

THE BEGINNING OF CIVILIZATION
Mythologies Told True

Book One

TALLSTONE
AND THE CITY

A New Heaven and Earth

Second Edition

Dennis Wammack

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Tallstone and the City: A New Heaven and Earth, Second Edition

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TALLSTONE AND THE CITY

A New Heaven and Earth

Second Edition

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1. In the Beginning

Sunrise.

Ten thousand years ago, on the plains north of modern-day Sanliurfa, Turkey, a tribe of hunter-gatherers began their day as they had for over two hundred thousand years. But on this day, the first of four children is born. Driven by love, wisdom, ambition, and jealousy, these four will begin our transition from nomadic hunter-gatherers into stationary settlements—the beginning of human civilization.

The child is born.

So, it begins.

2. The Birth of Vanam

“His name is Vanam!” Chief Saparu shouted as he held his newborn son toward the heavens. “He will someday lead my tribe to riches and power beyond knowing. Vanam will be the greatest chief to ever live!”

The hunters were happy their chief was happy, but a butchered antelope would have made them happier. A son for the chief was fine but it was another mouth in a tribe with too many mouths and too little food.

The gatherers were happy to see the newborn, even if it meant losing another portion of food. The mother, Aman, was a young woman accepted into the tribe only nine seasons earlier.

Saparu’s second-in-command, Ramum, had agreed to be the young woman’s protector. This, however, did not include protection from Chief Saparu, whose self-established tradition was to be the first to mate with each new gatherer accepted into his tribe. After Saparu was tired of Aman, she was passed on to Ramum, two months pregnant. If she produced a male, Ramun would raise the boy as Saparu’s son and heir apparent.

After allowing Aman almost a full morning to recover from giving birth, Saparu commanded his tribe to continue their northward run to the next campsite.

Chief Saparu was concerned. He thought, *This site had better have good hunting. At least better than our last two. We didn’t see antelope or anything else. We are living on roots and plants.*

Saparu was beginning to doubt the expertise of his tribe’s longtime moonwatcher, Nilla. *Nilla may be losing his good camp-predicting capabilities. He was never that great, anyway. Maybe it’s time to start looking for another moonwatcher. Yes, I need a new moonwatcher. If I am to have a great tribe, I need a better moonwatcher.*

The tribe arrived at the location Nilla had chosen for this hunting season, and camp was made. The hunters and the chief’s council sat around the campfire and discussed their situation.

Kattar, the elderly stonecutter, said, “We don’t have enough spear points. At least here we have rocks to replenish our supply.”

“Without game, spear points are useless,” Ramum replied.

Saparu asked, “Tell me, Nilla, does anyone else know how to watch the moon, or are you the only one who knows how to do that?”

“I am the only one capable of watching the moon and deciding where the next campsite should be,” Nilla replied.

“Everyone agrees with that?” Saparu asked.

A respected hunter, Karan, offered, “I don’t know about watching the moon, Chief. But I remember the last time we camped at this site hunting was miserable.”

Saparu asked, “Then where would be a good site, Karan?”

Karan answered, “From what I remember and the feel of the weather, we are headed in the wrong direction. We should be many days south of here. I think at least three days south.”

Saparu released an audible groan. “We would have to spend another day just to get back where we came from and then travel even farther south? That would mean even more hardship.”

Saparu considered his options. *Nilla is finished. The tribe can no longer support him. Children see the moon. The skill is knowing which direction to go and how far to the next good hunting site. Karan is an excellent hunter and can read the terrain better than most.*

He asked, “Ramum? Kattar? Palai? Comments?”

Palai, the tribal elder woman, said, “The vegetation toward the south is adequate. We won’t starve if we return that way.”

Ramum said, “If there is no game to be found, it will be a greater hardship than not going back.”

Kattar said, “I can collect rocks here and fashion them into spear points at a new camp, but I will need many uncut rocks and boys to carry them.”

“I have decided!” Saparu roared. “Nilla, you led us here. You will hunt from here. This will be your Last Camp. Take extra spears and a full month of provisions. Don’t return to my tribe.”

He paused. “Kattar, at sunrise, collect the rocks you need. We will break camp and travel south as soon as you have your rocks. Karan, your name is now Moonman, and you had better be a good one. You will direct us to the best hunting sites. You are all dismissed.” *We are on our way, Vanam. Your arrival is already changing things.*

Everyone except Saparu gathered around Nilla to wish him success and say goodbye. All knew that a lone hunter, whose greatest skill was as a moonwatcher, would, soon enough, be neither.

3. The Birth of Kiya

Four years later; ages 4, 0, 0, 0.

Sophia held her newborn daughter close. *You are beautiful, my daughter. As beautiful as the land and all that it grows. I shall name you Kiya. I shall be so proud of you. I shall raise you to be the wisest person to ever live. I shall find you a protector worthy of your great beauty and wise counsel. I will introduce you to your father in a while, but for now, you are mine. I will snuggle you until you are drowning in my love.*

The tribal chief, Irakka, awoke before sunrise. He felt by his side for his pregnant mate. She was not there.

He rose, looked into the distance, and saw the small fire. *Abbb, Sophia. You did not wake me. How did you do this without my guidance?*

He chuckled. *Well, I suppose women know how to do these things.*

He dressed and walked toward the pre-dawn fire and the several women sitting around it. He saw Sophia, with a cloak over her head and shoulders, nursing the baby.

The women saw Irakka. All rose except Sophia.

As Irakka approached, the women clucked in delight:

“She is as beautiful as the night sky.”

“Sophia did well with the birthing. She always does.”

“You finally have a daughter to add to your collection of sons.”

“She is a proud addition to our tribe, Great Chief.”

He stood at the fire and looked at his beloved mate and their baby. Sophia looked up and said, “Great Chief Irakka, this is your daughter—Kiya.”

“A simple name. A beautiful name worthy of your great wisdom. Thank you for this child, Sophia. We will raise her to be as wise as her mother.”

“Yes,” Sophia replied. “She will become a woman of great worth.” Sophia then stood and gently handed Kiya to her father. “But for now, she needs someone to spit up on.”

He placed his daughter on his shoulder and patted her back.

Kiya obediently spit up.

< Vanam of Chief Saparu's Tribe >

Saparu and Vanam were always the first to rise.

Vanam had now lived through forty-eight hunting seasons—four years. He was barely old enough to keep up with the tribe when they migrated. Certainly, too young for a training hunt. But the boy was growing taller, stronger, and more determined. Ramum and Aman were doing an excellent job raising Vanam.

But it was always Saparu that the boy ran to see first. He enjoyed the roughhousing, the playfights, and the unending praise his biological father provided. “You’re still too young for a training hunt, Vanam. But soon enough. You are going to take life by the tail and swing it around over your head. You are going to be the greatest chief to ever live.”

4. The Birth of Pumi

Six years later; ages 10, 6, 0, 0.

The hunters were away on the hunt and the young woman's labor was not going well. Palai could not even remember her name. *What kind of elder woman does not even know the names of her tribe's women? Surely, she has a name, but I don't remember ever bearing it.*

This young woman, as Palai now painfully remembered, did not even have a "Protector." She was on her own in protecting herself. No young hunter would obligate himself to this girl. Her hair was too light—not like the nice black hair other gatherers had. She was too tall—as tall as a hunter. She was too skinny, too quiet, too reserved, "too" everything. And her mind was always somewhere else.

A suitable protector had been found for the young woman Palai was trading, but Palai could not reciprocate. Palai succumbed. "Very well. I will receive your woman into our tribe, but I offer her no protector. You will receive my well-trained young woman into your tribe, but she will be under the protection of your finest hunter. There are no other considerations. Are we in agreement?"

"We are," the other elder woman had replied. Then added, "Do the best you can with her. She is a sweet girl."

Palai had thought, *I lost an accomplished gatherer and gained a sweet gatherer of questionable worth. I did not do well. Chief Saparu will not be pleased.*

He wasn't. But still, Saparu mated with her as was his tradition. And now, the sweet young woman lay dying while giving birth.

Palai considered, *What will Chief Saparu want done with the baby? It has no mother and it's undersized. Better to make the decision now rather than wait and let the baby die later. But Chief Saparu is the father. He told me he wanted another son—that Vanam needed a little brother to command. My chief will have to decide the baby's fate when he returns.*

The hunters eventually returned. Saparu was exuberant. This had been Vanam's first training hunt and he had excelled. Also, they had slaughtered ample food. Life was good. Saparu ordered a feast for his tribe. He had not yet been told that which awaited him in the women's quarters.

The fires were built. The feast was completed. The chief gathered his council around the campfire. "Moonman was a great choice. I am pleased with myself for selecting him. He remembers the good hunting camps based on the weather and how long ago we were there. We have been

camping in the wrong places for a long time. He said he could have told me, but I never asked. I predict our tribe will never go hungry again.” Murmurs of excitement ran through the camp.

Kattar said, “I have replenished our supply of spear points. I’m trying to recruit one of our boys as an apprentice, but none will hear of it. They want to become a great hunter like Saparu.”

“Keep looking,” Saparu commanded. “You are getting old. I can’t be without a good stonemason.”

Kattar laughed. No one else did.

Saparu asked Palai, “Any news from the women, Palai?”

“Well, yes. Great Chief. News that will require your decision.”

“I’m good at making decisions. What needs deciding?”

Palai called in a loud voice, “Pen, bring the baby.”

A girl stepped from the children’s circle holding a wrapped object. She unwrapped the bundle to show Chief Saparu. It was the baby.

Palai explained, “This is your son, Great Chief. The mother died. I took what milk I could, but it was not a great deal. We have no nursing mothers to nourish it. None of the women wish to take it as their own. It was born small. I see no way I can raise it into a robust boy. There is a river nearby. What shall I do?”

Saparu inspected the baby. “Hmmm. He is rather small, isn’t he? But he is my son. Hmmm.”

Vanam walked to the child and poked its chest with his finger. The baby reflexively hit the finger. Vanam said, “I like it. I want to keep it. Aman will raise it as my little brother. How do you make a woman give milk? Find one to give it milk. I want a strong little brother. Can we keep it, Father?”

“Of course, we can keep it. Shall we name it Secondson?”

Vanam replied, “No. Give my little brother a proper name. Name him Pumi. I will teach him to do useful things for my tribe.”

< Kiya of Chief Irakka’s Tribe >

Six-year-old Kiya always kept sharp eyes on her mother and took in her every word. She learned every plant and its use. Kiya once harvested an undesirable weed. “That is not a useful plant, Kiya,” her mother had told her.

“It *is* useful, Mother. I just haven’t found out what for yet.”

Vanam, Kiya, Pumi, Valki, Putt, Putt-pay, Breathson, Littlerock.

5. The Birth of Valki

Three years later; ages 13, 9, 3, 0.

The woman was panicked. She was birthing her baby, and the chief did not even stop the tribe for her. He did not allow a gatherer to stay with her. She squatted on the ground in the glaring sun; no water; no herbs; no ointments. *I don't deserve this. I know there is little food, but still—I don't deserve this. My chief expects me to die—wants me to die. Die with my baby. Anger will sap my strength. I need all my strength—all my will. I will have my baby. I will live. My baby will live.*

She successfully gave birth to a daughter and followed the direction the tribe had gone. Late that night, she saw the remains of the campfire. She had nursed her newborn baby. She had found edible vegetation along the trail. She would not starve and would produce enough milk for her baby. *My baby is alive. I will name her Valki. I will teach her to raise all who have fallen. The chief will not be pleased to see us. He wanted us to die. He might banish us from the camp. I need the camp for protection and scraps of food. If I stay out of his sight until they leave for the hunt, maybe they will be successful and make our chief happy. The elder woman is terrified of him and won't help me. A new mother should be given a season to nurse and care for her newborn. Perhaps the elder woman will not notice one of her gatherers has given birth and carries her child with her to gather.*

< Vanam and Pumi of Chief Saparu's Tribe >

Vanam had grown into a fine young hunter; everything Chief Saparu had hoped for. He was on the verge of manhood and would undoubtedly become a worthy chief when his time came. His little brother, Pumi, had survived but with slow growth due to a lack of proper nutrition as an infant. Pumi loved his big brother and never missed a chance to interact with him.

Vanam enjoyed his little brother. It was fun to have someone look up to him, was always thrilled to see him—and knew his place. Vanam felt grown-up as he taught his toddler brother the things a toddler brother should know.

< Kiya of Chief Irakka's Tribe >

Kiya grew into a mature, sophisticated, knowledgeable young girl. She was aware she had advantages—her father was the chief, and her mother was the elder woman—but she did not flout her high status. She was “just one of the girls” and giggled with the best of them. Sometimes, in the back of her mind but never expressed, *We can be silly sometimes.*

But always, she listened, learned the art and science of gathering, and sometimes discovered the use of a thing by herself.

6. Pumi, Apprentice Stonecutter

Three years later; ages 16, 12, 6, 3.

As he often did, Pumi watched the old stonecutter chip away at his rocks. Now and then, Kattar stopped to admire a well-crafted spear point he had fashioned. The boy picked up a large, discarded chip and said, “In here.”

Kattar looked at the six-year-old and asked, “What’s in there, Pumi?”

Pumi replied, “One of those things—a spear point.”

The stonecutter took the discarded chip from Pumi and examined it. “Maybe, with a little work, I could turn this piece into a spear point.”

“No,” Pumi said. “The spear point is in there. Just remove the rock from around it. The spear point will be free.”

Kattar laughed. “Here,” he said as he handed his cutting tools to Pumi, “set the spear point free.”

With inexperienced hands, Pumi took the crafting tools and the rock. He set the rock on the anvil stone and tentatively made a first strike with the hammerstone. The boy frowned at the result. He repositioned the burin and struck the rock again. This time, a little more to his liking. Kattar was impressed. He had never told the boy how to hold the tools nor had given any other stone-cutting instructions. The boy’s amateur strikes were learned by nothing but observation. Pumi struck the rock a third time and excess material flew away. What remained was one side of a spear point; the other side and the edges remained encased in stone, but a spear point was being set free.

Pumi looked at Kattar for approval.

Kattar grinned as he shook his head, “Yes.”

With pride and excitement, Pumi repositioned the stone and struck it again and again. *This hammerstone is not good. It doesn’t fit my hand. The balance is bad.*

The old stonecutter watched a reasonable spear point emerge from what had been a discarded chip. He asked Pumi, “Would you like to learn everything there is to know about cutting stones?”

Pumi looked at Kattar with wide-eyed excitement and said, “Yes, I want to learn how to set the things in the rocks free!” *And make a better hammerstone and a sharper burin that’s easier to control!*

Kattar said, “The hunters will return soon. I shall ask Chief Saparu if you can become my apprentice at the next council meeting.”

Pumi looked at the surrounding rocks. He saw a better hammerstone waiting to be set free. *I want to make EVERYTHING better!*

< Kiya of Chief Irakka’s Tribe >

Aman held a private ceremony for her twelve-year-old daughter.

She said, “You are no longer a child, Kiya. You are now a woman. I have so much to share with you. You can now join the women in the gathering fields. I must tell you about men and their weaknesses. You must now take on the joys and burdens of being a woman. There is much to be thankful for and much to bear, but your body can now bring forth life, although, perhaps, unfortunately, you will need a male to do that. But time enough for these things. Right now, let us rejoice.”

< Valki of an Unknown Tribe >

Valki no longer toddled.

The environment and conditions had forced the three-year-old to walk in straight, purposeful motions. To toddle was a sign of weakness. There could be no sign of weakness in Valki or her mother. Each day could bring their banishment. The mother made a show of taking little food. What she took, she shared with Valki. They were both gaunt, more so than the other women in the tribe.

The hunters took more than their share of food because “they had to maintain their strength” for the hunt. The chief, of course, needed to remain the strongest.

Her mother had taught Valki which plants were edible. Valki could explore the periphery of the camp and find a few edible plants; enough to ward off starvation, at least. Her mother held Valki tightly each night, softly singing songs, laughing with her, talking to her, stroking her hair, and being the best mother she knew how to be.

Valki grew to be a happy, caring child.

She knew no better.

< Vanam of Chief Saparu's Tribe >

Vanam sat between his two fathers at the council campfire.

The hunt had again been good, and Vanam was becoming a dominant hunter. He already commanded respect and deference from most of the other hunters. Only Saparu, Ramum, and maybe his friend, Valuvana, the strongest hunter in the tribe, remained his obvious betters. But Vanam was working on that problem.

As the council meeting ended, Saparu asked Palai and Kattar if they had more issues requiring his attention.

Kattar cleared his throat and said, tentatively, "Yes, Great Chief, there is one more issue I wish to bring to your attention."

Saparu hated hearing the words "Great Chief." That meant something was coming he did not want to hear. "Very well, what is it?"

"It concerns your younger son, Great Chief. And my pressing need for an apprentice stonecutter. I ask you to consider—if it might be possible—if it might be good for the tribe—if perhaps ..."

Vanam snapped, "You wish my little brother to become your apprentice?"

Kattar answered, "Just consider it. You can change your mind as he gets older. He's still a boy and may grow to be a full-sized hunter—but for now—he would be extremely useful to me—and he has a great talent for it—maybe a great hunter who also knows how to create spear points would someday be helpful—I was just asking for your thoughts on the matter—I told the boy I would ask." Kattar became silent.

Saparu asked, "What do you think, Vanam? Your brother, a stonecutter?"

Vanam replied, "Better a good stonecutter than a poor hunter. Pumi isn't old enough for training hunts and he is too skinny to ever be a good hunter, anyway. Even if Pumi is a poor student and never becomes accomplished, there is no harm in it, and it will help Kattar. I would allow it."

Saparu roared, "I have decided! Kattar, you will take Pumi to be your apprentice stonecutter. Let us know when he makes his first spearhead so we can assess his progress. You are all dismissed."

Kattar was dismissed before he could present any of the spear points Pumi had already produced. Upon further reflection, Kattar decided, although he did not know why, this had been for the best.

7. Encounter with Chief Irakka

Two years later; ages 18, 14, 8, 5.

Moonman saw the reflections of the distant campfire in the night sky. He told Saparu and concluded with, “They will have seen our fire and will now be deciding what to do. How shall I proceed, Chief?”

Saparu replied, “An encounter, I suppose. We have a little food to offer, several young women to trade, extra spear points—pretty good spear points, at that. We need linen and rope. Take Ramum with you—and Vanam, take Vanam, too. Ask if they wish to encounter us. If you meet their delegation on the way to us, then whatever you decide will be my command.”

“As you command, my chief,” Moonman said as he hurried off to enlist Ramum and Vanam as emissaries to the unknown tribe.

Saparu sought Palai to advise her of the probable upcoming encounter. *These things are more women’s work than men’s. Too much planning, feasting, bartering, and visiting to be a man’s work. I’ll have to entertain the other chief. Who is wealthier? Us or them? Who is more powerful? Are they dangerous? Will they have anything of value to us? Can Palai trade off some of our young women? I had rather be out hunting!*”

Moonman and company were two thousand paces from their camp when they saw the torch of the other tribesmen approaching. They shifted their direction to meet them. Upon meeting, Moonman announced, “Two thousand paces.”

“Three thousand paces,” the opposing moonwatcher announced. “I am Irul, moonwatcher from the tribe of Chief Irakka. We have made an overnight camp on our way to the west. We seek to encounter your tribe.”

Presumably, Irul and his company had begun their march toward Saparu’s camp first and were, therefore, the presumptive moderator.

“I am Moonman, moonwatcher from the tribe of Chief Saparu. We have made our season camp and will remain here for the remainder of the hunting season. We, too, seek to encounter. My chief will accept whatever terms you and I might agree upon.”

“Let us counsel,” Irul suggested.

The six men placed their torches into the ground and sat down to work out the delicate details of an encounter between two tribes. Chief Saparu would eventually become the host of this encounter since his camp was long-term rather than temporary.

The negotiators returned late that night and called a council meeting.

Sapuru complained, “Oh, no. I’m the host? Must I provide the food?”

Moonman answered, “All we can spare. And they, unfortunately, are a large tribe. If they are honorable, then they will bring their share, but be prepared for the worst.”

Sapuru asked, “Can you prepare the festivities, Palai? When do they get here?”

Moonman said, “Late tomorrow. That will give us time to prepare and leave time for our tribes to mingle. The feast will be held after the mingling. We will host trade negotiations the day after.”

Palai said, “I will have the women prepare for many guests. They will be excited. The young women, especially. You must be both forceful and magnanimous tomorrow, Chief Sapuru. This will be an exhibition of your greatness. You must make a good impression not only on their chief but on their hunters and gatherers. This is how your reputation will grow.”

Sapuru said, “My responsibilities are never-ending. But I shall be wonderful!”

Palai was excited. “I will call the young women together at sunrise and discuss our goals. I will get the older women to start preparing the feast. And our traders must review what we have to trade and the things needed.”

She stopped and looked at Vanam. “Vanam, you are my best young hunter. I can command a great premium on one such as you—son of the chief—the heir apparent—the best young hunter in our tribe—and so tall—so handsome. Be prepared to accept a desirable young woman into your protection. And I have Valuvana and Maiyana, too. Oh, I have so many desirable young hunters. They are a large tribe, you said? I hope they have desirable young gatherers to exchange. How exciting!”

The young hunters groaned, “Tied to a woman?”

But they would, they all knew, do as their chief commanded.

Sapuru was excited. “Don’t forget. I have my tradition when we accept new gatherers into my tribe.”

< Next Day After Highsun >

The tribes mingled to assess each other.

The eligible males gathered near the great fire pit, talking about hunting.

The eligible young women paraded around the fire pit; ostensibly visiting with the young women from the other tribe; comparing notes on gathering techniques and that sort of thing. They took no apparent notice of the young hunters nervously glancing in their direction.

Not that their preferences made any difference in this matter. Selecting a proper protector was far too important to be left to the young. The elder women would decide. The chiefs would approve. Those matched were expected to acquiesce. The right of refusal was sometimes offered, but not always.

Female candidates from Irakka's tribe were all aware of the tall hunter who was the chief's son and would probably one day be chief himself—and an excellent hunter—and provider—and so handsome.

Although most hunters thought a running antelope far prettier than a gatherer, several hunters from Saperu's tribe, including Saperu himself, were struck by the tall, dark-eyed, self-possessed beauty from Irakka's tribe. "The chief's daughter," it was said. Extra consideration might well be needed to acquire this one into a tribe. Saperu would be open to extra consideration—tradition, and all.

There would be a great feast that night—Irakka's tribe had contributed much. The fire was built. The feast was wonderful.

Tomorrow, trade negotiations would begin.

< Next Day >

Trade negotiations began:

"Your spear points are superb."

"This rope is not as strong as I would like."

"Your linen is nice but do you have finer?"

"Yes, I believe these pelts will do nicely."

"The spear shafts are straight but a little thin."

"You say this ointment will help heal open wounds?"

"This potion ensures the woman will not become with child."

And then, it was time. Matches would be made. Lives decided.

The two elder women secluded themselves with the two moonwatchers. The moonwatchers would speak only if spoken to. The chiefs stayed nearby amicably sharing hunting information, both pleased with the day's transactions.

The encounter had been beneficial for both tribes. All that remained was the negotiation of finding suitable protectors for the young women. The

women and girls gathered around the fire pit, guessing which women would soon be joining their tribe—and leaving.

Moonman and Irul walked to the fire pit. Moonman called out, “Valvuna, come with me!”

Irul then called out, “Pen-Pu, come with me!”

Through much giggling, the two young adults dutifully marched into the area where the elder women were holding Court. Later, they returned. Valvuna was holding Pen-Pu’s hand. She was smiling and blushing. After the night’s final feast, Valvuna would stand before both tribes and vow to protect Pen-Pu from the dangers of the world and to care for whatever child she might bear.

The two moonwatchers again returned to those gathered at the fire pit. “Maiyana, come with me,” Moonman commanded.

Irul commanded, “Pen-Alai, come with me!” The two walked through the giggles. Soon enough, they emerged to the cheers of the women and the catcalls of the men.

The process was repeated two more times with young hunters from Irakka’s tribe and two young women from Saparu’s tribe.

After that, the moonwatchers did not appear at the time expected—nor any time soon, thereafter. Negotiations must have been intense and difficult. It was obvious, to all who kept track of such things, that the two prime candidates for matchmaking had not been called—the most eligible, desirable hunter and the most eligible, desirable gatherer. Both were fathered by a chief. Both were superior to their peers. Vanam and Kiya.

Among those keeping track was Pumi. Although only eight, Pumi could size up people. Not yet physically mature, he could still see and appreciate Kiya’s great beauty. Not only her physical beauty but, too, her inner beauty. Her self-confidence—the poise—her easy way with both women and men—young and old—her presence—she was the most impressive gatherer Pumi had ever seen. It was obvious what was under discussion was whether his older brother would agree to become her protector. And, maybe, too, if she would accept him. Pumi had never before considered his older brother taking a gatherer. Where would this leave Pumi in his relationship with his older brother? What would be his relationship with Kiya? Life was getting too complicated. Pumi needed his rocks.

In the negotiations, Sophia said to Palai, “It is not my decision to make. Kiya is adamant. Since she became a woman, she has always been adamant. I realize what a magnificent protector Vanam would be. He is undoubtedly man enough to protect several women. But he must agree to Kiya’s condition. She will not negotiate. Chief Irakka will honor his daughter’s desire. She will agree to always mate with her chosen protector whenever called upon and support him in all things. But whichever protector she accepts must agree to her demand that she need not mate with any man not of her choosing. I realize this puts you in an untenable position. You told me of Chief Saparu’s tradition to be the first to mate with each new woman to join his tribe. I am sorry. To refuse a chief is unthinkable. Perhaps Kiya will agree to mate with your chief, but you must be prepared for her refusal to do so. It will be better for both us and our tribes if we do not make the match rather than having Kiya refuse the match—and know Chief Irakka will not command her to accept—and even if he did—she would still refuse—and she is well trained in the art of self-defense. If your chief came for her after she refused him—there would be an incident so horrible neither of us may even think of it. Let us put this match behind us, Elder Woman Palai. We have made four wonderful matches. That is sufficient.”

“Let us rest, Elder Woman Sophia. I will counsel with my chief and ask him to counsel with his son. Let me find out if they have any interest in this matter. We must meet again later.”

The two women walked to the fire, negotiations apparently over. There was an audible collective sigh. There would be no match between Vanam and Kiya.

Pumi was mildly upset. He walked to Kiya, who was standing alone. He said, “Hello, my name is Pumi. I am an apprentice stonecutter. My brother is Vanam. I thought maybe he would agree to become your protector. I guess that would make us related in some way. I’m sorry that didn’t happen. You are so mature. You would have made our tribe much better.”

She knelt on her knee so she could look up rather than down at him. “My name is Kiya, Pumi. It is so nice to meet you. This is my third encounter as a woman and Sophia has yet to match me to a protector. I may never find one. But if I do, I hope he will be the man that you will become.”

She smiled, rose to her feet, and said, “And I would have loved to be related to you.” She then left to join her mother, lost somewhere in the crowd.

Elsewhere, Saparu was beside himself. He said to Palai, “Refuse to mate with a chief? Is that even possible? I mean every woman should be thrilled

to mate with a chief. Did you explain my tradition? Surely, she wouldn't reject such a fine tradition. I understand not wanting to mate with some of my hunters—but the chief? Palai, this is highly irregular.”

Palai answered, “I understand, Great Chief Saparu. But she will probably reject Vanam if he does not agree to this. That would put him in an impossible position. If he agrees to her condition and if you came for her, she might aggressively reject you—then you would have to banish her—but your son would be her protector—so he would have to abandon his vow to protect her—which would make him unqualified to be chief. I see no way to make this negotiation work.”

“This is what happens when you let a female have a say in who she mates with. Respect is going downhill. Wait! Do you think this is a negotiation ploy? Maybe they want me, the chief, to agree to be her protector. I may be able to do that. Would they agree to that?”

“Kiya is a young woman, Great Chief. A young woman can sometimes be quite vexing to a mature leader, such as yourself. Especially, for a leader who has chosen to never accept the responsibility of a woman and any children she might bear.”

“I suppose you're right, Palai. Do you think Vanam would have any interest in this matter?”

“That would be for a father and a son to discuss and come to an understanding.”

“Send Vanam to me. I will then decide what to do.”

Vanam arrived. He and Saparu discussed the awkward situation.

Saparu said, “She might refuse me, her chief. That is not certain, but it would be her choice. A woman's choice over a chief's choice. Could that even be allowed?”

Vanam replied, “It could not be allowed, Father. The only solution is for the issue to never arise. You would simply never ask her to mate. The only condition appears to be I give the woman a choice. She might accept you but then she might not. That would create the impossible situation—for her—for me—for you.”

Saparu asked, “Do you think she would refuse me? A chief?”

Vanam laughed. “Probably not, but she might. It would be easy enough for you and me to agree in private that you will never ask her. The situation will

never arise. I could then agree to her condition. Maybe I could get her to agree to tell everyone she wanted to mate with you, but you didn't ask. Understanding, of course, you will never ask because your son is her protector."

Saparu roared, "Yes! I have decided! Do that!"

Vanam then did the unthinkable. He requested a private meeting with Kiya so "they could get to know each other" before another formal meeting between the two Elder Women.

The campfire burned down. The feast had been wonderful and was now complete. The ceremonies began. The women and children were allowed to mingle with the hunters for this particular ceremony. The men and women sat and stood together without regard to rank.

Elder Woman Palai stepped to stand behind Chief Saparu, who was sitting beside Chief Irakka.

On her right was Valvuna. On her left was Pen-Pu. She let the adoring crowd adore the scene for a while and then stepped back. In a loud voice, she asked, "Valvuna of the tribe of Saparu, do you agree to protect this woman, Pen-Pu of the tribe of Irakka? Do you agree to protect her from harm, to provide food for her nourishment, to help her raise any child she might bear, and any child she might adopt? Do you promise to do these things upon your honor and upon your manhood?"

Valvuna took Pen-Pu's hand in his, raised them into the air, and, with an adoring look from Pen-Pu, loudly proclaimed, "I promise to do these things!"

Palai returned to the fire with Maiyana and Pen-Alai by her side. To the delight of the crowd, the process was repeated.

It was then Sophia's turn. There had been two additional matches made. Twice, she brought a hunter from her tribe and a young woman from Saparu's tribe. The two young women would leave everyone they knew to join their protector in a tribe they had never before seen. The women were strangely unafraid.

The ceremonies were apparently over. Those sitting began to rise.

"Wait!" Palai commanded. "There is one more ceremony to perform!"

The crowd hushed in anticipation.

Sophia walked to stand behind the two chiefs, where she was joined by Palai. From out of the darkness stepped Vanam and Kiya. There was a collective gasp from the witnesses. Palai began, "Vanam of the tribe ..."

Kiya held up her hand for silence and said, “Elder Woman Palai, before I ask the Great Hunter Vanam to consider being my protector, I wish to confess a weakness directly to your Great Chief Saparuru so his son can make a wise decision. Can this be permitted?”

Palai feigned confusion even though the act had already been agreed upon by all participants. Palai said, “Well, if my chief agrees to this request, then I am sure he wishes to hear your confession.”

Kiya went and knelt between the two chiefs but addressed Saparuru so all could hear. “Great and wise chief of this great tribe I desperately wish to join, I feel you must know this about me. I have never before mated. It is my understanding it is your tradition that a maiden is introduced into your tribe by your being the first to mate with her. I am inexperienced in these matters, and I know I would bring dishonor to my tribe by not being satisfactory in my first mating. I do not wish to dishonor my tribe, but I leave it to the wisdom of my protector and his chief to decide such matters. I did not want the greatest hunter in the land to agree to protect a woman without being aware of the problems she would present.”

Saparuru laughed. “Ah! I shall command my son to welcome you into our tribe instead of me. Who you mate with will be left to you and your protector!”

Chief Irakka stood and said, “Great wisdom leads this tribe. I am well pleased my daughter will be accepted into your tribe!”

Pumi was impressed. *Nicely done. Who came up with that?*

Kiya rose. With wide eyes and a soft smile, she looked into the eyes of her soon-to-be protector as she walked to stand to face him. The tall, full-bodied, dark-haired, dark-eyed beauty accepted the hand of the muscular, imposing, self-confident Vanam. The two beautiful people turned to face the enthusiastic approval of the two tribes.

And their turbulent future.

< Valki of an Unknown Tribe >

Valki’s mother had lived too long on too little food.

She knew she could not survive tomorrow’s run to the next camp. “Please, Elder Woman, find a mother for my little Valki. She is a wonderful, resourceful, loving child. She deserves to live. Please—find her a mother.”

There was no one listening to their conversation. An elder woman should never lie, but—what harm could it do this once? Besides, no one else was

listening. The elder woman replied, “If the child survives the run to the next camp, I will find her a mother. Valki will grow into a fine, strong woman.”

The starving woman tried to embrace the elder woman, but the elder woman pushed her away.

The woman said, “Thank you, elder woman. You are kind and merciful!”

The woman returned to her pallet and her sleeping child. She held the child tightly through the night.

< The Run >

Her mother woke Valki before the sun rose. She said, “Today is our great test to see if we live. I will stay at this camp, and you will run with our tribe to the next camp. You must run by yourself all the way. When you arrive, find our elder woman and ask her who your new mother will be. She will find you a new mother to love and take care of you.”

Valki was confused. “But I don’t want a new mother. I want my real mother. I don’t want to leave you.”

“You must do what you must do, Valki. Always remember I have loved you with all my love. You have brought me great joy, but it is your duty to live. And to live, you must leave me and run by yourself to the next camp. No one will help you. But once you prove you can do it, the elder woman promises to find you a new mother. Elder women do not lie.”

In the distance, the tribe was beginning its run to the next camp.

Her mother embraced her and said, “Hug me, Valki. Then run with your tribe. Do not stumble.”

Valki hugged her mother and then ran after her tribe.

Her mother’s request to the elder woman was reasonable. When a child could perform a migration run without assistance or other consideration, the child was no longer considered a burden on the tribe. Valki was young but her mother had trained her daughter well. Valki was as developed and much better trained than other children her age. Although all women and children in this particular tribe were undernourished, Valki’s mother had provided Valki with sufficient food for her to develop normally but her short legs could not command the stride to stay up with her tribe even though it was not a fast run. She would fall behind but then catch up when the tribe stopped to rest. At long last, nightfall came, and the tribe stopped to make camp.

Valki saw her tribe stop in the distance. Valki ran. The tribe was eating their meager rations when Valki arrived. All the food had been distributed. There was none for Valki. Valki presented herself to the elder woman. “My name is Valki. Mother told me you would find me another mother when we made camp. Which woman will be my mother, please?”

The elder woman was in disbelief that the child had made the run. She said, “We run again tomorrow. Find me when we make camp and we will discuss finding you a mother.”

Valki said, “Thank you, Elder Woman. You are kind and merciful.” She went to the edge of the camp to find an edible plant or root.

Valki would live another day.

8. The Liberation of Valki

Valki had risen early to find food to carry on her day's run.

She had been successful in her search the night before; edible roots, three grubs, and an earthworm. Not an abundance but enough to get her through another day of running. One more day and she would have a new mother. She mourned for her real mother, but it was Valki's duty to live. If she did not survive then all her mother had sacrificed for her would have been to no avail. *I am ready, Mother. I will run and I will not stumble.*

Valki was stronger on the second day's run because she had been successful the day prior and her confidence had increased.

This time she knew there would be no food for her, so she scavenged outside the camp before presenting herself once more to the elder woman with her request for a new mother.

The elder woman was resigned to facing the issue. She said, "I will counsel with the chief at tomorrow's council. The chief will advise me on how to proceed. In the meantime, find a place to sleep and stay out of the way during tomorrow's gathering.

Valki was happy. She wasn't too hungry, and she was going to get a new mother.

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The council met the next night. The chief was not happy to hear of another potential mouth to feed. He answered, "What woman would want another child? We have too many children. They don't do anything useful!"

The elder woman was fearful, but replied, "Great Chief, our tribe doesn't have *enough* children. We die faster than we are replaced. Many of our children have already died and many women, too. That this one still lives attests to her great strength and worthiness. Your tribe is barely large enough to function. I don't have enough gatherers. I believe that I can send Valki into the fields and she would find more food than she would eat."

The chief roared, "Silence! If you find a woman who will take her, let her stay. But let it be understood that the child's rations will come from the mother's rations. If a mother cannot be found, send the child away. Anything else?"

"No, Great Chief. I understand." The elder woman made a cursory attempt to find a woman willing to adopt Valki, but the sharing of already barely sustainable rations was simply not feasible.

Out of pity, Valki was given a child's ration from the community dinner that night. Valki was excited to have a real meal for the first time in many days and excited, too, that she would soon have another mother.

The chief came to inspect the women as they ate. He saw Valki sitting by herself in a corner—eating.

The chief demanded, "Who is this girl's mother?"

All the women looked down in silence at their food. The elder woman hurried over. "I am still looking for a mother for the child, Great Chief. While I look, I gave her just enough food to sustain her."

"That food is MINE!" the chief shouted as he hurried over and took Valki's food. Let the mother of this girl stand—NOW!"

He looked around and seeing no one stand, demanded, "Send the girl away. Tell her not to return to my tribe!" The chief stormed out with Valki's food.

The woman sitting nearest Valki shoved her ration to Valki. "Take this. I'm full," the woman said as she rose and left.

Valki was sad because the woman had obviously not eaten enough. Valki took the offering and gave it to, other than herself, the youngest girl in the tribe. The girl had earlier rejected Valki's efforts at friendship. Valki said, "Here, I wish you to have this." She then surveyed the room and asked, "Will anyone be my mother?"

The women stared at their food. No one spoke.

Valki left the women's fire and walked to the edge of the camp to search for roots and grubs.

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In the night, Valki sat beside a trail leading to the campsite. She would have to remain near the camp for safety. She could slip into camp late each night and leave before sunrise. For the first time in her life, she was lonely. She wanted to cry but crying would not help. She stared across the trail and imagined her mother sitting across from her. *I am still alive, Mother. But the elder woman did not do what she promised—you are still my only mother—I like that—I didn't want another mother, anyway.*

The mother in her imagination seemed so real. Almost like Valki could cross the path and embrace her. *What will I do, Mother? No woman will have me. The chief will beat me if he sees me in his camp. If I leave, an animal will eat me.*

The image of her mother segued into the image of a nice young man; one who would be nice to her. She jumped up and ran to embrace him. “Bubba, Big Bubba,” she said.

He seemed so real, just like he was really there. She thought she could feel him returning her embrace. Her mind heard him say, “Little sister, you are so sad. Why are you sad?”

She kept her eyes clenched closed, savoring the embrace of her imagined “Big Brother.”

She said, “I am alone, Big Bubba. I have no place to go. No one wants me. If I stay here, I will be beaten. If I leave, I will be eaten. I don’t know what to do. I don’t know how to stay alive for another day. Mother will be sad.”

“Well,” said the image in her mind, “will this tribe take care of you?”

“No, the elder woman will not do what she promised, and the chief will beat me.”

“Then should you stay or leave?”

“I should leave but then I will be eaten by a wild animal.”

“How could you not be eaten by a wild animal?”

“I don’t know.”

“Who would know?”

“I guess a hunter would know.”

“I see. If you weren’t eaten by a wild animal, what would you do?”

“I would walk until I found another tribe somewhere.”

“I see. If you found another tribe, what would happen?”

“Maybe, I could find another mother.”

“Yes, that’s possible. You will need a traveling bag with a knife. Where would you get that?”

“The chief has one and it has apples in it, too. I have seen it.”

“I see. The chief took your food away from you, didn’t he? For no good reason other than he could.”

“Yes, the chief took my food.”