



## Fair Isn't Life

*Kaje Harper*

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Luke Lafontaine survived the past year by not thinking about the father he lost, the dairy farm he couldn't save from bankruptcy, or his way of life that vanished with the rap of an auctioneer's hammer. Cleaning up city folks' trash at the Minnesota State Fair is just another dead-end job. But at the Fair, surrounded by a celebration of farm life, ambitions he'd given up on and buried deep start to revive. And seeing Mason Bell in the parade—gorgeous, gay, out-of-his-league Mason—stirs other buried dreams.

Mason left his hometown for college in Minneapolis without looking back. Student life is fun, classes are great, gay guys are easy to find, but it's all a bit superficial. He's at the State Fair parade route with his band when he realizes a scruffy maintenance worker is Luke, his secret high school crush. Luke should be safely home working on his dad's farm, not picking up litter. Mason wishes he hadn't fallen out of touch. He's an optimist, though, and it's never too late for second chances. Now he just has to convince Luke.

## Fair Isn't Life Details

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Author : Kaje Harper

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## From Reader Review Fair Isn't Life for online ebook

### Susan says

#### DNF at 50%

I was sure I would love this since it's filled with hurt/comfort, but I had such a hard time liking these guys that I decided to throw in the towel.

I think it was mostly because the conversations between Mason and Luke were a bit strange. Their emotions and what they said didn't feel all that natural to me. Like when Luke would snap at Mason for no apparent reason (that was just one example that comes to mind right now, but there were several other moments that had me scratching my head).

I think I need to stop reading this author, her books have never been a hit for me.

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### Kaje Harper says

Now available at most major e-booksellers and on the Dreamspinner website. I've had fun with some blog posts for this one (Thanks, Dreamspinner, for organizing more of tour than I'm used to.)

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### Dumbledore11214 says

Dear Kaje Harper,

I really enjoyed this novella - and as I hasten to add, often contemporary m/m romance is not my favorite subgenre. Moreover, farming is not really my thing, but I ended up really enjoying learning some stuff about farms that I had no idea about.

As blurb tells you Mason and Luke reconnect two years after they graduated from high school. Mason is an out and proud and marching as part of his school orchestra and Luke is struggling to make ends meet after the beloved farm that he helped his dad run for years went down after and he was forced to let the experienced farm hand go and left his home.

Mason and Luke did not come out to each other in high school, but they were friends and both were secretly crushing on each other. When Mason notices Luke he is curious and worried about him and wants to reconnect so being an optimistic and stubborn person he seeks out Luke and after brief initial reluctance Luke agrees to meet up.

I really liked both young men . Their circumstances may have been drastically different, but it was clear to me almost from the very beginning that their friendship /untold crush was based on something real and it does not take Luke too long to admit that he is indeed gay and interested in continuing meeting Mason and maybe dating him too.

Luke is in a dire financial circumstances when we meet him, and he knows that his cleaning job at the Fair is going to end when the Fair ends, so he knows he has to start looking for something permanent. Meeting with Mason gives him a necessary push - by no means Mason was saving him, or anything like that. Luke is a hard working and stubborn soul in his own way, but Mason helped with something as simple as stable internet connection and use of his laptop for example to send emails related to his job search.

Luke's passion is farm and animals ( especially cows - Anne was awesome :)), he knows a lot about them and that's the kind of work he wants to do and it seemed to me ( as somebody who respects farmers, but knows nothing about farming ) that he was very qualified after helping his father run the farm for several years.

"Luke pulled himself together, squaring his shoulders like he was in 4-H judging class, and looked at the cow. "Nice strong frame, pinbones a bit high, nice feminine head. Good dairy character, deep chest, wide ribs. Decent legs, pasterns kind of long. Good udder, rear attachment a bit narrow. How many lactations?" The man laughed. "I knew it. 4-H kid, right?" "Yes, sir." "So was I. About fifty years before you." He let out a long breath. "Farming's never paid worth a damn, but it's a noble calling. I went on to vet school, made a good living from it, now I'm teaching. But every year, there's less and less kids with a real feel for cattle or pigs or sheep."

I was rooting for Luke to have his dream come true and I rooted for him and Mason to have some kind of the future. I thought the story was well paced, since it was a novella, and the relationship arc seemed to be for the guys to reconnect, to me it made sense that there was no what I call "mandatory break up" plot point. I thought it worked very well.

Since they were both young, I would have been totally fine with the story not having strong HEA, and I was very happy and believed in how it ended.

Grade: B/B+

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### **Ann says**

4.5 Stars

A very dear friend of mine is from Minnesota and we've been talking for years about joining her and her family at the State Fair followed by a week at their cabin. Fair Isn't Life made me call her and talk about actually making it a thing next year. Thanks Kaje!

I can always count on this author giving me characters to read about that have so many dimensions and more realism than I expect. I should expect it though as it's a normal Harper thing, I just get to re-appreciate it every time.

The realism in Fair Isn't Life starts out pretty heartbreakingly actually. Mason spies the farm boy, Luke, he tutored and crushed on when he was in high school picking up trash at the State Fair. Luke should be working the farm that he loved, not picking up trash. Mason is intrigued (and still attracted) and so begins a campaign to reconnect with Luke.

Luke seems like a stereotype on the surface, but as Mason draws him out we get to see that he is so much

more than the dirt poor dairy farmer his peers mocked him for. Growing up, Luke was ridiculed for his perceived lack of smarts and wealth, but he kept his head down and did everything for the farm and the cows that he loved. All the while, he kept his sexuality to himself and the constraint he lives with made me so sad.

Slowly Luke reveals a little bit more and a little bit more and Mason is just a star for him. Luke has never really had Mason level support and while he doesn't necessarily know what to do with it specifically, he knows it's a gift and he's smart enough and humble enough to accept what Mason offers.

Luke has lost the one piece of his identity he could embrace fully. His life as a dairy farmer is over and he's at a complete loss as to who he is meant to be now. His life has narrowed down to living paycheck to paycheck, not necessarily knowing where that paycheck would be coming from. When Mason comes along Luke is finally afforded, for the first time in his life, the opportunity to explore more dimensions of himself and the courage to have hope for his future.

The journey these two went on was absolutely sublime. It was much spicier than I expected and I enjoyed the two of them together muchly. I loved where the author took Luke and his sexuality. It was unexpected in that it didn't fit stereotypes and isn't that the point of a great book? We should all expect more from our MC's and Kaje Harper delivered in spades. The beauty of breaking stereotypes is that the "different" becomes "normalized" and it gives hope that boys like Luke can be more than just a poor dairy farmer and more than just what is expected from him because of how he looks.

The angst in Fair Isn't Life is external from the relationship between Mason and Luke and that was just as it should be. There was plenty of life going on without unnecessary drama between the two of them, which, given their personalities, would have felt manufactured.

I didn't really say much specifically about Mason and that is doing his character a disservice, but just know you will love and appreciate him as much as Luke. Trust me, that's a lot.

I'm going to call my bestie so we can plan a Minnesota vacation.

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*\*\*a copy of this story was provided for an honest review\*\**

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### **Cadiva says**

[Don't worry, it eventually gets there too and the scene is bea

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### **Melanie says**

A Scattered Thoughts and Rogue Words Review

Rating: 4.75 stars out of 5

for the full review, visit <https://wp.me/p220KL-ff2> on 11/16

From that review: "I live in a county that used to be almost entirely agricultural, horse farms, sweeping forests, orchards and fields of corn and grain. Now mostly mini mansions or townhomes/condos as far as you can see depending on where you live in the county. That you had a choice of a farm on your license plate was highly ironic given how fast the farms were being sold and plowed under. But what we weren't seeing was the emotional cost on the other end.

That Kaje Harper now delivers in heart wrenching detail. If for no other reason to buy this book, it's for the portrait of what the loss of a legacy, a family, a person's foundation does to one young man. It will hit you in the gut. And we don't even go through the worst of it with him. That's already been done. By the time we meet Luke Lafontaine, he's survived the loss of his dad to cancer, the sale of his family house and farm, including livestock he himself raised, to auction, and been homeless. No, now he's through that, but just barely."

For all our reviews, check out <http://scatteredthoughtsandroguewords...>

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### **Ami says**

You don't know how excited I was when I saw Kaje Harper's title listed at Dreamspinner Press Upcoming Release section. Harper is one of my favorite authors and it's been a while since I read any stories of her – the last one was back in 2017.

Luke Lafontaine has had a challenging year – losing his father and his family daily farm in amount short of time, and ends up working a dead-end job at Minnesota State Fair. Mason Bell, on the other hand, has been living his life as a college student and an out gay young man, even if the relationships is short and rather meaningless.

They meet again at the State Fair and Mason remembers his crush over Luke in high school – he tutored the guy back then, but Mason didn't even know Luke's sexual preference, so he never really did anything about it. However, now that he finds Luke again – and that he knows Luke is gay – Mason wants that second chance. Despite Luke's reluctance because of his economic condition.

***Fair Isn't Life*** -- how great is the title? – is simply lovely! This is story about two young men, who come from different stage in life, but discover that when they're together, they can overcome the unfairness of life :).

I liked that the 'conflict' was about Luke's financial (and job) situation – I felt that it added a realistic touch to the romance. I really loved how Mason, slowly but convincingly, managed to give Luke a helping hand. Mason also showed Luke that he had something to offer in their relationship. Not everything in life is about money after all, isn't it? Though yes, having them really help :).

It's a hopeful kind of read, which manages to put a satisfactory smile to my face when I finish it.

### **A Guest Review for The Blogger Girls**

*The ARC is provided by the publisher for an exchange of fair and honest review. No high rating is required for any ARC received.*

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### **BWT (Belen) says**

Far sexier than I anticipated (in a good way), and with far more feels and churning emotions throughout, *Fair Isn't Life* was a real pleasure to read.

Both Mason and Luke complement each other so well, which, for me, is a hallmark of Kaje Harper's writing style. She consistently creates believable characters with relatable problems and weaves a storyline that sucks the reader in and keeps them interested throughout.

The only thing I would have liked differently would have been an on page conversation between Mason's vegan sister and Luke. (view spoiler)

Dual third-person POV romance, with medium heat, some hurt/comfort, and a very happy ending.

*Advanced Review Galley copy of Fair Isn't Life provided by Dreamspinner Press in exchange of an honest review.*

*This review has been cross-posted at Gay Book Reviews.*

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### **Pjm12 says**

More and more I read about people struggling with underemployment, health care costs, poverty and making ends meet.

I think it's a social issue that touches a lot of people's lives and is causing real social strife across many countries. It might be the issue of the year.

Luke's circumstances are terrible, unfair and common. To find Mason, to be able to keep marching on, to find strength despite everything makes this a strong read.

Very realistic and also uplifting.

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### **Tess says**

Paused at 30%. Just not capturing my interest.

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### **CrabbyPatty says**

Mason was Luke's math tutor at their Buffalo Minnesota high school and when they meet up again at the

Minnesota State Fair, Mason is intrigued. He imagined Luke still on the family farm helping his father with their dairy herd, but Luke's father is dead, the farm lost to foreclosure and Luke is living in a small apartment with 3 others trying desperately to not return to homelessness.

Kaje does a wonderful job of giving us a young man whose passion is farming and you really understand why Luke yearns for the farm, his connection to the land and the cows he raised and showed at 4-H, and his willingness to give his all for something that has the real possibility of failure despite all his hard work and effort. The plot really draws you in (and you may shed a few tears, like I did, over those sweet bovines) and although the book is less than 150 pages, it feels fully developed and complete.

The relationship between Mason and Luke is nicely complex as Luke embraces Mason's out-and-proud attitude while Mason understands Luke's hesitancy in sharing his truth with his former neighbors and friends. I liked the trust between the two young men and how their relationship develops without needless manufactured angst. This story succeeds on so many fronts, giving us a sweet and compelling romance and a strong sense of what makes Minnesota the greatest state in the union (I may be *just* a bit prejudiced here). 4 strong stars for "Fair Isn't Life."

*I received an ARC from Dreamspinner Press in exchange for an honest review.*

Review posted at Gay Book Reviews - check it out!

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### **Heather K (dentist in my spare time) says**

\*2.5 stars\*

I'm the hugest Kaje Harper fan, but Fair Isn't Life wasn't a stand-out for me.

I found it to be a bit... slow, and maybe with too much of an unlikely pairing. I didn't find that the chemistry grabbed me, and I felt like the story plodded along without much to reel me in.

Sometimes the dialogue felt a bit awkward for me, like it didn't match their ages or their places in life. I think NA is a hard genre to write, and I don't know if the author captured the nuances of their conversations well enough.

Parts of the story were heartfelt and very heart-wrenching, and I felt for these characters. I'd say that I enjoyed it overall, but it wasn't that LOVE like I get from most books from this author.

\*Copy provided in exchange for an honest review\*

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### **Julie Bozza says**

As always, Kaje's characters are appealing, her writing is thoughtful, and the whole thing feels very grounded in both reality and romance. I hope you'll give it a try!

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**Anke says**

More like 4.5 stars

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**Vallie says**

This was all over the place. I never bought into the romance. I absolutely adored Luke and thought he was an amazing character. His pairing with Mason seemed entirely unfitting to me. Mason was a typical 20 year old college student -mind on sex 24/7 and quite immature. He was obviously quite helpful to Luke and empathetic of his situation but Luke was way wiser than his 22 years of age would imply. He'd been through too much loss and just seemed different. I would go as far as to say that despite Luke's high school crush on Mason, the reason why Luke was drawn into Mason now was because he had absolutely no one and craved some human affection.

The ending was a tentative HFN and didn't really inspire much. Seeing this book as Luke's story was fine but the romance was almost in the way.

Didn't enjoy.

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