

## Chapter 1

# BEING KEVIN SANDERS

Kevin Sanders!” people shouted. “I love your videos!”

“Make sure to like and comment,” Kevin said. He pushed his hair back and smiled.

Fans held up their phones. He posed for photos.

“Let’s go,” a man said. He was Kevin’s helper. Right now he had one job. Get the star through the crowd.

A path had been roped off. But some fans ducked under it.

“Back!” the man yelled.

“Pipeline,” Kevin called. “Come to the booth.” He held up his phone. Fans cheered.

Hollywood had film stars. These were online stars. There were dancers and singers. Some wrote books. Others were bloggers. Many stars gave tips. They were about fashion and makeup.

Their posts got millions of views. It was how regular people got famous. There was a name for it. Instafamous.

Take Kevin. He did pranks. Millions loved his YouTube videos. When he wasn't posting, he was at events. Meeting fans was important.

Today he was at See It Live. It was held once a year in LA. Tickets sold out in minutes. If you were here, you'd made it.

Fans were a big part. But it was also about business. Agents handled that. They made deals. Companies paid stars to use their products. That was how Kevin teamed up with Pipeline Clothing.

They saw a video he made. He was surfing with a shark. Then the video went viral. The company wanted a deal. Three million people followed Kevin on Instagram. One photo of him sold tons of stuff. In this case, it was surf gear.

Kevin made money too. He got four grand to be here. His agent set it up. Ron Simon made great deals. Today the deal was simple. Wear the clothes and pose for selfies.

"Kevin Sanders!" a woman called out. She was a reporter. "What are you working on?"

"Aww. You know I can't say." He gave her a sly grin. "It'll ruin the surprise."

He was working on a show for YouTube. It was called "I Am Kevin Sanders."

“Come on, Kev,” she said. “Tell us.”

“Yeah, Kev,” a voice said. “We want to know.”

It was Chase Rogers. He was also an online star. Sometimes the two teamed up for pranks.

“What’s up?” Kevin said.

“Your shirt,” Chase said.

“What about it?”

“It’s Pipeline’s. They hired me! You’re a cheap fake!”

“Don’t make me hurt you,” Kevin said. He gave Chase a push. Suddenly the crowd rushed in. They started to pull the guys apart. But the two had stepped aside. People hadn’t seen them. Now the crowd turned on each other.

Kevin headed for the exit. At the door, he looked back. A fight had broken out. Chase was close behind. They each ran to a limo and got in. Kevin called Chase.

“That was epic!” Kevin said.

“Dude!” Chase said. “Check out YouTube. This thing is blowing up! The traffic’s on fire!”

“Doesn’t take much, does it?”

“Are you kidding? We started a riot.”

## Chapter 2

# COMMITTED

The limo stopped at Kevin's house. He lived with his parents in LA. Some called his family rich.

"Hi," Kevin said when he walked in. His parents were online working. Kevin's career was a full-time job. The money he made had paid for their home.

"You guys are online more than me."

His dad didn't look up. "That prank with Chase? Over one million views."

"I know," Kevin said. "That's up from a minute ago."

"Checking Instagram now," his mom said. "You have more followers."

"Cool," Kevin said. He loved his parents. And they had to love him. He was their son. But at times he wondered. Was it about love? Or was it the money?

“Good news,” Kevin’s dad said. “You’re booked for the month. Want to hear the schedule?”

*Do I have a choice?*

“Be Seen photo shoot. True Stars meet and greet. The Show List event in—”

“Hold on,” Kevin said. “I have a test in two weeks. When will I study?”

“Dad spoke to your teacher,” Kevin’s mom said. “You can make it up.”

Kevin looked at his dad. “Are you sure it was the right teacher? Mr. Fail-’Em-All Foster?”

“Yep. His son follows you. He thinks you’re ... How did he put it? Oh yeah. Da bomb.”

His mom looked up. “You know the deal. Five days for school. Weekends are for work. No rest for the famous.”

Sometimes Kevin felt like he was being pranked. He just wanted to be normal. But what was normal?

“See you later,” he said. Kevin stood at the door, watching them. They never looked up.

Kevin’s phone buzzed. It was a text from his girlfriend.

“Don’t forget. We’re meeting at the mall.”

Being around Kyla made Kevin feel calm. Was that how normal felt? Whatever it was, it worked.

The two had met when they were juniors. Kevin couldn’t help but notice her. She was so tall. Later he

found out she played basketball. He started going to the games.

Finally Kevin asked her out. They talked the whole time. He liked how smart she was. It was good to be with someone on his level. But Kyla wasn't his type. Not because she was smart. Because of her online status.

Kyla had only a small following. It wasn't something she worked at. But somehow they stayed together. Deep down he knew the reason. He needed an escape. It's what kept him from going insane.

Now they walked through the mall holding hands.

"Sorry I wasn't at See It Live," Kyla said. "I know it was a big deal for you."

"You could've come," he said. "There was room in my limo."

"Ha-ha." She leaned over and nudged him. "Not all of us can be stars. Some of us have to study."

"What can I say? I rule. You could be a star too. You just need millions of followers. Like me."

"I guess. But why? It's not real."

"That reminds me of Bryan," Kevin said.

Bryan Lowe and Kevin used to be partners. They had a channel on YouTube. It was called "Lowe and Lower." They did basic pranks, like wear masks and scare people. Or they'd make gross noises in public places. Anything to get a reaction.

The two also had a show. It was called “Pop-up Pranks.” They’d go random places and give classes. Once it was karate. Another time yoga. It wasn’t real. But they always got laughs.

Then it all changed. Kevin didn’t know it at the time. He found out later. Bryan had been feeling stress. It wasn’t the pranks. It was Instagram. Keeping up with it was a lot of work. But Bryan pushed himself harder.

It became an endless loop. Taking photos and editing them. At night, he’d scroll his feed rather than sleep. He’d stay up tracking likes and comments. He’d even check the number of double taps. That showed his fans really loved him.

Finally it got to be too much. Bryan got sick. It was some kind of meltdown. His mom had a word for it. *Agoraphobia*. It was a fear of going places.

Kevin didn’t know how to help. So he stayed away. A year had gone by since then.

## Chapter 3

# BORED

Huge sneaker deal in the works!” It was a text from Kevin’s agent.

“Keep them coming,” Kevin texted back.

“Put the phone away!” Mr. Harris yelled. He was the sub for English. Kids called him Heartless Harris behind his back. The man was not nice.

“Lighten up,” Kevin said. “I’m doing work.” It was true. It just wasn’t schoolwork.

Mr. Harris pointed at Kevin’s phone. “I’ll take it.”

“Relax,” Kevin said. He put the phone into his pocket.

“Okay, class,” the teacher said. “You have the assignment. Ms. Ward wants it done by Friday.”

The class had been reading a book. It was called *The Catcher in the Rye*. Today students were working in groups. They had to define words they didn’t know.



Kevin typed *blasé* into the search box. *Having no interest in something*. So sad but so true.

Being a video star helped at times like this. Kevin knew how to act. Now he sat up straight. He nodded as kids talked.

Mr. Harris seemed to buy it. He turned to face the board. Kevin took out his phone. He'd have to text fast. At one point, he looked up. Harris had reached behind his back.

Something made Kevin start filming. Harris slid his hand into his back pocket. Then he took it out. This was too good. Kevin did a quick edit.

After class, he uploaded the video. One of his friends came up. It was Adam. "Check this out," Kevin said.

The video was on Instagram. Harris moved his hand up and down. It looked like he was scratching his rear-end. There was a caption with it. "What is this sub teaching us? #nobuttstaboutit." It was already trending.

"This is killer, dude!" Adam said. "You got his good side."

Nick walked up to them. He was another friend of Kevin's. "I'm dying here," he said. "This is a Paulson High first."

Adam looked at Nick. "Kev doesn't care about that. He's already famous. Right, Kev?"

Kevin nodded as he tapped the view count. It was up from a second ago.

“Kev does it like a boss,” Adam said. “He’s making mad bank.”

These kids hadn’t always hung out with Kevin. In fact, they didn’t know each other at first. They had little in common. Adam wore tank tops and flip-flops, even in winter. And Nick was a rich kid into designer labels.

Kevin had been taking drama. He wasn’t into social media then. It was his acting teacher who brought it up. “If you want to act, you need to be online.” Kevin took the advice.

Soon he had a small following. It was mostly kids at school. Some started hanging around Kevin. Adam and Nick were two of them. They thought he was cool. Kevin had a different idea. He thought they wanted a piece of the fame.

That gave him an idea. He reached out on Instagram. “Follow me @KevinSanders. I’ll follow you back.” It worked. Kevin’s attention was worth something.

After that he posted every day. It would be a picture of him. Or it was something he liked. He spent time on the photos. They had to be perfect. He used filters to make them pop. His captions were clever. Then his numbers jumped.