Sample Fiction Review

*We’re Good* by Ann Finn-Spencer  
Harrington Romance, 2015

If you’re looking for an engaging plot with complicated, realistic characters and just the right amount of romantic tension, you’ll find most of the above in the new novel from Ann Finn-Spencer entitled *We’re Good* (2015), destined to become this summer’s must-have beach read. Publishing under the Harrington Romance imprint, Finn-Spencer is a New York native whose emerging voice has much to say about modern romance. The novel’s story centres on the romantic trials of young Lanie Jooby, who moves from upstate New York for a new job and a taste of freedom in Nashville, Tennessee. Though a bit derivative compared to other examples of the romance genre, Finn-Spencer manages to offer a relatively fresh perspective on an otherwise tired scenario in her 300-page debut effort.

Though the novel’s plot will ring familiar with devotees of the genre, Finn-Spencer provides enough nuance and surprise developments to keep even the most jaded reader engaged. Beginning with Lanie’s conflict with her overbearing parents, the author manages to put a fresh spin on the trope of the young girl striking out on her own by relocating the central character to the American South. Once in Nashville, Lanie encounters the story’s antagonist, the aptly named Eden Bridges, Lanie’s foil whose perfect life stands in stark contrast to the mess Lanie has made of her own. True to form, Lanie meets and falls for a dashing Southern cowboy named Cooper.

While Finn-Spencer’s first novel is charmingly plotted, her characterization is less than skilful. Dialogue is sometimes clumsily constructed, and the characters’ actions and speech are often predictable when they’re not wooden. Such ham-handed portrayals left me struggling to like the characters, much less root for any of them as the story progresses. Nevertheless, it’s noteworthy that despite this obvious weakness, the author’s style and voice keep the novel afloat. At worst flowery and at best sublime, Finn-Spencer has the voice of a poet. Her spare economy of words left me rereading even the simplest passages in delight. Her use of imagery and figurative language are enchanting, and the words simply flow off the page. In short, readers of *We’re Good* will find themselves in familiar territory, but it’s still territory with a fresh breeze blowing through it.

If you’re looking for a novel that redefines the romance genre, you won’t find it in *We’re Good*. But, if you’re looking for a reassuring dose of the familiar with a dash of the new, Finn-Spencer’s debut should probably find its way into your beach bag. Like an old friend with a new haircut, *We’re Good* provides its readers with enough convention to be comforting and enough innovation to still be interesting.