect. He then sets out to do just about every suspicious thing he can in order to ensure that he is the main suspect. He begins to think that everyone (bar his little entourage) is against him and he and Halliday start detecting on their own in an attempt to find the real culprit. It all comes together in a spooky grand finale in the haunted house--complete with seance and red lamp.

This is the Mary Robert Rinehart story that tried to be supernatural and failed. It never did get the right creepy-crawly atmosphere. And I didn't really sympathize with poor, persecuted Professor Porter. I just wanted him to sit still for a few moments and let some things happen when he had a roomful of witnesses so he could be sure that nobody suspected him. After all, if you don't want your neighbors to think you're the

sheep-killer, then don't go skulking around countryside at night. It really shouldn't take a PhD to think that one out (and it didn't...).

I also had difficulty with the journal entry style of writing. There are times when this works, but this isn't one of them. Porter's journal entries seem to ramble and there were many instances where I had to thumb back a couple of pages and sort myself out. It made it difficult to settle down to the story.

What saves this book is Rinehart. Even when the style isn't quite right; even when the supernatural setting doesn't quite come off--she can still write and there are some mighty good portions that help keep *The Red Lamp* from being a total loss. If I can find some choice quotes (as you can see below I did), then a book can't be all bad. I enjoyed the characters of Edith and Halliday very much. I think perhaps if this had been written with more of a focus on them--with straightforward story-telling rather than the journal entries--then we might have had a much better book. Two and a half stars.

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### **Margaret Perdue says**

My very favorite, MRR, ever!

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### **Pat Roseman says**

I couldn't finish this one. Not sure why. It seemed a little disjointed and I just couldn't get into the story.

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### **Lynn says**

This was a very mediocre mystery/ghost story. It is written in the form of the diary of a man, who moves with his wife and their niece to house he has just inherited. The uncle who left him the house died under suspicious circumstances. There are confusing suggestions that a phony psychic who formerly lived there was involved in foul play, or that the house may really be haunted, or both. It's not a creepy, mysterious or clever story, but the situations and dialog were sometimes funny, so I got through it.

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### **Kathy says**

Normally, I don't care for novels about the supernatural, and the beginning of this was rather tedious. But once I got into the story, I found it quite engaging. Likeable protagonist. Interesting problem.

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### **Diane says**

Narrative of an English Professor's daily journal of strange goings-on, supernatural happenings & murders

during his summer vacation at the seaside. Written in the early 1900's, so the language is very old-fashioned, & Mary Roberts Rinehart uses words I've never heard of. Not many conversations between characters. Like Prof. Porter might be talking to his niece's boyfriend, & between conversations, many ruminations so sometimes I lost the thread of their talk! Also the description of the story on the back jacket is misleading, as the one character it mentions is hardly in the book! But I guess that was a marketing tactic.

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### **Katherine says**

This book bored me to sleep, twice!

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### **Pat says**

A fine mix of mystery and ghost story. Perfect for the Halloween season.

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### **Katy says**

The Red Lamp was published in 1925. I read it in about 1969. I got to me. Ghosts, seances, and murder most foul. It is as good as an Agatha Christie.

In some ways it is silly and old fashioned, but it retains the ability to entertain. No I did not feel the shiver of ghostly presence this time around, but I enjoyed the nostalgic thrill of adventure.

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### **Ibrahim says**

Very classic..

It's feel like you're watching the old movies..

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### **Jenn Estepp says**

2 1/2. A bit boring and very eye-rolling conclusion to the mystery.

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### **Jerry Rose says**

Confusing story telling by one of the groundbreakers of the mystery genre.

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