

# */ - Visitor*

Dusk nears as a man stops at the city gate. He is not old, but his unkempt hair makes him seem so. His rags are riddled with holes but they still cover his body almost completely. A cane rests in his left hand and a linen bag is flung over his right shoulder. It does not seem like he has any other belongings or a mount. This begs the question of how such a man could have survived the desert alone. But the answer to said question comes clearly to anyone who examines the visitor closely. Despite his tattered apparel, he is standing firmly and emanates some kind of strength, completely unfit for a beggar who has just crossed the desert. Either he is just a local who left the town and came back late or the desert was nothing compared to what he has endured before.

No matter which it is, the city guards are not paid to ponder such meaningless things.

“What is your name and why do you come to Sahvestar?” asks one of the two men standing on the wall, his ornamental armor shining amber in the last rays of sunlight.

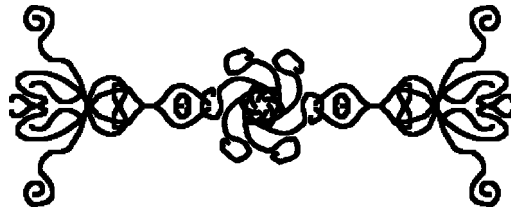
“I come seeking shelter.” the visitor answers, his voice firm and strangely dignified.

“I don’t seem to have heard your name, care to repeat it?” the guard states with a grin of a man who gets to exercise the little bit of power that he holds.

“My name is not of any importance anymore, but if you wish you can use the name Zahreen.”

“Welcome to the city then, Zahreen. Sufail, open the gate.” the guard says as, as much as guards like to make use of the power they hold, duty comes first and there is no reason not to let in a visitor seeking shelter. The other man, Sufail, nods and begins to open the gate. The metal gate rises, making way for the visitor.

“Thank you, be blessed.” he says and enters the city of Sahvestar.



The man partially lied to the guards. It is true that he used to be Zahreen and that the name does not hold any significance anymore but that was only half of the truth. He does have a new one but knows better than to reveal it so soon. After all, names have meaning.

Strolling through the streets of Sahvestar, he admires the view. It has been quite a while since he had contact with civilization. But that isn’t why he came to Sahvestar. While he is clearly enjoying his walk, this time it is about the destination rather than the journey. Not stopping to ask for any directions, he walks confidently despite not having visited the city before. On his way, he passes luxurious stores and ancient wonders of architecture which would be most people’s reason for visiting the capital. He is different, he does not care about such things. Maybe Zahreen would have cared, but he is no longer Zahreen. There is something of utmost importance that needs to be done and he knows that better than anyone else.

Finally, he arrives at his destination. Before him stands a large but surprisingly undistinguished building. The God-King’s palace. The main entrance is open as the God-King is supposed to listen to the problems of his people. Granted, with the rapid growth of Sahvestar, not even a god could have enough time to listen to everyone but the symbolic open gate still allows anyone to enter.

As he crosses the threshold, he begins to feel slightly stressed.

He heads straight for the throne hall. He has seen the plans of this building many times before and knows the way perfectly.

His final destination is a spacious room. It is lit by colorful light coming in through many beautiful stained glass windows. There is also a large, crystal chandelier but it is not lit and only dimly reflects some of the dyed sunlight. At the end of the throne hall there is, as the name suggests, a large throne. It stands between eight chairs, four on each side, with a priest sitting in each of them. Only the grand seat itself is unoccupied. The man formerly known as Zahreen is confused. It is clear that this is hardly what he was expecting to find. And such surprises warrant drastic changes to the plans made in advance.

“What do you seek here?” asks one of the priests.

“I am Morlicht and I came here to take my throne as the God-King of Assir.” he answers, his firm voice echoing across the enormous chamber.

One of the priests gets up from his chair. He is a colorfully dressed, tall, slender man with a short, black beard and an unfriendly face.

“Do you know how many people come here claiming to be a god?” the priest asks, his eyes filled with contempt. It has been around twenty years since Assir last had a God-King.

Morlicht does not answer. Instead he looks up and sets his sight on the chandelier. The large crystal lamp suddenly lights up, filling the room with delicate, sky-blue light. The light dims and goes out shortly after. Some of the priests gasp but the one who asked the question does not seem to be impressed.

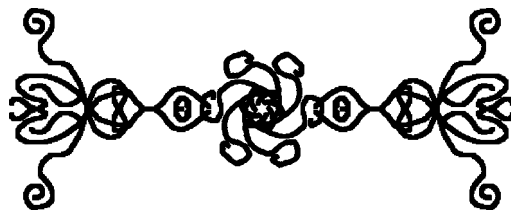
“I don’t know how you managed that trick and I do not believe you are anything more than a fraud.” he says “But the protocol requires us to consider your candidacy fairly, so please give us a time to confer.”

The men all get up from their chairs and begin talking to each other in muffled voices. Wurtzstah is standing too far from them to make out what they are saying but he knows that they are deciding whether to trust him or not.

Eventually, after a few minutes, all priests but the unfriendly one take their seats.

“You, who call yourself Morlicht. You are to be detained until further notice. That is unless you wish to withdraw your claims of godhood and leave the city.” the unfriendly priest says, clearly suggesting one option over the other. A few of the others make ostentatiously dissatisfied faces, begging the question whether the resolution was even settled by a fair vote.

“I will stay in custody for as long as you have doubts regarding my legitimacy.” Morlicht says, kneeling before the priests.



The cell that Morlicht got isn’t like those small, dirty cubicles that lowly scum is usually put into. Quite the contrary. The room is spacious, furnished and likely much better than what the average citizen of Sahvestar lives in. In fact, the only thing that differentiates it from a regular room is the steel door and the metal-reinforced windows meant to prevent whoever is inside from leaving. It is a room more fit for a political prisoner rather than a blasphemer who insists that he’s god. That’s because, despite claiming to not believe him, the priests cannot rule out the option that Morlicht is a god. As a result, he is kept in a cell not as a fraud but as a man who needs to be kept around until further decisions are made by their council.

Unfortunately for the priests, their prisoner has more important things to do than politely sitting in the cell and waiting for them to confer. Instead, he simply leaves the cell. He does not break the door nor does he unlock it. He simply passes through it. Nobody is there to witness it but he doesn’t care to flaunt his divinity in order to convince the council.

The corridors of the building are empty, or rather they are such for Morlicht. There might be people walking through the exact same hallways but they do not notice him vice versa as he doesn’t want to be seen and holds no interest in observing any of them.

He leaves the palace and heads out onto the streets. It is probably going to take a while before the priests realize that he left. And even if they do, there is likely nothing they can do to find him. An unkempt man, whose clothes are riddled with holes is a completely inconspicuous sight in a city like this. Morlicht is just one among many. But, even if he were to stand out, it would still be impossible to track him down. Such are the ways of the divine.

Yet again, he does not stop at any of the luxurious shops which are the pride of the city. Morlicht passes jewelers, antiquary shops, and many others, only to stop at the first farmer's market that he sees. He walks up to the counter. "Any fruit for a hungry man?" he asks.

The large, powerful-looking man at the counter looks at him for a quarter of a second before he opens his mouth.

"You really think you can fool me? I have seen countless like you and I know when a man is lying," he laughs "But even if you were really in need, you still wouldn't get any. There are many people in the markets who would have given you something to eat just for helping them out." there is truth in what the man says and it would have been sound advice if Morlicht's only goal was to find something to eat. He leaves the market and heads to a nearby bakery.

"Bread for a poor, unfortunate man?" Morlicht asks the baker, a slender, tall woman with sharp facial features. This time, there is none of his usual dignity in the voice. He really does sound like the 'poor, unfortunate man' that he claims to be.

"If you want to eat, go and work for it, you worthless scum!" the woman shouts at him gesturing aggressively. He leaves promptly.

He repeats this a few more times, visiting various places where food can be acquired but every time he is either chased out or at the very least strongly asked to leave the building.

At one of the bakeries, he asks for bread again. The baker, a big but friendly-looking man, doesn't answer. Instead, he reaches under the counter and pulls out a piece of slightly dry bread, probably leftovers from a few days ago. Not the best that the place has to offer but Morlicht wouldn't even imagine asking for anything better.

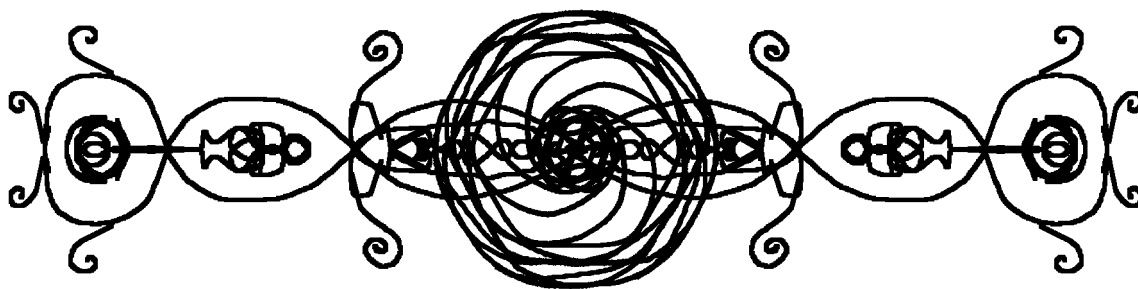
"Thank you," he says as the man hands him the food.

"But listen, only this once. If you come here begging for food again, I will not be so generous," the baker says after a while but does it in a tone so apologetic that it does not indicate that he is going to stay true to his words "Even now, I shouldn't have given you this bread. If my wife finds out, I'm as good as dead."

"Fret not, your secret is safe with me," he says, smiling kindly while biting the crunchy piece of bread.

"I hope so. Because, you know, it's not just my wife that can be dangerous..." again, the baker makes a threat so empty that it's hard to even take seriously. But Morlicht isn't a man who takes advantage of human kindness like that. He is going to respect the baker's wish and never come beg for bread at this place again.

After he is done eating, Morlicht thanks the man once again and heads back to the palace. He sneaks back into the lavish prison cell and lies down on the bed, finally allowing himself to rest. After all, he had a long journey and an eventful day behind. And even gods need sleep.



*A few years ago*

*The man walks through the forest, following a familiar mountainside path that he has walked many times before. The familiar, chilly breeze brushes against his face as he walks. He walks along the path for a long time until he finally stops near a large tree. There, he takes a turn to the right and wanders off the trail. But to a careful eye, it is clear that there is a different, very faint and much less used trail that he's following.*

*He continues walking.*

*Finally, after around twenty minutes, he sees a clearing in the forest, marking the nearing of the end of his journey. It isn't long before he makes his way to the glade with the familiar, small, wooden cottage in the middle.*

*The door is open wide.*

*Something is wrong. He knows that the master would never leave the door open like that. It's too cold up here to allow the warm air to escape like that, he personally has been scolded for this multiple times. So why is the door open now? His heartbeat spikes as he gets closer.*

*Carefully, he enters the building. When he enters the living room, he witnesses a terrifying sight.*

*His master lies on the floor in a large puddle of blood. Blinded by anger and fear he rushes to her without even thinking to make sure the culprit is not around anymore. After brief examination, his worst suspicions prove to be true – multiple stab wounds to the chest and lack of breathing – she's dead. Leaning over the dead body, he loses himself in his thoughts for a few seconds but quickly snaps back to reality. Filled with rage, he begins search for the murderer. From the fact that the wooden planks haven't absorbed the blood, it is apparent that it hasn't been a long time since whoever killed her left the cottage. Additionally, after seeing the wall mount empty, he knows exactly what the motive was. There is blood splattered around the floor and not all of it seems to be master's. That means that the culprit has been injured too... But there is far too much blood for it to have been a fair one-on-one fight. There were at least two people fighting her, which makes sense considering that he himself could never come close to besting her.*

*It takes a little while for him to connect the facts. The murderers entered the cottage and killed his master but were also injured by her. Then they left, taking the sword with them. But they didn't take the main path down, otherwise he would have encountered them on his way up. That means that they didn't have any mounts as there was no path suitable for horse-back riding. Injured and making their way through the wilderness... he is definitely able to catch up to them.*

*He grabs a shovel from the broom closet and leaves the cottage, looking for clues. After brief search, he finds a trail of freshly trampled grass. He follows it into the forest. There, it turns into broken sticks, footprints and trampled leaves. But tracking was never a problem to him. Realizing that, at this rate, he is not likely to catch up, he speeds up. The trail is very clear and he is able to follow it even while moving quickly. At this rate, he will definitely be able to catch up, especially considering that his injured prey is not going to be able to keep a good pace.*

*He trips.*

*The momentum and steepness of the ground makes him fall uncontrollably. He lets go of the shovel and tries to use his hands to grasp onto something and prevent falling down further but its no use. As he rolls down, the world is spinning uncontrollably. Something hard hits his head. He blacks out.*

*When he regains consciousness, he is lying between the trees, his body aching from multiple cuts and bruises. He looks around, wincing in pain and realizes that he has lost the murderers' tracks. He tries getting up but his body refuses service. He tries again, this time managing to get himself to stand half-bent. Even standing in that position brings him excruciating pain. He lies down again to think for a second. He must have fell down quite a lot. And to find the trail again, he would need to go all the way up to the spot where he tripped. Getting up again, he begins climbing. But every single step is slow and brings him pain. He realizes that it's going to take a long time for him to get back up there.*

*And by that time, the murderers are going to be far away from here.*