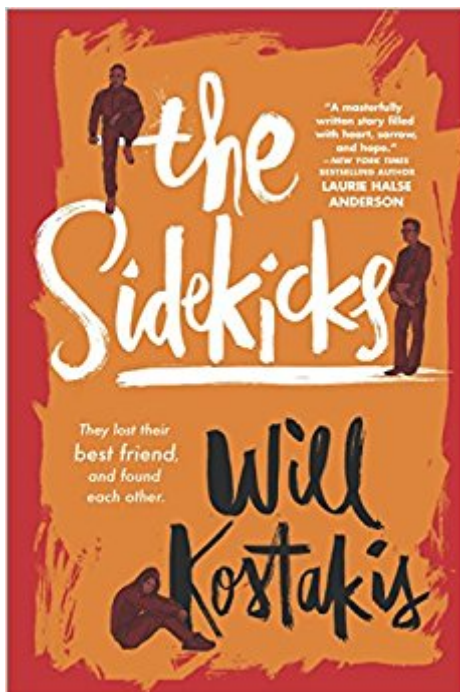


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# The Sidekicks



## Synopsis

Ryan, Harley and Miles are very different people—the swimmer, the rebel and the nerd. All they've ever had in common is Isaac, their shared best friend. When Isaac dies unexpectedly, the three boys must come to terms with their grief and the impact Isaac had on each of their lives. In his absence, Ryan, Harley and Miles discover things about one another they never saw before, and realize there may be more tying them together than just Isaac. In this intricately woven story told in three parts, award-winning Australian author Will Kostakis makes his American debut with a heartwarming, masterfully written novel about grief, self-discovery and the connections that tie us all together.

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## Customer Reviews

"A masterfully written story filled with heart, sorrow, and hope." -New York Times bestselling author Laurie Halse Anderson  
"The Sidekicks is a hypnotic story of friendship, loss, grief, self-discovery, and-most of all-love. Read this book. Trust me. I loved every word and you will too." -Jennifer Niven, New York Times bestselling author of All the Bright Places and Holding Up the Universe  
"Gutsy, ambitious, funny, sad and beautiful." -Melina Marchetta, Printz Award-winning author of Jellicoe Road  
"America, you are about to be introduced to the heartfelt, funny, wrenching and absolutely wonderful work of Will Kostakis. The Sidekicks will make your heart ache." -Sara Farizan, author of If You Could Be Mine

Will Kostakis' first novel, *Loathing Lola*, was released when he was just nineteen, and his second, *The First Third*, won the 2014 Gold Inky Award. It was also shortlisted for the Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year and Australian Prime Minister's Literary awards. As a high school student, Will won Sydney Morning Herald Young Writer of the Year for a collection of short stories. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

"How was your afternoon?" "No one died, so it was a big improvement on my morning." "I find it difficult, at times, to write a review for a book I've really liked. Sometimes it's hard to pin down exactly what it is that made it such a favourite of yours." "all you want to do is put down a whole lot of adjectives in shouty capital letters and be like 'READ THIS NOW'." Jamie Cummins and I started at Barton House the same time, I remember sitting next to him at Year Seven orientation. They must have orientated him one way, and me another, because our paths have hardly intersected since. "This is an underrated gem, people, and it needs more ratings on goodreads, stat. If you need further convincing, then let me say that this book gave me major Jellicoe feels" and you all know that it's one of my favourite books of all time. I don't know what they have in the water Down Under, but Aussie authors seem to knock it out of the park, time and time again. "Can I say it's not as bad as I thought it would be? Mostly, it isn't this huge sadness. It's a constant, sort of, hollowness in my chest. An acknowledgement of an absence." The Sidekicks consists of three novellas, each from the perspective of a different dude's friends of the now-dead Isaac. But they don't repeat exactly the same events from a different perspective which would be incredibly boring but rather fill in the gaps and provide insight into each character's grieving process and personality, while remaining true to the plot thread of the novel. "I'm the gay one now. I don't want them to look at me and see a rainbow, but is it any better that they look at me and see a lie?" The book just manages the perfect combination of dark humour and wit amidst the more serious incident of a student's death indirectly resulting from substance abuse, and the issues facing each of the friends he left behind. It had me cackling at some points. And it also portrayed some real heartfelt moments that punched you right in the feels, without crossing into cheesy or melodramatic territory. "Ah, Harley's world-famous benders. He drinks for one day, but disappears for two because the myth maketh the man." It was the small gestures that really did it; the small ways you show that you care Harley rushing to Ryan's home to warn him when his secret is made known to the whole school, Miles taking steps to ensure that one of Harley's steps to penance comes about, Harley making sure

that Miles gets his deserved inclusion in Isaac's memorial tributes. You're either going to be one of those billionaire media moguls, or a very successful white-collar criminal. I think? I loved Ryan's mom and their relationship, her utter supportiveness. I loved Harley and his blossoming relationship with Jacs. I loved the gentle teasing of Miles' parents. I think I want to become Harley's friend. Mum stifles a laugh. That's a good thing, isn't it? Harley is a Neanderthal in a private school uniform. You were always hard on him. He is more flammable than methylated spirits. He is a pharmacy with a pulse. His grammar is appalling. There were a few things that bugged me "Miles sounded a bit too much like a robot at times, Harley's section was written the way he spoke" so should of instead of should have, which sounds petty but jarred me a bit from the reading experience. But these are minor nuisances compared to the overall brilliance of the novel. Yes, brilliance. It's simple in its own way, a book I'd classify as Quiet YA, but it was cleverly done, with realistic depictions of teenage males, a diverse set of issues, and a few gut-punching moments of heartbreak, hope and humour. This ends now. We're breaking bread. The waiter gets to us before Thommo's had time to peruse. Do you have bread? We have croissants. Thommo blinks. We're breaking croissant. One croissant? the waiter asks. With three plates. They're very small. He mimes the croissant's size. Then bring small plates, Thommo says.

I want to thank the author for this great read. I blew through it in two days and am enjoying discussing it with my son as he reads it. I'd also like to thank the Catholic School that snubbed Will Kostakis causing a bit of an uproar online...without their close minded bigotry I may have never heard of the book or gotten to share it with my boy.

The Sidekicks is the new young adult book from Australian author Will Kostakis. Will is the author of fantastic 2013 book The First Third, which went on to win the prestigious Gold Inky Award in 2014 (in which teen readers chose the shortlist, and selected the winner!). So, Will's third book and first after The First Third (wow, tongue-tied) was a most-anticipated fare and I'm happy to say, it absolutely lives up to high reader-expectation. The book is in fact three linked novellas "from the points of view of

three boys after the tragic death of their mutual friend (and actually, Isaac is the only thing these boys have in common). The book opens with Ryan, *The Swimmer*, and sets up a lodestone scene the next two boys will come back to when they're called into the Principal's office to learn of Isaac's death the night before. From there we see how each of these boys—Ryan, Harley, and Miles—cope with the death of Isaac, and how he fits into each of their lives and maybe, how they can each fit into each other's lives as they embark on this new normal, without the glue that held their tentative friendship together. Ryan refers to himself, with little ego, as; Ryan Patrick Thomson, Olympic hopeful. He's a minor celebrity at his private Catholic school, and is well aware that his currency on the swim team grants him certain leeway, which his mother (as Head of the English Department) is quick to counteract. Ryan also has a boyfriend that nobody except Isaac had any idea about. In a candid discussion with sympathetic teacher Mr Collins, Ryan confronts the idea that in only letting his best friend know the truth about his sexuality, he has compartmentalized his life; "I didn't want to leave my legacy to one person, and risk it being lost. I gave as much of myself to as many people, so that when they put all those pieces together, that would be the mark I left on the world." I will say that of all the boys, Ryan's novella was the most powerful and there may have been a slight dip in the action when his chapter concluded. There was just so much nuance there, particularly when his sexuality was at logger-heads with the casual homophobic rhetoric he was hearing from his fellow students, and even the teachers at his Catholic school—all of which added to his paranoia, and wish not to come out to his friends and family. That being said, once I got over my reader-grief at losing Ryan as narrator, I could really appreciate what each boy's point of view brought to the story and in many ways, how they each helped to build a picture of who Isaac was. Each novella—Ryan, Harley and Miles—takes a different look at grief. For Ryan, it's coming to grips with the loss of the person who knows you best—right down to your biggest secret. In many ways, the book is about a certain degree of selfishness is one's grief, when we look at how the loss of someone affects us, as individuals. This is also partly because Isaac was a bit of an enigma to all his friends, as we see each of them had a very different relationship and connection to him, he played a very unique role/function in each of their lives—as people tend to do in high school, when you're more likely than ever to be narrowed into your most public persona. For *The Rebel* Harley, he and Isaac (or Zac as he insisted on cooler calling him) found mutual ground in partying and getting wasted. With Zac's death, Harley is forced to confront feelings of guilt, and also abandonment—a

feeling he can't help but connect to Zac's departure, since Harley is still combating feelings of rejection since his American-born mother moved back to the States "making Harley feel as though he and his father were merely an uninteresting stop-over in her life. Harley is someone who has tried not to get close to anyone for fear of rejection, but with Zac's death comes the stark realization that he craves affection, from the very people he insists on pushing away "one of whom is his friend, a girl named Jacs, who has her own thoughts on Harley's attempts at keeping his distance. Miles, "The Nerd", triggers a mystery sub-plot in the book when, immediately after learning of Isaac's death, he rushes to the dead boy's locker to retrieve a mystery bag | Miles's chapter plays around with form, and is often laid out like a screenplay. This is partly because of how he and Isaac connected, as both were in a young filmmakers programme at school. But it's also a way for Miles to candidly discuss his emotions that don't come easily, and there's certainly suggestion here that he's somewhere on the spectrum. Something I loved about this book was that, in many ways, Will Kostakis has taken the cliché male characters that sometimes appear in YA books (and pop-culture, or society generally), and made them multi-dimensional, relatable and real. The prosaic "Breakfast Club" labels of The Swimmer, The Rebel, and The Nerd feel very tongue-in-cheek, and what's clever is how Kostakis breaks them down to normality and humanity "takes them beyond the label of "Sidekicks", and makes them the heroes of their own stories. Harley, arguably, is what that marvelous parody Twitter account "Brooding YA Hero" is poking fun at. Miles feels like he could be akin to all those nerd-lite characters John Green loves to write, those who could be built with a John Green Plot Generator. While Ryan reads like the perfect tick-box "Book Boyfriend", outwardly designed for girls to swoon over. But those are what they'd be if broken down to their most basic traits "The Swimmer, The Rebel, and The Nerd "the faces they show the world are not all that they are | and the book is really about how grief confronts them, and frees them. I've often said that I crave contemporary YA books in which male characters are actually allowed to show their emotions, in a plot that's not cloaked by quest or end-of-the-world catastrophe. "The Sidekicks" is exactly why I crave those sorts of stories "in a book that shows the honesty and intimacy of male friendship and complicated friendship groups. A book in which the seemingly typified male characters are so much more than the sum of the parts they're often broken down to, by various pop-culture portrayals and societal expectations. This book "like the multi-layered, and nuanced characters "shows grief to be a prism with many sides. It's devastating and devastatingly funny, and just

makes me excited for whatever Will Kostakis writes next.

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