

Arcana Magi Memorial

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by H-M Brown

It was like flying through the air, even though her bookbag weighed her down a bit. Within the darkness illuminated by purple light, Azure felt the wind brush against her wings. She tried her best to enjoy this experience to override the harsh memories this darkened tunnel inflicted on her. From the day she received her shackles to the day she was taken in by Ocular that transformed her into a chimera. It was a struggle she wanted to end, but she had to wait longer. Patience as all she could muster.

Watching Polo ahead of her, now knowing the truth about the young girl she killed was his sister. The monster, Ocular controlling her to attack Memorial Academy to get people's Mana. All of this was because of Mother. To fight back and not be chased or harmed by her is something Azure wants done, if she wanted to regain her focus on purifying her body of the unclean Mana within her. She felt her hands shiver; her heart pounded as the light ahead grew bigger.

Azure saw Polo flip his body so feet pointed at the light. It took a second, but she did the same. Beyond the light, there was a floor. She saw Polo land on it and step aside. Her eyes grew wide, not sure how she was going to land. She braced herself, bending her knees. Suddenly she stopped and felt her bookbag drop beside her feet. Azure opened her eyes and found herself kneeling on the ground. She was short of breath. She felt Polo's hand rubbing her back as she calmed down.

"You'll get use to it." A girl said; her white boots appeared before Azure.

Azure stood to her feet, looking at the girl's outfit. Thigh length white and pink boots, white and pink shorts and long sleeve white pink shirt with two tails draped behind her back. Azure walked around her with eyes wide open. She lifted the tails, feeling the

fabric, and turned to her.

"I love your costume."

"Excuse me?" The girl looked at Polo and he responded with a shrug.

"Oh, sorry." Azure said taking a step back. "My name is Azure Martinez. I here to help your group."

"Ah, so you're Azure." The girl said with a smile. "I am Miri, leader of Salamander."

"Please to meet you."

"Very polite." Miri said walking around Azure, examining her wings and cat ears. "So it is true that you are a chimera."

Miri gently placed Azure's tail on the palm of her hands, but Azure pulled away, facing the leader with an unwelcome look. Miri raised her hands up.

"I'm sorry. I was just fascinated."

"Don't do that again." Azure received Miri's nod as a response. "So what can I do to help?"

"I'll show you to your room. Polo please carry her bags."

"Oh come on!" Polo said.

"Be a gentlemen." Miri crossed her arms and Polo picked up Azure bookbag. Miri lifted her arm pointing Azure to follow, and the girls walked ahead of Polo into the hallway. "The empty room we were just in is used to teleport in and out without worrying about crashing into tables, objects or anything."

"Is that something I will learn?" Azure said looking up at Miri.

"Considering that you have been remade into a Nocturne, yes."

"Nocturne?"

"That is what Mother turned us into. We are made into mindless monsters to serve her."

"Wait have I been killing humans when this Ocular attack Memorial Academy?"

"No, those are regular animals, common pets, horses, lions, all remade into Nocturne. We humans maintain our humanoid form as you have experienced, but we lose our free will and reduced to animal instincts. Well, whatever we humans were on a primitive

level. Truth is... we remember it all."

Azure looked down at the ground understanding what Miri said. The memories do hurt still and are fresh. Azure saw Miri take her hand, softly and gently, she turned to the leader looking her in the eyes.

"It's okay Azure. We've all been there. You're not alone."

Azure looked at her hand one more time and tighten her grip on Miri. She looked up to her a smile with a nod.

"Thank you."

"After you settle in to your room, I'll give you a tour of the facilities, so you can find your way around on your own."

"Okay."

"So the location of this place is in the rural farmlands."

"What town are we in?"

"I won't say specifically because if Mother should capture us, she'll read our minds, forcefully if she has to."

"I see."

Miri stopped before a door along a hallway. Azure analyzed her surroundings. There were potted plants along the walls. It reminded her of the dormitories at Memorial Academy. Each room had a number. Hers was 2-108. Miri opened the door and inside was an empty room. A bed to the right, a dresser to the left, and all walls.

"No windows?"

"We are still sensitive to the natural light outside. It's not like we can't walk in it, we can, but it can be irritating and we need to maintain our focus and strength in our fight."

Azure turned around with a smile.

"Don't worry. I'll do whatever I can to help out."

"Excellent." Miri said while Polo placed Azure bag on the bed. "Settle yourself in, then I'll take you to the dining so we can talk about our plans during dinner."

"Where are the others?"

"Some are on mission, others in the offices. You'll see them soon. Right now we just want you to settle in first today and get to know the place."

"Okay. Thank you." Azure watched the door closed. She sat down on her bed, with her arms clutching her shoulders. It was such a weird feeling she got not just from Miri, but the building itself. She focused her ears and had not heard anyone from the other rooms, or when walking along the hallway. "Maybe she's right, the others are in the offices. I'm just getting paranoid for no reason."

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The coffee pot filled with hot brew. When the maker finished its last drop, an old hand reached out and grabbed the handle. With a pour of the cup, nothing was added to it. No sugar. Nor cream or milk. Just straight. In the hands of Madam Mayweather, the coffee took its time to cool down. Even as she walked across the living with its log walls, the coffee resisted to cool down. Madam Mayweather stepped outside of her log cabin home, standing on the balcony looking out at the road between the lake and the forest. The sun reflected lake to her right, yet the morning had not turned the darkness of the wooded area to her left.

There was a serene calm in the area. Silence. Madam Mayweather smiled approaching the cushioned seat to her left. She sat and rocked on it, looking out at the lake splashing onto the shore. Memories of Memorial Academy filled her head. The first day as a teacher; where her first students had little to no smiles on their faces. It was difficult to reach to them and she barely had a footing herself. They walked over. Bullied her. Used the 'Innocent Child Card' to get their way over her. She remembered her naiveté. It was not that she lacked any understanding of why she became a teacher. It was that she was dealing with children who had no understanding of the world.

Her memories ended as a limo appeared at the first turn. Moving along the lakeside, making its way to the cabin. Madam Mayweather placed her coffee on the table, and stepped out into the morning light. She met the limo halfway, as the driver stepped out to open the back door. Madam Mayweather's brows lowered.

There was Sora and Ciel with smiles on their faces. They were happy to see Madam Mayweather, embracing her in a hug, but she

the girls away.

"Sorry." Sora said. "We're just happy to finally found you."

"How did you find me?"

"We used our resources to find..." Sora paused at Madam Mayweather glare. "...you."

"Go home."

"We need your help." Ciel said walking alongside Madam Mayweather.

"I have no obligation to student anymore. I am officially retired."

"It's Azure." Sora said making Madam Mayweather stop. "She's missing."

Madam Mayweather looked at Ciel and shook her head negatively.

"You still think she came here?"

"Still?" Ciel stepped back with eyes open.

"The police said I was the last person she was looking for before she disappeared." Madam Mayweather stepped back creating distance from the Ciel. "My reputation is damaged enough as it is because of the last incidents at the Academy. This... this is the last thing I need. Not into retirement years. I want you girls off my property before you make it worse."

"Don't you care?" Sora said. "I think Azure believed in you. I believe in you."

"PLEASE!" Madam Mayweather looked at the girls, whom were startled by her yell. She took a deep breath, holding back her emotion. "I appreciate the sentiment, but my time as an educator has come and gone. My lawyer does not want me to get involved. I moved out here to keep distant from any students. Your presence here is risking my freedom."

"But..." Sora said and saw Ciel shake her to not say anymore. "I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry, Madam Mayweather." Ciel walked toward the limo quietly.

"Ms. Martinez..." Madam Mayweather said making the girls look back to her. "... she is a good kid. Scared, but has a good heart. I

hope you find her."

"Yeah." Sora said with a low voice. "Like you care."

"Sora." Ciel placed her arm hand on Sora's shoulder to calm her but her friend pulled her arm away.

"No. Why did you even become a Dean in the first place?" Sora said as Madam Mayweather walked toward the cabin. "You're just like any other teacher. Any other adult. We're nothing to you all."

"That's right!" Madam Mayweather turned around. "Welcome to the adult world Ms. Narutaki."

Madam Mayweather curled her hands into a fist, resisting to move forward as the limo driver watched her intently.

"This is how adults treat each other and children! We look out for ourselves and have little friends to trust. You girls are not my friends! You are students that I was entrusted by your parents to be responsible for. When you graduate, not a single one of you would return to my life to see how I am doing! You just move on as if I was a stranger, a blip on your radar of life. Your parents, all of the parents say I failed you, the students. So be it. I have no more obligation to any of you. So don't you dare lecture me on how to be an teacher when you show no appreciation for what I pout with. Especially, you three."

Madam Mayweather looked at Sora. "You and your family of secret organization."

Madam Mayweather looked at Ciel. "You and your family, with your brother trespassing on private property peeping at girls. And that thieving girl..."

Madam Mayweather saw the tears in the girl's eyes. She showed a stoic look, uncaring to their cries.

"No... no... you both need to grow up. You're not children anymore."

"Then why keep treating us as kids if you want us to act like adults?" Ciel wiped her tears. "Make up your minds!"

Ciel entered the limo and Sora shook her head with the look of disdain at Madam Mayweather. The limo driver paid the woman no mind closing the door and entering the driver's seat. Madam

Mayweather watched the limo drove off in the distance. She returned to her seat. She picked up her cup of coffee, cooled down a bit. With a taste, she winced. With a growl she threw the cup at the pillar of the canopy shattering it. As the coffee puddle dripped to the ground below, Madam Mayweather leaned her head back. The last words Ciel said invoked continued the interrupted memories. A point that was dagger to her heart. A point she learned in her first year.

“We damned the children too much.” A young Mayweather said out loud to her peers before a board meeting with the parents and teachers. “We tell them to stop acting like children and grow up, but when they do something wrong or act in an adult manner, we call them children to their faces. Shield them by saying they are just kids. We damn them for acting as children, and we damn them for acting like adults. WE...”

Madam Mayweather paused to calm herself.

“We the adults have to make up our minds. Are they children for us to coddle and protect? Or are they adults who need to learn our world, sometimes the hard the way? I've made up my mind whether you like it or not, as their teacher I will not treat our students as children, but as adults and respect them as such. They will learn. They will understand.”

Staring at the ceiling, with her hand over her eyes, Madam Mayweather cried.

