



Property of a Lady

Sarah Rayne

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A house with a sinister past – and a grisly power - When Michael Flint is asked by American friends to look over an old Shropshire house they have unexpectedly inherited, he is reluctant to leave the quiet of his Oxford study. But when he sees Charect House, its uncanny echoes from the past fascinate him – even though it has such a sinister reputation that no one has lived there for almost a century. But it's not until Michael meets the young widow, Nell West, that the menace within the house wakes . . .

Property of a Lady Details

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From Reader Review Property of a Lady for online ebook

Teresa says

I've thoroughly enjoyed many of Sarah Rayne's previous books, psychological thrillers with a touch of the supernatural and a smidgen of gothic which always hits the spot with me! Property of A Lady appears to be the first in new series of "ghost books" featuring Nell West and Michael Flint. The second in the series, The Sin Eater, is due for release in 2012.

Michael Flint, an Oxford Don, is asked to keep an eye on renovations of an old Shropshire house inherited by his American friends. He soon realises that Charect House is not quite the rural idyll his friends are expecting; from the moment he crosses the threshold, the aura of evil is palpable and Rayne cranks up the tension beautifully, drawing in the reader. Nell West, a local antique dealer, soon finds herself joining forces with Michael to discover the truth about Charect House. Why are Nell's daughter and Michael's American god-daughter having the same nightmares about the Dead Man's Knock and a man with pits for eyes? What happened to the previous occupants of the house? What happened to the psychic investigator who visited the house? All these questions are answered in the end but not before the author has stepped up the fear factor, leaving you (well, me in this case..) too scared to turn off the bedside lamp.

Once again Sarah Rayne has succeeded in weaving a complex, compelling story with lots of twists and turns. She's also excellent at creating atmospheric locations and Charect House is a truly eerie setting. It's a very readable, riveting book which I read in one sitting, into the wee small hours, as I just had to find out what happened next. I'm looking forward to the next book in the series which deals with the ancient practice of sin-eating, a topic which intrigues me, and there may be a rural Irish setting too - roll on publication date in 2012!

Crowinator says

Actual rating: 2.5 stars

Is there such a genre as cozy horror? Because this is it.

It has its creepy moments, but it's mostly slow and romantically tinged and not at all scary. I picked this up because one of the later books in this series peaked my interest and I wanted to start at the beginning, but if the rest of the series is as tame and typical as this one, I don't know if I want to put in the time to get through them all. Lovers of old-fashioned classic ghost stories may get into this series starter, provided they have a patience for the main characters spending 80% of their time reading historical diary entries and/or letters to investigate the haunted house. I really dislike epistolary novels, so that might have colored my view a little more than the average reader.

Dean Cummings says

I wasn't even done the first chapter and I knew for sure I was going to really enjoy "Property of a Lady."

Michael Flint, a professor at Oxford is asked by his friends, Jack and Liz (from Maryland) if he would mind

driving out to a small English village of Marston Lacey to take a look at an abandoned mansion named Charect House, that Liz just inherited. Flint arrives in the village, obtains the keys from the lawyer's office and visits the home. Before even viewing the property, he's already heard more than one of the local's stories about the house and its eerie history. Within a few minutes of entering, he's already putting some credence to what he'd recently heard about Charect House...

Nell West is an antique dealer, with a shop of her own in Marston Lacey. She's been located by Liz and is entrusted with sourcing the furniture and accessories from the period the home was constructed (somewhere between 1780 and 1800). Nell attends an auction and bids on a grandfather clock that was apparently once a fixture in Charect House. The clock behaves a bit strangely at auction which seems to confirm the foreboding tales that Nell has heard about the house, and any item associated with it. At one point, she visits the house and has an experience no dissimilar to that of Michael...

Alice Wilson is a character that is placed in an earlier time period (the main timeline is in the 2000's), her entry point in the store is the early 1960's. Alice works for a "paranormal society" and is hired by the town council in Marston Lacey to investigate the claims of strange sightings at Charect House. Even by the early 1960's, the house has been abandoned for over a decade, and the town council has been forced to take responsibility for it. In order to generate much needed revenue, they hatch up a plan to attract renters to the house. But potential tenants are warded off by the rumors that the mansion is haunted. Alice begins to research the property from a distance, but is increasingly coming under pressure from the local council to declare the house "ghost free." She finally decided that the best idea is to set up listening devices in the house and spend the night observing what may be happening there (courageous lady). But before the night is out, she abandons the job she's assigned, but not before stashing her notes in a compartment in the grandfather clock...

There were so many elements of the story that just worked...especially because it featured an antique, long abandoned mansion abounding in local ghost folklore, mysterious sightings and an erratic record of ownership. It was with this in mind that one certain feature of Sarah Rayne's storytelling really stood out for me...that was how she "captured" the atmosphere surrounding the very instant that each of the main characters first laid eyes on Charect House.

All of them were in a heightened state of anticipation just as the notorious mansion first comes into view. Each time this happened, I thought of the following quote:

"The more earnest our affections, desires, emotions, the more vivid are our perceptions; and, on the other hand, the clearer our perception, the more intense are our feelings." – Hubbard Winslow

Without giving too much away, here was the reaction of each of these three characters:

Michael Flint:

"Blackberry Lane was a winding bouncing lane with bushes and thrusting thorn hedges that pushed against the side of the car, and whippy branches that painted sappy green smears on the windscreen. A thin rain was starting to fall, making everything look mysterious and remote..."

The lane wound round to the left, and quite suddenly the house was there, set a little way back from the track, standing behind a tangle of briar and blackberry. There were no shades or wraiths, but seen through the rain the house was misty and eerie.

Michael regarded it for a moment, then got out of the car..."

Nell West:

“Probably, Charect House would look very pleasant and welcoming in the sunshine, Nell thought when she arrived, but seen through a curtain of rain, with moisture dripping from the branches, it was depressing in the extreme. The garden was a tangled mass – nodding seed heads of rosebay willow-herb, rosehips from ragged-headed wild roses and immense bushes of lilac and lavender...”

Alice Wilson:

“Then I drove out to inspect Charect House. I’ll admit to feeling nervous. I must have seen more sinister houses than most people do in a lifetime, but this one is special. It’s a remarkable old place. Romantically-inclined folk would sigh poetically, and think it beautiful and sad, but I didn’t think it was either of these things. I thought it was in a shocking state of dereliction and that it was a crying shame nobody had found money from somewhere to mend the gutters or shore up the sagging roof.”

I can’t say for sure if Sarah Rayne intended this, but I was intrigued by these “first sighting” accounts, and how they matched the perspective of each character in relation to Charect House. The account of Michael Flint, a methodical, academic man who preferred putting things into context, noted the lane that took him to Charact House, as if experiencing the road to the place was necessary to understanding the property itself. Nell West was given the job of beautifying the home, so I thought it was fitting that Rayne had her taking an initially optimistic attitude to what the house might look like, “Probably Charect House would look very pleasant and welcoming in the sunshine.” Finally, Alice Wilson, tasked with debunking the “ghost story” legends of the house, shows her cynicism by adding the disclaimer of “I’ll admit” to feeling nervous, when the other characters would have freely said they were nervous without the extra clause.

These “first sightings” were just a few of the many aspects that I enjoyed about “Property of a Lady.” This is the first of Sarah Rayne’s books I’ve read, but based on this first-rate experience, I’ll look forward to enjoying her other titles.

Mary says

This is the third book by Sarah Rayne that I have read, and I am not quite sure why. Her plot line relies heavily on the modern-day characters stumbling across old letters and diaries stashed away in antique clocks, book bindings, sealed-off rooms, etcetera, which is interesting but far-fetched (“I shan’t destroy these incriminating papers, I shall hide them where they may never be found”--um, OK...), the romance angle feels forced, and there’s a cutesy little girl for that extra added spark of adorable whimsy and mispronounced words, not to mention a curmudgeonly, mischievous cat. All very darling and sweet (and convenient!) but not so ghostly and creepy, KWIM? In two of the novels I’ve read thus far--A Dark Dividing and The Silence--there’s even the classic damsel-in-distress who must be rescued, and who is, within hours, no harm done. These are not Big Brain books, they are quite relaxing because you know nothing bad is really going to happen, so they are perfect for those read-a-bit-before-falling-asleep moments. I have one more on my Kindle--I bought four, in a weird frenzy after having read and really, really liked John Harwood’s The Ghost Writer, because my Kindle told me I would like them. And I do, I do like them. See the three stars? I just don’t *really, really* like them, and would be surprised at myself if I bought any more.

Susan says

This is the first in a series of books featuring Oxford don, Michael Flint, and Nell West, an antiques dealer.

Michael is contacted by some friends in America, who have inherited a house in Shropshire. They ask Michael to go and look at it, but when he arrives at the house, he is unnerved by strange noises and then by spotting a figure, who he believes is an intruder. Despite his misgivings, Michael reports on the condition of the house and later makes touch with Nell West, who has been asked to try to locate any original furniture from the house.

Nell is recently widowed and has a young daughter, virtually the same age as the daughter of Michael's friends. As building work begins on the house, not only do both Nell, and Michael, have strange experiences, but both her daughter and Michael's god-daughter, begin to have similar nightmares.

Some readers have suggested this is 'cosy horror,' if such a genre exists. Certainly, it is an old-fashioned ghost story, rather than a horror novel, with hints of a mystery and even a touch of romance. I really enjoyed this, as Michael and Nell join forces to try to discover what is wrong at the house and why the girls – so far apart – are suffering such similar experiences. I liked the characters of both Michael and Nell and look forward to reading on in the series.

C. says

"**Property Of A Lady**" and **Sarah Rayne** are meaningful discoveries for me. My first literary choice is serious ghost fiction with adult adventurers. There was none. 'Cozy' paranormal mysteries are parodies. It took thirty years, nearly all my life, to obtain solid recommendations. I loved this book beyond belief! I read until I had to sleep! I felt the euphoria of a book being as superb as I hoped. I did not want the floating journey to end! The ultimate books comprise a moving spirit encounter, finding secret places, and mementoes. We got only a whiff of the first but the atmosphere furnished a good dose of suspense.

Secret places and writings, **Sarah** indulged in abundance! It is a reader's treat to gobble-up a novel that unabashedly weaves fiction and gratifyingly doles out the good stuff! We never awaited "the best part": the whole novel was an unceasing good part! The documents and rooms weren't served on a platter either. Nell & Michael, for the sake of her daughter and his Goddaughter, investigated things vigorously. After talking with people, newspaper offices, and libraries; their fortuitous discoveries merely confirmed each conclusion they reached and filled gaps.

I appreciate characters we respect, great writing, and invigorating plots tied-off with skill. The 1930s spirit was not acknowledged clearly as the ticking sound across the ages and we got no story about why she was not found. My sole other critique is an appealing character passing away. Why not allow Nell to meet the riveting woman, or have Michael describe the times he had? Every other plot, **Sarah** swooped astonishingly into a circle. Such thorough sewing of all of the threads was exciting and we acquainted every character compassionately. When we were not caught up in suspense, the dialogue and correspondence was uproariously funny.

LJ says

First Sentence: Michael, Is there any possible change you could sneak a day or two away from Oxford and take a look at a house for me?

Oxford Professor Michael Flint receives a letter from his American friends asking him to check out an old house in Shropshire that has been empty and derelict for years, but has been found to now belong to his friend's wife. Charect House is in decidedly poor condition, but it's more than that which causes Michael to be uncomfortable during his visit. Who is watching him? Why does he hear a clock ticking where there is none, and who is the woman captured at an attic window by his photograph? Things become even more puzzling when Michael meets antique dealer Nell West, a young widow with a daughter the same age as his friends', and both girls are having the same nightmare, and ocean apart.

Do you like "Ghost Hunters," a show which tried first to debunk claims, or find a rational explanation for them and if they can't, then it "might" be paranormal. That is the type of paranormal mystery you'll find here? There is plenty to raise the hair on your arms, but it is not bloody, gory, and creepy. From the very beginning, and the definition of the house's name, you know there will be suspense and things that go bump and in the night...and in the day.

Rayne has such a natural voice. By opening with the exchange of letters, we learn quite a bit about Dr. Michael Flint. He is well educated, something of a luddite, and has a cat, Wilberforce, about whom he creates wonderful adventures. It is that sort of detail with does add humor and light to an otherwise eerie situation. Also, with Nell West and her daughter, we are provided their history, the tragedy that befell them, and how Nell rebuilt her life for the two of them.

It is wonderful that the two characters are normal people; neither overly brave, but neither is foolhardy. It is curiosity—a desire for answers—that drives them on and wanting to ensure there will be safety. That there is a bit of a romance doesn't hurt at all. But Rayne is also a very literary writer occasionally driving one to a dictionary..."welter of jingoism..." or the internet to do research of one's own.

There is a very strong sense of place and atmosphere..."The scent of age met Michael at once, and it was so strong that for a moment he felt his senses blur. But this was not the musty dankness of damp or rot; this was age at its best and most evocative; a potpourri of old seasons timbers and long-ago fires, and a lingering scent of dried lavender."

This is a first book and it is not perfect. Although always interesting, there is too much "telling" through letters and diaries, than showing the reader the events. Even so, without the book being set in multiple time periods, I'm not certain that could have been avoided.

"Property of a Lady" is a wonderful paranormal mystery with just the right balance of light and dark that leaves you with a "bump in the night" moment at the very end.

PROPERTY OF A LADY (Par Mys-Michael Flint/Nell West-England-Contemp) – VG
Rayne, Sarah – 1st in series
Severn House, 2011

Mireille Prusak says

This story relies on an awful lot of coincidences...to the point that I found myself thinking "they're not going to find yet *another* diary are they--oh look, they just did." I'm more willing than most to suspend disbelief for a good story, but this book asked for an awful lot. That being said, this is a truly *wonderful* ghost story, the kind I'm always looking for but never find. So many start out strong and creepy and then lose steam and have weak, terrible endings. This novel starts out strong and just gets stronger. The last third of the book is quite possibly the best, which is rare for any novel, especially a ghost story. There are so many twists and turns towards the end that it's just delicious. And the final page, while similar to many horror stories and movies, is just so well done, a perfect-pitch cherry on the sundae. I've actually read a couple of other novels by this author and haven't really enjoyed them, but this book was everything I've ever wanted in a ghost story. Excellent!

Louise says

This was a gothic suspense very reminiscent of books I read as a teenager. An old but haunted house is inherited. A couple come together because of the paranormal mystery. A portion of the backstory is discovered through diary entries, which I didn't mind. What detracted from the book for me was the ending. I didn't quite get how things were suddenly resolved, especially the storyline involving Harriet, a character from the past. However, I think this was the author's first book. I will probably try another.

Carol says

I love Sarah Rayne's use of traditional British ghost traditions. And I like the two "ghost hunter" characters she introduces here. A promising series beginning!

Magdalena aka A Bookaholic Swede says

A reviewer on Goodreads wondered if there is a cozy horror genre because that's what he/she thought that this book was. And, the funny thing is that was my actual thought about it too before I saw the review. And, no I don't think there is a cozy horror genre, however, cozy paranormal feel more appropriate. This is not horror, if you are frightened about this book, then well, you should not read real horror books. It's an interesting paranormal book that turns into a romantic paranormal novel, which didn't surprise me a bit when that happened. Luckily, the main characters, Michael Flint and Nell West did not spend too much time lusting after each other, and their "courtship" was not annoying.

However, the story feels a bit lackluster. It's alright to read, but it never gets terribly exciting or engrossing. Part of me is sometimes amazed how "suddenly" diaries and secret papers just happen to be found by the right people so fast when no one else has discovered them. Yes, I'm a born cynic. Sometimes it's believable, and sometimes, not so. In Property of a Lady, well I can take it because the place has been uninhabited so long, and the clock, well it's been away from the house as well for a long time. So that at least did not annoy me. Thankfully.

The story about the "ghost" is actually quite tragic, more tragical than horrifying. I was a bit surprised by the

turn towards the end of the book, it was a nice twist. It's an OK book, not especially memorable, but if you like a cozy paranormal book is it not so bad.

Would I read more books in the series? Yes I would, it was not a bad book, I was not bored. However, I hope the stories get better, and perhaps even a bit more horrifying?

Beadyjan says

A traditional haunted house gothic style ghost story. Very readable and spooky with quite a few twists and enough scary bits to keep you on the edge of your seat and almost too many coincidences - most of which tie up nicely into the story as it draws to a close.

Great if you like spooky tales and strong characterisation, and can suspend disbelief enough to allow yourself to be scared by things that go bump in the night.

Julie says

I really liked the main characters, Michael Flint and Nell West, but this seemed a little jumpy. The way it was told - including journal/diary entries and letters, meant to summon and evoke the past, made it feel disjointed. The supernatural, ghostly aspect of the story was much more present (and frightening) near the beginning than at the denouement. I have read a lot of Phil Rickman's paranormal mysteries and they are so good that they leave me a little bit biased. Taking into account that this is the first in the series, I am looking forward to seeing if the next one is stronger.

Tracey Allen at Carpe Librum says

Property of a Lady is the first in a series of ghost stories written by one of my favourite authors Sarah Rayne, featuring characters Nell West and Michael Flint.

Michael Flint is an academic living in Oxford and is asked by friends based in the USA to look at an old house they've just inherited. When Michael sees Charect House, he becomes interested in its history and stumbles across a mystery that goes back generations.

Michael enlists the help of local antiques dealer Nell West who is buying back the original furniture belonging to the once grand house, and the two begin to dig into the past together. Nell's daughter is having terrible nightmares about a man with no eyes, the same dream that is terrorising the daughter of his American friends.

Property of a Lady is a modern day ghost story with characters employing straight forward sleuthing techniques to get to the bottom of the tragedies that occurred inside Charect House several generations ago.

Together they discover letters, diaries and other source material that is expertly drip fed into the story in a believable fashion and at just the right time. The connections and mysteries take Michael and Nell to a prison, and to an asylum both of which give the novel a creepy ghostly feel, but mostly it's about unravelling sad tragedies of the past.

I read *Property of a Lady* at lightning pace, and from a reader's perspective felt it was perfect in every way. Visit my original review for a link to download the first chapter for free:
<http://www.carpelibrum.net/2013/07/re...>

Hannah says

Meh.

Thought the writing was sophmoric and simplistic and there were far too many coincidences and "conveniently discovered" clues to drive the plot along at the right time. Shallow horror/ghost story/mystery at best. However, I will give kudos to the twist at the end - that was clever. Otherwise, I prefer the "house of horror" spin as written by James Herbert in *Magic Cottage* or Barbara Erskine's *House of Echoes*.
