

Arcana Magi - c.7: Instinct

by H-M Brown

Reya laid on a gurney dressed in a hospital gown. It was Thursday and for the third night in a row, she stayed at Level B3. She watched a male human take a syringe and filled it with pink liquid. The catgirl turned her eyes toward the ceiling, when her mind drifted, and had no sense of focus. The syringe pinched her arm and a female elf stretched the teen's eyelids to shine a light. Her body shivered from the liquid and she felt loose. Her mind relaxed and a veil of pink mist covered her body. It was faint, but she adjusted to the burning effects of her injection. With a deep breath, she heard Oryn nearby sounding slow and deep.

"How is she?"

"She's responding very well.' Reya heard the man's voice speaking normally. 'Her mana output is restored at ten percent. It will still take more time and injections to get her at full strength."

"This is good enough. You may go." Oryn said.

Reya thoughts wandered back and forth between her therapy sessions and Alysia. She swore she would protect her friend, but their failure to break free from Oryn has now made their situation worse. Whenever Reya's mind cleared from the drugs, she saw Alysia drift further away from being human. Watching Oryn attach some new technology on the Sentinel and made her use Saga to see what effects come out from it. Reya regained her focus as Oryn stood over her body. Reya saw the mist around Oryn and trembled with fear.

"What...?' Reya said with a drained voice 'What am I covered in?" She lifted her right arm up to Oryn and the mist trickled through her fingers.

"Your mana Reya.' The executive placed her hand on Reya's grey hair and rubbed it gently to relax the teen.

"How?"

“It's a long story,' Oryn reached into her pocket. ‘but it will all be clear in a moment.” The woman took out a flash drive she retrieved from Archives. Mana covered the computer device.

Reya does not know what it was, but she remembered the first day she woke up. She saw Oryn placing the item on a pillow before an orb. She heard Oryn mention memories but she did not understand what that meant. Reya's thoughts drifted away again, and her eyes trembled at Oryn's smile.

“Get up Reya. It's time for therapy.”

Reya sat up as ordered and saw Alysia standing behind Oryn. Alysia's pupil-less teal eyes frightened her. She knew Oryn planned to do the same thing. Reya tried with her own power to reach out to Alysia, but her legs would not listen. It was as though Oryn glued her feet to the floor. So aware of everything going on and incapable of controlling her own body, she screamed with frustration in her mind. She shifted her body a little while Oryn stood beside Alysia watching the struggle.

“Put on your Mage Suit.”

Reya's ears twitched and she obeyed. As she took her Mage Suit from a chair, the scientists left the room except Oryn and Alysia. Reya wished the woman would leave so she could change. There was no place for her to go behind to get dressed. She could not even turn around without Oryn's order. With Oryn watching on, Reya felt humiliated as she removed her hospital gown. She slipped into her Mage Suit with Alysia standing there, wondering what went through her friend's mind, if that ability was still intact.

“Lift your hair up.' Oryn walked toward Reya to zipper the back. As the woman stood behind the teen, she heard a hiss. ‘Calm down kitten. You don't want therapy to hurt, do you?’”

“No.” Reya became quiet lifting her grey hair up and Oryn zipped the Mage Suit. The catgirl slipped on her gloves, boots, and shrug jacket as she felt Oryn's hands lifting her head up. She stared at Alysia while Oryn propped her hair and felt the green and yellow hairclips snap into place.

“There, you look pretty.”

Reya felt Oryn's fingers scratched the back of her ears. It made her purr and her cheeks blush. She could not resist and that made Oryn smile.

"Stop." Reya said while purring. "Why are you doing this to us?" Reya felt Oryn's hands slide down her shoulders and pause. At first, Reya thought Oryn was going wrap into a hug, instead she felt the woman breathing into her ears.

"Move." Oryn saw Reya's catears twitched and looked up at Alysia. "Both of you."

When Alysia turned around, Reya saw the Sentinel's teal tipped white wings. It was her first time seeing them. In fact, she remembered Alysia riding the manaboard. How Alysia flew into the air, she imagined the wings flapping like a bird in the sky. She studied the wings, etching every detail into her memories. From the bristled edges to the mist flowing downward like a cascading waterfall. She found Alysia to be prettier with these wings. Reya wondered if she would be pretty with those wings as well. This was something to worry about later though. Right now, Oryn imprisoned Alysia's mind and she needed an idea.

"What is Oryn's plan?" She thought. "What does she want with us?"

Moments later, they arrived at the Therapy Room. Waiting outside was Jonas and Anna holding files of their report of a few assignments they took care of this week. When Oryn stood before them, Anna handed her file document.

"All links to the viral video of the incident are removed. I moved the video into a website and took control of the flow of comment traffic. I hacked into the original posters computer and crashed it. We shouldn't have to worry about Mystic Intelligence tracing it back to us."

"Good job Anna. Jonas?" Oryn received his file document.

"According to the latest news reports, Quillian is under investigation from the arson your two test subjects started. They died in the fire. As expected, the prosthetics burned in the fire and

the mana serum tested on them vaporized after they died. There were three other injuries reported.”

“How sad.’ Oryn said with no sympathy in her heart. ‘Reya go into the room.”

“Yes Madam Oryn.” Reya walked to the door as Oryn presented the flash drive to Anna.

“What’s this?”

“Reya.” Oryn said as Anna and Jonas looked at each other.

Inside the control room, Anna scrolled through the windows on the monitor. There were files of videos and images from Reya’s life, from when she was a baby to a small child cradling a grey kitten.

“I’m going to name you Koi.” The child said to the kitten.

Anna looked up to Oryn. As the executive stood before the window looking down at Reya below, everyone turned to her and listened.

“Everything I’m about to tell you is classified. Only Vyndor and I have access to this data.”

“Oryn,’ Anna said. ‘is what I’m seeing on this screen, the information you were looking for in Reya’s mind?”

“No. I was looking for Byakko.”

Oryn’s colleagues gasped and jerked their bodies in unison.

“Reya...’ Marcel said. ‘is the Sentinel of Byakko?”

“Was. Hopefully still is.’ Oryn sighed. ‘Six years ago when Reya was eight, we had the Pendant of Byakko. Her mother, Doctor Sydney Everheart and I created the Therapy Room here to help war veterans deal with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Reya interacted with one of them who reminded him of his deceased daughter. He had the Pendant of Byakko he found on a mission and gave to it Reya. She made contact with Byakko and chose to become a Sentinel. Curious, I did some research on the pendant and found that the creatures who communicate with the Sentinels call themselves the Four Elements. Suzaku, Byakko, Genbu, and Seiryuu. They give blessing to those who accept their role as a Sentinel and they could not interfere in the decisions of a Sentinel’s life.”

“Which means,’ Jonas said. ‘Sentinels can commit crimes without retribution from the Elements.”

“Correct.’ Oryn stood before the window, looking down at Reya. ‘When I told Vyndor this, he became interested in the Sentinels and saw the potential in controlling that power. I, on the other hand, found it an opportunity to prove my theory. We had a common ground. The only problem was her mother. We didn't know how to get her out of the way. That was until an opening to separate them appeared. We learned that while although the Therapy Room succeeded in healing the veterans, it created a side effect. They were consumed with a sense of healthy goodness they could not control. It made them feel different, like they changed into someone else. Some of their emotions they wanted to feel never came to fruition. It resulted in murder, suicide, and insanity. These incidents traced back to us.”

“So,’ Anna said. ‘you set her up?’”

“Of course. Vyndor contacted a local judge he had in his pocket and sent her to prison. I wanted to put her through therapy but Vyndor feared we could lose her knowledge of psychiatry if anything went wrong. After putting her in prison, we got the judge to place Reya in our custody. Afterwards, the child went through therapy and since she was eight, we had no problem with resistance. Vyndor wanted to take Reya to the next step. We traveled to Avalon Tech Headquarters. We attempted to control Byakko itself. Since Byakko is a tiger, we figured that if Reya were a catfolk, their connection would be stronger. Enough for us to control the Element through Reya. We took Reya and her kitten Koi to a new machine that was able to fuse metals and ore together. We modified one to turn living beings into Chimeras.”

Oryn's eyes drifted into space and remained silent for a moment. She turned around, leaning her hands on the control desk, and partially sat on it. She closed her eyes.

“When we put them in... I never heard such a scream in my life. I don't know if that was even a scream. It was inhuman. Reya became as you see her today. For six years, she lived her life a Chimera.

What we didn't realize was that the fusion machine parts lost all of their mana output. This resulted in Reya losing her ability to channel mana. She couldn't access her pendant and Byakko. We spent weeks trying to restore her mana with serums and chemicals, but we did not have the technology we have now. We had more problems. Reya was feral and unaware of herself. I flew back here with Reya to tame her. Along the way, the plane flew into a lightning storm and crashed in Virginia. Some of us survived, debris everywhere, and the pendant was lost. We got Reya out of the area before local and federal authorities or Mystic Intelligence arrived.”

Oryn opened her eyes, crossed her arms, and took a few steps into the center of the human circle.

“Once everything settled, we put Reya through therapy and found her connection with Byakko gone. Controlling her mind was more difficult than we thought. She wasn't human anymore. Her animal instincts prevented us from getting into her mind. She became violent, out of control, and destructive. Vyndor visited to remedy this problem. We had the tech boys carefully construct this flash drive without losing its mana. They kept the output at fifty percent. We put Reya through therapy and downloaded all of her feral memories. It was a difficult therapy for Reya but everything worked out. Her mind was human again and some, but not all, of her memories came back. Vyndor put the flash drive in Archives and we agreed that until we could restore her mana, we would leave her be. I spent the past six years injecting her with all kinds of chemicals and had her memories of those experiments erased. Now we finally did it.”

“I see.’ Jonas said. ‘Now that she has some mana output, if we upload her memories, we would learn if she is still connected to Byakko. She may find the pendant.”

“But,’ Lyn said. ‘what if she isn't connected anymore?’”

“Well with ten percent output, the tech boys will have some fun using her for their new inventions. Either way she will make a fine test subject and help us prepare the inventions for the Sentinels when we have them all. So, shall we begin?”

Everyone remained silent for a moment. Everything they learned was overwhelming and they wanted a little time to soak it all in.

"To turn back now is pointless. You may not have had a hand in what Vyndor or I have done, but you have extended the very nature of our crime and chose this yourselves."

"We know." Jonas said. "But if you don't mind we would like a minute to prepare our stations before we begin."

Everyone nodded to Oryn and made the adjustments for whatever Reya would do when Anna uploads the teen's mind. They started the machine and Marcel saw Reya's mana output appear on the monitor in synch with her brain waves. It was faint but steady.

"Mana output at ten percent."

"Preparing upload." Ann activated the c prompt screen on her computer and typed in the codes. She pressed enter and a small window appeared. The download meter filled up slowly yet steady. The memory size of the file was large, but would not take too long.

There was a faint sound beyond the window. Everyone looked up and heard Reya's scream. They never heard anything like it. It was horrific in every way.

"Focus Everyone." Oryn said.

Anna looked at her monitor and the upload finished. She closed the window, and brought up another one. Reya's heart rate went up and down and a second line appeared next to her heartbeat. It was also faint but synchronized.

"Oryn, something came up."

"I see it." Lyn said as she watched the mirror. "Is this Byakko?" Lyn looked back at Oryn as the executive approached her, peeked in the mirror, and nodded.

"NOW JONAS!"

Jonas channeled his mana and pressed his hands on the orb. He tried to cast a spell on Reya to keep her under control as Marcel saw her brain waves go out of control.

"She's resisting Jonas." Marcel said.

"I'm trying to Erase some of her memories but I can't."

"She's turning feral.' Marcel saw another brainwave appear.
'What the...?"

"I see it Marcel.' Lyn said. 'Byakko contacted someone."

"Who is it?" Oryn leaned closer to the mirror as the image shifted to the side. With Lyn looking alongside her, they saw Reya standing before a small shadow. Beside them was a white tiger towering over them.

"Hi! I'm Brie Williams." A girls' energetic voice said from within the shadow.

"I...I'm Reya... Everheart, Sentinel of...Byakko..." Reya dropped to her knees clutching her head. She looked up to the Element and saw her reflection in its yellow eyes. Reya felt violated from the therapy done to her and alien from her fused body. She remembered her kitten Koi and saw its memories in her mind as well. Their time in the machine became all too clear; her eyes trembled from the pain.

"Are you okay?" Brie said as Reya took a deep breath wiping the tears from her eyes and focused.

"We don't have time. You activated the Pendant of Byakko and so... Byakko must... must connect to you..."

"I don't understand." Brie's shadow reached out to Reya as the catgirl struggled through the pain.

"Byakko... will explain... listen... they have the... the Sentinel of Suzaku."

"Who?"

"Avalon Tech... our passcodes... our passcodes are..."

Oryn's eyes grew wide as she grabbed the mirror and overheard Reya giving away as many secrets to Brie as she could. A red aura surrounded the executive and she turned to Marcel and Anna.

"DISCONNECT THEM!!"

"We can't!" Marcel said as they tried to sever the link and Oryn hurried to Jonas.

"Byakko...' Reya said from within her memories looking up to the tiger. 'I can't be a Sentinel... anymore..." Reya reached out to the Element and caressed its furry cheek. She saw her reflection in Byakko's yellow eyes as its tears fell on her face. For six years,

Byakko laid in stasis, connected to Reya. They both knew it and felt it now that some of her mana had restored itself. Seeing her now made the Element want to do more for her, but its creed could not be deviated. With a nod, the catgirl watched the white tiger stand beside Brie and heard it howl with a soft feminine voice.

“We shall return, Sentinel.”

“I will come for you Reya and we'll free Suzaku.” Brie said as she and Byakko disappeared.

“I know you will.” Reya placed her hands over her heart with a smile. She remembered the warmth of her mother's arms wrapped around her, the smile of little brother before he died, and the strength of Alysia that gave her hope. She felt she did the best she could under these circumstances, and she felt no regrets. Slowly emptying of everything she regained and fought to hold onto, she no longer could handle the pain inflicted by Oryn.

“Alysia... brother... mother... I love you.” With a tearful smile, her body disappeared. Her mind erased forever.

“We lost Byakko.” Anna said looking at the monitor. ‘Reya transferred the connection.’ She heard Reya scream inside the chamber. She saw Marcel's hand shivering, and Lyn and Jonas trying to get Oryn off the orb.

A burst of wind from Oryn's spell pushed them off her arms. The executive roared with anger and brought her hands together. In a crushing motion, she felt Reya in her fingertips. The closer her they got, the more the orb cracked.

“Stop it Oryn!” Anna said as she saw Reya's heartbeat jump up and down violently.

“You're killing her!” Marcel said as he saw Reya's brainwaves jump up and down violently.

The orb shattered and with one final scream, Reya became silent. A long tone echoed the room. All the monitors showed flat lines.

Outside the Therapy Room, Alysia stood where she was before everyone went inside. Running past her, doctors and nurses hurried to the door pushing a gurney. Jonas carried the catgirl out and laid

her on the bed. Marcel pressed his hands on the girl's chest as the nurses pushed the gurney. As they passed by Alysia, she saw the teen's eyes glazed over. A pulse jumped out of her heart. She followed them like a ghost, slowly, dragging her feet along the floor. She could not make out the image of the catgirl in her memories. Alysia could not even remember her name, but she knew there was something in her heart that made her want to be closer. She wanted to take the girl by the hand and do something. All of the new programming Oryn put into her mind broke down piece by piece. She saw the doctors pull the curtain and she stopped.

“Ready... CLEAR!!”

Three times over, the sound of the defibrillator pulsed in unison with Alysia's heart. With each short breath, a pounding sensation ache her mind. Rather than her hands press upon her head, she instead pressed them over her heart. Her eyes twitched as Oryn stood beside her.

“Put your arms down.”

Alysia did not listen and when Oryn reached for her, the woman froze as she saw the Sentinel's eyes. The pupils appeared over the teal center and Alysia exhaled. Her heart and mind focused on the girl she saw as everything went silent for a moment. Then, she heard a consistent beep and Marcel came out from behind the curtain. Alysia watched him approach Oryn and gave the results.

“We brought Reya back in time... but she's in a coma.”

Oryn slapped Marcel and never said a word. She saw Alysia walked toward the curtain tightening her hands together over her heart and they heard her whisper.

“reya...”

To Be Continued...

