

**GOLDEN ADVICE**  
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Once upon a time there was a family with three sisters who moved to Mexico to learn Spanish. Alexia, the oldest sister, loved to read. She would read day and night and hated to be interrupted for anything. Naomi, the middle sister and Charlotte, the youngest sister didn't like to read too much. They loved to play.

One day when Alexia was reading in her room, Naomi and Charlotte got bored of playing indoors. "Let's go outside to the park," said Charlotte.

"Great idea," said Naomi. "Let's ask Alexia to come too."

"She won't come. All she wants to do is read," said Charlotte.

"Maybe she'll come this time," said Naomi.

The girls opened the door to Alexia's room without even knocking. Alexia was lying on her stomach on the bed, with her feet on her pillow. She was reading and was so involved in the book that she didn't realize her sisters had come in. Alexia had extraordinary concentration powers.

Naomi, who had a very loud voice yelled at Alexia to get her attention. "Alexia, we are bored. We are going to go to the park and play. Come and join us."

Alexia was annoyed and showed it. "Leave me alone. All you want to do is play. You both act like big babies. Let me give you some golden advice. You should read. You can learn so much from reading. It will help you all your life. It will make you smarter and richer. Playing won't."

"Reading is boring. Play is fun," said Charlotte.

"If you read more you would get good at it and then it would be fun," said Alexia. "Now go and leave me alone."

Naomi and Charlotte gave up. They left Alexia's room, forgetting to close the door until Alexia screamed at them to close it. Then they raced outside and went straight to the park with two shovels and two pails.

They loved the park. It was mostly level with some swings and slides other gym type equipment for kids. There was also a small rock cliff on one end of the park that the girls loved to climb.

The girls went straight to the cliff. They hadn't even been there for 15 minutes before the ground began to shake. Naomi said, "Charlotte, this is an earthquake. Let's get off these rocks fast."

They raced off the rocks and onto the level ground away from the trees, just in case one might fall. The trees tilted and rocked back and forth as the ground shook and made loud grinding and cracking noises. The shaking lasted about half a minute and then stopped. Everything got so quiet, it was weird. Naomi and Charlotte looked all around. A few branches had broken off and fallen to the ground. That wasn't bad. But several huge rocks had tumbled down and the ground had split along a line that went up into the area of the rocks.

Naomi and Charlotte decided to climb back up. When they got to the top they were amazed to find that the cliff had split and a giant, deep crevasse had opened up. The girls lay down on their stomachs and gazed down into the crevasse. It was so deep and dark that they couldn't see the bottom. The sun was high enough in the sky to light part of the way down.

Naomi was very observant. About four or five feet down she noticed a small, level ledge. On the ledge were some teeny flecks that gleamed in the sun.

Naomi said, "Charlotte, let's get some of those sparkles. I'll hold your hands and let you down."

Charlotte was too scared to go. "It's too deep for me."

"I'll help you," said Naomi.

"No, I won't do it," said Charlotte

"OK! Then hold my hands as I go down just in case the ledge is not safe." Naomi turned backwards and let herself down very slowly. She finally touched bottom when her hands were almost fully extended. The ledge held firm but it would be hard to climb out. "Charlotte, I can't get out by myself. You will have to help me up when I'm ready. Don't leave."

"OK," said Charlotte.

Naomi looked around. She saw that the flecks on the ledge gleamed like gold. But the ledge was so narrow it would be dangerous to bend down to pick them up. She looked around and saw a small cleft in the wall of the rock. And then Naomi saw it. Lodged in the cleft was a huge chunk of the golden metal, which looked like a shiny yellow meteorite. Naomi tried to dislodge the chunk. It shook a bit. She began shaking it back and forth to loosen it.

Charlotte asked, "What are you doing, Naomi."

"I am trying to pry a big chunk of gold loose."

After about five minutes, Naomi finally pried it out. But it was so heavy she lost her grip and it landed on her toes when it fell to the ledge. It really hurt but even though she wanted to cry she held back her tears and pushed her feet together to prevent it from falling down the crevasse. To pick it up she had to bend over on the narrow ledge. Naomi was scared. She bent over very carefully and very slowly. The chunk was hard to lift it was so heavy. Naomi picked it up and

stood up very slowly and very carefully. With all her might she lifted the chunk over her head, just enough to reach the top. “Charlotte, grab the golden rock and pull it away from the edge.”

Charlotte pulled the golden rock away from the edge. Then, because it was so bright and shiny she started playing with it, turning it to see how the reflections changed in the sun. She was so fascinated she completely forgot about her sister until Naomi screamed at her, “Charlotte, stop playing and help me up.” Charlotte grabbed Naomi’s hands and strained with all her might to pull her up as Naomi used all her strength to get up out of the crevasse.

Naomi’s arms and legs were all scratched up but she didn’t care. The rock gleamed in the sun she was amazed at how brilliant it was. “It looks like gold. Do you think it is, Charlotte?”

“Of course it is.” Charlotte had all the confidence of a kid, which meant that she wasn’t sure but she imagined that she was sure.

Naomi looked around to see if anyone else had noticed and breathed a sigh of relief. The earthquake had scared everyone else out of the park. “Let’s cover it so that no one else sees it and take it home,” said Naomi. Naomi took the chunk and it just squeezed into her pail but stuck out the top. “Take off your shirt, Charlotte, so we can cover it.”

Charlotte didn’t like the idea at all. “You take off your shirt, Naomi!”

“I’m getting too big to go around in just my undershirt, but you’re young enough. Besides, I am the one who risked my life going into the crevasse.”

Charlotte agreed reluctantly. Naomi covered the chunk and lifted the bucket from the bottom. It was so heavy that she wobbled when she walked and had to put the bucket down several times because she got too tired. When they finally got back to the apartment building Naomi looked so ridiculous struggling to climb the stairs hauling the bucket with her legs wide apart that Charlotte started to belly laugh. Naomi got annoyed but then she started to laugh too.

When they got into their apartment they went straight to the bathroom to weigh it on the scale. Naomi tried to weigh the chunk, but it didn’t balance and fell off. After several failed tries, Charlotte had a great idea. “Naomi, weigh yourself first without the gold and then weigh yourself with the gold. The difference is the gold.” Naomi thought that was a great idea.

Naomi weighed 36 kilos without the gold and 57 kilos with it. “Wow!” she said, “It weighs 21 kilos. If it is gold then we are rich for life.”

“How rich? Oh, let’s look it up on the internet,” suggested Charlotte. When they did, it was clear that it was solid gold. Most of the pictures of gold nuggets looked like meteorites, just like the one they found, only all of them were much, much smaller. They looked up how much most of the nuggets weighed and when they compared they were amazed. They knew they had found a giant but what they didn’t know is that they had found one of the largest nuggets ever. Then, just to make sure, they read more and found that gold is just about the densest thing, 19.3 times

denser than water or 19.3 times heavier than a container of water of the same size. That's why Naomi had so much trouble hauling it back to the apartment.

Next, they looked up how much gold was worth in pesos because they were in Mexico. They found that gold is worth about 40,000 pesos per ounce.

Charlotte asked, "Naomi, how many ounces is our nugget?"

Naomi had to figure it out. She found out that gold is measured in troy ounces and there are 32 troy ounces in a kilogram. Since the nugget was 21 kilograms Naomi multiplied to get 672 ounces. Then she multiplied by 40,000 pesos per ounce. Her eyes opened wide. "Charlotte, its worth 27 million pesos!"

Charlotte started to laugh and so did Naomi.

But Charlotte got greedy and said, "Naomi, let's go back to the park and get some more gold. But should we tell Alexia?"

"Nah," said Naomi, "She's still in her room and will only tell us not to bother her because she is reading. She probably didn't even know there was an earthquake. Besides, this gold's our's! Let's hide it."

They took a spare blanket from the closet, carefully wrapped the gold nugget in it and pushed it far under the bed, where the floor was real dusty. Then, they took their buckets and shovels and raced back to the park. But just as they got there the ground began to shake again. This time, though, the shaking was much more violent and lasted longer. It knocked them off their feet. It was so violent they couldn't get up again so they lay there on the shaking ground. The trees were really shaking and making terrible growling noises. Large branches broke off and fell down. The houses nearby were also swaying. Charlotte was so terrified she was silent until Naomi began screaming, and then she screamed too at the top of her lungs. As they were screaming a tree near them toppled and came crashing to the ground not quite 20 feet from them. Then they saw a giant wave on the ground. As the wave passed over them the whole ground suddenly sunk down leaving the girls momentarily in the air but then they hit the ground hard when the crest of the earth wave made it rise back up. It hurt but Charlotte began to cry more from terror than from pain.

The shaking subsided but remained violent for almost two minutes, which felt like two hours for the girls. And again, after the shaking stopped everything seemed completely silent. It was weird. Naomi looked at Charlotte and asked her if she were OK. When Charlotte nodded, Naomi asked, "Do you think we should try looking at the crevasse again?"

Charlotte nodded but she didn't look too sure. Cautiously the girls walked over to the cliff. Charlotte's eyes opened wide and so did Naomi's.

"Wow, Charlotte, the cliff is much higher than before." Charlotte nodded again. Suddenly Naomi realized that Charlotte had been so terrified that she couldn't talk. "Can you talk, Charlotte?"

Charlotte shook her head, no and began to sob. “Don’t worry, Charlotte, your voice will come back just like your memory comes back after amnesia. I saw it in a Hallmark movie with Dad.”

Naomi began to climb the cliff, which was much higher now and much tougher to climb. But when she got to the top the crevasse was gone. It must have sealed tight. The cliff had gotten higher because the earth had squeezed tight together and one side had shifted. Naomi followed along the fault line to a house just beyond the park. The house had been sheared into two parts and one part had collapsed.

Naomi came back down to Charlotte and told her what she had seen. Then she said, “Let’s go home and see if our gold is still safe.”

When they walked home the cars had been shaken all over the place. One or two were on their sides. There was also a lot of glass from many broken windows. Fortunately, only that one house had fallen – all the others were still standing though many of the houses had long cracks on the walls. Their building seemed OK. They climbed the stairs and entered their apartment. Alexia was in the living room, eating a chocolate croissant. She and her book had been lifted off the bed and knocked on the floor. A lot of furniture had slid around and many things were on the floor.

Charlotte and Naomi raced to their bedroom to check if the gold were still hidden. The bedroom was a mess, and the bed had moved, so they pushed it back with all their might to cover the gold, which had somehow stuck in the same place. Then they went back to the living room, where Alexia was just about finished polishing off a second croissant.

Finally, Naomi could not contain herself any longer. “Alexia, you won’t believe what happened to us and what we found.”

But Alexia was too excited to listen. “No, Naomi, you won’t believe the story I just read. And it all came true, except for one thing. It was about a girl who lived in California, just like we used to. Then an earthquake hit and when the girl went into her backyard she found that the ground had split because they lived on the fault line. The book told all about earthquakes and what makes them. The earth is made of these giant plates and they move around because deep down it is so hot that rocks are slushy and are called magma. At the edges of the plates the rocks get locked together until the moving magma below makes too much stress. Then the rocks crack along the border line of the plates called a fault to make an earthquake. It’s just like a pencil can bend a bit until it cracks. When the rocks on the fault crack they move and shake, and make noise like the pencil does when it cracks. The noises are waves. And the rocks at the fault can move three ways. They can slide side by side or squeeze together or split apart. When they squeeze together one plate will go up and the other will sink. When they split apart they form a giant crevasse and you can fall in and die. And after millions of years and many earthquakes, whole islands and continents can move around the world. That is called plate tectonics.”

“But then came the most interesting part of the story. The girl went into her backyard and saw that a crevasse had opened. When she looked down into it she saw a shiny rock and it turned out to be a 1 pound nugget of gold that looked like a meteorite with lots of holes and ridges in it. She wasn’t sure it was gold so she looked it up and then she was sure because the nugget seemed to

be too small to weigh a pound. She was surprised that the nugget was so heavy but gold is very dense, almost 20 times heavier than water. And she looked up how much gold was worth and she found that her gold was worth more than 1 million pesos. She was rich.”

“So you see how much I learned from reading and you could learn it too instead of playing. That is the best golden advice.” Suddenly, Alexia remembered that Naomi had something to tell “OK, Naomi, now tell me what happened to you and what you found.”

Naomi began to laugh and so did Charlotte, who suddenly found her voice. “We don’t need your golden advice. You read about gold but we found it, and we know all about it too.”

“Baloney,” said Alexia.

“No, we really did,” said Naomi. Then Naomi told Alexia the whole story and showed her the scratches on her arms and legs. But Alexia had been so engrossed in her book that she never felt the first quake, which was, after all, only a precursor. So she didn’t believe it.

“You’re both lying. There was only one earthquake.”

Charlotte said, “Alexia, when you are reading you don’t know anything that is happening around you. There were two earthquakes.” Naomi nodded in agreement

Naomi and Charlotte each had the same strange, devilish smile. It made Alexia suspicious and curious. “Alright, if you found gold show me.”

“Come on into the bedroom. We wrapped it in a blanket and hid it under the bed,” said Naomi.

Alexia refused. “Bring it out here into the living room.”

Then Naomi and Charlotte refused. “We want to leave it hidden in the bedroom,” said Naomi.

They looked so insistent that Alexia followed them even though she didn’t believe it. It annoyed her that they were laughing. She didn’t want to feel like a sucker. In the bedroom Naomi and Charlotte pointed out where the gold was. Alexia looked under the bed and sure enough, she saw the blanket. She put her arms around it and tugged. There was clearly a large, surprisingly heavy boulder in it.

Then Alexia got really annoyed. She didn’t bother to pull it out from under the bed or try to open the blanket. Instead she stood up and said, “You just found a large, heavy rock and wrapped it up. I’m not going to be a fool and unwrap it.”

“OK, *I* will,” said Charlotte. The sun was coming in through the bedroom window. Charlotte and Naomi together pulled the blanket and gold nugget to a spot of sun on the floor. They began to unwrap the blanket, laughing all the time. Their laughter made Alexia furious. She turned around to stomp out of the room. Just as she reached the door, several beams lit large golden spots on the wall and ceiling. Alexia turned around and gasped out loud.