

## Hungry

Who knows when it started? My sister thinks it happened when we gathered water from the rainwater barrel outside our house. We recently discovered that some animals had been drinking from the barrel without us knowing. One of them might have tracked in infected spoor into our water.

Normally we boil the water before using it, but my mother was sick with a fever and needed water too badly to wait. We gave her most of the water, and drank a little bit ourselves. When Papa came home from his job in the mines, he was also very thirsty. Before we knew it, we drank half of the rain barrel and welcomed an uninvited guest into our bodies.

For a week, everything was like normal. My sister and I worked on the family garden and learned with some of the neighboring kids at Señora Alvarez's house. Mama cooked, cleaned, and cared for the livestock that we raised. Papa got in the truck with his work buddies and went off to the mines. If I think hard about it, the only changes I can remember would be packing more things in my lunch sack before heading out for the day.

It was Mama that told us how much money we'd been spending on food. "Twice the amount as last month," she said with worry in her voice. She added, "We're not even halfway through the month."

My sister and I looked guiltily at each other, knowing that we had been sneaking more snacks than we were allowed. Papa also cleared his throat, "It is my fault. I've been very hungry by the end of the day, so I've been packing much larger lunches."

Not wanting Mama to get mad, I chimed in, "No, no! It is me and Sonya. We have been sneaking snacks every day after we get home from Señora Alvarez's house. We've been extra hungry as well."

Mama smiled at the effort and patted my hands. "It is no one's fault, I've been eating a lot as well." I looked at her. I don't see her much throughout the day, so I didn't know if that was true. What I could see was the fact that she looked much slimmer. The skin around her neck seemed to sag a little and there were purple bags forming under her eyes.

"But Mama," I started, "You look like you're losing weight. Wouldn't all the extra food plump you up?" She smiled in a distracted way and sighed.

Now it's been a full month since my mother's fever. Both my sister and I haven't been to Señora Alvarez's house to learn for three days. Papa is too weak to go to the mines for his work. Mama has been in her bed for a week, unable to care for the animals or prepare meals for herself or the family.

Our Tía, left yesterday to drive into Rio to get us some medicine. When she stopped by to visit for our monthly dinner, she was surprised to see us so frail and sickly looking. My sister and I had to use ropes to tie our pants onto our wasting hips when we greeted her at the door.

She asked us what happened and we told her everything. "You must have tapeworms," she told us as she pulled my sister and me in for a hug. "I can get you the medicine, but it will take until tomorrow."

So now we sit here in our *casa*, waiting for her to return. I head out to the garden and dust the dirt off of one of the remaining carrots. I bite off of chunk of the tasty root feeding myself, and the creature living inside me.