

TALLSTONE AND THE CITY

Foundation

1. In the Beginning

Sunrise.

Twelve thousand years ago, northwest of modern-day Sanliurfa, Turkey, a tribe of hunter-gatherers begin their day as tribes had done for over two hundred thousand years. But on this day, something happens that will change the world. The first of four children is born. Children who with time, opportunity, circumstance, determination, love, and ambition begin our transition from hunter-gatherers into agrarian communities. This, in turn, supports ever-increasing knowledge, sophistication, and wealth – the foundation of human civilization.

The child is born. So, it begins.

2. The Birth of Vanam

Year 0; ages 0, 0, 0, 0.

"Vanam is his name," Chief Talaimai shouted as he held his newborn son above his head. "He will lead my tribe to even greater riches than I have. Vanam will be the most powerful chief to ever live!"

The hunters were happy their chief was excited, 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, Amman, was a young woman accepted by the tribe only nine seasons ago.

Talaimai's second-in-command, Cirantatu, had agreed to be the young woman's Protector. This, however, did not include protection from Chief Talaimai whose self-established tradition was that he would be the first to mate with each new gatherer accepted into his tribe. After Talaimai was tired of Amman, she was passed on to Cirantatu, two months pregnant. If she produced a male, Amman would raise the boy as Talaimai's son and heir apparent. But Cirantatu should always treat Vanam as if he were his own prized son. Cirantatu always strived to please his chief.

After allowing Amman a full two hours to recover from giving birth, Talaimai commanded his tribe to continue their northward run to the next campsite. *This site had better have good hunting. At least better than our last two. We didn't see an antelope or anything else. We had to live on roots and plants. Talaimai had started doubting the expertise of his tribe's long-time 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 much 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 there is a good selection of rocks here to replenish our supply."

"Without game to spear, spear points are rather useless," Cirantatu replied.

"Say, Nilla," Talaimai asked, "does anyone else in our tribe know how to watch the moon, or are you the only one smart enough 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?" Talaimai 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 the hunting was miserable."

"Then where *would* be a good site, Karan?" Talaimai asked the hunter.

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 four days south."

Talaimai 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."

Talaimai considered his options. All remained silent while their chief thought. *Nilla is finished. The tribe can no longer support him. A child can see the moon. The skill is knowing which direction to go and how far to the next good hunting site. Karan is not only an excellent hunter, but he also reads the terrain as well as any hunter and better than most.* He asked, "Cirantatu? Kattar? Palai? Comments?"

Palai, the tribal elder woman, said, "The vegetation in that direction is adequate. No one will starve if we return that way."

Cirantatu said, "If there is no game to be found here, 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!" Talaimai 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 back south as soon as you have your rocks. Karan, your name is now Moonman, and you had better be a good one. I will rely on you to direct us to the best hunting sites. You are all dismissed. *Well, Vanam, we are on our way, son. Your arrival is already changing things.*

Everyone except Talaimai 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 in year 4; ages 4, 0, 0, 0.

Mari held her newborn daughter close. *You are beautiful, my daughter. As beautiful as the land and everything that grows upon it. 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 your 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 in the distance, and saw the small fire. *Abhh, Mari. You did not wake me. How did you do this without my guidance?* He chuckled. Well, I suppose women know of these things. He dressed and walked toward the pre-dawn fire and toward the several women sitting around it. He saw Mari,

with a cloak over her head and shoulders, nursing the babe. The women saw Irakka. All rose except Mari. The women clucked in delight as Irakka approached them.

"She is as beautiful as the night sky."

"Mari 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. Mari 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, Mari. We will raise her to be as wise as her mother."

"Yes," Mari replied. "She will become a woman of great worth." Mari 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 Talaimai's Tribe ~

Talaimai and Vanam were always the first to rise. Vanam had now lived through 48 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 tall, strong, and determined. Cirantatu and Amman were doing an excellent job in raising Vanam. But it was always Talaimai that the boy first ran to see. He enjoyed the roughhousing, the playfights, and the unending praise that 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 in year 10; ages 10, 6, 0, 0.

Palai could not even remember the young woman's 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 hearing it.* The hunters were away on the hunt and the labor was not going well. If the mother died and her baby lived, Talaimai would have to decide the baby's fate. *Better to make the decision now rather than wait and let the baby die later.*

But the father is Talaimai. Immediately upon being accepted into his tribe, Talaimai mated with her as was his tradition. Not only that, but he had told Palai, "I want another son. Vanam needs a little brother to command."

This young woman, as Palai now painfully remembered, did not even have a "Protector." She was totally on her own in protecting herself. No young hunter would obligate himself to this girl. She was too quiet, too reserved, and stayed too much to herself. Her mind was always somewhere else.

A suitable protector had been found for the young woman that Palai was trading but Palai could not reciprocate. Palai had said, "Very well. I will receive your young 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 in agreement," the other elder woman had replied. Then added, "Do the best you can with her. She is a sweet girl."

I lose an accomplished gatherer and gain a sweet gatherer of questionable worth. I have not done well for my tribe. Talaimai will not be pleased. And now, the sweet young woman lay dying giving birth. What will Talaimai want to be done with the baby?

The hunters eventually returned. Talaimai was exuberant. This had been Vanam's first training hunt and he had excelled. Also, they had slaughtered ample food. Life was good. Talaimai 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 that our tribe will never go hungry again." Murmurs of excitement ran through the camp.

Kattar said, "Our supply of good spear points has been replenished. I am trying to recruit one of our boys as an apprentice, but none will hear of it. They want to become a great hunter like Talaimai."

"Keep looking," Talaimai commanded. "You are getting old. I can't be without a good stonecutter."

Kattar laughed. No one else did.

"Any news from the women, Palai?" Talaimai asked.

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

Talaimai replied, "I'm good at making decisions. What needs deciding?"

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

An older girl stepped out of the children's circle carrying a wrapped object. She unwrapped the bundle to show Chief Talaimai. 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. I mixed what milk I had with any milk substitute we could find, but even that doesn't go far. 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, that I can raise it into a robust boy. There is a river nearby. What shall I do?"

Talaimai 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 at the finger. "I like it. I want to keep it. Amman 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?"

"No," Vanam replied. "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. She took in every word her mother said. She learned to identify every plant and its use. Kiya once harvested an undesirable weed. "That is not a useful plant, Kiya," her mother told her. "It *is* useful, Mother," Kiya replied. "I just haven't yet found what it's useful for."

5. The Birth of Valki

Three years later in year 13; 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 even allow a gatherer to stay with her. She squatted on the ground in the glaring sun; no water; no herbs; no ointments. Anger welled up within her. She did not deserve this. She understood there was little food and little hope for food. *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 in 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. She would produce enough milk for her baby. *My baby is alive. I will name her Valki. I will teach her to lift all around her 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 relieve pressure on the chief. The elder woman is terrified of him and won't provide any help for our survival. A new mother should be given a season to nurse and care for her newborn. Perhaps the elder woman will not notice that one of her gatherers has given birth and carries her child with her to gather. I will stay out of everybody's sight until -- until?*

~ Vanam and Pumi of Chief Talaimai's Tribe ~

Vanam had grown into a fine young hunter; everything Chief Talaimai 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 stunted 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, too, loved his little brother. It was great fun to have someone who looked up to him, was always thrilled to see him, and knew his place. Vanam felt even more grown-up as he taught his little toddler brother the things a little toddler brother should know.

~ Kiya of Chief Irakka's Tribe ~

Kiya had grown into a mature, sophisticated, knowledgeable young girl. She was aware that she had the advantage that her father was chief, and her mother was an 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 their uses for herself.

6. Pumi, Apprentice Stonecutter

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

As he often did, Pumi watched the old stonecutter chip away at the 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?"

"One of those things -- a spear point," Pumi replied.

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 chip. He set the chip on a nearby large rock and tentatively made a first strike. The boy frowned at the result. He repositioned the chisel and struck it again. This time, a little more to his liking. Kattar was impressed. He had never told the boy how to hold the tools nor given any other stone-cutting instruction. The boy's amateur strikes were learned by nothing but observation. Pumi struck the chip 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 shook his head, "yes," and smiled. With pride and excitement, Pumi repositioned the stone and struck it again and again. The old stonecutter watched a reasonable spear point emerge from what had been a discarded chip. "Would you like to learn everything there is to know about cutting stones?"

Pumi looked at Kattar with wide-eyed excitement. "Yes. I want to learn how to set the things in the rocks free."

Kattar said, "The hunters will return soon. We shall ask Chief Talaimai if you can become my apprentice at the next council meeting."

~ Kiya of Chief Irakka's Tribe ~

Amman held a private ceremony for her twelve-year daughter. "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 all things. Right now, let us both 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 as were 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 could be. Valki grew into a happy, caring child. She knew no better.

~ Vanam of Chief Talaimai's Tribe ~

The young man, Vanam, sat between his two fathers at the council campfire meeting. The hunt had again been good. Vanam was emerging as a dominant hunter. He already commanded respect and

deference from most of the other hunters. Only Talaimai, Cirantatu, 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, Talaimai 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 that I wish to bring to your attention."

Talaimai hated hearing the phrase "Great Chief." That meant something was coming that he did not want to hear."

"Very well, what is it?" he asked.

"It concerns your younger son, Great Chief. And my pressing need for an apprentice stonemason. 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?"

"Just to consider it. You could always change your mind as he becomes older. He is only a boy -- he may yet grow to be full-sized -- a great hunter -- but for now -- he would be extremely useful to me - - and he has a great talent for it -- perhaps 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 that I would ask." Kattar became silent.

Talaimai asked, "What do you think, Vanam? Your brother, a stonemason?"

Vanam replied, "He wouldn't be an embarrassment, I suppose. Better an expert stonemason than a poor hunter. Kattar is correct. Pumi is still a boy, not old enough for training hunts -- and he *is* small. There is nothing to say that he could not do both, assuming we can find a new, proper stonemason. If it would help Kattar, I would allow it. Even if Pumi is a poor student and never becomes accomplished, I see no harm in it -- at least for a while."

"I have decided!" Talaimai roared. "Kattar, you will take the boy, Pumi, to be your apprentice stonemason. Let us know when he makes his first spearhead so that we may access his progress. You are all dismissed."

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

7. Encounter with Chief Irakka

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

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

"An Encounter, I suppose," Talaimai replied. "We have a little food to offer, several young women to trade, extra spear points -- pretty good spear points, at that. We need some linen and rope. Take Cirantatu with you -- and Vanam, take Vanam, too -- ask if they wish an Encounter with 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 hurried off to enlist Cirantatu and Vanam as emissaries to the unknown tribe.

Talaimai sought Palai to advise her of the probable upcoming encounter. These things were more women's work than men's. Too much planning and feasting and bartering and visiting to be a man's work. Of course, he would 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 one thousand paces from camp when they saw the torch of the other tribesmen approaching. They shifted their direction to meet them. Upon meeting, Moonman announced, "One 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 an Encounter with your tribe." Presumably, Irul and his company had begun their march toward Talaimai's camp first and were, therefore, the presumptive moderator.

"I am Moonman, Moonwatcher from the tribe of Chief Talaimai. We have made our season camp and will remain here for the remainder of the hunting season. We, too, seek an Encounter. My Chief will agree to 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. Talaimai, unfortunately, would eventually become the host of the Encounter since his camp was long-term rather than temporary.

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

"Oh, no," Talaimai exclaimed. "I am to be the host? Do I have to provide all of the food?"

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

"Can you prepare for all of the festivities, Palai? When do they get here?"

Moonman said, "Late tomorrow. That will give us time to prepare and still leave time for the tribes to mingle -- and size each other up. The feast will be held after the mingling. We will host trade negotiations the day after."

"Yes," said Palai. "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 Talaimai. 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."

"The responsibilities are never-ending, Palai," Talaimai said. "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 started preparing the feast. And our traders must review what we have to trade and the things we need to trade for." 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 -- 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 many desirable young gatherers to exchange. How exciting."

The young hunters groaned. *Tied to a woman?* But they would, they all knew, do their duty to the tribe. Talaimai became excited. "Don't forget. I have my tradition when we accept a new gatherer into my tribe."

~ Next Day ~

The tribes mingled to assess each other. The eligible males gathered near the great fire pit, talking among themselves. 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 apparently took no notice of the young hunters nervously glancing in their direction. Not that their preferences made any difference in this matter. Selecting proper Protectors was far too important to be left to the young. The elder women would decide. The chiefs would approve. The principles were expected to acquiesce. They were sometimes offered the right of refusal, 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 Talaimai's tribe, including Talaimai 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. Talaimai would be open to extra consideration -- tradition, and all. There would be a great feast tonight -- Irakka's tribe had contributed much. The fire was built. The feast was wonderful. Tomorrow, the trade negotiations would begin.

~ Next Day ~

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 elixir always ensures the woman will not become with child."

And then, it was time. Lives would be decided. Matches would be made. 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 Talaimai's tribe.

After that, the Moonwatchers did not appear at the time expected -- nor any time soon, thereafter. Negotiations must be intense and difficult. It was obvious, to all that 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 great physical beauty but, too, her great inner beauty -- the self-confidence -- the poise -- her easy way with both women and men -- young and old -- her presence -- she was the most impressive gatherer he had ever seen. It was obvious that what was under discussion was if 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, Mari 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 agrees to always and excitedly 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 Talaimai'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 that 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 -- an incident so horrible neither of us may even think upon it. Let us put this behind us, Elder Woman Palai. We have made four wonderful matches. That is sufficient."

"Let us rest, Elder Woman Mari. 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. Let us meet again later."

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

Pumi was mildly upset. He walked over to Kiya, who was now standing alone. "Hello, my name is Pumi. I am an apprentice stonecutter. My brother is Vanam. I thought that maybe he would agree to become your Protector. I guess that would make us related in some way. I am 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 at him rather than down upon him. "My name is Kiya, Pumi. It is so nice to meet you. This is my third Encounter as a woman and Mari 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 and rose to her feet. "And I would have loved to be related to you." She then left to join her mother, lost somewhere in the crowd.

Talaimai was beside himself. "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."

"I understand, Great Chief Talaimai. But she would probably reject Vanam if he will not agree to this -- which would put him in an impossible position with you -- and if you came for her, anyway -- she might aggressively reject you -- then you would have to banish her -- but your son is 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 any say in who mates

with her. Respect is going downhill. Wait! Do you think this is a negotiation ploy? Maybe they really 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."

"Find Vanam. Send him to me. I will then decide what to do."

Vanam arrived. He and Talaimai discussed the awkward situation. "She might refuse 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 that I give the woman that choice. She might accept you but then she might not. That would create the impossible situation -- for her -- for me -- for you."

"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. Perhaps I could get her to agree to tell everyone that she would love to mate with you if you had only asked. With the understanding, of course, that will never ask because your son is her Protector."

"Yes! I have decided!" Talaimai roared. "Do *that*!"

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

The campfire roared. The feast was wonderful. 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.

Palai stepped to stand behind Chief Talaimai 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 then stepped

back. In loud voice, she asked, "Valvuna of the tribe of Talaimai, 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 that 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 the adoring look of 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 Mari's turn. There had been two additional matches made. Twice, she brought a hunter from her tribe and a young woman from Talaimai'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, the crowd began to wander away from the fire.

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

The crowd hushed in anticipation. *Could it be?*

Mari 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. Again, the crowd gasped. "Great 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 Talaimai so that 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. *No one else needs to know.* 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 Talaimai. So that all could hear. "Great and wise chief of the great tribe that I desperately wish to join, I feel that you must know this about me. I have never before mated. It is my understanding that 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 that 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 that she would present."

Talaimai loudly laughed. "Ah! I shall demand that my son welcome you into our tribe instead of me. Who you mate with will be left to you and your Protector!"

Chief Irakka stood and applauded Chief Talaimai. "Great wisdom leads this tribe. I am well pleased that my daughter will be accepted into a tribe led with such wisdom!" Everyone stood and applauded. Only Kiya, Vanam, and Pumi noticed that Vanam had not yet agreed to be her Protector. Kiya rose and with wide eyes and a soft smile, looked into the eyes of her soon-to-be Protector.

Pumi was impressed. *Nicely done. I wonder who came up with it.*

~ 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 time? Besides, no one else was listening. "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 mother woke her daughter before the sun rose. "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 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 that 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. You will do this by yourself. But once you prove that you can do it, Elder Woman has promised to find you a new mother. Elder women do not lie."

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

"Hug me, Valki, and then run with your tribe. Do not stumble."

Valki hugged her mother. Valki 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 far 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 that you would find me another mother when we made camp. Which woman will be my mother, please?"

The elder woman was disbelieving. The child had actually made the run. "We run again tomorrow. Find me when we make camp tomorrow and we will discuss finding you a mother."

Valki said, "Thank you Great Elder Woman. You are kind and merciful."

Valki went to the edge of the camp to find an edible plant or root. She 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 food search the night before; edible roots, three grubs, and an earthworm. Not an abundance but enough protein

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 survive. If she did not survive then all that 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. She had proven herself because she had been successful the day prior. 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. This time, the elder woman was resigned to facing the issue. "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 quite happy. She was going to get a new mother. *Mother, I have lived another day!*

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

The elder woman was fearful, but replied, "Actually, Great Chief, your tribe doesn't have *enough* children. We die faster than we are replaced. Most of our children have already died. Many of your women, too. The fact that this one is still alive 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."

"Silence!" the chief roared. "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. "Who is this girl's mother?" The chief demanded. All of 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 away 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. "Here, take this. I'm full." The woman 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. "Here, I wish you to have this." She then surveyed the room and asked, "Will anyone here 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.

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 shall I do, Mother? No woman will have me. The chief will start beating 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 the 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 so disappointed."

"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."

"I must go now, Little Sister. I hope you can stay alive another day -- but I have stayed too long and talked too much. My associates will be angry with me. I must go."

With that, she felt her embrace returned -- firmly -- like her mother when Valki left her. She savored the feeling, then opened her eyes. No one was there. *Ask a hunter how not to get eaten. Get a bag with a*

knife. Walk in a direction the tribe will not go. Find another tribe. Stay alive another day. Valki was thrilled. She had a plan. She sneaked into the edge of the camp and slept well.

The next morning, Valki surveyed the campsite. The women had left to gather. The chief had kept one of the younger women from the fields to keep him company for the day. Two young hunters sat on the ground pitching stones into a circle. She approached them as innocently as she could. For a child, especially a girl, bothering a hunter was always a risk. "Are you afraid something will eat you at night when you're out hunting?"

A hunter looked up at her. "Nahhh", he said. "We just keep the fire going. Animals are afraid of fire."

"What would you do if the fire went out?" she asked.

"Keep my trusty spear ready," he replied.

His friend laughed. "Trusty spear? You would go climb the nearest tree. High up the tree, so a leopard wouldn't get you."

"Nahhh. We don't have that many leopards around here." The two young males then forgot about the girl standing there as she soaked up their every word about staying alive on the hunt.

Valki hung around the outskirts of the camp until the night before the camp would pack. All would retire early in preparation for the difficult coming day. The tribe would move to the east for the next hunting season.

After the camp had been silent for a long time. Valki quietly walked to where the chief slept, picked up his traveling bag and his spear, and quickly walked southward into the night. She traveled the entire night. If she were fortunate enough to not be eaten during her first night, she would be far enough away from her old tribe to build a fire or sleep in a tree. On this night, she could only rely on the beating of the spear against her traveling bag so that the noise would hopefully ward off any tentative predator. She would stand little chance against a determined predator, anyway. But the young hunter had demonstrated how he would use his spear to try to fight off a lion or a bear. "Good luck, with that," his friend laughed. She had prepared the best she knew how. She simply knew she had to be far away from the camp when the chief woke up and could not find his equipment. *He isn't smart, though. It was a fair trade. He may never figure out what happened to his bag and spear.*

She walked well past sunrise. She then found a tree in which to sleep and climbed high into it.

Valki was an expert gatherer. Her mother had trained her incessantly. She found protein crawling and flying in trees and protein in the ground. She wondered why her mother had not simply left the tribe and lived off the land. Things could hardly have been worse. But she remained thankful for each day that she stayed alive. There was surely something out there waiting to eat her. But, in the meantime, she was alive.

She traveled south for a full season; walking, trotting, resting, foraging, building fires, climbing trees, and staying alive for one more day. *I hope Mother knows that I still live.*

The sun was high in the sky when she, at last, saw motion on the distant horizon. She walked toward it. The motion became a gatherer. She saw more gatherers. She walked toward them. A gatherer looked up and saw Valki approaching. She stared at the girl. Another gatherer saw her, stood, stared, and loudly called out, "Elder Woman Vivekamulla -- Come quickly!"

Valki continued to walk through their midst. Gatherers continued to stand and stare. A woman came running up. She confronted Valki and fell to her knees. "Child, where did you come from? What has happened to you?" The women gathered around the two.

"My name is Valki, Great Elder Woman. Mother died. My elder woman would not find me a new mother like she promised. The chief commanded that I leave his camp and not come back. I took his hunting bag and spear because he took my food. I am searching for a new tribe and a new mother. Will you be my mother?"

Vivekamulla embraced the dirty, emaciated young girl. "We will find you a mother, Valki. And as much food as you can eat."

Valki returned the embrace with unimagined strength.