

GENERAL

You're Going to Buy the Place, Aren't You? A House with a Long Forgotten Past

Lawrence Lengel
Outskirts Press
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Three Stars (out of Five)

Lawrence Lengel's first novel, *You're Going to Buy the Place, Aren't You?*, could well be the opening volume in a new series championing the quiet life in rural America, despite the cumbersome title.

Jan Cope is an unmarried harpsichordist playing with a Baltimore-based orchestra. She purchases an old house in a small town in southern Pennsylvania, confronts evidence that a former slave lived there in the early 1800s, and inadvertently uncovers an unsolved murder mystery. Along the way, Jan meets a handsome lawyer with whom she shares romantic dinners at a local Italian restaurant. Life in Lenoir, Pennsylvania, is near idyllic.

Lengel's clear writing style is well suited to the informal tone of the story. He has an ear for casual, everyday conversation. Evaluating her single life with her married friend, Heather, Jan says, "I really haven't thought about it much, but I am at a point where others my age, and you're the exception that proves the rule, where others my age are settled into marriage and raising kids." There are, however, syntax errors that become rather frequent in the latter pages of the book.

Lengel has penned a captivating story. Jan is developed as a real person, working at her art and trying to assemble a life that has meaning and a sense of place. Her romantic opposite, Toby, is portrayed as a reasonably well-adjusted lawyer with a successful small-town practice. Their story is engaging and uncomplicated. Jan and Toby get to know each other through their joint efforts to solve the mystery surrounding Jan's house. Ultimately, they fall in love. Lengel presents each of them as likable people.

The author is to be congratulated for telling an interesting story that projects subtly transmitted lessons about the virtues of hard work, honesty, and caring for one's neighbors. In this way, Lengel has added substance to his novel. But, he missed an opportunity to produce an even better novel. Rather than follow the style of Jan Karon's Mitford books, Lengel could have explored other aspects of small town life using more of his own voice. More significantly, there

are two mysteries in Lengel's first novel and either could have been pursued in greater detail and developed into a full blown mystery-thriller.

Certainly, readers of Jan Karon's Mitford series, which showcases a fictional small town in rural North Carolina, will enjoy *You're Going to Buy the Place, Aren't You?* Residents of Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania will find Lengel's exposition of life in a fictional small town in their region an equally attractive story. There is also a larger audience of readers for this book who would enjoy reading about the lives of these decent, hard-working characters living quiet, orderly lives.

John Senger