

Fifty Yards and Holding

David-Matthew Barnes

Bold Strokes Books (March 2015)

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This dramatic gay-teen story of forbidden love intertwines themes of gangs, divorce, teen pregnancy, and transcendent love.

In David-Matthew Barnes's *Fifty Yards and Holding*, two young men from different worlds find love and security with one another. Toro and Riley meet by chance in a park that is divided by gang loyalties on the heels of a terrible tragedy. Barnes adeptly recreates the forbidden love story in the San Francisco Bay area, showing the conflict through a gang leader's and a baseball star's eyes.

The bones of this story have stood the test of time. Romeo meets Juliet, Aida loves Radames, Riley meets Toro. Riley's mother is supportive of their relationship, so she is ultimately the one to provide solace and support for the boys. Because this book is aimed at the young-adult audience, this is a good introduction to this tried-and-true story.

One issue that often occurs when a story is retold is that characters can often seem static and one-dimensional. This happens with Riley and Toro. Both young men epitomize their tribes—Toro the tough-talking gang member, and Riley the steady jock. As the two fall in love, their tender sides come through with one another, but unfortunately, it all seems a bit superficial. "Riley closed his eyes for a moment and thought about Toro. He was very attractive. But it was his take-charge persona Riley found the most appealing."

Barnes tries to do a great deal in this short book. The pacing is fast, which often gives the story a slightly unrealistic quality. Barnes introduces the subplot of Alma, Toro's sister, who is pregnant with the rival gang leader's baby. On top of that, Riley's mother is divorcing his father. While the plots are intertwined, they seem to push the story of the boys forward at a much faster pace, making events and the passage of time seem skewed.

It is clear that Barnes is a playwright, as he has a good handle on dialogue. The conversations between characters do a great deal to move the story forward, and they are believable and readable. Italicized sentences express the thoughts of the speakers, which adds omniscience into the story.

LYNN EVARTS (Summer 2015)

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