



# Better

*Jaime Samms*

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After filing charges that put his abusive ex-Dom behind bars, Jesse Turbul relocates halfway across the country, hoping to escape his past—but, of course, it's never that easy. When Jesse meets third-year law student Aadon at the library where he works, their mutual attraction is instant and obvious.

Despite the sparks, they just can't seem to make it work. Aadon is mired in guilt over his inability to help his older brother, damaged by events far too similar to Jesse's past. Jesse is stuck in his own desperate wish to forget the painful shadow that continues to threaten him and any hope of a happy future.

The only way to move forward is for Jesse to acknowledge he's broken and for Aadon to accept he can't make him better.

## **Better Details**

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## From Reader Review Better for online ebook

### Susan65 says

This was a really emotional story about Jesse, a college student who was the victim of domestic violence/rape who is struggling to get his life back, and Aadon, another student who wants to fix him. Aadon also has the added stressor of being the baby brother of a man who was molested and who destroyed his own life with drugs while trying to escape his demons. The premise is quite dark and brutal but the underlying theme is about love. Aadon and Jesse really love each other but before they can have any semblance of a life together, they both have to confront their pasts. Easier said than done, obviously.

Jesse's best friend is Sarah...and I know she cared deeply for him but she drove me nuts. I saw her as more of a hindrance than a help at times. Leo and Mike are Aadon's best friends and I felt they were more in touch with how to deal than Sarah. Why is it that the females in these stories make me cringe?

So, yes, the story is sad and dark and full of past demons but the actual victimizing is not happening as you read but told in the past tense. That makes it much easier for me to read and I definitely prefer that format to "being there".

Even though I wasn't sure if it was gonna have a happy ending, and it waited until the 11th hour to get there, but in the end you know Jesse is not cured but he has Aadon and together they make it work.

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### Laura M says

One of the best stories i've read recently. These guys really had to work to make this relationship happen - love and sex did not instantly solve all of their emotional issues . . . The book is well written with a lot of emotion and feeling.

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### Alex says

#### Overall

This is an excellent exploration of the "broken" and the "fixers" and how they work together and how they clash. Admittedly, I love a broken character, and this story played that point well. In addition, the main characters have Dom/Sub relations, although the complexities of Jesse's past make any real "play" fall somewhere between difficult and impossible (at least within the scope of this book). Still, the idea is explored.

This novel is character driven, with a plot that focuses on the characters' emotional advancements. The most action happens in car trips and emotional blow-ups, but the story doesn't require more than this, as it keeps true to what the blurb offers. I would definitely recommend this novel to readers who like character/emotional studies, broken characters, and emotional suffering and who don't require a heavy plot.

#### Strengths

One of the things I appreciated most about this story was that nothing was easy for the characters. They

didn't 'get' each other right off the bat. They had arguments, disagreements, and differing expectations. While outside sources didn't cause too much conflict, they did precipitate events by adding outside pressure. There was a realistic struggle that progressed the story and forced the main characters to deal with the issues and baggage each carried. There is never a magical outside source that fixes things, but instead the character is *enabled* to overcome what he needs to overcome.

*Better* is an emotionally compelling piece that digs into the heart. In some ways the topics the book broaches are difficult to read and highly sensitive matters, but they are well handled and didn't feel triggering. I was pulled along on the emotional journey with both characters and enjoyed it to the very end.

A good mix of characters with most, if not all, doing their best to 'help' their friends--whether that help is wanted or not! Although elements of this world and the people in it are seen with rose-tinted lenses, reality is still respected, in sequences of events and in characters. This definitely has a "feel good" ending that rounds out a rather heavy story with hope.

### **Weaknesses**

While not necessarily a weakness, the narration is told in a third-person expanded voice, which means we jump from person to person. It was properly handled and mainly stuck to the main characters (if not completely, I can't recall now), but some readers may have difficulty adjusting to this type of storytelling, since it's not as common a perspective.

There isn't much plot outside of emotional development, which, again, isn't a weakness, but readers should expect this going into the story. I was pleasantly surprised by how much I enjoyed this character exploration of a topic that--honestly--gets used a lot in the books I read. Or maybe I just hunt those books out. Either way, I felt it was done well and made up for the lack of any action-based plot.

The only real weakness was toward the end where Jesse evolved a little too quickly in order to slip in a sexy sex scene. I can't grade too hard against it because everyone is different, but I felt rather startled at the advancement from "Don't touch me," to "I'm ready for this!" ...Though who wouldn't want Aadon to hold him down and make love to him? Really.

*Requested this book for review.*

Be sure to check out my other reviews on my blog.

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### **KimberlyRose says**

My first experience with Jamie Samms's writing was *Finders, Keepers*. This is my second. I don't think I'll try another one of Samms's stories, unless someone **highly** recommends it to me.

As with *Finders, Keepers*, I suddenly realized I was bored. And absolutely did not care about the characters. This took me by surprise; the story had all the right ingredients for me to be transported wholly into a story, such as angst, a traumatic past/present, self-discovery, and struggling but growing inner strength. I haven't quite put my finger on the structural *why*, but something about Samms's storytelling process makes me slowly grow less interested in her characters.

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## **Sarah\_loves\_books says**

First read was worth four stars, second two stars. I really got tired with the endless wallowing in feelings, fear, past nightmares. It's not what I need now. At 95% into my second read I'll give this a compromise three stars, and move on. My favourite book so far by this writer is *Finders, Keepers*.

Original review:

Jaime Samms is my kind of a writer, she writes very psychological stories about characters who have troubled pasts and presents.

Shelved as bdsm, because the main characters are a submissive and a dominant person, and that shows in what little sex there is between them in the book. However, this, like other books I've read by this author, is not really a bdsm book. All books that I've read by Samms are about abuse and healing.

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## **Nic says**

This book is an emotional journey into the lives of two young college men. One has been 'broken' by abuse and the other is supporting a brother who was similarly damaged and has resultant mental problems. Although initially attracted, Jesse and Aadon need to work through many issues if they are to be together.

The story is full of heartbreak and anger but also the desire to find a way to move on. The subject matter includes abuse, rape and self-harm. There are no easy answers and the author shows both men making mistakes as they navigate through a complex relationship.

My only criticism is regarding the dominant side of Aadon which I did not find convincing. Reference is made to him looking for someone to submit and he sees this need in Jesse. He voices some thoughts on control and trust and opinions about how a Dom should act. I didn't see enough in his actions to support this side of his personality.

This book is flagged with BDSM as genre but, although some reference is made, there are no real BDSM scenes. The sex is limited. This book is more about dealing with issues and building the trust needed to establish such a relationship.

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## **Ayanna says**

This Samms person really likes writing about abuse O\_o

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## **Ami says**

**WARNING:** these scenes might be disturbing for some readers: self-cutting, talk/history about rape and molestation, drug use, and abusive relationship.

....

I need to take a whole night to think about this book. Because it's emotionally draining. I have read several stories by Jaime Samms, though I think this is her 'longest' to date. It deals with some serious issues and it packs a punch!! Forget the 'warning' of BDSM/Kink that Dreamspinner put on this, there is NOT A SCENE on that. This novel is mainly dealing with two people who have baggage in their life and how they are working through that.

Jesse survives from an abusive relationship. He has submissive tendency but his previous Dom practically taken his will, and Jesse ends up being broken, beaten, and messed up. He has scars as testament of that horrible relationship. While Aadon is dealing with his older brother, Ricky, who is in rehab for drug abuse, which ruins his body and mind. Some readers might think the drama is too much (few times I also think so) but I also find it engaging. I always prefer stories that are complicated anyway, when not everything is happy dory.

What I like THE MOST about this story, is how Ms. Samms portrays Aadon as not perfect. I mean, it's easy to describe Aadon as strong and patient and his love alone will be able to 'fix' Jesse. I believe that is one common thing with this kind of plot anyway. INSTEAD, Ms. Samms makes Aadon as vulnerable as well. Where he just can't handle it, when it's just too much, we have scenes where Aadon needs to talk to his brother's therapist. He admits that he's angry and that he's afraid. Often stories focus on the 'victim' but not on the support system. Aadon is practically the 'support system' for his own brother and Jesse, and he realizes that he might also need help on that.

As for Jesse, he definitely grows stronger ... and I admire him for it. At first, he thinks that by going away he is fine; that he can handle it. Later Jesse knows that NOT talking about it, doesn't mean that it's not going away. And he can also see how his attitude affects the people who love and care for him.

*"My secrets hurt a lot of people, and me most of all. The more I say it out loud, the less power it has to hurt me.... The people who do understand can help me stop it. Knowing that I helped to make it so that he can't do it to anyone else, makes me feel less like a victim, and more like I matter."*

Both Jesse and Aadon might still have to work on the relationship, and they have far to go. There are a lot of talkings in this story, as well as the push and pull because each man do not trust themselves enough at times, too caught up with their problem. Jesse is scared about letting Aadon in, Aadon fears that he's hurting Jesse all over again. But I can see them getting stronger in time. Because I believe in Aadon when he says this ...

*"What I can't do is ever let you go. I am too far into you to ever get out. I'll have to move in with you, because I already need to breathe you like air."*

Yes, I'm tired, but I'm also satisfied. I am aware that the kind of drama is not for everyone though. Personally, I think this is most definitely Jaime Samms's BEST yet.

PS: The plot does remind me of another story with similar theme, but I can't remember what it is \*shrugs\*

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**Lena Grey says**

The past can be a painful place to visit; people don't want to recall memories which can't be changed. They

don't want to experience the agony of wrong choices and missteps; but the thing is, for better or worse, what happens in our past shapes our future. We either confront our experiences and learn from them, or we deny them and inevitably get stuck there, allowing them to eat away at us, unable to move forward. Jesse Turnbul and Aadon Dounias are both stuck in the past; they are in denial, burdened with guilt and paralyzed with fear. Until they can come to terms with these feelings, the ghosts of the past will continue to haunt them, preventing them from living a fulfilling life.

I admired Jesse because as hard as it was to do, after Jesse realized that he'd have to face what happened in order to put it behind him, he takes immediate steps to rectify the situation. He accepts responsibility for his part in it and works to prevent Anthony from hurting anyone else. It may seem backwards, but having lived through the ordeal with Anthony and working his way through the pain, humiliation, and fear, actually makes him a stronger, more determined person.

Aadon has a good heart but what gives him problems is that he wants to fix both his brother and Jesse and it frustrates him because he can't. He tries to be patient, but walking on egg shells for fear of setting his brother off into a tantrum, or moving too fast and scaring Jesse takes its toll. It's difficult for him to sit back and watch them struggle, but he realizes that they are the only ones who can help themselves; but he also knows that he will be there to love and support them when they ask.

There are so many admirable characters in this story, people who go above and beyond in offering amazing support for both men—Ricky's psychiatrist; Aadon's cousin and best friends; Jesse's best friend, Sarah; Jesse's mother, and a host of others. Even though the book is dark in places dealing with rape, sexual abuse, BDSM gone wrong, and the devastation they leave behind, Jaime's bold presentation of the story and the tough issues it tackles are well worth the angst. If you don't mind an intense relationship with an occasional bumpy ride, but also a happy ending, then I say give 'Better' a try. Thanks, Jaime, for an emotional, but enlightening read!

NOTE: This book was provided by Dreamspinner Press for the purpose of a review on Rainbow Book Reviews.

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### **Lauraadriana says**

#### **Very touching, emotional and well told love story dealing with the damages of sexual abuse**

Jesse is 21, a third year college student, who is still living with the trauma of having been brutalized by his partner two years earlier. He was young, inexperienced, thought the man understood his needs, and would give him what he desired with care and love. **He was so wrong**, what he got instead was such cruelty and abuse that it completely broke him. Even when that beautiful law student Aadon approaches him, he can't get himself together enough to pursue a relationship, not really, he's terrified.

Aadon knows from the get go that Jesse is not alright, something really bad has happened to him. He more than anyone has seen what the aftermath of abuse looks like. His only brother, is a shell, his mind shattered, the result of years of trying to ignore the pain from his own abuse.

Aadon wants Jesse too much, there must be a way he can make it work. Aadon is a fixer. He has a need to make everything alright. He's a protector, a nurturer. But Jesse can't be fixed, he's too damaged. What he needs is to face just how horrible what happened to him was, and how dark things got. That's the only way that they can move forward. No matter how much they care for each other.

There were three things I really loved about this book. **One**, I thought the MCs were done really well. They were both broken boys. Jesse by what happened to him. Aadon by the burden of being left alone to care for his brother, without any support from his parents. The way that they were forced to figure out things between themselves, and individually was really good. There was never a secret formula that came along to fix things, or the right word or perfect kiss. With them it would always be hard, but not trying was not really an option.

**Two**, I loved the secondary characters. Aadon's friends who were supportive and fiercely loyal. Jesse's mother who despite how hard it was to understand her son's sexual needs and desires, never hesitated in her love, or in her conviction that her son didn't ever deserve to be abused like he had been. Sarah, Jesse's best friend, might have been good too, if she hadn't been so incredibly annoying.

**Three**, I thought Jesse and the cutting was done very well. It was not morbid or gratuitous, and it was not used as a way to get a gasp or a reaction. I really appreciated that.

I mostly really loved these two young men, what a hard road they had to travel. It was not perfect, even when they had found a way to move forward together, but it was a satisfying ending. They were on their way.

There were tough moments for sure, some semi-graphic descriptions of abuse, and some of the times with Ricky, Aadon's brother, were really hard.

Jesse and Aadon broke my heart a few times that's for sure, but they figured it out. Jesse finally understood what it was about Aadon that made him the man he needed. *"I can be afraid with you and still know I'm safe. That's the difference. That's why I love you."*

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**Very good book. I recommend.**

**DarienMoya says**

**3.75**

Better is about two men both with a similar past, and trying to make this thing called love work. Jesse a submissive who got the shitty end of the stick with an abusive Dom. Aadon a man who has witnessed the toll rape and abuse can have on a person, his older brother is the victim of that.

Jesse is still mentally/physically suffering from the abuse even years later, and is questioning if he will ever feel for another again. When Aadon appears in his life Jesse finds himself very attracted to the man but fears he is too broken to be anything good for Aadon. They both work to try and find a common ground, but it's not always easy to meet in the middle.

I really liked Jesse he was a solid character and very believable in his pain. The author really did a wonderful thing in making him accept that he does have a problem and doesn't pretend as if all is right. Aadon also realizes that he's not exactly perfect when handling Jesse, and he might be putting his issue with his brother unto him. They're all very angst, but believable angst.

I did have a few problems with the book, which kept it from being a complete 4 Pants off. I am telling you these boys were hitting the books hard, but unless I missed something \*hmm\* did they ever attend class? I heard about the classes but never read about them being in class. I don't know about you, but that really adds to the college atmosphere. I also couldn't handle the ranting these went on when they got in the mood. I get it you have problems and I appreciate that you realize it but... simmer down on explaining it.

Although Aadon's brother Ricky was a minor character he really left an impact on me. I think I will remember his character a lot longer than I will Aadon/Jesse. I would love him to have a book of his own book and find some healing. With the level of abuse he suffered, and his mental state. I'm thinking the book would be all kinds of epic, because sex has the power to hurt but it also has the power to heal *\*real talk\**.

Overall, I liked this one. This was my first book by Jaime Samms and will not be my last. I really enjoyed the writing, the pacing was good and I gobbled it all up in a day or so. You should check this one out if you are looking for an emotionally rich story with solid characters. The mother in me really cried for a young Ricky, and that was the hardest part in reading *Better*. Otherwise, I enjoyed it but not as much as I had hoped.

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### **Bea says**

I am not sure why there were a lot 2 star reviews for this book. I saw none of the pronoun problems or typos that folks mentioned. Now, there was POV hopping, but I got used to it and the author did a good job of letting us know who was who.

There is a lot of emotion, some might say melodrama, but I enjoyed it. I especially enjoyed that Jesse was not fixed by love automatically, and sex is not instant. In fact, we really do not see any sex until the end.

I gave it a 3 and not 4 because overall, the writing was satisfactory, but not compelling. And I felt nothing for the sex scene at the end. It felt mostly like the author was saying, "see, their relationship is healthy now so they are having sex".

Overall, an enjoyable read.

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• \* ° \*• Gwendolyn•°\*\*★°\*\*★ says

### **A HEARTFELT 4.5 STARS.**

*The only way to move forward is for Jesse to acknowledge he's broken and for Aadon to accept he can't make him better.*

This was a heartfelt Novel that delicately dealt with some tough issues, rape, molestation, ect. But, in this it does get better. This was an awesome read, that tugs at the heart pulleys on the strings and drags you along only to give a cuddle at the very end.

My favorite quote~

*"What I can't do," Aadon said after a minute, as he traced his fingers down those pale, marked arms, "is ever let you go." He lifted Jesse's chin and looked into his soul-stealing brown eyes. "I am too far into you to ever get out. I'll have to move in with you, because I already need to breathe you like air."*

*Jesse touched just the tips of his fingers to Aadon's cheek, awed by the continued acceptance. "I cannot believe I ever thought you were too tongue-tied to be a lawyer."*

? Jaime Samms, Better

I really like this read.

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### **Kaje Harper says**

As a young and inexperienced man, Jesse had been looking for a Dom. What he had found was a man who confused dominance with abuse. And whose abuse of Jesse was severe enough to eventually land the man in jail. Jesse has moved across country to a new school, hoping for a fresh start. And finds himself attracted to Aadon.

Aadon has a brother whose own abused past led to drug addiction and mental illness. He can't save his brother and he can't change Jesse's past. But maybe he can give Jesse a future.

This book is about recovery and trust, and dealing with abuse. And about discriminating love from just wanting to help someone. It could have been an emotionally intense read, but the frequent switches in POV kept me from becoming truly immersed in either main character's thoughts and emotions. I found this an interesting read with good characters and a nice understanding of the implications of abuse, but not an emotionally enthralling one. Some readers may prefer this less angst treatment of a difficult subject.

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### **Kassa says**

I'm a big fan of Samms' writing and I leapt at her first full-length novel. I've been asking for one of these for a while and it's not surprising that the concept is pretty deep. While the idea is solid and makes for an involving story, the writing stumbles in multiple places. There are problems that I've never associated with this author before and ultimately this one is merely ok. It has some high points but more low points than anything and makes me wonder if full-length stories highlight more weaknesses.

The plot is pretty emotional by throwing two very damaged and hurt men together to try to make them work. Each is very hurt by their past and littered with tons of issues. First there is Jesse, a submissive that got involved with the wrong man. Jesse's reeling from his past rape and abuse, which has left a lot of emotional and physical scars. Aadon is a dominant man trying to take care of his institutionalized brother, also a victim

of rape and abuse. These two college kids are trying to get past their individual issues to find common ground together, and maybe attend a class once in a while.

The highlights for me are that the author attempted such intense concepts. They're good and handled extremely well if not better than most books. The trauma isn't downplayed or sensationalized but realistic with a nice touch. The two characters recognize their limitations and issues, somewhat too much with long nearly professional speeches about their problems, but it's nice that the main characters are realistic about their many, many scars. Additionally the characters are well developed and fully three dimensional with Ricky being an exceptional and well-written addition.

Unfortunately after these positives, the story kind of fell apart for me. For starters the writing stumbles frequently with obvious editing errors and a horrible problem heading hopping. The POV tends to switch within a single paragraph making the narrative a bit dizzying, as the dialogue doesn't always match the person speaking. It's not hard to figure out the POV but it switches way too much and pulls me out of the story each time. Likewise the behavior of Ricky's therapist is so unprofessional that it drives me nuts. The intention is to inject a mothering, caring figure and that's fine but the casual mannerisms and unprofessional, nearly constant touching just isn't appropriate and I couldn't get beyond that.

The story also relies on contrived scenes and coincidences way too much. It even attempts to explain why such coincidences can happen but by then, it's too much. Not to give too many spoilers but the later scenes with the waiter, his boyfriend, and the additional victims are almost corny they're so contrived. None of this feels genuine or realistic, but more so these scenes feel like an easy way to illustrate yet again the horrors Jesse experienced and his attempts to grow beyond them. I wish the writing had been more subtle and nuanced in showing these objectives rather than taking the easy, almost silly route.

Overall there are good points and bad points about Better and the attempt to tackle truly damaged men and give them a happy ending is a nice idea. Unfortunately the men come off almost too hurt to be together and the writing don't quite live up to the concept. This is especially sad, as I like Samms' short stories quite a bit. Perhaps the next novel will be better.

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