

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.

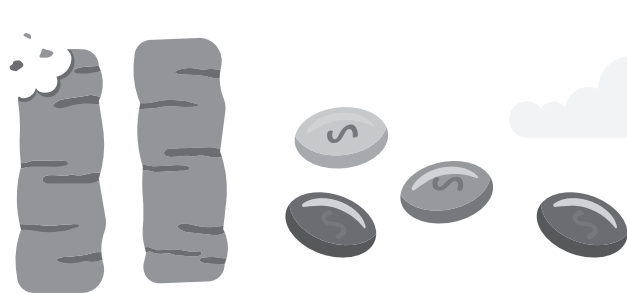


Ashley Moore is an overachiever. She's good at almost everything she tries. Is she a perfectionist? Maybe. But Ashley is 16 and likes to have fun too. And her family doesn't let her accomplishments go to her head.

Trick or Treat



Marlon's fave costume ever: Rainbow Dash from *My Little Pony*. He was obsessed!



Best candy? For Marlon, it's Twix. For Steve, it's Skittles all the way.



Fun Facts



i Libre Soy!



All'alba
Sorgerò

Ashley knows how to sing “Let It Go” in Spanish
and Italian.



To Kayla, Halloween is all about scary: zombies,
severed limbs, oozing blood. Epic!





Chapter 1

Tricked

I'm almost 14," Marlon said. "Why does Ashley have to come? I go out alone all the time."

It was Halloween.

Marlon's parents were sitting in the living room. An old horror movie was on TV. It was in black and white. A candy bowl sat by the front door.

Mr. and Mrs. Moore wore costumes. Marlon's dad was dressed as a clown. He

wore a blue-and-gold bodysuit. His face was painted white. On his nose was a big red circle. Embarrassing!

His mom was dressed in a prison jumpsuit. It was orange. She had worn it to work that day. Marlon's mom was an elementary school teacher. All her students loved her costume.

“Because it's at night,” his mom said. “You know you're not allowed to go out alone.”

“And it's Halloween,” his dad said.

Their eyes were glued to the movie. Both ate candy. Marlon felt like he was talking to two big kids. Who were these people?

Marlon was dressed as Captain America. The costume came with a plastic shield. He looked buff.

“So what?” Marlon said. “I’m going to be with Steve. We won’t get in any trouble.”

Steve McCain was Marlon’s best friend. They always went trick-or-treating together. The boys hung out at the middle school. They were in the eighth grade. Next year they would be in high school.

Steve was going as Iron Man. Marlon had already seen his friend’s costume. The costume had a cool mask.

“Don’t think I’m happy either,” Ashley said. She came down the stairs. “I’ve got a party to go to. What about *my* curfew? It’s at 10. There will be no time for fun. Let’s get this over with.”

It was six o’clock. Ashley only had to be with the boys until eight. Marlon wanted to wait until it was darker. But he didn’t want to waste time.

Ashley was dressed as Elsa from *Frozen*. She wore Elsa's sparkly dress. It came with silver slippers. Her wavy black hair was now in one big braid.

"See?" Marlon said. "Ashley's not going to be any fun. She just wants to get to her party."

"Marlon," his dad said. "You're leaving now. You'll have plenty of time."

"Yeah," Ashley said. "They're making me walk you guys for two hours."

"Two hours?" Marlon whined.

Mrs. Moore looked up from the movie. "The neighborhood's not that big, honey."

The Moores lived in a city called Walden Lane. The small city was like many others. It was made up of homes, apartments, and businesses. Walden Lane was surrounded

by beautiful hills. There were places to hike. Some parts of town were nice. Other parts were rundown.

Marlon's parents were right. The neighborhood wasn't big. Still, he loved Halloween. He didn't want to feel rushed. He had a big goal. It was to get as much candy as possible.

"Do you want one of us to take you?" his dad asked, smiling.

"Yeah, little brother." Ashley was smiling too. "Have Mom or Dad take you."

"No!" Marlon screeched.

Going with Ashley was bad enough. She didn't want to go trick-or-treating. Ashley felt too old for that now.

Big sister or parents? He chose big sister. It was better than going with his

parents. Marlon hadn't trick-or-treated with them in two years. He didn't want people he knew to see him. He'd be the joke of the school. No eighth graders trick-or-treated with their parents!

“Then get your shield, Captain,” Ashley said. “You're wasting time.”

Marlon looked at his parents. They smiled at him and shrugged. He picked up his shield. Then Marlon followed Ashley out the front door.