

Arcana Magi Memorial - c.5

by H-M Brown

It never crossed Azure's mind of what she held in her shadow hand. Blood. Droplets fell from the tip of her nails. The Summoner's tears splashed on her palms. The human shadow dropped to its knees and fell back. All Azure could do was watch as its chest heaved rapidly. She did not know what to do or how to save its life. Azure did not understand why her heart felt so hurt for this thing. After everything it did to everyone here in the academy, all Azure could do was shed tears. So strange for that she had no problem destroying the shadows around her. Yet somehow, with blood staining her hand, she feared she might have taken a life.

"Azure!" Sora said kneeling beside her and analyzed her transformed body. She knew it was her friend but she looked so different now. Sora touched Azure's shoulder and startled her. She saw her red eyes tremble and felt her oily scaled skin shiver. They both saw the Summoner close its tear-filled eyes as the blood soaked the grass and stopped moving.

"I'm sorry." Azure said with her voice layered between a cat and a bird. She placed her hand on the Summoner's thigh and lowered her head.

"It's not your fault." Sora said as they heard shrills and screams all around them. Each shadow burst into mist around Madam Mayweather, the guards, and Globos. It appeared the summon spell reversed itself. While the celebration began, Azure did not share their sentiment as Madam Mayweather stood over the shadow.

"You feel for this person?" The dean said as Azure and Sora turned to her with eyes wide open from her comment. Their stare showed both insult and contempt over that sentiment. "That is the price of combat when lives are at stake. It may seem easy to destroy shadows, but people will eventually die."

"Still, if I had known,' Azure said. 'I would have tried to save this person."

"Even if it meant your own death Ms. Martinez?"

Azure became silent. She never thought of her death before, nor thought about actually fighting creatures and saving people's lives. Azure spent her time trying to unlock her shackles and never thought of others. Now as a shadow creature herself and the Summoner before her, Azure wondered what she could have done to help each other. She had no answers.

"So easy to talk.' The dean said. 'So difficult to back it up."

Azure leaned close to the grass. She saw something rise out of the ground itself. It was mist. She turned to Sora as her friend held her arms up watching her Mana leave flow out of her body. Azure looked up at the dome creature.

"How? All of the creatures disappeared.' Azure said as she saw Madam Mayweather drop to her knees. 'NO!"

"With the Summoner dead... ah...' Sora said clutching her shoulders as a veil of light covered her body. It was Globos. The dome creature's actions weakened Sora and unsummoned the combined Golem. Her eyes grew wide. 'That means... the person had control over the spell."

Azure stood up unaffected since her shackles kept the rest of her Mana locked. However, her shackles did glow purple due to the vacuum pulling her Mana. Looking at the red light high up in the pillar, an idea came to mind. It was a risk, but Azure felt she was the only one who could save everyone. With her first step, a tug on her wrist pulled her back.

"Azure... no..."

"Remember what we learned in our first year about unstable Mana?"

"I don't... understand..."

"Trust me.' Azure removed Sora's hand and held it gently directing her attention to Madam Mayweather. She dragged her feet toward the pillar. Looking back, Sora helped the dean downhill. When they slid out of her sight, Azure focused on the dome creature.

Azure entered the pillar. The shackles became heavy enough to pull her to the ground. On her hand and knees, she used her claws to push her way toward the center. Once she reached the cloak, she leaned her shoulder inward so when shackles slammed her body onto the grass, she faced up. Azure's fingers glossed over the soft cloak. She thought of the Summoner. How this person had no control over its spells. She understood how difficult it must have been for this person to control such an overwhelming power.

The vacuum pulled Azure's body. Yet her arms, ankles, and neck locked down on the ground. She pressed her teeth together, growling under breath from the pain. The vacuum got stronger and her body lifted off the ground. It took some time elevating up the pillar. She slightly turned her head and she saw how far up she was. The campus looked vast. Buildings, parking lots, recreation areas and sports facilities. Without thought, she smiled. Her time at Memorial Academy had been memorable. She loved being here as she saw all of the Mana from as far as the dormitories flow toward the pillar like a valley of rivers. Azure faced the red light at the top of the sky and knew what she had to do. She just did not know what was going to happen next.

Azure finally reached the red light that sucked in the Mana. It was circular, and moving. Rolling like a marble. All of the Mana pulled into the spinning orb like a thread wrapping around a spool. She did not understand what was happening. It looked alive. Before she knew it, a strange black disk surrounded by a white ring, slid over the surface and stopped at the edge of the circle. It slid to the left. It slid to the right. It centered itself directly at Azure. And blinked. Her heart sunk. She felt cold. Her shadow skin tried to jump off her flesh. Five white hands and arms shot out of the white ring and latched onto her shackles. Azure screamed as she struggled to break free, but the hands stretched her body. It pulled her closer to the black surface as she closed her eyes. Her body pressed on the sticky black surface as the monsters hands pulled her inside.

The liquid forced her eyes open as she slid upward. She saw an array of colors that burned and stretched her body within its

muscular walls. There was no end to her screams. It was like a tunnel where another black disk and white ring waited on the other end. As Azure emerged out of the tar like tunnel, her arms thrashed and legs kicked. Her body stretched side to side as she hyperventilated. Azure's mind went blank as she spilled out into a sea of darkness. Her numbed body spun in the liquid and mist mixture as her eyes tried to focus on what direction she was facing. It was too difficult to tell if she was looking up or down, left or right. She struggled to grasp the sight of the world she swam in. There was nothing but fleshy walls oozing with black tar and clear looking veins pumping something green. A bright light flashed in the darkness as the white hands stretched her arms and legs, and lifted her head up. They pulled her toward a ball of red light, where the hands and arms originated. The red sphere looked like planet with white clouds floating above the surface.

"Mana." Azure said as the white hands and arms stopped towing her. Her mind cleared and she remembered her plan. Only now, it seemed she had a better opportunity if she could get inside the sphere. "Come on! I know you want my Mana! You can sense it!"

Azure focused her thoughts and channeled her locked Mana. Another arm shot out of the sphere. Its fingers stretched and slid along the surface of her scaly skin. It stopped at her chest as her heart beat. The thumping made the fingers react to it. The hand slid through her skin and pierced her heart. She could not move as her mouth struggled to release a scream. It was as if it tried to rip her emotions apart and rearrange them to suit its needs. Azure felt the dome creature reaching for her Mana. It felt like it struggled to reach for her Mana beyond the fence as she exhaled and breathed again. Azure saw part of its arm on her chest and a new pair of arms came out of the sphere.

"More?"

The hands slid on the surface of her head and touched her cat like ears. They twitched. The fingers slid through the skull and pressed on the surface of her brain. Her screams burned her throat. The dome creature messaged her brain and played with her memories

like a television. While it re-winded and fast-forwarded through her life, she had a moment where she rationalized that it was looking for something. It was looking for an answer to the shackles that blocked her Mana. With concentration, she created a brick wall about her knowledge of Mana and directed it to the parts of her memory about the shackles.

“Read... it...” Azure said and took a deep breath. “Take me in...”

Azure rolled her eyes up as a few bricks fell out of her mental block. The shackles crushed, her heart burned, her brain squeezed, this was the most horrific pain she ever experienced. Her mind linked with the dome creature. There was nothing but endless hunger in its thoughts. A primitive form of speech taught by the Summoner, a girl who begged it to stop hurting her heart. Azure understood her pain and reached out to save her, but it was all just a memory.

Azure focused her thoughts and directed it to the day she was shackled. She gave the creature every information she had. She repeated the memory in a loop until the creature figured it out. All the arms pulled Azure to the core. Her body splashed through surface as she screamed once more. The gravity of the core and all the hands folded every part of her body until she became a perfect ball like the Summoner. The dome creature concluded to do the same thing the four mysterious creatures did to lock the shackles, in reverse. When the five hands on the shackles glowed, they stretched off Azure's skin. The pain caused the mental block to fall apart and what Azure hid became clear of what she learned her first year at Memorial Academy.

Unstable Mana was poisonous.

It was too late for the dome creature as the shackles snapped and gathered to form her magic circle. Azure finally felt her Mana for the first time since she was ten. The fence collapsed in her imagination. The dome creature's hand shivered as the unstable Mana covered it and Azure's body. It was a wonderful feeling she had, but it was short lived for her Mana fell apart. It spilled over like a fallen cup of water and spread across the red core. Azure opened her red eyes as

everything mixed and turned purple. The fleshy walls waved and the veins stretched outward. The mist became thick purple sludge and filled her lungs with each breath she took. It burned her chest as the core moved forward toward the eye of the monster. Azure could not uncurl her body, her muscles locked in place as she rolled inside the core. She saw the veins pop spilling the green liquid. She heard the roar of the creature as the flesh decayed and melted. Nausea from the poison twisted her stomach.

The unstable Mana spilled out of the eye socket of the dome creature. Its roar caught everyone's attention as they struggled to look up. The eyes and the dome itself burst into mist. The starry night and the full moon provided some light, as did Azure and the falling toxic core. There was not enough time for everyone to react as the core slammed the top of Poet's Hill. A mushroom cloud rose up into the sky and the shockwave knocked everyone to the ground. A wave of purple Mana covered the grass and rumbled downhill. With the earth shaking, Sora clutched Madam Mayweather with a whimper as the dean held her tight. The shock of the ground stopped. Sora lifted her head up at Madam Mayweather and saw the dean's eyes tremble. Sora looked ahead and gasped at the purple mist set before them. The cloud stood like a tree as real birds flew past it. The Mana moved away from everyone and the mushroom cloud lowered itself back to the hill. No one knew what to say.

Azure was on her knees over her magic circle. Her hands rested on her thighs with stable and unstable Mana gathering at the palm of her hands. She shaped it into a ball. The scaly skin covering her body slid past her arms and mixed with the sphere. It left behind all the body parts it created on Azure. Furry white cat ears and tail, and teeth of a kitten. Humanlike dragon scales on her hands and claws, and humanlike turtle webbed feet. Small white feathered bird wings, and white and teal hair. Those parts burst into Mana and entered the orb, and she returned to her normal self. Azure opened her teal eyes and saw the four creatures surrounding her. Just like her drawings, she saw a dragon, a turtle, a tiger, and a bird. She understood now, that was what she turned into as a shadow. They

watched her struggle to keep the orb from unraveling. They manipulated the magic circle so it would become shackles again.

"BACK OFF!" Azure said as the sphere wobbled in her fingers. Her eyes glazed at the orb as she kept it under control. It was pure and impure at the same time. Difficult to comprehend. Her eyes blurred and her body leaned forward. She lifted her head up and took a deep breath. Azure pressed the orb onto her chest and pushed it through her skin, seeping through her bones. Her rampant heart pumped the mist through her veins. The burning sensation made her body twist and vibrate. She opened her mouth and her throat lumped forward as thick purple mist spilled out. Azure lifted her head up as she felt the coldness in her veins warm her body. The Mana spilled out of her skin as she fell back and rested on a pair of feathered wings. The teal shackles clasped her wrists, ankles, and neck as her eyes closed to the sound of a bird singing softly.

* * *

The sun rose over Memorial Academy as three days had passed since the incident. Sora stood at the entrance, watching another student place her luggage in her parent's car. She waved goodbye as the car rode off toward the main entrance. With a sigh, Sora walked past a sign on the bulletin board that read Parent-Teacher Conference Tonight. The slow exodus of students created a depressing atmosphere. Sora wished she could convince some of her classmates to stay. There was nothing she could do to change their minds. Sora arrived at Azure's room ready to walk with her to class, and she heard her whimper beyond the door. Sora offered to talk about the incident, but all Azure did was joke about it. She knew Azure was in pain deep inside. Sora made a smile hoping that it would cheer her up and open her into a conversation. She knocked on the door.

"Come in, Sora." Azure said with a moan.

When Sora opened the door, her smile dropped, and her eyes grew wide. There was Azure, not crying or whimpering, but struggling to zipper the back of the one-piece skirt that was part of her Magi costume she bought a couple of days ago. Sora just stood

there as Azure spun around the room while trying to keep the long sleeves from covering her hands. When Azure fell on her butt, Sora giggled.

"Check it out. A teacher found my bookbag and returned it to me this morning. Unfortunately my arms are still numb and I can't reach my back." Azure stared at her teal shackles on her wrists as they disappeared. She felt her outfit tightened and heard the sound of the zipper. Azure smiled.

"So you're really going to wear this?"

"What better way to make a comeback then by dressing in style." Azure turned her body to the side. 'I hope white and pink match my teal eyes."

"I still think this outfit is tacky."

"Then why are you helping me put it on?" Azure looked up to Sora with wide eyes. 'Ahh... so you do like me. I can stop looking for boys for you."

"Get serious." Sora placed her hands on her hips. She paused for a moment as Azure flexed her toes. Sora wondered what Azure was thinking.

"Sora, do you want to do something after my parents and I come back from the counselor after classes today?"

"My parents are here and they want to have a talk with me. I'm sure you're parents would want to do the same too."

"I really wanted to talk to y..." Azure paused for a moment as she slipped on her white thigh length stockings. She decided to change the subject. 'I finally got to talk to those four spirits. I apologized to them for the way I acted."

"What did they say?" Sora said as Azure strapped on her knee high boots.

"They said I was selfish and reckless for channeling unstable Mana, which is why the shackles hurt me. That I could have gotten myself killed going into the monster. They weren't happy, but they said I was brave for what I did. I wished I could have protected everyone better and saved that Summoner girl."

"Azure..." Sora held her friends hands. "What about you? Are you okay?"

Despite her smile, Azure's eyes welled with tears. She shifted her head away, but Sora placed her hand on Azure's cheek making her look eye to eye.

"No. I... I can't sleep right now. It's my heart. Ever since that thing grabbed my heart to unlock my Mana, I feel..." Azure placed her hands over her heart and her fingers pulled a piece of her outfit. "I have to protect my Mana in my heart from now on. I can't let anyone, or anything, touch it again."

Azure stepped back wiping her eyes. She slipped on a pair bracers with gloves attached and flexed her gloved hands to help ignore the lingering pain in her heart. She shook her head and focused on what she wanted to say.

"The four spirits and I made a deal. Since most of my Mana stabilized, I can access some stronger spells, but I still have a long way to go. So they made a few alterations on the shackles so it could act as our magic circle when I cast spells. This is until I can stabilize the rest of my Mana as I learn more."

"That's great Azure. But that means you've got to pay attention in class."

"I know." Azure said as she felt Sora fixing her hair. A pair of hairclips snapped in place as a clear white lace draped down the back of her hair. Azure tied a clear white wrap skirt that covered only her back. She stood before the mirror and sighed. "It looks bland for a magical outfit. I'll have to make it better."

"How?"

"Beast Form... Chimera!" Azure crossed her arms over her head and stood on her toes. Her shackles glowed over her costume and Mana covered her body. It sprouted the animal parts that formed on her body when she turned into a shadow. Azure stretched her body as her small wings spread open. Looking at herself in the mirror, she smiled at her reflection, stroking her dragon hand over her white and teal hair. Her cat ears and tail twitched from the sensation.

"Can I not look anymore awesome?' Azure turned around to Sora as her friend stood like a statue with mouth slightly opened. 'Well?"

Sora shook her head and snapped out of her daze.

"You're going to get detention if you go to class with that spell on."

"We'll see.' Azure stuffed her textbooks and sketches into a large purse. She walked past Sora grabbing her hand. 'Come on. We're going to be late."

Azure ran to class with arms wide open. She looked back and saw Sora right behind her, trying to keep up. Azure headed off to fulfill her dream.

THE END.

