

HIKE

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



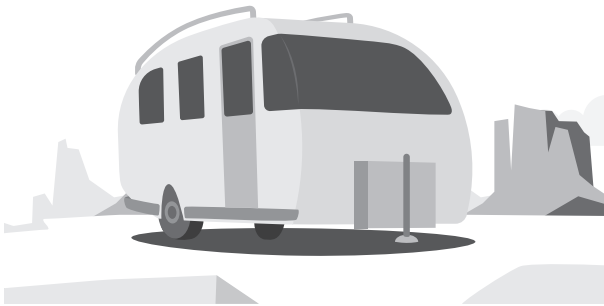
Marlon Moore loves gaming. When he's not in school or riding his bike, he's online. But 14-year-old Marlon is also a loyal friend and a great little brother. He would tell you his best friend is Steve McCain. But his dad is his true BFF.

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.

Camping or Glamping?



Steve just needs his pack and a map to tackle the John Muir Trail.



What is Mr. Moore's idea of camping? A vintage Airstream parked on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon.



Fun Facts



Alice Hoyt dreams of the Kalalau Campground in Kauai—
at the end of an 11-mile trail!



Mr. McCain secretly liked the hotel spa package his
wife made him buy for their anniversary.





Chapter 1

The Trip

Are we there yet?” Marlon Moore asked. He didn’t look up. His fingers tapped on a screen. Marlon was playing *Clan Castles: Unbound*.

Steve McCain, Marlon’s best friend, sat next to him. Steve’s dad was driving. Marlon’s dad sat in the passenger seat. The boys were in the back.

The new *Clan Castles* game was fun. It was a strategy game. Players built their own villages. Each village went to war.

The guys were going camping. The

pickup truck was full. There were sleeping bags and a big tent. They had food and water for three days.

The camping site was in Dry Oak. It was two hours from Walden Lane.

There was camping in the hills around Walden Lane too. But it was more like glamping. Dry Oak was in the mountains. There were small shops and restaurants in town. Homes were far apart. For Marlon, it was like going to Mars.

“Dude,” Steve said. He looked at Marlon’s phone. “You’re using too many coins.”

“No I’m not.”

“Isn’t this great?” Mr. Moore asked. “We take our boys camping. Try to connect with nature. But they can’t even look out

the window. Their eyeballs are stuck on their phones.”

“I blame the cell phone companies. There are cell towers everywhere,” Steve’s dad said. “Even here. We’re in the middle of nowhere.”

“Cell phones?” Steve asked. “Do people even call phones that anymore?” He rolled his eyes.

The two dads laughed.

Steve looked like his father. The two had blond hair. They were both tall.

Marlon looked a lot like his dad. The two had black hair. Everyone noticed their dimples when they smiled.

The four guys wore jeans and T-shirts. Three also wore jackets. Winter was almost over. But it was cold up in the mountains.

Marlon had packed his jacket away. He never got cold.

Marlon's dad was an urban planner. He worked for the city of Walden Lane. Steve's dad was an electrician. Sometimes the two dads worked together.

"You are going to love the camp," Mr. McCain said. "Dry Oak is like Old Creek. Remember that place, Steve?"

"Yeah," Steve said. "It was awesome."

"Hey!" Marlon cried. "No!"

"What happened?" Mr. Moore asked.

Marlon held up his phone. He looked at his father. "It says my signal is bad. I can't play the new game."

Steve and his dad cracked up.

"Marlon," Mr. Moore said. "You're in the mountains. Cell service isn't going to be perfect."

“Why not?” Marlon couldn’t believe it. “You said I would get a signal here. This is like living in the Middle Ages.”

“It would be rad to live back then,” Steve said. “Knights. Castles. Jousting. It would be cool.” He put his phone away.

“You know, Marlon?” Mr. McCain said. “Families live up here.”

“They *live* here?” Marlon gulped. “Without good internet?”

“Yeah.” Mr. Moore smiled. “Like the Downing family.”

“The Downing family?” Steve asked. “Do they live in Dry Oak?”

Mr. Moore and Mr. McCain shared a look. They were joking. The boys didn’t see it. This was a prank.

“They live in Dry Oak,” Mr. McCain said. “It’s a small house in the woods.”

“There’s no running water. It comes from a pump. The pump is behind the house. There’s no electricity either,” Mr. Moore said.

“Sounds like a nightmare,” Marlon said.

“Nobody goes too close to the house,” Mr. Moore said. “People who got too close were never seen again.”

“The family has lived there since the 1920s,” Mr. McCain said. “They still live there. At least that’s the story.”

“Why don’t the police go there?” Steve asked.

“Oh, they’ve tried,” Mr. Moore said. “Those officers never came back either.”

“This is a joke,” Marlon said. He eyed his phone. His fingers were crossed that he could get texts. “There’s no way this is real.”

The dads smiled.

“Well, this trip will be good for you boys,” Mr. McCain said. “You can live without tech for a few days. It will be okay.”

“I know *I* can.” Steve looked out the window. “I love camping.”

Marlon rolled his eyes. “You always go camping,” he said. “REI is your fave store. I don’t think camping is for me.”

“Dude, relax,” Steve said. “You’ll have fun.”

Sure, Marlon could live without his phone. Probably he could live without any tech—for a while. But why would he want to?



Chapter 2

The Great Outdoors

The camping spot was in the middle of nowhere. It was surrounded by forest. A river was a quarter mile away.

Steve, his dad, and Mr. Moore set up the tent. Marlon watched. He took out his phone. No service. He shook it. Then he checked again. Nothing. This was boring.

“Marlon,” Mr. McCain asked. He held out a hammer. “You want to put in the last stake?”

“Sure,” Marlon said. He took the hammer.

Everyone else had done it. Now it was his turn. Hit the stake with force. Drive it into the ground. How hard could it be? Marlon had never used a hammer. But he “knew” how.

Whack!

The stake barely budged. Marlon had to get it into the ground.

Whack!

Whack!

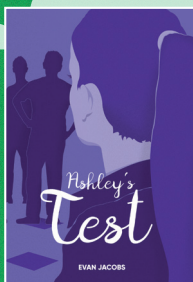
The stake moved a little.

“Want me to try?” Steve asked.

“No,” Marlon said. He was frustrated.

Of course, Steve could do it. Then Marlon would be humiliated.

“You really have to hit it,” Mr. Moore said. “Hard. Use some muscle.”



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HIKE

Marlon does not like camping. No internet. No gaming. Boring! But he has no choice. Steve's dad has organized a camping trip. On their first night, Marlon convinces Steve to go on a night hike. What could happen?



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