

ANNE SCHRAFF

URBAN
UNDERGROUND®

Out of
LOVE for You

 SADDLEBACK
EDUCATIONAL PUBLISHING

CHAPTER ONE

Jaris Spain was walking onto the campus of Harriet Tubman High School with his girlfriend, Sereeta Prince. “Look,” Jaris pointed. “Isn’t that Vanessa with Trevor?”

Trevor Jenkins was Jaris’s closest friend. A few months ago, Trevor and Vanessa Allen were very close, even though Trevor’s mom was dead set against the girl. Vanessa dropped out of Tubman in tenth grade, and she hung with a bad crowd. Now Vanessa told Trevor she had turned over a new leaf, and they were together again. She was studying for her GED. She had a great new job. She promised Trevor that she would tell no more lies. She would be up

front with Trevor. Jaris was dubious, but for Trevor's sake he wished him luck.

"Yeah, that's her," Sereeta confirmed.

"Am I seeing things, Sereeta? Is Trevor giving her money? Is he peeling off bills for her?" Jaris asked.

"Yeah," Sereeta said, "he's going in his wallet and pulling out cash. Maybe she has some emergency or something."

"Trevor's been working like a dog at the Chicken Shack, always asking for more time too," Jaris commented. "I know he's helping his mom as much as he can. She's getting older. She just can't do those ten-hour shifts at the nursing home anymore. I hate to see Trevor handing his hard-earned cash over to Vanessa. She's supposed to be working at a good job now."

When Trevor told Jaris he was back with Vanessa, Jaris couldn't help but feel bad. When they were dating before, Vanessa's sister and her boyfriend, Bo, tricked Trevor. They got him to drive Bo to the drugstore, supposedly to buy cough

syrup. Instead, Bo stole a lot of stuff from the store. He came running out, demanding that Trevor gun the engine and speed off. Trevor had been duped into driving a get-away car after a crime.

Jaris always believed Vanessa was in on that. He was not convinced that Vanessa had really changed. In Jaris's mind, Trevor had once again fallen into Vanessa's sticky spider's web. But Trevor was too much in love with her to see it.

Trevor had pleaded with Jaris not to diss Vanessa. Trevor now believed in her. He asked Jaris to give her some slack out of respect for their friendship. He told Jaris it would mean the world to him to have Jaris's support. And Jaris reluctantly gave it.

Now Jaris muttered, "Poor sucker, I think he's being had again." Vanessa tucked the money into her oversized purse, which Jaris figured cost a lot of money. Then she hurried away, like a thief escaping the scene of a crime. Vanessa had lied to Trevor in the past. Jaris recalled the old saying: "Fool me

once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.”

“It might be okay, Jaris,” Sereeta reasoned. “She might pay him back. Sometimes people get a sudden problem, and they need money.”

Jaris looked at Sereeta and smiled. She was so beautiful. He never tired of looking at her dark, velvet eyes, the honey-colored skin, the shiny curls framing her face. Sereeta had been through hard times herself. Her parents had divorced and remarried, and for a long time they ignored her. After a long struggle with alcohol, Sereeta’s mom, Olivia Manley, was now at a rehab center trying to straighten out her life.

Jaris reached out and took Sereeta’s soft little hand as they walked. “You bring out the best in me, girl,” he told her. “Sometimes I feel that darkness that wants to surge over me and make me bitter and cynical. But you drive it back.”

“I know that Trevor means a lot to you, Jaris,” Sereeta said. “You guys have been

more like brothers than friends, even when we were all kids. He's a really good guy. I care about him too. I don't want to see him get hurt. I mean, I know where you're coming from. I'm there too. But maybe Vanessa has learned her lesson. She's seventeen now. Maybe she's finally grown up."

Sereeta's thoughts turned to Trevor. She continued speaking. "Trevor hasn't ever had a real girlfriend before. His mom was pretty strict. She had those four boys to raise on her own, and she ran that family like a drill sergeant. She didn't even want them to date in high school." Mickey Jenkins's two eldest sons were now in the U.S. Army. Her middle son, Tommy, was in college. She had finally relented and given Trevor some space.

At lunchtime, Jaris and his friends went down the trail leading to the spot under the eucalyptus trees. That was where they usually gathered for lunch. Alonee Lennox and her boyfriend, Oliver Randall, were there. Sami was with Matson Malloy. Sami

Archer was a big, joyful girl with a heart big enough for everybody. The gang called itself Alonee's posse because Alonee had brought most of them together. Even as a little girl, she was the glue that held them together.

When Trevor appeared, he wasn't carrying a lunch. At one time, his mother packed hideous tuna fish sandwiches for him every day, and he ate them faithfully. Then she told him to buy what he liked. So he usually bought a tasty-looking sandwich from the machines, which he microwaved. Today, though, he was empty-handed.

"No lunch, dude?" Sami asked. Sami had a beautiful animated face and a full figure. Everybody loved her. In fact, the Tubman High kids once chose a school princess who best exemplified the virtue of the school's namesake, Harriet Tubman. Sami won in a landslide. If you needed a friend—even if you didn't deserve one—Sami was there.

CHAPTER ONE

“I’m not hungry,” Trevor sighed. “I guess my stomach is upset or something.”

Jaris had his suspicions. Vanessa appeared unexpectedly this morning and asked for money. Trevor gave her all he had, and now he couldn’t afford lunch. Although Trevor was trim and athletic, Jaris couldn’t remember a time when he wasn’t hungry for lunch.

“My mama, she packed me two sandwiches this morning,” Sami piped up. “I said to her, ‘Mama, you want me to get so big that they’ll want me at the circus?’ She just laughs. She fixin’ these two sandwiches with slices of roast turkey and tomato and lettuce. They got big juicy pickles and a lotta mayo with olive oil. Trevor, you got no lunch. How ‘bout you do me a big favor and take one of these sandwiches off my hands, boy?”

Trevor’s eyes widened when he saw the sandwich. “You sure you don’t want it, Sami? I wouldn’t want to take it away from you,” Trevor said. “Uh, I’m not hungry, but

it sure does look good, and if it's just going to waste . . .”

“Trevor,” Sami assured him, “I sure would like that second sandwich, but it ain't good for me. Mama, she's big, and Daddy, he's bigger. But I'm wantin' to slim down a bit.” Sami handed the sandwich to Trevor, “So here you go, boy. Take the sucka off my hands 'fore I fall into temptation.” Sami grinned at Trevor. “You skinny, boy. You can use all these calories Mama packed in here.”

Trevor took the sandwich and ate it with enthusiasm. Jaris's dark suspicions were confirmed. Trevor was hungry all right, but he gave his lunch money and whatever else was in his wallet to Vanessa. That really burned Jaris up, but he couldn't say anything.

“Man, Sami,” Trevor declared, “this is one great sandwich. It's like on a scale of one to ten, a twelve. This sandwich makes the ones in the machines taste like nothin'. Your mama sure knows how to make a good sandwich, girl.” He grinned and told

her, “Thanks, Sami. I guess I was hungrier than I thought.”

“You a growin’ boy, dude,” Sami replied. “You oughtn’t to be skippin’ lunch. Now in our house we can skip breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Still we got plenty fat on our bones.”

Sereeta glanced at Jaris. She was thinking the same thing he was. Sami must have guessed at the truth too. In spite of what Sami said, she wasn’t putting on weight. In fact, she’d lost over ten pounds during the summer, and her figure was looking great. She meant to eat that second sandwich. She gave it up because she thought Trevor needed it more.

When Trevor left early, Sami sounded worried. “That boy havin’ money troubles or what?”

“He’s working more hours than ever at the Chicken Shack,” Jaris answered. “Tommy and Desmond are both helping their mother. So that’s not a problem. Trevor helps her too. But with the boys all