

Kavita has decided to give birth to her child in an abandoned hut, not far from her home.

No one heard my prayers. Kavita closes her eyes and her body shudders with silent tears. She leans forward, seizes the midwife's¹ hand, and whispers, 5 "*Daiji*², don't tell anyone. Go quickly, fetch Rupa³, and bring her here. No one, you hear?"

"Yes, my child. Blessings to you and your baby. You rest now, please. I will bring some food." The midwife steps outside into the night.

As the early light of dawn seeps into the hut, Kavita awakens and feels the 10 throbbing⁴ ache in her pelvis. She shifts her body, and her gaze falls upon the newborn sleeping peacefully beside her.

It is not long before the door creaks open and bright sunlight spills in. Jasu enters, his eyes gleaming. "Where is he?" He beckons playfully with his hands. "Where is my little prince? Come, come... let me see him!" He walks toward 15 her, arms outstretched.

Kavita stiffens. She clutches the baby to her chest and tries to sit up. "She is here. Your little princess is right here." She sees blackness cloud his eyes. Her arms tremble as she wraps them tightly around the baby, shielding her small body.

20 "Another girl? What is the matter with you? Let me see!" he shouts.

"No. I will not. You are not taking her." She hears the shrillness of her voice, feels the tension flood into her limbs⁵. "This is my baby, *our* baby, and I will not let you take her." She sees bewilderment⁶ in his eyes as they search her face for some understanding. She has never spoken to anyone, let alone⁷ her husband, 25 with such defiance.

He takes a few steps toward her, then his face softens and he falls to his knees next to her. "Look, Kavita, you know we can't keep this baby. We need a boy to help us in the fields. As it is, we can hardly afford one child, how can we have two? My cousin's daughter is twenty-three and still not married, because 30 he can't come up with the dowry. We are not a rich family, Kavita. You know we can't do this."

Her eyes fill again with tears, and she shakes her head until they spill out. Her breath becomes ragged⁸. She squeezes her eyes closed for several breaths. When she opens them again, she looks squarely at her husband. "I won't let 35 you take her this time. I won't. If you try, if you even *try*, you will have to kill me first."

"Kavita, come, you're not thinking straight. We can't do this."

He throws his hands in the air. "She will become a burden to us, a drain⁹ on our family. Is that what you want?" He stands, towering over her again.

40 Her mouth is dry. She stumbles over the words she has not quite allowed to form except in the distant corners of her mind. "Give me one night. Just one night with my child. You can come fetch her tomorrow."

Jasu remains silent, looking down at his feet.

"Please."