

The Glass Collector

Anna Perera

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Aaron is a 15-year-old boy from Mokattam, a community right outside the city of Cairo. The people here are poor, for work they collect trash from Cairo and sell to a recycler who comes around a couple times a month. Aaron's mother has died and he is left to live with his stepfather and two stepbrothers. One of his stepbrothers is a drunk who doesn't do much work and the other, Lijah treats him like he's not part of the family. Every morning Aaron and Lijah take the pony and cart to the city to gather bags of trash. Glass is Aarons specialty. He is really good at handling the broken pieces without hurting himself. He also finds comfort and joy in the way the light reflects through glass. Some of the glass bottles he collects come from the alley behind a perfume shop owned by Omar, who Aaron admires. After the bags are filled for the day, they return to Mokattam, where there's always the smell of trash in the air. One day while the step brothers are out collecting the day's haul, Lijah fails to water the pony, on the way home the pony gives out from thirst and exhaustion. This leaves the family without a way to make a living.

When the family is near starving Aarons stepfather orders him to go into town and do what he can to get food. Aaron begins to hitch rides to the city and turns to stealing because there is no way for him to get a load of trash home. This feeds his family for a while but when he is caught with stolen goods by a neighbor and the priest, his step father feels like Aaron has disgraced him and he tells him not to return home. The people in the community also see him as a thief. Aaron finds himself sleeping in the pony pen, that is cared for by a girl named Rachel who he is fond of. She brings him food when she can. Aaron turns to his best friend Jacob, who has a job collecting medical waste that has not been discarded properly. Jacob's mother takes Aaron in and is happy that Jacob has someone to help with the work. Collecting medical waste is a dangerous job, many people have died from the diseases they contract while working this position. Aaron is not happy about what he has become. Soon Jacob and his mother are ready to rid themselves of Aaron, and one event makes it easy for them to do that.

Again, left without a job, Aaron doesn't know what he will do, he thinks about going back home and asking his stepfather to take him back, but after getting knocked out in the street by Lijah, he is taken in by a man named Michael who works in the community. As he recovers at Michael's home which is in the city, he realizes how lonely life is there, he wants to be back home in Mokatten, where he is comfortable and known by many. Once back home Aaron finds that his stepfather has died, his brother Lijah has married and he is welcomed back.

Journey through the days with Aaron in this amazing book as he experiences life, love and self-awareness. The writer brings this book to life by painting a picture that makes you feel as you are right there in the midst of it all. This is a very descriptive and emotional story that touches on important issues like family, community, and faith. I enjoyed this story of survival and how the writer showed that even during tough times you can find peace and beauty in even the smallest of things. Life lessons are incorporated into everyday events. This story is truly powerful and bold. I'd recommend this book to age groups 15+. I feel this book would be a great addition to any home library. It will be enjoyed by teens and adults alike. You'll become attached to Aaron and the people around him as you learn about the culture and traditions of the Zabbaleen people.

Recommended Books:

Guantanamo Boy by Anna Perera

The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini

Paper Towns by John Green