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My Turn

An uneasy peace

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Once upon a time, there was a much beloved, boundlessly beautiful, isolated mountain valley. Over the centuries, three proud clans made the valley their home. Though the clans generally lived peacefully beside one another, there were persistent tensions at the juncture of their intertwined existence and contrasting customs.

The valley had been the revered ancestral home to one of the clans for a thousand years.

These so-called "Ancestrals" were time-honored stewards of the valley's soul, keepers of its spiritual flame, and guardians of its sacred lands. Cherishing their way of life, they vigilantly protected their customs from incursion and alteration, and carefully controlled outside access to their revered spaces and places. The spirits of the earth, sky, wind, and water were Ancestrals' guiding beacons. Though they regulated their involvement with other clans, they offered generous guidance to those unschooled in the mysteries of the natural world.

A second clan settled in the valley sometime later. Its members lived with, loved, and nurtured the precious valley for untold generations. It was widely understood that these "Multigenerationals" were guardians and operators of the valley's mechanisms of commerce, communication and governance, and that this would likely remain so in times to come. They especially prized family loyalty, legacy, cohesiveness, and continuity, and were like foster parents to a succession of valley newcomers.

Without Multigenerationals' effort and industry, valley life would have been devoid of necessities and conveniences of daily life.

The most recent group of valley emigres was a semi-nomadic, more loosely knit people. They maintained predominantly sentient ties to their forefathers.

These recent arrivals ("Recents") had wandered and explored the outside world's wilderness until they, too, saw the light and were captivated by the magical mountain valley. They were filled with energy and enthusiasm for their new home. While Recents brought a special vigor to the valley, they also had a penchant for disturbing the community's delicate equilibrium. Recents sometimes unknowingly transgressed other clans' cherished customs and traditions. Some likened them to exuberant youngsters who lacked wisdom, circumspection and respect for tradition. But, in Recents' eyes, they intended no offense. They were merely eager to make up for lost time in contributing to the betterment of their adopted land.

A fragile peace persisted among the valley's clans. Potentially deeper inter-group bonds were blocked by recall of painful pasts, both real and illusory. Clan members were keenly sensitive to matters of respect and self-worth. They had strong memories of slights, whether intended or inadvertent.

Within this delicate co-existence, the clans often viewed each other with thinly veiled suspicion. Multigenerationals feared Recents would become interlopers and usurpers. Recents feared Multigenerationals would deny them a meaningful role in valley affairs and would resist any and all change. Ancestrals harbored concerns that others might violate their hallowed places and practices. The clans often talked past one another. Each group had difficulty seeing its possible contribution to the conflicts that beset the valley, projecting shortcomings onto the other groups, and seeing their group as above reproach.

Lacking the means to reconcile long-simmering tensions, episodic eruptions were common. Specific flare-ups often defied explanation. Conflict could arise around matters as seemingly simple as what to name a public space, or whether a public servant had been duly respectful and responsive. The depth of feeling expressed often seemed out of proportion to the facts ... unless one considered the powerful symbolism that had been ignited. Without restorative dialogue across group boundaries, the clans would continue to project their deepest fears and least admirable motives onto one another.

Could a pathway to trust and reconciliation ever be found?

Could a collaborative quest proceed in the face of the possibility of further disappointment and injury? Could clan leaders summon the wisdom and marshal the courage to reach across group boundaries and nurture cohesive connection among the valley's people? Some thought the prospect so daunting as to require an impossibly rare combination of leadership skill, strength, stamina, sensitivity, and bravery. Yet, against all odds, the valley's people quietly kept hope alive. They silently prayed that wise and respected elders would come forward in a united search for a path to authentic reconciliation and enduring peace.

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