



The Door

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One of the most popular and accomplished mystery writers pens her most spine-tingling novel yet, as a wealthy matron discovers how little we know about the people who are closest to us. What is the world coming to? This is what ran through Elizabeth Bell's mind on the night of April 18th. Sarah Gittings, the family nurse, had just been brutally murdered. But all thoughts of a homicidal maniac running amok were banished when the evidence revealed that Sarah had known and trusted her murderer.

Who would have anything against sweet old Sarah? As Elizabeth was about to discover, her staid and orderly household harbored more than one suspect with a motive...and, before all was said and done, more than one victim.

The Door Details

Date : Published December 1st 1998 by Kensington (first published 1921)

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Author : Mary Roberts Rinehart

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From Reader Review The Door for online ebook

Veronica says

There's nothing better than a...

Mystery that has you toggling back and forth as to who did it. This is my first Mary Roberts Rinehart and most explicitly not my last.

M. says

It is a testament to one of my favorite authors, Mary Roberts Rinehart, that I enjoyed this book immensely in spite of the fact that the Goodreads profile of this author completely and quite rudely spoils the entire thing...I happened to glance at that page one-third of the way through my reading of this book (thankfully, the kind librarians at Goodreads have since edited the page).

That bit of unpleasantness aside, this book was a great deal of fun. It is the story of an upper-class family whose lives become embroiled in a series of deaths, assaults and secrets that at first seem without rhyme or reason (it is refreshing, albeit a throwback to days gone by, that the family members are boldly unapologetic for being well off). The tale is narrated by Elizabeth Jane Bell, at whose home much of the mystery takes place. Like many of Rinehart's female leads, Elizabeth is respected, observant and decisive...until the last page, but who could blame her for that? That's a tease, of course, but they are abundant in the book, as it is set in the format of Elizabeth recounting events on a date long after they had concluded.

This was one of those books where I had to force myself to place the bookmark between the pages and close the cover for the night. I wanted to know what happened next and glean more clues as to the sinister motivations behind the chaos. It is an easy read, as Rinehart is a master at mental scenery and the mystery itself - just *what* is going on in this house? - keeps the reader captivated. Rinehart takes the time to flesh out her characters, allowing the reader to become familiar with them and invested in their drama. And in the end, yes, it all makes sense...especially the title.

Ryan says

It's been a long time since I've read a Mary Roberts Rinehart book, so I felt it was long over due. For the most part, it was simply that I had run out of "new" books at the used bookstore. Every time I went in, I would check for them, but ones I hadn't seen before stopped showing up. When I found The Door, I jumped for joy, went home and put the book away. It then languished on the shelves for almost a year, and while I would think about it, I would get busy with something else. The one time I did pick it up, it wasn't holding

my attention so I put it away, and didn't pick it up again until another bazillion months had passed. I picked it up once again, not that long ago, and while it still wasn't holding my attention, I forced myself to persevere and get it done.

I'm really not sure why I didn't get into this one as much as I have most of her other books. The mystery itself was well plotted out, the characters were engaging, and the tension was thick enough that a power saw would have been needed to cut it in half. Elizabeth was a hoot to read, and I loved how involved she got into the whole thing, including the destroying of evidence, so I can't lay the blame at her feet. I'm kind of at a loss to explain why this one didn't do it for me. Maybe the pacing was a little slower than the previous books. Maybe the weighing sense of claustrophobia that I've enjoyed with some of her other works, wasn't as present in this one. Maybe I just didn't like the title and that fact it takes most of the book to understand where it came from. I don't know, I'm kinda of grasping at straws here.

And I don't want to leave you with the feeling I didn't like it, because by the time it was over, I did. It's not my favorite and I probably won't read it again, but it will stick around collecting dust for years to come. Much in the way I feel about Agatha Christie's work, I would still put this one up against most of the cozy, cookie cutter stuff being written today. I just wouldn't put it up against my favorite Rinehart books.

Kay says

Clever puzzle that will keep you guessing until the last page.

I enjoyed the tone of this book: breezy, modern, clear. Without knowing when it was written, the story worked as being set in that generic time when some people had big houses with servants. It takes place in an unknown city "down from New York city". People have cars and telephones, smoke cigarettes all the time, and dress for dinner. There were some cultural and racial references that reflect the class and background of the author.

The mystery depends on every minute detail, and the reader is taken along with the amateur sleuths who may or may not be victims or suspects. I didn't figure it out until the very end.

Bev says

First off....this review is chock full of spoilers. I can't really talk about the book the way I want to without spoiling it. So--if you don't want to know the solution, don't read past the synopsis until after you've given Mary Roberts Rinehart's *The Door* a read of your own.

Synopsis: Elizabeth Bell is an older woman with a houseful of servants and a niece staying with her. When the family nurse, Sarah Gittings, is brutally murdered and hidden down a brick sewer Miss Bell begins to wonder how well she knows the people around her. Because the police inspector makes it clear that it is no homicidal maniac or random burglar who has done this--evidence indicates that Sarah knew and trusted her murderer. And Sarah isn't the last to die. There is a cunning mind behind the deaths who wants nothing to disrupt his complicated plans--and doesn't mind seeing an innocent man sent to the electric chair if necessary.

Okay, for those of you still with me....This is one of the most disappointing books I've read by Rinehart. It is credited with being the source for the cliche "the butler did it," because--guess what--he did. I knew that was a very good possibility going in which is why I chose to read it (I needed a good butler story for my very own Vintage Mystery Challenge). But that's not what ruined the book for me. At almost 400 pages, it is, I believe, the longest book I've read by Rinehart. She manages to wrack up four murders and three murderous attacks along the way and not dredge up much of my interest on the journey. She takes a very long time to work her way to the solution--which, admittedly, is probably a surprise for anyone who doesn't have an inkling of the butler connection before reading.

My biggest complaint about the book is Miss Elizabeth Bell. She, apparently, is perfectly content to see servants, friends, and strangers all polished off one by one rather than allow the police to have ANY information or clues that she happens to stumble on. What should you do if you find a rug with kerosene on it after the murderer has killed someone and tried to burn up the body? Hide the rug and try to burn it up in the middle of the night. Find out that someone has behaved suspiciously with a glass after another person has died? Well, the last thing you want to do is tell the police--because heaven forbid that we make the widow upset knowing that her husband might have been murdered. Miss Bell is the most obstructive person in a detective novel (for no good reason) ever. She exasperates me. I stopped caring about whether we were going to find out if the butler really did do it and how he accomplished everything long before the mid-way point. Miss Bell keeps saying she doesn't know what came over her when she tries to hide something. I know what came over her--a case of the stupids, that's what came over her.

Miss Bell is also the narrator of the story and she tells it from memory. She spends way too much time foreshadowing events in very odd manner--it's not even quite the "Had I But Known" sort of thing (although there are bursts of that too). It's just annoying. For instance:

It seems strange to be writing all this....the light-hearted experiment to find if a pencil dropped from the third floor made the sound I had heard, and my own feeling that it did not; and the final discovery of the shattered pane in the rear French door of the drawing room, and our failure to see, lying on the step outside, that broken point of a penknife which Inspector Harrison was to find the next morning.

Some of the bits are more pointed and come near to spoiling the mystery for the reader. This is just not Rinehart at her best. *The Bat* does the older woman in the old house much better. The characterization is better, the dialogue is better and the action is better. I might reread *The Bat* at some point. I won't be rereading this one. Two stars--and I'm not sure about that.

First posted on my blog My Reader's Block. Please request permission before reposting. Thanks!

Mary Ellen Millbranth says

Fabulous mystery. Loved every minute of it.

"Had she but known" does it again. Rinehart is a master of this technique and this book is a prime example.

Sarah Peterman says

I had a hard time getting into this book and remembering all the characters. Judy, Karthrine, Ms. Bell, Joseph, Jim, Sarah, Dick, and that's those that I can remember, there's more. I had a hard time too getting into the linear storytelling, "Had I known what I know now, this story would be different, but I'm not gonna tell you cause we aren't at that part of the story, but only if!" Thinking back, that might have been the beginning to most of the chapters.

For all of its faults, I did like the characters and was a pretty decent mystery.

Gail says

Not one of her best. I never quite understood why the perp did what he did. Modern readers will be offended by her attitudes toward African-Americans and the working class.

Tina says

Well, I didn't see it coming. The killer was not at all who I thought it was. Published in 1930, *The Door* plods along from one murder to the next right under the narrator Elizabeth Jane Bell's nose. To say more would be to tell you too much about the actual events that leave several injured and four dead.

The author, Mary Roberts Rinehart, has been called the American Agatha Christie of her time. I don't know if I would agree about comparing her to the talented Agatha, but this is my first book by Rinehart. Quite frankly, I'm on the fence about what I really think about *The Door*. It is entirely too long and, at times, confusing. So, I'm going to give this novel a 3 star rating because I didn't dislike it. I did read it cover to cover and never guessed who the killer was. I'm going to try another one of Ms. Rinehart's novels at a later date.

Helen says

This book took me rather longer to read than it normally might have. Owing to Hurricane Harvey and its aftermath this book was picked up and put down more times than I can remember.

I may have given it more than 3 stars if I could have read it straight through. When I started it was with the thought this was going to be a good old-fashioned (vintage) mystery. A cozy read. But precisely because of the way it was written added to the fact I could not steadily read it through I began to chafe at the constant narrative of what the main character was thinking. Toward the end I found myself thinking: just get on with it! Who did it? I'm tired of your guesses and lists. Because it seemed everyone in the book had a motive or was a red herring.

By the time I turned the last page and read the last sentence which named the killer I was underwhelmed. But I will definitely look for another of Mary Roberts Rinehart's books. Hoping for a calmer time for a good read.

Julie says

Elizabeth Bell has a quiet household with servants. Her family comes in and out as well. Then one of her servants, Sarah, goes missing and is killed. Their lives change forever. Can Elizabeth, her niece and her boyfriend plus the inspector figure out who did it before someone else gets hurt or the wrong person is accused.

Fairly surprising mystery with a twist. It's a classic and is not politically correct and uses some words the modern reader may not agree with.

RuthG says

Too many coincidences and too much foreshadowing weakened the story for me.

Sophie says

When I read on Overdrive that Mary Roberts Rinehart is credited with inventing the phrase the butler did it, I had to borrow one of her books. I'm glad that I did because I enjoyed *The Door* very much. It is an involving mystery, convoluted and layered with convincing details, that never felt cliched or predictable. I especially liked the way the author structured the novel, with the main character reconstructing the mystery after the fact. It added a nice layer of suspense to the story to have Miss Bell foreshadowing the outcome as the narrative unfolded. I'm looking forward to discovering more of Rinehart's mysteries and novels.

Jennifer says

I enjoyed experiencing the writing of this popular American author from the mid-20th century who was often compared to Agatha Christie. Storyline is good overall, though by today's standards it drags a bit.

Ending is comparable to many Agatha Christie novels - you'll probably want or need to go back and re-read to completely follow it. I didn't have time to do this so this was a bit frustrating and disappointing! Probably not a good read if you don't really have the time to savour and get into it, not sure whether I'll read another book by this author but at least I know what she's all about now.

Carla Remy says

Not bad, good characters, but incredibly long. It was very popular when it came out in 1930.

Anita says

Rinehart has rightly been described as the American Agatha Christie. Mary Rhinehart is the originator of "the butler did it" cliche; I mean that in a good way.

The tone of the book could be described as "had I only known" in that it is written in the first person after the fact and although all the action and clues are described, the protagonist is as completely in the dark as the reader.

Since the action is set in the 30's there are some unfortunate racial and class system stereotypes which some might find offensive.

Well written and fast paced with good character development.

If you like 1930's and 1940's movies on TMC you will enjoy her books.

Monica Blum says

Horrible Ending

The plot is good. But the story line is chaotic and the pacing is goes from plodding to breakneck speed back to plodding. But all of that could be forgiven if the "pay off" was worth it. But it is as if the author had no idea how to end it so she suddenly through a "twist" in with no explanation or grounding.

Brenda Mengeling says

If I hadn't been sick while reading this, I never would have finished it. The plot is preposterous. It has not stood the test of time at all well. It is far too long and drawn out. People do things that make no sense over and over again--and they know they make no sense. There is goofy foreshadowing, and there really aren't all that many suspects. Bad.

L. (Super Easy. Barely An Inconvenience.) says

[do Elizabeth Jane and the detective ever hook up? Don't leave me hanging, Mary! Oh wait, you're dead. Drat. (hide spoiler)]

Whistlers Mom says

WHO did it ?!?

Rinehart was a prolific and popular writer from the time that her first mystery appeared in 1906 until her death in the 1950's. She wrote romances and non-fiction also, but is best remembered for her mysteries. She's frequently compared to her contemporary Agatha Christie, but I think it's an unfair comparison. Christie's interest was in her tightly plotted puzzles and her stock characters are seldom interesting in themselves. Rinehart's love was people and her characters are so fascinating that the crime itself is secondary.

This is one of my favorites. The narrator is one of Rinehart's wealthy, elderly spinsters and (like the others) she's conventional but has an unexpectedly adventurous nature. She's also a romantic in a tough-minded way. There are two pretty young women and two romances. When Rinehart started writing, class was a potent factor in American life and young people from wealthy families were expected to marry into similar families. Was this still the case in 1930, when this book appeared? Obviously, Rinehart thought so. Judy's friendship with a handsome young reporter is fiercely opposed by her proud, controlling mother. Mary Martin is lovely and intelligent, but not considered good enough to marry a man from a prominent family.

While ideas about class may have changed, families still operate the same way they always have. A wealthy elderly man in poor health is the center of schemes and plots as those around him angle for a share of his estate. A second wife may resent the child from her husband's first marriage. Half siblings may be close, but they're treated differently. Parents still hope that a son will be a brilliant professional success and that a daughter will make a profitable marriage.

I like the character of Jim Blake, the ageing man-about-town who remains a popular guest although he struggles to keep up appearances on a small income. His sister Katherine Somers is the pampered wife of a wealthy man, but she knows that her safety and her daughter's future are threatened. They're devoted to each other and both are tough, single-minded people who are capable of doing almost anything to protect their family's money and social position. Would they commit murder?

Then there are the servants who are supposed to stay quietly in the background. They're paid to keep the comfortable lives of their employers running smoothly and it's easy to forget that they're humans, too. Nurse Sarah Gittings is a dependable middle-aged woman who serves the extended family as they need her, but her sudden disappearance is the first sign that something is seriously wrong. Joseph Holmes is the quintessential butler - quiet, differential, and efficient. It's a shock to his mistress to realize that she knows so little about the man who has lived in her home for decades.

I think you're either a Rinehart fan or you aren't. Her stories are elaborately told and contain a wealth of detail that I find fascinating. I love the sly humor and the starchy-but-eccentric characters. Her books are novels-with-a-mystery-on-the-side and she was a faithful, talented recorder of life in her era as she experienced it.

This one is of particular interest because it was the origin of a well-known phrase. Apparently, Mrs. Rinehart's readers in 1930 were as surprised to discover the identity of the killer as I was. I feel better.
