

Arijana had found her way back home after a morning adventure. Her body was covered in dirt and muck, but she had the kind of beaming smile that melted her father's heart.

"Welcome home, Ari. I'm making some tea - would you like some?"

Arijana wasn't old enough to understand the nuance of her family's finance, but she was good at spotting patterns. Early in the month, she could usually get juice or milk on the weekends - later in the month, she got tea. Even when the month's money was drying up, her father was still determined to provide something more special than tap water for his darling kids. He was a good man like that - a bit of a dreamer, perhaps, but there were worse things to pass onto your children.

"Papaaaaaaaaa..." Arijana drew out the word as long as she could. "I'm hungry! Hungry!"

Her father laughed, messing up her already frazzled hair with one hand. "I'm sure you are, Ari. Maybe I can make some snacks for you. I'll see what we have, okay?"

"Okay!"

"Now, while I get that ready, could you go round up your siblings?"

"Do I haaaaaaaaave to?"

"No, of course not. But..." Her father leaned in with a conspiratorial whisper. "You can have a cookie before bed if you get them all here in ten minutes."

"Cookie!" Arijana was out the door in a blur, her father laughing softly to himself as he watched her scamper off.

Taking a peek inside their pantry, he sighed. He'd made a pretty big promise. And Ari was always a fast runner... he'd have to find himself a cookie. And before that... enough snacks for seven kids.

Well, he managed it before. Nothing was more important than making sure his kids had something to look forward to.

Oh, and he had to fill a tub. All of them would be just as filthy as Ari. Who knows where they were poking around?