

MURMUR OF THE LONELY BROOK

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EXCERPT

Pravin walked back home. The sky was overcast and a mild wind was blowing. He reached home and saw Parvati cooking while Nisha helped her. He waved at her and went to the other room.

“Aama, your son is calling me. I will see what he needs and come back,” said Nisha.

Parvati nodded and Nisha joined Pravin.

Pravin closed the door and gestured to her to sit down. He sat next to her on the bed.

“I have something to tell you.”

Nisha remained silent and looked at him. She saw he was serious and hesitant.

“You know our farmland is small and if divided will not be enough for the two of us to sustain.” He paused.

Nisha nodded.

“I have decided to work while baya will take care of the farm and orchard. As of now he does not want to join the army.”

“But that was always his dream.”

“I don’t know about tomorrow but now he wants to stay in the village.”

“And what happens to the land when he marries?”

“He will not marry anyone else. He will be your second husband. I have spoken with him and he has agreed to share you with me. This way the land will remain intact and the family will stay together.”

“What?” She sat quietly as the full depth of Pravin’s statement sank in and hit her consciousness. She was stunned and outraged.

“But... but I look at him as a brother,” she managed to say.

“That was before. From now, you can treat him otherwise. Even my fourth uncle who got

married to my aunt later is much younger than she is. It will not be a problem. And this is best for the family.”

“How can I love both of you? How can I love equally? How can I be in bed with him?”

“It’s only the two of us, not four or five. If both of us can sacrifice for the family, then it should not be difficult for you.” Pravin raised his tone a bit.

Her universe crumbled and sank before her. All the while she thought that he loved her immensely and wanted to possess her and keep her for his own. It would have been different if it were a shared marriage from the beginning. Even her cousin was married to three brothers. She never thought, even in her dreams, that this was a possibility. She was not prepared mentally. She was terribly shaken and disturbed.

She knew she could not contest the decision; she had to accept it. If she didn’t, she would be marked as an outcast and thrown out of the house. There would be no place she could go. She also knew that her world would not be the same again. She knew the meaning of love would be lost forever. True, she enjoyed his brother’s infatuations and also floated with his dream sometimes, but in her mind, the image of love was always around one person. Was it that he did not find her love strong enough, not passionate enough, that he could share her so easily?

She looked at him in pain. How could the person she trusted so much betray her love? Had he ever loved her? She felt very much like a commodity that had no say in the trade, or who would acquire it. How could he decide like that?

She looked away. She went to the window and looked outside. Tears rolled down her cheeks. Outside the sky was dark and the wind gathered speed and grew into a storm. A blizzard came from the south and hit the eastern peaks, sweeping the snow off the pine trees and blowing them down on the valley. The trees swayed violently and the wind started brushing the rocks and boulders in broad furious strokes; the deposits forming on them rode the storm to scatter everywhere. The blinding blizzard moved from one peak to the other like a caged leopard, knocking down poles, flags, tiles, and all in its path.

Nisha stood still as a rush of snow came along with a gust of wind and plastered the window. Another came soon to clean it and then a burst of wind approached, twisting and twirling with snow, and hit the house, shaking the foundation. The front yard, the logs, the grass, everything disappeared below a covering of white. Huge slabs fell from the rooftops, blocking the roads, lanes, and steps. Pravin left the room while Nisha sobbed silently near the window. Her sobs floated across the ranges and finally condensed into a single teardrop, which fell on the river and flowed toward some unknown destination.

