

# *We Three*

MARKUS HARWOOD-JONES



# How can love between three people survive?

Jassie has always struggled to make close friends, so she is surprised when she quickly connects with Ams and Sydney at summer camp. The only problem is that those two never seem to stop bickering. All three of them getting along starts to seem impossible. Even so, as the summer days go by, one thing leads to another and the three soon become close friends, and then even more.

As camp comes to an end, their unique relationship is put to the test. As her partners debate whether to run away or end their relationship, Jassie struggles to find a compromise that can keep them all together. Can she find a way to make the trio's love last in the real world?

**MARKUS HARWOOD-JONES** has self-published the short story collections *Confessions of a Teenage Transsexual Whore* and *Everything & All At Once*. His documentary film, *Mosaic*, tells the story of his journey across Canada and the United States to learn more about the trans community. He is the author of the Lorimer Real Love romances *Just Julian* and *Romeo for Real*. Markus lives in Toronto, Ontario.



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*For all of us who live and love outside the lines*



# 01 Expectations

THE FAMILY CAR kicks up dust as it goes back down the gravel road. I'm left standing next to Mom's big floral suitcase and Dad's duffle bag, wondering what I am supposed to do next. There's a handful of grown-ups in baggy orange T-shirts calling out names, trying to get campers to line up in single-file rows. All around, kids are already talking to each other. They're laughing, some of them hugging. I'm sure no one makes friends that fast. I guess a lot of them met last

summer or the summer before. I shudder at the idea of being ditched here by my parents year after year.

The archway above welcomes us to Three Star Summer Camp. The only other times I've heard of something having 'three stars' have been cheap hotels we sometimes stop at during family road trips. The kind that smell like cigarette smoke. Where Dad has to check for bedbugs before we're allowed to put down our bags.

I slide my feet back and forth, leaving streaks in the dust. This is it. I'm here for a whole month. No phone, no internet. I'd say I was worried about having no friends, but that wouldn't be much of a change. At least back home I could hang out in my room and binge watch my favourite TV shows.

Everything was going just fine until parent-teacher night last winter. Mom and Dad heard all about how I wasn't "connecting with my peers." Next thing I knew, I was sitting in the guidance office doing tests. Now I'm not just a "self-starter" and "space-case," like Mom used to say. Turns out I've been



“under-socialized” because of “undiagnosed Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder.” After that, Mom and Dad got me to sign up for all these after school programs. Soccer, musical theatre, even chess club. I totally tanked at all of that stuff. It turns out being really bad at something doesn’t make you a lot of new friends. I thought maybe when school was done, I’d be off the hook. But then they got a whole new idea.

“It’s just something to try, Jasbina,” Dad told me. “Somewhere low-pressure. Lots of kids your age and no homework to worry about. Doesn’t that sound great?”

No, it didn’t. Couldn’t I stay home so we could bond as a family or something? Before they know it, I’ll be done high school and off to university. Didn’t they care that these are their last years with me, their one and only daughter?

“You’re being dramatic,” Mom teased. She poked at my nose like I was a little kid. “It’s only a month.”

“Just try to have fun,” said Dad. He didn’t even look at me as he patted Hari’s back and tried to get him to

burp. “Maybe you can make some friends.” Then Hari spit up all over Dad’s shirt and that was the end of that.

I squeeze the plastic suitcase handle. It’s only a little broken from when Mom dropped it at the airport after a long business trip. I can still feel the place where Dad kissed me on the cheek. I already wish I was going home. Even if I was stuck balancing a diaper bag on my lap while dangling Hari’s toys to keep him from screaming in his car seat.

“Jasbina Dhillon!” someone with a clipboard shouts at the front of the crowd. I raise my hand. The person nods. “Like I said, when I call your name, please get in line behind your counsellor!”

That’s when I notice a woman with a bobbing blonde ponytail waving me over. Her big arm movements make her oversized orange shirt flap at her sides. I cringe, grabbing my bags. I drag them over the gravel as best as I can, sending pebbles and plastic flying.

As I get in line, I pull down the brim of Dad’s old baseball hat to shield my eyes from the mid-summer sun. I wish I could cover my ears, too. With so many

kids talking and screaming as they run around, I'd give anything to have my headphones in right now. Somewhere in the crowd, on the boys' side I think, I hear someone bust out an acoustic guitar and start a sing-along. Right next to me, I eye a handful of kids showing off their moves. One girl speaks up loudly, saying she just *has* to sign up for the mime classes. "Oh, you just *have* to mime before you even *try* to get into interpretive dance!"

I wonder, not for the first time, why Mom and Dad signed me up for a performing arts camp. I mean, I like to sing a little now and then, but mostly just when I'm doing chores. Still, I guess it's as good an option as any. I'm not much for sports. And I couldn't hack it at a science or space camp. I guess I don't really have a "thing." I'm not cool enough to play hooky with the rebels. I'm not smart enough that people want me on their group projects. And now that I'm at the age where other kids don't have to invite me to their birthday parties, I'm not getting invited anywhere. I think that stuff bothers Mom and Dad. It never used

to bug me. But looking around, I can't help but notice the distance between me and everyone else.

"You new?" I feel a tap on my shoulder. I spin around to look into the most pierced face I've ever seen on a teenager. She's got two rings in her lower lip. She has a spike through her right nostril and another one through her eyebrow. Three studs shine from each ear. Even under layers of heavy eyeliner and black lipstick, her face glitters as she flashes me a pearly grin. "Maybe I can show you around?" she says.

Speechless, I nod back.

"Okay, campers!" The orange-shirt at the front waves. "Follow me to Cabin Eight!"

A few of the kids in line start chanting, "Eight, eight, eight!" I'm not sure I understand the appeal of shouting the same number over and over again. I glance back at the girl behind me, who is rolling her eyes at the whole performance. I grin and join her in a quiet rebellion as we make our way into the campground.