

Except from "Trash Mountain"

The mission volunteers talk to us daily about the new school and how they intend to make it grow into a larger school which will hold more children. I just nod my head. I know I will not be able to attend anyway, because of my work. I just say to them, "Si Dios quiere... if God wishes." But they are persistent, almost as persistent as the drug lords. They say they offer us a way out. I pray that is true. For me I think it is too late. But for my younger brothers and sisters, for Yoli, I pray they are right.

My sister, who is very knowledgeable, for someone her age, yearns to be able to go to the new school. She has taught herself to read. She reads the books that the Christian volunteers give to her over and over again. She treats them as if they are her treasure. She hides them from the storms, rats, and insects that plague our flat. Sometimes, she will read to me. She reads to me about boys who are homeless and find families, and children lost on an island that somehow eat better than I do, all the while fighting and building a city all out of material available to them from the island. I laugh at the nonsense of it all. But my sister says one day she intends to write a book, a book about us. I tell her it would do no good. After all who would want to read about a world like this. I see it all the time. They come, they look at us. They hand out food, and candy, and water, but they never really know us. Why should they? If I weren't a part of this, I wouldn't want to come. I wouldn't want to see us. How we live by the trash that they throw out. I don't blame them. I don't know how the Christian missionaries stay so long. I wouldn't if I had another life to return to. I tell my sister she would be wasting her time writing about our world, but she is pretty insistent, so I let her dream.

The trucks move out to the west end of the mountain as we trudge into the knee deep garbage. We have our large canvas bags swung over our heads as we begin to dig. We dig with items we find lying around, large sticks, pieces of wood, pipes whatever will begin a tunnel that can be sifted through. The sun starts to bear down on us as the stench makes it hard to breathe. The cool breeze coming from the north hits us in the face saving us from the blistering heat of the morning. We take advantage of this cool breeze, hurrying our efforts to beat the grueling afternoon sun.

There are many who pick up in the evening, when it is cooler, but the dangers from the trucks, which cannot always see us in the dark, is too much to combat so we try to start at sunrise when there has been a fresh patch of trash laid out. Sometimes-as I am going through the miles and miles of trash-I dream that I find a large diamond ring, or a great deal of money that some wealthy person has dismissed as lost. Unable to find it and not really being dependent on it, they never come to claim the fortune. I dream that I use it to buy a large home for my family where there is inside plumbing. My mother wears long beautiful dresses every day, and we eat only the finest of foods. We have servants that bring us whatever our heart desires. Then I am awakened by the noise of the trucks, or someone yells my name and I am brought back to reality. The dream never really leaves. It just keeps reoccurring time and time again, as if it is a nightmare I can't seem to wake up from.
