

Arcana Magi Zero - v.1: Alysia's Saga, the Awaken

by H-M Brown

The last thing eleven year-old Alysia Perez remembered, she clenched her mother's waist as they both turned to stone in the museum. When she opened her eyes, she was in a world of darkness. She lifted her arms up, and found her blouse and skirt colored grey. Her short brown hair and green eyes were grey too. A light appeared in the distance and drew her to it. She stood before the warm light, and within it was a teal colored bracelet. It had five glowing marbles embedded around the object. The first marble that separated was a crystal and it floated in front of Alysia as the other marbles detached themselves from the bracelet. The black marble separated itself from the bracelet. The white marble, the blue marble, and the red marble followed it afterwards. The four marbles stretched, grew, and took shape. Four large creatures appeared before Alysia, a black turtle, a white tiger, a blue snake like dragon, and a red bird. They towered her tiny body, she shivered in fear, her eyes trembled by their appearance. She wanted to run away but she did not know where to go or where to hide in her shadow imprisonment.

"Do not be afraid." A little girl's voice echoed within the child's mind. "Please tell us your name."

Alysia looked at the four creatures and could not tell which of them spoke to her.

"My name is Alysia Perez."

"I am Megumi Miyazaki, Guardian of the Gate to the Shrine of Four Mythic Elements. Standing before you are the Four Mythic Elements." Not even one of the beasts before Alysia moved their mouths.

"How can you talk without moving your mouths?"

"I am sorry. I am talking to you through dream telepathy. The Four Mythic Elements before you are only images."

"Where are you?"

"I am waiting for you to awaken."

"Awaken? I don't understand." Alysia approached the Four Mythic Elements as they looked down at her. She stretched her arms out to them and the red bird leaned close to her first. Alysia rubbed her hands on its feathers and felt its warmth calming her fears. The turtle, tiger, and dragon gathered around her and she touched them while they gave her comfort.

"I am Genbu of the Water." The black turtle said with a male voice, its head stretched out further beyond its shell. A small white and teal turtleneck armored vest materialized before Alysia. "I bestow upon you, my armor, to shield and protect you."

"I am Byakko of the Earth." The white tiger said with a female voice while laying down her belly. A small pair of white and teal armored boots materialized before Alysia. "I bestow upon, my boots, to grant speed and agility."

"I am Seiryu of the Air." The blue snake like dragon said with a male voice, its head held high with pride in its eyes. A small pair of white and teal armored gloves materialized before Alysia. "I bestow upon you, my gauntlets, to give strength and power."

"And I am Suzaku of the Fire." The red bird said with a female voice, spreading its wings out. A pair of small white and teal tipped wings materialized before Alysia. "I bestow upon you, my wings, to fly with heart and soul."

The child smiled with a breath of awe as the Four Mythic Elements glowed before her. The teal bracelet floated behind the crystal marble and it took the shape of a staff. The headpiece grew into a circular band, forming four triangles, within the circle itself, pointing outward from the center up, down, left and right. It was like looking at a compass. The Four Mythic Elements turned into marbles and embedded themselves on the circle band by the points of each triangle.

"I Megumi Miyazaki, present to you, Alysia Perez, your mystic staff. Call its name and awaken the mana within your body, your mind, your heart, and your soul."

"Mana? What's that?"

"It's a magical energy that is within you since you were born. With that energy, you can cast spells. If you awaken your mana, you will be freed from your imprisonment and we can free everyone who had been turned to stone."

Alysia thought about her mother, and did not know what will happen to if she did not do anything. Losing her mother was something she did not want to live with. She closed her eyes and a teal light filled the crystal marble like water. It glowed as Alysia's hands came together and rested the teal marble on her palms. She brought it closer to herself and covered it with her hands. She felt a warm energy throughout her body, her heart, her mind, and deeper within herself, something she had never felt before, her soul. A magic circle appeared under her feet. It was teal, had runic text written on the edge of the circle, and within the center was the four phases of the moon: the new moon, the crescent moon, the half moon, and the full moon. Alysia released the marble and called out the staff's name.

"AWAKEN... SAGA!!"

In a room of stone, Alysia's magic circle stretched out on the grey floor and her body materialized from the pillar of light. The tip of her boots touched the circle as it disappeared and her feet planted on the stone floor. She opened her eyes and examined the armored gloves on her arms, then she twisted her body looking at the outfit she wore, and stared at the staff she held in her hands.

"Am I dreaming?"

"No, you are not." Megumi said as Alysia took one-step back. A tiny fox approached the little girl, with a shiny brown fur, green eyes, and a lavender collar around its neck. The fox walked toward Alysia looking at her outfit. The fox sat in front of her.

"Are you Megumi Miyazaki?" Alysia ask as she knelt down before the little fox placing Saga on the floor.

"Yes. Please to meet you." Megumi bowed her head.

Alysia lifted Megumi with her hands and examined her body looking to see if she was real or not. She stroked Megumi's fur, laid the fox on her back to check the belly, and found Megumi was as real as she was. She noticed the lavender marble on Megumi's collar, saw the marbles on Saga, and felt the collar on her own neck.

"Are you one of the Four Mythic Elements?"

"No, I am a mystical fox called a kitsune."

"A kitsune?"

"As a kitsune, I protected the Gate to the Shrine of Four Mythic Elements. It was where the staff you named Saga was stored, along with another mystical item, which belonged to the Four Mythic Elements. One day someone attacked the Shrine to steal the mystical items. I escaped with the bracelet, but I couldn't find my way home afterwards. I tried for years to find my way back but someone picked up the bracelet when I fell asleep one night. I followed the scent to an airport and found the bracelet in the hands of a foreigner. So I hoped on the airplane and followed him here."

"I think that foreigner you were talking about, was my father."

"You're father?"

"Yes. He's an archeologist. He travels around the world looking for rare and lost treasures to preserve and protect them. He brought this bracelet back from an expedition in Japan. My mother runs this museum and created an exhibit for your bracelet."

A flash of thought pulsed in her mind and remembered that her mother was in danger. Alysia stood to her feet with Saga and Megumi in her arms. She turned around in the room and saw that every object was stone. Alysia approached one of the stoned artwork hanging on the wall and touched it with her fingers. It crumbled into pieces and dust floated in the air.

"Megumi, what happened here?"

"A magical force was awakened. It apparently turned everything and everyone into stone. It also weakened my mana and prevented me from taking my human form. Without my human form I can't cast more powerful spells to help you."

"It turned to dust so easily." Alysia looked down and saw that she created footsteps from the stone floor. She stayed still afraid to walk anywhere.

"Alysia." Megumi got no response. "Alysia!"

"I can't do this!"

"Stay calm and focus Alysia. I know this isn't going to be easy. Your mana is still weak. If you listen to me, we can undo this spell together."

Alysia lifted Saga up and the four marbles glowed for a moment. She placed Megumi on the floor and stood ready.

"How do I use my mana?"

"First, you have to channel your mana. It requires you to focus you mind, body, heart, and soul. They are the four essence that mana flows through. Close your eyes and lift Saga up. Clear your mind and think of what you want to cast. Let's try the wind. Think of what the wind is, how it acts like."

Alysia lifted up Saga and thought of how the wind blew the leaves hanging off trees. She held onto to that in her mind and felt a warm energy in her head.

"Good. Now feel the air that is around your body."

Alysia felt the air around her body. It rolled over her skin gently as her body became warm.

"We're halfway there. Now with your heart channel that energy and send it to Saga."

The air moved around her body, brushing her hair gently, making its way to Saga. A ball formed at the edge of the staff's headpiece.

"Great. Finally, Saga acts as an extension of your soul. You'll feel through your staff the ability to activate and release the spell."

Alysia opened her eyes and saw the ball of air. She smiled at how wonderful it was until it warped and became distorted.

"Megumi what's happening?"

"Focus Alysia! Focus!"

The spell burst and Alysia and Megumi fell to the ground. Alysia lifted herself up brushing some of the dust off her outfit. She felt the

sting of failure, pounded the ground as Megumi stood up, and shook the dust off her fur.

"I can't do it."

"Yes you can Alysia. You just have to practice."

They heard a loud crash outside in the hallway. Alysia and Megumi stuck their heads out to the hallway. They saw something move into another hallway but they never saw what it was.

"Megumi, do you think that was what created this spell?"

"Maybe. We should check it out."

"I still don't know any spells, Megumi."

"I know, but I think we've ran out of time to train you. There are too many lives in danger."

Alysia worried that she might not be able to defeat this thing, but she also knew she had to free her mother and everyone else. She calmed herself, built a little courage within her heart and stepped out into the hallway to follow the mysterious moving thing.

Alysia and Megumi walked down a long hallway, it was empty and silent. The entire area was stone, from paintings to the rug on the floor, and the chandelier hanging on the ceiling. Once they turned the corner and walked toward the room, a shadow peeked out from behind a green potted plant.

"Megumi, look at that."

The shadow engulfed the plant and slid off it, turning it to stone. The shadow crawled along the floor and took shape. A long tail and four legs with its toes stretched apart from the body, its head extended outward, and its green eyes opened wide, they were like glass that reflected Alysia's and Megumi's bodies. A hum vibrated from its throat that rattled the girl's ears and gave them a headache. It rushed toward them with the intent of turning them to stone while they were distracted.

With a natural reflex, Alysia raised her left hand and a small magic circle appeared before her palm. The circle glowed teal as the shadow lunged at them. She thought about shielding herself and Megumi from the monster's attack.

"PROTECTOR!"

The shadowy creature bounced onto a ripple of air, its pulse pushed the creature back and it bounced on the ground. The creature scurried back to its feet and it saw Alysia on her knees in shock as her hand kept the shield up. The creature jumped onto the wall and crawled on it to get around the ripple. It stopped on the wall and saw Alysia aiming Saga at it with a ball of air at the end.

"AIR BURST!" The ball of air shot out to the creature when it jumped off the wall and it burst on its face. The creature landed on its face and stood upright. It escaped before Alysia could cast another spell.

Alysia dropped to her knees, weakened from using her mana.

"I'm alright Megumi." Alysia looked at the direction the shadow scurried toward and read a sign with an arrow pointing to the ocean exhibit.

"The creature is in there." Alysia set Megumi on the ground and stood to her feet. They ran down the hallway and stood before a set of stairs leading down to the lower floor with the other ocean exhibits.

"We lost it." Alysia sighed.

"I have an idea, Alysia. Bring me those potted plants outside."

They both stood at the edge of the stairs. The shadow snuck around behind them and pounced them both down the stairs. When everyone reached the ground, the shadow saw two puffs of smoke and stone plants replaced Alysia and Megumi.

"NOW!" Megumi yelled as the shadow looked up and saw Alysia floating in the air with Saga aimed at it.

The magic circle under Alysia's feet glowed and the shadow retreated to the top of the stairs. A large red ball bigger than her body grew before her. She thought of destroying the creature now and end it quick.

"That's too much!" Megumi said, but Alysia did not care for she wanted the thing dead, so she could free her mother, and all the people in the museum.

"PYRO MAELSTROM!" The ball fired, struck the top of the stairs, and created an explosion. The shrapnel burst out and pelted Alysia,

tearing her suit, cutting her arms and legs, while shielding her face. Alysia floated to the ground and stumbled from exhaustion. Even though she was weak for a moment, she felt Megumi biting her leg.

"Ow, what was that for?"

"For being reckless. You almost got yourself killed."

"But I..." Her vision blurred and she collapsed to her knees. She looked up and felt her body slammed to the ground. Once her vision became clear, she stared at the teeth of the shadow, its mouth widened with purple saliva stretched out and since it could not turn her to stone, it chose to eat her. With a scream, she shifted her head to the side as the shadow snapped at her face. She struggled to get it off, but the loss of energy numbed her body. She saw Saga on the floor near her and she tried to reach for it as Megumi glowed lavender and tackled the creature. Alysia watched Megumi bounce off the shadow and felt the brush of air from the snapping teeth that missed her face. Alysia reached for Saga, but the tip of her fingers pushed it further away until Megumi sprinted over and pushed the staff into the girl's hand. Together, Megumi tackled the creature again and Alysia swung Saga striking the creature, knocking it off her body. Alysia stood on her feet and felt a pain her right leg. Her right foot twisted when attacked. Alysia saw the shadow lift its head and she bashed it with Saga knocking it back to the ground.

"Alysia let's get out of here!"

The little girl limped as she tried to run using her staff as leverage. She looked back as the creature stumbled to its feet and chased after them, closer and closer it got until the girls escaped into the women's restroom slamming the door in the creatures face. At the end of the restroom, Alysia found an air vent near the sink and with the little mana energy she had, her gauntlets glowed, and she pulled the grate open, and slipped inside with Megumi. She pulled the grate back with enough force to make it stick and they both watched the shadow crawled. Its hum rattled Alysia's ears as she took short breaths. Her hands shook violently when the hum repeated itself in her memories. Her eyes were transfixed from this

experience and tears fell down her cheeks. She heard the shadow had stop humming and it left.

Alysia felt Megumi pushing with her paws and tugging the stocking with her tiny teeth. The young warrior was startled and saw the fox jerked her head to move on. They crawled through the air duct for a while. Neither knew where they were going. They kept moving as Alysia took a deep breath, struggled to keep up with Megumi, and stumbled over Saga along the way. They reached the end of the air duct. Alysia turned around and kicked the grate off. Alysia crawled out collapsing onto the ground and Megumi waked out after her. Alysia's eyes stared at the ceiling and stayed silent. She tried to forget everything that happened.

"Mom... dad..."

"I envy you..." Megumi said sitting before Alysia. "...to still have parents in your life to worry about."

"What about... your parents?"

"They died."

"I'm... sorry..." She closed her eyes from exhaustion after casting so many of her spells one after another. Alysia felt the pain of her injuries now that she has relaxed. She wished she could forget it all. When Alysia opened her eyes, she felt some of her strength had returned. She found Megumi asleep in her arms, it was the first time she felt secured since this whole ordeal happened. Alysia sat up to her knees and saw a stone clock that has not moved. She did not know what time it was or if it was a new day. Alysia looked at Megumi and saw how peaceful her new friend was. She knew Megumi is helping her and she felt she was not doing enough to undo the spell.

"I promise Meg. I'm going to better this time." Alysia raised her hand out and focused her mind. She made her magic circle appear under her body and Alysia examined the runes written on outer edge. She was able to read the text as if she knew the language. She felt chills on her arms.

"Undo. Heal. Restore. Reflect. Purify." Her body glowed and became entranced in warmth. "Cancel. Mend. Bind. Break. Protect."

Her magic circle glowed and the four phases of the moon rotated one complete circle clockwise. Alysia's heart pulse, wind blew her hair back, and her mind became clear. She imagined what those eight words were supposed to do. She knows that these are personal spells.

"No..." Megumi said in her sleep and broke Alysia's concentration. "It's not true." Megumi opened her eyes and shook like a leaf in Alysia's arms as the magic circle disappeared. Megumi felt Alysia hugging her.

"You had a nightmare Meg? Are you okay?"

"I keep seeing this girl with black hair inside this mirror in my dream. I've never seen her before. I don't know who she is."

"It's okay. We can find out who she is when this is over."

"Really?"

"Yes. We'll find out together. Okay?"

"Thank you." Megumi stretched in Alysia's arms as the little girl noticed where they were.

"This room..." Alysia let Megumi go and she stood to her feet, with Saga in hand. She and Megumi looked around and found themselves surrounded by statues of people. Their faces of fright and panic sent a feeling of chill. Alysia was very quiet as her heart pounded. Each breath she took was short as she walked past each person. When she looked to her right, she dropped Saga, and covered her mouth.

"Mom." She walked closer to the statue of her mother. She remembered that she and her mother came to the museum for the unveiling of a new exhibit that her mother hosted, and then chaos occurred. People were running they turned to stone. She held onto her mother as they both turned to stone but the bracelet she held saved her. Alysia saw that her mother knelt with her arms in circle that had wrapped Alysia to protect her. The expression of fear frozen on her mother's face overwhelmed the child's feelings. Alysia reached out to the statue wanting to touch her face.

"Don't touch her." Megumi said as Alysia fingers were about to touch her mother's cheeks.

"Why?"

"Your mother's body will crumble and she will die. Remember that painting."

Alysia stopped and she remembered, even though she tried to will herself to feel her mother's face. Her hand shivered knowing in her heart it is what she wanted to do, but she stepped back, and collapsed to her knees beside Saga. She looked up to her mother with tears rolling down her cheeks and onto her clothes as Megumi pushed her paws on the young girl's legs.

"Alysia, you're the only one who can save everyone."

"Why did this happen?"

"Alysia!"

"I should be there with my mother."

Megumi bit her leg and the young girl winced from the pain. The fox snapped Alysia out of her trance and pushed Saga closer.

"Listen, we have a chance to save her and everyone who turned to stone."

Alysia looked down at the fox and took Saga. She stood to her feet and pointed the staff at her mother. She remembered the words she spoke when she read the runes on her magic circle. Alysia closed her eyes. The warmth of mana flowed through her body, her magic circle appeared under her feet, and a runic text glowed.

"HEAL!" The staff fired a beam of teal light at Alysia's mother that surrounded the body. The little girl concentrated, thinking only of freeing her. She pushed hard, with all her energy, but it was not enough. She was still too weak to cast a powerful spell. Her spell did not return her mother to normal and the light vanished.

"It didn't work."

"It's okay. You tried. Save your strength."

"..." Alysia just stood there and stared at her mother.

"There's nothing more we can do Alysia. I'm sorry. We have to go."

Alysia sighed as she lowered Saga and walked past her mother. She paused and opened her mouth wanting to say she was sorry that she was not strong enough, but she had no way to express it. Alysia

and Megumi left the room and they both walked down the open corridor carefully avoiding the stoned people. The atmosphere was depressing and Alysia felt sad. Men, women, and children, their faces showed terror and shock Frozen in time, they were artwork unto themselves. Alysia stopped and thought about the pain she felt when her body turned to stone. She clutched her shoulders and tried to fight the physical pain she experienced, but she could not.

"Alysia... focus."

"I'm sorry. I can't help it."

Megumi sat down and watched Alysia wipe her tears away.

"I must look stupid don't I? Some hero I turned out to be."

"No Alysia, you're not stupid. You're in a situation you can't control. You have suffered greatly and lost a lot. It's okay to feel a little weak at times."

"No. I don't want to be like this. I don't want to be weak." Alysia lifted her head and tightened her grip over Saga. "How can I protect my family from something like this? No, I will get stronger and I won't give up."

"I'm glad to hear that, but don't ever betray your feelings. If you feel you must cry then cry, it's your right to feel that way. However, don't let it overwhelm you to the point that you will give up. That's how you will fail yourself... and fail to save everyone."

"I understand." Alysia tears stopped and she walked alongside the fox as they searched every room in the museum. All they saw was the same thing, gray stone, on every floor they walked on. On every hallway they crossed and every staircase they climbed. As time passed, if they knew what time it was now, the creature was nowhere. Tired from walking, Alysia and Megumi sat down to rest. Alysia took the time to look at herself. Cuts and bruises covered her body from her first fight. Her right foot felt numbed from the injury and she never thought about it until she relaxed herself.

"Megumi, how did you lose your parents?"

"A group of Samurai accused them of destroying crops and the forest. They killed them both. However, they were innocent and that it was a group of bandits that caused all of that. After that, I was

taken to serve as the Guardian of the Gate to the Shrine of Four Mythic Elements, where I lived a very long time."

"When did this happen?"

"It was in 1754."

"That long?"

"Yes. I've been alone ever since. I miss my family a lot."

Alysia lifted Megumi up and hugged her.

"You can stay with me, after we get everything back to normal."

"You will let me stay with you?" Megumi's tail wagged as Alysia nodded and together they smiled at the plan.

They heard a low hum echo in the hallways and the vibrant sound irritated Alysia's ears, frightening her until she calmed herself. She grew angry and wanted to end this conflict for good. She lifted her head up as Megumi jumped off.

"It's nearby." Alysia stood to her feet with Saga in hand.

"It came from down the hall." Megumi ran down the hallway with Alysia running behind her. They both arrived in a large room with a high ceiling. The hum made an echo that hurt the girls' ears and they closed their eyes from the pain.

"It's so loud!" Alysia said and opened her eyes. There was a stoned man standing over a pedestal. He had a mask on to hide his face. His tools were also stone and were scattered on the ground in broken pieces. On the palm of his hands was a green jewel. Alysia approached it and lifted Megumi up to show her.

"So this guy caused all of this." Megumi said.

Alysia looked at the pedestal and saw a plaque that read "Basilisk Eye."

"A basilisk."

"What's that Alysia?"

"I must be that..." The basilisk shadow tackled Alysia, separating the girls from each other. Alysia shielded her face with her left arm as the creature chomped on it piercing the armor and its teeth into her skin. Her scream echoed from the high ceiling and like a doll, she was tossed to the side. She cradled her wound as blood dripped out of her gauntlet convincing her that the monster was much

stronger than her armor. With the corner of her eyes, the basilisk towered over her.

"REFLECTOR!" Her magic circle knocked it back into a corner. Alysia hurried over to her staff and picked it up. She looked over at the gem and knew what spell to cast.

"Megumi, can you keep the basilisk away from me?"

"You got it." Megumi stood before the basilisk, wiggled her tail at its face, and she led it out to the hallway. The little fox approached Alysia and sat next to her.

"I don't how long the Decoy Spell will distract the basilisk."

"Don't worry. You did good. Thank you."

Alysia aimed Saga at the gem and a small magic circle appeared above it. A small wind formed over the circle and slid down to the gem in the form of a funnel.

"Alysia, I hope you know what you're doing."

"I've this idea on my mind since I tried to free my mom."

"LEVITATE!" The wind sucked the gem up like vacuum and it went through the circle without disturbing the stoned man. Alysia directed it towards her and she gripped it. Her hand turned to stone and it spread up her arm. She focused her mind and her magic circle formed a band of light over her elbow.

"CANCEL!" One of the runes written on her circle glowed. The band pushed back the stone spell and restored her arm to normal. She concentrated on the magical energy of the gem and felt the evil within.

"It's so cold." Alysia's body shivered as Megumi looked at the entrance.

"Stay focus and hurry. I felt the basilisk destroying my spell. It'll be back soon."

Alysia gathered all her strength. She can feel her mana getting stronger. Her wish to save her mother and everyone gave her the strength to push her mana to its limit. The spell of the gem fought back trying every bit it could to consume the little warrior. Force against force as mana conflicted with each other. Alysia released Saga and it floated in front of her. The palm of hands faced upward

as if she were scooping up water and the gem floated above them. With her own power, she created two small magic circles, one above the gem and one under the gem. At the same time, the circle above ripped out a dark energy that looked like night itself, and the circle below pulled the gem down. The gem became clear as crystal and it fell to the floor as the basilisk jumped at Alysia from behind.

“PURIFY!” Another rune text on her circle glowed bright.

The basilisk flew through Alysia, like a brush of wind, stroking her hair forward and disappeared into nothingness. A teal light enveloped the dark mana until the darkness turned milky white and burst into dust. Alysia collapsed onto the ground gasping for air and felt a loss of all her energy. The magic circles went away and Saga landed on top of the girl's body.

“Alysia!” Megumi pushed the girl with her paws and felt her taking deep breathes.

“I'm... okay... Meg. Just... tired.” Alysia moaned as she lifted herself up to sit straight. A pair of hands wrapped around her waist and helped her up. Alysia saw a human girl her age, with long light brown hair, a pair of fox ears and a tail, dressed in a white and lavender kimono, and her collar with the lavender marble attached to it.

“Meg?”

“It's me.” She smiled.

Alysia embraced her friend and they hugged each other. The stone spell removed itself from the man and he collapsed to the ground. The entire room, and throughout the museum, the spell was being undone and everything was returning to normal. She leaned on Megumi's shoulder as they both held hands.

“I can't move my legs.”

“You used up all of your mana. A good long sleep will restore all your strength.”

Alysia and Megumi looked at the crystal gem on the floor as they heard the crowd outside the halls. It was over. Alysia laid down on her back staring at the ceiling. With her left hand rested on Saga, she nodded her head, and decided to keep the staff.

"Meg, can you take me to my mother's office? I know she'll find us there."

"Of course." Megumi helped Alysia to her feet and together they left the room, with the sound of the security guards getting louder as they got closer. Megumi and Alysia took their time and made their way to the top floor of the museum marked "No Entry. Personnel Only."

"It's that door over there." Alysia pointed to Megumi and they arrived at the office. Alysia opened the door and they entered inside. Inside the office, there was a couch. Megumi laid Alysia on it and lifted her head on top of the pillow to comfort her.

"Alysia!" A woman called out as the door opened and the girls looked up toward her.

"Mom!" Alysia's mother hurried over to her daughter and embraced her. She heard Alysia moan in pain as they held each other for a while. Alysia and her mother pulled back from each other. Alysia's hands trembled as they gripped her mother's shoulders. Her mother saw the injuries throughout her daughter's body; she lifted Alysia's teal hair, and caressed her cheek.

"Alysia, what happened to you? And your hair?"

"It's a long story. We just want to go home now."

"We?"

Alysia looked back, reached out to Megumi, and took her hand to bring her closer.

"This is my friend Megumi. She doesn't have any family. Can she stay with us?"

Alysia's mother looked at the girl's fox ears and tail and pretended not to have noticed. She could see it in Megumi's eyes that she did not want to be alone.

"We can talk about it we get home." Alysia's mother said.

Megumi's lips trembled at the thought of not being alone, to have a family again. Her eyes turned toward Alysia and they smiled. Megumi hugged Alysia's mother with tears in her eyes.

Alysia smiled and leaned on her mother's shoulder as she held both girls in her arms. Alysia closed her eyes shedding one tear.

“I am happy this is not a dream.”

THE END.

