

Arcana Magi - c.22: Moving Forward

by H-M Brown

“Do you remember why you grew wings Alysia?”

That was the question asked by Suzaku as the Sentinel stood before the red bird within the Temple Plain.

“I... I don't remember.” Alysia said with a monotone voice as she stared at her gloved right hand with her pupil-less teal eyes. She struggled to move her fingers. She could feel the tightness caused by her new spell she cast to destroy the chimera. ‘My memories are nothing but fragments now, Suzaku. Every time I learn something about myself, it just... hurts. I don't care how I got these wings. I just want to move on with my life. But even that is hard with everything that happened.’”

Alysia felt the wings on her back flapping off her shrug jacket. Despite being mist like, they felt more real than she could imagine. When her wings burst into mist, there would be a strange sensation that stimulated her back. Alysia stroked her hair back just under her hairclips as she approached the red bird. She looked up to the mystical creature as its head looked down to her.

“I just want to know Suzaku, that spell I cast. Was that mine?”

“Yes.” Suzaku nodded as Alysia looked at her hands. The red bird perched itself before the Sentinel and stretched its long neck close to Alysia. ‘You are now channeling your own mana resting within your wings. As much as you don't care how you got them, I feel it is very important for you to understand again, how you're wings work.’”

“Why?’ Alysia turned around hugging her waist. ‘Why is it so important?’”

Alysia saw Suzaku wings enclose around her. It drew her close to the red feathers. The Sentinel laid on the bird's belly and felt the warmth of the feathers through her Mage Suit. Alysia closed her

eyes and relaxed. Her thoughts ran around like a marathon. Each thought playing each memory like a video recording, rewinding then playing, fast-forward then play. It made Alysia uncomfortable and anxious.

"No." Alysia tried to get up but Suzaku's wings hugged her body like a blanket and the sound of a quiet hush whispered into her ear.

"Just relax."

"But you swore you would never..." Alysia's eyes looked out at the wings. Each breath she took she felt the pain from the enchantment. She tossed and turned on the feather, experiencing a nightmare within the sanctuary of her dreams. "...Suzaku..."

Alysia felt her heart beat in unison with Suzaku. Her eyes stared out at the raining embers as she remembered it that day they first met. It was after she injured herself sliding into the boards during her hockey game, when she agreed to be the Sentinel of Suzaku. The red bird knew what happened to her and the Element filled in that missing piece. When she absorbed the mana from the Mist Wing Staff into her body, it fused with her raw mana that had awakened in her body. She remembered her head hurting and heart felt like it was ready to explode. It was then that Suzaku huddled around her as she was doing right this moment. A warm light that was trying to soothe her pain as the wings burst out of her back. This was in contrast to her memory of floating in the Therapy Room where the warm light inflicted pain as her wings burned from her back.

"I was... dying?" Alysia's eyes welled with tears as Suzaku nuzzled her face with its beak.

"Yes. Your parents told you that the doctors resuscitated you. The mana from the staff that entered your body overwhelmed you physically since you were injured. The mana was killing you. Since this staff came from me, it was my responsibility to protect your life and not take it. So, I stabilized both your mana and staff's mana by giving a piece of my spirit into your heart."

Alysia looked up and remembered how much her heart fought against Oryn's Therapy, despite the pain from the torture.

"Suzaku,' Alysia sat on her knees and clutched the feathers. 'does this mean that you suffered from Therapy as well? You felt my pain."

"Because we share the same essence within our hearts, I felt it all, and could not save you."

Alysia felt Suzaku's heart suddenly cry. The Sentinel pressed her body against the feathers. A hug to ease Suzaku's pain. They could hear each other's hearts pulsing together. It was a beautiful feeling they shared. Alysia pulled herself up and saw Suzaku's own mana covering the Sentinel. The winged girl looked up and sensed a smile from the bird.

"You have my wings, and now my mana, but you are still too young right now, my hatchling."

"I don't understand." Alysia felt Suzaku's wings hold her back like a mother holding her child.

"There is plenty of time for you to understand the way of fire. For now, what I want for you is to grow up with some happiness. Be a child, and grow into a young lady, properly."

"I don't know if I could do that with everything that has happened to me."

"You are very strong.' Suzaku's wing caressed Alysia's cheek. 'And you know it. I never held your hand one bit. You never ran to me at a moments tear. You did that all by yourself."

Alysia never said a word as she rested her body on Suzaku's feathers. She felt the wings cover her like a blanket. It brought memories of her mother doing the same as they watched a movie together on the couch. The warmth and security. Alysia knew there was more she had to do before she could truly return to being a kid, return to school with her friends and Kyo. Hang out and play with her new friends she made. But without a home to return to, with Avalon Tech after her, she will never have peace of mind, peace of heart.

"I love you Suzaku." Alysia closed her eyes and nuzzled the feathers with her face, feeling safe. She felt her heart pulsed with Suzaku's as the bird looked up into the darkness and hummed a

peaceful song. A song that Alysia remembered and cherished with all her heart.

Alysia opened her eyes and found herself resting on a cot. She removed the blanket and found herself still dressed in her Mage Suit. The winged girl saw her hairclips resting on a box beside the cot and out reflex, she clipped them on. She found herself in an office. It was empty. There was a corkboard devoid of any papers tacked on it. A metal desk with nothing on the surface. It brought back memories of her desk at Avalon Tech. A memory she wished to erase. Alysia heard voices outside. Just as she got up and channeled her mana, the door opened and Kyo stepped inside.

"Kyo." Alysia took one-step and became weak kneed from channeling her mana. She forgot she was still wearing her Mage Suit and her energy was still low from casting her new spell. Alysia fell back, but she felt Kyo's hands on her shoulders and looked up. Her heart skipped a beat as her teal eyes locked into his brown eyes. For a moment, she leaned close to his lips, until they heard the footsteps and they pulled away from each other.

"Alysia!" Reya said with a smile. She ran up to the Sentinel and pounce her back onto the cot. The catgirl nuzzled Alysia's chest. She felt Alysia stroking her grey hair and her ears rose up with each rub. Reya looked up to the winged girl. 'How are... you feel today?"

Alysia sat there hearing Reya speak. She did not expect this to happen. It bought joy to the Sentinel despite the pain of the enchantment.

"I am fine." Alysia said very clearly with her monotone voice and Reya understood. She then turned her attention to Kyo as he pulled over a seat from behind the desk and sat down. 'Where are we?"

"We are in an abandoned warehouse in Ironbound."

"So we're still in Newark."

"Yes. Fynir and Lori have been hiding here since you all got separated."

"What's today?" Alysia lifted Reya up and held her hand.

"Saturday. You've been asleep for two days."

"Really?"

"Yeah." Kyo said as he leaned back on his seat. "That was a powerful spell you cast. I hate to say it but the world on TV won't stop talking about it."

"The world? On TV? They're talking about me."

"You've become quite popular. Thankfully, Danica pulled us through this mess."

"What did she do?"

"After you passed out, I woke up and saw Mystic Intelligence coming for us. I cast a Night Spell over the agents to slow them down. While they were confused, we ran. Danica saw a news van nearby and she took the box of evidence over and convinced them an exclusive interview with us in exchange for the escape. They agreed. Suzie borrowed the reporter's cell phone and called Karl who was across town to meet us at Branch Brook Park. Once we got together, Karl called Fynir and got their location and we all wound up here in Ironbound."

"Amazing." Alysia sat in awe of the brief story.

"So are you ready to see everyone?"

"Well, yeah, but I would like to use the bathroom first. I want to get out of these clothes."

"About your clothes..." Kyo rubbed the back of his head as Alysia's eyes grew wide and noticed Reya still dressed in her pajamas.

Moments later Alysia came out of the bathroom still in her Mage Suit. The girls met her with chuckles as they gathered around her to say hello. Brie hugged Alysia and Chisame gave her a high five, while Danica gave her a victory sign. It was a joyous moment for the four of them, as they got out of that battle with the chimera alive.

"You were amazing Lys." Brie said with a hyperactive voice.

"Lys?"

"Don't mind her Alysia." Chisame said. "We've been worried about you since you used that spell."

"I'm sorry I made you all worry."

"Your voice is emotionless again." Brie said looking up. "Can't you at least smile."

"Brie,' Chisame said. 'she's still wearing her Mage Suit. We don't want her to drain her any more mana and energy."

"It doesn't work like that Chisame." Brie stood before the leader and pouted.

Alysia flexed her right hand a little and her eyebrow shifted from doing that. She kept calm from the pain as Danica stood before her.

"So how are you feeling?"

"Fine.' Alysia stepped back shielding her bracelet. 'I haven't forgotten what you did."

"Fair enough. But I have no desire for your bracelet anymore."

"Keep it that way." Alysia walked away from everyone as Chisame turned her attention to Danica.

"What did you say to her?"

"What I wanted to say to her." Danica walked away from Chisame and the Sentinels started to drift apart again.

"Chisame.' Brie said getting the Sentinel's attention. She shook her head side to side, displeased at the reaction to Danica. 'We can't keep acting like this. We're still not safe. We need each other."

Brie took Chisame by the hand and hurried to Danica. The hacker took the thief's hand and dragged them both to Alysia. There they saw winged girl sitting alone on a box. The adults were not far away, as she watched Lori talk to a male reporter while a cameraman set up the lights around a pair of chairs. The girls gathered around Alysia, sitting down to form a circle.

"I'm sorry Danica." Chisame said.

"I don't care." Danica crossed her arms as Chisame shook her fist and calmed down.

"Please.' Brie said. 'We can't be like this anymore. We're supposed to be friends."

"I didn't ask to be your friend, Kiddo."

"So that's it Danica? We don't mean anything to you? Then why are you still here?"

Danica looked away from Brie but turned her eyes to Alysia. She acted cold but that was a lie. All the thief wanted was to just be alone and wait for the next battle to come. She noticed Alysia flexing

her right hand again and took a closer look.

"Ow." Alysia pulled her hand away.

"Danica," Chisame said getting up. "why did you hurt for?"

"It's not her Chisame." Alysia rubbed her right hand gently. She saw Danica's hands pull the glove off. Her hand was red and raw looking. "I think it was the spell that caused this."

Danica held Alysia's hand gently without expressing any care. She saw Kyo and Reya arriving with some breakfast for Alysia and growled at them.

"Go get the first aid kit." She said to Kyo.

"What?" Kyo saw Alysia's red hand and dropped the food on the box to examine her but Danica pointed her finger at him.

"I said go get the first aid kit." Her stern voice made Kyo run to the adults. The thief nurtured Alysia's hand as she took a long deep breath. She did not want to admit to her feelings towards them or Alysia.

"Danica." The winged girl said. "Is it true you went to Avalon Tech to fight Oryn?"

"Yeah, so?"

"That was reckless." Alysia felt Danica's hands shiver. She looked up at the thief as Kyo arrived with Lori, Suzie, and Karl. As Lori took Alysia's hand and opened the first aid kit, as Suzie and Karl gave her a hug. The winged girl watched the thief walk away quietly. She wanted to reach out to her but having felt Danica's hands, she wondered how much Danica truly cared for her.

"I'm glad to see you're awake, Alysia." Lori said as she rubbed a cold gel on the right hand. "It would have been nice if you kids had told us."

"We wanted to be with her first." Brie said with a giggle.

"Is Fynir okay?" Alysia said.

"He's fine Alysia." Lori wrapped a bandage around Alyisa's hand. "He got over the fever and is recovering well."

The winged girl saw the cameraman in the distance taking footage of everything that is going on. She felt a little exposed and turned to Lori.

"Am I going to be on television?"

"Only if you want too." Lori said as she tied the bandage. "There. Your hand will be good as new."

"Thank you." Alysia looked at the Sentinels, Reya, and Kyo. She turned to the adults. "Lori, Suzie, Karl. I need to speak to my friends. Alone. Please."

The adults became silent and agreed with a nod. Alysia got up and stood in front of Danica. The girls and Kyo gathered around them. Alysia told them about her conversation with Suzaku. She told them everything about her wings and where they came from. How she felt vulnerable because she could feel her wings on her back. Her future was so uncertain now, that she became scared. She even mentioned that the mana almost killed her. The news caught Kyo off guard.

"I never knew that happened."

"Kyo, it's okay." Alysia used her left hand to pull keep him close as he looked at his left hand.

"I'm so stupid." Kyo stared at the scar for a moment and saw Alysia's right hand rest over it.

"Can we..." Alysia turned to the girls. "Can we move forward? I don't know what is going on with the TV, but I don't care anymore. I need to put this behind me and try to be... a kid. A kid. How can I be one after all of this? I can't feel. I can't think straight. I'm complaining again aren't I?"

"Don't worry." Chisame said. "You won't have to do this anymore, now that we told our stories to the news reporter. Well except Danica. But still, people will leave us alone and so will Avalon Tech."

"So I guess I'm next." Alysia looked over at the camera crew.

"If you want to. As far as Lori and Fynir are concerned, none of us had to. We just felt like we wanted our voices heard."

Alysia watched the reporter sit beside the director in the van. She realized that there was an opportunity as he stepped out into the open. The winged girl thought about her parents and wondered if she could reach them through the interview. With her friends following her, Alysia stood before the reporter and tugged his jacket.

"Excuse me." Alysia got the reporters attention.

He wore a black business suit and had short black hair. He fixed his black tie and buttoned his jacket as he talked to the Sentinel.

"You must be Alysia. I am Daniel West, field reporter for the Global New Network. I have to say that your story is quite remarkable."

"I don't see how remarkable it is to be kidnapped and tortured."

"Oh." Daniel paused for a moment and changed the subject. 'What's with your voice?'

"It's the way I talk now." Alysia said as she saw the television screens in the van. 'Do a lot of people watch your news?'

"We're seen in fifty countries around the world." Daniel stepped aside and showed Alysia the monitors on their control system. 'Right now we're monitoring some of the reactions from many countries, the United Nations, even the Vatican. The world right now is in an uproar, now that everyone knows magic exist. The world religions alone are tied up trying to explain their contradiction.'

"Condrabiction?" Reya said as Brie corrected the catgirl.

"What does religion have to do with magic?" Alysia said.

"International Treaty 439." Daniel said as his director changed one of the monitors to another station. 'Apparently this treaty was what kept you Magi hidden from the rest of the world. Now that everyone knows, thanks to your little battle with that monster, the people are turning to the world religions for answers. After all they were the ones insisting that magic was the work of the devil and witchcraft is a heresy and a blasphemy.'

"Oh." Alysia heard footsteps behind. She turned around and saw Fynir with a sling cradling his injured are. Without hesitation, she hugged the elf detective. 'You're alive.'

"This bullet is nothing." Fynir said as Alysia stepped back. The elf led the winged girl away, leaving the Sentinels behind. 'Kyo informed me that you were not born with mana and your powers activated after your head injury, correct?'

"Y...yes." Alysia looked up at Fynir as she looked over at Kyo, who shrugged at her. 'I've always known about Merydia and wanted

to go to Memorial Academy, but because I couldn't see or channel mana like my parents, they felt it was not worth it."

"Memorial Academy, eh? That's a very respected school to go to. Now, I had Headquarters in Merydia do an investigation on your parent's whereabouts."

"And?" Alysia stopped as Fynir took a deep breath.

"We can't locate them." Fynir sat down on the box and Alysia sat across him. "Since your home here is gone, we decided to list your parents as Missing Persons and are treating this case as such since we now know your death was faked. The reason we are still here in this warehouse is because the Newark Branch is compromised and taking you all there is dangerous. HQ is investigating the matter. Lori and I have been instructed to send you and the Sentinels to Merydia where you will be safe."

"What about Kyo and Reya?"

"They will be coming along too. In fact, Kyo's parents will meet with you and him in Merydia. I'm sure they would be excited to see you. Now, you are an unregistered Merydian, we assume that because your parents never had the chance since Avalon Tech kidnapped you. So when you arrive there, we will be spending time at Immigration Services to register you and give you proper identification to become a citizen."

"So I'm going to live there?"

"Yes." Fynir leaned forward and folded his hands together. "Listen very carefully. You are a key part of this investigation into Avalon Tech. Contrary to what you may hear on television; this investigation is deemed classified to the public eyes. As far as the public knows, you girls are still rogue. HQ wants you to go on television and give your statement because Avalon Tech is winning the Public Relations battle. They have so much power that no one believes outside of us that they were capable of doing what they did to you and Reya. And about the whole International Treaty thing, the politicians and the media are going to run this into the ground. So don't worry about it. All you girls are going to do is continue your lives normally in Merydia. You might meet scrutiny and possible

isolation there, but Lori and I are in command of this case. We'll make sure you're settled in."

"So I'll never be safe."

"You are going to be safe. We will have everything arranged to ensure your safety. By coming out into the public, Avalon Tech won't make any attempts to kidnap you or your friends, unless they want to draw attention to themselves. Now I won't lie to you Alysia. This case may never be closed. You may never get your justice for the crimes committed against you or everyone Avalon Tech got their hands on. Our top priority right now is to keep you safe and let you move forward with your life. You need to recover from all of this. Understand?"

Alysia looked at the floor. She closed her eyes and nodded. Knowing that Avalon Tech was going to get away with everything was painful to think about. She got up to her feet and walked on her own as Brie tried to follow her, only for Fynir to stop the hacker. The winged girl spent a good hour just wandering around, clearing her thoughts. No one came to her. No one talked to her. She was left alone and it brought peace of mind for her to not hear anything from anyone. It was hard for now than she could imagine. No parents. No home. A broken past. Sure she has friends. And to see Kyo's parents would bring relief in meeting someone from her past. But moving forward. She told herself to move forward from time to time but she never truly gave it that much thought as she sat on a box.

"Oryn beat me in the end."

"Hmph..." Danica sat behind Alysia. Their backs facing each other. Never looking to one another. "That's like me saying my parents beat me because I ran away from them."

"But did your parent do the things Oryn did to me? Erase my knowledge of emotions. Casting an enchantment that gave me a concussion every time I feel? Knowing that they looked into my memories, seeing images of my life, hearing my thoughts, watching my fantasies... my private fantasies." Alysia hugged her knees as she truly felt the invasion from Oryn's criminal acts. She felt embarrassed and humiliated as she held her head. Feeling the

hairclips, she ripped them off, taking a few strands of hair, and threw them to the ground. 'I'm acting weak again aren't I?"

"I don't know Shorty.' Danica lifted her head up and looked up at the high ceiling. 'You're here. You fought monsters. You found your home. You're still wearing that ridiculous Mage Suit even though it drains your mana. If that's weak, then you deserve to be Oryn's mindless slave."

Alysia leaned her chin on her knees and tightened her grip on her hands.

"I don't feel strong."

"That's because Oryn is getting away with what she did and you're right to feel upset about it. But weak is the last thing you should feel.' Danica climbed over the box and sat behind Alysia. She wrapped her arms around the winged girl and leaned close to her ears. 'You can hug your knees all you want. You earned it, but if you want to walk away from this with some satisfaction I can help you."

Danica lifted Alysia's right hand. They both stared at it as they remembered the spell Alysia cast.

"Avalon Tech will walk away from this crime with clean hands. But Oryn, do you think they would care if her life ended?"

Alysia jumped off the box and stepped away from Danica. She understood what the thief wanted.

"I won't do that Danica."

"Why?' Danica approached the winged girl. 'She violated your body, your mind."

"Yes but..." Alysia felt her head lifted up by Danica.

"Will letting her walk ease you pain?' Danica placed her hand on Alysia's cheek and caressed it gently. 'Don't let Oryn get away with what she did to you."

Alysia stared at Danica. This very position they were in reminded her of Oryn doing the same in her office. This uncomfortable position that she could not express because of her altered mind. She lowered her eyebrows and pushed Danica into the boxes. She stretched her wings out as a warning and curled her hands into a fist.

"This isn't about me. It's about you. Because your parents gave you away. You ran off before to fight Oryn. Why don't you do it now?"

Danica stood to her feet and looked away.

"Yeah, at first I did want to kill Oryn because of my parents. But now... I just don't want to see them win and you lose."

"What?"

"That's right. Seeing you come this far only for them to get away with it all. You got heart Shorty. I don't, but that's my choice. I can live with that. I can live being evil. But you, as strong as you are... I'll never raise my sword at you. Never."

"Danica." Alysia kept her thoughts focus and tried not to take her words to heart. 'If you do have feelings for me, it will take a lot to earn my trust to be your friend.'

"Trust and friendship is not important to me. I nurture the weak and kill the strong. But you... you're strength is not the strength I think of. It's a different kind of strength. That's why I nurture you, instead of trying to kill you."

"I don't want you to nurture me. Just be a good person. Atone for your sins. Live happy. That's what I'm going to do. After all as you said, I've come this far, so I am not weak. If Oryn wants to think that me running away is a victory, so be it, but she'll never get me under her control again. That's victory enough for me."

Danica stood there, hearing Alysia words. They echoed her mind over and over again as the winged girl walked up to her. Danica shifted her head to say something to Alysia, but she remained quiet.

"Thank you." Alysia said as she walked away. Her appreciation was cryptic to Danica. She left the thief to her own thoughts and never looked back. Alysia approached the news van where the seats were perched up. She saw Fynir and Lori behind the van hidden from the cameras. The Sentinel stood before everyone as they became silent. She approached Daniel and looked at the seats. 'I'm ready. Where do I sit?'

"Right here." Daniel led her to the seat facing directly at the camera. She saw the lens as Brie and Chisame fixed her ruffled hair.

"What happened to your hairclips?" Brie said.

"I threw them away. I can always get new ones."

Brie and Chisame turned to each other as the cameraman stood ready to record. The Sentinels stepped back as Daniel sat on a seat across from Alysia and the director in the van gave the signal to begin.

"I am Daniel West, here with an exclusive interview with Alysia Morales. One of the victims of Avalon Tech's kidnapping spree. She was twelve years old when Oryn Zentharis took her away. As you can see in this before photo provided by Kyo Kusanagi, her childhood friend, she had light brown hair and green eyes, but now after having undergone Avalon Tech's experiments, she now has white and blue hair and teal colored eyes. Now Alysia, I understand you were subjected to brainwashing by Oryn, do you still remember most of your past?"

"Y...yes." Alysia said with her monotone voice. Nervous about being on camera. Looking down and away.

"It's okay Alysia. Just look at me and take your time."

"They actually," Alysia lifted her head, summoning her courage to answer his question. "they made me believe that my parents kidnapped me and lied about being my parents."

"I don't understand."

"It's like this. You know your past right?"

"Right?"

"Now imagine if someone told that was all lie. Your birthday, school, playing in a park, and they say your parents are complete strangers who pretended to be your real parents. That your life is one big lie. You would feel like a different person. That you were someone else. They made me believe I was not..." Alysia paused for a moment. It never occurred to her how precious her name was. Her very being and identity hinged on that name. To have been stripped of it by Oryn, she realized she has to cherish the very name given by her parents. She saw Danica arriving and standing next to Brie and Chisame. Despite her misguided views, Danica touched something very important. The thief knew who she was and was willing to accept her choices. Alysia spent so much time trying to sort out her

life that she never knew the one thing she had to sort out first. Somehow, from Danica, Alysia felt inspired to say something on television.

"Is everything okay Alysia?" Daniel said.

"Is everyone going to see this interview?"

"Of course. Why?"

"I just want to say something before we continue."

"What would like to say to everyone watching out there?"

The winged girl faced the camera. Her eyes were cold but gentle. There was a sense of lost innocence but it was hard to tell what emotion she displayed.

"My name is Alysia Morales, Sentinel of Suzaku. My mind was crushed, my identity was stolen, my life was destroyed. So long as I walk free, I'll always beat you Oryn. You will never have me again. You never got what you wanted from me and you will never have what you want from me."

Oryn stood in front of her television monitor in her office. The executive stood quiet as she tapped the remote on her thigh. Hearing that statement, she could almost hear laughing at her expense despite being alone in her office. Her feelings for Alysia, to express them, were a missed opportunity. No matter how successful she and Avalon Tech get in a now changing world and economy, she knew she would never get everything her heart desired. She raised the remote and aimed for the power button. Instead, her hand glow and crushed it into pieces.

"Alysia,' Daniel said on the screen 'what would like to do when you arrive in Merydia?"

"I want to hang out with my friends and have fun."

To Be Continued...

