

ANNE SCHRAFF

URBAN
UNDERGROUND

DELIVERANCE

 SADDLEBACK
EDUCATIONAL PUBLISHING

CHAPTER ONE

Sixteen-year-old Naomi Martinez rushed from Chill Out. She had been working at the yogurt shop for two weeks. Sherry Carranza, the crew leader, said Naomi was the best worker they ever had. She was efficient and friendly. The customers loved her. The owner of Chill Out was Elia Ancho. When Mr. Ancho first saw Naomi, he had told his son Jimmy she was “stunning.”

Naomi’s boyfriend, Ernesto Sandoval, was waiting in his Volvo. He had parked in the Chill Out parking lot to take her home. Naomi and Ernesto were juniors at Cesar Chavez High School. Ernesto had been born in the *barrio*. But he and his family

DELIVERANCE

had spent ten years in Los Angeles. Then Luis Sandoval, Ernesto's father, got a job teaching history at Chavez. So they came back to the *barrio*. Ernesto and Naomi had been dating ever since then.

"I got my paycheck," Naomi said, ripping open the envelope. "Oh, I love payday!"

"I hear you, babe," Ernesto agreed. "When it's payday at the pizzeria, I'm happy. Now that I'm the assistant manager, the check is a little fatter. All good!"

"Ernie!" Naomi cried, "I got a raise already. I've been there only two weeks, and I got a raise!"

"Is it a good one?" Ernesto asked, smiling at Naomi. She was probably the most beautiful girl at Chavez High. She was the most beautiful girl Ernesto ever saw. That was for sure. She had awesome violet eyes and perfect features. Her skin was a lovely creamy coffee brown, and she was slim. She looked irresistible in a sweater and skinny jeans.

CHAPTER ONE

“Ernie, it’s huge!” she exclaimed. “I can’t believe this! It’s almost double what I was getting. This is amazing.”

“Wow, they must like you a lot, Naomi,” Ernesto remarked, as he pulled the Volvo out of the parking lot.

“Well, Sherry, the team leader, is always telling me how good I am,” Naomi explained. “And Jimmy Ancho, the boss’s son, he’s the manager. He’s saying good things too, but I never expected this! What do I do? Thank them?”

“Sure, but don’t go overboard,” Ernesto advised. “Don’t get all emotional about the size of the raise. They might think maybe they made a mistake and gave you too much. You just say, ‘Thanks a lot for the raise.’ Give them a real cool smile. Let it go at that. Then they’ll think you *know* you’re good. They’ll feel lucky to have you.”

“Oh Ernie, I’ve been saving for a car of my own,” Naomi told him. “I’d love a nice sporty car to run around in. Daddy wants me to drive the old family sedan. But I hate

that old Toyota. I want something like Carmen's car. I saw one for sale for under two thousand. Wow, making this kind of money, I'd have enough in no time."

Naomi's eyes widened. "You don't think they made a mistake on my paycheck, do you? I mean, it's hard to believe. Would they give me that big of a raise so soon?"

Ernesto looked over at Naomi and grinned. "Don't even think that, babe. If you even breathe something like that, you're cooked. Let's say they did make a mistake. If you thank them, then they'll have to let you keep it. They'll be ashamed to take the money back."

"You know, Ernie," Naomi commented. "It's such fun working there. It's like not even work. The customers are so nice. Sherry is great. Jimmy is so friendly. I don't have much to do with the dad. But I can tell even he likes me. He always notices me and gives me a big smile. He'll come in sometimes. He just sits there at his favorite table

CHAPTER ONE

for half the night. I guess he likes to make sure everything is going okay.”

“Well, Naomi, you deserve a break,” Ernesto told her. “You really went all-out arranging that fiftieth birthday party for your dad. That was so awesome. To think your brothers hadn’t seen him in years. Yet you managed to work it out so all that bitterness was erased. Your dad and his boys are reconciled. That was beautiful, Naomi. And you did it all. How’s it working out now? Are Orlando and Manny coming around a lot?”

Naomi giggled. “Well, they both work in LA, of course. So they don’t live at the house anymore. But you know what? About every two weeks, they come home. They sleep over in their own bedroom. Then they’re in there like little boys roughhousing. They’re just like they used to be when they were kids! It’s like all those horrible years have disappeared. It means the world to Mom, and it just was like salvation for Dad.”

Naomi paused a moment to think. “Breakfast is the best time,” she said.

DELIVERANCE

“There we are, all six of us. We’re just sitting around the breakfast table yakking. The boys got home last night. Ernie, it’s like a light goes on in Dad’s eyes.”

For years, Orlando and Manny had been unforgiven and unreconciled with Dad. During those years, there had always been a heavy darkness in the Martinez house. It was as if heavy curtains were always drawn shut and no light could come in. Anyone could feel the ill will between Felix Martinez and his missing sons. Now the little house on Bluebird Street seemed lighter and brighter.

“I’ve seen your dad a few times,” Ernesto commented. “Now that your brothers are back in the family circle, it’s like a big load was lifted off your dad’s shoulders. Being estranged from his two boys all that time must have hurt a lot. I know he threw them out. But I think he figured they’d come crawling right back. And they might’ve *never* come back if you hadn’t worked it out, Naomi.”

CHAPTER ONE

“Daddy and Orlando still argue,” Naomi remarked. “But they end up making fun of each other and laughing now. It makes me so happy.”

Ernesto pulled into the Martinez driveway. Dad and Orlando were in front playing with Brutus, the family’s pit bull. Both Orlando and Manny would be at the house until tomorrow night. Then they’d board the Oscar Perez Latin Band bus and head for Los Angeles again. Orlando was a singer. Manny usually took care of the equipment and sometimes played the guitar.

“Hey, Naomi! Ernie!” Orlando yelled. “Look at this dog. I’ve only been with him a couple hours in the last few weeks. Already he loves me.”

“Hey,” Dad protested, “Brutus loves everybody. Don’t get a big head, Orlando. This is the sweetest dog in the world.”

“I don’t know,” Orlando teased. “Pit bulls usually have their favorites. And I think I’m Brutus’s favorite.”

“Look at this kid,” Dad complained. He was making believe he was annoyed. “He’s been around here a couple, three weeks. Already he’s stealing the affection of my dog away from me!”

“Daddy, Orlando, I got a huge raise down at Chill Out,” Naomi announced. “Look at my paycheck!”

Dad and Orlando looked at the check. Orlando remarked, “That’s a lot of money for dishing out yogurt, sis. Way to go!”

“Yeah,” Naomi agreed, “I’m saving for my own car. This is going to help a lot.”

“We got a perfectly good Toyota Camry sitting in the garage,” Dad said. “I use the pickup all the time. The Camry’s like new. But no, the girl wants to be tooling around town in something sportier. Naomi, look at your boyfriend here. Look at Ernie. He drives the ugliest car in the *barrio*. An old granny Volvo. And still you love him.”

Orlando threw back his head and laughed. “You gotta get a different car, Ernie. Dad’s right. Your car is not cool.”

CHAPTER ONE

“Well,” Ernesto squirmed, “the thing is, the car works like a charm. It never needs repairs. It just goes and goes. I’m sort of attached to it now. It’s like a faithful old horse. I’d feel disloyal getting rid of it. I mean, it’s been so reliable. I’d hate to send her to the crusher.”

“I like this guy, Naomi,” Orlando commented. “He’s sentimental about a car. He has compassion for a Volvo. You can’t go wrong with a guy like this.”

Naomi kissed Ernesto good-bye and went into the house. She was about to throw out her paycheck envelope when she noticed a piece of paper inside it. She took the paper out and read it. It said, “Naomi, I just wanted you to know that your work at Chill Out is extraordinary. I hope you know you are appreciated. Elia Ancho.”

Naomi was stunned. The older man had spent hours sitting at that table observing her. And he thought she was good enough for that big raise. Naomi had assumed Sherry told Jimmy what a good job Naomi