

Chapter 1

Mario Goes to School

Mario lives with his mother and daddy, big brother Juan, big sister Camilla, and little brother Lucio in a wooden hut with a thatched roof, on the edge of the jungle in the country of Belize.

Mario is five years old. He is old enough to go to school. Mario longs to go to school like Juan and Camilla. Each morning they walk down the dusty road in their school uniforms carrying backpacks full of books. They laugh and talk with their friends. They can read books. Mario wants to go to school so he can learn to read and have lots of friends.

Mother sews Mario's uniform. She makes dark blue pants and a light blue shirt.

Daddy buys Mario a new blue backpack, a notebook, a yellow pencil, and a box of crayons.

Uncle Luis gives him an eraser shaped like a parrot.

"You must take care of your things," warns Daddy. "Always keep your books, pencils, and crayons in your backpack. Do not lose them. Do not leave them on your desk or someone might take them. God wants us to take care of the things He gives us."

Mario puts his notebook and crayons into his new backpack. He puts the pencil and the parrot eraser into the front pocket of the backpack. He hangs the backpack on a nail in the wall beside his bed. He cannot wait to go to school.



Now it is the first day of school. Juan and Camilla jump out of bed and hurry to the creek to bathe. Mario does not jump out of bed. He is in his bed crying.

“What is wrong?” asks Mother. “Are you sick?” She puts her hand on his forehead to check for a fever.

Mario shakes his head. He is not sick. “I do not want to go to school,” he whispers.

Mother is surprised. “Why?” she asks.

“The teacher is too big and she talks too loud,” he mumbles.

“The teacher is no bigger than I am,” answers Mother, “and she has to talk loud so all the children can hear her. She will not hurt you. She is your friend.”

Mario shakes his head and rubs at his tears with his fist. “There are too many children. Maybe they will laugh at me,” he says.

“They will not laugh at you. They are all starting school too. Your friends, Pablo and Tomas, are in your class. You know them.”

Mario smiles. “Yes, I know them.” But then his smile turns to a frown.



“I do not want to walk home alone,” Mario whispers.
“Maybe I will see a drunk man,” he adds.

The Infant class dismisses one hour before the other classes. Mario does not want to walk home alone without Juan and Camilla.