

Arcana Magi Memorial

Vol.6 - c.3

by H-M Brown

Ciel and Azure sat across each other on Azure's bed. There were stacks of artbooks sprawled between them. From hardcovered to magazines, Ciel was introduced to all kinds of sculptures, photos, and canvas paintings. It was overwhelming, even as Ciel scanned the area for any clues. For a brief moment she saw the Circle of Four taking positions at various spots, from the door to the window, acting as guards. The Blue light floated beside Azure as she opened her own artbook.

"So this is what I drew." Azure handed Ciel the book. The first page was a beach with the setting sun.

"This is well done." Something about the image reminded Ciel of something but she could not pinpoint what it was. She flipped to the next page. It was a drawing of a street with cars waiting at the signal light. "I think I've seen this place."

"Don't be silly. It doesn't exist."

The next pages revealed locations Ciel recognized. It was Central Heights. One after another, from the shopping district to the local park, Ciel tried to connect the dots of these pictures.

"Hey Ciel, are you okay?"

Ciel stared deep at the drawing of Memorial Academy. It was vividly detailed and accurate. There were students walking casually along the gate. The next drawing was the dorms. Next were the classrooms. Every location of the campus.

"This is Memorial Academy."

"Hey how did you know that? I just named these drawings yesterday."

"It's where we go to school."

"There's that joke ag—"

"It's not a joke!" Ciel said clutching Azure's shoulders. "Your life

is in danger. Don't you know what happened to you?"

"You're scaring me."

Ciel released Azure as the Circle of Four focused on the girls for a brief moment. Ciel struggled to hold her tears, but she regained her composure.

"Azure..." Ciel said planting her hands together, tapping her lips. "Oh Azure."

Ciel planted her hands on her knees. "Are we in Central Heights?"

"Central Heights?" Azure's moved her head with her eyes lowered in skepticism. "There's no such place, we're in Artland."

Ciel lowered her head to the sound of a door opening. She looked up and Azure turned around.

"Azure!" A woman's voice said. "I'm home!"

"Mom!" Azure stood to her feet with a smile and turned to Ciel. "Wait until you meet my mom. She's cool."

As Azure stepped out of her room, Red floated over a black artbook. Ciel noticed and she walked up to it.

"It is her secret artbook." Red said.

"Secret artbook?" Ciel said, her hands reached over it to sound of thumping outside the room.

"Hey!" Azure said from the door catching Ciel holding it in her hand. "Don't you look at that!"

Ciel noticed Azure in tears and she turned to the book. "What's in it?"

"Please." Azure reached out to Ciel, with a whimper, wiping her tears. "I don't want you to know."

As Azure closed her eyes to wipe away more tears, the sound of the book landing on the floor snapped her out of it. She opened her eyes and found Ciel was gone. The Circle of Four gathered around in shock.

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Mother's eyes stared outward in a trance, on her throne, visualizing the world Azure made. Though it was right before her, she could not reach it. Her illusionary right hand would press upon

that world but bounce off it. She growled tightening the grip of her left hand on the top of Azure's head. The teen nocturne just staring out with a blank face as the image before Mother scanned on the Circle of Four. Unable to do anything else, Mother released Azure. The teen collapsed on the floor, her eyes glazed over and feet twitching.

Red eyes lit up the chamber. Various creatures seeped out of the walls, one by one, slipping into the shadows. Mother rose to her feet tugging on the chain to move Azure, but she saw her still laying on the ground in shock. Mother made the chain glow red, sliding down to Azure. Red electric sparks slid over her body making the teen roar in pain, snapping her out of the trance. Azure whimpered over to Mother, sitting before and receiving a pat on the head. The comfort made Azure's tail wag and she scurried to ward the shadow where she was released upon the world.

Mother then raised her hand gently reaching out to a cloud that reacted to her touch. It roared aloud, vibrating the walls, causing all of the Nocturne to thrash violently. With a smile Mother opened a large portal and watched the cloud lead more Nocturne.

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Ciel opened her eyes on her own bed where Jean-Pierre and Hitomi placed their hands on her shoulder to keep her still. She was unaware that her body was strapped down. Her heartbeat raced rapidly as she received a glass of water from Hitomi.

"Jean-Pierre?" Ciel looking at the straps. "What are you doing?"

"That was me." Hitomi said magically removing the straps. "You were thrashing about and I had to keep you still so you wouldn't hurt yourself."

"How are you able to reach Azure?" Jean Pierre said looking at the Blood Circle. "I thought you were disconnected when Mother took Azure into another realm."

"I don't know. I didn't really have time to think it over once I saw Azure." Ciel looked over to Sora by the window. "We're still trying to figure that out Jean-Pierre."

Sora had her mouth covered and looked away from them. "Azure.

What did she say?"

"She doesn't know were she is, or us."

Sora clenched her fist taking a deep breath.

"Ciel." Jean-Pierre said. "Did you try to recall Azure back from to your circle while you were there?"

"N-no." Ciel felt her heartbeat calm itself. "I didn't think about that."

"Did you find any clues?" Hitomi said.

"Yeah." Ciel said getting up and approaching Sora. "Are you okay?"

"That artbook you picked up." Sora turned to Ciel. "I know what that is."

"Okay." Ciel then explained everything that happened and what the Circle of Four said to her. She leaned backed receiving a change of clothes from Hitomi, much to Ciel's chagrin, and she got up heading to a screen to change. Sora then explained the black artbook as Jean-Pierre looked away, and Ciel spoke. "So we just have to get Azure's artbook and show it to her."

"I don't understand." Jean-Pierre said to Ciel. "Why didn't Azure tell you about the book?"

"Jean-Pierre do you tell your friends every secret you have?"

"No." Jean-Pierre nodded his head. "I see."

"I didn't know either." Sora said. "I just picked it up and looked at it."

"Really smart move." Ciel said stepping out of the screen in a skirt and shirt.

"It was an accident." Sora crossed her arms. "I wasn't trying to spy on her."

"Okay, okay." Ciel approached waving her to change the subject. "Look, what's important right now is getting Azure back. We'll have to go to her house to get the book."

"Cool." Jean-Pierre said. "Let's go."

"Actually," Sora said. "you and Hitomi go and get Madam Mayweather. She told us she was staying with Doctor Patrica at the clinic. Tell her everything. We're going to stop at the Academy to get

some stuff."

"Stuff?" Ciel said.

"I have a few things there to trap Azure with." She saw the disdainful look on Ciel's face. "We have no idea what Mother has done to Azure and you've seen her when she is turned into a Nocturne."

"Right." Ciel said with a deep breath. "You're right."

"Let's go." Sora said, and led everyone out of Ciel's room.

* * *

Sora and Ciel arrived with a black cloud forming above the campus. They looked up at its abnormality. Barely affected by the wind itself. They ran towards their dorm as students and teachers ran for cover. The area was getting darker to the point that the streetlamps turned on. Sora's heart raced while she looked up at the sky.

"It's just like that dome." Sora's glazed eyes stared out at the clouds until Ciel pulled her along. She snapped out of it and hurried with her. They both climbed the hill and their dorm was within the distance. The girls ran for when suddenly, Ciel froze and Sora turned to her. "Ciel?"

"She's here." Ciel revealed her Blood Circle and Azure's summon spell glowed bright. Sora stood beside her.

"Try it."

"Azure... Return!" The circle sparked, there was resistance. "Is it because I'm too far away?"

"Let's find her." Sora said to the sound of sniffing. She and Ciel looked to their right and their eyes trembled. There before them was Azure as a Nocturne, sniffing the ground and the air. The girls unable to express what they were witnessing as the chain dragged behind their friend. She growled before them as Ciel planted her hand on her circle one more time.

"Azure Return!" The sparks shot up off the circle, it was like friction. The loud roar of Azure startled Ciel and she found herself knocked aside by her friend.

Sora made her magic circle appear and she jumped through it.

"GOLEM MODE!" Sora emerged in her Golem Armor and tackled Azure down the hill. They landed at the bottom, but Azure was on top of Sora's body. Azure pushed down hard and made Sora scream aloud. She cringed in pain as the Nocturne continued pummeling on her body like an animal, denting the armor, and prevented her from casting spells.

Azure sniffed at Sora and roared aloud to sound of a her shackles glowing. She looked around and saw Ciel with Blood Circle aimed at her.

"Return Azure."

Azure rushed up the hill to Ciel leaving Sora lying on the ground in shock.

A battle reflected from the surface of the eye. A tear welled up lightly as the muffled sound of grunting and moaning build up. A flash of light and a burst of flames clashed like swords, flickering off her pupil. Sora lay still struggling to get up off the grass. All she could do was watch at the top of the hill, a fight she did not expect. A one-sided battle where Ciel hang inches above the ground due to the difference of height, the tip of her toes struggled to touch the floor. Sora watched her friend try to unwrap the fingers of a black hand around her neck.

Ciel's eyes fought the force of rolling back. Her throat made every effort to gather air. She could not concentrate her mana. Her thoughts were that of surviving. Her heart skipping a beat out of fear of what held her high. The hand tilted Ciel's head back and above the sky, she saw the clouds slurring a black, pink and purple hue. It moved as though it was a living being. The edges of the clouds flowing like hair in the wind. Ciel's eyes trembled how this all could have happened. With tears falling down her cheeks, all senses of hope disappeared.

"Please." Ciel said with a failing voice, and the girlish scream mixed with a dying cat's meow and a singing bird rattled her ears. Ciel's eyes shifted downward and there she stared into the cold red eyes of Azure. The cascade of impure mana flowed down Azure's back. The eyes on her wings looked around recording everything

around her, including Sora lifting herself up. Ciel could see another world beyond the eyes. Her mind could not comprehend it and on the verge of collapse. "Azure."

Ciel's plea went unheard and Azure opened her mouth to roar once more. Looking into the maw of her friend, she could see a vortex of star and clouds circling toward Azure's throat. The sight of it imprinted into Ciel's mind and her thoughts fell into silence. Mana seeped out of Ciel's face and headed toward Azure. But before she had a taste of the clean mist, a bolt of lightning struck the tips of wings and electricity covered her body. Azure released Ciel roaring from pain while her friend rolled down the hill to Sora.

Sora crawled to Ciel and pulled her body to her chest amidst the deafening roar in the sky. Azure roared rushing on all fours like cat, ready to pounce her friends, but another bolt of lightning struck her and her scream was much louder than before. They looked up trying to figure what that was when the sky roared again and Sora realized what that was. The cloud was in pain. It rolled and stretched almost as though it was nursing itself. What the Rain sprinkled out was actually its blood. Sora saw Azure crawl back with a whimper, looking past her and Ciel.

Standing next to them was Madam Mayweather, her cold stare as frightening as the horrors that surround them. A strange whistle echoed from behind the hill and Azure scurried like a loyal dog up the hill. Climbing to the top was a woman in shadow, the veil of darkness hiding her identity, but just like Azure, only her red eyes were clearly visible. They watched in horror as Azure acted like pet, sliding her body on the legs of the woman like a cat, walking around her with purr. She sat on all fours with smile when her ears were scratched.

The purple shackles appeared on Azure. Her collar part of her circle tethered to a leash held by the shadow woman. Azure roared at Madam Mayweather and the girls below taking one step forward. A light tug from the leash made her stop, but she continued growling. Ready to fight for Azure, Madam Mayweather heard strange sounds rising behind the hill. Sounds familiar to Sora that

Ciel felt the Technomancer's hands trembled in violent fashion that she could sense dread.

Red eyes rose above the hill like the rising sun, some in pairs, other single, and most in three or more. Too many in numbers, all hidden in shadow. Difficult to discern height or shape. It did not take long though for complete black wall of darkness to suddenly drop down behind the hill, to the sound of sloshing liquid and the screams of the dying creatures. A trumpet blared in the sky and they found the clouds were partially hidden, and only the red eye the size of hubcaps peered down at Mayweather and the girls.

They ran without looking back, but can sense the creatures are catching up to them. Not too far from the hill was an SUV. The doors opened and Madam Mayweather pushed the girls inside. After she jumped in and closed the door, shadows bounced off the windows, cracking the glass a bit. Patricia struck the gas pedal and with the tires screeching, she drove off. They never looked back, they kept quiet for a moment. They cleared the gate of Memorial Academy and the living cloud consumed the sky. It was like another world was replacing the old one. Madam Mayweather checked on the girls and found Sora and Ciel buried in each others arms crying, shivering like leaves in the wind.

"Where's Azure?" Patricia said turning left on the intersection. Everyone was quiet, unable to say a word. To describe what had happened, but with the clinic nearby, she knew she would get her answer soon enough. Upon their arrival, with orderlies and nurses guiding people inside, the living cloud arrived over the clinic and continued onward across the city.

