

Arcana Magi Memorial

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by H-M Brown

Sora was dressed in her armor. She sat before a council with her back turned to them. With her seat connected to the silver gear on the back of her armored vest, everyone one looked up at the monitor as images of memories played back the incident at Memorial Academy. The council was quiet as Sora took a deep breath remaining calm, clenching the arms of her seat, trying to resist any emotion. When the play back ended, her body relaxed and her head slumped slightly. She was free to move. Sora turned the chair around to face the adults, and in the center was her grandfather.

"Thank you for your report Sora."

"That felt weird." She looked at her hands trembling.

"Oh?" He said making Sora look up. "You will get use to it in time. Right now, our attention is to this matter with Mother."

A young woman, with an implant over her eye, leaned forward. "I propose we send drones into the Sanctum for reconnaissance."

"We'll give ourselves away." A middle aged man with a metallic arm said. "We need the element of surprise."

"Agreed." Grandfather said. "However, without a test subject, we won't know if our armor can enter the sanctum and not get absorbed. After all, the Nocturne was able to siphon Sora's Mana when the Ocular captured the academy."

The council nodded in agreement as Sora listened on. For some reason hearing her grandfather mention the Nocturne taking her Mana, rattled her. Her memory flashed of her being dragged away in the darkness as Azure reached out to her. It switched to Azure being pulled by Mother in the Sanctum and placed her hands over chest.

"Sora!" A woman's voice said from amongst the council, snapping the Sora out of her trance.

She looked up at the angered faces of the council. Their piercing

eyes, judging her just now. Sora straightened her back and sat upright, holding back any tears. She changed her expression to a mature look.

"Forgive me." Her voice matured. It reminded of how Azure's voice matured. "Permission to leave mother."

"Permission granted." Her voice made her heart skip, but she did not hesitate to get up and leave. Once she stepped outside, she heard the sound a wheelchair right behind her. Sora turned around leaning on the wall as the door closed. They waited for people to pass by them through the hallway. "I'm sorry."

"You have a long to go, but you will learn Little Golem."

Sora turned her head and crossed her arms. "I just had a memory of what the Nocturne did to me when you mentioned they took my Mana."

"It's trauma. I hate to say it, but it does happen to people. It's nothing to be ashamed of. Even the toughest of men among us can have it."

"How do I stop it?"

"I don't know. Everyone has their own way of coping with pain."

"Azure."

"We'll get your friend back. Don't worry."

"It's not that. I feel like I failed her."

"Oh?"

"She came for me right away when the Nocturne grabbed me, she didn't hesitate... and here I am not following after her. I didn't even jump in. I feel like I abandoned her."

"Then you've truly failed her."

Sora looked up at her Grandfather driving away on his wheelchair and he turned his head back.

"Well, come on. Let's give you and your Golems a maintenance check. You can't rescue Azure if you're not in good condition... or do you want to keep feeling like you abandon her. Either way you're free to do what you want. Just don't complain about it afterwards."

Without hesitation, Sora nodded and followed her grandfather.

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Ciel was sitting on her bed, knees tucked to chest, staring deeply at her magic circle with her ruby red, pupil-less eyes. The outline of Azure's body imprinted on the surface with the runes on the edge of the circle, brought a strange feeling in her. It felt like Azure should be in there but she was not, however it was more than just that feeling. It was as though she could remember clearly, Azure's personality. Ciel pressed her hands over her head, and tears just fell down her face. There was a knock on the door, but she did not respond. The door opened and Hitomi entered the room.

"Ms. Ciel." She approached the teen watching her wipe her eyes. "Are you okay?"

"I feel her." Ciel slid her over the drawing. "She's fighting the pain, but she feels angry and wanting to fight."

Hitomi looked over at the circle. "This is part of the blood circle. Now that you have a Summon Spell, you can feel your servants."

"She's not my servant. She's my friend." Ciel turned to Hitomi and took her hand. She stared at Hitomi's outfit, pressing down on it. "Azure's costume felt like your outfit. Stuck on her, but her outfit was store bought."

"That girl, Miri, must have converted it into a Servant Suit to allow Azure to become a Summon Creature."

Ciel's eyes shifted away from Hitomi. She tightened her grip on the rabbit girl and opened her mouth.

"Do not apologize to me. I signed a legal binding contract and I receive pay, health benefits and vacation in your family's employ. Your friend however..." Hitomi placed Ciel's hand on the surface of the blood circle. "... she did not and must be freed from this spell."

Ciel closed her eyes, wiping the sweat from her face. She took a long deep breath, struggling to fight the pain in her mind. "Hang in there Azure. I'm coming for you."

"And your brother and I will help."

Ciel looked up to Hitomi and nodded. She leaned her head on the rabbit girl's chest and felt her arms wrap around her as they stare at the blood circle.

* * *

"Come on!" Azure said. "Unlock the shackles! I know you want to eat it Mother!"

She stood in the darkness, dressed in her costume, her body glowing bright. Azure curled her hands into a fist and shook it in the air.

"Unlock the shackles! I'm ready for you!" Azure let out a sigh, and looked at her outfit. She lifted her open front skirt staring at the leotard, never believing she would be wearing this outfit again. She turned her gloved hands and noticed a slight alteration, the gloves were fingerless, exposing her dragon claws. Azure rubbed her forehead, growling under breath over what had happened. "I can't wait to get out of here and punch Miri. I can't believe she did this to me."

She looked at her outfit again. "She could have at least given a new costume to wear. I'm not a big fan of rehashing my old favorites. At least the alterations are nice. Thigh length stockings with knee length boots? I don't know about that combo now, it seems cliché. I look heroic at least."

Azure sat down, crossing her legs over each and resting her arms on her thighs. She quickly rested her head on her palm and just waited. Thinking. Wondering why she has not been attacked yet. She sat herself up, her hands trembled. With a deep breath she closed her eyes. Azure saw where she was at through night vision. A strange room where the walls moved. She opened her, her glowing body had scrambled backwards. Her eyes moved side to side and she realized, she is in her own mind.

Azure felt her physical body. The walls clinging to her like a suit. Her ears picking up strange moaning. It was her voice, but there were others. The moaning was as though something pressed down her mouth. She moved her tongue, the taste was oily. She tightened her teeth with a growl and resisted the pain. Short of breath she stopped feeling the pain and focused her mind.

"I... I don't get it." Azure looked up. "What is she trying to do? Does Mother know what would happen if the shackles are removed? I guess she would."

Azure scratched her head comprehending this strange situation. There was another feeling she was experiencing. She pressed her hand over her heart. It felt like a magic circle. She remembered teaching Ciel her Circular Theft spell and she wondered if her friend was the one she was feeling. She concentrated on that feeling, she could not see Ciel, but she did recognize her circle and saw the outline of her body imprinted on the surface. She smiled.

"Ciel did it." Azure looked up unaware of a group of black lightning bolts sliding up behind her. "There is a chance."

The bolts struck a barrier that startled Azure. She stumbled onto the ground, her eyes trembled and chest heaving with each breath. The barrier exposed four lights around a dome. "The Circle of Four."

The lightning disappeared, and the barrier became invisible again. Azure felt her physical body moved around by something. She hesitated, but she closed her eyes.

Through her night vision, she felt herself hanging off a ceiling, the weight of her shackles pulling down. She could see clearly now that there are people of all ages in the same chamber as her. Their bodies pressed out of the black skin walls coated in oil like substance. Their faces in muffled screams as their arms and legs stretched out. The inside of their mouths turned into a strange vortex, the air entering into it like a vacuum. Her eyes pointed down to the floor and there were animals, undergoing the same process. A horse's face pulled back as though it was peeling. A wolf's tail stretched out into a whip. A cat and a beetle fusing together into one creature, its howl rattled Azure's ears. When she rotated her head up, she saw a woman in shadow, perfectly normal human shape, staring right back at her.

Azure opened her eyes in her mind and dropped to her knees. Her hands pressed the ground, curling up into a fist. Her mouth looked like it was about to vomit, but instead she let out a loud scream. She lifted her body up looking into the air; she could not forget what she saw. The memory looped over and over again, she clenched her hair and tried to fight that pain. She growled in anger.

"Just open the shackles!" Azure got up to her feet. "Do it!"

Azure stomped on the floor. She could feel her voice pushing out of the oily skin, trying to bark at Mother. She took a succession of deep breaths and focused herself, preparing one more time, and she closed her eyes. She stared down Mother. Her hands reached out to the shadow. She tried to signal the woman to open the shackles, but all she did was stare at the teen.

Mother grabbed Azure's wrist and lifted up. The shadow pulled out the impure Mana. That made Azure's body twitch and her scream muffled. Mother lifted Azure's head up and turned it to the impure Mana. She slowly turned it into clean Mana. Mother placed the clean Mana into Azure's mouth and made her eat it.

Azure opened her eyes and saw her body glow bright. It was so clean. The shackles on her wrists, ankles and neck faded slightly. The Circle of Four appeared before her immediately. Azure did not know what say to them. She understood what Mother could do for her and them. But she could sense the objections of the four lights. They do not know what Mother would do if Azure accepted. Azure does not if she should.

With her guard down, Azure's memories of everything she went through being shackled because of impure Mana overwhelmed her emotions. A chance to be free, a chance to no longer be shackled, and it was what she always wanted. The four lights gathered around her. She could sense them pleading with her, she could hear their voices fading away.

"Do not be reckless again." A male voice said among the lights, fading away to a new voice.

"I can set you free from this impure Mana."

Azure stood between the Circle of Four and the darkness where Mother is calling out. The fact that Mother demonstrated she can purify Azure and free her from the shackles was too much to say no. Azure pressed her hands over her chest sensing Ciel's magic circle, she turned to the Circle of Four.

"I trust you, Circle of Four." Her eyes stared deep at the lights and she made the shackles glow. She turned around, closed her eyes, and stepped out of the shield they made for her. The lightning

rolled right at her, striking her body. She disappeared. Azure opened her eyes in the real world. She no longer was aware of herself. Just an animal instinct moaning in the darkness.

Mother cleansed the Mana and fed it to Azure. She watched the teen lap it up like a cat. The woman caressed the teen, giving her loving eyes. The shackles faded slowly as all the Mana was purified, and Mother opened her mouth ready to take it all back.

Suddenly the purple shackles returned with small traces of teal and red along the outer edges. Azure felt the Circle of Four and Ciel. The now purified Mana was locked out to Mother and in a fit of rage, Mother slapped her hands on Azure's hand. The shadow opened her mouth revealing the vortex, and consumed Azure whole.

Mother touched the ground, one hand resting on her back, and one hand resting on her belly, rubbing it gently. She felt Azure inside, fighting and resisting, until the teen slowed down to a complete stop.

TO BE CONTINUED...

