A world of possibilities opens up for Joy Harkness when she sets out on a journey that’s going to show her the importance of friendship, love, and what makes a house a home.

Coming-of-age can happen at any age. Joy Harkness had built a university career and a safe life in New York, protected and insulated from the intrusions and involvements of other people. When offered a position at Amherst College, she impulsively leaves the city, and along with generations of material belongings, she packs her equally heavy emotional baggage. A tumbledown Victorian house proves an unlikely choice for a woman whose family heirlooms have been boxed away for years. Nevertheless, this white elephant becomes the home that changes Joy forever. As the restoration begins to take shape, so does her outlook on life, and the choices she makes over paint chips, wallpaper samples, and floorboards are reflected in her connection to the co-workers who become friends and friendships that deepen. A brilliant, quirky, town fixture of a handyman guides the renovation of the house and sparks Joy’s interest to encourage his personal and professional growth. Amid the half-wanted attention of the campus’s single, middle-aged men, known as “the Coyotes,” and the legitimate dramas of her close-knit community, Joy learns that the key to the affection of family and friends is being worthy of it, and most important, that second chances are waiting to be discovered within us all.

My Personal Review:
I had just finished a rather disappointing book and opened this one not knowing what to expect. I was happily surprised when I was instantly hooked from page one. The writing is so engaging. It's also clever and funny, a bit erudite at times (it is about a college professor of English!) and deals with the heroine's transformation from just going through the motions.
of life to becoming an active participant. The other characters are a nice assortment of quirkiness but don't let this make you think that the story is a light read - it's not, there are major issues dealt with here, one rather horrifying, but all showing us the growth that takes place in our heroine as she takes steps that engage her fully in life.

Joy Harkness (who is 48) takes a huge job leap from a Manhattan college (Columbia) to Amherst College in western Massachusetts. She joins a group of professors wanting to transform the method of teaching Shakespeare, but that's just a sideline in the story. The real story involves her getting involved, in buying and restoring a house, in socializing with her office mates, in learning to feel and relate. Her trials at this are both touching and hilarious. The other main character, Teddy, the handyman genius who is transforming her house has his own hard and crazy story. He dropped out of school to support his mother and Joy attempts to transform him are a major part of the story. Get ready for a major mother/son disfunction here.

I thoroughly enjoyed the book. The characters, from the secretarial temps to the bachelor professors who make a play for Joy are so well and humorously described. Hopefully this won't be the author's last book. I want to read much more.

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