

Chronos

by

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Matu carefully made his way across the broken, rock strewn hillside. The hot sun was beating down on him, sapping his strength and drying his mouth. His sandals had reached the end of their useful life and he desperately needed replacements, on such terrain as this, a man could die for want of a sandal. At this time, Matu would have admitted that all his possessions were easily carried in the small pouch he had slung across his broad back, he no longer had a home as such, his wife was dead and they had failed to produce children. In the grip of the hunger which had scoured his homeland he set off to seek a new path. One glance at Matu would tell you that he was a working man, had been since the age of nine, first tending goats, then building houses and cutting stone. Now he could, perhaps, call himself a metalsmith, he wielded a hammer with vigour and some skill. According to the man he'd met on the lower trail that morning, the great mountain was less than five leagues ahead, a full day's journey on this ground, but he would probably be able to spend the night within a league of the town at its foot. Already he was walking down more than up, he judged he'd probably crested the mountain ridge some hours ago. There was a decided difference to the view. The ground was much the same but ahead, in distant valleys, there was a clear quality to the air, his nostrils detected a faint odour of water and growth even through the dust and grime which covered his face.

Matu was in the middle of taking a longer step over a large stone when he heard a noise, very faint. He'd stalked animals and occasionally defended the village where he, at that time, lived, he knew sounds of hills and those of rivers. He could tell by the splash which species of fish had jumped from a pool, he instinctively knew this sound was different. Mountains play tricks, sound echoes from cave and rock face, direction is difficult to discern, Matu stepped quietly to the side of the path and gently squatted, removing his pouch and resting it on the ground beside him, he pulled a small hunting knife from his rope belt and grasped it firmly in his right hand. In front of him, he placed his left hand on the ground, fingers spread, gripping the earth itself, feeling for vibration. His body tensed and he waited.

For nearly half an hour he waited, sweat, slowly trickling down from his thin, dark hair, darkening the back of his woollen tunic, pulse quick but steady, eyes alert. Eventually he

decided to change position, he sat down, stretching his legs, then lay on his side, pressing his elbow into the ground and leaning his head over till the hard bone behind his ear rested firmly against his shoulder. Within minutes he felt the vibration, deep and pulsing, not quick like a man or a horse. There was really no sound but there was this throb, like a distant earthquake or thunder on a summer night. When there was something to see, Matu almost missed it. An imperceptible darkening of the sky around him then a dark flash passing low overhead. Behind the dark object grey-white clouds joined the shape to the mountains behind Matu. Matu stood to see, a mistake. A few moments after the object passed over, the mountain shook, Matu was thrown to the ground with force, he felt the pain of impact on one knee and his eyes and mouth filled with dust. He began to cough violently and it was some minutes before he looked up again.

The great mountain was visible, alongside it, seemingly hanging in the air like a hawk, was a large dark body. Matu moved swiftly down the mountain path moving closer to the body. He was an experienced man and he knew exactly what he'd just seen. A broad smile crossed his open features as he walked with a proud step towards his God. An hour later he was refreshing himself in a small stream near the foot of the path. He hurried in his preparations because he knew that God might abandon him at any moment, he must look upon the face of divinity before he lost his opportunity forever.

As the sun began to set he pressed on, already God was becoming harder to make out in the deepening gloom. Every few minutes he stopped to look, it was difficult to believe that he of all people had been chosen to see God. But as he got closer, there was something peculiar about God. He appeared to be two parts. Indeed as Matu watched with awe, the gap between the two parts was becoming larger, it was some minutes before it was clear whether the upper God was climbing, or the lower God descending. In fact, it was both. Matu was tired, he sat and watched the proceedings as they occurred. The lower God began to give birth. A number of small God-children appeared and began to fly in a wide circular spiral around their parents. It was now clear to Matu that the lower God was in fact a Goddess, and wife to the great God above her. The Goddess moved in a wide sweep round the foot of the great mountain and her children split up and vanished quickly but silently over the horizon. After her peculiar dance was complete she moved back below the God and began to climb once again. As she did, however, the God moved upwards as well, pulling away from her. As they climbed they moved closer to the peak of the great mountain until they were suspended directly above it. At last she began to tire and fell away, resting smoothly on the peak. Nothing happened for over an hour. Matu made some progress in his journey but he was still worryingly far from his God. Suddenly and without warning the God-children

reappeared. To Matu's horror, God seemed not to welcome them back, just stationary above the peak and instead, when each got close enough he would suck them in and devour them whole. As this was happening the goddess was rousing herself. She appeared unable to lift, but she was gathering material from around her and forming it into a large structure. As the last God-child approached his father he veered away and the structure upon which the Goddess has been working appeared to leap towards the God. As with his children he devoured it instantly. The Goddess then fell quiet again clearly unable to continue. Matu was intensely aware of what was happening. Obviously the God had been tricked into accepting rocks in place of his son. What meaning this had Matu did not know. One thing, however, was clear, it was not important to understand God, merely to worship him. Matu had no idea what God would ask of him, but he filled his flask with fresh water at the next stream in case he needed to bathe when he met his destiny. Casting a glance around him, he realised that this land, over which God himself had flown, was holy. Perhaps he was defiling it with his presence, would God be angry? Matu trusted that God would look into his intentions, and find them worthy. Hopefully not too detailed a search though. Matu still suffered from pride and was already thinking about how he could turn this situation to personal advantage. Of course, service to God came first, personal advancement second, but there would probably be some benefits due a disciple which were not due a labourer. Matu hoped so.

Matu still had far to go and he was very fatigued. He pulled out his travelling blanket and made himself a bed. When he awoke, the God and the remains of the Goddess were still in their places, there was, however, no sign of the God-child. Matu was deeply concerned. Obviously this great God was unkindly and dangerous, he had slain his wife and all of his children excepting only one. Matu was starting to wish that the missing God-child would avenge his mother and siblings. It would be terrible to be left with such a God. Matu pressed on once again, moving as quickly as he could towards the mountain. It was late afternoon when he finally passed under the shadow of God. God had moved slightly, no longer exactly central over the peak of the great mountain. Matu gazed up at the underside of God. Strange patterns twisted across his smooth surface, there were shallow depressions and small regularly-shaped holes. God was mighty indeed, far larger than even the large communal hall of his home village and yet hovering like a fly with no visible effort.

Matu was never quite sure what made him turn his head, but turn he did. Approaching over the horizon was the surviving God-child. The God-child slowed until it rested close to God and then there was a very long pause. Matu was confused, were they talking, fighting, making peace, or war? Whatever caused the victory, it was extremely sudden. Matu had a feeling of being pressed to the ground, trees and bushes low on the escarpment were

flattened in a high wind and there was a bright but cold light. After the noise and light went away, Matu looked up. Around him was a scene of local devastation, perhaps taking refuge beneath God was not such a clever choice after all. Above him, flying smoothly in a circle around the mountain, was the God-child, now the sole God in this place. At times he flew quite close to the ground and each time he came round and overhead, Matu jumped into the air and cheered the victorious God. As the God passed overhead it would sing its name in exultation. "Zhoosh, Zhoosh" he was called, Matu recognised it as a name of power. After a while Zhoosh moved off and settled near his mother on the mountaintop. Matu bade Zhoosh a farewell and started to walk west. There was a God on the mountain, and Matu was his first disciple.

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