

Arcana Magi Memorial - c.1

by H-M Brown

"It's so wonderful." She said while opening her teal colored eyes.
"This Mana."

The mist surrounded Azure. Her tiny body absorbed its energy. She shed a smile, embracing it. She wanted this power more than anything else. To harness it all for herself. Her magic circle appeared. Four arrows pointed in four directions like a compass, the mist flowed out of them. A pair of wings drew itself in the center of those arrows, her back felt uncomfortable. Ancient runes, written along the edge of the circle, had its basic knowledge pour into her mind. They were the basic building blocks of spellcasting. Earth. Water. Air. Fire. Yet far too advance for her to understand. Her mind drifted and clouded during this process. Unaware of what happened around her, Azure's only thought were the four colors on the arrows. Blue. White. Black. Red. They combined before her entranced eyes and turned into the color teal. It spread across the circle and gave it its color. Her hands pressed the circle. It was warm to the touch.

But something happened. The Mana around Azure twisted and distorted. It broke apart. Her eyes trembled as she swiped the mist, struggling to pull it back. The magic circle turned purple. Azure slid her hands on the surface and tried to figure out why that happened. The circle shattered into five purple shackles. They clamped onto her ankles, wrists, and neck. The twisted Mana returned to her body and corrected itself. The shackles tightened and pressed onto her skin, snapping into place. She struggled to break free, but they paralyzed her. Appearing before her were four creatures. She could not make out their shape, but their eyes were visible. Eyes that matched the four colors that combined over her circle. Eyes that was cold and unforgiving. They were the ones that shackled her. They were the ones that imprisoned her. Her screams went unheard.

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Four years have passed since that moment. Azure spent these years learning how to harness the four elements and find the four creatures that shackled her. To unlock them so she could access her imprisoned Mana. She curled her hands into a fist and focused her thoughts. Channeling her Mana, the purple shackles appeared with the same runes she read, all visible on the surface. She sensed her Mana within, but like a ball lying on the other side of the fence, this power was out of reach. Even now, she felt the shackles pressing against her skin. A permanent part of her body. What little Mana she did have access to, were the same strength she had before her imprisonment. The spells she could cast, were only weak, defensive and support spells. Casting any offense spells would activate the shackles and hurt her. It was difficult to deal with, knowing this shame hung over her head.

The morning sun shined through the window of her dorm. The sun warmed her wrists. She saw the buildings of Memorial Academy just beyond the trees. Her parents enrolled her the year the creatures shackled her. At first, she did not like that her parents dumped her in the school, but in time, she came to love her new home.

The birds chirped as Azure looked out the window of her dorm. She leaned on the windowsill and smiled at the busy nest. Azure picked up her sketchbook and flipped through pages of drawings. In each page, she drew cats, birds, turtles, and dragons. She never understood why each of them was so clear in her mind, but she felt inspired to draw them. As she was halfway through her rough sketch, a knock on the door disrupted her concentration.

"Azure?" A girl's voice said outside.

"Come in Sora." Azure said as the door opened. She stopped for a moment and turned around. Sora had been Azure's friend since their first year at Memorial Academy three years ago. At first, Azure kept her distance from Sora due to her Mana problems, but Sora showed she was not the type of person who believes in loneliness. She had been supportive of Azure. From helping her with studying to going out and having fun. As Sora approached Azure, she helped picked up

some of the clothes on the floor so she would not trip over them, and sat on the bed. Azure continued drawing as Sora leaned closer to see the sketch.

"Eh. Another bird drawing?"

"Yeah."

"You never tire from drawing the same four animals." Sora tilted her head as Azure shook her head side to side. "So, did you study for the exam?"

"Sure. Why?"

"Oh, nothing." Sora shifted her eyes to the side. She waited for a reaction from Azure and smiled when the artist stopped drawing. Sora nodded as Azure faced her with eyes wide open.

"Magi History?"

"Math."

Azure dropped her pencil. She studied the wrong subject and searched her desk for her math textbook, but it was not in her room.

"I left it in my desk." Azure slump her shoulders as Sora took out her math book.

"The test is this afternoon and you won't get a chance to get your math book this morning. You better get started."

"You're such a great friend." Azure grabbed Sora's shoulders with gleaming eyes and a thankful smile.

"That'll be five ouros."

"Huh?" Azure saw Sora's hand waving for money. She reached into her shorts pocket growling under breath. "You really are a great friend."

"Penalty fee." Sora took the money and stood to her feet. "You'll never learn responsibility if I bail you out. We better hurry. Classes are about to begin."

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At the track and field, Phys. Ed. Class was underway. Azure and Sora's class finished warm up exercises and the boys and girls separated. They all sat on a grassy slope ready for the long jump test. As each student took there turn, Azure laid on her back and looked up at the clouds in the sky. She soaked in the fresh air and

the scent of freshly cut grass. The sentiment faded as lingering thoughts of the semester took over.

"This is so irritating."

"You should sit up before the teacher sees you."

"I'm being serious here Sora. I hate waiting until the third semester to start casting spells."

"We just started the new school year. We have to first study magic properties and undergo physical training. It takes both mind and body to cast spells."

"But I can't wait that long. I want to learn offensive spells."

"Azure," Sora turned to her friend. "you have to be patient. The purpose of the academy is to teach us non-violence with our magic. It's the only way to show the rest of the world that we Magi are responsible with these powers. Learning attack spells is reserved for people in law enforcement, the military, and Mystic Intelligence. Are you thinking of signing up with them?"

"No way. I just want to cast spells like fireballs, water geysers, or earthquakes. Maybe I'll use those spells to be a performer."

"Way to lower the bar Azure. A perfectly good waste of all that powerful Mana."

"Azure Martinez." The teacher said as Azure rested her hands under her head.

"Or maybe I can combine the two and make hot steam or maybe mudslides. What do you think?"

"I think you should listen to the teacher."

"I want be the most powerful Magi by the time we graduate."

"Azure Martinez!" The teacher finally got Azure's attention and she sat up. "You have five seconds to get down here or you'll get an F."

"Coming." Azure ran down the slope to the sound of laughter while brushing her gym shorts. She stumbled to the starting point as the teacher held the whistle to her lips. Ready, the sound of the whistle made her rush toward the sand box. As she prepared to jump, she felt a twinge on her back. It was as though there was something attached to her. She had not felt that in years. With a

leap, she had control over her body's movement in the air. Like she was gliding, seamlessly over the sand. She landed and fell on her butt. The class moaned in awe as Azure looked back and saw how far she jumped. She sat on her knees unmoved, stunned at her feat. Azure stumbled to her feet as her teacher caught her shoulders. Without saying a word, she went back and sat next to Sora.

"That was amazing Azure."

"I felt something on my back." Azure wrapped her arms around her legs.

"Eh?"

"Sora Narutaki. You're next."

"Okay." Sora stood up and looked back at Azure. She saw the concerned look in her friend's eyes as her teacher called for her to hurry up.

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At lunchtime, Azure ate her sandwich outside, while reading Sora's math book. Her arms rested on the table as she leaned close to the pages, reading the same equation over. She had no idea how the answer worked. She flipped back to the previous page to make the connection, but she could not understand the solution. Azure looked at Sora to ask her about the problem, but she noticed her friend staring at her. It was as though Sora was analyzing her. It was freaky.

"You find me attractive Sora?"

"What?" Sora said as she blinked her eyes.

"We could get together after school... and study."

"That's not funny." Sora turned away and her cheeks blushed.

"It's okay. I can give up on boys and learn to adapt."

"Idiot.' Sora pounded on the table to the sound of Azure's laughter. 'I was concerned about what happened to you during Phys. Ed.'"

"I see.' Azure took a sip of her juice. 'Well the best way I can describe it, was that it felt like there was something attached to my back.'"

"Like... wings?"

"I don't know. It felt the same just like the first time I drew my circle. Maybe it is. I want to try again after school." Azure leaned back and crossed her arms. There was a great feeling she experienced jumping through the air. It was as though she got closer to unlocking the shackles. She was not sure and did not want to get her hopes up. But if what she did came from her locked Mana, she wanted to take advantage of this path, and use as much of this spell as she can until she broke free.

"I know that look." Sora said. "You think you found a way didn't you?"

"I have an idea on what I could do."

"Don't be hasty. You were lucky the last time. This time... I don't know. I don't want you to get hurt. Or worse... Are you listening?"

Azure held an empty bowl and watched a butterfly crawl on the table. It flapped its wings, minding its business, as Azure moved closer, quietly. With a slap, the bowl covered the bug and Azure felt it bump the side when it tried to escape.

"I got it." Azure took her sketchbook out of her bookbag. "Now I can draw a picture of it."

"It's no wonder your Mana is locked away."

"What's that suppose to mean?" Azure turned to Sora.

"What you did just now is childish. You're fourteen. Act your age and let the butterfly go. How would you like it if someone trapped you in a dome? Besides you have important things to focus on."

Azure saw Sora's finger tap on the math notes. Slouching her shoulders and without question, she lifted the bowl. The butterfly struggled to fly as she heard Sora long sigh. The bug managed to get back into the air, but it did not fly the same way again. Azure felt guilty since it was so pretty in the sky. She did not mean to hurt it. She just wanted to draw it.

"Studying hard are we?" A woman's voice said, cold and emotionless.

"The Dean!" Azure and Sora said as they turned their heads, startled from the woman's voice. They looked up to the woman with long white hair. Her eyes half opened looked uninterested. It was

hard to tell if she had something on her mind or not, or if she had had any feelings at all. She just stood there with a cold stare at Azure. Suspecting her of breaking the rules as Azure shivered in her presence.

"Y...yeah?"

"Yes Ms. Martinez." She said with a stern voice.

"Yes, Madam Mayweather.' Azure corrected her statement and sat straight in a ladylike posture. To sit and speak properly was what the dean expected from all her students when in her presence. 'I'm studying for a math test today."

"Good.' Madam Mayweather held Azure's arm up staring at her wrist. 'I expect you to set a good example for your classmates and not get into trouble."

Azure tilted her head as Madam Mayweather left the girls without looking back. The dean's words sent a shockwave in her thoughts. Azure never thought of herself as a role model. It was not something she wanted to be.

"Does she know about my shackles?"

"Maybe your parents told her about them. You know teachers like to call our parents and ask questions about us without out knowledge. That's why our parents call and yell at us."

"True.' Azure turned the math book around to face Sora and pointed her finger at the equation. 'What's with these angles?"

Azure smiled at Sora and waited for her answer. Sora rolled her eyes at the sudden change of subject and she took a pencil to show Azure the solution.

"The angle is based on directing spellcasting."

"Oh."

* * *

After school, Azure stood before the sandbox. Footprints from her jumps littered the box. Not one single attempt matched the same distance she accomplished during Phys. Ed. She took a deep breath and focused her thoughts. Azure tried to get that feeling on her back to happen again. She ran fast and felt the wind brushing against her body. Azure jumped and nothing happened. When she landed, she

fell on her face. Azure pulled her face out of the sand and squeezed it. She heard Sora's laughter as she wiped her face and brushed her clothes.

"If only you could put up a better effort studying." Sora said as Azure approached her.

"At least I'll be ready for combat unlike you." Azure stood before Sora with hands on her hips.

"You should really take you time.' Sora brushed the sand off Azure's hair. 'Rushing is not going to get those shackles off."

"I know. I know.' Azure picked up her bookbag and slung it over her shoulder. 'So did you pick up your Golem?"

"Yeah. I got an A at Golem Construction test. My teacher said that Aeros was well built and thoroughly constructed."

"So that makes it four now?"

"Of course.' Sora smiled as Azure walked with her. 'Though he warned me to be careful when combining them into bigger Golems, since it takes a lot of Mana to do so."

"Ah."

"Well this calls for a celebration. How about we go into town to the ice cream shop? Then check out a few stores."

"Sora, are you asking me out on a date?"

"Can you be serious for a moment?!"

"Seriously, I can adapt."

"You're really picking a fight, aren't you?"

Azure laughed as they walked past the swimming pool where the swim team practiced for the upcoming meet. They crossed the open grassy field where a group of students had a picnic and studied. The girls made their way through the auditorium as a short cut across the academy. They looked at the drama club rehearse their play. Azure and Sora passed by the library where a girl carried books on potions and chemistry. Azure slid her hands along the chain link fence as Sora threw a tennis ball over it to the tennis team.

Azure and Sora arrived at the main entrance. The girls stood before the security checkpoint and presented their school I.D. Cards. They swiped them through a electric band and their names

appeared on a screen acknowledging their departure from the campus. They walked past the gate where a large plaque read on the brick wall, 'Memorial Academy EST. 1496 Central Heights, Merydia'. They headed for the bus stop down the street, passing by a car with tinted windows. Azure looked back and saw it turn into the entrance. She tried to get a look at who was inside, but it was too dark to see.

"Hurry, the bus is coming!" Sora said.

Azure ran never looking back at the car. Together they crossed the street and ran toward the bus stop at the edge of the hill. Waving for the bus that arrived, they saw the town of Central Heights at the bottom of the hill.

To Be Continued...

