1951 The Nuances of Proper Grammar

It was going to take Aiko some time to prepare the new Memories for Sunny to peruse. In the meantime, he hesitated for a while, looking at the shimmering runes with a bit of trepidation.

By now, he already explored those of his Memories that he had either personally crafted or altered. Two more remained, though...

Weaver's Mask and Shadow Lantern. Sunny was a little afraid of them.

He had already seen their weave, after all — and it was unlike anything he had ever witnessed. Even the most powerful Memories he had possessed in the past, Estuary Key and the Crown of Twilight, seemed like toys meant for an infant when compared to the unfathomable complexity of the weave hiding within the Divine Memories.

Sunny had almost killed himself a couple of times by witnessing more than mortals were meant to perceive — like the endless tapestry of fate that Weaver's Mask could show him.

He had not been harmed by merely looking at the weave of Divine Memories, sure. But there was a vast difference between taking a look at them and becoming one with them — fusing with the Silver Bell was already a shock, so Sunny was hesitant to do the same with either Weaver's Mask or the Shadow Lantern.

Still, the temptation was too strong.

Finally gathering his courage, Sunny sighed and summoned the Shadow Lantern. Soon, a palm-sized lantern appeared in his hand. It was made from a black material that felt like stone, but wasn't stone, engraved with intricate patterns that resembled the scales of a serpent. A short chain was attached to a metal ring at its top, similarly black.

The lantern's gate was carved from glossy black morion... needless to say, there was no light shining through it. Instead, the darkness around Sunny suddenly seemed to grow deeper, colder, and more impenetrable.

Shadow Lantern was beautiful, but unassuming —not at all like a relic left behind by a god. Then again, maybe it was exactly the kind of thing that the elusive Shadow God would leave behind.

It also only had a single enchantment... which was both quite simple and dealing with such absolute concepts and endlessness and infinity.

Enchantment: [Gates of Shadow].

Enchantment Description: [This lantern devours light and can contain, and then release, an infinite amount of shadows.]

That enchantment had served Sunny well in the past. In fact, it was one of the most useful and irreplaceable tools in his arsenal.

He remained motionless for a while, studying the dark Memory, then sighed again and controlled his gloomy incarnation to wrap itself around the serpentine stone lantern.

In the next moment...

Sunny let out a horrified yelp and tossed the lantern away. Of course, that did not do anything, so he belatedly remembered to separate himself from the Divine Memory by allowing his trembling shadow to dash away.

The Shadow Lantern fell on the floor and rolled a few times, its chain ringing in the silence.

"Ah... goddammit..."

Sunny found himself laying on the floor, having hit it hard with his forehead. Of course, his head was quite sturdy, so he wasn't even bruised... the Marvelous Mimic, however, seemed to have received some damage. The floorboard was cracked, slowly repairing itself.

A brick cottage could not really express emotions, but somehow, Sunny felt that he was surrounded by an aura of resentment.

He let out a shaky breath.

'Yeah... I'm not doing that again any time soon.'

Just as he had expected, fusing with a Divine Memory was not something a mere mortal like him was meant to do. His mind was too small, fleeting, and fragile to contain the vastness of the Shadow Lantern's weave, the weight of its enchantment, and the humbling scale of its unseen expanse. The Divine Memory might have appeared no larger than a palm on the material plane, but truly... its essence was far too immense to fathom.

Sunny slowly sat up and let out a low groan.

'At least I didn't start with Weaver's Mask...'

Shadow Lantern was a Divine Memory of the First Tier, while Weaver's Mask... it was a Divine Memory of the Seventh Tier. It had more than one enchantment, as well, woven by Weaver's own hand.

Sunny was suddenly thankful that he was a little scared of his mask, having been traumatized by its [Where is my eye?] enchantment a long time ago. He had used it on several occasions — the last time already as a Saint, to see if he was really free of the Strings of Fate and disconnected from its tapestry. Remembering those times consistently made him shudder.

Of course, fusing with Weaver's Mask would be far more merciful than witnessing fate without the privilege of looking away. His mind would not melt, shatter, and collapse under the pressure... it was just that becoming one with something so much greater than himself posed a high risk of his sense of self being substituted by that thing entirely.

Sunny had no plans of spending the rest of his life believing sincerely that he was in fact not a person, but a wooden mask instead.

He had come really close to being irrevocably convinced that he was an intricate stone lantern, already.

Shaking his head, Sunny closed his eyes for a moment, then threw a dark look at the Shadow Lantern.

'That was close'.

The experience of fusion with the Divine Memory had indeed been perilous...

That said, it had not been entirely useless.

Slowly, Sunny's expression changed.

Remembering that short moment of being one with the Shadow Lantern, he scrutinized his feelings intently.

He had not really managed to fathom the nuances of the spellweave of the Divine Memory, but he did become briefly aware of its true essence. That impression, although momentary, imparted a much deeper understanding of the Shadow Lantern to him.

And of its single enchantment.

Suddenly, Sunny's eyes widened, and he stared at the glossy morion gate of the stone lantern in utter disbelief.

'No... it can't be.'

And yet, it could.

He was paralyzed by shock.

'The Gates of Shadow!'

Long ago, soon after receiving the Shadow Lantern, Sunny had wondered how it was able to contain a literal infinity of shadows. Where did the shadows he sent into the Lantern really go? He had even sent one of his own shadows inside, learning very little as a result.

He had also tried to store the Fragment of the Shadow Realm in the small stone lantern, attempting to test if its capacity was really infinite. The Fragment could indeed be sent into the Shadow Lantern — sadly, no matter how hard Sunny tried, it could not be retrieved.

There was no reason Sunny knew why the Shadow Realm's Fragment would not return from inside the Lantern, like all other shadows would, but that was what he had discovered on Alethea's Island. The discovery had crushed his hope of being able to move his piece of a Divine Domain freely wherever he wished.

But now... now, Sunny had a strong suspicion about what the reason was.

It was because the name of the single enchantment of the Shadow Lantern was much more literal than he had thought.

Gates of Shadow... not of the Shadows, but of Shadow.

'Made pale and feeble by the radiance of day, Shadow laughed and rose from the ground...'

That was what the Nightmare Spell called Shadow God in the description of the Lantern.

So, the Gates of Shadow were really the Gates of Shadow God.

Now...

Where would the Gates of Shadow God lead?

Sunny stared at the small stone lantern and its tiny morion door with an expression of horror.

There was only one logical answer.

They would lead to Shadow God's Realm.