



Bertie's Place

Edie Goodwin

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A plucky schoolteacher seeks to improve her community, earning the admiration of a fellow boarder, in the quaint romance novel Bertie's Place.

In Edie Goodwin's optimistic Christian novel *Bertie's Place*, a teacher in a rural Ohio community searches for love.

Molly was an orphan who grew into a dependable, easygoing woman. Now a recent college graduate, she moves to Winslow, Ohio, to teach remedial reading in a summer program. She rooms with Bertie, a widow whose other boarders include a retiree and Joe, the school's temporary principal; the latter invites Molly's romantic interest. She also becomes involved in the Lutheran church's community after being invited there by Ned, a deputy sheriff.

Molly meets all of the challenges that she faces with aplomb, including incidents at the school. She empathizes with students who have learning differences, brainstorms ways to raise the community's literacy, learns about the children's home circumstances, and discovers the school's inefficiencies. She's resourceful, but she also complicates her own life with her self-imposed expectations that she'll make great improvements to the community before summer's end. Personal challenges further complicate Molly's days, including eldercare and her struggle to forgive a flighty former friend. She goes out with friends and attends Bible group studies, but such scenes are rushed through; her days are full but light on momentum.

Joe is a handsome but flat romantic lead whose interest in Molly develops with such speed that it strains credulity. The couple's exchanges are heightened; he is delighted over her community initiatives, and she is curious about and attracted to him. But their relationship is without subtlety; italicized passages pronounce its developments, their tone contrived. Further, the secondary cast is extensive but underdeveloped. Bertie is limited to her role as an amiable, grandmotherly presence, while Ned, Molly's sounding board, fades into the background after providing light romantic competition for Joe.

The worldbuilding is anachronistic. The story is set in 2010, but elements like Bertie's matchmaking tendencies evoke an earlier period. In addition, the book's allusions to housing shortages and domestic strife exist in stark contrast to the otherwise picturesque setting. And in the end, Molly's story becomes predictable, featuring familiar misunderstandings that are soon resolved. An abrupt death and an additional romantic interest clutter it as it meanders toward its wholesome ending.

In the romance novel *Bertie's Place*, a woman enters into a close-knit community, exploring faith and love in the course of her everyday challenges.

KAREN RIGBY (November 30, 2024)

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