

Arcana Magi Pure - c.2

by H-M Brown

Mayumi arrived at the kitchen, where her mother prepared breakfast. She did not know how to begin to tell her about what happened yesterday. It was overwhelming enough what she had learned about Mana and spellcasting, but what happened to Emi was her biggest concern. She stayed up most of the night struggling to sleep, unsure of when, or how, or what to say. But she became focused and spoke.

"Mother?"

"Yes Mayumi."

"Something strange happened to me and Emi yesterday."

"You got into a fight again." Mayumi's mother turned on the faucet.

"Well, no... but... you see..."

"Get to the point." Mayumi's mother reached for a bowl in the cabinet.

"We can see this mist called Mana, and we have the ability to cast spells."

"Mayumi, you're thirteen now. You're too old for these childish games."

"But..."

"You are five minutes older than Emi, and she is the one mature enough to join a track and field team. You on the other hand decided not to join her. Have you thought about joining any sports clubs or after school clubs?"

"No." Mayumi looked away.

"Of course not. As the eldest, you should be leading by example. Not talking about this magic and Mana stuff."

"I understand."

"Good. Now go get your sister. Breakfast will be ready soon."

"Yes mother." Mayumi looked back at her mother and felt alone about her situation. She thought about her father but he was overseas on a business trip. The time difference was against her

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since her father would be asleep at this time. She found it pointless to call him later for she feared it would be too late. Mayumi did not know what to do.

Just as she reached the stairs, Emi was halfway down. Her blouse un-tucked, a belt slouched around her skirt, and an unbuttoned teal vest on. Mayumi and Emi stood quiet. Neither knew who would speak first, or if they even wanted to speak at all. They faced a strange aura now. A growing distance between them building up. Mayumi did not forget what Emi said last night. That they always did things together. It was strange that she would say that. She never knew that was how Emi truly felt.

"Mayumi. I'm sorry for the way I acted. I was..."

"It's okay. I understand. Having this ability was scary. Now we know what this is and everything will be fine. Maybe you could show me this shrine you went to after school."

"It's okay. You don't have to come. I know we can't do everything together forever. Besides, aren't you going to that shrine you mentioned last night?"

"Yeah."

"Then everything worked out for both of us."

Mayumi followed Emi and noticed links of a necklace around her neck underneath her blouse. She never saw it before, let alone ever knowing Emi owning one. There was a strange mist on the chain. It was Mana, but so faint and dull. The mist mixed with Emi's Mana giving the off the same effect. Mayumi wanted to ask what it was, but she feared that her sister would get angry again. With Emi still talking to her, Mayumi could not risk her sister going into silence. Her best bet was to follow Emi to this shrine after school. To find out what this place is and who was in charge.

* * *

After school, Mayumi arrived at Emi's track and field practice. She noticed the team was on their way to the field and her sister was not there with them. One of Emi's teammates saw her and waved with a smile. Mayumi walked down the slope approaching her.

"Sorry I thought you were Emi-chan. You looked like her."

"I'm her sister Mayumi. You're the team captain, Sayako Mizuguchi."

"Please to meet you."

"Emi is still in the locker room?"

"She's actually not here. I was wondering if something happened."

Mayumi clenched her fist. Her chance to follow her sister was lost. There was nothing more she could do right now. She clenched her teeth own holding back her anger.

"Akamatsu-san?" Sayako said snapping Mayumi out of her anger. "This is the second day Emi-chan missed practice. If she doesn't show up our coach will sit her out of the next meet, or worse."

"Don't worry, I'll find her and make sure she comes to practice."

"If you do see Emi-chan, please tell her the team really needs her. Her and I are the best runners and we make a powerful team. She has the best quickstep I've ever seen."

"Quickstep?" Mayumi tilted her head.

"It's the first three steps we take to get into stride. If you can take your first three steps within one second and half seconds, you will have a sizable lead over your opponents."

"That doesn't seem like much of a lead."

"Trust me. A one and a half second lead is like having a one-kilometer lead in car racing. Every second counts in track and field."

"Okay." Mayumi cracked a little smile. "If you say so."

"Please. She's my best friend and she didn't seem like herself today."

"Captain!" One of the girls called out to Sayako.

"Coming!" Sayako turned around.

Mayumi watched the captain rejoin the team. Not seeing her sister out there and throwing away something good did not settle with her. Without knowing where this shrine was, Mayumi realized she was going to need help.

* * *

As Mayumi walked up the stairs to the Shrine of Four Mythic Elements, she checked her phone for any text messages from Emi. There was none. When she reached the top, she found Nina sitting before the shrine. Mayumi was about to say hello, but she realized how quiet everything became. There was no sound of trees rustling or the sound of birds in the sky. Yet, there was peace and calm. It was soothing to Mayumi's mind, even though her fear for Emi's safety stressed her. With a deep breath, sound returned and Nina turned around.

"Hello Mayumi." She tilted her head and noticed she was alone.
"Your sister didn't want to come."

"Emi went back to the shrine she found yesterday."

"Was she okay when you found her?"

"No." Mayumi shook her head side to side. "When I saw her Mana this morning it looked weak."

"How?"

"I can't describe it but it didn't look anything like it did yesterday."

"This doesn't sound good."

"Why?"

"Emi's Mana may be corrupted."

"How? Wait." Mayumi remembered the chain necklace Emi wore. "That's probably what's causing it."

"What is?"

"This necklace I saw her wearing. I didn't see all of it, but it was giving off that same weak look. We have to find her."

"I'm afraid not."

"What?" Mayumi looked down at Nina. "This is my sister. She could be in danger."

"Or maybe not." Nina stood to her feet and approached Mayumi.

"I don't understand." Mayumi picked up Nina and held her in her arms. She approached the shrine itself and stood before the four-lit candles.

"Mayumi. Let's start with Mana. You have to think of it like water. You've seen clean water right?"

"Yes."

"Now have you seen water that was dirty?"

Mayumi thought of the difference and understood what Nina was talking about. She gave a nod and listened on.

"Mana is like water. When clean, it gives off a radiant glow and when corrupted, it gives off a dark hue."

"But it didn't look like that."

"Not yet." Nina pointed to a nearby bench by the well and Mayumi walked over there. "Chances are Emi may have found a shrine that is either home to an evil spirit, or abandoned and covered in corrupted Mana."

"Why do I have the feeling it's not the abandoned one."

"You said she wore a necklace that was corrupted. Someone gave it to her and she accepted it. She most likely already learned a few spells too. The point is that if she chose this with her own free will, she is not innocent."

"But she could have been taken advantage of while she was vulnerable. We knew nothing about Mana."

"That's also a possibility, but, as long she doesn't tell you what happened, you'll never know the truth."

"So chances are, she may not be in danger." Mayumi placed Nina on the bench beside her.

"No your sister is in danger no matter the situation. There are Magi out there that fight against evil and corruption. If she is using her Mana to do harm, Magi will hunt her. Maybe kill her."

"Then what are we waiting for?" Mayumi stood to her feet and took one-step forward.

"For you to learn to cast spells." Nina's words stopped Mayumi. "You do not know a single spell. I'm sure by now that your sister knows at least one spell. So you're already at a disadvantage if she decides to fight you."

"You don't know that." Mayumi turned around with her hands curled in a fist. "She would never attack me."

"How do you know Mayumi? Corrupted Mana does strange things to people. It varies from person to person. Not only that but if

really want to save your sister, you need to learn Purify."

"Purify?" Mayumi relaxed her hands.

"It's a very powerful spell that takes a lot of Mana, and a toll on the user. You'll need to use that spell on Emi if her Mana is corrupted."

"Then teach me."

"I will but not right now. If you use that spell on a human at your current level, you could hurt Emi."

"But Purify sounds safe."

"If done correctly yes." Nina looked away. Her eyes shivered. "If done wrong, you could break Emi's mind and leave her an empty shell. It can be... horrific."

Mayumi lowered her head hating the idea that she cannot go get Emi now. It was like she abandoned her sister. Yet, everything Nina said made sense. Something she did not want to admit while looking at her Mana. Unless she knew what Emi was up to, she could not just sit by and waste time.

"Teach me something Nina. Anything. I just need one spell. So I can find my sister, and... and just make sure she's okay. At least I could be ready for anything. Maybe she's just using it for good."

"Mayumi please, don't get your hopes up about Emi. She may be your enemy and you may have to fight her."

"I... I know. But... I rather it'd be me and not some stranger. At least... no, I don't want think that. Just teach me something so I can face her when I get home."

"Okay. This is the most basic spell a beginner can learn. Come with me."

* * *

Night fell and Mayumi paced around her room. She peeked out at the hallway looking at the door across the way. It was partially opened and dark. Mayumi stared at her hands shivering. It was difficult to stop it. She felt a little tired from the training and thought about bringing an extra set of clothes to wear instead of her school uniform. She felt a little prepared even though she did not know what would happen when Emi arrived. Fighting was the one

thing she did not want to do. Mayumi, stood at the edge of the stairs and looked down at the door expecting Emi to arrive. Instead, she heard a noise in her sister's room.

"Emi?" Mayumi opened the door and reached for the light switch.

"Don't turn on the light." Emi said making Mayumi stop.

Mayumi heard Emi taking long deep breaths. She found on the ground cradling her stomach. Mayumi focused her eyes and noticed Emi was not wearing her school uniform. It was an unusual outfit. Mayumi approached her sister for a closer look. Emi was wearing a white and lavender long sleeve turtleneck leotard with gloves, boots stretching up to her thighs, and hairclips. There was a purple gem on a locket attached to Emi's chest. Mayumi reached for it but Emi smacked her hand away. The strength of the slap left a sting.

"What are you wearing? Where are your clothes?"

"I don't know where my clothes are. I got this outfit as part of my spell." Emi turned her head a little, where the moonlight shined on her face through the window. It revealed her pupil-less red eyes that made Mayumi stumble back. "Don't I look pretty in this outfit?"

"No. You look tacky." Mayumi went into Emi's dresser and pulled out a skirt. She presented it to her sister. "Put this on before mother sees you."

Emi took the skirt and tossed it aside. She clutched her shoulders and took a deep breath. With a little smile, she tilted her head back at Mayumi and crawled towards her.

"You should come with me. The shrine will teach you everything. You'll even get your own magical gem to change into this pretty outfit. It feels so good. The power. The Mana." Emi stretched her arms up over her head and lowered them. She smiled at Mayumi with a distant look. It was almost as though she was not there.

Mayumi shook her head side to side. She could not believe what happened to Emi. Mayumi placed her hands on her sister's cold shoulders and looked at her deep in the eyes.

"Emi did these people hurt you?"

"No." Emi place her hands over the gem. "They helped me."

"Are they really?"

"Yes."

"Please. I'm worried. You missed your track practice again and..."

"Now that you've mentioned it. I'll be there tomorrow. I have to keep appearances right?"

"What?" Mayumi pulled her hands away and Emi rubbed her eyes.

"I have to keep up. I have to keep up. Yeah. You're not supposed to see me like this." Emi closed her eyes and curled her hands in a fist. She channeled Mana, gathering it around the gem. Emi brought her hands to her chest feeling the wind around her body. She opened her eyes and shifted her head back. There was Mayumi with her hands held outward trembling. Emi could sense a barrier placed between them and she realized that Mayumi learned a spell also. Emi canceled her spell. She placed her hands against Mayumi's spell. It felt like a glass window separating them.

For a moment, Mayumi thought she saw Emi's pupils returned to normal and tears well up. She was ready to drop the barrier to hug her, but Emi's turned back to red. Mayumi felt the force of wind bash against the shield and push her against the wall. Mayumi rubbed the back of her head and looked up to Emi standing tall. She faced the moon outside its light shining over like a spotlight. Mayumi saw two sets of three white and purple metal sticks floating behind her sister's back. Each spread apart forming a pair of wings.

"I can fly."

TO BE CONTINUED...

