

Arcana Magi - c.11:

Feelings

by H-M Brown

Sunday morning in western New Jersey. Alysia looked at herself in the mirror of the dressing room. She wore a light blue t-shirt with a teal and pink bike shorts. The colors became a common theme for her, something that she did not want to discard, especially since it matched her teal tipped white wings and Mage Suit hairclips. She rubbed her scarred right hand and looked up to the mirror. The pain from punching the mirror still lingers in her thoughts. She sat down on the small bench before it and analyzed herself.

Having spent most of her car ride with Brie explaining emotions and feelings, Alysia stared at her reflection and smiled. Looking at the smile, she tried her best to feel happy, but her experiences really made her sad. She did her best to ignore the pain triggered by her emotions, but she felt forced into ignoring any sense of feelings.

Alysia reached for a shoebox and opened it. Inside was a pair of white sneakers. She slipped into them and stood to her feet feeling the softness. Even that sensation triggered pain. Frustrated, she threw the box at the mirror and rested her head on her hands.

"Alysia." Suzie said from outside. "Are you okay?"

"Yes." She knew that was a lie, but was not interested in talking about it.

"Come on out so I can take a look at you."

Alysia stepped outside and saw Brie in a skirt, t-shirt and vest with sneakers.

"It feels great to be in regular clothes again, right Alysia?" Brie said while spinning around with energy.

"I don't know."

"Eh?" Brie stopped and turned to Alysia looking at the teen's emotionless face. "You still sound like a robot. How about a little smile?"

"I tried."

"Tried? There's no trying when feeling."

"Okay Brie let's drop the subject." Suzie leaned closer to Alysia.

"Does your head hurt?"

"A little." Alysia looked up to Suzie.

"Don't you like your outfit?"

"Well I like the colors Suzie. I guess I like it."

"Guess?" Brie sighed and shrugged her shoulders.

Alysia thought it over and looked back at the mirror. She wanted to smile but became scared. That emotion too made her hold her head. She stopped feeling and looked back Brie and Suzie.

"It's okay." Brie said. "I'll make sure you feel again without your head hurting."

"I need gloves." Alysia covered her right hand.

"Okay. I can help you find them. Let's go."

"Wait." Suzie said. "First I have to pay for the clothes. I've talked to the sales clerk and she said I could pay for it now so you don't have to change back into your Mage Suits. We'll continue shopping afterwards."

"OKAY!" Brie excitedly ran off to the cashier leaving Alysia and Suzie behind.

After Suzie paid for the outfits, Alysia and Brie took their time trying on clothes. Brie enjoyed everything she tried on, but Alysia just stared at her garments. She was not interested in clothing styles. She just wanted some clothes on. As she handed Suzie what she wanted, across the aisle was sports equipment. She quietly walked away without them noticing and explored the department.

Alysia found a pair of white and blue batter's gloves hanging on some hooks. She slipped them on to see if they fit and fixed her bracelet for comfort. She flexed her fingers and felt glad to have covered her hands. She wandered the department, looking at the lacrosse sticks, swinging tennis racquets, and bouncing a basketball. She felt it in her heart, enjoyment playing around with the sports equipment, but her heart skipped a beat when she reached the last aisle. Her mouth opened with awe.

Alysia walked down the aisle looking at the hockey equipment. From sticks to masks to gloves, she remembered this game. It made her lips smile, as she looked left to right at all shelves. Memories of skates shaving the ice. The sound of sticks clashing each other. The roar of the crowd. Her eyes closed and envisioned herself skating toward the goal and shooting the puck. She took a white helmet from a shelf and slid her fingers over the clear visor. She removed her hairclips to try it on, but her long white and light blue hair made it difficult to wear. She remembered how she hated having long hair and understood why. It felt uncomfortable even if made into a tail, that's why her hair was short. She realized that she never liked long hair to begin with.

Her attention back to the helmet, she remembered that game, when a player slammed her into the boards. She remembered sitting in the locker room feeling the pain in her head. Her concussion. The very injury that awoke her ability to see and channel mana. She would not be what she had become now if not for that injury. She would be with her parents. She would be with her friends. With Kyo. The very memory of that injury played repeatedly in her thoughts.

"Alysia." Brie ran past the aisle and took a step back. "There you are. We were looking for... you."

Alysia walked past Brie quietly, taking the helmet off, and handing it to the small Sentinel. She dragged her feet across the floor as Brie looked down the aisle at the hockey equipment. Alysia kept her head down trying to sort through what ever was left of her memories. When she looked up, there was a pair of scissors hanging on a display. She was at the beauty department. Looking at her face in the small mirror, she put on her hair clips. Looking at them she never understood why Oryn had her wear them. She did like these clips and decided not to worry about them. Her long hair however and she wanted to get rid of it. She took the scissors and looked around the beauty supplies on the shelves. She found a small bag of rubber bands and knew what she wanted to do.

"Are you okay Alysia?"

Alysia turned around and faced Brie.

"I don't know."

Within the hour, they arrived at a motel off the interstate highway. They each carried one bag to room 4C and entered. Inside were two beds, one of which Reya rested on. On the floor, Karl worked on repairing a laptop for Brie to use. He waved hello as they set the bags on the bed and sorted through the merchandise.

"Did you all have fun?" Karl said.

"I did.' Brie said with a smile. 'And so did Alysia right?"

"Eh?" Alysia looked at Brie and nodded.

"That's good to hear.' Karl took a circuit board and lifted it up. 'Brie, This is a new circuit board I took before we left. Once I install this you can start your search for the Sentinels."

"Great thanks.' Brie said. 'This will be a big help."

"I got this for you." Suzie handed Karl a skullcap. She smiled at him as slipped it on and pulled it over his elven ears.

"Thanks honey. I can finally go outside." The couple smiled at each other when they heard a gasp in the room.

"Why?" Alysia took out of the bag, a pair of hockey gloves and a helmet.

"Hey.' Brie said. 'It wasn't time for you to see that."

"I don't understand." Alysia flipped the bag upside down and emptied it of all the contents, a pair of hockey sticks, three plastic roller hockey balls, two pairs of gloves, two helmets, and two pairs of roller blades.

"I remember you talking about hockey and seeing you sad about it in the store, I asked Suzie if she could buy them to cheer you up."

Alysia sat on the bed holding the helmet. She pulled her hair back and took out a rubber band she got from the store and formed a tail. She slid on the helmet and strapped it in place.

"You want to learn Brie?" She said with a cold voice.

"YEAH!!"

Outside Brie skated around and twirled like a figure skater. She held the hockey stick upside down, the gloves were too big for her arms, and she knocked down an empty garbage can to serve as goal.

"Now starting for the Sentinels... Alysia Morales!"

Alysia skated outside like the hockey player she was. Skating in a warm up circle by herself, she slapped the hockey balls into the garbage can. With a loud thud, the pucks bounced back out of the can.

"Amazing." Brie said as she watched the power of Alysia's practice shots.

Alysia guided the hockey balls to Brie's feet and stopped before the Sentinel of Byakko.

"Ready Brie?" Alysia took Brie's stick and helped her hold it correctly.

"Uh... yeah..."

Alysia taught Brie the basics of stick handling, passing the ball gently and not hard, and skating fast. Alysia took Brie's arms and showed her how to shoot a puck. Alysia watched Brie shoot the puck into the goal and failed a couple of times until finally she got it in and cheered loudly. Alysia skated over and embraced her friend in celebration as if it was a game. After one hour passed, Alysia and Brie sat down on the ground by their motel room taking a rest. They both looked at each other and laughed. Alysia clutched her head and kept laughing until tears went fell down her face.

"Is this being happy Brie?"

Brie stopped laughing as Alysia removed her hockey gloves and wiped her tears away. Not answering her, she watched Alysia skate away out into the open and did not what to do or say to her.

"Alysia." Brie stood to her feet as the door opened and Karl stepped outside.

"The laptop's ready.' He said presenting the computer. He noticed Brie was sad and looked out at Alysia skating by herself. 'What happened?"

"She needs to be alone.' Brie took the laptop from his hand. 'Thanks for setting this up."

"Glad to help." Karl turned to Suzie. "I'll get the ice chips for Reya."

"Okay Karl."

Brie entered the room not saying a word. After taking her hockey equipment off, she took a chair, and dragged it over to Reya's bedside. The Sentinel placed her hand on the catgirl's grey hair and felt how soft it was. She felt the same softness like that one day, when she found a stray cat and tried to play with it, before it scratched her left hand. Brie looked at the little scar on her the cat left behind. She thought about Alysia's scarred hand. Their scars are not the same and despite having been a prisoner of Oryn, she knew that she could never truly understand what her friends went through. Brie took a deep breath, sat down on the chair, and turned on the computer. With her eyes on Reya, Brie clicked on the internet and went into the website that Alysia said had the video of her using her powers to draw out the Sentinels.

Alysia came inside and took off her hockey equipment. She saw Brie typing away and approached her. She leaned close and saw the video playing on the screen. Watching herself using her spells to hurt the kidnappers, she never realized how powerful she really was. Seeing the last man begging for his life, she did not want to kill him. Hearing Oryn's voice commanding her to kill him, it rattled her mind.

"I don't want to kill him.' Her eyes trembled. 'I won't kill him."

"Alysia." Suzie placed her arms on the Sentinel's shoulder.

"Please, I don't want to kill him." Alysia clutched Suzie's shirt, her hands trembling. She felt herself pulled into Suzie's arms.

"It's okay. You don't have to kill anybody."

Brie looked at the screen and saw Alysia struggling to fight the commands. She watched the spell fire at him and her eye grew wide as his body turned to dust. She looked up at Alysia in Suzie arms and saw the fright in her eyes.

"Mom, dad,' Brie whispered. 'How can I help my friends and stop the bad guys?"

Brie looked down at the paused image of Alysia standing in the fire, with unforgiving eyes. It was frightening to see. She lifted her head up and saw Alysia lying on the bed clutching the pillow while Suzie stroked her hair to calm her.

"I'll find a way."

It was the afternoon and everything had been calm. Alysia slept on the bed as Suzie placed an ice ship on Reya's lips. Karl sorted through the duffle bags and pulled out a pair of manaboards.

"So you brought them." Suzie said.

"Yeah." Karl laid out the two boards on the floor. He placed his hand on the surface and channeled his mana. It floated up into the air and then let go of it, letting it fall to the ground.

"Not so loud. You're going to wake her up."

"Oh?" Karl looked up and saw Alysia shifting her body into a ball. 'Sorry.'

Suzie approached Karl and sat next him. Together they checked the entire board. There was not a single scratch on it, newly built and ready to fly.

"YES! I found a Sentinel Alysia!" Brie said with her fist pumped into the air to the sound of hushing. 'Sorry.'

"She's asleep." Suzie said.

"Oh. Well I think I found a Sentinel."

"I don't like the idea of you two going back there."

"I know. I know. If Oryn hadn't set up that trap, we wouldn't have any reason to go back. Now that I made contact with one of them, Alysia and I are going to have to get this person before they do."

Brie typed a message to the mysterious person claiming to be one of them, and a reply never came back. She decided to leave the computer on and wait for a return message. She got out of her seat looking at her friends sleeping, and smiled. She knelt before the inventors and picked up the manaboard. Turning it and flipping it around, she did not understand what it did.

"We'll show you Brie." Suzie said as Karl picked up the boards and opened the door for the ladies.

When the door closed, Alysia opened her eyes. She lifted her body up wiping the tears from her eyes. Her dreams erased. She tightened her fist and took a deep breath. The sound of Brie laughing outside caught Alysia's attention. The Sentinel pulled the curtain back and saw Brie learning to fly on the manaboard. Alysia

clutched her head. The memory made its way back to her. She remembered pushing it away, forgetting it by force because her head hurt, because she fell down. Her eyes lit up and understood why. She felt it in her heart that she was happy to have ridden it in the air. She created an array of colors that caught everyone's attention. She placed her hand over her heart and felt that happiness. That pained her because she did not know that happiness was what she experienced.

"Oryn." Alysia whispered.

The Sentinel saw the scissors she got from the store on the table next to the bag of rubber bands. She took it to her hand and went to the bathroom. She wedged the tail of her hair between the blades. Then she paused. Looking at herself, she wondered if it would make a difference if it were short or long. She knew she would not get her life back together no matter what she did. Her memories distorted, truth and reality blended with lies and fantasy. She could stand there and say over again, that she was a Sentinel. That she should fight back as a Sentinel and protect people from someone like Oryn and Vyndor.

"No." Alysia pulled the scissors away from her hair. She wanted more than just cut the lock off. She knew that would not make her feel any better. She walked out of the bathroom and stood next to Reya. She placed her hands on the catgirl's forehead and sighed.

"I'll be back, Reya." Alysia left the room with the scissors in hand and watched Brie and Karl fly in the air. She kept on going, out of sight. None of them paid attention. She made her way into the nearby woods. Navigating around the trees and bushes, the sound of birds chirping in the air resonated in her ears. She found a small open space completely isolated from the rest of the world. She gathered rocks within the surrounding area. She used them to form a circle. With leaves and sticks in hand she piled them into the center of the circle. With her hands stretched outward, she channeled her mana.

"Ember." A little spark lit the pile aflame and Alysia sat down before it hugging her knees, the teal gem of her bracelet aimed at

the fire. She focused her eyes on the flame and watched it lick up in the air. The soft light reflected off her teal colored eyes. She focused her thoughts and with her heart, she expressed her feelings. It triggered the pain in her mind but she built enough energy to ignore it. What she wanted to feel, she searched deep in her mind. With no one around, her ears listened to sounds of the flame crackling. She felt her wings spread open and heat extending beyond her feathers. A part of her body.

The warmth flowed around her and her heart beat at a calming pace. She felt as though the heat bathed her like water and felt her body cleansing within it. When lifted her right hand, it moved through the heat like water. She removed her glove and touched the fire itself. Neither a single pain nor injury occurred. It felt like the air itself, blowing through fingers. She planted her hand on the burning twigs and leaves. They felt like the ground she sat on this moment. She studied fire itself as she experienced these feelings.

"Suzaku, did Oryn hurt you too? Is that why you never tried to protect me from her?" Her heart and bracelet pulsed together and she felt a pair of red feather wings wrap around her body. The Creed of the Four Elements, never interfere with a person's choice in life. She felt the flames drop onto her body like tears. A beg of forgiveness for not protecting her. Alysia reached her hand to her shoulder and stroked the bird cheek as it appeared beside her ear. Alysia felt no hate or anger towards Suzaku. She understood what she had done. She accepted the false story that Oryn implanted in her memories. Convinced about the lies, the memory erasure, all of it, because she wanted the pain to stop. Alysia's heart knew it was a lie and yet she chose to deny it. The scars on her hand proved that point.

"The book.' Alysia remembered seeing the cover of the book in Oryn's office about the Sentinels. 'Did she know that the Elements can't interfere on a Sentinel's decision?"

Tightening her grip of her knees, Alysia concluded that forcing a Sentinel into a choice would keep the Elements from interfering. Like what happened with Byakko when Oryn imprisoned it with

Reya's memories as Brie explained to her. It made sense now. Byakko tried to interfere because Reya did not make a decision under pain. Reya never made a choice, but she did, and her life as she knew it, destroyed.

Now Alysia had to make a decision. There was so much she wanted, but she did not what she wanted the most. She wanted to be a Sentinel to help and protect people from Oryn and Vyndor. She wanted to find the other Sentinels before Oryn. She wanted to find her family, find Kyo. She wanted her memories back. She wanted to feel without pain. She wanted. She wanted. She wanted...

...and she took her lock of hair and cut it off with the scissors.

Her shortened hair spread out and swayed with the wind. The lock of hair in her right hand shivered as she stared at the scars. She rejected her true self that day and punched the mirror. She clenched the lock tight and realized what she should have rejected. The scissors in her left hand never shivered as she stared at the bracelet. She accepted this as her true self that day, when she tried to escape with Reya. She clenched it tight and realized what she should have accepted. She could tell herself over again that she was a Sentinel, but there was still something in her heart that she missed.

"Alysia. We were looking everyw..."

She heard Brie's voice from across the fire. Alysia looked up and saw the Sentinel of Byakko stand there with eyes frozen.

"Are you okay?"

"No." Alysia was so lost in thought. She did not know what to say. She watched Brie sat down and look at the flame with her.

"It's amazing what you're doing right now Alysia."

"What am I doing?"

"I can see the heat connected to your wings. Just lie in the video."

"I can feel..." Alysia lifted her right hand up and stared at her hair. She set the scissors on the ground and looked out into the fire. "...I feel like I can't do anything."

"What do you mean?"

"What's it called when you can't fight back? When you can't do anything to fight back?"

"Weak?"

"Weak." Alysia closed her eyes and thought about the number of times she was in the Therapy Room and could not fight back. She just accepted it.

"You're not weak."

Alysia opened her eyes and felt the anger in Brie's voice.

"Then why couldn't I stop Oryn? How could I just give up? I know I never give up on anything. Why did I accept what Oryn said?"

"You were injured Alysia. It's easy to beat up on someone when their hurt."

Alysia understood what Brie said. She was injured, and she was scared about her concussion when Marcel told her and her parents about it. She was scared that she would never play again. Scared that she might die the next time she got hurt. She did not understand her injury.

"Alysia. You're a lot stronger than Oryn thought."

"I am."

"Before Reya transferred Byakko to me, she gave me your password. When I used it, I noticed something about the numbers." Brie crawled around the campfire and sat on her knees before Alysia. She drew the password 324652.

"My password."

"Yeah. Now the security keypad had letters under the number. So like how some phone numbers would say 1-800-CALL-NOW, people would use the letters instead of the numbers. Like you did." Brie wrote letters under each number.

H-E-L-P-M-E.

Alysia's mouth grew wide.

"See, somewhere in your mind, you came up with this. You knew about the pattern. There was no way you could come up with that if

you were completely under her control. You were fighting to be free.”

It was clear. She stood before the keypad asking her to set up a passcode. She felt it in her heart that someone would one day figure it out and rescue her. She looked up at Brie.

“I guess you could say I got your message, though a little late. Either way, this proves you're not weak. You were beating Oryn from the start. It was only a matter of time.”

Alysia wiped away the passcode and looked at the fire. She lifted her right hand, staring out at the hair and scars.

“I beat you Oryn.” She threw the hair into the fire underhanded and watched it lit aflame. She curled her hand into a fist, twisted into a punch position, and drew it to close to her heart.

“I won't be what I once was, but like Suzaku said...’ Alysia faced Brie. ‘I can still live my life anyway I want.”

“RIGHT!” Brie threw her fist into the air in excitement looking up at the stars.

“Thank you Brie.”

Brie looked at Alysia and saw a light smile, despite her monotone voice. With both hands, Brie took Alysia's right hand, and looked her in the eyes.

“Let's bring justice to Oryn and Vyndor. There's someone out there whp can help us expose what they did to you and Reya.”

“But first, we have to find the others before we take on Oryn and Vyndor.”

“Hee-Hee... right.” Brie's eyes opened wide. “RIGHT! I found one of the Sentinels.”

“Who?”

“The Sentinel of Seiryuu. She was watching your video.”

“Are you sure?”

“She posted a video of herself wearing the Ring of Seiryuu. The gem looked exactly like ours. Very stupid of her exposing herself so easily on the internet.”

“Did you get her name?”

“Danica Leandros.”

Alysia helped Brie to her feet.

“Then let's go get her.”

They left the forest together as the flame stretched out of the campfire and became absorbed by Alysia's wings, leaving the darkness behind.

To Be Continued...

