

Battle of the Eclipse

Once upon a time, in the land of the Meads, there lived a young boy named Madia. Madia grew up in a small village. He grew up in a land where everyone had a great deal of respect for the Sun. For the Sun indeed was the source of all light, of all sustenance, of all warmth. Madia loved the Sun. He adored the Sun and would send prayers to the Sun daily. He would always, always, always look to the Sun for some sort of guidance in one way or another. As he grew older though, he started to feel stifled in his environment. He started to feel restless. He wanted to go beyond the border of his village. He wanted to go elsewhere out into the world where he could seek his fortune, find great things, have adventures, have anything other than the sameness that he had become accustomed to.

One morning, he went out to a field and he sat underneath a tree. Sitting in the shade, he thought about the Sun. He thought about how the Sun flew across the heavens day in and day out. How the Sun was always up there traveling. He wished he could travel just a portion of all of the traveling that the Sun did. As he was sitting there, he looked up and he saw two strangers approaching over the horizon. Ahh! He always loved strangers. Strangers were the source of strange tales and far off things. He ran up to meet the strangers. He invited them into the village. He showed them a place where they could get food. He bought the food for them. They sat around and they talked, and he asked these two strangers question after question.

Soon they started to speak of an impending war and this peaked Madia's imagination. He thought ahh – where there's a war there's a need for troops. This could be my ticket out of here. Aha, he asked more and more questions about it, and soon they told him this story. One of the princes of our land, they said, has been killed. He has been killed in a dreadful way. You see the King hired some hunters to go and hunt for his court, and when one day these hunters returned, empty handed, the King mocked them. He said something that must have been so insulting that they took it inside and they vowed revenge. They went the next day and they killed one of the King's sons, and they served him at a banquet.

No one knew about it at first, but when rumors started to spread and people put two and two together, the missing prince, the strange food, they began to grow sick inside. How could these people have committed this deed? Everyone at the banquet? They grew very sick. The King, he was torn up. He was so upset. He was so angry. He called on his troops to go and find these hunters immediately. They searched high and low, everywhere, but they couldn't find them in the land of the Meads. They looked at intelligence and they found that it seemed those hunters had crossed the Hallace River, the border between the Meads and the Lydians. In fact, they had gone straight to Sardas, the capital of the Lydians.

The King immediately sent messengers and messages across the border all the way to the Sardas King, saying you've got to turn these guys over to us, but the King of the Lydian's refused. They were already having problems at the border. The Meads were starting to get stronger. He didn't like the sound of this. It was a no go. Last we heard, there was still an impasse. No one had come to any conclusion. And we think, said the hunters, that a war might be upon us. The strangers mentioned this to Hallace, and Madia thought ahh, this could be it. Well, he finished his meal with them and he said farewell. They parted and he went back to that tree where he had been sitting before.

He sat there and he thought about the possibility of war. He thought yeah, war. It could be so exciting. It could be my way to get out of this little village, but it's terrifying. He looked to the Sun again for guidance and he imagined the Sun burning firey red. He imagined the Sun who had sometimes scorched the Earth in times of drought, and he thought, ahh, that sounds right. He felt inspired. He decided he was going to do it if the chance came, and the chance came soon. Soldiers from all over started to gather troops around them to get ready to invade the Lydian empire. The King of the Meads had declared war. Hallace said farewell. Madia said farewell to his family and he joined those troops and he marched towards the Hallace river.

Many years passed. Many years of fighting. And Madia found himself once more on the banks of the Hallace. It was yet another battle and still the same war. But Madia wasn't the same person. He had grown up. He had gotten older, and he had become completely sick and tired of this war. So that morning when he awoke for battle, he didn't offer his thanks to the Sun as he used to when he was younger. What did he have to be thankful for he thought? He joined the battle as he had many times before, but he didn't join it with his heart and his mind engaged. No. He wasn't there, he didn't care. So, it wasn't that surprising that shortly into the battle someone got at him while he was unaware, and he was injured in the shoulder. He went stumbling off of the field. He found some boulders. He sat down amidst these boulders and he checked his wounds. It wasn't too bad. This one wouldn't be fatal, but maybe the next?

He suddenly remembered he might be in danger. There might be an enemy near him. He looked around, he listened, but all he heard was the distant sounds of the battle field. The clash of metal, the thuds of wood. Horses and men running, screaming, shouting, yelling in pain. Moaning, groaning – ahh. In the past, he would have run right back into the battle, wound or no wound, but now, what was the point? What was the point of this war? I mean those hunters? Long gone – they would never be found. It was clear that this was just a battle of power between the Mead King and the Lydian King. This was an attempt to get more land. And what did that have to do with him? All he was doing was following orders, and how many orders had sent his friends to their deaths? How many orders had cost him his life – almost?

Worst of all, he missed that home that he had wanted to leave so badly before. He sat there and he looked up to the sky and the warm rays of the Sun bathed his face, and all of that light compared to the darkness inside of him felt like a cruel joke. He got enraged toward the Sun. He almost screamed out at it, but he realized it might give away his position. And that rage inside of him bottled up and turned into despair and agony. He called out in his mind to the Sun – Sun! Where is all that warmth, that sustenance, that light? I have none of it in my life. Where's the fire in my heart? Why have you abandoned me?

It almost seemed like the Sun heard him. It seemed as if the Sun might have understood, for suddenly, it looked like the Sun went a bit dark. No . . . this couldn't be. He looked around – sure enough. Shadows were creeping in everywhere, the light was changing into something of a twilight. What was going on? He looked at the Sun and he said, what? Did you hear me, did you understand me actually? And the response he got back – increased darkness. He rubbed his eyes. He looked through the air to see if there was dust, but no. There was really darkness. The Sun's light was failing them. And he wasn't the only one who noticed. All over the battlefield one soldier after another started to notice that things weren't as they had been a couple of minutes before. The light was dimming. Some of them were confused, looking around trying to figure out what was going on. Other soldiers dropped their weapons and they were running off the field in every direction. And very soon, darkness crept over the entire field, and it was as if it were night in the middle of the day.

Pandemonium broke out. Soldiers were yelling and screaming. They were throwing their weapons down. They were running from this side to that side, crossing over to the enemy lines. They didn't know which way they were going, but they were running to get away from that field. And in a few minutes, all that they had were the dying, the injured and the already dead, moaning. Madia stood up amidst those rocks and he was too much in shock to go running off. He just stared at the darkened disk where the Sun had previously been. He didn't know what to think. Only one idea came to his mind, and he sent a prayer to the Sun – simply, please come back.

And at that moment, there was a spark of light off to the one side of the Sun, and then, the light came flooding back over the plain. The light increased and grew and grew. And Madia? That was the end. What could he make of all this? He just said thank you to the Sun and he stumbled blank face back to his camp. And when he got there, it was still chaotic. Everyone was clearly relieved that the Sun was returning, and the Sun had in fact returned, but there were still soldiers streaming in from every direction. Soldiers who had fled. Everyone was talking. They were discussing what could have caused this. What could it mean? Some said, this means that the Lydian's will soon fall. Others said that this is a terrible sign that means that we will lose the war. And others said that this is clearly the fact that the Gods are upset with us that we are even having this war in the first place.

Madia though did not share his ideas. He didn't share the fact that the Sun seemed to go dark as soon as he had sent up his feelings of anguish and desperation. He didn't mention that the Sun seemed to return when he asked it to. He kept it quiet, but he mulled it over in his mind. And over the next few days, he had plenty of time to do so, for he wasn't required to return to battle. None of the troops were. Because instead of fighting there were messengers flying back and forth between the different camps. Between Sardis and the Median empire. Everyone was talking. All the soothsayers in both lands had gathered together and they were discussing what did this mean. What kind of sign was it that the Sun would disappear and allow night to fall in the middle of the day? What could this be?

Finally, word came to the camp. A truce had been declared between the two empires. Everybody was in such a good mood. And when they heard that they had to prepare for a royal visit at that very camp on the Hallace river, they were overjoyed. Everyone was stirred up. There was great preparation and soon the King arrived. He gave a very grand speech to everybody thanking them for bringing honor to the country. And he said to seal the truce, he was marrying his own son to the daughter of the Lydian King, and they would do it there on the Hallace river – what would be the new border between their two lands. The established border between their two lands.

The next day, the wedding took place amid great celebration and festivities, but Madia didn't care about all that. All of this royal, political goings on seemed hollow to him after all those years of suffering. All he cared about was his interaction with the Sun over the last few days. And his one new prayer to the Sun – Let me go home. He didn't have to wait for long. The armies were mainly disbanded, and all the different troops were sent back to their homes. Madia returned to the home that he had wanted to leave so badly before. And he settled there. He decided that's where he would remain for all of his years. Throughout those years, he would often hear people thinking and talking about the great battle in which the Sun had been blotted out entirely. And he never shared his story. He always thought about it but he never spoke it. For in his mind, it was simply between him and the Sun.