

Chapter 1

Maria Lopez was tired after cleaning two luxury apartments in the tall building that overlooked the Hudson River. Now, she slowly walked to the bus stop on the corner. After waiting ten minutes on the cold windswept street corner, she was glad to see the bus come.

She dropped her coins in the entry box and headed toward an empty seat that she saw in the rear of the bus. However, the woman in the adjoining seat set the child she was holding on her lap down on the empty seat. So, Maria had to grasp a bus strap above her head to keep from falling as the bus lurched forward and left the bus stop.

At the next stop several people got off, and Maria was able to claim a seat for the long ride to her destination. She was tired and soon dozed off. When Maria awoke, she reached up and pulled the cord to signal the driver she wanted to get off.

Tonight, Maria was going to the delicatessen in the middle of the block to purchase salami for her husband, Carlos. It would be a surprise treat for his birthday dinner tonight. Mrs. March, her seventh-floor employer had been so pleased with the way she'd cleaned the apartment and decorated the table for an important dinner tonight that she had given Maria a few extra dollars.

Maria hadn't enough money to purchase something special for her husband's birthday dinner and knew Carlos was fond of this Genoa salami. She was proud to be able to buy some for tonight's dinner and she also baked a cake for a festive table

before going to work in this morning.

Maria inserted her key and entered the apartment. She saw sunshine streaming in through her dirt-streaked windows. Then, she recalled the complaints of Mrs. March, and the other lady she worked for in the tall residential building about the dirty windows in their elegant apartment; a special window-washer came to clean them every six weeks... Then, Maria recalled although Mrs. March had been pleased with her work, she had pulled the drapes to hide the dirty windows for tonight's guests.

Suddenly the idea that she could have clean windows in her apartment tonight for the rich ladies she worked for caused Maria to laugh. And she changed back into her work clothes and got to work in a good humor to clean her windows. The ladies she worked for would envy her clean windows, she continued to laugh.

Georgio, the seventeen-year-old son of Maria and Carlos, came home after school. He was planning to do his homework, eat, and then meet his friends after dinner. They were planning to spray paint graffiti on the trains in the railroad yard tonight.

He was disappointed when he saw his mother wasn't in the kitchen preparing dinner. He quickly realized that he might be late to meet with his friends if he didn't hurry her up. *"Ma" he called out feeling annoyed with her, "Why aren't you making dinner?"*

At that moment the front door opened, and his papa entered carrying a decorated ice-cream cake. On seeing it, Georgio remembered today was his dad's birthday.

“Is your mama in the kitchen? “

“No.”

“Good” said Carlos, and he placed the ice-cream cake in the freezer. “Son, I’ll go find her.”

Carlos entered their blue bedroom just as Maria finished cleaning the last window in the apartment. He hurried to help her back inside the room, but she was on her feet by the time he reached her.

“Don’t kiss me now sweetheart. I need to take a shower first.”

“Why were you cleaning the windows now?”

“The ladies I work for were complaining today that they have dirty windows, but now they are clean windows, Carlos. Now, I feel that we’re better off than they are, and she laughed.

“I bought you that special salami you like to have with our beans and rice tonight.”

“Thank you very much my rich lady. I’ll cook our dinner while you are in the shower.”

Returning to the kitchen Carlos saw his son making himself a sandwich using all the salami. “Stop! You can’t eat all my Genoa salami. That’s for all of us to share, not just for you to eat.”

“Mama didn’t make dinner. I’ll be late to meet my friends. I didn’t mean to be greedy.”

“Your Mama has cleaned our windows to feel richer than the ladies she works for. We’ll cook the dinner tonight.”

“Papa, do you cook, too? I thought only women cooked. It’s not a man’s job to cook.”

Carlos laughed and said, “The best chefs in the world are men, my son. Do you plan to get married so you won’t starve to death if anything should happen to your mother? Here’s a pot. Fill it halfway with water while I get the salt and rice out of the cupboard. Tonight, we’re cooking dinner for my rich wife.”

“Did Mama inherit money?”

Carlos laughed and said, “No. She thinks she’s rich now because she has clean windows while all the windows of those rich women, she works for are dirty... A special window cleaner is used for the tall building, however, he only comes to clean the windows every six weeks.”

Chapter 2

Georgio knew he was late, but he ran to meet his friends. He saw they were still waiting for him under the lamppost on the

corner. Dominick complained, “Waiting for you we missed our free ride to the railroad yard. What kept you?”

Georgio didn’t want to admit to his friends that his dad had taught him to cook dinner that night... So, he told them “My Mama got a loco idea into her head she would feel richer than the ladies she works for if she cleaned up all the windows in our apartment tonight. Those ladies she works for can only get their windows cleaned every six weeks. So, now my Mama feels she’s rich, but she made me late. I’m sorry for being late, my friends.”

“We’re sorry too. The night watchman at the yard is usually drunk Friday nights. We could’ve had a clear field to do our spraying while he slept it off.” said Josh, the undisputed leader of this gang of Latinos.

“Hijo mio” called out a middle-aged man running toward the group of boys.

“What’s the matter, Papa?” asked Edwardo.

“Thank God you’re here with your nice friends. Mama and I saw the television coverage at the railroad yard tonight. It was terrible... Shooting and fighting! Ambulances came and took away the boys who got shot. The police rounded up the other boys. Mama thought one of them was you. I was on my way to the police station to bail you out of jail... Whew! I’m glad you’re here with your nice friends. I’ll tell Mama it wasn’t you she saw. It’s good that you stay with sensible boys who obey the law. Here’s ten dollars to buy ice-cream for everyone. Don’t stay out too late, Edwardo. Goodnight fellas.”

“Caramba! It’s lucky for us your Mama got it into her head to clean her windows tonight” said Corto... he was the tallest fellow in the group but they called him “Shorty”.

“Hombres... cleaning windows was an inspired action tonight. It kept us from getting into trouble and tells us where to look for work this summer. If that window cleaner comes every six weeks... Then the guy needs more workers and we’re looking for jobs, too” said Josh.

“I’d rather make money than go to school,” said Edwardo. It was soon agreed money was more important to them all than school.

Georgio said, “I’ll ask my mother if she knows the name of the window cleaning company.”

“Don’t bother her, we’ll look up the cleaner of tall building windows in the phone book,” said Josh. Everyone nodded his head or said “Yeah” agreeing with their leader. Everyone thought Josh was smart, and the right man to be their leader.

Josh said, “Georgio, I give you the job of calling the company to make an appointment for us all to apply for jobs.

As soon as Georgio returned home he asked his mother if she knew the name of the window cleaning company that the building used where she worked; and she did.

In the morning Georgio telephoned information to get the phone number of Wally’s Clean Windows and then wrote it

down. After that, Georgio put on his Sunday shirt and tie. Next, he took the phone into the bathroom. After he'd selected a proper expression for himself reflected in the mirror, he called the company.

“Hello” said a gruff voice, “You want to place a work order with my company?”

“No, sir” replied Georgio. “My friends and I want to work for your company.”

“Are you afraid of high places?”

“No.”

“Are your friends afraid of working at high heights?”

“I don't know.”