



THE NEW KID

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.

Let's Go Shopping!



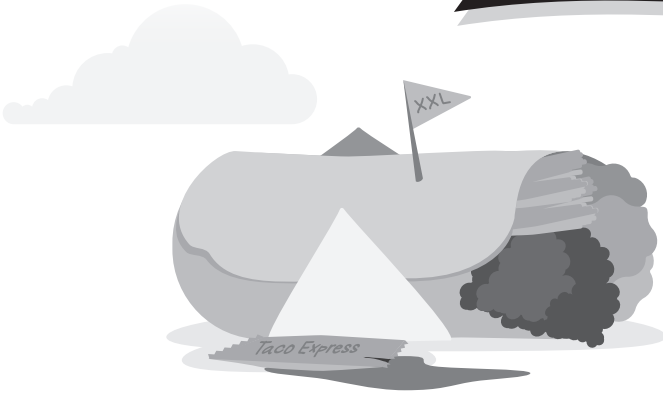
Of course Ashley's favorite mall store is Book Barn.



Marlon could spend hours in WowTech and never once think about his next meal.



Fun Facts



Robert loves mall food, especially the XXL burrito at Taco Express.



Principal Williams has not been to a mall in 10 years.





Chapter 1

The Buddy Program

Monday morning was off to a bad start. Marlon Moore had been called to the principal's office. It was only first period!

He hadn't done anything. What was going on?

Marlon had been sitting in English class. Mrs. Egan had just assigned some reading.

The classroom phone rang. Mrs. Egan answered it. Her eyes moved to Marlon.

It happened just like that. He was told to go see Principal Williams.

The school's office was quiet. Marlon sat waiting. He tapped his tablet. The camera app popped up. Marlon used the camera as a mirror. He wanted to look good for the principal.

Was he in trouble? If he looked presentable, it might help.

His short hair looked nice. He had no dirt on his face. Marlon smiled. His dimples showed. Marlon's mom said he had cute dimples.

An office door opened.

Principal Williams stood there. She wore her usual. Black pants. White blouse.

“Come in, Marlon,” she said.

Marlon stood up.

Principal Williams smiled.

Maybe things would be okay.



“You’re in the school buddy program,” Principal Williams said. She leaned against her desk.

The principal’s office was filled with books. There were file cabinets. On the walls were her college degrees. Her desk was covered with papers. Pictures of her family were behind her.

“Do me a favor?” she said. “Make sure Robert feels at home. That is a buddy’s job.”

The principal was talking about Robert Miranda. He was a new student at Walden Lane Middle School.

Walden Lane was a great place to live. The city had many parks. There were

beautiful hiking trails. Like any city, it had its problems too.

“Okay,” Marlon said.

Marlon was a school buddy. School buddies were students that helped others. It was a new program. Marlon liked to help. He had convinced his friends to join. Many students wanted to be buddies. The program was cool.

“Now, Marlon,” the principal said. “Robert just moved here. He’s from East Downs. Walden Lane is a different world. Do your best to help him adjust. Show him what a model student looks like.”

East Downs was about an hour away. It was a big city. Walden Lane was small in comparison. East Downs had skyscrapers. It was always on the news. There was a lot of crime.

“I will,” Marlon said. “He’s going to love it here.”



Marlon was with his friends. Steve McCain. Clark Pham. And Doug Greene. The boys walked around the school. It was snack time.

Robert walked with them. He didn’t talk. Maybe he was shy.

“This is the cafeteria,” Marlon said. “The food’s pretty good.”

“No way!” Clark said. “The food is gross.”

Steve and Doug cracked up. Robert smiled.

“Robert,” Doug said. “Do you play *Zeke’s Revenge*?”

Doug took out his phone. He tapped the screen. It lit up with bright colors.

Zeke’s Revenge was a new game. It was

about a kid named Zeke. He had been lost in space. Now he was flying home. Zeke had to zap enemies along the way.

“I don’t own a phone,” Robert said. He sounded nervous. “I’ve played it on my dad’s, though.”

“You’re lucky,” Steve said. “Phones are a time suck. I don’t use mine much. I’d rather talk to people.”

“Yeah,” Robert agreed. He nodded.

“It’s a pretty cool game,” Marlon said.

“I’m at level 75,” Robert said.

“Level 75?” Doug couldn’t believe it. “That’s amazing.”

“Wow!” Clark said. “None of us have gotten past level 26.”

“It’s easy.” Robert held out his hand. “Can I use your phone?”

“Sure,” Doug said.

Marlon felt good. Robert was cool with his friends.

“Here’s what you do. Fly to the moon,” Robert said. “And crash into it. Instant death, right? But you won’t die. That move will take you to level 75.”

“That rocks!” Clark said.

“How did you figure that out?” Marlon asked.

“YouTube.” Robert shrugged. “I just typed in ‘Zeke hacks.’ Someone else figured it out.”



Chapter 2

The First Sign

Are you sure it's okay? Your parents won't mind driving me home?" Robert asked.

School was over. Marlon, Steve, and Robert decided to hang out. They were going to play video games at Marlon's house.

"No problem," Marlon said. "It'll be fine. My mom comes home around four."

Marlon's mom was an elementary school teacher. She taught third grade.

His dad was an urban planner. He

worked for the city. His projects changed all the time. One week he was modernizing an old building. The next week he was improving a city park.

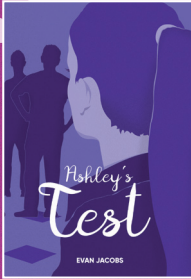
“Um ... okay.” Robert sounded uneasy.

Robert lived on the south side. That part of Walden Lane was rundown. There was a lot of graffiti. Still, it was much nicer than East Downs.

Marlon wondered if Robert was embarrassed. Parkhurst was rough. It was an old apartment complex.

The boys walked into 7-Eleven. The store was in Walden Center. Marlon and Steve got drinks. Marlon got soda. Steve got flavored water.

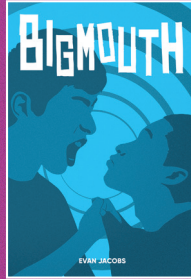
“This is so good,” Steve said. He held up his drink. It was raspberry flavored. “There’s no sugar.”



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Marlon is a school buddy. The job is a big responsibility. Principal Williams has asked him to show the new kid around. But fun turns into drama when Robert shoplifts, not once but twice. Can Marlon turn him around?



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