

**MARIA AND RAFAEL
LEARN THE SIGNS OF A
DEBT RELIEF
SCAM**

**A FOTONOVELA FROM
THE FEDERAL TRADE
COMMISSION**



MARIA AND RAFAEL LEARN THE SIGNS OF A DEBT RELIEF SCAM



Maria



Rafael



Paula



Leticia



Mrs. Rodriguez

ABOUT THE FTC

The Federal Trade Commission is the nation's consumer protection agency. Its mission is to protect consumers from fraudulent and deceptive practices.

This fotonovela is part of the FTC's ongoing efforts to help the Latino community avoid scams and stop fraud. For more information, visit www.consumer.ftc.gov/fotonovela.

Report fraud by calling 1-877-FTC-HELP or online at www.ftc.gov/complaint.



Rafael, I can't believe our baby is graduating today.

I know. It feels like just yesterday I was rushing you to the hospital to give birth.

Congratulations, Paula.

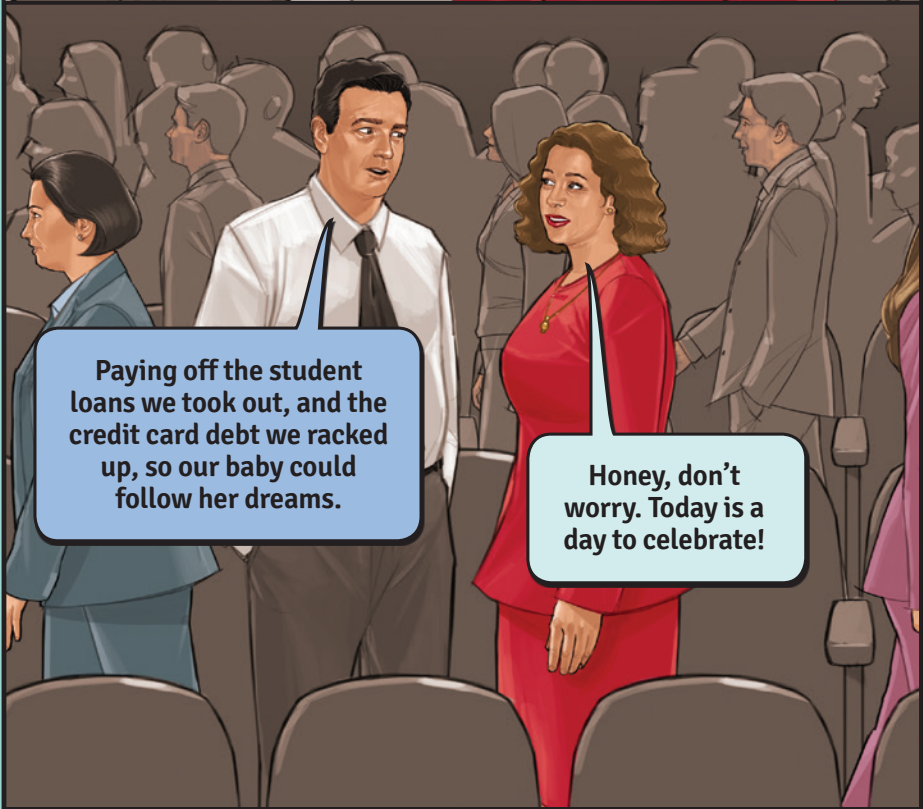
Thank you so much!

You did it!



Now comes the hard part.

What do you mean?



Paying off the student loans we took out, and the credit card debt we racked up, so our baby could follow her dreams.

Honey, don't worry. Today is a day to celebrate!



Mom! Dad!

Congratulations. We're so proud of you.

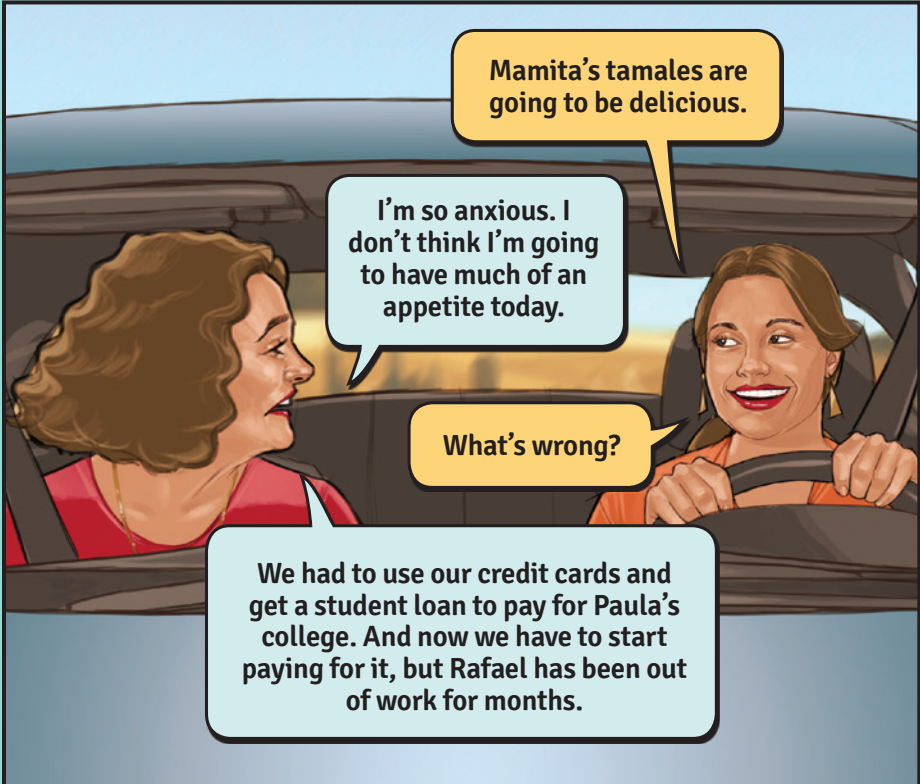
Thanks. I couldn't have done it without your support.

Mira, let's get going. We have a party to get to!

Leticia and I are going to the store to get one more thing for the party. Come on, sis.



Okay, but hurry. The tamales are waiting!



Mamita's tamales are going to be delicious.

I'm so anxious. I don't think I'm going to have much of an appetite today.


What's wrong?

We had to use our credit cards and get a student loan to pay for Paula's college. And now we have to start paying for it, but Rafael has been out of work for months.

Maria and Leticia hear a radio ad.

*"Are you in debt?
We can help.
Call now!"*

Leti, quick, give me your phone. I'm going to call.



So, what did they say?

She said they have special access to federal student loan assistance programs and they can help us get rid of the credit card debt, too.

Hmm, I don't know, sis.

Well, let's go. I have to go celebrate with my college graduate!



Congratulations, sweetheart.

Hi, honey. I made you a plate of tamales.

After the party.




That was some party, huh?

⇒Sigh.⇐

What's wrong?

I'm just stressed out about paying for Paula's college.



Mom, Dad, are we in trouble?

Don't worry. I heard a radio ad for a company that can help us.

I know someone who can help, she spoke at one of my classes. The director of the legal aid clinic. They help people who are having trouble paying their debts.

A few days later, Maria and Rafael go to the legal aid clinic Paula told them about.


Welcome, I'm Mrs. Rodriguez.

Hi. I'm Rafael, this is my wife Maria. We need your help. Our daughter just graduated college.

That's great, congratulations.

Thanks. But I got laid off two months ago, and now we have to start paying off the student loan.

And we owe a lot on our credit cards, too.




I heard an ad for a company that can help and spoke to a woman. She guaranteed they could lower our monthly student loan payment.

Oh no. Did you pay her?

No.

Good. Her guarantee that she can help is a classic sign of a scam.



There are companies out there that lie and say they have special access to government assistance programs.

Others tell you to stop making your payments but don't explain the consequences, like late fees that could damage your credit history.



The woman I spoke with was really pushy. She wanted me to pay her over the phone.

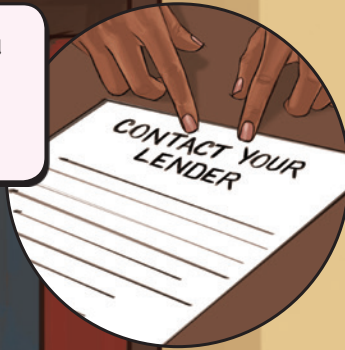


It's illegal for a company to charge you before it does anything to help you with your debts. That's another sign of a scam.




Here's a free brochure that tells you your options if you can't pay your debts.

First, contact the company you owe money to. Tell them you can't pay and ask what your options are.



FEDERAL STUDENT LOANS
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
studentaid.ed.gov
1-800-4FED-AID
(1-800-433-3243)

If you have a federal student loan, contact the Department of Education.



When you get home, call your lenders right away. If you need help after talking to them, come back and see me.

Thank you so much for your help.

A few weeks later, Rafael has a new job. And things are starting to look up.



How's your new job going, honey?

Great.

We got the new student loan statement.

Now that's a payment we can afford!



I'm so glad you went to see Mrs. Rodriguez from the legal aid clinic.



AVOIDING A DEBT RELIEF SCAM

Some dishonest debt relief companies lie about how they can help. A reputable debt relief company:

- Won't make you pay before it does anything to help you. That's illegal.
- Won't guarantee it can get rid of your debts.
- Won't say it has special access to government assistance programs.

Report debt relief scams to the FTC at www.ftc.gov/complaint or call 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357).

If You're Having Trouble Paying Down Your Debts

- ☑ **Contact your lenders.** Call the company you owe money to, tell them why you can't pay, and ask if you can pay less each month. If you have a student loan from the government, contact the Department of Education at studentaid.ed.gov or 1-800-4FED-AID (1-800-433-3243).
- ☑ **Get credit counseling.** To find legitimate help, start with a credit union, local university, military base, or the U.S. Cooperative Extension Service.

This fotonovela is part of the Federal Trade Commission's ongoing efforts to raise awareness about scams targeting the Latino community. The story offers information about avoiding a debt relief scam.

**See all of the FTC's fotonovelas at
www.consumer.ftc.gov/fotonovela.**

Order free educational materials from the Federal Trade Commission at bulkorder.ftc.gov.

Sign up to get free scam alerts and other news at
ftc.gov/stay-connected.



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