

Walden Lane

Where the mountains meet the sea ... Where the city blends into the wilderness ... This is Walden Lane. Hike in the sage-green hills, or surf in the cool Pacific—all in the same day. Is Walden Lane perfect? No. But it is home.

Meet the Characters

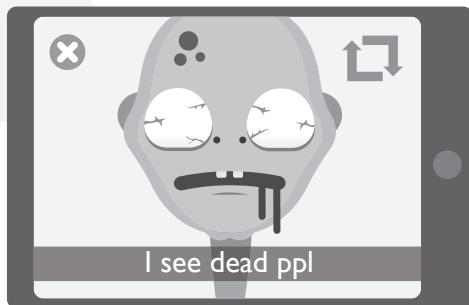


Marlon Moore loves gaming. When he's not in school or riding his bike, he's online. But 14-year-old Marlon is also a loyal friend and a great little brother. He would tell you his best friend is Steve McCain. But his dad is his true BFF.

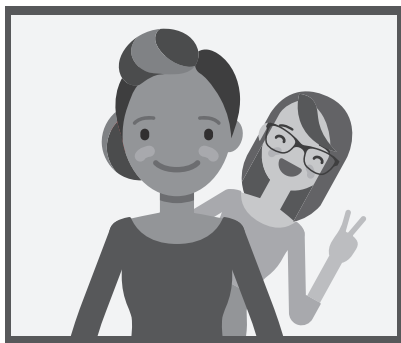


Ashley Moore is an overachiever. She's good at almost everything she tries. Is she a perfectionist? Maybe. But Ashley is 16 and likes to have fun too. And her family doesn't let her accomplishments go to her head.

Cell Phone Zone



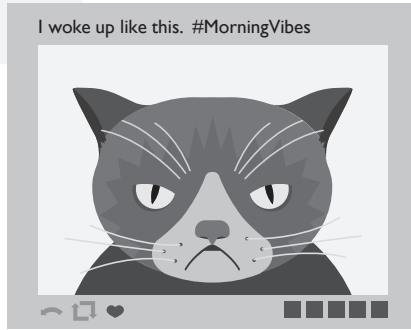
Steve loves zombie photo filters. Sick!



Thuy—killer of all things fun—loves to photobomb strangers.



Fun Facts



Tyler follows Grumpy Cat's Twitter feed.



Principal Williams still uses a flip phone.





Chapter 1

Big Trip

Dude, the Viper looks sick!” Marlon Moore told Steve McCain. Marlon was excited.

The boys had their phones. They were video chatting.

Steve brushed his teeth.

Marlon was already in bed. He had his blanket. It was pulled up to his chest. His room was a mess. It was a mix of video games, clothes, and books. The lights were off.

Sunday nights were always a letdown. Five days of school were ahead.

“X2 looks way more gnarly,” Steve said. Toothpaste foamed in his mouth.

They were talking about the eighth-grade trip. It happened every year. Eighth graders got to go to Magic Mountain. It was an amusement park.

Marlon and Steve were eighth graders. They went to Walden Lane Middle School. Walden Lane was a small city. It was surrounded by nature. There were hills and trails.

The city was like most others. There were beautiful homes in the wealthy parts. People rented when they couldn't afford to own. Some areas were nicer than others.

“Just think,” Marlon said. “Three more weeks! Then we'll be there.”

“I’m riding Colossus three times,” Steve said.

“We have to ride them all,” Marlon said.

The boys weren’t the only ones who were excited. The whole eighth-grade class was thrilled. Even kids who were scared of fast rides were going.

“Marlon!” Mrs. Moore sounded mad. “What are you doing? It’s time for bed.”

“He’d better be sleeping,” his dad said.

“Are you in bed?” his mom asked.

Marlon and Steve made silly faces. They tried not to laugh. Marlon thought his parents were downstairs.

“Um, yes.” Marlon put a pillow over his face. He was cracking up.

“You’d better be,” his mom said. “Or you can forget about that class trip.”

The boys looked at each other. “Later,” Steve said. He signed off.

“I am, Mom,” Marlon said.

He pressed his recording app. Catching his mom nagging would be fun.

“We mean it, Marlon.” His dad’s voice was stern. “Bed. Now.”

“Okay.” Marlon snorted, trying not to laugh. He stopped the voice recording. He wanted to play it. Suddenly there was a knock on his door. “I’m trying to sleep!” he called.

“It’s me,” Ashley said.

She opened the door. Ashley was still dressed. She wore black jeans. Her black T-shirt had a front pocket. Her long black hair was in a ponytail.

“You’re going to get me in trouble.” Marlon pretended to be mad.

“You don’t need my help doing that.” Ashley laughed. “Did you take my Wite-Out?”

“Yeah, but I put it back.”

“Where? Is it on my desk?”

“I think so.” Marlon eyed his phone.

“Maybe it’s downstairs.”

“You’re a dweeb,” Ashley said, sighing.

“Here.” Marlon held up his phone.

“Listen.” It was the recording he’d made of their parents.

For parents, they were cool. The two rarely got angry. Unless they felt their kids did something wrong.

“You’re going to get in trouble,” Ashley said.

“I’m not going to play it for them. Duh.” Marlon squirmed under the covers. “I’m not that lame.”

“Don’t sell yourself short,” Ashley said. She had all the snark of a high school sophomore. “Do not record me. If I catch you ...” She turned with some attitude. Then she walked out.

“You’ll never know,” Marlon said.

Ashley’s hand snaked back inside the room. She flicked on the light switch. Marlon groaned. He would have to get out of bed to turn it off.



Chapter 2

The Theft

It was the next morning. “Play it again,” Steve said.

Marlon cracked up. He pressed a button on his phone. The boys were walking to school. A few other kids walked on the sidewalk too. It was Monday. Students were dragging.

“We mean it, Marlon.” It was his dad’s voice. “Bed. Now.”

The boys laughed.

Marlon hadn’t gone to sleep. He’d

stayed up watching funny videos. Good thing his parents didn't know.

Marlon loved themed T-shirts. Today's was rad. It had an old-school Atari joystick on it.

Steve was in his usual "uniform." He wore a T-shirt and jeans. A flannel shirt hung like a jacket. It was unbuttoned. Steve's family loved to camp. The shirt was from his dad.

"You better watch it," Steve said. "Knowing your luck, they'll hear it."

"What's up?" a voice called.

Marlon and Steve turned. It was Doug Green. He was with Clark Pham. They were coming out of 7-Eleven. Both ate doughnuts.

Walden Center was on the way to school.

It was a basic strip mall. There were food shops, a Game Stop, and a pool store.

“Hey,” Marlon said.

The four of them walked to school together. Marlon and Steve always hung out with Clark and Doug.

Out of all the boys, Clark was the most hip. He wore skinny jeans and tight T-shirts. Doug dressed more like Marlon. He liked wearing T-shirts from his favorite classic rock bands.

“I checked out Viper last night,” Clark said. “It looks epic!”

“I just hope I don’t barf,” Doug said.

“If you do,” Marlon said. “Do it on Thuy Le!”

The boys snickered.

Thuy could be annoying. She hadn’t

wanted to go on the trip. The class should go to a museum, she said. B-O-R-I-N-G!

At school, students talked out front. Some were on their phones. Parents dropped off other kids. The parking lot was always nuts in the morning.

The campus was shaped like an open square. Most classrooms faced each other. Off to the side was the lunch area. Behind the big square was a blacktop. It had basketball and handball courts. Next to that was a large field. It had a dirt track.

Something was different today. There was a police car parked out front. Students stopped to look.

“Why are they here?” Marlon asked.

The boys walked on the campus.

“Play that app again,” Steve said. He grinned. “The guys need to hear it.”

Marlon tapped his phone. His parents started nagging.

Everyone cracked up.

Thuy walked past them. “Why are you guys laughing?” she asked. She always wore big dresses. They made her look frumpy. She looked older too. “Our trip to Magic Mountain is off.”

“What?” the four boys said.

“Somebody stole the money.” Thuy shrugged. She kept walking.

“Is she kidding?” Steve asked.

“I hope so,” Marlon said.