

*The novel Sold is written as a series of prose poems. In this excerpt, Lakshmi, a girl from Nepal, describes how people in her village deal with a drought—and then must face the consequences of a downpour. Read the excerpt and answer the questions that follow.*

*from* **Sold**  
*by Patricia McCormick*

*MAYBE TOMORROW*

Today, like yesterday, and the day before, and the day before that, the sky is deadly blue.

Today, like each day before, the water in the rice paddy drops a little farther, and the plants hang their heads a little lower.

5 I watch as Ama<sup>1</sup> makes an offering of marigold petals, red kumkum powder, and a few precious bits of rice to her goddess, praying for rain. But the only water that falls comes from Ama’s eyes.

I go back to mopping the baby’s face with a damp rag. As  
10 Ama goes past, I touch the hem of her skirt.

“Maybe tomorrow, Ama,” I say.

My stepfather rises from his cot. “If the rains don’t come soon,” he says to my mother, “you will have to sell your earrings.”

15 Yesterday, or the day before, or the day before that, Ama would have said, “Never.” She would have said, “Those are for Lakshmi. They are her dowry.”

But today she hangs her head like the paddy plants and says, “Maybe tomorrow.”

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<sup>1</sup> *Ama* — Lakshmi’s mother

*WHEN THE RAIN CAME*

I smelled the rain before it fell.

I felt the air grow heavy like roti dough<sup>2</sup> and saw the leaves of the eucalyptus tree turn their silvery undersides up to greet it.

- 5 The first few droplets vanished in the dust. Then bigger drops fell, fat and ripe, exploding the earth.

Ama came out of the house, pulling her shawl over her head. Then, slowly, she lifted the folds of fabric away from her brow and, like the leaves of the eucalyptus tree, raised her  
10 waiting face toward heaven.

I ran across the yard, released Tali<sup>3</sup> from her wooden peg, and led her to the creek bed, her tongue unwilling to trust. Then, little by little, a trickle of muddy water came hopping down the gully.

- 15 Tali lapped and snuffled and snorted and sneezed and drank herself silly, her bony sides billowing with water.

I shut my eyes tight, letting the tears that had been gathering there finally spill down my cheeks, where they could hide inside the rain.

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<sup>2</sup> *roti dough* — dough for a flat bread

<sup>3</sup> *Tali* — the family's goat

## *TRYING TO REMEMBER*

The rain is so fierce, so relentless, so merciless, it finds every crack in our roof.

Ama and I pack the walls with scraps of cloth, but each day they melt a little more.

- 5 When there is a rare moment of sun, the women gather on the slope, shake their heads, and say this is the worst monsoon in years.

- After several more days, when there is no sun at all, the village headmen gather in the tea shop and ask the holy  
10 man to say a special prayer to make it stop.

I wait at home, as the damp firewood sizzles and smokes, trying to keep the baby from catching a chill. He wrestles with the blanket, bored and cranky from days on end inside.

- While I try to remember the days when the heat was so  
15 fierce, so relentless, so merciless, that we prayed for this rain.

## *WHAT DISASTER SOUNDS LIKE*

- When the night rain soaks the ground past the soaking point, when the earthen walls around the paddy melt away, when the rice plants are sucked out of the earth one by one and washed down the slope, there should be a sound, a  
5 noise announcing that something is terribly wrong.

Instead there is a ghostly hush that tells us we have lost everything.