

Mia's story

I will never forget the day I met Mia. My bus was broken down and I found myself in her village. We made friends at once and I want to tell you about her. This is Mia's story.

Mia's village was called Campamento San Francisco and was somewhere between the big city and the snowy mountains. It was not much of a place, but for Mia it was her home and her world.

There are no pretty gardens or trees. There isn't a proper road, just a muddy track.

Mia's father goes every day to the city with his truck to sell scrap.

It used to be a farmland but the city grew bigger and bigger and now they can only harvest what the city throws away.

The houses of Mia's village are made from odds and ends and bits of rubbish, whatever the people can find. The villagers are very clever at fixing things they find on the dumps.

Sometimes papa comes home happy with money in his pockets and sometimes he comes home sad with none.

Mia runs to meet her papa every evening.

Mia's father dreamed of one day being able to build a house of bricks.

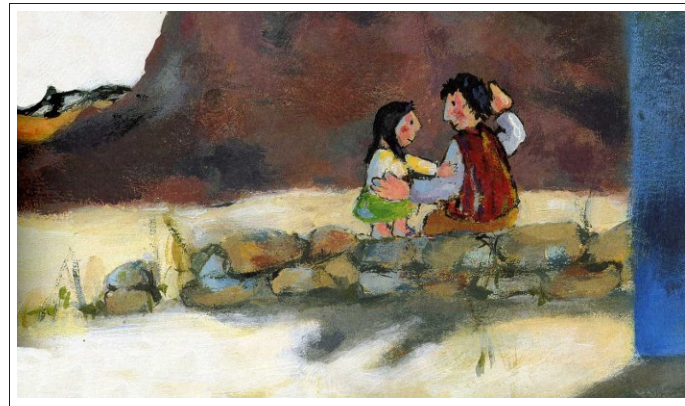
One evening in early autumn Mia's father came home with a strange grin on his face. He unzipped his jacket and there was a beautiful puppy! Papa had found him all alone in the city.

Mia kissed her new puppy on the nose. She decided to call him Poco because he was so small.

Mia showed the puppy to everyone and soon he was part of her life.

Poco follows Mia everywhere - even to school. He is very good and waits outside until the end of the lessons.

But it was hard winter and one day Poco disappeared. Mia searched the village. "A pack of dogs went that way. He could have been with them," one man told her, pointing at the dumps. Then she climbed onto Sancho, the horse, and set off to look through the dumps.



As she searched she got further and further from home. Until eventually she found herself high up in the mountains, far higher than she had been before. From up there she could look down on the dark cloud that always filled the valley.

The air above the cloud was so clean it took Mia's breath away. She was dazzled by the whiteness all around. She jumped down from Sancho and grabbed the snow, tasting it and rolling over and over in the whole white world of it.

Sancho watched her and then he too rolled over and kicked his old legs in the air. Then Mia lay on her back, arms and legs outstretched in the snow. The sky had never been so blue and so near.

They called and searched for Poco until night began to fall and the first stars appeared and snuffled at the ground. Mia liked around. Instead of snow they were now surrounded by flowers. Mia carefully gathered a clump, roots and all. She knew that whatever happened they would remind her of how she looked for Poco and found this place in the stars.

The next day, Mia planted the flowers.

She pots some in tin cans. She tends them and waters them every day. The flowers grow tall and strong and they spread in the summer.

In the autumn the wind blows seeds all over the village.

The flowers spread quickly. By the following spring they had spread all over the village and the dumps were covered with flowers as white as the mountain snow.

Although she enjoyed looking after the flowers, Mia never forgot Poco and called for him every day.

One morning when her father was leaving for the city with a load of scrap to sell, Mia said she wanted to go with him to try and sell her flowers. She pointed to rows of white flowers in tin cans. Her father laughed and agreed to give it a try.

Mia put her flowers on the steps of the cathedral and Papa laid out his scrap nearby.

"Good luck, Mia," he wished her.

The main square is busy with traders.

Soon Mia had so many customers, Papa had to give up his scrap business to help sell flowers. People asked, "Where do these flowers come from?"

And Mia said, "They come from the stars."

From that day on, Mia and Papa sold flowers and shared his dream of building a house of bricks. And whenever a pack of dogs came running by, Mia thought of Poco.

Until one day one of the dogs stopped running and came to smell the flowers. He licked Mia's face and lay down among them.



I was travelling from Santiago, Chile, into the Andes mountains and came upon what appeared to be a wasteland - a landscape of waste from the city. But a man who lived there, Manuel, showed me it was the opposite of wasteland. For Manuel and his fellow villagers, the waste was a crop to be harvested, recycled and made useful once more.

Michael Foreman
Mia's story
London, Walker books, 1988