

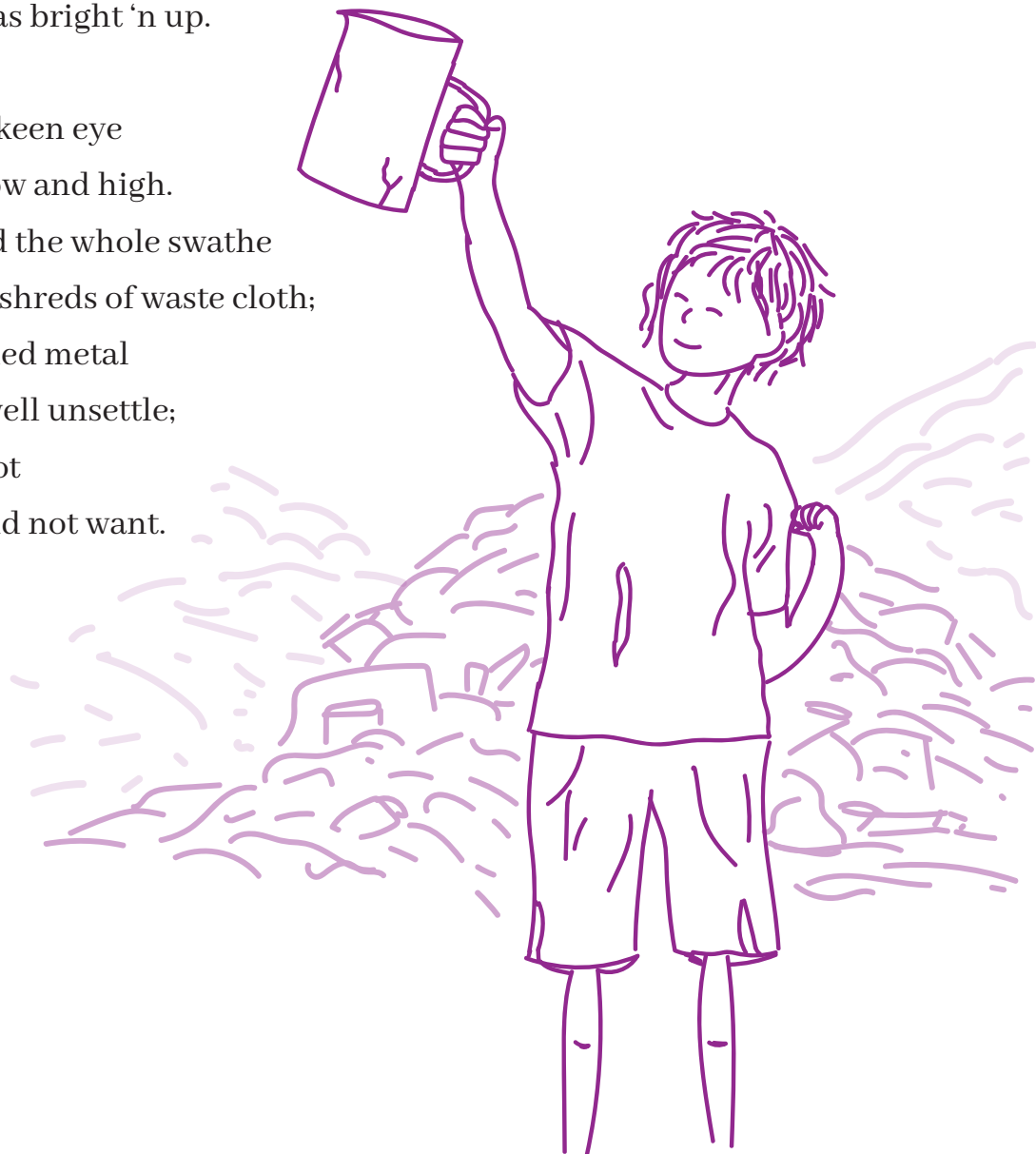


Rag Picker

Vasanthi Vasudev

Not whole of eight
Dark, stick like straight;
Carrying a soiled long sack
The burly 'big man' at his back
Every day, to every dump
He went ere the sun was bright 'n up.

His piercing elephant keen eye
Bored into the heap, low and high.
Scanned and upturned the whole swathe
For empty bottles and shreds of waste cloth;
Squashed tins, discarded metal
His deft hands could well unsettle;
Old shoes, and what not
That folks in homes, did not want.



“Come on boy, find a treasure, quick,
Before some tea and biscuit to pick
May well become wholly bleak
For the whole day, and week.”
A voice, foreboding, growled deep
Creepy enough to make him weep.

Holding his breath dead still,
Nostrils plugged beyond his will;
Hands grimy, nails sharp like metal
Palms broken, rough like nettle,
His tiny brittle hands, delved deep
Chest pounding, in eager thud and leap.

‘Ah ! Here’s some good stuff,
That seems like treasure enough.
To earn a rupee and some tea
This morning’s meal, it may well be!’
His hand stretched over his head
In excitement and pride, high held
An old and battered jug in aluminium
Like a trophy in precious titanium!

He learnt to gorge through, without a pass
Mighty mountain like, squalid mass...
To discover a ‘cast away gem’, in the dump.
To smile, jubilant, spirt never in any dump!
As though he had won every battle in the face;
Any doubt or question thereof, never a tiny trace!

So, it was with every little thing,
No matter what the day may ever bring!
So, what if the food was burnt all in all
It was fine to fill him from fainting a fall!
So, what if his shirts were tattered and torn
He had at least four to be washed and worn!
So, what if he didn't go to school every day
He still belonged there and could have his way!
So, what if he had to share every petty mite
There were so many at home to care, despite!

Was it the 'sure -eye' that found a gem,
Sifting rotten pile stinking like phlegm?
What made him so sure of his luck,
Making him so full of verve and pluck?
Find a silver lining behind every dark cloud,
Feeling positive ever, never crushed or cowed?
Atop such mountains of mess,
Without a grumble or a whiff of stress?

If only I could see the light,
At the end of every dark tunnel, so bright!
If only I could cast aside all bitter woes
And look for treasures in dark corners, just suppose!
If I could feel 'gung-ho' like a winner,
Hurtling past every hurdle in a glimmer
How wonderful would that ever be!
Who cares? A rag-picker, I may, as well, be!

Verses
BY VASANTHI