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Murillo snored as he lay back in his favourite hammock, on his favourite porch, of his favourite house. The sun warmed his body as clouds placed just properly provided shade for his face.

Wind blew lightly against him, the sensation refreshing on his skin. He had just woken up as a few servants scuttled by, no doubt checking on him in case he needed anything.

The servants couldn't talk, of course; they were magic apparitions. Vaguely glowing humanoid figures that would stop by and complete any task Murillo posed to them. The Voice had gifted them to him for company, though they were terrible at *that* job.

I mean really, who cares about company if they can't hold conversation? He thought. Sure, they played chess, made drinks, cooked, cleaned, fixed broken things and complied with his every demand, but he missed conversation. Discussion. He could talk with the Voice, but it never really cared for speaking with Murillo, only fulfilling his every wish and desire.

Murillo left the hammock and stared at the beginnings of a sunset. Sure, it was beautiful. After all, the Voice constructed this mansion specifically at Murillo's request to have a gorgeous view of the cobbled city he was born in, the larger buildings catching light in the most magical of ways at sunset. The problem is, the beauty of a city and its skyline tended to decay when it was witnessed day after day. It was underwhelming at this point. The city itself was losing its light, and he could see fewer and fewer people walking about the market each day.

Murillo sighed and turned to walk inside, brushing feathers out of his black curls left from the pillow he slept on. When he turned, he saw a servant waiting in the doorway.

"Hi, could you fetch a pastry? I'm a tad hungry," Murillo said. "Oh, and then set up a chessboard, or maybe billiards. Whatever you prefer." The glowing servant tilted its head in confusion.

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“No preference? Ok, chess it is then.” Murillo’s mind wandered for a moment. What’s the point? He knew he was going to win anyway. He always won. The only challenge was back when his friends Isaiah and Remy used to come by and bask in the glory of Murillo’s estates. They were good company and friends since before Murillo’s engagement with the Voice, but after a while they just stopped coming by. Even when Murillo decided to reach out with some letters, he received no replies. He had considered reaching out to them in person. It had been a few years since he moved out of town to truly bask in the life of luxury he was being given, and while in the first year, he would go to town on occasion, he realized it was all quite sad there and so he stopped altogether.

Besides, why should I have to bring myself down there just to bring them back here? That’d just be a bother. Murillo thought to himself. *Plus, I have more power and influence than any king in miles of this decaying shitbasket of a town. I won’t go crawling for their attention just because I’m bored. No, they’ll come asking for something eventually.*

Murillo’s mind returned to the moment as he realized the servant was still in the doorway, confused at his request.

“Right, never mind. Those games are boring anyway. Just the pastry then.” With that, the servant turned to complete its task. Murillo sighed as he watched the humanoid apparition vanish down a hallway deeper in the mansion. He followed in and made his way to a nearby living room. Lavish rugs inlaid with gold and silver patterns lay across a dark wood floor. He planted himself on a cushioned, velvet-fabric couch set in front of an ornate fireplace. Deciding it was a bit cold, Murillo was about to get up to go activate the fire, when another servant apparition rushed by, placed its hand against the kindling, and sparked a flame.

Efficient bastards. They’re getting even more attentive recently.

He signalled the servant away with a nod of approval, and stared as the flame began to give off a comforting heat. As he stared at the dancing embers, Murillo realized that he didn't used to be like this. Every waking morning in town when he was a kid was filled with wonder. It was a dangerous life, where nothing was certain and others were unkind and disrespectful, but he could wake up and be surprised by what the day held ahead. There were days when Isaiah and Remy would come to his family's ramshackle house and spend all day drawing or making up stories, or playing dumb, ruleless games. It was fun, and all he had wished for at the time was more of that. More fun, more entertainment. That led to wanting more money, a better home, and fancy clothes. Now, he had everything he wanted and he still wasn't content.

"What is wrong, Avarus?" The Voice echoes its words in his head. Murillo could always tell it was the Voice because of the name it began to call him long ago, after he began asking it to fulfil his wishes in recompense for saving it from drowning in a well—that and of course its one-note, high-pitched voice playing directly in his mind. The Voice had begun to get a bit antsy at Murillo's demands, but still complied. It did agree to reward him for saving its life, and who could put a price on that? So, it had agreed and formed a pact with him. The Voice would grant my every wish and desire to the best of its ability until the day Murillo deemed he was completely satisfied.

Murillo turned his head to see the mote of light clinging to his shoulder. He could hardly feel it, but it did have substance. While it could float and drift, it seemed to prefer perching on something. Murillo assumed this was because it was not physically powerful despite the magic it had at its disposal. After all, the water in a well was enough to threaten the little wish-granter.

"Nothing. But that's the problem, you've given me so much that all of it bores me now."

"This will not do. Would you like me to put on another play?"

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“I’ve seen them all.”

“That’s an exaggeration, Avarus.” Murillo rolled his eyes.

“Yes, well I feel like I’ve seen them all.”

“What would you like me to do then?” the Voice asked. Its own curiosity as to Murillo’s reply cutting through into its words.

“I don’t know. The truth is, you’ve given me everything. I don’t work, I’m never starved, I’m the richest man ever. I have everything.”

“Good. My debt, I take it, has been paid long ago, Avarus. I have made you want for nothing, even if I were to leave now, the servants are capable enough to do anything you need,” the Voice said, moving off Murillo’s shoulder to drift by his face. *“So, how about this to sate your boredom: You provide something for me.”*

“Like what?” Murillo scoffed. He didn’t imagine the Voice would ask him to do anything in return for all its extra wish-granting. But Murillo *was* extremely bored, so maybe this task would do him some good.

“Just a simple conversation. You speak to my friend below. You see, he is as bored as you are, so maybe you can cheer each other up. To find him, just head to the mountains near the city and go down the mine. Down down down, to the lowest point possible.”

Murillo considered for a moment. After quickly realizing he had nothing better to do, he answered.

“Yes, I think I *will* talk to your friend.” The Voice didn’t have a face, but Murillo had a vividly odd feeling that it was grinning widely.

And so, after finally snacking on his delicious cream-filled pastry, Murillo changed out of his tight-fit velvet finery and into looser, lighter fabrics. He grabbed a lamp and packed some food just in case. Then, he embarked on his journey down the mines.

The entrance to the mine was marked by a gateway of stained wooden beams that seemed as if they propped up the surrounding wall of jagged rock that was only a small portion of the mountain. Murillo realized how dark it was getting as he straightened his pack of rations on his shoulders and stared at the deep darkness of the mine's entrance. It was like a portal to midnight beyond. He gripped the handle of his lantern, lit the flame inside, and before he could overthink it, walked forward.

His light provided little comfort, which Murillo found oddly satisfying. When was the last time he felt fear or worry like this? As he continued forth, only being able to see a few feet in front of himself, he took in what little he could see of his surroundings. Abandoned pickaxes littered the hallway, tally marks scraped onto the rough walls and words written either in a language Murillo did not speak or simply written too frantically to make out were scattered about.

This stretched on until his lantern revealed a rusty metal lift. The door looked like a grate, and when Murillo pulled it up to enter the lift, he could feel how shaky it was.

This thing is barely held together. He thought, hearing the screech and clanging sound of the grate rubbing against the metal of the lift itself. As he stepped inside and pulled the grate back in place, he began moving his light around, scanning for any mechanism to begin his ride downward.

There was nothing. No buttons, no levers or anything he imagined would start his descent. As Murillo put his hand back on the door to check outside, he heard something.

He stopped in place, listening closer.

A faint metallic screech began to rise, the metal around him beginning to shake and creak. A bolt burst off a wall. A clunk as the bolt hit the floor.

The screech built and built, and as it grew louder, it began to sound less metallic and more like a scream. Until suddenly, it stopped.

The lift dropped.

Soundlessly, the metal contraption began to plummet. Luckily, Murillo managed to grip tightly onto the rusted bars surrounding him. He screamed, his voice echoing up all throughout the mineshaft as he fell further and further below. His forearms and palms burned with pressure from gripping so tightly; his lantern smashed against a wall.

He was going to die, wasn't he? His guts churned as he realized he would end up a broken mess on the ground when this was over. For a moment, he almost accepted it. Maybe he was done. He had everything and still wasn't happy. That train of thought ended as he remembered his old friends. No, he didn't want to die. And if he made it out, Murillo swore he'd suck it up and find Isaiah and Remy.

He fell for what felt like hours, his stomach dropping the whole time. In reality, it only took a minute to reach his destination. The lift began to screech once more as it slowed toward the end of its descent. Murillo's legs, which had lifted off the ground from the velocity of his fall, were tingly when they touched the ground. As the lift came to a stop at the bottom, Murillo crumbled to the ground, his legs giving out to his own weight. He clung desperately to the bars of the lift as he tried to catch his breath.

It took many minutes of clinging, heavy-breathing and staring ahead at nothing before Murillo was able to stand again. When he did, he managed to walk forward and open the door of the lift.

He was shocked, but he needed to press on. Despite the fright, he had to acknowledge that it had been forever since he felt an emotion as heightened as just now. Even if that feeling was terror. So, Murillo marched onward, dazed but ready to meet the Voice's friend.

It didn't take much walking through the dark before what seemed like torchlight gave way to a cave entrance. Within the cave, lit by one enormous flame, stood a demon.

He was gargantuan, his form dominating the massive chamber. The naked figure had black-furred goat legs that led to a rotund torso of red skin. A black, pointed beard decorated a scowling mouth and red eyes. The centre piece of the creature was his charcoal-black horns protruding from his forehead, ending in points, and the enormous, dark-leathered wings on his back. The demon was sitting on a large throne, with his fist propping up his face, boredom written across his expression.

When Murillo finally pried his eyes away from the demon, he saw the rows and rows of people chained to the floor or walls. Large manacles gripped around necks and wrists. In his moment of panic, Murillo had had enough. He turned around and was ready to flee, until the Voice returned.

"What are you doing, Avarus?" the Voice said, no emotion in its words.

"I'm leaving, this isn't fucking worth it!" Murillo exclaimed, trying as hard as possible to whisper it, so as not to alert the demon.

"I assure you, my friend could solve your problems. Speak to him. You said you would for me. Remember all I gave you?"

Murillo considered for a moment. This was awful, sure, but it was different. New. Exciting. That was better than boredom right now.

“Fine.”

Murillo turned back around and walked forward, mustering up as much courage as he could. He walked into the light of the flame, keeping enough distance so he didn't burn. When he stepped into the light, the demon's eyes darted to Murillo, causing him to flinch back a step.

“Mortal boy. Come closer,” the demon roared in its impossibly deep voice. Murillo took a few more steps; the heat was blazing. Beads of sweat began to dart all over his body, soaking the fabric of his tunic.

“Speak.”

“My name is Murillo, sir,” he said to the demon. His voice started to shake, legs threatening to give out again. “I-I've come at the behest of a friend of yours. A wish-granting being of light.”

“Ah, yes. I know of whom you speak. Tell me, mortal: what is it you desire from life?”

“I-I wish to be entertained. I want for nothing but to laugh again. I sit around and am given everything I need, but I no longer have joy because of it.”

“I see. Have you no ambition?”

“W-what, sir?”

“This is your own fault, mortal. You are given all, yet seek to do nothing of your own accord. You could use your resources for others, yet you hoard it all. The very city above our heads grows hungry, its citizens starving, yet you spare nothing? You could be a king to them if you chose to be.”

“No, I...I swear I didn't know th-”

“You do nothing because of what my friend provides for you. You believe you are entitled to these gifts. I will make you learn.” The demon's arm rose, his hand stretching forth to point a sharp-nailed finger at Murillo. **“Make me laugh, or even just smile, and I will allow you to return above. If you fail, you will remain here forever. You may begin.”**

Murillo stood, wide-eyed. He couldn't even entertain himself; how was he to do *this*? So, he began to think, desperately, for anything.

“Uh...um. O-Ok sir. One moment, I-If you'd be so kind.”

The demon stayed silent, staring forward.

“Voice..I need your help. Tell me how to make him laugh.”

“*No, Avarus.*”

“What do you mean ‘no,’ you can't say no to me!” Murillo's face twisted in confusion and annoyance.

“Yes, I can Avarus. Earlier, I said our debt was settled. You admitting that I gave you everything you've ever wanted is enough to consider our pact complete. You've used my gifts for years to satisfy yourself. Take, take, take. You've never even considered giving. So now, give to my friend. Amuse him Avarus.”

Murillo was shocked. *How could it! After all these years! I saved its life, and this is what I get? No matter, I have to try something.* Murillo turned back toward the waiting demon, trying to feign charisma, yet no amount of smiling could hide his quaking legs and mumbling voice.

“O Great One! P-please listen. What do you call a one-legged woman?” Murillo asked.

The demon grunted his response, signalling for Murillo to continue. “Eileen!” He said

emphatically. The demon's frown did not budge. His red and yellow eyes stared holes through Murillo. Murillo's own face dropped its fake smile to reveal the terror underneath.

"I-I-I apologize, sir. The next will be more witty."

He tried telling more jokes: nothing.

He tried telling stories: nothing.

He tried dancing around the flames, and praying, and cursing, and making faces.

Nothing. None of it was even making the demon scoff. He was a jester with a joyless audience. The Voice was also silent, no matter how much Murillo pleaded for help.

"I am growing impatient, mortal."

Growing desperate, Murillo turned to the chained men and women scattered around the endless chamber. He ran to various groups of them, their chains stuck to the same post in the ground or a section of wall.

"Please, please help me, friends! How do I make him laugh! Surely someone knows!"

Murillo screamed as he ran between groups. Each time, he was met with the same deadpan faces. Nothing behind the eyes. He thought he was going crazy, but he could swear he recognized a few of them. It was only when he spotted two faces that he realized why.

Isaiah and Remy were sitting on the rocky floor, with the same cold expression as everyone else. These were people from the city, but why were they down here?

"Isaiah? Remy? How did you get here? What's happened?" asked Murillo in a panic.

There was no response.

"You seem to know those two. They are dead, mortal. Along with the others," said the demon. **"They cannot understand you, as you are living."** This broke something in Murillo.

“No, that can’t be! How? When did they die? E-everyone here? This is half the town.”

Tears began to well up in Murillo’s eyes as he pleaded.

“You never checked on them. The town was starving. Apparently, most of the food would vanish from their homes, as if by magic. Murillo thought he could hear the Voice faintly chuckle. This couldn’t be happening. He felt despair, and for the first time in years, guilt. “Your friends did not starve, though. They were killed and had their food stolen from them by other townsfolk. I’m sure if they were truly in need, they would have asked for your help, but they truly did not seem like they could put up with your ego.”

Murillo was lost, overwhelmed, and moments from needing to vomit. With no other choice, he ran to the foot of the demon and begged.

“Please! Smile! JUST SMILE!” he screamed it out over and over.

“SMILE! LAUGH! PLEASE!” he cried.

“Why beg and grovel when life bored you anyway?”

“It’s all I have. My life is all I have.” Murillo dropped to his hands in knees, tears falling as he bowed to the demon.

“Yet you could have what you desire down here. You could talk with them, possibly even make amends for never sharing your wealth.”

Murillo knew what the demon was implying. Knew it was possibly a trick, but he was so tired. Tired of being alone. He didn’t want to admit it, but today he had felt more than the past few years combined. The idea was intriguing. And now that he learned that the town and his friends were doomed, what was up there for him anyway? Nothing important. His greed got him an easy life, but one that he squandered. Now he just wanted to talk to his friends, even if they hated him.

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It was then, staring up at the demon just as the Voice had once stared up at Murillo, that he realized he and the demon were alike. *We both wanted too much. We both ended up trapped, not caring about what we had. Now, I may give this demon its false satisfaction by giving in and accepting its request to stay.*

As Murillo wiped his tears away, he spoke.

“I accept, demon. I will stay here. There...there’s nothing for me up there anymore, maybe one day, we could both be entertained again.”

At Murillo’s comment, the demon smiled.

This is based on Journal entry 4, although I did end up messing with the format a bit.:

Cards used:

