



# **I'll Be There**

*Holly Goldberg Sloan*

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Emily Bell believes in destiny. To her, being forced to sing a solo in the church choir--despite her average voice--is fate: because it's while she's singing that she first sees Sam. At first sight, they are connected.

Sam Border wishes he could escape, but there's nowhere for him to run. He and his little brother, Riddle, have spent their entire lives constantly uprooted by their unstable father. That is, until Sam sees Emily. That's when everything changes.

As Sam and Riddle are welcomed into the Bells' lives, they witness the warmth and protection of a family for the first time. But when tragedy strikes, they're left fighting for survival in the desolate wilderness, and wondering if they'll ever find a place where they can belong. Beautifully written and emotionally profound, *I'll Be There* is a gripping story that explores the complexities of teenage passions, friendships, and loyalties.

## **I'll Be There Details**

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Author : Holly Goldberg Sloan

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# From Reader Review I'll Be There for online ebook

## Kaya Dimitrova says

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## Chelsey the crazy cat lady says

Oh my gosh, what a story! and what a life to have lived, it's hard to imagine. This was a unique story. I am so glad it all worked out in the end for the Bell family and Riddle and Sam. my heart broke for those two boys.

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## Brigid says

Wowza. I don't know what to say.

I loved the book. I couldn't put it down. Another one that I read on my phone anytime I had a spare moment. I will agree with other reviewers who said that the relationship between Sam and Emily didn't have much development. But what's funny is that's not the point of the story. This book is a perfect example of an omniscient narrator. Imagine that this book takes place in a snow globe full of people, and you're watching everything from above. You're not going to hear every line of dialogue, you're not going to see every moment. Some things you're going to see develop in fractured moments, and that's okay, because that's how life works.

Really masterfully written, this story is told in short, easy sentences. There's no overwriting. It's just ... perfect.

But.

Because of this "bird's eye view," it's hard to get closely emotionally invested in the characters. That's partly because of the nature of the story -- you're watching these people live their lives, and they're fascinating. Also, because of the style of writing, this feels like the type of book I would have read decades ago, when this type of omniscient narrator was more common. Because of that, any time a character sent a text message, I was jolted into the present day. I kept thinking the story was set in 1970 for some reason. :-P

Definitely worth a read. It won't disappoint.

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## Sarah says

There are only two nice things I can say about this book:

1. It's age-appropriate. It is YA that actually remembers what the Y stands for.
2. It is the only book I've ever read that is narrated by a grizzly bear.

At least I hope having the bear narrate was intentional...otherwise this book is even more incompetently-structured than I first supposed.

*I'll Be There* opens one inauspicious day, in a Unitarian church in an affluent American suburb. Emily Bell is the pastor's daughter, and she is terrified, because her father is also the music director, and he is forcing her to sing in front of the whole congregation despite the fact that she has no pipes and is (by her own admission) nearly tone-deaf. He is also making her sing "I'll Be There" by the Jackson Five, as opposed to, y'know, church music.

Meanwhile, Sam Border the homeless kid has snuck away from his deranged, abusive father and ambiguously autistic little brother, as he often does on Sundays, to stop in a church, any church, and listen to the pretty music.

Luckily, Sam doesn't look like a homeless kid. In fact, with his tall, toned body, lush dark brown hair, and big soulful eyes, he looks like a Hollister poster-boy.

Emily is quaking in her boots at the lectern when she spots Sam in the back of the room, staring at her. She doesn't know why he would be staring—maybe Sloan should have picked a different five-member boy band to base this thing on and called it *You Don't Know You're Beautiful* \*gags\*—but she decides to pretend that she's serenading him privately, because for some reason that prospect makes her less nervous than that of singing to the whole congregation. As opposed to *more* nervous, like most of us would be.

After the disastrous musical number and the service concludes, the two bump into each other, and nervous Emily disgorges her breakfast all over the stoic Sam, who is so enchanted with her beauty and fragility that he isn't disgusted in the slightest.

Unfortunately, Sam's home(less) life is an absolute mess. His father is a schizophrenic (?) who has repeatedly upended his sons' lives due to the demanding voices in his head. If memory serves, the dad's name is Clarence. If so, he deserves it. (If you caught that reference, Santa will give you a sweet sword or bow this year). Anyway, the dad is constantly abusing his sons: perfect Sam, the guitar savant, and delicate little Riddle, who seems like a candidate for Asperger's Syndrome, if not a more severe form of high-functioning autism, and spends his days drawing the innards of machines on the pages of discarded phone books. The three live in their truck, which the dad parks on the outskirts of a given town until the voices tell him to leave.

I can understand Sam needing to escape from this environment whenever possible, but it bothers me that he would EVER leave Riddle alone with the monster that spawned them. I also don't understand why the voices in Clarence's head have not yet told him to abandon his sons, since they've told him to do every other wrong

thing you can imagine.

Understandably, Sam doesn't want to reveal this horrifying reality to Emily, and after initially being way too open with his feelings he disappears on her for a while, hoping not to lead her into his chaotic world, hoping not to draw his father's jealous attention to her. It's the same old hot-boy-disappearing-act from every other YA book these days, but at least here there is a good reason.

But Emily can't forget Sam, and having no clue where he lives or anything else about him is just hypervigilant, watching for him. Her best friend worries that Emily is sad and withdrawn of late, and drags her along on double dates with her boyfriend's friend Bobby.

Bobby is just the worst. If you combined Gaston from *Beauty and the Beast* with Frank Burns from *M\*A\*S\*H*, the result...*still* wouldn't be as annoying as Bobby. I know we're supposed to hate Bobby, but I have a hard time believing we're meant to hate him quite this much. Ugh.

Alas for Emily, Bobby has decided in his lizard brain that she is his property, and when Sam just happens to walk by the window of the restaurant where this joyless double date occurs, and Emily excuses herself with all the subtlety of a grand piano falling from the sky—or Kylo Ren running after Rey, but I repeat myself—Bobby's lizard brain puts two and two together. And Bobby's lizard brain tells him to eliminate the competition at any cost.

Then Sam and Riddle get haircuts, which the book treats as a major event. I suppose it's a rare treat for them, given the miserable lifestyle forced on them by their father, but Sloan acts like this is a life-altering, unrepeatably beautiful experience. Sure.

Emily finally prevails on Sam to visit her house and meet her parents, little brother, and dog—and of course, sweet little Riddle is welcome too. The whole Bell family falls in love at first sight with the waifish Border brothers.

Bobby's lizard brain, after several improbably escapades, discovers that Sam is really a homeless kid with a crazy dad, and tries in various nonsensical ways to use this as leverage against his rival. This accomplishes nothing until Clarence snaps again and forces his sons to move with him. Emily is shattered when Sam leaves without saying goodbye or explaining himself—shattered so badly it makes you wonder how she functioned before she met him—shattered so badly that Bobby's lizard brain's creepy advances seem comforting. She never responds to his attempts to kiss or molest her, but she never pushes him away either. Ugh.

Meanwhile, far away in the wilderness by now, Sam finally fights back against his father. Clarence pushes both boys out of the truck and attempts to shoot them—why is this the first time that he's tried to kill them?—but Sam gets the gun, shoots him, and is able to escape with Riddle.

From here the boys spend several chapters trying to survive in the deep woods, encountering dangers that ought to be thrilling—including river rapids and our narrator, the grizzly bear.

The narrator reveals herself on page 240 and never breaks the fourth wall again. Or to be more strictly accurate, the grizzly bear is probably not meant to be the narrator of the whole book—although that would be hilarious—but out of the 500+ POV characters in this thing, for some reason the bear is the only one allowed to tell her story in first person. It's just as random and jarring as it sounds, and I howled with laughter when I realized just who/what was talking in that paragraph.

The two brothers eventually lose each other. Riddle is miraculously discovered by some paleontologists who happen to be digging in the area, while Sam winds up closer to a city and is able to catch a bus to Vegas, and then to Emily's town.

Clarence somehow survives all this, is found by a hiker, and goes to jail. Um, yay?

Meanwhile, Emily has remained in a catatonic state, wasting away for an absent lover like a Victorian girl with consumption and vapors, preparing to go to prom with Bobby like it's her best friend's funeral.

Bobby's lizard brain tells him to get a spray tan for the occasion and winds up breaking his arm. Don't ask me how it happened, I was too busy laughing to connect point A to point B. I'm not sure that Sloan connected point A to point B either. Bobby's lizard brain also tells him to book a hotel room for himself and Emily, because Lady-of-Shallot levels of long-suffering silence somehow equal sexual consent to him. Ugh.

So, the brothers are reunited, Emily finally dumps Bobby, Bobby's lizard brain completes its goal of ruining his life forever, the Bells adopt the Border boys, because a girl dating her adopted brother isn't creepy at all, and the book ends with Sam headed off to college despite the fact that he never finished second grade.

Um.

This would be a very silly story in any format. But all the obvious flaws in the plot, characters and narrative structure are compounded by the relentlessly bland prose and almost complete lack of dialogue. Everything is told rather than shown. We can go ten pages in which everything is summarized for us, and we don't see an interaction or hear a conversation for ourselves. This adds an unnecessary sense of distance to far-fetched characters who are hard enough to identify with as it is.

At least there's no drug content or glorified suicide, the violence isn't graphic, and the sexual content never ekes beyond innuendo. I would feel perfectly comfortable with a twelve-year-old kid reading this. I would just want to hand them a better book.

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## **Javiera says**

Nunca pense encontrarme con esta historia, yo pensaba que se trataria de lo mismo de siempre .. el amor juvenil y sus cliches, pero no. Eso me sorprendio bastante. La historia se centra en dos hermanos que vienen de una familia disfuncional, con muchos altercados delictuales, violencia. El mayor de los hermanos se enamora de una chica y comienzan los problemas, tanto para él como para su familia.

Los personajes son super interesantes ... cada personaje tiene un conflicto interno consigo mismo, algunos por tener una enfermedad que impide que puedan vivir plenamente (que cabe decir aqui estan muy bien expuestas y desarrolladas), otros que presentan tanto obsesión por tener lo que desean que los vuelve locos y otros que la empatia les brota por los poros. Estan bien desarrollados, en algunos se ve un cambio notorio desde el comienzo hasta el final de la historia.

Lo que mas me llamo la atencion fue la forma en que esta escrito, porque carece de dialogos en la gran mayoria de la historia, es una narracion continua y no fue extenuante como uno podria esperar que fuera. Y lo otro que también me llamo la atención fue el concepto que entrega el libro y en el que se basa su narración, el cual es ... que cada accion o acontecimiento que sucede en tu vida, por muy trivial o efimero

que sea, va a generar un cambio en tu futuro, para bien o para mal; y eso se demuestra en todos los personajes que co ponen esta historia.

Aún así siento que le falto algo, su no se que.

Es un libro recomendado para cualquier persona, tienen que darle una oportunidad.

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### **Ferit Feyzula says**

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### **Kelly (Diva Booknerd) says**

Loved the concept, but I just felt no connection to the characters and storyline. It should have been far more emotional, given the hand that Sam and Riddle were dealt. But I couldn't immerse myself and form any sort of attachment.

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### **Maja (The Nocturnal Library) says**

3.5 stars

I'll Be There has been collecting dust on my shelf for over a year. I usually don't buy books unless I intend to read them right away, but sometime between ordering Holly Goldberg Sloan's debut and actually receiving it, I convinced myself it would be too emotionally draining. So I just left it on my shelf where it made me feel guilty every time I looked at it. And then last night, I finally picked it up.

In the end, while I did tear up a couple of times, I'll Be There came nowhere near making me feel all those things I expected it to. It is a modern fairy tale, and as such, it is based on extreme situations and characters, both good and bad. There are no gray areas at all, and this made it very hard for me to form an emotional connection.

Sam and Riddle Border are being raised, and I use the term loosely, by a father who hears voices. He took them from their mother when they were both practically babies and has been dragging them around the country ever since. The younger, Riddle, has untreated asthma and seems to be mentally underdeveloped, and neither of them goes to school.

*Because, if you cared about something, it would be taken away. If you stood up for yourself, you would be beaten down. If you spoke out, you would be silenced. They had only learned how to be there for each other. Other people could never be part of the equation. Clarence had set up the rules of the game that way long ago.*

Emily Bell is just a normal girl with two normal parents and a normal younger brother. She is a senior in high school and a soccer player. There is nothing unusual about her life, until she meets Sam.

When Sam and Emily meet, they immediately feel a connection and their lives inevitably become intertwined. But Sam's father Clarence has different plans for his boys, plans that involve a forest and a shotgun, not teenage love and happiness.

I am not used to third person omniscient narrator, not anymore. It is a narrative mode that was favored by Honoré de Balzac and Charles Dickens, for example, but that is rarely seen in newer (genre) fiction. Writing in this way, that allows the reader to see everything, but not to experience it through any of the character's eyes, is not easy, and for Holly Goldberg Sloan, it was made even more difficult by the emotional complexity of her novel. And yet, she succeeded in offering insight into not just one or two, but almost every character in her book. Instead of getting overwhelmed by a very large number of characters, which would certainly have happened to a lesser author, Goldberg Sloan maintained all the narrative strings firmly in her grasp.

While the narrative voice certainly worked to her advantage in many ways, it also gave *I'll Be There* a movie-like quality I didn't really like. Combined with the naiveté of the plot, it somehow lessened the emotional value of the book.

Goldberg Sloan's writing gave me so much to admire, but the story itself didn't exactly inspire awe. Some people never outgrow fairy tales and I truly wish I was one of them, but unfortunately, they hold no appeal for me. This particular (modern) fairy tale is more layered and insightful than most, but it's a fairy tale nevertheless. As much as I'd like to believe it, people don't usually get what they deserve, when they deserve it, and the good guys don't always win against all odds. I find the idea slightly ridiculous, to be honest, having seen far more injustice than any person should see in a lifetime. I envy people who still believe in fairy tales, but I'm not one of them, which means this book just isn't for me.

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## **Tim says**

At my house we call this type of book "And Then The FLOOD!" (nod to Bugs Bunny & Daffy Duck). That just means that one plot device after another is thrown at the characters...and that there are several too many. It was ok to read, but wildly improbable and, for a book by a screenwriter, strangely lacking dialogue.

Just to start: a sociopathic liar, ex-con, murderer leaves his brain-damaged wife; he inexplicably takes their two small sons on the road to rob where ever he can along the way. The two boys grow, one to a musical genius and the other to an artistic (asthmatic) genius. The elder son, when 17, meets a girl who wants to save him.

So far, though unlikely we can go along...then crazy dad gets wind of the relationship and tosses the boys into the car...and on the way to other places to plunder decides to knock off his annoying sons (tell me again why he would take them with him in the first place?) And here's the flood: in shooting them, he knocks them down a, well a mountain. They survive in the wilderness (thanks to a watch crystal accidentally starting a fire!). A bear attacks! They discover a two man canoe! They escape down the river and go over the a waterfall! One gets amnesia (the elder)...the other is discovered by paleontologists. After a side trip to Las Vegas, they are reunited with that girl who wanted to save them and her very helpful family. (I left out the



crazy stalker boyfriend who becomes a parody by the end of his sections). And thanks to a very ethical coin dealer (to whom dad tried to sell coins he stole from brain-damaged mom), they are rich too!

Not an evil book like some I had to read this year...just silly and a bit over amateurish.

OH MY GOD! She wrote a sequel! HOW does someone write a sequel to an "and then the flood!" book?!? Everything has already happened! HA!

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### **Steph Su says**

When one describes a novel as being “magical,” we often think of lyricism, of rhythm and beautiful descriptions. But Holly Goldberg Sloan’s debut novel, *I’LL BE THERE*, is magical in quite a different way. A story of how the little things add up to the big things, *I’LL BE THERE* takes extraordinary characters and ordinary moments and weaves them together into a suspenseful and unforgettable story, one of the most unique books I’ve read in 2011.

I want a Sam in my life. He is undoubtedly an extraordinary boy—model-worthy looks, raw musical talent, swooningly romantic—but made sympathetic and real by all the hardships he has had to endure. Unlike other beautiful and talented love interests in YA fiction, Sam does not seek the spotlight, which endears him all the more to us. His lack of awareness of his own specialness is his best trait.

*I’LL BE THERE* is told from multiple points of view, covering everyone from Emily, the girl who draws Sam and Riddle out of their shells, to Riddle, smart and determined and existing in a bubble of lack of oxygen, to the various adults who come in and out of these two boys’ lives. This is a technique we don’t see often in YA, and yet I think works exceptionally well at riveting our eyes to the page especially during the later, most suspenseful moments of the book, when I literally couldn’t put the last 250 or so pages down.

There is nothing flashy about Holly Goldberg Sloan’s writing: instead, the magic of the writing and story comes from the characters and predicaments themselves. Don’t expect to find a regular ole contemporary story of trial and triumph in these pages: *I’LL BE THERE* contains truly enviable story craftsmanship, and is a unique, and uniquely told, story that you will find difficult to not read in one sitting. Magical, indeed.

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### **Thomas says**

*I’ll Be There* is one of the most unique young-adult novels I’ve ever read. It’s about Sam and Riddle Border, brothers who have been moving around with their unstable father for several years - Sam, now 17, hasn’t seen a classroom since the second grade. Their lives consist of grabbing food from garbage disposals, hiding from people who may report them to the police, and moving away whenever their criminal father makes a too close for comfort encounter with the local authorities. One day, Sam steps inside a church and sees Emily Bell singing - and that single moment sends their lives spiraling in directions they had never imagined.

It’s difficult to describe the magical, lyrical feeling Holly Goldberg Sloan instills in *I’ll Be There*. Readers are disconnected from the characters, but not in a bad way - it’s like you’re watching them from faraway, yet standing close enough that you can discern their thoughts and emotions. Sloan switches perspectives constantly, traveling inside the mind of almost every character in the book. Each character and their

respective point of view is like a thread hanging on its own, interacting with other threads (not sure how that would work, but), and by the end of the book Sloan somehow ties together all the threads to make one spectacular, interconnected story.

My only qualm with the book was Sam and Emily's relationship. Their bonding is never broken down and shown to the reader. We're simply told that they love each other very much, but why? Their relationship is immense and profound, but how so? What do they see in each other? What is it that makes them love one another so much? These questions are touched upon but not enough to fully convince me of the power of their connection.

Overall, an inspiring novel about human ties and how little things can add up to create something profound. I finished it in a day, and I must once again thank my friend who gave this to me for Christmas. Highly recommended for fans of realistic fiction and books like *Marcelo in the Real World*.

\*cross-posted from my blog, the quiet voice.

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## Laura says

Our lives are packed with people, relationships, and connections—big and small. So many people and pieces that come together, break, and fall away each and every day. Moments and people that passed by without a second glance could somehow, some way make an impact on your life without you even realizing it. Moments and decisions that ripple through time and unite the past with the present. This story reminded me again and again just how connected we all are—how an act of violence, kindness, or helping hand can change everything. From a song on the radio to the stars up above, I believe with all my heart that some days the big, beautiful universe can't help but show us it's magical connections.

*I'll Be There* tells the story of Sam and Riddle Border. Two brothers raised on the road by their father, Clarence --a scary, unstable, violent criminal. On the run, moving from place to place, the brothers felt locked away in their own world. Clarence didn't allow school, friends, medicine, or outside help of any kind for the boys. Sam and Riddle had each other. They relied, protected, and lived for each other. Then....a song, a voice, a girl and her family opened up their world with new faces, loves, threats and challenges.

**"Because he now knew that sheer joy wipes out pure pain."**

So many voices bring this tale to life. A story told almost with a fairy tale air about it, but with an underlying layer and power of violence and danger. Real danger. Clarence felt very real to me—like I wouldn't be surprised if I saw him on the news kind of real. We hear from all the characters and angles though, so a warm caring ingredient is stirred in the mix to balance out the ugliness. It took me awhile to warm up to this third person omniscient style, but once I did it really pulled me in. All the voices and pieces started to come together with sadness, heart, and humor. Each voice added something new to the story—to Sam and Riddle. Some voices I loved at once and others not so much. But I can't emphasize enough how real these characters felt. So many of them displayed traits to admire one minute and roll your eyes at the next. A beautiful collection of voices that revealed everything that makes us human—the good and the bad. This magical, heartfelt, suspenseful journey of family, friends, loyalty, and love has it all!

My favorite moments on the page though were always between Sam and Riddle. They stole my heart. Riddle

made me laugh and laugh! Out of the blue, he would say the most touching and adorable little line that could make me “aww”, cry, or smile. Every time he said...”my Sam” made me tear up. The love and loyalty between these two brothers ruled the show and my heart from beginning to end. Music plays a big part of my love for this story as well, but it always—always!—came back to the love and trust between Sam and Riddle.

**”Sam did as he was told, comforted as his fingers slid up and down the neck of the guitar. He played, as he had in the past, to be transported from reality into another place. He didn’t just make music. He became the music. And as he played, he remembered what mattered.**

**His brother. Riddle.”**

I’ll Be There was a joy to read. Sam and Riddle had me looking at my world and day in a brand new way. If I hadn’t stopped for coffee, I wouldn’t have bumped into them and then I wouldn’t have had the opportunity to....Haha...it goes on and on. A wonder of a read that made me very happy! Very happy to have met Sam and Riddle.

Hope you meet them soon. Recommended read.

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## Angie says

I don't know. I just don't know how any self-respecting book lover can see this book and not have to buy it immediately. I mean, look at that cover. It's gorgeous and haunting and somehow bursting with meaning all at once. As I mentioned before, it reminds me very much of the exquisite cover of *Marcelo in the Real World*--a book I loved without reserve. All that put together had me on the edge of my seat to read it, and I had a lovely copy all ready and waiting for me on the nightstand in the nursery when I got home from the hospital. I tend to go through a massive rereading binge after having a baby. Like my battered body and mind need the comfort of intensely familiar stories and friends as part of the recovery process. But this was the first new book I read once I felt sufficiently rejuvenated to take on a whole new world. The physical book itself really is put together perfectly. The dust jacket has a matte finish that just calls out to be stroked. It was quite literally a tactile as well as a cerebral pleasure reading this beautiful debut novel by Holly Goldberg Sloan.

It all starts with a song. A song sung badly in church by a reluctant girl by the name of Emily Bell. But the song meets the ears of one Sam Riddle. A boy who doesn't believe in anything anymore but who sits in the back of church pews whenever he gets the chance. Just to hear the music. And though the song is sung so very badly, something in Emily's voice reaches out to Sam. They come from very different worlds and have next to nothing in common. Sam and his unnaturally quiet little brother Riddle have been on the run with their con man father as far back as they can remember. Never allowed to go to school, always expected to take care of themselves, they are used to being uprooted from whatever hovel they're currently living in whenever their father gets the itch. Emily has a loving father and mother, a perfectly normal younger brother, and they've lived in the same place as far back as she can remember. There's so much they can't tell each other, even if they did have the words, but the peace they feel together feels like enough to bridge the gap. But the past catches up with Sam and Riddle, even as these two lonely boys begin to imagine a different kind of life surrounded by the warmth and welcome of the Bell family.

I should just start by telling you to go buy this book. Go buy it now. It is so very worth it. If you've ever read Meg Rosoff's *Just In Case*, the prose reminded me a fair bit of that lovely, unique book. There's the same smooth flow of narration, coupled with a magical and inevitable sense of destiny and mingled hope and despair surrounding the characters and the paths they follow throughout the course of the novel. The point of view shifts between all of the characters in the book--a tricky feat that Ms. Sloan pulls off effortlessly. Some voices are wistful, some pragmatic, while others are scheming and downright terrifying. But I dare you to read Sam and Riddle's thoughts and not fall hard for these two brothers who have survived against all odds. It's impossible not to sink all your heart and soul into hoping for their escape and it's breathlessly painful to watch the predator in their lives stalk that slim chance of happiness with a single minded urge to destroy. Here's a favorite passage early on when Sam and Emily first meet:

She could not really sing.

That was just a fact.

But it was also a fact that she was riveting. She was raw and exposed and not really hitting the notes right. But she was singing to him.

Why him?

He wasn't imagining it.

The girl with the long brown hair had her small hands held tight at her sides and, maybe because of how bad she was, or because she was staring right at him and seemed to be singing right to him, he couldn't look away.

She was saying she'd be there.

But no one was ever there. That's the way it was. Who was she to tell him such a thing?

It was intimate and suddenly painful.

Not just for her.

But now for him.

Very painful.

And just a few moments later:

Sam watched her flee.

He understood completely.

Hadn't he spent his whole life running? The girl with the off-key voice and the glossy sheet of brown hair and the watery eyes was now gone.

The choir continued, seamlessly moving on to another song. But Sam was up on his feet as well. He didn't care that the big wooden doors made noise. He pushed down on the brass bar

and was outside.

In moments he was around the back of the church and standing next to the girl who was in some kind of distress. He put one hand on her shoulder. Her eyes were all watery. He didn't want her to cry. If she cried, he might cry. Why would they go to that place?

But he'd learned how to make emotions go away. He was an expert at that. So why was he back here behind the church right now? He was supposed to be invisible. Right?

Right?

And then he found himself saying:

"You're going to be okay. Really . . . It's all right. . . ."

He was comforting her. The girl who couldn't sing and who had been so exposed. Her choir robe parted, and she shook it off and he could see she had on black pants that fit over her perfect little legs and a crisp white shirt that clung to her now small, sweaty body.

Sam suddenly wanted to scoop her up and maybe get on a motorcycle and drive away with her. Except he didn't know how to ride a motorcycle, but he'd seen that in a movie once on TV and the guy was wearing a military uniform and the girl knew him and she wanted to be scooped up.

And then, as she stared at him, it was all too much. She abruptly turned away.

And that's when her breakfast of toast, eggs, and bacon made its second appearance of the morning.

Because this girl didn't know him and, if she did, she would never want to have anything to do with him. This girl had taken once long, intense look at him and that, combined with her singing, had made her sick. He reached out and instinctively took hold of her long hair to keep it from the next retch.

He wished he had a rag or a towel or something she could use to wipe off her mouth. But he didn't and then the side door of the church suddenly opened and a woman was standing there. She said:

"Emily, are you all right?"

Sam dropped his hands and released her hair and stepped away and it was over.

Broken.

Done.

He turned on his heel and took off, moving fast but without running.

Away.

Away from her.

And, really, it just gets better and more intense from there. It's a quietly riveting book that makes you feel as though the world is somehow both much larger and much smaller than you thought it was. And the minutely thoughtful and caring ways in which some of the characters look out for each other are beautiful to read, especially as they are related through such thoughtful and caring prose. I'LL BE THERE had me at hello, filled my mind with the sights and senses of these characters, and had me playing the title song over and over in my head for days after.

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## **Bü?ra Köprü says**

Kitab?n kapa??nda Gayle Forman'?n "Kalp k?r?c?, merak uyand?ran, hayat dolu, sihirli ama daha önce okudu?um hiçbir ?eye de benzemiyor." diye bir yorumu var. ?lk defa bir kitap kapa??ndaki yorumun, kitab? bu denli yans?tt???n? gördüm. Bu kitapta bir ?ey var, beni gerçekten çok etkiledi ama tam olarak ne oldu?unu söyleyemiyorum.

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## **Erin says**

Ugh. Okay. I saw amazing reviews on this book, so I was psyched. But in the end, it just disappointed me.

I'll start with this, though - I absolutely loved Sam and Riddle, and their ability to get people to fall head over heels for them (except the evil people, obv's). Their parts of the story were awesome. If the rest of the characters were written as well as Sam and Riddle, I don't think I'd have as much of a problem.

But it seems as if Sam and Riddle are the only characters you're supposed to care about, because everything else was just soooo vague. It was a big pile of eh. The potential was there, but so many things weren't described very well. It was like the cliff notes version. I want the real thing, please.

Like, Sam and Emily's relationship. You get the idea that their romance is supposed to be OH-SO-INTENSE, but you don't ever see that. There's like 3 tiny scenes that ever-so-slightly hint that they're together, and it just left me wanting more. With Emily in general, actually. I ended the book without knowing anything about her, besides the fact that she loves Sam. Supposedly.

My biggest pet peeve, however, was the seemingly unending recaps of what was going on with random outside characters. Specifically, Bobby. Oy. I just did not give a flying flip about Bobby. Ever. Not even for laughs. When the author kept going back to Bobby's Terrible Horrible No Good Very Bad Prom Day at the end, I nearly just put the book down. I would've if I wasn't so close to the end. It's like, "Why am I reading about this a-hole's spray tan accident when I should be reading about what the heck's happening with Sam and/or Riddle?!?"

But beyond Bobby, the last few pages were filled with a grocery list of every minor character in the entire book, and how things ended magically happy-ever-after for them after their encounter with the Border bros. It was really trite, and really boring to read about. I skimmed that parts hoping to get a last glimpse of Sam and Riddle and the Bell family that would make the whole experience worth it (which I didn't).

I don't often give below 3 stars. It takes a lot to disappoint me. But I just wasn't feeling this book. It was maddening, because I love the story, just hated the way it was written.

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## **Limonessa says**

### **3.5 stars**

*I'll Be There* is a modern fairy tale.

It reads like a fairy tale and it's got the tropes of a fairy tale, though revisited in a modern key.

It is the story of Sam and Emily.

Sam, our modern male Cinderella, has been on the road with his little sick brother for as long as he can remember, obliged by their psychotic father to live a miserable life, not going to school, kept out of society. Emily is just a regular small town girl, reserved, introverted.

But when Emily is obliged by her father to sing a solo in church and sees Sam sitting on the back pew, something in the cosmic order of things shifts and their encounter will trigger a series of events which will change, once and for all, not only Sam, Riddle and Emily's lives profoundly but the lives of all people who will get caught in this devastating snowball effect.

I'll admit straight away that I liked this book against my better judgement.

Said judgement was purely based on emotional reasons, namely on the character of Riddle Border. If I had to choose a kid to adopt, this kid would be like him. His thoughts, his story, his drawings, the world seen through his eyes were the best part of the story for me and the main reason why I liked this book. I recommend you to read *I'll Be There* if only for Riddle.

When I look at it with my analytical skills though, there are various things which didn't convince me or didn't care for.

The first, is the writing style. To tell you the truth, it is pretty much in line with my first statement, that is that this is a fairy tale. Simple, concise, direct. But it unnerved me. I felt like the author was trying to talk to me like you would to a little kid, presenting facts in a linear order, making it simple for my simple mind. I am sure this might appeal to some people but I really didn't care much for it. Now, had the story been narrated from Riddle's point of view, it would have made sense. But for a third person omniscient, I felt like I was talked down to.

Second, Sam and Emily's story. You can call it heart-breaking, touching, whatever you want but the truth is that, like in fairy tales, it was insta-love and not even well developed, at that. I would have loved for the author to have written more scenes for them, to justify Emily's heartbreak or Sam's attraction.

Same goes for Emily's parents. What made them literally fall in love with the two kids? Was it only because Sam has a natural talent for the guitar?

Third. The *I'll Be There* theme. It was way, way, way, way too corny for me.

Finally, the villain. Well, there were two villains actually. Clarence Border is well portrayed and believable. He is a psycho and as the story unfolds, I really wanted him to burn in hell. He scared the crap out of me, but that means emotional involvement on my part and that is a good sign.

But what about Bobby Ellis? The more subtle villain? He is ok in the first part of the book, ok meaning I can understand his behavior. What happens to him on Prom Day was just downright childish though, like a *deus ex machina* taking revenge on him for his bad behavior.

So, if I consider how I *feel* towards this story, I can probably say this book succeeded in its effort: in the second part, it won me over and I felt my eyes getting misty. The story is sad, touching, heart-breaking if you will, and enjoyable all in all. Many will like it.

BUT keep in mind this is a FAIRY TALE, don't look for too many logical connections or overused clichés, let yourself be taken from the flow of emotions and you'll love it.

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## April says

When people say Do Not Read In Public, I should probably listen, as it would likely save my mascara. You want a book that brings crocodile tears from sadness and joy, read I'll Be There by Holly Goldberg Sloan. This is arguably one of the best contemps I've read all year.

[Read the rest of my review here](#)

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## Capillya says

This book took me on a journey I wasn't expecting at all. From the beginning, I thought I'd had this book in the bag. I thought I knew what I'd be rating it, where the characters would end up, the road they'd be on. Midway through the book I think I could hear Holly Goldberg Sloan laughing at me.

Excuse me while I go dig up every interview I can find with this author. The way she explores (so many) characters throughout this book is fascinating. The way she explores the human condition and its amazing level of resilience is inspiring. What a gorgeous little novel. I need to read more of her work. Yesterday.

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## Marie says

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## Reynje says

**4.5 stars** (Brace yourself for the gushing - apparently my brain was having a fire sale on similes and adjectives.)

Books like this make me feel so grateful that I am a reader.

Imagining that I was born without a propensity for reading and/or taught to love it tends to put me in a panicky tailspin, at the thought of all the characters, places and emotional experiences I would have missed, had I not been so inclined to pick up a book whenever possible.

And as far as emotional experiences go, this one was like a small wrecking-ball swinging though me.

”His mind was flooded.

He’d seen pictures of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, and that’s how he felt. His life was now underwater and, even if the tide somehow receded, everything that he had was now damaged beyond repair.”

“I’ll Be There” is a powerful and unsettling read, particularly throughout the early descriptions of Sam and his younger brother Riddle’s life on the road with their mentally unstable father, Clarence.

Told in third person omniscient, the story at first feels slightly detached, as if the reader is being held at bay to watch as the characters and plot unfold. However, this particular style is employed to great effect as the characters each form a thread of the story, pulling tighter and tighter into a delicate snare of words; a little noose constricting around the heart.

Honestly, there were parts of this book when I had to shut it and remind myself it wasn’t actually happening, because I felt like I was trying to breathe with a weight on my chest. I wanted to reach into the pages and make everything okay.

When Sam encounters Emily Bell at a college-town church, they experience a moment of connection which will change the direction of their lives. From this point, and through his contact with Emily and her family, Sam begins to become visible after a lifetime of remaining unseen. He begins to form connections, experience a part of life he has never known. Juxtaposed with Clarence’s mounting paranoia and lurking menace, the tension ratchets up steadily. Small, tender moments are incised with sharp shadows of foreboding.

The gradually interlocking sections of the story, while gritty and harsh, are also shot through with something kind of.. *magical*. (Which, judging from reviews, will either sit well with you... or it won’t).

I don’t mean to infer that this is magical realism – this story is nothing if not all too possible in terms of Sam and Riddle’s brutal childhood – but there is something almost fable-like in the way it is written. (If I think of a better word, I’ll come back here and edit).

Stylistically, the book reminded me in parts of the 2006 film ‘*Stranger Than Fiction*’, in terms of the

narration and the sense of overarching purpose, the fragments that snap together to form a fractured, yet beautiful whole. Personally, I really liked the slightly whimsical element to story that tempered the darker themes and events.

The plot did take a direction I was not expecting, but once I had adjusted to this particular choice I settled in and let the story take me where it would, strictly realistic or not. (I find that I'm prepared to suspend my belief on a case-by-case basis – generally, this is illogically determined by how much I love the characters and the writing.)

Due to the style of the prose, and the spare dialogue, we never get completely close to the characters. We don't exactly live in their world, or walk in their shoes. Instead, we are shown small snapshots and glimpses into their lives. In spite of this, I still felt heavily invested in them. If anything, the fleeting insights into Riddle's thoughts, his drawings, Sam's attempts to keep his brother protected and Emily's tenacious hope had me in a kind of chokehold, and I grew to love them.

I would like to have seen more of the interactions between Sam and Emily. The way in which their connection was described was well suited to the overall tone and style of the book (alluded to, rather than explicitly spelled out) – but I kind of wish Holly Goldberg Sloan had given them more on-page moments and dialogue. Regardless, the portions of the book where they were together and their respective feelings were tender and bittersweet.

One of the elements I particularly loved was the use of colour throughout the story. I am intrigued about the recurring orange motif, the colour appearing with increasing frequency throughout the climax of the novel. Beyond the possible significance, which I'm still wondering about, it also ties in beautifully with the cover art.

I wish I could be more articulate about why I loved this book so much. The writing, deceptively simple, yet quietly and devastatingly expressive, has left me feeling woefully inadequate to the task of reviewing it.

All I can really say is that reading 'I'll Be There' was an experience both painful and precious. It's exquisitely written, moving, harrowing, heartbreaking.

And I loved it.

If I could sum up I'll Be There with a picture, it would be this one (from tumblr). Dark, beautiful, hopeful:

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