

Arcana Magi Memorial

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by H-M Brown

The sound of sirens in the distance blended with the sound of thunder and rain. Resting on the ground wrapped in a blanket was the man Hitomi found, his eyes barely open. Patricia flashed a light in his eyes while Madam Mayweather stood behind her with arms crossed. Mayweather stared hard at him, unsure of what to do with him. So many questions on her mind, but the feeling of frustration swelled alongside her thoughts. Her eyes shifted to Jean Pierre and Hitomi whom stood quietly waiting to hear what the man had to say. The injured man coughed, his hand gripped Patricia's jacket.

"What's your name?"

"Gurney." He said. "Mother knows."

"Who is Mother?" Patricia said, gently removing Gurney's hand from her jacket.

"She controls the Nocturne."

"Nocturne?" Patricia looked up at Madam Mayweather to see if she knew what that was. She received no response and turned to Gurney. "What are they?"

"They're creatures seeking Mana to feed Mother."

"Are you one of them?"

"Yes." Gurney looked away not wanting to answer more. "I need to get to Miri quick and warn her. I got caught by one of the Nocturne and dragged into the Sanctum. Mother read my mind, I barely escaped."

"Miri?" Patricia said and Gurney nodded.

"Leader of Salamander. Nocturne freed by Azure when she killed the Ocular."

"Freed you?" Patricia sat up back. "How did Azure know?"

"I don't think she did, once Ocular died we broke free and escape. Look, our plan to kill Mother is compromised. She is

expecting Azure.”

Suddenly, Mayweather wrapped her hand around his neck. He gripped her wrist struggling to remove it. Patricia and Jean Pierre tried their best to pry Mayweather off, but they saw that she used a strength spell to keep her hold.

“Where is Azure?”

“With... Salamander... our group. Please...”

Mayweather used a Levitate Spell to lift him as the sirens grew louder to Hitomi's ears.

“They are around the corner.” The rabbit girl said.

“What does she have to do with you?” A blue glow surrounded Mayweather.

“Miri said Azure has the scent to infiltrate Mother's Sanctum without turning into a Nocturne. None of us can do it, only Azure.”

Mayweather's eyes invoked fright out of Gurney as he struggled to break free. Patricia placed her hand gently on Mayweather to get her attention. Mayweather looked at the doctor and saw the concern in her friends eyes. She felt the anger in her heart for everything that had happened since Azure disappeared. In the end, Mayweather knew she could not take her anger out on this man. She released him and he gasped for air.

“Send me to Miri, now!”

Gurney looked up and saw it in Mayweather's eyes. Saying no was not an option. He pointed at a nearby shadow by the fence, though there was no sign of activity on it.

“Just jump in.” Gurney said looking up at Mayweather. “You'll arrive at Salamander.”

“Karyn.” Patricia said as Jean Pierre watched on. “Are you sure he's telling the truth?”

“I'm not lying!”

Mayweather looked at the shadow unsure if it was going to take her to Azure or Mother or somewhere else. Her willingness to jump inside blindly; she realized she had not jumped head first into an unknown situation since she was young. Thinking of Azure, Ciel, Sora, all of her students; and looking at Jean Pierre and Hitomi, she

had forgotten what youth was like. Then she remembered how problems can be dangerous when youth threw themselves into trouble haphazardly.

"To be young and stupid."

"Madam Mayweather...?" Jean Pierre said getting her attention.

"It's okay Mr. LeBleu." Mayweather let out a light smirk thinking of her haste at this moment. "I guess I see a little of me in Azure when I was her age... reckless."

Mayweather jumped into the shadow just as the police and ambulance turned the corner. As the vehicles stopped, Jean Pierre and Hitomi walked past Patricia.

"Let's go Hitomi."

"Where are you two going?" Patricia looked up.

"We know where Azure is." Jean Pierre pulled out his smartphone and swiped the screen. "We're going into the Academy to get my sister and Sora."

"Okay."

* * *

Sora and Ciel stood before Dean Morden inside his office. It felt weird to the girls looking at him sitting behind Madam Mayweather's desk. His hands folded, listening to their explanation that the rumored shadow creatures roaming the area may have Azure. He turned his chair to the side, looking at the rain splashing onto the window. He was not sure what to think.

"That is a bit of a stretch to believe." Dean Morden said.

"But it's true." Sora said and Dean Morden turned the chair to face her.

"Do you have proof?" He saw the look on the girl's faces, the look of not being believed. He stood to his feet and walked around the desk, leaning his back on it. "Look, I'm not going to dismiss the possibility, they have come for her before, however without any evidence we can't use up our resources to search that avenue. We don't even know what they are or where to start looking for these shadow creatures. We couldn't even catch one of them the last time they came here. Have you girls thought that maybe, she ran away?"

"Why would we think that?" Ciel said.

"Troubled teens like Azure have been known to run away from home, their friends, and find themselves—"

"Forget it." Sora said walking away from the Dean reaching for her poncho on the coat rack. "You adults are all the same. Just make assumptions about us without a care."

"I'm sorry about your friend," Dean Morden said. "but it's been a long time since Azure disappeared and I have a student body of over seven hundred to take care of, right now! There is someone in this vicinity of the school hurting people, and I have to protect each and every one you. I can't bog down my resources to find one single person."

Dean Morden rose up one finger at Sora and Ciel.

"One life or seven hundred lives. What do you think my priority should be since you both know my situation better than I?"

Sora and Ciel remained silent for a moment staring at the finger. Sora lowered her head as Ciel stepped back toward the coat rack.

"I'm sorry." Sora said handing Ciel her poncho.

"I'm sorry, too." Ciel took her poncho holding back her tears and Dean Morden raised his hand up to calm them.

"Girls, I'm not mad at you. I understand. I know loss, but right now, time is not stopping for us and giving us a chance to do what we can to find the people we love. I have seen you post flyers up, so don't give up on your friend. If you need more copies, just let us know and we'll make more for you at our office."

"Thank you." Sora said as she and Ciel slipped on their ponchos.

"Also..." Dean Morden said getting their attention and approached them holding the doorknob. "you did the right thing coming here and bringing the shadow creatures to my attention instead of running out there to handle it yourselves. Whatever information you learn about Azure, you come here right away so I can get the authorities. Understand?"

"Yes sir." Sora and Ciel said, and Dean Morden opened the door to let them out. He followed them out the office and he stood by his secretary's desk. Once the girls left his sight he grabbed the

secretary's phone. "Daniel, gather any available security guards to my office right now and bring Karyn's Contingency Plan that she left us."

* * *

Azure stood up dropping her costume to the ground. She stared deeply at Miri's eyes, her hands trembling from restraint. What ran through her mind was more than anger. It was a revelation. All this time, when she feared the presence of the Nocturne at Memorial Academy, she believed those after her was from Mother. Yet, there it was, the box of costumes she once wore during her most vulnerable period of her life, in the hands of Miri and Salamander. Azure struggled to process what is the truth and what is the lie. Struggling to decide whether to strike Miri or just leave. So many emotions fighting to be the one used by Azure, and the first thing she said were not what she wanted.

"What do you mean 'the next mission'?" Her mind screamed at herself to just leave.

"It's very simple." Miri said approaching Azure. "You will wear one of your costumes, infiltrate Mother's Sanctum, and kill her."

"What does me wearing this..." Azure pointed at the box. "...have to do with killing Mother?"

"It's all in the scent." Miri tapped her nose. "When we enter Mother's Sanctum, we take on our Nocturne form, and our scent becomes noticeable, Mother's defense mechanism. She can tell who is there and who should not be there. Once she confirms, we then are connected to her physically so she knows our movements when we roam the Sanctum mindlessly."

"I see. So, are you saying I can get inside without being detected?"

"Yes." Miri picked up one of the costumes. "The night you went to rescue your friend, you unfurled your Nocturne Wings and used that power. The wings unleash the Nocturne scent that saturated itself onto your outfits, like a sponge. When you threw away your clothes in a box, they all got the scent, so I took it to find the strongest one."

"You've been spying on me all this time." Azure got in Miri's face. "How dare you?"

Miri stepped back to create distance. She raised her hand up innocently as a sign of non-aggression.

"You have to understand Azure; Mother is kidnapping people and turning them into Nocturne, then send use out to hurt people by taking their Mana to feed her. We can't get close to her." Miri folded her hands together pleading and Azure place her hand on her hips taking a deep breath. "You wear your costume, Mother will pick up the scent, but you won't connect physically to her, so you will move freely in the sanctum. You get close to her, unlock your shackles like you did with the Ocular and—"

"NO!" Azure turned around. Her eyes wide in shock, trembling at that idea. "You don't understand my situation."

"I do. You get pulled down by weight of the shackles, but when they unlock they unleash the poison in you."

"I can't do it anytime I want, and even if I could, I won't do it."

"Don't you understand—"

"No, don't you understand! This is poison! People die. How do I know that my Mana won't kill the people you are trying to save?"

Azure crossed her arms and Miri turned around with her hand over heart. Azure relaxed, rubbing her forehead. She looked at the box and her costumes on the floor. She remembered Madam Mayweather saying she looked like a clown dressing in them. Azure shook her head with smile. She lifted her head up with an idea and turned her head to Miri.

"Come with me." Azure said looking at Miri's back. "I'll take you to Madam Mayweather. She will listen to you. She will help you."

"There's not enough time." Without looking back, Miri's hand glowed blue and small circle appeared. "We need to act now."

"Then I'll go by myself and bring Madam Mayweather here." Azure knelt down to her knees, opened the box and placed her outfits inside. "But first I'm going to throw this out once and for—"

A blank blue magic circle flew through Azure, leaving behind an outlined shape of her body lurched back, and her pained scream

muffled in the air as though she was far far away. The outline vanished slowly as Miri walked past a pile of clothing that Azure wore; her shorts, shirt, socks, sneakers, and undergarments, all smoldering a white smoke even though there was no sign of singe or fire.

Miri stood in front of the circle, where Azure is now flat like a two dimensional painting. Her eyes closed; arms and legs outstretched with her shackles exposed with a glow and her wings spread outward giving the appearance of an angel with cat ears and tail, and scaled skin. Miri picked up the box of costumes and began to sort them out.

"I'm sorry Azure, but you gave me no choice." Miri set aside the open skirt leotard, taking whiff of the strong scent. "I was patient since the day you came, because you needed some training, but each day we spent with you here was time Mother spent capturing more people."

Miri pulled out gloves that matched the outfit and she looked up at Azure in the circle. "I wish you would have openly volunteered, I didn't want to make you my Summoning Spell."

"Miri..." Polo said by the door. His eyes wide open and short of breath. "What have you done?"

"What I had to do?" Miri said as Polo approached the circle.

"But she trusted us!" Polo looked at Azure's body, eye trembling from she had turned into. He curled his hand into fist, growling lightly. "Her shackles are glowing. She has little to no mobility to fight now!"

"Calm down." Miri looked at red mini boot and tossed it aside. "I understand your anger, but we have to face the big picture. Mother is going to find use out and she will crush us. Then the world will have no means of stopping her."

"Not like this!" Polo turned around grabbing Miri collar, her eyes showed no fear. "Azure would have a better idea than this. Like, like looking for this Madam Mayweather should told me about before I brought here. Get outside help."

Miri's eye grew wide that this idea had been brought up before,

but her thoughts told her it was too late and finish the job. Miri pulled Polo's fingers back inflicting pain to get him off of her. She continued sifting through the box without shifting her eyes toward Polo.

"A necessary evil. I will take responsibility for this."

"Get her out of there!" Polo rubbed his fingers.

"I can't!" Miri turned to Polo eye to eye. "I have to complete this spell or she will die."

"You're no different than Mother."

"Duly noted." Miri crossed her arms. "Now get everyone ready, we'll begin the mission in one hour."

Polo stepped back, looking up at Azure in the circle, unsure of what to do or how to free her.

"NOW!" Miri pointed out the door and without saying another word, Polo shook his head negatively and walked away. Once he left the office, Miri placed her hands on the desk, gripping the costumes, she closed her eyes not wanting to shed tears, and gritting her teeth to avoid breaking down. "I'm sorry Azure! You will understand when it's over. I can't watch people suffer anymore. I can't."

Miri clutched her shoulders as her tears fell from her face.

TO BE CONCLUDED...

