

## Chapter Seven / Home

As the family settled in, they learned that only the old man, who worked in shifts with others, had actually always been in that mountain pass. His children were up in the mountains, working in hidden fields. All the others of the village had arrived as travelers through the pass, drawn in times past by trade and more recently by desperation.

The sound that had brought the family so far had been one part of a test. It was said among the people of the mountains that only those with the qualities that were needed could hear the sound, or those who were most desperate.

The second part of the test was whether those who followed the sound would be useful. Those who stood around only, or worked with little interest or vigor, were gently escorted by the old man to a small camp farther along the pass where there was a small trickle of a waterfall. He would leave them with a small bundle of food while they slept and walk back to the small village of caves. The flakes on the floor of the clearing would obscure his path.

The old man was known as the pattern-maker. He knew all the stories, and the designs of the baskets, pots and textiles. He knew how to weave branches to make walls and fences and which branches to use. He knew how the subtle changes in the sky heralded rain, or cold, or warm sun. He understood how the plants and animals of the mountains worked together

Or had known.

For a long time, the sky had not been reliable. Though they were still able to plant crops, to harvest fruit and berries, to dig roots and catch game, it took more effort. They watered the gardens now, carrying the precious liquid carefully from a stream that still flowed at a distance. They planted the gardens in little beds that were ringed with dams, so the water that was poured would stay inside and seep down slowly. The beds were terraced, and they had learned that by watering the top beds first they needed less water once they reached the bottom.

They tended the fruit trees that birds had randomly planted along the terraces, increasing the yield on those trees.

Because foods were scarce, though, the animals would take all of the crops if they could, so as long as the crops grew members of the village took turns day and night to walk the fields, chasing away animals with stones or adding to the store of pelts and meat that were kept for the winter.

The adolescent who had so admired the new type of arrow point was the grandchild of the pattern-maker. He had taken the new points and arrows up to the fields early

in the day to test them out with the small, tender birds that liked to sit at the tops of the trees.

In the mornings, the man of the family found the pattern-maker and, with his eldest and a group of others went to the clearing to make more tools. The sound of chipping was quite loud at times, ringing back and forth between the walls of the mountains. The tools took time to craft, but were durable, a quality of the stones in those mountains.

The woman quickly found that her ability to create threads and ropes was in demand, and relished the chance to show the others how to use the spindle – the one item she had brought with her from their former life through all the long journey. They had been using a far older method to make threads, much more time consuming, and less effective. The weavers of the village taught her to weave in return for the threads she made. And so she sat in the large cave where the weavers and spinners worked, enjoying the quiet and the comfort.

The children helped with chores, sitting near the older members and hearing the stories, watching and learning.

It was a good village, it was a good time.

When the rains began, the children were frightened at first. Only the eldest child of the family remembered water falling from the sky, remembered plants covered in green and endless stretches of trees bedecked in leaves so thick that the sun barely reached the forest floor.

So this child became a storyteller for the younger children of the family, then for the children of the village who did not know the types of plants and unbroken forest of the lowlands, and then for the entire village. Sitting in the evenings while the meal was shared, first the pattern-maker and then the storyteller would talk about how the world worked. First speaking of the past, and then speaking of the changes and how the changes had upset the patterns.

Each day, similar stories emerged: the regularity of Nature, the patterns of the seasons, the rhythms of weather and Time had been disrupted. What once was a certainty was now a memory.

Word count: 843