

Vandalism



EVAN JACOBS

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.

What's Perfect?



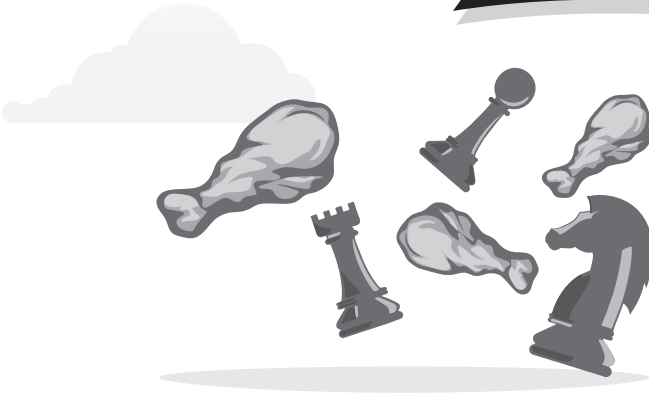
Marlon's idea of perfect? No. Homework. Ever!



Mrs. Moore could watch the Food Network 24/7.



Fun Facts



Alex Torres just wants to eat hot wings and play chess with his grandfather.



To Kayla, perfection is a Broadway show with a backstage pass.





Chapter 1

Vandalized

I'm so glad the race is over. So much is going on. I've got tests," Ashley said. "Papers are due. Now I can focus."

"You ruled the track meet," Kayla said. "Our team is number one."

Ashley Moore was with her best friend, Kayla Flores. They walked into Walden Lane High School. Students were everywhere. Some stood around talking. Many looked at their phones. A few worked on laptops.

Both girls held their phones. They checked social media. Kayla filmed a story. Ashley liked a few images of her race. It didn't stop them from chatting.

Ashley loved school. She belonged to many clubs. Model United Nations. Key Club. She wanted to help the community. Her dream job was to be a lawyer.

Kayla was a drama geek. She loved movies. Her passion was theater. NYU was her college pick. She would major in drama.

The winter morning was cool. Both girls wore long sweaters.

Ashley wore black jeans and brown boots. She'd finally mastered a blowout. Her black hair was smooth.

Kayla wore jeans and sneakers. Gloves kept her hands warm. Her hair was pulled back. On her head was a gray beanie.

“Brrr,” Kayla said. “I hate this time of year.”

Neither girl looked up. Their eyes were glued to their screens. Many students did the same. Nobody ever seemed to wipe out.

“Me too,” Ashley said, sighing. “It’s cold. Worse, it’s test season. I’ve got ’em in every class. Calculus. AP Chemistry. AP English . . .” Her voice trailed off. She didn’t want to think about it. It was too much.

“Well,” Kayla started. “I’ve got tests in math, chemistry, and English too. Oh yeah, I am also in *The Crucible*. It’s running for two weeks.”

The Crucible was the biggest play of the season. It was about the Salem witch trials. The trials took place in the late 1600s. Arthur Miller had written it in the 1950s.

Kayla was one of the leads. She always

got the best parts. Everybody knew she was talented.

“Ugh,” Ashley said.

“Ugh to you too,” Kayla said.

Kayla smiled. The girls never fought. They had been best friends for a long time. Honesty first was their motto. Never once had they argued.

There was a commotion.

The girls looked up from their phones. Students blocked the path. They crowded around the science building.

“What’s this about?” Kayla asked.

The girls moved in closer. What was going on? It didn’t take them long to find out.

The school had been vandalized.

Graffiti covered a wall. The scribble was black and gold. There were no words.

But there was an image. It looked like a vase. Two windows were painted over. The glass was black.

“Wow!” Kayla said. “This is bad vandalism.”

“Like there’s good vandalism?” Ashley couldn’t look away.

“Some graffiti has meaning.” Kayla kept staring too. “What does this mean? Can you make it out?”

The bell rang.

Everybody started walking to class.

Ashley couldn’t look away. She was shook. School was supposed to be safe. “I don’t get it. Why?” she asked out loud.



Chapter 2

Alex

“Are you okay?” Alex Torres asked.

Alex was with Ashley. They sat in the chemistry classroom. He quizzed her on chemical compounds.

Alex was a senior. At school, he was a big shot. He was senior class president. Like Ashley, he was in many clubs. She’d met him last year. Both were on the student council.

For fun, Alex took college prep classes. He’d already been accepted at USC. At

this point, he'd made it. The university had given him a scholarship.

Alex was a teacher's aide in chemistry. Science was one of his best subjects. But he was good at everything.

"Yeah," Ashley lied.

"You seem distracted today," he said, smiling.

"I'm okay." She tried to smile.

She was still thinking about the vandalism. Ashley loved Walden Lane. It was a nice city. Sure, there were dull strip malls. But at the same time, there was open space. Nature made it seem less urban. It was the best of both worlds.

"Your meh face says something else. Come on, Ashley. What's up?"

The two had always gotten along. They didn't have deep talks. He was not like

Kayla, who was a soul sister. Still, they were cool. They always made each other laugh.

“The spray paint,” she said. “It bums me out.”

“Did you do it?” he asked. He looked serious.

“No!” she said, laughing. “I think it’s stupid. Like, I understand graffiti as art. It’s a way to express yourself. But to ruin property for no reason? That’s lame.”

“So true,” he said. “I tried to figure it out.”

“Right?” she said. “You can’t even tell what it is. Whoever did it didn’t do a good job. There’s no message.”

“I get why you’re sad,” he said. “But don’t let it ruin your day.”

“We have a nice school. Why would somebody want to wreck it?”

“Well,” he said. “Maybe they were just having fun.”

“That’s a dumb way to have fun.”

“Agreed,” he said. “But we’re mature.” He stared at Ashley. Then he started to grin. “We’re classy,” he continued. His voice deepened. “We’re bougie.”

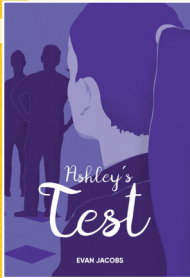
Ashley cracked up. She looked around. Was she too loud? Students were studying.

“Look ...” Alex stopped smiling. “It’s not a big deal. Whoever did it won’t do it again. At least not here.”

“You think so? I hope you’re right.”

“The school’s going to fix it. It will be like it never happened.”

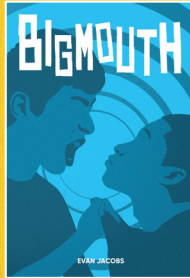
Maybe Alex was right. In a few days, the graffiti would be gone. The science building would be clean. The glass would be cleaned.



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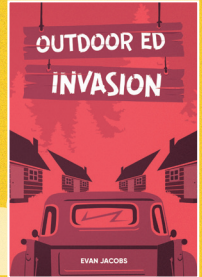
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Vandalism

Ashley is shocked when the high school gets tagged. She asks for volunteers to fix the vandalism. The senior class president is behind her 100 percent. But when she finds some damaging evidence, Ashley is shook.



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