



Vegan, Virgin, Valentine

Carolyn Mackler

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"Warmth and humor suffuse the story of Mara's senior-year transformation from tense, rigid perfectionist to relaxed, centered graduate. . . . Funny and optimistic." *Kirkus Reviews*

Mara Valentine is in control. She's a straight-A senior, a vegan, and her parents' pride and joy. She's neck-and-neck with her womanizing ex-boyfriend for number-one class ranking and plans to kick his salutatorian butt on her way out the door to Yale. Mara has her remaining months in Brockport all planned out, but the plan does not include having V, her slutty, pot-smoking, sixteen-year-old niece - yes, niece - come to live with her family. Nor does it involve lusting after her boss or dreaming about grilled cheese sandwiches every night. What does a control freak like Mara do when things start spinning wildly out of control? With insight, authenticity, and a healthy dose of humor, Carolyn Mackler creates an evolving Type A heroine that every reader will recognize - and root for.

Vegan, Virgin, Valentine Details

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From Reader Review Vegan, Virgin, Valentine for online ebook

Karina Perales says

In Vegan Virgin Valentine, Mara Valentine has a somewhat perfect life. She's an honors student, going to Yale, a perfect daughter and planning on entering Yale as a second year student. But then comes her niece Vivienne Vail Valentine or V and she comes and changes her life. At first Mara hates V for fooling around with her ex-boyfriend Travis Hart, smoking behind her parents back and giving herself a bad reputation at school. But as the book goes on you can see how V changes Mara's life also for the better. Mara realizes she doesn't have to be this perfect daughter. As Mara starts lying to her parents and taking risks like dating her boss James who is 22 and not really the type of guy she'd usually date or deciding to drop a class. As things change with Mara, V starts changing for the better too. V is now living up to her potential. She's now into school activities like musicals which she's the star in and getting her grades up by SAT classes. V and Mara have changed their lives for the better and have even become closer. I really liked this book and I actually think I'm most like Mara. I'm constantly trying to impress my parents and make them proud. I think I've learned a lot from this book.

Jacob Proffitt says

Another book about an overachiever with the path of her life planned out, merely coasting on her way to Yale. Like Vanessa in *Plan B*, Mara's life is upset by the arrival of a relative who comes to live with her family for the new school year. And like Reed, V is something of a screw-up and rebel. Indeed, these books are very similar; though I think *Plan B* is marginally better for its approach to the romantic (or unromantic) elements of Vanessa's life.

Mara isn't terribly likeable, really. She's engaging enough to read about, don't get me wrong. Her problems are interesting ones and Carolyn Mackler does a good job keeping the pace of events flowing so that I was never tempted to put the book away and move on to the next. But she's judgmental and self-centered and deeply resentful of V's intrusion into her well-ordered world. The book is about her learning to accept others and to figure out what *she* wants in life (as opposed to the expectations of others), so only some of her defects are addressed—i.e. she remains largely self-centered, just more healthily so by the end.

V's character is just *this* side of caricature. She's a bad girl, with bad girl habits, but with an underlying insecurity caused by moving around so much following her flaky mother. Of *course* she has a heart of gold. Duh. You can practically chart her character path from there. Yes, she blossoms under the love she receives from Vanessa's parents. Yes, she reforms (or is on the way to reformation) during the course of the novel. Yes, she and Mara develop respect, and eventually honest love, for each other. If the story were about V, we'd have a serious problem. As it is, there's enough heart, enough warmth, in her character to let me get over the stereotype she plays in this book and I was, quite frankly, relieved that she didn't turn darker and end up betraying Mara or hurting Mara's parents. Someone blossoming in a loving environment they've never had the chance to receive before isn't inherently unrealistic and Mackler does a good job making her character real-enough to remain believable.

The most interesting part of the book is Mara's romance with James—the 22 year-old college drop-out (can you have dropped out if you never applied?) who owns the successful coffee shop where Mara works. James is that guy with intelligence who decided to apply himself to business early rather than worry about more academic learning. As such, he's an acceptable, though unexpected, match for Mara and their relationship is an interesting one. Mara is naïve and inexperienced, as the book's title suggests, and James is both aware of

that and man enough to respect Mara's uncertainty and concerns. He's also key to Mara exploring what it is that she wants and I liked him for his steady good sense and refusal to become just another voice telling her what she should do.

So yeah, the book is a little formulaic. There's just enough substance there to like it, though, so it earned the three stars I'm giving it.

Rebecca says

Ah, YA! So few and far between you are, but I am currently on that page of my list, so I am finding more than usual. This was your typical, type-A personality high school senior who is headed off to Princeton (why not Harvard?) and will enter as a second year, as she has enough AP whateverness to do that. Oy. Someone needs to write a book on a NORMAL person. After reading this book, I totally wanted to write a book on my senior year, which while accomplished nothing, was awesome. ANYWAY. The girl's niece (who is a year younger than her) comes to live with her and her parents and proceeds to piss the girl off. But not really! They start to get along really fast. So pointless. The girl is a vegan so she can have some control in her life. After she broke up with her boyfriend the year before (because she wouldn't have sex with him) she wanted something to fill the void, so she became a vegan. DUMBEST REASON EVER. And in the book, she starts dating her MUCH older boss at the coffee house she works at. She is 17 and he is 22. Seriously, creepy. But whatever. And now because of this, she doesn't want to go to some pre-college program at John Hops. SO LAME! Agh, I hate shit like this. I hate when smart people do stupid things. LAME.

Grade: C-

Kate says

This was okay. The whole concept of the niece who is the same age as the aunt going to live together seemed like it would be interesting but it wasn't developed very well. Their relationship in general wasn't developed at all almost. Mara the main character goes from hating her niece V then all of a sudden it seems like they just get along. It kind of seemed dumb the whole novel and while it did hold my interest there wasn't much to it and it wasn't that deep. The ending bothered me as well. She pretty much gets everything she wants yet she still isn't happy. I probably wouldn't recommend it.

Rebecca says

What bothers me:

Mara is SUCH a special snowflake who thinks that she's above everyone else, especially her sister (Aimee) and her niece (V).

"Getting into Yale wasn't a total shocker."

"But I'm convinced that my parents brought me into this world to compensate for my older sister, Aimee, who was eighteen and skidding down a road to nowhere."

"Aimee is now thirty-five and can't stick to one decision about her career, geographic location, or sexual partner."

"Besides, she [V] acquires a new bad habit in every town. In Vermont, she lost her virginity to an eighteen-year-old harmonica player." Losing your virginity is now a bad habit!

"Aimee has always been the Screwup. V, the Unrealized Potential. And me, the Only Hope."

"We do not, I repeat, DO NOT talk about sex, much less orgasms, in the Valentine household."

"I could tell by her smirk that she was thinking I'm a hand-raising, teacher-hugging goody-goody. But I didn't care because I'd already decided she was a class-ditching, chair-in-the-principal's-office-warming deadbeat."

"Not to mention that in the month since our split, he'd transformed into a male slut and was sleeping his way through the sophomore class."

"I've never been sure why James didn't go to college. He's one of the smartest people I've ever met."

"Yeah, I'm a real refrigerator slut," V said. "Take out the "refrigerator" part and you're right on target."

"I knew I was being a bitch, but V had asked for it."

"I hope she has a biiiig case of herpes, too." So just because your EX-boyfriend is dating someone else, you wish that she has an STD...

"I nearly snorted at the mention of 'strong morals' and 'Travis Hart' in the same breath..."

"I tried to distract her by pointing out our favorite Internet mismatch. The beanpole mama's boy and the butternut-squash-shaped mama." Way to make fun of your customers.

"And, besides, V has made this bed for herself- let her toss and turn in it." No. She does not deserve to be made fun of and insulted in such a derogatory way.

"Well, Mom, skanky is a term for a dirty slut who's riddled with sexually transmitted diseases. You know, a girl who'll drop her thong for every guy in school."

"I do not wish a fever and swollen glands on anyone." Yet you wished that a girl would get herpes earlier... Symptoms of herpes includes blisters that break, leaving painful sore taking weeks to heal. You can also have flu-like symptoms (including fever and swollen glands).

"Then I'd tell myself, No, no, I haven't done anything with James, especially not like what V did with Travis. So I'm still innocent, right?"

"Less than a day later, V realized her potential with Travis Hart in the boys' locker room of my high school, which left me with only one hope: that V would get the hell out of my life."

Um, he's your ex. It's not your business.

"How could she say this to me? I have been a freaking ambassador for this high school for nearly four years!"

"I'd always assumed I was brought into this world to give my parents award ceremonies and Yale bumper stickers and everything that Aimee didn't provide them."

"Why can't you control yourself? ...I mean, why do you have to say whatever goes through your head? Why can't you control your emotions?"

1) *"Why don't you leave me alone?" I said... 'I don't like your attitude,' Dr. Hendrick said. 'Well, I don't like your attitude, either,' I said."*

2) *"Will you shut up already?... Didn't you hear me? I don't want to talk right now.' ...I clenched my fists. 'You don't know what my deal is?'"*

3) *"I chucked the remote control at V. She dodged it, so it smacked against the wall and split open."*

4) *"Then I shoved her, much harder than she'd pushed me because she stumbled backward."*

Bridgit says

Vegan Virgin Valentine is a book written by Carolyn Mackler, and its about Mara Valentine, who is a good girl. She gets good grades, shes a strict vegan, and shes running against her womanizing ex-boyfriend for valedictorian. She even got into Yale. Shes all her parents could have ever wanted, and everything was going perfectly.. until she got the news from her parents that her sixteen year old neice, V, was coming to live with her. She wasn't exactly V's biggest fan, and she didn't want her to come and ruin everything for her. Which is basically what she did. Now, Maras incredibly stressed, and it doesn't help that shes falling for her twenty two year old boss, who one of her friends happens to be in love with. Shes even begun to dream about grilled

cheese sandwiches.

I really liked this book, and i would recommend it to anyone.

Steph Su says

Senior Mara Valentine has got the most well-put-together life. She got in early decision to Yale, is chairperson of numerous committees, holds down a steady job at a locally owned coffee shop, and is determined to beat her ex, Travis, in the valedictory race. In short, she's all set on breaking out of Brockport, New York.

However, in the second half of her senior year, Mara's niece (yes, niece), who calls herself V, comes to the school. V is a self-proclaimed slut and stoner. Mara hates her, mostly on principle, but also because she hooks up with Travis on the very first day of school.

But things are changing for Mara and V. V lands a leading role in the school musical, and Mara finds herself falling in love with the coffee shop's owner, James. With both girls shedding their previous masks and carefully carved facades, aunt and niece inevitably grow closer.

While not as impressive as her first two books, VEGAN VIRGIN VALENTINE is nevertheless an entertaining read. The characters lack depth, but Carolyn Mackler has got the teenage language down right.

Liz says

Mara is a strict vegan. She's taking college classes, she has early acceptance to Yale and she's a virgin. Mara thinks her life is going just fine, until her niece V, who is only a year younger than her, moves in and everything changes. V is Mara's total opposite. She's loud, she's rude and having a good time is number one on her priority list. Mara doesn't know how to handle her, and lately she's having trouble concentrating on anything at all. She keeps dreaming about grilled cheese sandwiches, and other things that are off limits. But with the fight to become Valedictorian and to achieve the highest GPA in the school, Mara doesn't have time to sort out her problems. What's a girl to do?

I started reading Vegan Virgin Valentine knowing nothing about it at all. I didn't read any reviews for it, so I had no idea what to expect. I ended up liking it quite a lot. Mara was a character I could relate to; it was easy to understand why she was so stressed out, and I could see that she was struggling to juggle all her classes and extra-curricular activities, as well as the difficulties she was experiencing to stay vegan. I liked how Mara wasn't perfect; she broke out in spots occasionally and said stupid things sometimes, just like other teenagers, and all of this made it feel more realistic and believable to me. I liked the way she was so determined, and how this was both one of her strengths and weaknesses - her determination meant that she felt she always needed to be in control, something that she found progressively harder with each day.

I liked the way V and Mara's friendship developed; they started off as almost-enemies and ended up actually caring about each other. I thought V balanced Mara out a bit, and they were both quite funny characters with their own quirks and flaws. V seemed quite tough on the outside, but was really actually quite understanding underneath.

Though I liked James' character, I wanted to know more about him. He was very sweet and charming, but I

felt like I didn't know much about his character except he was twenty-two and owned a coffee shop. I also felt the same way with his relationship with Mara; I wanted to know why they both liked each other and what made them want to be together. I also thought that Claudia's character could have been explored a little more, though I did like her and thought she was pretty fun.

Another thing I enjoyed was the relationship between Mara and her parents, and how Mara started off not minding all the phone calls and check-ups and ended up bursting out a bunch of secrets she'd been keeping. Mara felt like her parents only had her to make up for her older sister's failures, so I thought it was funny when Mara's mother had a chat with her about this, because it was something Mara really didn't expect. I thought that perhaps her parents would have been a little more shocked by her outburst, but I'm glad that everything worked out in the end. As for Aimee, V's mother and Mara's sister, I definitely understood why V sometimes resented her, and I was pleased that V got to do something *she* enjoyed for a change.

In conclusion, Vegan Virgin Valentine was a quick (could've been longer in my opinion - I wanted to know more!) and entertaining read and I'm very happy I read it. Recommended.

Olivia says

I had read this once before when I was much younger and was very impressed at the age of 13 with Mara Valentine's extreme dedication to her school and upcoming college life. However, reading the book now, I notice how the author glorifies the idea of Mara throwing away her future (dropping out of a prestigious summer college programme, nearly not attending graduation, paying less attention to the last of her schoolwork/finals) just because her boss at the coffee shop she works at has become her boyfriend. Although I see what the author is trying to convey, that life should not be all work and no play and to make time to enjoy yourself instead of becoming a slave to your commitments, I think it is the wrong message to be giving young people, as so many of them are willing to throw opportunities away in favour of boyfriends. 2/5.

Katie G says

I had high hopes for this book. As a straight-A student and a wannabe vegan, I was hoping that I was finally going to find a character that I could relate to. I thought she was going to find a way to have more fun while still being herself. I thought she was going to slowly learn how to relate to the people around her.

Instead, she drops out of her summer college classes to spend more time with her boyfriend, who becomes the most important thing in the world to her. She finally gets the title of valedictorian, and she almost skips graduation and ends up showing up un-showered, without a bra, wearing a tank top and a pair of shorts. I'm sorry, but that is what we've been waiting to see happen? That is the moral of this story? Hey girls – don't spend all your time studying and trying to get somewhere in life. Instead, blow off college and make out with a guy instead.

There were some interesting parts of this novel. The first half of the book sort of dragged for me, but there was a good quarter of the novel where I just wanted to keep reading. I did want her to get with the guy she had a crush on. I just wanted to find a way for her to have both him and the college summer classes. I wanted her to still care about the things she cared about before. I guess I wanted it to be more like My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic. Twilight Sparkle, the main pony in that show, starts out obsessed with books and doesn't care about friendship at all. When she finally does learn that friendship is important, she doesn't

change who she is – she still loves reading and learning. She still freaks out if she doesn't live up to her standards. She just also has friends that she makes time for, and they help her relax without giving up everything that was important to her before.

I guess I'm just sad that Mara couldn't learn that same lesson. Also, I'm pissed that this is the first vegan character I've read about, and she was only a vegan because she wanted something to obsess about. Vegans get enough of a bad rep in life; it was annoying to read about another one who wasn't really into it. All we really saw were the bad parts of being a vegan – namely giving up cheese and having a hard time eating out at small little diners. I'm not saying it was the author's job to educate people to the lives of vegans, but it would have been nice not to cast them in such a bad light.

Also, there wasn't really as much Mara/V interaction as I was hoping for. There's one scene where Mara learns that V stood up for her, and she starts to reconsider her opinion of her niece, but for the most part there's not much in the way of getting to know each other. There are just a few scenes at the end, after they've stopped hating each other. I would have liked to see more of a middle, where they still don't like each other but don't outright hate each other, either.

I was originally going to rate this book higher than I did, but then I waited a few days to write the review, and the parts that jumped out to me were the bad parts. I would not recommend this book to others.

Imani says

I liked it and thought it was cute, however I prefer the author's other novel, *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things*. That one just has something that's really special and I gave 5 stars to. This book was just good. Which isn't a bad thing!

Randi says

It started off okay. I knew what I was getting into what I started it—a typical coming-of-age story that has some of the usual cliches about high school and growing up.

But I found the main character annoying. She has a complete “change in character” towards the end, but I have no idea why...other than the fact that she just can. Which didn't at all fit the book or the character. I honestly didn't see any reason for it.

Along with that, the romance in it felt completely forced. She says early on that this guy is just a friend, and she doesn't see him as anything more than that, but he starts to show feelings for her and suddenly she loves him too.

So, I didn't have high expectations from the start, but I still got even less than what I was expecting. I found the book to be more frustrating and annoying than enjoyable.

Steph (Reviewer X) says

Ah, reading this book reminds me of why sometimes it's good to ignore the negative reviews. Because, honestly, I only requested it for the title, which I thought was absurdly awesome (as are all of Mackler's up 'til Guyaholic, which is pretty meh). My expectations were between a rock and a hard place, shot to hell by all the low-ratings on Amazon and GoodReads.

But you know what, I actually enjoyed this book. Very much so, in fact.

So I went back through all the negatives to see what people were on about. Be warned this review will pretty much be an anti-thesis to most of the criticism allotted to this novel. I'll throw in my "original" thoughts somewhere, maybe, but until then:

So, Mara is a vegan (as one can probably guess from the title). She's also a virgin. Her last name is Valentine. The mystery of the title is now resolved, and given they're in the title, you'd think these three characteristics would play some big part in the novel. This in mind, I understand, to a certain degree, Criticism #1:

The character's knowledge of and motivation for the pursuit of veganism were nonexistent.

Frankly, I don't know that much about veganism and couldn't care less if she followed that lifestyle out of her own, singularly-formed conscience or if, as it happened, she decided to stop eating animal byproducts because she needed a new focus after her boyfriend broke her heart. Yeah, her foundation's misconstrued, and I wouldn't recommend people making every life decision on rebound impulses. But again: it's veganism we're talking about, and as it doesn't play a huge part in my life, I don't feel the weight of what she did incorrectly or not. (Nor, to be blunt, do I care.) I'm sure other girls have made more serious decisions without substantial consideration.

Though once more: I don't know any vegans, I'm not a vegan, so this doesn't hit home. If you hate books where the character is perhaps "gratuitously" vegetarian or vegan (which is to say, she isn't so into it that she knows the rationale and animal-activism aim for every food she boycotts), perhaps this isn't the right novel for ya.

Then there's the question of Mara's morality. In the beginning of the novel, she's battling to become the valedictorian, take as many college courses as she possibly can, and enter Yale (early acceptance, baby!) as a second-year student. Then she begins changing, transforming, undergoing her own sort of awakening. She begins dating a new guy—who, unlike her old boyfriend, respects her—and being with him makes her question why she's rushing through everything.

So, she ends up dropping a college course, not really caring about schoolwork anymore, and subsequently dropping out of a prestigious summer program to further advance her college credits. She begins thinking about the path she's on and changing this according to what she sees fit. Yes, this means she's swayed by the desire to stay with New Guy until the end of summer (thus why she dropped the summer program). But she struggles with all those decisions, questions herself and what her life's been so far, and you know what? That's pretty damn admirable. Whether she's losing her morality or not, I choose not to judge because I believed Mara was doing what she felt correlated more with what she wanted, too.

Vegan Virgin Valentine? Good book, as far as I'm concerned. Examining oneself—taking a good look in the mirror—once in a while and asking, "Why?" is never, ever a bad thing. In contrast, I think beginning-of-the-novel Mara was narrow-minded and intolerant. Toward the end, I thought she became more mature and compassionate.

DID I MENTION HOW PROUD I WAS THAT SHE FINALLY CAME TO TERMS WITH WHAT SHE WANTED AND TOOK CONTROL OF HER LIFE?

Despite everything, she'll still be attending Yale with excellent transcripts in the fall. Which goes to show you for her morality. Let the girl have a little fun in the meantime for god's sake.

When all is said and done, I acknowledge people will always find something to nitpick, me most of all. They

expected more out of the story, out of the ending, out of Mara. They'll be judging her morality. (Which I'll be guilty of doing in a couple of days, with another book. Hah, hypocrisy. Case-by-case basis, grasshopper.) I hope, however, that this review outlined what happens and my perspective on it, and above all, I hope someone, somewhere, understands what I'm saying. The writing was good; the character development was good for what was required of the novel; the self-discovery part was one I related to immensely, especially when Mara realized grades are very rarely the meter of someone's intelligence, capability or potential.

What I'm saying is: I thought it was awesome. It's not for everybody (evidently), but presented to the right set of eyes, this book is quite scrumptiously good. (And funny!)

Liralen says

Mara's one of *those* girls, the ones who seem to be effortlessly at the top of everything. Vying for the top ranking in school, a list of extracurriculars as long as her arm, a job she likes, doting parents. She's passionate about her veganism. She has her Ivy League acceptance in hand and plans to finish university a year early. And then along comes her just-barely-younger-than-Mara niece, and things change.

I read this largely for the fact that it had 'vegan' in the title, and I was curious to see how that would be addressed. To that end I'm a bit disappointed, as Mara's veganism is ultimately something tied to her need for control and order, not something that's really organic to who she is / how she approaches the world. Still...I enjoyed the back-and-forth between Mara and V (and the balance they ultimately have to find), and I enjoyed having a pretty grounded heroine whose rebellions against the norm—against 'perfect'—are on a small, realistic scale.

Cara says

I have a very odd, complicated, and mixed relationship with this book. I thought some things were dead on, and others not so much.

Mara is on the fast track. She is in tons of activities in school, she takes college classes, works and basically an all around shining star. She feels like she has everything under control until she finds out maybe she doesn't want the things she thought she wanted. To make things a little more interesting we see V come into the picture. V is her niece that's only about a year younger than Mara, and the polar opposite of her. Things get kind of sticky when Mara hears that V was making out with her ex-boyfriend. Said ex-boyfriend is also the one she has to beat to get title of Valedictorian. Here we see it start to unravel...

The thing that really hit home for me was the feeling of having to live up to what you think others want. Mara has this deeply embedded in her and along the way she finds out what she really wants to do. I know this is going to sound strange but I was so glad that she and her niece didn't go to the prom because they knew they didn't have to go just to prove something. The aspect of the story I most appreciated was the dynamic between Mara and V. They are so different but they learn a lot from each other despite of that. The book breaks the boundaries of what people think is successful which isn't always the right definition and how doing everything fast doesn't necessarily mean better.

What really didn't set well with me was how Mara went about with her new relationship (can't say who!). She really is secretive about it and I get why, but when she reveals what has been happening I felt that the people around here didn't really seem to have a big reaction. Going behind people's back is a pretty big deal

and I expected a bigger fallout. Then there is the thing that the guy she is with seems a little too well-spoken, but that might be just me. He is sweet and really is good for Mara. There is also this one part of the book I think is supposed to be pretty romantic but it felt a little forced to me.

This is a really engaging book and I stayed up late to find out what happened. It's getting a 3.5 star rating from me (yes I'm one of the fans of the half star:D) and I'm sure there are people who will love it more than I did. Oh I have to mention that don't let the cover title mislead you, this isn't light and fluffy. The story has a good amount of depth and reminds you to smell the roses sometimes.

Lauren says

Somewhere in these pages is an interesting book about discovering who we are, learning how to veer off our planned path when it no longer suits our purposes, and not taking people at face value. I love the idea of a spoiled, much-younger child suddenly having to share her parents with a niece the same age who moves in with them for some needed stability.

What we have instead is a clichéd YA novel that makes it abundantly clear that, if you are an overachieving high-school student, you need to get your panties out of a bunch and learn to live. And remember girls: Boys must ALWAYS come before whatever other plans you have in life. You qualify for the Olympics but your boyfriend doesn't want you to be away training? Dump the Olympics and stay with the boy! Who cares about your dreams and goals when you can have a boyfriend?!

I'm a big fan of boys and boyfriends. I also veered too close to choosing boys over life goals a few times, and guess what? Always regretted choosing the boyfriend, because here's the thing: A guy who loves you and truly gets you? He supports those dreams, whatever they may be. And giving up dreams, well, it often leads to resentment.

I know. That's not romantic at all. That's the boring voice of experience.

But come on!

Oh, and once again, a YA author tackles veganism without any actual understanding of what vegan or vegetarianism is and instead turns it into a control issue. Which, hey, I live in Los Angeles, I know people who do weird diets as a way to justify and hide eating disorders. An author, however, should at least understand and respect a diet that a lot of people follow for solid reasons, even if that's not their character. But what would be the fun in that? I guess the acceptance message in this book does not extend to high achievers and vegans. Not recommended.

Katy Johnson says

I read this because I am fascinated by the lack of adolescent literature featuring vegan/vegetarian protagonists, and I have to say I was a little disappointed. The story was okay - nothing groundbreaking, but I was more annoyed that veganism was treated as a "phase" that is synonymous with the need for control over one's life and a rigidity that is emotionally unhealthy. I didn't hate the book, but as someone who has been veggie since the seventh grade, I felt it was just another mainstream misinterpretation of teenage rebellion.

Arminzerella says

Mara Valentine is a parents' dream child. She's smart, she's involved, she's not experimenting with drugs or her sexuality, and she's Yale-bound. Her parents have another child who is much older than Mara and whose personality is a lot different. She's the one who is always experimenting and finding herself and chasing after bums. She has a daughter, too, Vivienne (or V), who is a year younger than Mara. When Mara's sister moves to South America to follow her latest dream and bum, V comes to live with Mara and her grandparents. The first thing she does is make out with Mara's ex-boyfriend, which does not set the stage for any closeness between the two girls. Mara becomes a refugee from her own house in her efforts to avoid V, and V seems set on being a juvenile delinquent. They don't seem to have anything in common at all – except family. But things change for both of them. Mara becomes a lot less stuffy when she falls in love for real, and V becomes a lot more responsible when she has some stability in her life and the time to explore some of her own passions.

A good, funny, light read. I am not going to remember this one forever, but it is well-written, and better than most.

[EDIT] I reread this in May of 2017 not realizing that I'd already read it back in 2005! This is the first time I've ever completely forgotten something! I liked it better the second time around - giving it 4 stars instead of the 3 I'd originally assigned. I wrote a new review, too:

Mara Valentine is a model student and daughter and has her whole future mapped out for her when her “niece” V comes to live with her. V is almost the same age, and is wilder, freer, and more spontaneous than Mara could ever hope to be. And she'll be attending the same high school. And Mara's parents want Mara to help V adjust. Mara and V clash repeatedly, but eventually begin to understand one another and see something other than “perfectionist” and “loser” when they look into each other's eyes. Having a stable home and structure and people who care about her and encourage her really brings out another side of V. Having V around and falling in love and slowing down the breakneck pace of her life really helps Mara start to identify what she wants. Their discovery of their true passions and the connection that forms between Mara and V is empowering and uplifting. Smart, fun, emotional, and funny – realistic fiction at its best.

Elle says

fabulous title (so memorable!), but the book was so less than. I particularly had issues with the ending, mostly because there really was no ending. It seemed to me like the author didn't want to go through the trouble of thinking up a valedictorian speech, so she left her character unprepared for one of the biggest moments of her life. And then the reader was just left hanging, wondering what happened at graduation after the big build-up.

Overall, after a strong start with the title, the book went slowly downhill and ended up being a terrible letdown.

Elizabeth says

Honors Student and all-around Perfect Child Mara is thrown for a loop when her niece V (who is only a year younger than her) moves in. This book started out well- I really identified with Mara, since I was also an overachiever. But it kind of got lost along the way. It was a quick read, but I guess I didn't like the romance aspect. Or the seeming moral of "If it feels good, it must be good." (I think that's called emotional reasoning, and psychologists will tell you to avoid it.)
