



# The Long Road North: Mateo's Story

Kylie Bassett



Mateo stood small against his old adobe home, which already seemed to shrink behind him. The once-brown, fertile earth of Dry Valley was now a stark, cracked white, baking under a relentless sun. Three years without rain had turned their world dusty and barren, forcing his family to seek a new life. A single, wilted plant drooped sadly by the doorway, a poignant symbol of what they were leaving behind.



With determined hearts, Mateo's family prepared for their long journey. His older sister, Elena, adjusted her heavy backpack, while their wise grandfather carefully loaded hand-woven blankets and gleaming metal pots onto their trusty, small donkey. The air was thick with the dust of departure, but a glimmer of hope sparked in their eyes as they faced the unknown path ahead.



The family began their trek across the parched land, their colorful clothes a vibrant contrast against the muted browns and grays of the dusty plains. Mateo clutched his father's hand, his small feet kicking up puffs of fine, dry soil with every step. The sun beat down, turning the horizon into a shimmering mirage, but they pressed onward, their shadows stretching long before them.



Soon, the landscape transformed into an endless salt desert, sparkling like snow but burning with intense heat. The ground shimmered with blinding white crystals, reflecting the harsh sun. Mateo and Elena wore bright scarves to shield their faces from the hot, dusty wind, their expressions a mix of awe and weariness as they traversed this otherworldly terrain.



Under the vast, clear sky of the salt desert, the family paused for a brief rest. They huddled together, sharing a precious sip of water from a small canteen, their faces streaked with dust. Even amidst the stark beauty, a moment of quiet connection and shared strength brightened their spirits, a testament to their unwavering family bond.



After many long days, the salt desert finally gave way to a distant, hazy line on the horizon. A murmur of excitement rippled through the family as they realized it was the mighty Río Grande, a sign that they were nearing the next stage of their journey. The air felt heavier, promising a change in the desolate landscape.



Standing at the edge of the vast Río Grande, Mateo felt a knot of fear in his stomach. The river was not a calm, blue stream but a wide, churning expanse of chocolate-colored water, rushing swiftly between jagged gray rocks. His father gently took his hand, offering a comforting squeeze, his steady gaze reassuring Mateo that they would face this challenge together.



With a deep breath, the family waded into the powerful river, the muddy water rising to their waists. The sky above them was a dramatic canvas of heavy, gray clouds, threatening a storm that mirrored the turbulent current. Small, brave figures, they battled against the river's strong pull, their determination shining through their struggle.



Finally, soaked and exhausted, the family emerged from the turbulent river onto the opposite bank. Though weary, their faces held a renewed sense of purpose. In the distance, through the fading light, Mateo caught his first glimpse of the North City – a faint, green shimmer against the horizon, a beacon of their new beginning.



They arrived at the outskirts of the North City, a vibrant contrast to their arid homeland. Tall buildings with lush rooftop gardens reached towards the sky, and the streets were lined with countless green trees. Mateo sat on the cool, damp grass of a park, feeling a strange mix of homesickness and relief. As the sun set, casting an orange glow over the glass buildings, he saw his mother smile by a sparkling fountain, and knew their long journey had been worth every step.