

## The First Sweat

1,750,499 years ago.  
Negev Desert

Uma knew almost immediately that there was something wrong with her baby. This was her second child, and the birthing went smoothly—much more smoothly than the birth of her first child. Like before, when her water broke, she went over to the birthing alcove in the rock shelter the tribe was using that season, and her two sisters joined her to help her push out the new baby. It slid out after just a few deep pushes. One sister, Ula, helped Uma to push out the placenta while the other sister, Uta, pulled out a flint from her bag and cut off the umbilical cord. Ula went out of the shelter with the placenta to bury it as a gift to the life-giving Ter, while Uta wiped off the child with her leather rag and placed the baby on Uma's breast. "It's a boy." Uma looked down at her baby, his big bright eyes staring up at her. Uma cradled the baby to her chest. "But it has no fur!" she thought. Her first child had been covered with fine blond hair all over its body when it was born, hair that over the next three seasons had turned into the dark brown fur that every member of the tribe sported. But this baby had only a few wisps of hair on its scalp and almost none on the light brown skin that covered the rest of his body.

The next day, after Uma and baby were back on their sleeping straw, just inside the opening to the rock shelter, Uma's partner Hanu came up. "What's its name?" he asked. Hanu had joined the tribe only a season ago, soon after Uma's first partner had disappeared after having gone out on a hunting trek and never returning. Hanu had appeared at the rock shelter the tribe was using that season, lugging a big antelope over his shoulders. He told the group that he had run down this deer but had become separated from his tribe, which had moved on by the time he got back. Hanu looked a little different from the men in Uma's tribe, with shorter arms and longer legs, a less protruding jaw, and, after he had dropped the antelope, he stood taller and straighter than Uma's people. Still, Hanu was clearly a good hunter, and Uma soon welcomed him as her new partner.

Uma looked down at her baby that was taking its first suckle at her breast. "Haku" she said. "That's his name."

Over the course of the next few seasons Haku grew up like a sprout. The hair on the top of his head had turned brown and grown into a tangled mat that came down over his eyes.

A few tufts of brown hair had appeared on his chest and back, but the rest of his body was still just brown skin. The other members of Uma's tribe tended to avoid this funny looking, furless, child who, like his father, stood more upright and had a flatter face than they did. Often when Haku would kneel next to another member of the tribe to see what they were doing, that person would snort and shoo him away. But not his aunt Uta, who encouraged this inquisitive child. Uta was one of the best flint knappers in the tribe, and after a few seasons of her instruction Haku could make a blade nearly as quickly and as well as Uta. He gave a bright smile at Uta when she gifted him with a precious piece of the shiny black stone that made the best blades. And by this time Haku had grown up enough to be able to tag along with his other aunt, Ula, when she went out to collect nuts and herbs. Ula carefully pointed out what herbs to pick, which ones could be eaten right away, which should be saved to be used when someone became sick, and which ones he should never touch. Haku especially liked it when Ula brought him with her when she went out to collect straw to replace the tribe's old straw, something she did at the end of the old season, when the straw was tall and had seeds that could be taken back to the shelter and ground down before being put in the cooking bag with water and hot stones.

After Haku was two handful seasons old and nearly as tall as his mother, Hanu started taking him out on his hunts. Hanu carefully showed Haku how to cover himself up to lay in wait for a deer or wild goat to come by. And if their spears failed to fell the animal, Haku showed Hanu how to jog after the animal, steadily running for a great distance until the animal finally flopped over in exhaustion and they could dispatch it. "There's no rivers in this Ter-forsaken land we're in now," Hanu said, "but if we ever move on to where there is a river, I will show you how to spear the fish the swim up them." "What's a river?" Haku asked. "Think of the water spring near our rock shelter. Then think of water coming out of it as wide as two handfuls of sleeping men. That's a river." "Wow, I want to see that river thing someday."

Every couple of seasons the tribe moved on, following the deer that each season seemed to be found more in the direction of the rising sun. The men of the tribe would scout out a place with a water spring and a nearby rock shelter, and the tribe would move on. And each season it seemed to be getting hotter and hotter, and water springs becoming harder and harder to find.

After a handful of moves, the tribe had settled into a small rock shelter that scarcely afforded any shade from a sun that seemed to shine brighter every day. And Ula and the other

gatherers were finding it harder and harder to find anything edible in that dusty land. And one day Hanu, who had gone out to hunt on his own, staggered back into the shelter and fell over panting. “It’s just too hot! I tried to run down a deer I saw, but I just couldn’t keep up.” “Let me try,” said Haku, now as tall and muscular as Hanu. Haku tightened up his leather loin cloth, grabbed his spear, and sprinted out of the shelter. The sun had gone down and had come up again without Haku reappearing, much to the worry of Uma and her sisters. Then, at the height of the next day, Haku appeared at the front of the shelter, a life-saving antelope slung across his broad shoulders, his whole body covered in sweat. Everyone in the tribe whooped and came up to hug him. “What’s this on your skin?” Uma asked. “Yeah, it feels like water,” Uta snorted. “Have you become a spring?” Ula added, giggling. “It’s just my body crying tears of happiness that it’s not covered in fur on such a hot day,” Haku said, grinning at the tribe that somehow seemed a little less like his family.