

Arcana Magi - c.17:

Separation

by H-M Brown

“What is a Sentinel?” Alysia said to the Four Elements with her monotone voice as the Sentinels stood in the Temple Plain. She spun around looking at Genbu behind Chisame, Byakko behind Brie, Seiryuu behind Danica, and Suzaku behind her. The winged girl's eyes filled with uncertainty now more than ever. She wanted to understand what a Sentinel was. The winged girl clenched her fist as Brie, Chisame, and Danica waited for an answer.

They received none.

“Perhaps,” Chisame said. ‘we should be asking ourselves that question. It's not as though the Four Elements pushed us. Maybe Madam Karyn was right. We did not understand our decision to be Sentinels.”

“We have the right...” Brie said as she walked past the girls. ‘...to live our lives as we see fit. I remember this one time with my mom, that I got mad at her because I wanted to go to the movies with my friends, but she said no. I yelled at her saying I wished I was a grown up so I could make my own decisions. She said, decisions are easy to make, living with those decision are harder. I never understood, but now...”

Brie turned to Byakko and thought about what Oryn did to the tiger and Reya. She thought she did the right thing by becoming a Sentinel to help Byakko, Alysia and Reya, but decisions were not as easy as she thought.

“My mother was right. I tried to learn about the Sentinels with Professor McClean, but it was just information, much different from being a Sentinel. So when I decided to be one, it was all based on that information.” She placed her hand on Byakko's furry cheek and caressed it.

"So you're saying you want to quit?" Danica said with a smile. She expected them all to quit after this conversation so she could have their weapons for herself.

"What about you, Danica?" Chisame stood before the thief. "Why do you want to be Sentinel? Why are you so eager for Brie to quit?"

"I have my reasons. I don't have to answer to you." Danica moved her eyes up to Chisame as the Sentinel of Genbu stood taller than the thief. Danica did not budge and sized up her potential opponent.

"Stop this." Alysia said and the girls turned to her. She sat down on the dark floor, and leaned her chin on her right hand. She could not remember why she chose to be a Sentinel in the beginning. The memory so blur from the brainwashing she endured. The winged Sentinel felt she could quit being a Sentinel, but would it make a difference. Her life destroyed, she does not know if she still has a home to go to. She looked up at Brie and knows that she will go back to witness protection and be with Professor McClean. Danica will go back to streets she came from. Chisame, will get to go back to her parents. Being a Sentinel is all she knows, her only means of living until she can find her family and friends. "It's not fair."

"It's not fair huh?" Danica said as Alysia looked up. "From the way you're acting I'd say you have nice parents. Chisame has nice parents and Brie had heroes for parents. Mine want me dead. So whether I quit being a Sentinel or not doesn't make a difference. What makes a difference for me in choosing to be a Sentinel or not, is whether I can stand a chance to survive fighting my parents with Epic at my side."

"You're right Danica." Chisame said turning everyone's heads. "It would not have made a difference if we were Sentinels or not. Avalon Tech had made up their minds about controlling the Sentinels and obviously the Four Elements themselves. Reya is proof of that. She had the Pendant before any of us right, Brie?"

"Yeah." Brie nodded.

"So even if the four of us were not Sentinels, other than Reya, whoever the other three chose to be Sentinels, would be in the same situation as us."

"Different paths, same story." Alysia said as she stood to her feet and followed Brie and Danica, gathering closer to Chisame. They understood what Chisame said and reflected on the fact that their lives would not have drastically changed if they were not Sentinels.

"I would still have gone blind."

"My parents would still be dead." Brie said.

"My parents would still want me dead." Danica said.

Alysia remained quiet. She thought about what would have happened if she had not chosen to be a Sentinel. She would still be home with her family. With her friends. Looking at the Brie, Chisame, and Danica, she feared this point would alienate herself from them. She did not want them to turn on her. So she remained quiet. Alysia felt Chisame's hand on her shoulder.

"Don't worry. We know your story would be different if you weren't a Sentinel."

"I know but," Alysia placed her hand on her head. "I still would have had this head injury even if I wasn't a Sentinel."

Alysia looked up to Chisame and saw a smile and a nod. The winged Sentinel nodded in return and her bracelet appeared before her. The ring, the brooch, and the pendant all appeared before the Sentinels and they came to an understanding.

"We can walk away from this," Chisame said. "But it's not going to stop Avalon Tech from pursuing these weapons or any of the new Sentinels."

"Right," Brie said. "We shouldn't pass this problem over to someone else. It's not right."

"We can't allow Avalon Tech..." Alysia said. "...to get away with what they're doing. There may be more people being placed in the Therapy Room and are being tortured. It's not just us alone suffering."

Alysia, Brie, and Chisame, placed their hands out to the center of the circle, stacked on top of each other. They looked at Danica as she showed apprehension in placing her hand on the group.

"With or without you," Alysia said. "it won't make a difference."

“Only because my parents aligned with Avalon Tech.” Danica placed her hand on the pile.

Four arrows appeared under their feet like a compass. Their items floated before them inside the circle. Alysia took her bracelet, Brie took her pendant, Chisame took her brooch, and Danica took her ring.

“WE ARE... SENTINELS!” They said together as four pillars of light elevated them away from the Temple Plain.

The morning sun rose over Newark. A newsstand opened for business. Fynir picked up a copy of the newspaper dated July 24th, and paid for it. He opened the paper to the continuing coverage of the Newark Airport incident. The news reported that government officials claimed the explosion was the result of faulty wiring from the public address system. They debunk the rumors of a terrorist attack. Fynir wondered what the Merydian government had to say about this. He hoped that this incident would not draw the ire of the United Nations. As Fynir turned the page, he felt someone bump into him. He reached into his pocket and found a slip of paper that read ‘restaurant five minutes’. The elf agent lowered the paper and with his elven eyes, he saw a building across the street. The curtain behind the window shook a little and he could see a camera moving to the side. Fynir acted as though he saw nothing and walked in the opposite direction.

Fynir arrived at the designated restaurant and entered inside. Almost every seat filled. Patrons were either ready for work or rushed for a cup of coffee. The elf agent saw his boss sitting at the far end of the counter sitting on a stool. Looking out the window, he could see a black car across the street driving by slowly. He approached his boss and walked past her.

“Let's go Lori.”

Without hesitation, she followed him to the back of the restaurant. They entered the kitchen where a chef opened a door on the floor. Fynir led Lori down the stairs nodding to the chef. They both went down as the door closed and the chef slid a table over it. Fynir and

Lori made their way through a secret passageway and emerged out of a door to another cellar. They walked up the stairs and emerged into an alleyway.

"This way." Fynir led Lori out into the open and they blended in with the large crowd. They both arrived at a parking garage and stood in front of an elevator. They went to the fifth level and approached the black van. When Fynir slid open the door, the Sentinels emerged from behind parked cars, carrying their weapons and Karyn stepped out of the driver seat.

"What is this Fynir?" Lori looked at the girls as they approached the van.

"Take off your clothes." Danica said.

"What?" Lori saw Brie approach her with a clean pair of clothes. The chief took the wardrobe and Karyn escorted her inside.

"It's nothing personal." Karyn said. "But we want to make sure you have tracking bugs on your body and clothes.

"I understand." Lori climbed inside with Karyn and closed the door.

The Sentinels leaned on the cars waiting as Fynir surveyed the area for anyone nearby. The door opened and Karyn threw Lori's suit on the floor. The Sentinels climbed inside the van and took their seats as Karyn sat in the passenger seat. Fynir took the driver's seat.

"Where's the evidence?" Lori asked.

"Hidden." Fynir said as he drove the van down the ramp heading for the exit. "You'll get to see it soon enough."

Fynir saw the exit signs at the bottom of the ramp. As the van reached the bottom, the elf agent hit the breaks and stopped the vehicle at the edge of the exit. Fynir gritted his teeth as the sounds of black cars and black SUVs screeched to halt around the van. Mystic Intelligence agents stepped out of the vehicles. Some agents pulled guns out of their holsters, while others pulled out wooden wands.

"Captain Lori Peterson, Agent Fynir Robinson, we have orders from Commissioner Sterling to arrest you on site and take the girls into custody. Surrender your firearms this instant."

"The Commissioner is currently on vacation.' Lori said to Fynir. 'This doesn't make sense."

"Therapy." Alysia said with her emotionless voice that shocked Lori.

"Hang on." Fynir shifted the gear to reverse and drove backwards up the ramp. Shots fired and fireballs burst off the front of the van. The barrage made the van's hood pop up and steam sprayed out from the engine. Fynir lost control of the vehicle and crashed into a parked car. The impact stopped the van but pushed the parked car through the barrier and onto the street below. It caught the civilian's attention as the van's back wheels hanged off the edge.

Everyone got out of the vehicle as the agents ran up the ramp. Karyn stepped in front of the van as everyone got out. They watched the old mage stand at the top of the ramp looking down at the agents. They aimed their weapons at her.

"Stupid.' Karyn said with a monotone voice and channeled her mana. 'CRACK!"

A light flashed from her right hand aimed at the first gun-wielding agent to reach the top. When she curled her hand into a fist, the agent's arms and legs snapped into pieces. He fell to the floor, rolling down ramp screaming. The agents stopped and watched their comrade roll past them. They looked back at Karyn, her cold eyes made the agents hesitate. The old mage pulled her hand back feeling the pain in her knuckles.

"Damn arthritis.' Karyn saw the Sentinels and the agents still standing there. 'Get the girls out of here."

"NO!' Chisame said as she felt herself pulled away by Lori and Fynir. 'Madam Karyn please!"

"Come on." Lori said as she struggled to pull Chisame away.

One by one, Karyn used her spell to break the bones of each agent, but there were too many and they wised up. She saw the agent's knelt on one knee as her hand tired out. They fired shots and cast fireball spells at her. She blocked each one with a small shield spell as best she could. A bullet grazed her leg and a fireball burst on her right shoulder. She fell on her back, unable to get up. The

agents gathered around her and locked her wrists with mana suppressing shackles.

"You have the right to remain silent..." As the agent read Karyn her rights, the rest of the agents resumed their chase.

At the top floor, there was nowhere to run. Everyone ran to the far end of the parking lot and saw a building across the street. Looking down, more law enforcement departments and Mystic Intelligence agents gathered, surrounding the building.

"Great Fynir." Lori said. "You could have picked a better meeting place."

"You were the one with a tracking bug on your suit."

"Stop it." Brie said. "That's important right now."

"Madam Karyn." Chisame said looking back at the ramp.

"Some help she was." Danica said. "All that power and she couldn't blow them out of sky?"

"She's old." Chisame said getting into the thief's face. "She can't cast the type of spells she used. I saw her try it once. She struggled."

Alysia remembered leaving Sydney behind. She placed her hand on Chisame's shoulder and her eyes turned away her emotionless expression.

"Don't get captured, so that the people who helped us escape, their efforts are not wasted. Right Brie?"

"Yeah." Brie said understanding Alysia. "For Sydney and for Madam Karyn."

Chisame wiped away her tears and felt better, knowing she was not alone.

"I've got a way out." Danica looked back at everyone. "Just how good are all of you in jumping?"

"It depends on your definition of jump." Brie said as Danica smiled.

"Here they come." Lori said as agents arrived at the top ramp.

Brie lifted her hammer, Legacy, over her head and channeled her mana.

"SHATTER!" The Sentinel slammed her hammer on the ground and entire asphalt ahead of her collapsed to the floor below. The agents fell with it. She watched them land on top of cars and rubble. They all were moving and moaning in pain. "Thank goodness."

"Ready Kiddo?" Danica said to Brie as the hacker broke the barrier with Legacy exposing the open fall below.

"Ready." Brie said.

"GO!"

Brie ran past everyone. She jumped outward over the street as Danica channeled her mana into her sword, Epic.

"HURRICANE FORCE!" Danica swung her sword downward and a burst of wind blew the dust and debris out of the roof. The wind struck Brie on the back and pushed her across the artificial chasm. Danica watched Brie channel her mana under her feet.

"VIBRANT SHOCKWAVE!" Brie used the vibration as a soft landing on the rooftop. She rolled on the surface and stood back up. Brie turned around and waved as Chisame jumped and received a push from Danica's spell. Brie channeled her mana as Chisame descended. "VIBRANT SHOCKWAVE!!"

The ripple of sound slowed Chisame's descent and she landed on Brie. They repeated this for Alysia, Fynir, and Lori. All landed safely. Everyone looked up and wondered what was taking Danica so long. The sound of bullets firing and small explosions worried everyone. Everything went silent and they saw Danica jump off the roof, turning her body mid flight. She swung her sword and created an airburst that sent her flying across. Brie used her spell to slow the Sentinel down and the thief crash-landed on the ground.

"What happened?" Chisame said as she saw blood stains on the green-jeweled blade.

"Just a little self indulgence." Danica smiled as she walked away from everyone staring in shock.

"She didn't...?" Brie said looking up to Fynir. "Did she?"

"We'll deal with her later. Let's go."

Fynir saw the rooftop entrance into the building and led everyone to the door. As they entered inside and went down one flight of

stairs, Fynir's elven ears heard the sound of agents running up the stairs. Lori saw a door leading to the service elevator. Inside the room, there was a large elevator door with a control panel for the entire elevator system in the building. Fynir pressed down and everyone waited.

The Sentinels held up their weapons at the main door, preparing for a fight. Lori saw the look on the girl's eyes, something she felt she should not see in them. It was sad for her because they were so young. She turned to Fynir and drew out her gun. The agents stood in front of the Sentinels with their guns aimed at the door.

"We can handle this." Alyisa said.

"Sorry," Lori said without looking back. "I don't believe in children fighting, let alone wielding weapons."

"You can help us..." Fynir said as he heard the agents outside searching. "...by watching the elevator. Get on once it arrives."

The doorknob shook. When the door opened, they were not Mystic Intelligence agents. Instead, they had assault rifles and bulletproof vests an NPD emblem on their helmets.

"SWAT!" Fynir said as he and Lori hesitated to fire. They watched the team aimed their rifles at everyone and pulled the trigger.

"IRON SHELL!" Chisame knelt down on one knee, raising her gauntlet, Fable, over of her head like a turtle. The disk glowed and each bullet fired bounced off a turtle shell light in front of Fynir and Lori. "You can fire back Fynir!"

Fynir and Lori regained their composure and fired back. The bullets struck the vests knocking back the SWAT team. The firing stopped as the police officers stood in shock at Chisame's spell. The distraction was enough for Alysia to rush to the bottom of the stairs and aimed her staff Saga at them.

"Flamethrower." A wave of fire scared the men back, all of the stumbling on top of each other. The intense heat triggered the sprinkler system and water rained down on Alysia cooling off her spell. She looked up at the top of the stairs and watched the officers get back to their feet.

"I got this." Chisame said as she channeled the mana from the falling water drops. She gathered them around her body, in the form of two strands of rope. The Sentinel raised her arms up over her head as the watery ropes twisted around each other and coiled in the air like a pair of snakes. Chisame spun her body in a circle to increase the speed of the spell. "SPIRAL PRESSURE!"

Like a curve ball, the spiraling ropes of water flew through the door. The force pushed all of the SWAT team back further away.

As the water dripped down the stairs, Alysia ran to the top and closed the door. She aimed the headpiece of Saga at the doorknob.

"Welder." A small line of flame sparked out of the headpiece and melted the metal doorknob until it created a sealant on the door. A loud thud from the door startled the winged Sentinel and she stumbled down the stairs. Alysia felt herself land on someone. Alysia turned her head and saw Lori nursing the pain on her back.

"Are you okay?" Lori said as they saw a lump on the door bulge out. "Their breaking in."

Brie looked at the control panel and pulled Danica over.

"Open that up."

"Don't give me orders."

"DO IT!"

Danica's head jerked back and with a growl, she used her sword to open it. With the wires exposed, Brie analyzed the wires to map where which one went. The elevator arrived and Fynir lifted up the metal door as the bolts on the door fell off.

"Come on Brie." The elf agent waved for Brie and Danica to come.

"I got it." The hacker pulled out some of the wires and rewired the service elevator to only go down and not stop. The door fell over as Brie and Danica ran to Fynir. Brie got grabbed Alysia's hand and jumped into the elevator as she heard the sound of a pop from a rifle.

"IRON SHELL!" Chisame said but her spell was too slow to stop the bullet as Fynir and Danica fell over into the elevator. The rest of the bullets bounced off the shell of light. Lori pulled down the metal door and the elevator went down.

"Are you alright Danica?" Fynir said as his teeth gritted in pain.

"Yes." Her eyes shivered as she saw the elf's blood trickle down his hand. She pulled herself away from Fynir as he nursed his shoulder. The thief did not understand why he saved her life. She watched the Sentinels and Lori gather around him, ripping his shirt off to check his wound. Danica wanted to join them but instead, she growled. "Why did you do something so stupid?"

"Danica!" Chisame said. "He just saved your life."

"And yet you were too slow to activate your spell. You're unreliable."

Chisame shook her head in shock. She marched up to Danica but Brie wrapped her arms the Sentinel of Genbu's waist to stop her.

"Forget it Chisame." Brie said. "Danica is useless. Focus on Fynir."

Danica sat there watching Fynir, his eyes locked at hers. No one ever saved her life before. She does not know how to react. She does not know if she was worth saving. Danica kept quiet the rest of the way down.

"Help me up." Fynir said after Lori wrapped his wound with a piece of his torn shirt. "Once we reach the bottom, you girls run. There may be more waiting outside the building."

"What about you?" Alysia said. "Can you run?"

"Don't worry. We'll be right behind you." The elf agent held onto Lori's shoulder and held his gun up. The elevator door reached the bottom as Chisame took her position, ready to cast Iron Shell. Lori helped Fynir lift the metal door up and he peeked outside. No one was around. Fynir and Lori stepped out and waved the girls to move. As Danica walked past the agents, Fynir placed his bloodied hand on her shoulder. "When we get back, you owe me a favor."

Danica stepped back looking at the agents, the blood stained her shirt, and she ran without saying a word. She stopped behind the Sentinels as they looked at the two doors. They did not know where to go.

"Which door Fynir?" Alysia looked back.

"Any door, just go."

The Sentinels took the left door and ran ahead. When the door closed a red aura veiled over the lock

The agents arrived and they tried to open it. Lori shot a couple of bullets at the doorknob but it bounced off.

"Fynir!" Brie said. "We can't open the door?"

"Damn." Lori said. "There must be a spell on it."

"Girls..." Fynir groaned from the injury and Lori propped him up. They watched heard the sound of explosions and vibrations bounce off the door. They realize the girls are trying to break through, but the spell was too powerful.

"Fynir." Alysia, Brie and Chisame called out for him as they tried again to break through the door.

"RUN!" Fynir said. "JUST RUN! We'll meet again."

Fynir and Lori looked across to the right door. They walked through it and ended up outside in the alley. Fynir clenched his fist and roared out into the air.

The Sentinels walked through the hallway. They reached a door and opened it. It was the lobby of the building and the SWAT team's rifles aimed at them. The girls looked at each other as Danica raised her sword up.

"They're going to kill us. We're going to kill them." Danica felt Alysia's hand move her sword down. They looked at each other for a moment as Chisame took the point.

"IRON SHELL!" Chisame said and turned to Brie as bullets fired at them. "Turn the ground to dust."

"SHATTER!" Brie said as slammed Legacy to the ground. The entire floor turned to dust as Chisame looked to Danica. The thief sighed.

"DUSTSTORM!" Danica spun her sword up over her head and swung it downward. The wind blew the dust right into the faces of the policemen. The entire dust storm burst out of the lobby and into the street. The spell frightened the people and caused confusion with all law enforcement departments waiting outside. Danica created a small veil of wind keeping the dust away from her body.

She felt Alysia's hand and saw Chisame and Brie holding hands as well. The wind pocket protected the Sentinels from the dust as they hurried out of the building. Once they cleared of the dust, they ran as fast as they could, never looking back.

Night fell and no one returned to the motel. Karl heard his cell phone ring and he picked it up. He waved Suzie over as she watched the news report about the plume of dust in Newark. She stood beside the elf as he struggled to get a better reception. They went outside as he switched it to speaker mode. It was Fynir. They listened to him as he explained everything that happened.

When the door closed, Reya's eyes twitched. She opened them slowly, the room was a blur. She lifted herself up, it was a struggle, and sat up. Her head was in pain as she tried to figure out where she was. She could not remember her name. She could not remember anything. The catgirl heard the television reporter talking. She did not understand the language.

"mew..." Reya said as her ears twitched and heard voices outside. She could not see through the window because of the curtains. The catgirl saw the mirror across her bed. She could not recognize her face. She felt her cat ears and her cattail. They were soft and fuzzy to the touch. Reya stroked her grey hair back. The habit felt familiar, but she could not recall it. She tried to move her body but the disorientation overwhelmed her. Weak, she collapsed back on the bed. Her yellow eyes blinked at the wall. She could not think of a single word in her thoughts mind, nor speak a single word from her throat. There was nothing in her mind. Just emptiness. Tears came out of her eyes. She wiped them out of instinct. Her eyes closed and she fell asleep curled on the side of her body. She lay on her back, with her arms over her belly as the door opened.

Suzie and Karl came back inside, depressed at the situation. They sat down on the bed next to Reya's.

"We shouldn't have let them go." Suzie said.

"I know.' Karl took Suzie's hand. 'But they made this choice and from what Fynir said, the girls are lot stronger and smarter than we think. I believe they made it out. I believe they will be just fine."

"What about Karyn? Reports on the news say the police captured an old woman."

"If they did Suzie, they won't hold her for long."

"So, all we're going to do is sit here and wait for the girls."

"Fynir told them to hide in the nearest church for twenty four hours. Then when everything looks calm, catch the bus he told them to take to get back here. There aren't anymore phone booths in the city streets, so they're on their own."

Suzie let out a deep breath. A sense that she could not help the girls at all, it got to her. But there was nothing more she could do for now.

"Okay." Suzie got up and without paying attention, she pulled Reya's sheet over the catgirl's body. Suzie caressed the teen's cheek as she watched the teen rest peacefully. She smiled. As she went to get ready for bed and Karl faced the curtain taking off his shoes, Reya open her eyes a little one more time and closed them.

To Be Continued...

