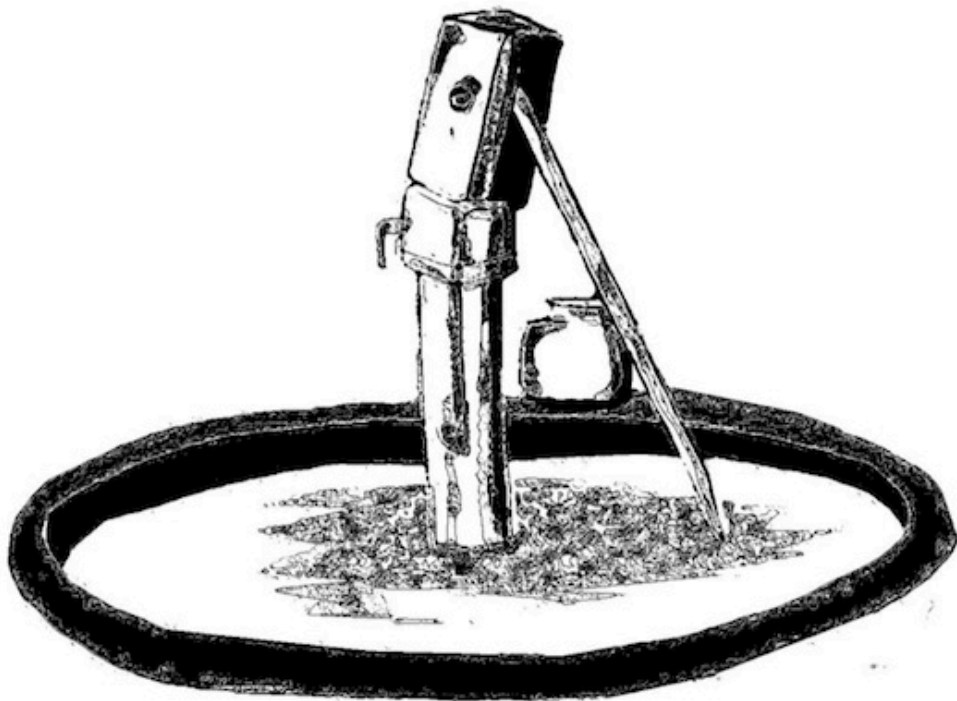


પુષ્પા
પાંચદૌદે



LORRI FRANDSEN

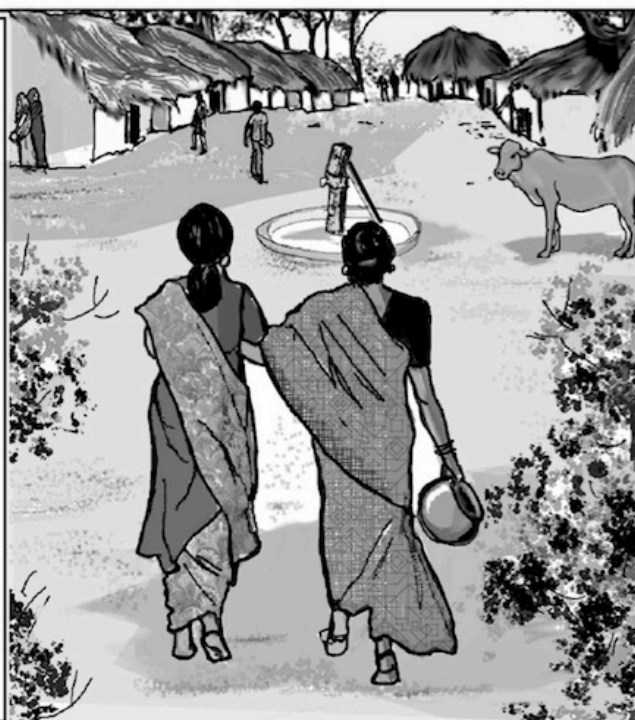
1. memories



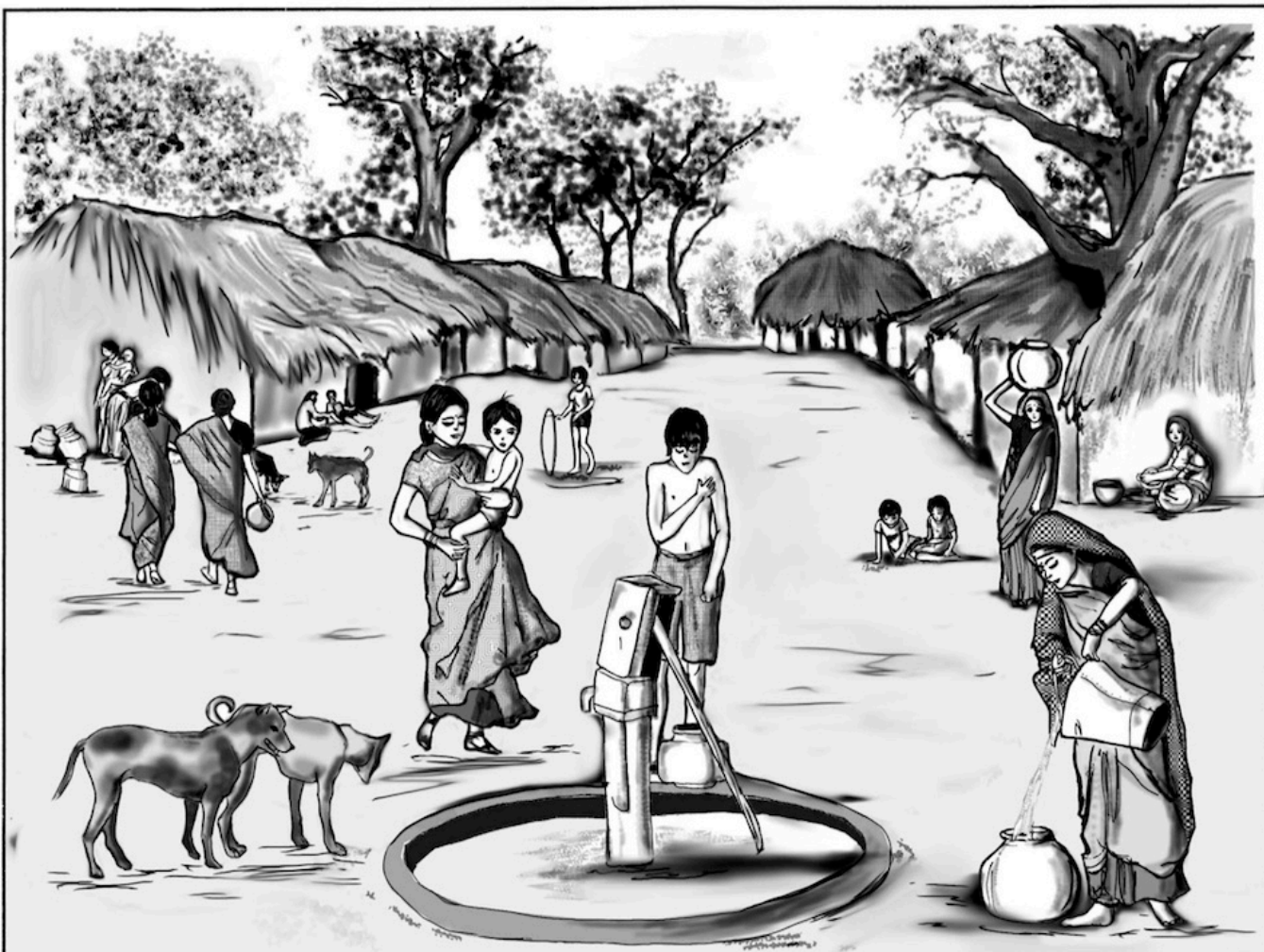
As a little girl growing up in Orissa, India, I'd wait every day for the morning mist to settle over our valley like a veil. I loved the way it draped over the mountains and shimmered across the fields. As the sun rose higher on the horizon, streaking the sky with purple and gold, the veil of haze would be whipped away to make way for the celebration of a new day. I'd watch the scene unfold before my eyes and imagine myself wearing the colors of the dawn with a veil of silvery mist floating around my shoulders... I'll always remember that about the place where I grew up, although I have many other memories of my valley and what it was like to live there.



Most of the people in our valley were tribals who lived close to the forests and farmed small plots of land. Some were rice farmers while others worked in the rock quarry a few miles away. Every day started out with dogs barking and roosters crowing. Then it was time for the women to gather their pots and go to the well to fetch water.



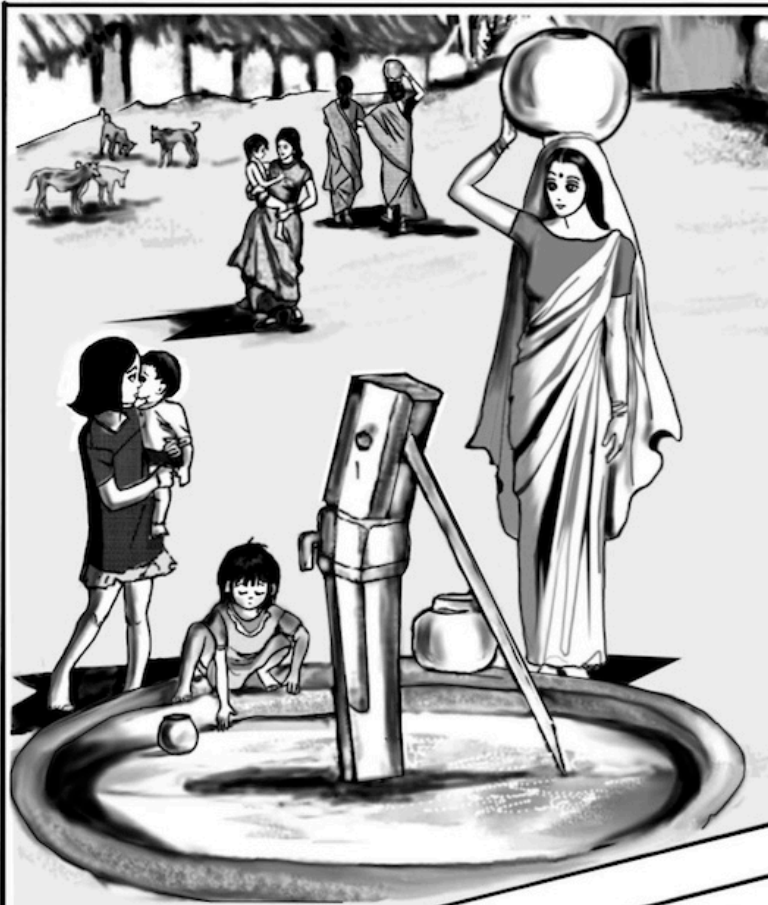
The bore well was at the end of the main street. It supplied the entire village with water and it was also the place where many people gathered to gossip and exchange news. Our village was very small so everyone knew each other.



All the houses looked the same. The walls were made of mud mixed with cow dung and the roofs were thatched. There was usually one door and one window with iron bars to keep out animals and intruders. Inside there would be a small room or two with a rope bed, a clay oven built into the wall, and a few shelves for storage. No one had a bathroom or running water. We used the fields and roadsides for our bathroom needs. Our village didn't have dependable electricity so everyone used candles at night. Few of us had ever seen a TV and we didn't even know about computers.

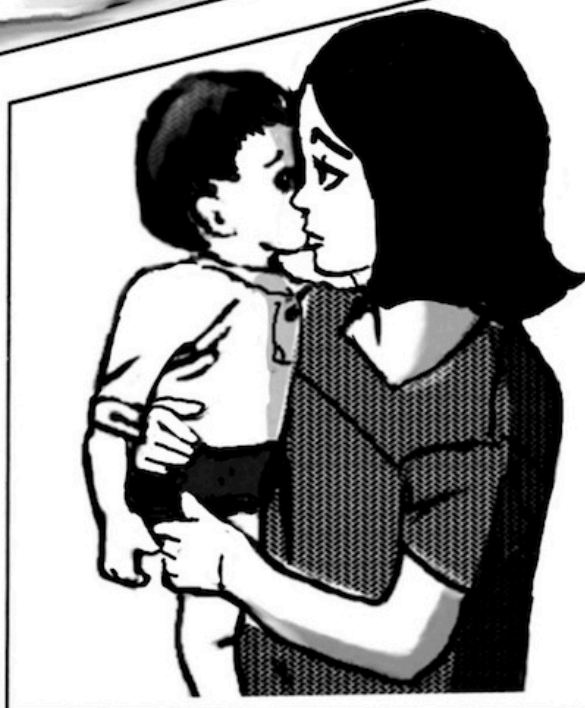
Water from our well was used for drinking, for washing clothes, for bathing, and for watering gardens. I still remember the women pumping at the well, lifting the handle up and down, over and over again, until their pots were full. It took a long time and sometimes you had to wait in line for over an hour until it was your turn. Men rarely fetched water because it was considered a woman's job.





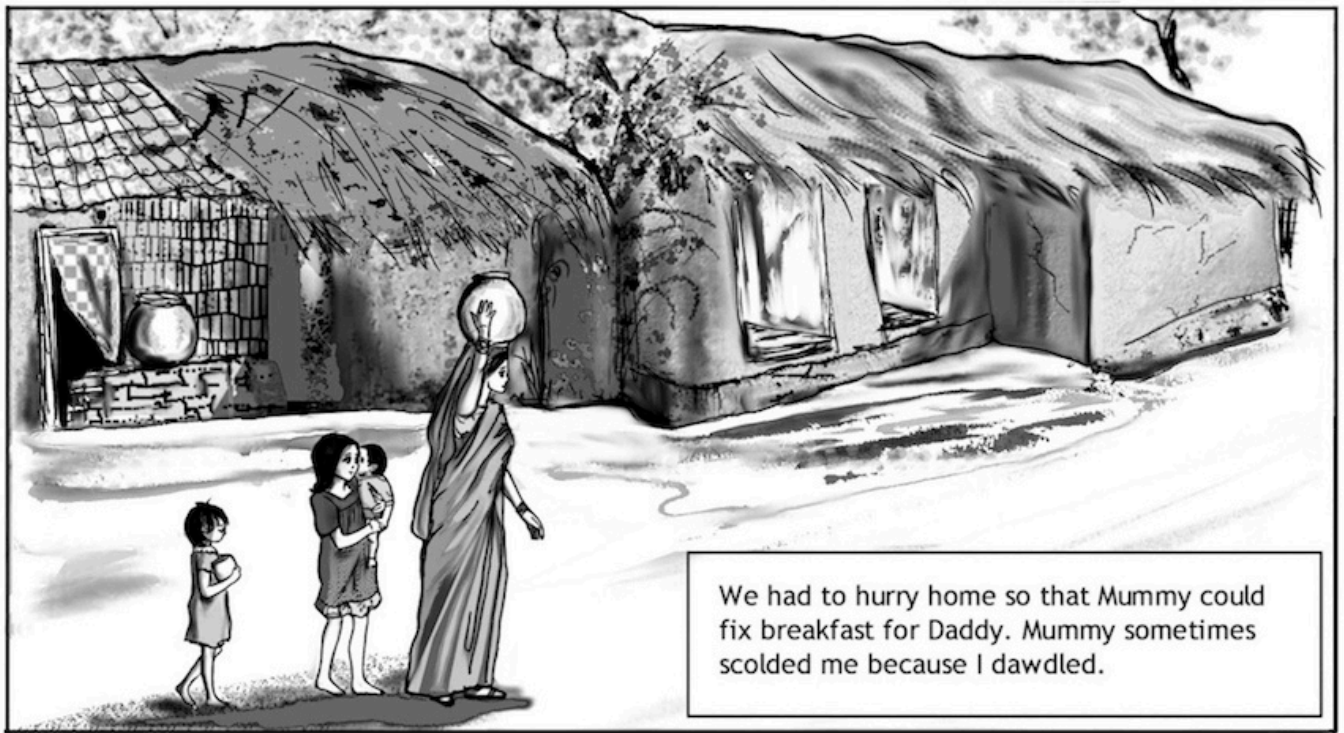
We also went to get water early every morning. Mummy balanced a big pot on her head which was very heavy when it was full. She had to carry it all the way back to our house at the end of the street. Anita, my 9 year-old sister, carried baby Kumari, and I, Pushpa, was only five so I just filled a little jar. I always liked to play in the water that spilled from the well. Mummy would remind me not to get my dress dirty. I only had 2 dresses - one for every day and one for dressup - so I tried to be careful. But sometimes I got mud on it and then Mummy would have to wash it when we got home.

Anita often helped Mummy by taking care of Kumari.

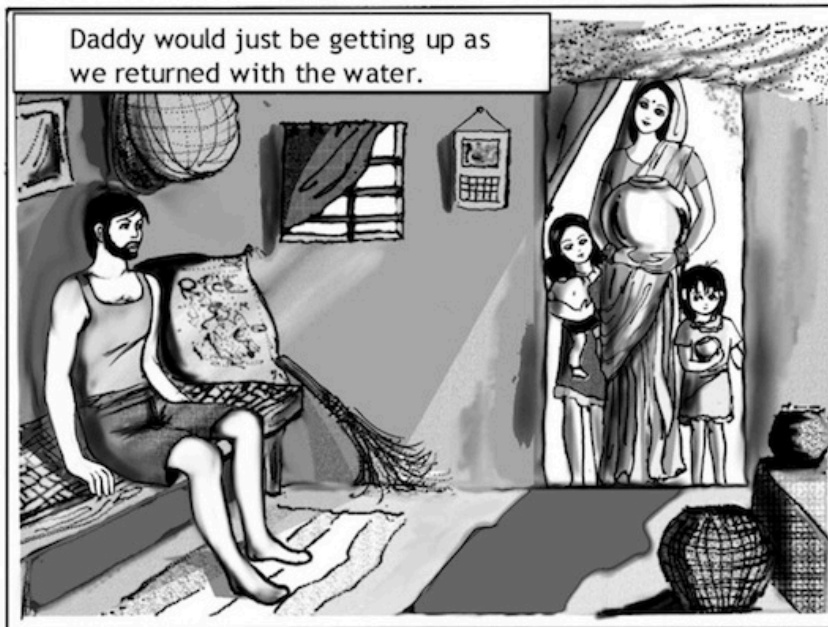


I just mostly played.





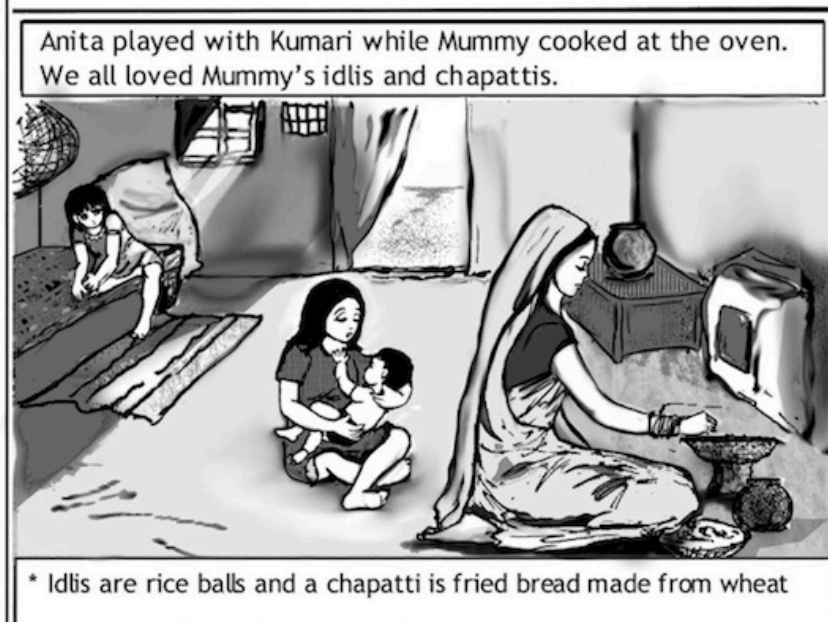
We had to hurry home so that Mummy could fix breakfast for Daddy. Mummy sometimes scolded me because I dawdled.



Daddy would just be getting up as we returned with the water.



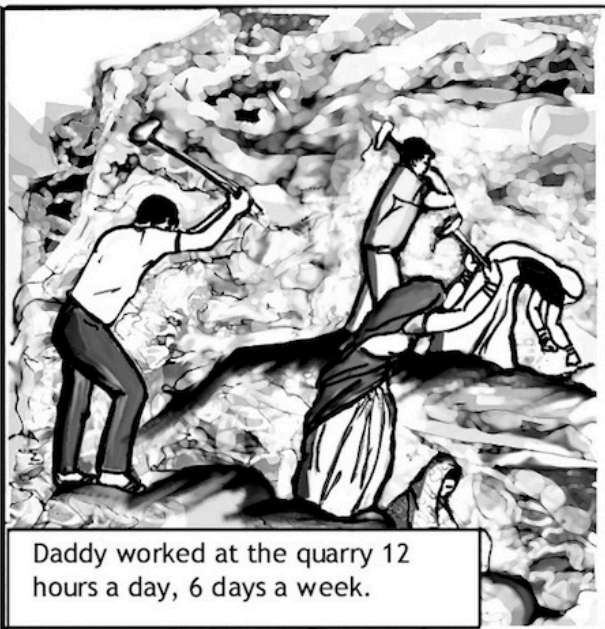
Bye Pushpa.
Be a good girl.



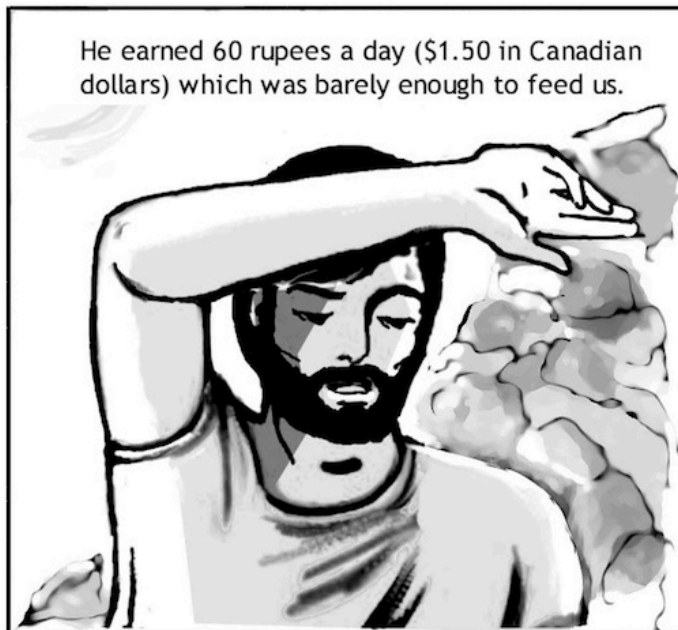
Anita played with Kumari while Mummy cooked at the oven. We all loved Mummy's idlis and chapattis.

After breakfast Daddy went to work at the rock quarry. He had to walk 2 miles to get there so he always took a tiffin lunch pail with him.

* Idlis are rice balls and a chapatti is fried bread made from wheat



Daddy worked at the quarry 12 hours a day, 6 days a week.



He earned 60 rupees a day (\$1.50 in Canadian dollars) which was barely enough to feed us.

Anita went to school every day. She was in third level and she had a school uniform, some books, and a tiffin lunch pail. She also had a pair of shoes. She looked so pretty all dressed up. Mummy said I was too young to go to school but maybe I could go next year...if we could afford it.

*All school children in India wear school uniforms.



Anita's friends came by each morning to walk to school with her. Everyone liked my sister.



I wish I could go to school so I could learn things too.

Pushpa, school isn't the only place to learn. The whole world can be your teacher. There are many interesting things to discover right here at home.



Mummy was right. There were many interesting things to learn right where we lived. She said I should ask questions because that was the best way to find out about things. Mummy sometimes laughed at my questions but she always tried to give me an answer.



Mummy said I was an exceptionally curious child.





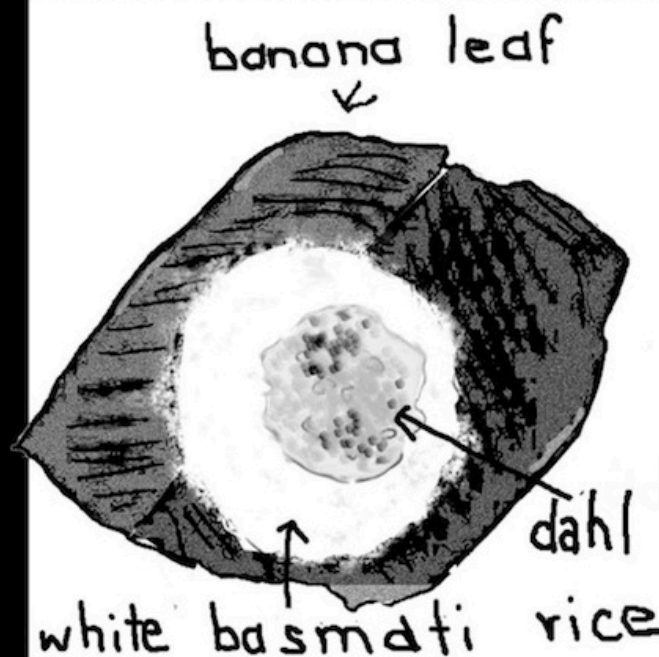
I think I loved Mummy so much because she was gentle and kind. She was beautiful too. She loved to sing when she combed and braided my hair and I loved to listen to her. Sometimes she told me funny stories about when she was a little girl. Being with her made me forget that I couldn't go to school like I wanted. We did so many fun things together.



Let's get dinner ready, Pushpa. Anita and your father will be home soon. You can help fill the glasses with water.

We were a poor family so we hardly ever ate chicken, and we never ate beef because Hindus don't eat cows, (except for water buffalo). Once a week we had eggs. Usually we just ate rice and dahl.

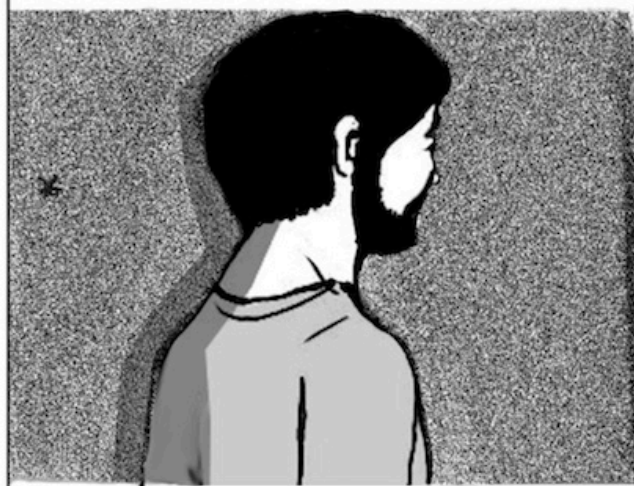
*Dahl is a thin soup made from lentils. It is poured over rice like a gravy.



We used banana leaves for plates and we ate with our fingers. We only used our right hand because in India it is considered very rude to eat with the left hand. Mummy taught me how to scoop up rice into a ball and pop it into my mouth. After we finished eating, we threw the leaves outside for the cows to eat.



Daddy was gone from early morning til late in the evening. When the sun began to go down we knew he would be home soon. He always looked so tired when he walked through the village.



We helped Mummy get the dinner ready so Daddy could eat as soon as he washed up.



Sometimes Mummy and Daddy whispered in bed and I could hear them

I don't see how we can survive on my low wages at the quarry. There's never enough money for the things we need.

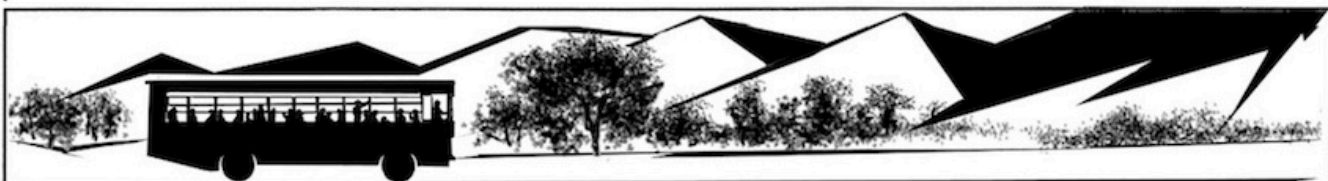
I know. I'm worried that we won't be able to get more medicine for Kumari if she gets sick again.

What scares me is that the boss has been talking about laying off some of the workers.

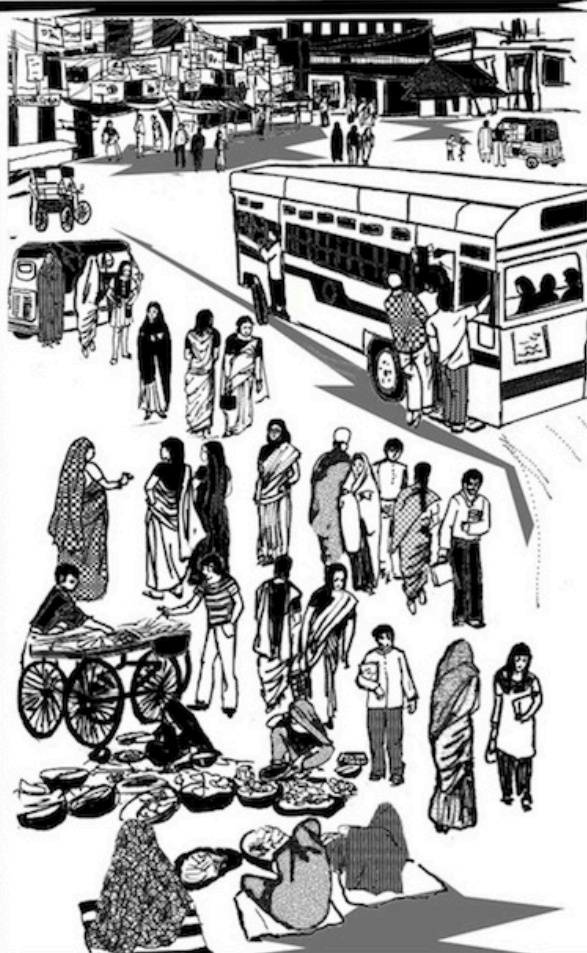
Do you think I should go to the town temple to do puja?

Usually we prayed to the Hindu gods in our house or at the shrine in the village. We only traveled to the temple in town for special holy festivals, when we wanted to ask the gods for big requests. I knew Mummy and Daddy must be very concerned if Mummy was thinking of going there. After Daddy went to sleep, Mummy was still awake and I heard her crying.

Two days later Mummy and I took a bus into town. Mummy asked a neighbour to look after Kumari while we were gone. Sabita, an old woman from our village, traveled with us.



It was a long 2 hour ride. Every time the bus stopped, more people got on until the bus was completely full. We were lucky to have seats so we didn't have to stand up the whole way.



Finally we arrived at the market square where people were selling all sorts of things.

Mummy bought flowers and fruit for the Durga puja*. Mummy said that Durga's energy would be inside her image and if we gained her attention, and if she was pleased with our gifts, the goddess might show us favor and grant our prayer requests.

*Puja is the worship of Hindu deities through prayers, songs, and rituals.



You don't think the child will be frightened?

She was alright the other times I brought her.



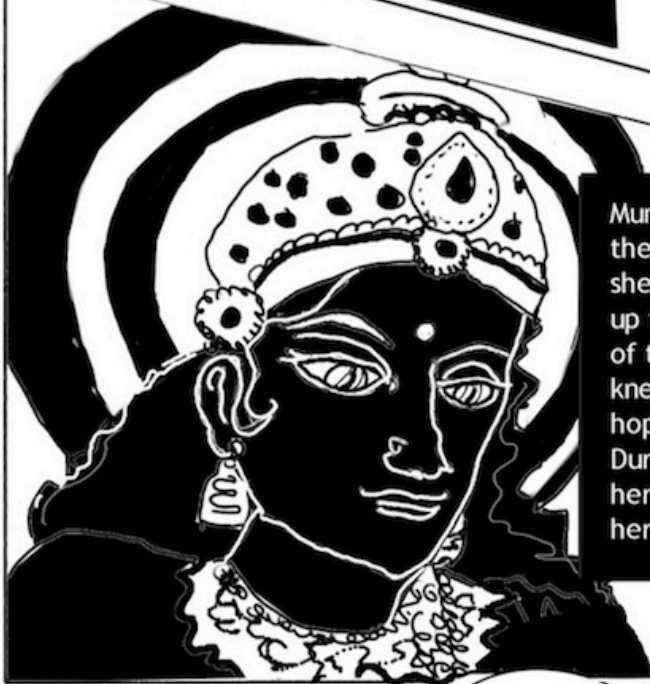
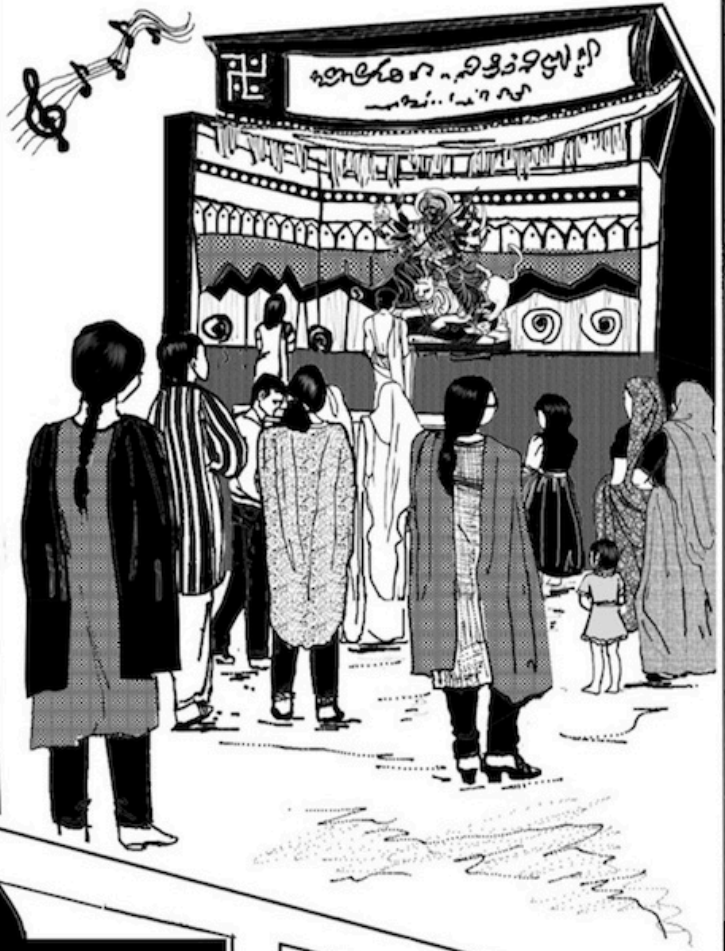
Hindus believe that Durga is a great warrior goddess who is ferocious and very powerful. Her images represent her fury.

She must be a brave one then.

I wasn't really so brave because Durga can be very frightening to look at. I was especially afraid of her eyes which Mummy said could see right through a person.



When the drumming began, many worshippers gathered around the temple. We stood in the front so Mummy could give her offering to the goddess. Durga's statue showed her painted black with ten arms waving around. She was sitting on a lion and her foot was on the head of a demon. The demon was being eaten by the lion. Whenever someone wanted to do puja, they had to take off their shoes and climb the stairs to the top where they rang a bell so the goddess would notice them. Everyone was chanting and some people danced in circles. There was a strong smell of incense everywhere. Mummy finally got her turn to give the priest her offering and he put it on the altar.



Mummy climbed the stairs and she looked right up into the eyes of the goddess. I knew she was hoping that Durga would see her and answer her prayers.



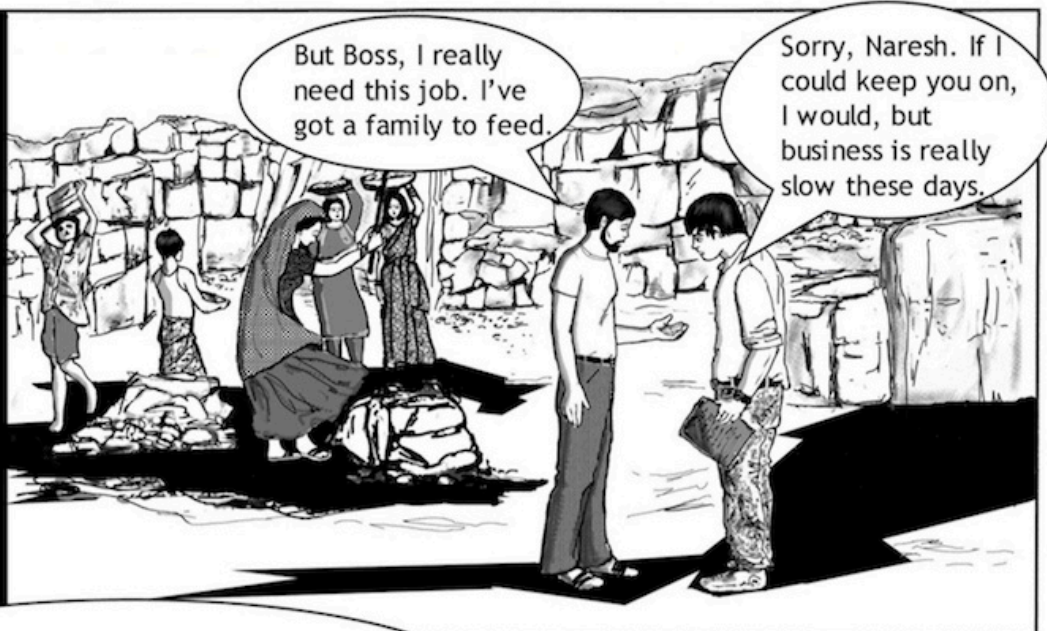
Please make Kumari strong and healthy and please bring prosperity to our family.



I was glad when puja was over and we could go back to the village.



The puja to the goddess didn't work because things didn't get better for our family like Mummy had hoped. In fact, the following week they got a while lot worse.



But Boss, I really need this job. I've got a family to feed.

Sorry, Naresh. If I could keep you on, I would, but business is really slow these days.

Kumari is terribly sick. She won't eat and I can't get her fever to come down. We've got to do something for her! Look at how flushed she is.



What am I supposed to do, Lalitha? I don't have a job anymore and there's no money for more medicine! There's nothing I can do!



I heard the
neighbours talking



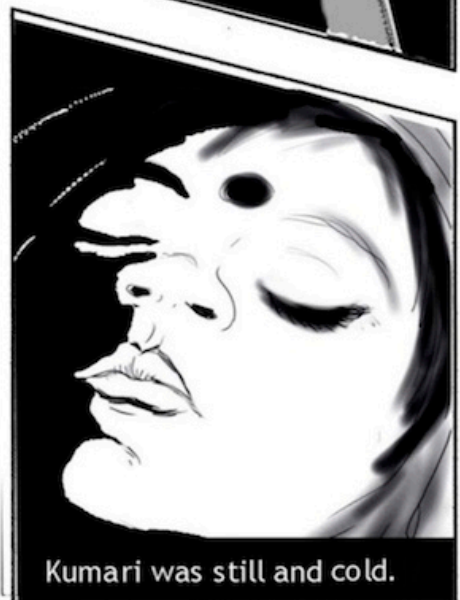
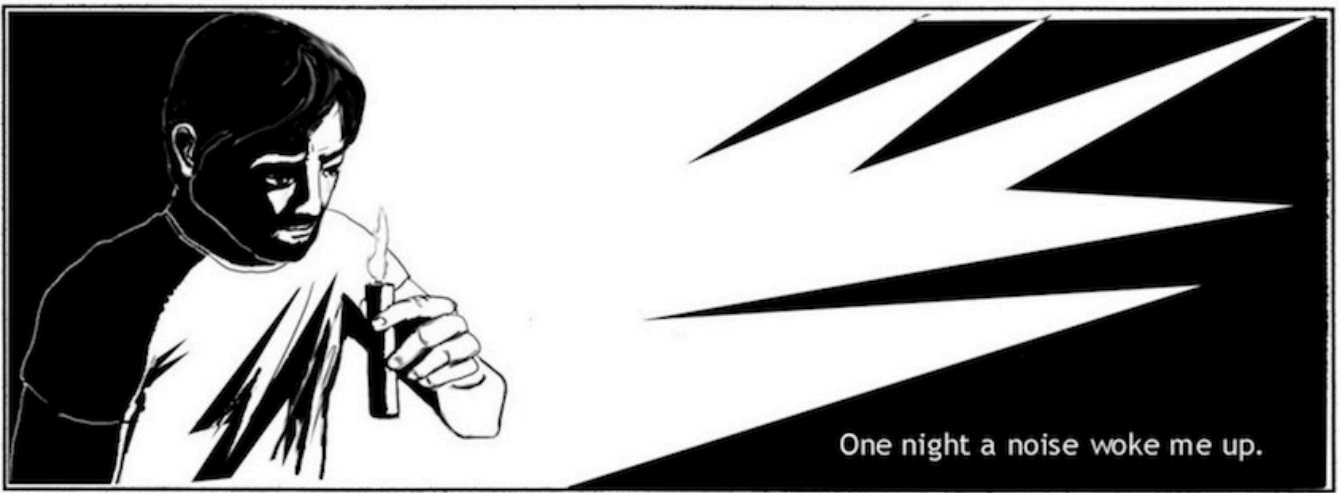
What rotten
karma! No job
and a sick
baby. I feel so
sorry for
them.

That's not their only bad luck. They
have 3 daughters and no sons. Girls are
of no use to a poor man. He will never
be able to get dowries for them all.

And with no son,
he has no one to
carry on his name
or perform the
burial rites when
he dies. What a
hopeless
situation!

That's life I guess. But its their duty to
suffer and gain as much good karma as
possible. Then they can have a better
life next time around. I'd like to help
them but I'm afraid to do too much. If I
take away their suffering, they will have
to go through this all over again. That
would really be too bad.





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