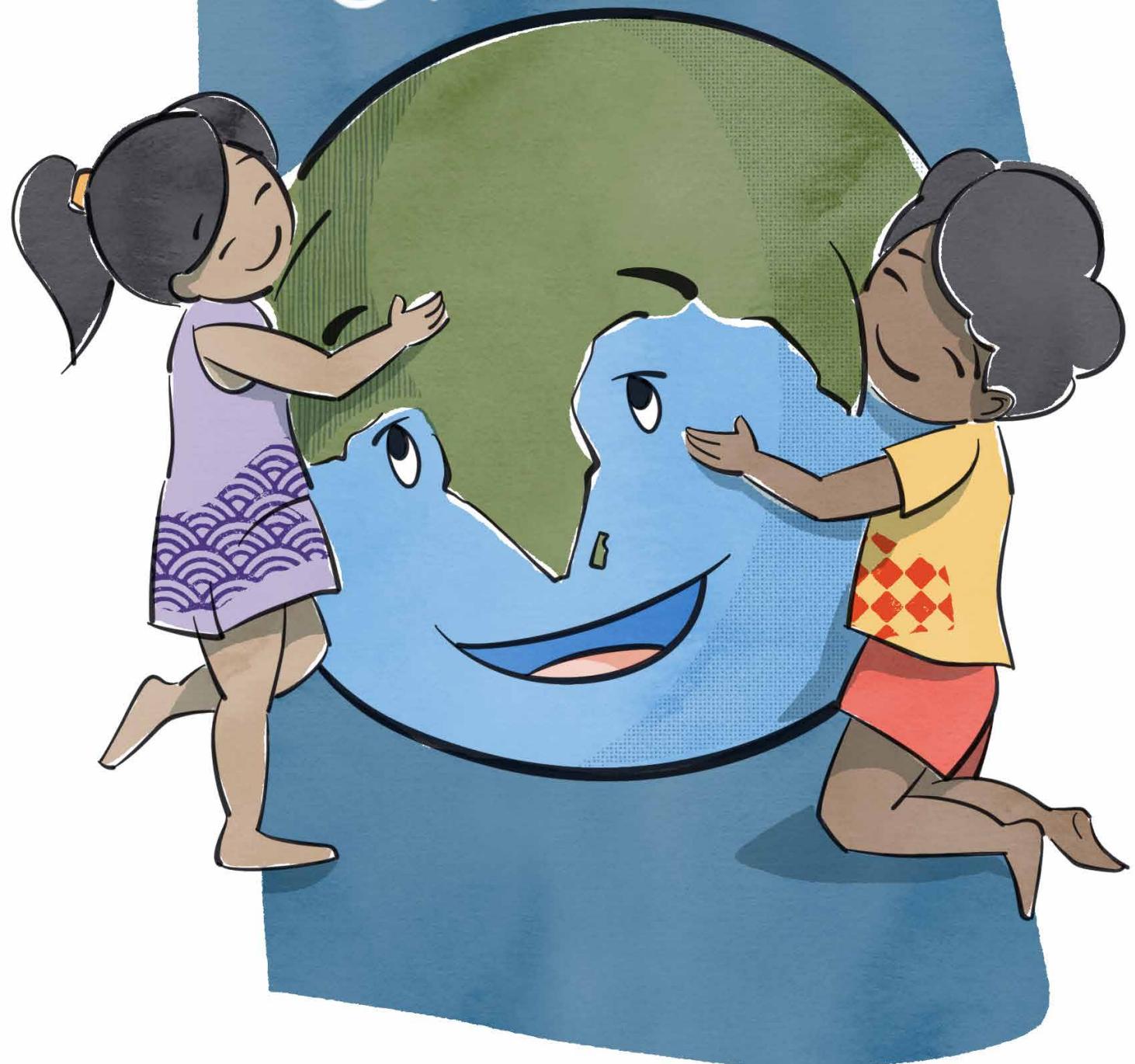


With love,  
GANGA

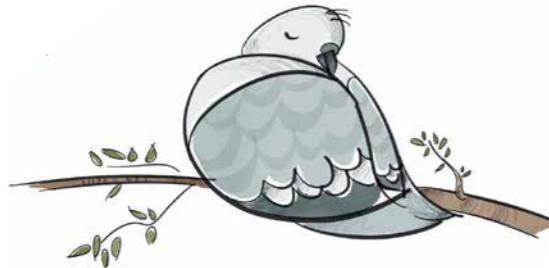


Written by Kirthi Jayakumar and Nanditha Ravindar

Illustrated by Raghu Ramachandran

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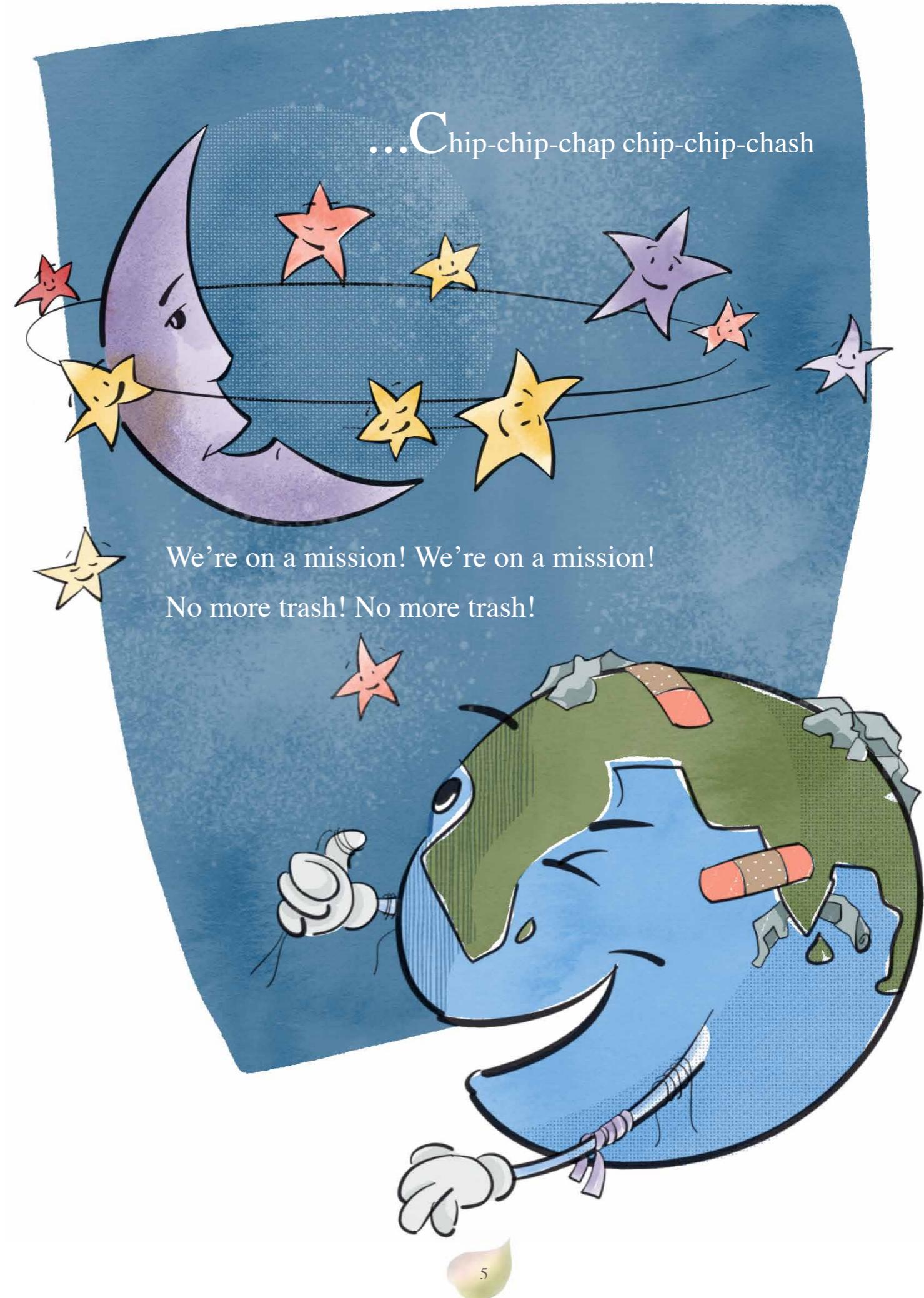
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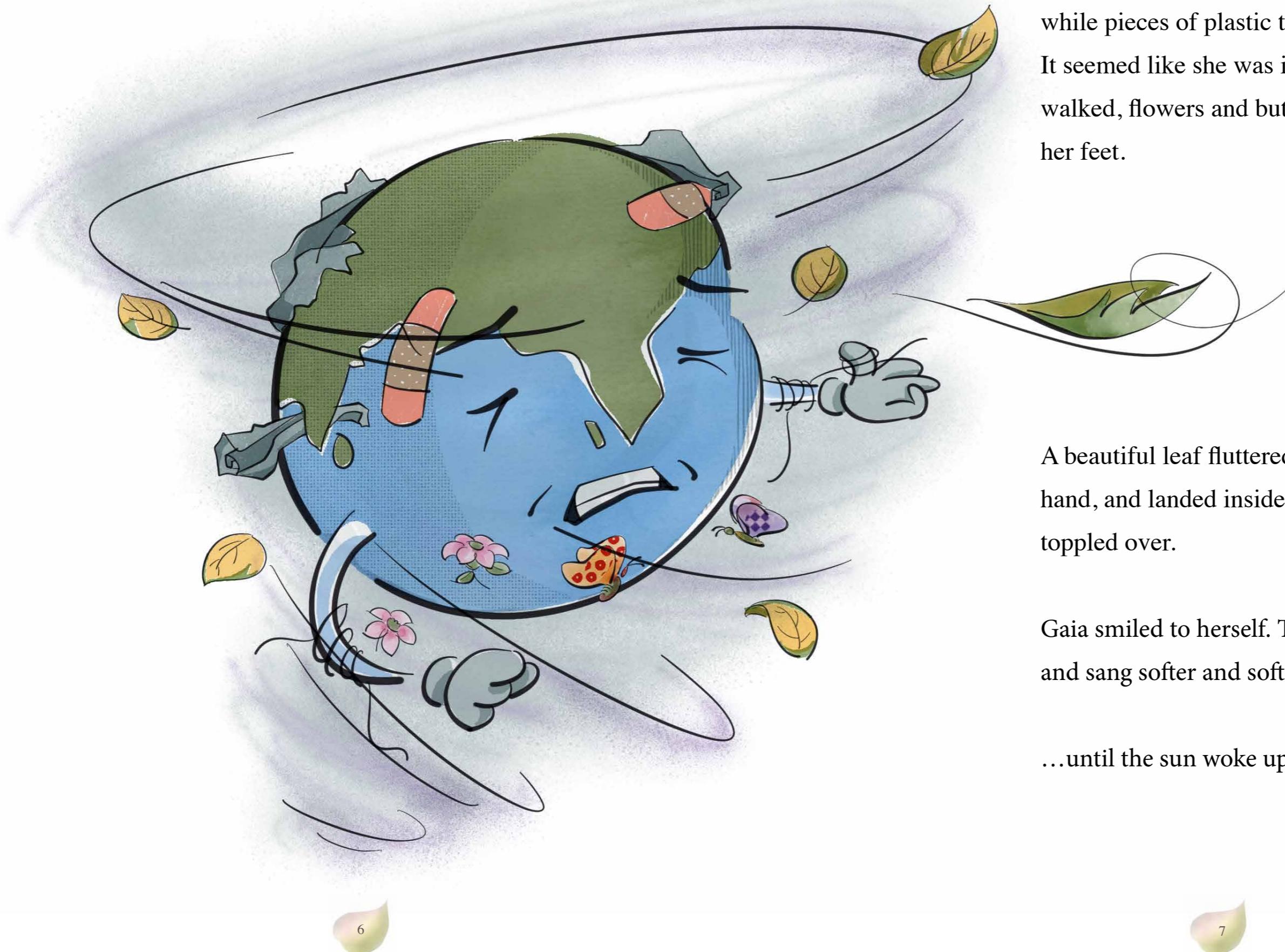
The sun had long since set. All the little sparrows and pigeons had gone quiet, and all the children had quietly gone to bed.

The stars formed a ring around the moon and danced with joy. Gaia, Mother Earth, had spoken to them about a very important mission that she was on. She needed the moon and the stars to shine bright, so she could complete her mission.

Slowly, the stars began to sing in melodious voices:  
“Chip-chip-chap, chip-chip-chap!”  
The moon burst into song...



A big, whooshing wind blew a whirlwind of leaves into a twister, and in their center, stood Gaia, Mother Earth. She had cuts and scratches all over her.



Crumpled bits of paper stuck out of her hair, while pieces of plastic twisted around her arms. It seemed like she was in pain - but as she walked, flowers and butterflies danced around her feet.

A beautiful leaf fluttered from the palm of her hand, and landed inside a garbage bin that had toppled over.

Gaia smiled to herself. The stars clapped in glee and sang softer and softer and softer still...

...until the sun woke up and brushed his teeth.

When Kabir finally came rushing out of the house, Kaya couldn't contain her excitement and began to run.

“Hurry up Kabir! The library will be open by the time we get there!” said Kaya, hopping up and down on one foot.

She was very excited about going to the library. It was time for their annual Earth Celebration Day at school on Monday, and she had to find something very interesting for Show and Tell!



“Aah! Yuck!” cried Kaya.

She had slipped on a banana peel, and fallen headlong into a pile of garbage around a toppled garbage bin!

But she wasn't hurt, because she fell on lots and lots of paper that people had crushed and thrown around the bin.

Just as Kaya was about to get up, she noticed a beautiful leaf. Something was written on it. She reached for it, as Kabir came over to help her up.

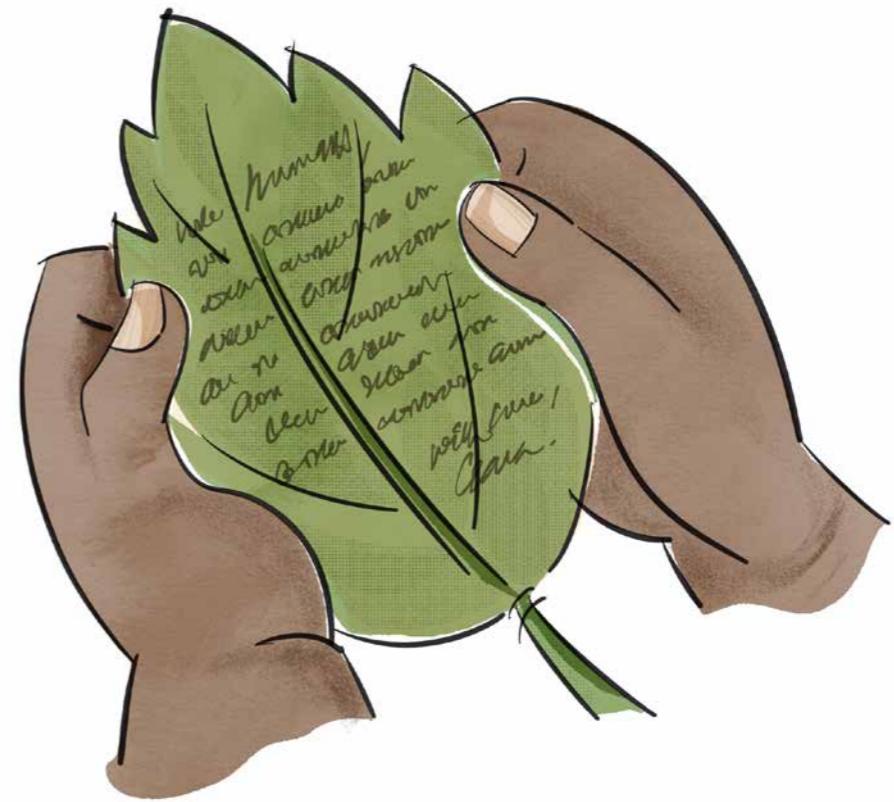


“Are you okay, Kayu?” asked Kabir, gently. He stepped over the rubbish and held his hand out to her.

“Yes...” Kaya said, not paying attention to Kabir. She turned the curious leaf over and over in her hands.

Kabir reached for her and pulled her up.

“What is it, Kaya?” Kabir asked, leaning close to her.



Kabir read the writing scribbled on the leaf out loud:

*“I am so sad, my little ones, so sad. There is so much garbage around, that I don’t know my own home anymore! My little friends, the plants and trees, are not able to breathe from all the dust around me... Oh, there’s so much garbage everywhere! There’s paper in my hair, and plastic in my arms, and pieces of glass in my belly!*

*Dear humans, oh dear, dear humans, you keep your houses clean, but mine so dirty! Please help me!*

*With love,  
Gaia.”*

**“G**aia? That sounds like Kaya!” she clapped in glee, her mouth a big wide grin.

“No, Kaya. This is Gaia, I read in my English textbook that it is a name for Mother Earth! She has written us a letter, and this is very grim news. We have to do something!”

“Yes, Kabir, you’re right! Gaia does sound really sad. Do you think she might have left us more letters? Come on! Let’s go see if there are any more letters lying around,” Kaya said, tugging a rather puzzled Kabir by the sleeve.

The two of them rushed to the next street over.





Just then, they saw a woman picking up the garbage from around a overflowing garbage bin.

Poor lady! She was having a hard time picking up all the garbage that was thrown outside the bin. Kaya and Kabir started talking to her.

She explained to them that her job was just to collect the garbage from the bin, and load it onto the big truck, to take to the landfill and recycling center! But with all the crushed papers and plastic wrappers, fruit peels and wasted food that had been thrown around the bin, clearing the garbage was her biggest challenge.

“Mummy always scolds us when we throw garbage anywhere inside or outside the house instead of putting it in the bin,” Kaya said shaking her head.

“Shouldn’t everyone treat their streets the same way and keep them clean?” sighed Kabir.

“We have to do something,” declared Kaya and Kabir looking at each other.

With greater determination, they first decided to look for more letters. After hunting up and down and high and low, Kaya and Kabir finally sat down.

“I think that was the only letter. Maybe it was meant for the two of us. I think we should do something about what Gaia told us,” said Kabir, thoughtfully.

“But... but how, Kabir? Why us? We’re just two kids, what could we do?”

What would they do? The two of them sat there for a while, thinking hard.

Finally, Kaya looked at Kabir with a gleam in her eye.

Quickly, she whispered an idea into his ear.

“Yes, yes, yes, Kaya!” he said.



**N**ow, they were ready.

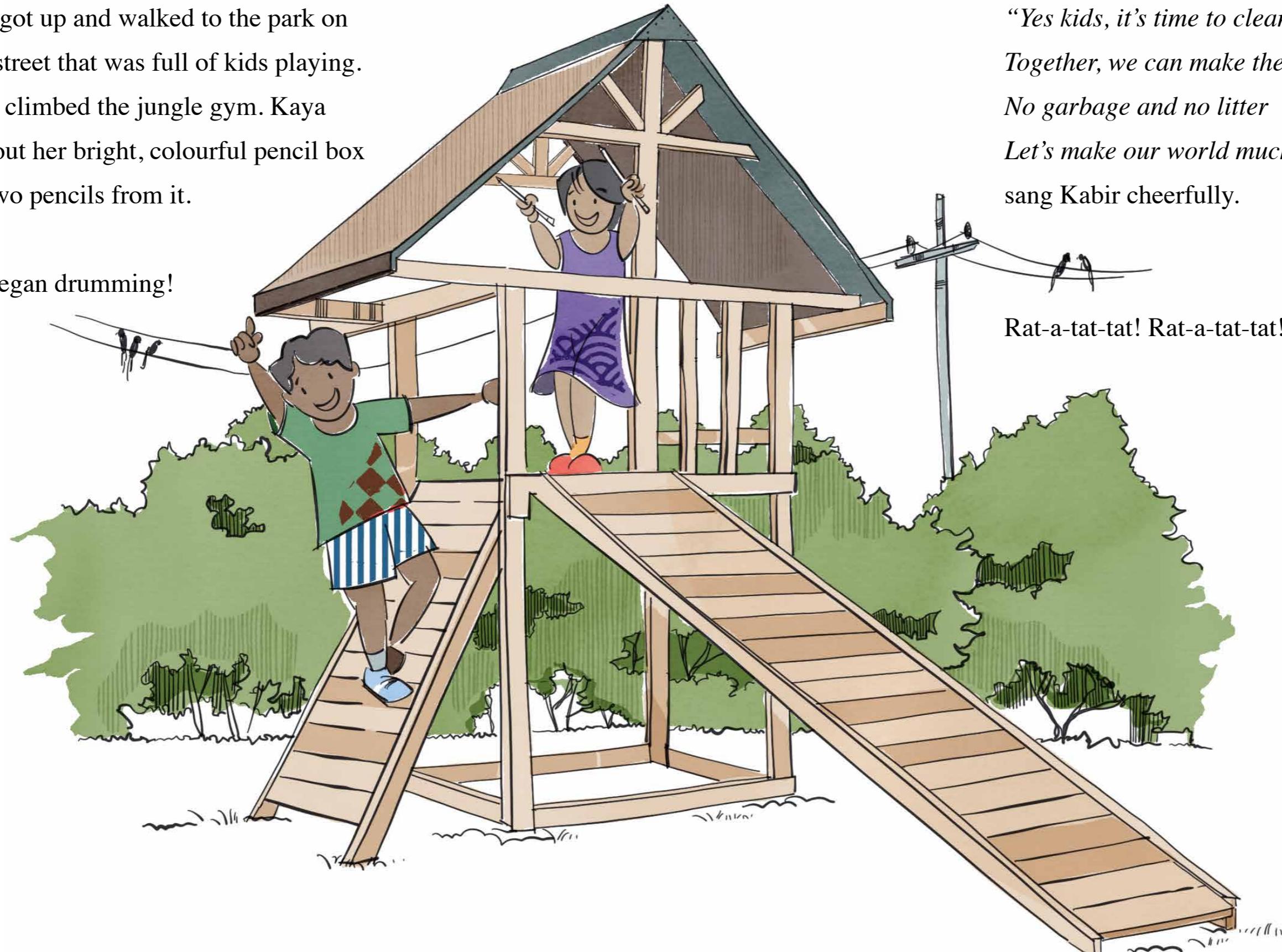
They got up and walked to the park on their street that was full of kids playing. Kabir climbed the jungle gym. Kaya took out her bright, colourful pencil box and two pencils from it.

She began drumming!

**R**at-a-tat-tat! Rat-a-tat-tat!

*"Yes kids, it's time to clean!  
Together, we can make the whole place green!  
No garbage and no litter  
Let's make our world much better!"*  
sang Kabir cheerfully.

Rat-a-tat-tat! Rat-a-tat-tat!





All the children in the park gathered curiously around Kaya and Kabir.

Kaya and Kabir showed their new friends the garbage that had been thrown onto the street. They explained how thoughtless people were being in not thinking about the environment.

Kaya told them how the aunty they met worked so hard, and how difficult it was because of people littering the streets.

Kabir told them how by throwing garbage all around the dustbin instead of inside, everyone was disrespecting her hard work. The environment also had a hard time staying healthy.

**B**ut what can we do?" asked one of the children.

"Let's make a vow to team up and clean five streets during playtime!" Kabir said.

The kids began to chat excitedly amongst themselves! This sounded like an interesting project and they couldn't wait to get started.

Gaia smiled gently, breathing gently in peace. She was so pleased to see that Kaya, Kabir, and their many young friends had become active citizens!



**S**oon, it was playtime. Instead of playing with cricket bats and balls and footballs and frisbees, the children got to work. They put on their gloves and masks and were on the move.

*Banana peels and plastic bags  
Bits of paper and bits of rags  
Tossed around on the streets  
Are bottles and some untidy sheets  
Humans litter, tell me why?  
With twin litter bins for trash wet or dry  
Green bin for wet waste  
And blue for dry  
Let's separate the litter  
And not make Mother Earth cry!*



**A**round 6:30 p.m. that evening, the five teams were done. They had successfully cleared the streets they had been assigned.

“Well done, team! We all worked hard, didn’t we?” asked Kabir.

“Phew, yes!” said Kaya. “But Kabir, people will come back and litter again! How can we stop them?”

“Hmmm... How about we draw and stick posters and tell people not to litter?” asked a girl named Maya.

“Great idea! Krish and I are good with art and craft. Let’s do that!” said a boy named Mohan.

“We can be street monitors like Maya is in class, and tell everyone not to litter! We can write down the names of those who litter and give them to Gaia ma’am!” said a girl named Shravanti as the children giggled.

But in the midst of this, Kaya, Kabir and their friends glowed in the setting light of the sun. Soon, they had found the perfect solution.

“Yes! We will each tell at least five more people around us to help keep the neighborhood clean!” said Kabir excitedly.

“Soon, Mother Earth will be clean and green again!” Kaya said.

“Yes yes! Clean and green!” the children shouted.

As the kids stood there discussing their next plan of action, Deepika Didi joined them. They excitedly told her their adventure as Mother Earth's little friends and their plans to keep the streets clean.

"Oh my little superstars! I'm so proud of what you all have done!" said Deepika Didi.

"But didi, how can we get more grown-ups to help us?" asked Shravanti.

"Just like the aunty who works hard to keep our streets clean every day!" added Mohan.

"Men and women who help take care of the roads, health and hygiene, and education are called city workers. They are employed by the Municipal Corporation, which is a part of the local government in cities and towns that is responsible for taking care of our everyday issues," explained Deepika Didi.

"How can we ask them to help us with this problem, didi?" asked Kaya.



“Do you remember the letter I had given to the Municipal Corporation,” said Deepika Didi, “asking them to give us more streetlights?”

Kaya snapped her fingers and said, “Yes, the pet station.”

“Pet station?” the children looked puzzled.

“It’s called a petition, not a pet station, Kaya,” explained Deepika Didi with a smile on her face.

“I remember, you asked Mom to sign the petition,” added Kabir.

“Can we also make a petition asking the Municipal Corporation for more dustbins?” asked Kaya.

“Deepika Didi can you help us write it? We can ask Mom to send it to the Municipal Corporation!” said Kabir with great excitement.

“That’s a great plan. In fact, we can all go to the Municipal Corporation and meet the Councillor for our area!” said Deepika Didi as the children jumped with joy.

“Count-silly-sir!” said Kaya. The children looked puzzled. Who was Kaya calling silly?



“Hahaha! My little one, it is pronounced coun-sill-or!” said Deepika Didi.

They wrote the petition in Kaya's notebook, and went from door to door and took signatures from grown-ups. They got 57 signatures!

Deepika Didi took them to the Municipal Corporation Office, so the children could make their request for more dustbins and also ask for more grown-ups to help keep the streets clean. Inside the office, they met Mr Ramesh Hegde, the Councillor for their area.

"Hello children! How can I help you?" he asked.

"Mr Councillor, my sister, my friends and I want to give you a petition we have drafted!" said Kabir, feeling very important.

"We want more grown-ups to help keep our streets clean, Mr Ramesh!" said Shravanti.

"Yes! There's too much garbage, and it makes Mother Earth very sad!" said Maya.

"Very, very sad!" said Kaya, looking down at her feet. Big, round tears began to roll down her cheeks.



“Oh my, how wonderful that children are being so responsible!” said Mr Ramesh Hegde. “You know, my young friends, you are all active citizens and I am so proud of you!” he said.

“We are actipitisens!” Kaya clapped, as the other children looked at Mr Ramesh Hegde curiously.

“Hahaha! My young friends, active citizens are people who take action to solve a problem. My team and I here at the Municipal Corporation will do our best to provide you with all the support as requested in your petition. Thank you, dear friends!” he said.

The children hopped and skipped alongside a very happy Deepika Didi, chattering all the way home.

The next morning, Kaya and Kabir woke up nice and early. To their great joy, a wonderful sight awaited them when they walked out of their front door. Mr Ramesh Hegde, the Councillor, and his team were installing more dustbins, and had already put up posters asking for more people to help keep the roads clean!

What's more, Renuka aunty and Vishwa uncle were busy putting up more posters. Sunitha aunty and Ravindar uncle were picking up fallen leaves and twigs. Even their teachers, Mr Ramachandran, Ms Vimala, Ms Gita and their principal, Mr Jayakumar were busy helping the municipal officers by separating the plastic bottles from all the other waste!

"Hi sleepy head!" said a voice. Kabir turned in the direction of the voice. It was their father, who was busy collecting all the plastic bottles from the teachers.

"Hello kiddos! Come on, help out!" said their mother, who was climbing up a ladder and dusting off all the dried leaves that had gathered on top of the compound walls.





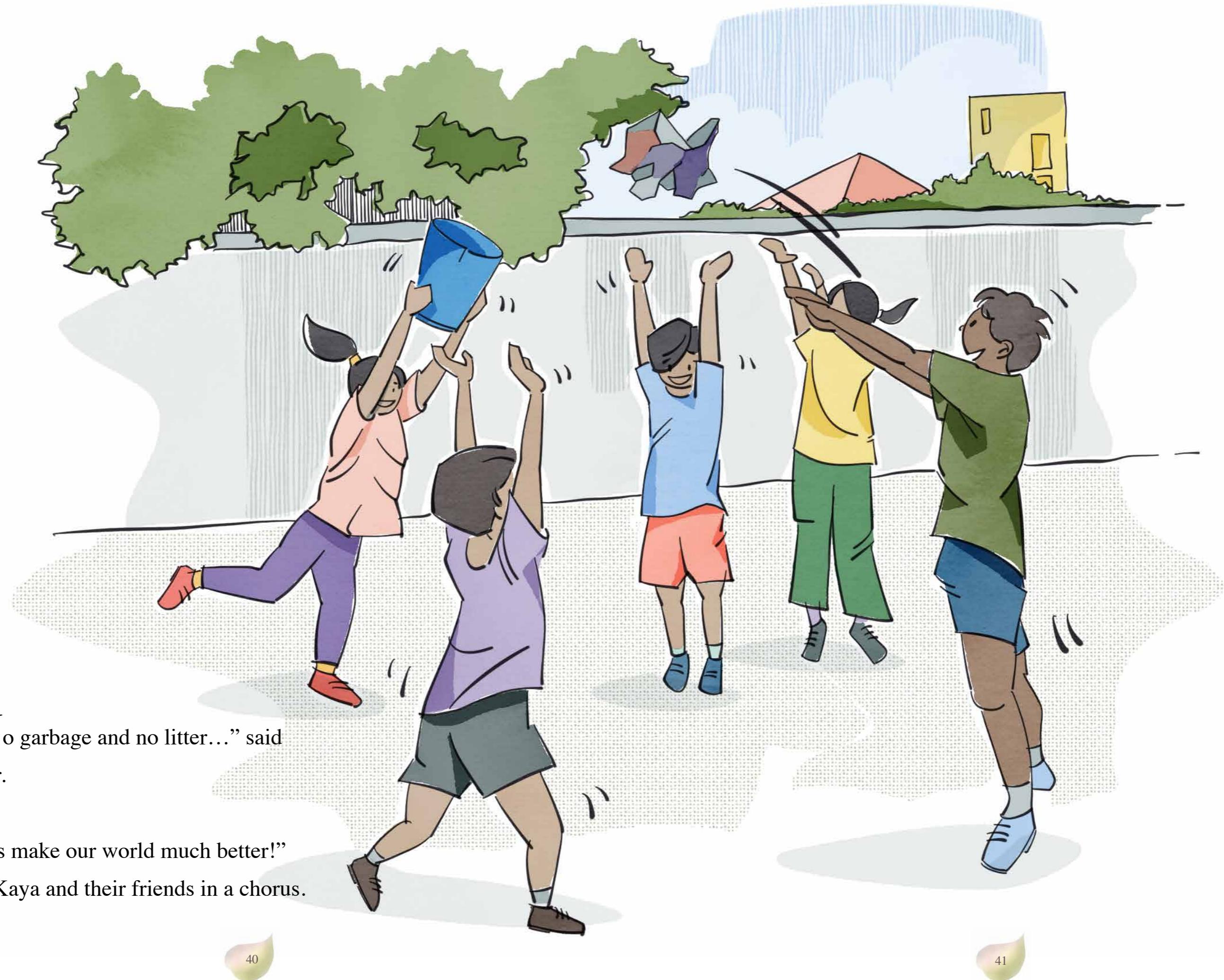
As Kabir and Kaya went about helping people here and there, they crossed the same garbage bin on their road as before. They noticed another beautiful leaf, with a different message this time. Kaya read out the letter.

*“Hello, my children! I saw what you and your lovely friends did yesterday! Oh, how happy and healthy I feel! I can breathe easy and my stomach isn’t rumbly and grumbly from plastic, and I am able to stretch my arms better! I am so proud of you two. I hope I stay this healthy always. I will, if you all take care of me properly. Will you?*

*With love,  
Gaia.”*

Kaya and Kabir smiled at each other. They couldn’t wait to rush to school and tell all their friends about being active citizens! Oh, how exciting everything seemed! They had so many things to share about taking charge and taking care of the environment.

Kaya took out the leaf with the message from Mother Earth. This year, Show and Tell was going to be super exciting for everyone in their class!



“No garbage and no litter...” said  
Kabir.

“Let’s make our world much better!”  
said Kaya and their friends in a chorus.

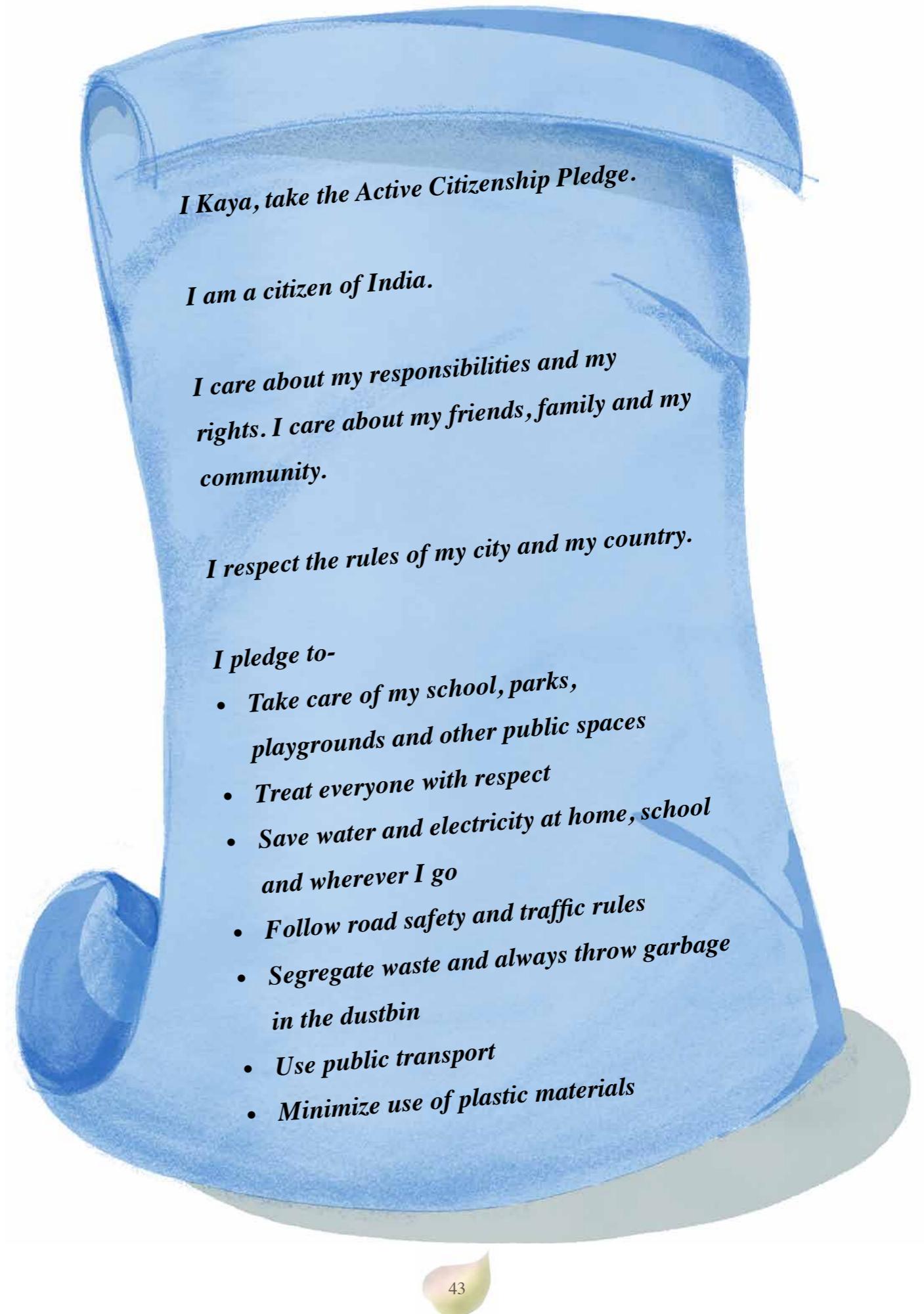
Their teacher congratulated Kaya, Kabir and their friends on being active citizens.

As Show and Tell came to an end, the children promised to keep their streets clean. With their teacher's help, they also made a list of rules they would follow to make their community a better place.

"This is your pledge to be an active citizen," their teacher said beaming with pride.

"I will also put this up on the notice board for other classes to take the pledge," she added.

Thrilled, the entire class took the Active Citizenship pledge as they ended the Earth Celebration Day.



## About Janaagraha

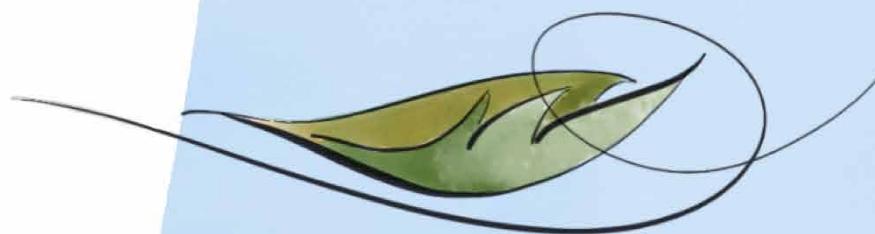
Janaagraha ([www.janaagraha.org](http://www.janaagraha.org)) was founded by Swati Ramanathan and Ramesh Ramanathan in December 2001. It is registered under the Indian Trusts Act, 1882. Janaagraha's mission is to transform quality of life in India's cities and towns and it defines quality of life as comprising quality of infrastructure and services and quality of citizenship. We work with citizens to catalyze active citizenship in city neighbourhoods and with governments to institute reforms to city governance (what we call "city-systems"). Civic Learning, Civic Participation and Advocacy and Reforms are Janaagraha's three major strands of work to accomplish its mission.

Quality of Citizenship is an integral component of Quality of Life and therefore, Janaagraha's Civic Learning Program is aimed at catalyzing Active Citizenship in our cities. We firmly believe that systematic Civic Learning is a prerequisite for large-scale civic participation in our cities, whereby citizens will take ownership of their neighborhoods and cities and work constructively with each other and their governments to solve civic problems. Good citizenship is about what citizens do, rather than who they are. As citizens, we can make our cities a better place to live in and improve our quality of life. In this process we become responsible, engaged and active citizens.

**ichangemy city**

IChangeMyCity is a Janaagraha initiative

A beautiful leaf flutters from the  
palm of Gaia, Mother Earth, with  
a message for Kaya and Kabir.  
What's the message?



Read on to find out about  
Kaya and Kabir's adventure.