

ANNE SCHRAFF

**URBAN**  
UNDERGROUND

# MISJUDGED

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# CHAPTER ONE

When she was a baby, the girl had a magical smile so her mother named her Mona Lisa Corsella. She was a pretty baby and a bewitching toddler, but as she grew into a teenage girl, she became painfully plain-looking. When she was thirteen, her mother was brushing her hair and she said, “Mona, you are not beautiful, but you’re a nice-looking girl, and you’re healthy. We’ve nothing to complain about.”

But hearing those blunt words was very hurtful to Mona, even though she knew they were true. She’d known for a long time. But the truth was, Mona wanted to be beautiful and hot, and she never wanted it as much

as now because this was her senior year at Cesar Chavez High School.

Mona stared at the really beautiful girls, like Naomi Martinez with her violet eyes and her perfect skin. Naomi had a perfect little nose and an expressive full-lipped mouth. She had a figure to match, slim but with curves in all the right places. Naomi had a boyfriend, Ernesto Sandoval, who was handsome with broad shoulders and an athlete's physique. Mona did not want to look enviously at girls like Naomi and Mira Nuñez, who dated a Chavez Cougars football star, Clay Aguirre. She did not want to stare at the pretty, lucky girls, but she couldn't help herself.

It wasn't that Mona was ugly or anything. She was five feet six inches tall, and she weighed a hundred thirty pounds. She had a nice complexion and long brown hair that she wore straight. It was just that her eyes were a tiny bit too close together, and her nose was okay, but not perfect, and her lips were a little thin, not

luscious looking like Naomi's. It wasn't any one thing. It was a lot of little things, and when they all added up, Mona wasn't beautiful.

"Hi, Mona," Teri Montana, Mona's closest friend, called out as she hurried to catch up with Mona. Teri wasn't beautiful either, but she didn't seem to care that much.

"Hi, Teri," Mona said.

"Wasn't the football game on Friday a downer?" Teri said. "I sure thought we'd win. That dude from Taft, the quarterback, he's awesome. But we had a good season anyway. Chavez was in the playoffs, and that's something." Teri could always see the bright side in every situation. Mona envied her that ability.

"I was surprised Clay Aguirre didn't do better," Mona said. Everybody in the senior class knew that Aguirre was egotistical and often nasty, but he was a good linebacker. Clay was the kind of guy who wouldn't give a girl like Mona a second look.

“Yeah, well, it just wasn’t our night,” Teri said.

“Clay is so arrogant,” Mona continued. “One time, I just asked him a question about a test in biology, and he sneered at me. He only talks to hot chicks.”

“Not all boys are like that,” Teri said cheerfully. “A lot of guys just go for a girl who’s nice and friendly. She doesn’t have to be all that hot.”

“Dream on,” Mona said a little bitterly.

“Mona, look. Two senior guys are coming this way right now. They’re both on the track team, and they’re in my classes too. Julio Avila and Jorge Aguilar. The other day, I watched the track team practice. Julio is like lightning, but Jorge is improving too. I bet if I said something nice to those dudes, they’d light up right away,” Teri said.

Mona said nothing. Julio and Jorge were not as good-looking as dudes like Ernesto and Clay, but they were tall and well-built, and they could probably have their pick of

the hot chicks at Chavez High. Boys on an athletic team always appealed to hot chicks. Mona didn't think either boy would want anything to do with Mona or Teri.

“Hey, you guys,” Teri chirped. “I wanna tell you, you both looked great at track practice. I bet the Cougar track team is gonna knock the socks off the other schools.”

Both Julio and Jorge stopped. Julio grinned and said, “Whoa! You hear that, Jorge? With fans like this chick, how can we miss?”

Jorge Aguilar was a lot shyer than Julio. He'd gotten in trouble a few weeks ago hanging with some gangbangers, and only Ernesto Sandoval's intervention saved him from serious trouble. He was almost bounced off the track team. But Jorge smiled too and said, “Thanks, Teri. I'm running a lot this year. I hope I can help the team.”

Mona thought Julio was really handsome. He had kind of a bad-boy image. His father was little more than a bum, but if

anybody made a disparaging remark about Mr. Avila, Julio turned into a bear. He really loved his father.

Mona was absolutely sure she could never get a boyfriend as cute as Julio. Too many hot chicks would be looking at the boy many said might end up in the Olympic trials because of his amazing speed on the track.

But Julio looked at Mona and said, “Somebody told me your middle name was Lisa. Mona Lisa Corsella. Is that true or were they joking with me?”

Mona felt her face turning hot. She was always keenly embarrassed by what she considered her ridiculous name. What were her parents thinking? Didn't they realize the problems they'd cause their poor daughter by sticking her with such a name? “Yeah, it's true. Crazy, huh?” she finally said, adding, “I hate it.”

“Why?” Julio asked. “I think it's kinda cool. Mona Lisa is one famous chick. People have been wondering about her for

hundreds of years. Was she really smiling? Some dude even wrote a song about her a long time ago. How come your parents named you that? They artists or something?” He seemed really interested.

“No, my parents sell real estate,” Mona said. “But my mom got this print of *Mona Lisa* when she was a kid, and she fell in love with it. When I was a baby—and this is really weird—everybody said I had a smile like Mona Lisa in the painting. Is that nuts or what? Right after I was born, in the hospital, they said I had that smile.”

Julio continued looking at Mona, almost staring at her. It made her uncomfortable, and yet she was thrilled at the same time. Julio had big dark eyes, vaguely sinister, but dreamy. “Yeah, I think I can see that, yeah. Around the eyes, the mouth too. Pretty cool. Well, have a nice day, Mona Lisa.” Then he walked on.

The boys walked around the corner to their class, and Teri said, “See? Weren’t they nice, Mona?”



“Julio was mocking my stupid name,” Mona snarled. “He was laughing at me. Couldn’t you see that, Teri? He was thinking ‘look at this dog with the funny name!’ ”

“Mona!” Teri scolded. “I don’t know what’s the matter with you. Both those boys were very nice, and Julio was really fascinated by your name.”

“Oh, Teri, you’re such a Pollyanna,” Mona grumbled. “If you saw a field full of ugly stinkweeds, you’d say they were beautiful sunflowers.” Mona didn’t want to hurt Teri’s feelings, but it was true. Sometimes Mona got so sick of Teri’s relentlessly sunny disposition. A lot of the time, life could be really horrible, and if you couldn’t see that, you were stupid or naïve.

“Well, *I* say we made a good impression on those boys,” Teri insisted as the girls headed in different directions to their classes.

Mona knew better. Right now, those boys were laughing about the two pathetic girls who were trying to flirt with them.

They would probably spend all morning laughing about it.

Mona went into her American history class, which focused on the U.S. as a world power. An older man, Jesse Davila, was the teacher, and Mona liked him very much. He explained things so clearly, and his tests were really fair. Mona could not understand why a few of the kids in class hated Mr. Davila and made fun of him sometimes when he made a little mistake. Everybody knew Mr. Davila had a very sick wife, disabled by Parkinson's disease, and he was also helping his single daughter raise her fourteen-year-old daughter. Mona felt sorry for Mr. Davila.

The other day, Mr. Davila did something very clever, which put some of his critics to shame. With the use of videoconferencing, he allowed the students to see and talk to a woman who had once been secretary of state. It was very exciting.

Before Mr. Davila arrived to start class, Clay Aguirre was talking to his friend, Rod

Garcia. Mona disliked them both. Rod had run for senior class president, but Mona voted for Ernesto Sandoval because he seemed nicer.

“How’s it going with Mira?” Rod asked Clay Aguirre.

“She’s eating out of my hand, dude,” Clay boasted. “She worships the ground I walk on. When I say ‘jump,’ she wants to know how high.”

Rod laughed. “She’s a really hot chick too,” he said.

“Yeah,” Clay said. “Would I want any other kind?”

Mona thought to herself, “Creep!”

Just then, Naomi Martinez walked into the classroom. Clay glanced at her. Everybody knew Clay used to date her, but she dumped him for Ernesto Sandoval. Mona didn’t blame her. Ernesto seemed really sweet, in addition to being handsome.

Mona and Naomi had a drama class together when they were juniors, and now Naomi was friendly to Mona. She smiled