

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

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

“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 in year 4; 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 in year 10; 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 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 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 in year 16; 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.