

Arcana Magi Memorial

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Azure floated inside a vast space red and purple with her eyes closed. Her head was surrounded by the Circle of Four, each light positioned in four cardinal directions. They just floated in place, as though they were observing her. A wave of energy rippled directly to her brain. They could see within, shards of what was her mind. Each piece put back into place while maintaining her sedation. The Circle of Four noticed physical damage in her brain. They directed energy removing the bruises. They heard her moan, and White saw her eyes twitch. Blue accidentally saw into her memories, but it felt Azure's hand gently guiding it and the others inside.

The Circle of Four saw Azure as a child. They sensed she was ten at this point and standing in the middle of a store. She snatched a small rabbit doll from a shelf. Without fear in her eyes, she walked out the store, and ran around the corner. She looked at the doll with a smile, looking around to make sure no one followed her. Azure ran home, hiding the stuff animal in her deep coat pocket. Just as she opened the door and stepped inside, her mother stood with arms resting on her hips. Her mother's hand reached out, but Azure pleaded innocence. As her mother reached out for the pockets, Azure pushed back, only to get smacked across the face. Azure stood still as she watched her mother take the doll out. Azure was chased into her room, scared of her mother. With the door closed, Azure sat on her bed just staring at the floor with no guilt in her heart.

The Circle of Four were veiled in a white light, and they found themselves at a magic shop. The door opened, and Azure stepped inside. She walked around looking at the books on the shelves. The Circles observed her as she read the titles of each book. The shopkeeper was at the counter watching her with a smile, unaware of her intentions. The books were too big, so she turned to bowls,

and flasks. However, making potions was not what interested her. She noticed the amulets and talismans behind the counter, so there was no way she could get to them.

That was when a man with a metal box entered the store. He got Azure's attention. She grabbed a small cutting board and stood behind the man to form a line. Azure leaned to the side and saw the man open the box. Out came a piece of paper, the lights recognize their drawing; its teal colored outline popped out as if alive, the four arrows with their own colors reflected off the light on the ceiling, the runes written along the band of the circle were as if a story was told, but the center, was blank. While staring at the blank spot, they heard Azure's voice.

"Wings."

The Circle of Four looked at the little girl's back, and they could almost see the wings, but it could never take shape because of her heart. They could see deep into her heart, there was a glimmer of innocence hidden within the corruption. A darkness they could not figure out where it came from. It was just there, at natural level. They noticed the man with the metal box turned his back to look at some equipment, when Azure snatched the paper, and scurried out the store. She was fast. For that brief second the Circle sensed the wings within her heart trying to stop her from stealing but they were pulled away from some dark energy. That's when they discovered it, it was quick like lightning, but they managed to find the source. It was in Azure's own mind. She was willfully and consciously resisting what she felt in her heart.

"Irredeemable." The Circle of Four said together.

"I know." Azure said with her deep mature voice. She opened her eyes as the Circle of Four continued to heal her mind. "My head hurts."

Azure lifted her arms up. They were human. She touched her skin and there were no scales or grooves. She looked at her unclothed body; there was no scales or webbed feet, her back devoid of wings. The shackles appeared over her arms and ankles, and she felt the collar around her neck.

"I still have a long way to go." Azure leaned her back, her eyes trembling at the thought she would never be free. She felt relief from the pain and looked at the white light over her forehead. "Why are you helping me? Wouldn't it be better if I die so you would be free?"

White did not answer as it shot a small beam of light onto her forehead. Azure's eyes lowered from the pain in her head. It was acting as a new dose of painkiller easing the throbbing of pain that Azure was not aware of. Azure turned her eyes away feeling ignored.

"Yeah, I'm messed up in the head. I steal stuff and show no care. I'm not sure why I do it, it's like... it's like some kind of challenge to me. How far can I get away with something before being caught? I always tell myself that. That's why I never feel regret or shame. I don't see the purpose. I have no sense of guilt."

The Circle of Four paused for a moment. Azure kept silent collecting her thoughts. The lights resumed healing her, and she reflected in her memories. She had no way of understanding why they are taking care of her.

"I not sure why I brought you into my memories, maybe I just wanted you to know me. I don't know. All I know is that you four changed my life. When you shackled me, I was scared. I never felt afraid the way I did that day. I guess, maybe..."

Azure thought of her mother and father disciplining her and she just sat in her bed with coldness in her eyes.

"I was never afraid of my parents. Because even if they punished me, I knew it would be over, and I can do whatever I want. They could never stop me. It was a challenge. How far can I be free from parents? But you guys, your shackles were so heavy, I couldn't walk or run. I felt helpless."

Azure placed her hands over her heart as the Circle of Four finished their surgical healing. She saw them float before her, she felt like they were staring at her. Listening to her.

"I don't know how many times I can say 'I'm sorry.' for I have done. I don't think I will ever be redeemed. No amount of good I do will ever correct what I put my parents through, and what I have

done to you." Azure lifted her hands out to the Circle of Four, her eyes slowly welling up in tears. "I don't know who or what I am, all I know... is that I am not human, because a human would know what shame and guilt would feel like and I feel none of it."

Azure wiped her tears from her eyes.

"I must sound stupid to you, and look pathetic." Azure wipes more tears from her face. "I know you want to laugh at me. Like you said, I am irredeemable, so am I crying. I hurt people, so I shouldn't cry."

She opened her teary eyes, staring at the Circle of Four. She felt like they were looking at her with sadness for her.

"I'm so sorry." Azure broke down and cried aloud. "I'm so sorry mom! I'm so sorry dad! I don't deserve either of you. And I'm sorry I stole your magic circle guys."

The Circle of Four made the shackles appear, and they drew her attention to its teal color. Azure noticed that there was no impure Mana seeping out of the shackles, however, there was still impure Mana but it was not from the Circle of Four, it was her own. She lifted her head and felt their warmth.

"You're keeping the impure Mana from killing me. Why?"

The Circle of Four stared at Azure. Their memories flashed on the first night they shackled Azure. As she laid flat on her bed asleep, she struggled to move due to the weight of the bands. They hovered over her tiny body and saw deep into her heart, a conflict between guilt and no regret. When she whimpered an apology, they felt the purity in those words. Their seething anger subsided.

They now see a teenaged Azure, staring at them with a child like innocence wanting an answer.

"We believe." And the Circle of Four returned to the shackles.

Azure struggled to understand the meaning to the answer. She wiped her tear one more time, and smiled.

"Azure!" Ciel's voice made a magic circle of Azure's image appear. It slid over Azure's body, and vanished.

* * *

Sora and Ciel were in Azure's room at Salamander's hideout. They ignored the noise outside. Patricia waited by the door watching Ciel plant her hand on Azure's image to summon her. Sora, in her Golem Armor, leaned on the wall beside Patricia with her arms cross, her cold fixated on Ciel's spellcasting. They all watched the Blood Circle eject Azure and bare feet planted on the floor. Ciel recalled her circle as Azure looked around, trying to get her bearings.

"Azure." Ciel said and her friend turned around.

"Ciel." Azure said and received a hug. Azure rested her eyes, taking a deep breath.

Ciel's eyes grew wide, realizing Azure's pain. She tightened her hug for a moment until Azure pulled back. "Are you okay?"

"No." Azure said with her matured voice, jarring Patricia. "It's all too fresh. Everything."

"Take your time." Ciel lifted Azure's dark brown hair. "You're back to normal."

"We don't have time." Sora said with her eyes focused on Azure. "Patricia needs to check up on Azure and we need to get to the evacuation room."

"What happened?" Azure said as Patricia laid her on the bed. She saw Patricia's magic circle appear. It scanned over her body and statistics appeared.

Sora answered. "Memorial Academy is overrun with Nocturne and the city is fallen."

"No way."

"Look at me Azure." Patricia said with a medical flashlight aimed at the teen's eyes.

"A lot of people have become Nocturne," Sora said with a cold voice as Patricia used a stethoscope. "That cloud above the sky is too close now to save anybody left behind."

"Was I dreaming, or were we in my house?" Azure said and Patricia opened her mouth placing a flat wooden stick, shining a light inside.

"That's how we to get you." Sora pointed to Azure's black

covered artbook.

Azure's eyes twitched as Patricia pat her belly, squeezing along the abdomen.

"Feel anything?"

"No." Azure watched Patricia check every part of her body.

"Mother purified the Circle of Four."

Everyone looked at Azure and she explained briefly what Mother had done to her. Ciel placed her hand over her heart while Sora remained unfazed. Patricia immediately lifted Azure's arms.

"Let me see."

Azure made the shackles appear and Patricia used her circle to analyze it. Patricia looked at the girls and nodded. "She's right. Let me the other circle. Carefully." Azure focused her thoughts and her own circle appeared. It was the first time any of them saw it. It was small and purple. Patricia looked at the runic text, similar to the Circle of Four, but with a different context. There was star pointing at each rune and in the center of that star is a pair of wings.

Patricia analyzed Azure's circle. "These are the same wings as one the Circle of Four."

"It's me." Azure said. "I think."

"Your Mana is impure."

"The Circle of Four are keeping me shackle to lock that Mana in place." Azure stood up to her feet and moved her arms. "See, it's not heavy anymore."

As Azure opened her dresser and pulled out clothes, Sora approached her. "We need to talk."

"I know. I have something to say, but I would like to get dressed first."

"Then hurry." Sora's cold voice stopped Azure from putting on her shirt. She watched Azure continue dressing herself and listened.

"I know I messed up." Azure said. "I should have come to you."

"That's right. After all that talk we had about Technomancer, our support, and you go run off with this group."

Azure sat down and pulled out a pair of sneakers under the bed. She rolled her socks down before slipping on the shoes. "I looked for

Madam Mayweather before I left. So I didn't just run off recklessly."

"And what if Salamander had been working for Mother, this was all a trap."

"Look!" Azure stood to her feet, got in Sora's face, and Ciel placed her hand on Azure's chest to hold her back. "I believed I was making the right choice! Okay!?"

"Enough girls." Patricia stood between them and Sora threw her hands up in the air turning her back on Azure.

"But I was wrong and my parents are paying for it. My parents?" Azure looked to her friends, and Ciel lowered her head.

"They were cocooned when we rescued you."

"You're father?" Azure turned to Ciel.

"Everybody got out in time, but they are over in New London."

"That's good. That's good to hear." Azure placed her hands on the dresser looking down. "I'm so stupid... and all I can say is I'm sorry. I'm sorry for taking all of you for granted."

Sora dropped her arms as Azure turned around.

"I'm so sorry." Azure lifted her head up at everyone looking directly at their eyes. "You all have been by my side, and... and... I'm just sorry for everything I did to all of you."

Sora stepped forward, her eyes made Azure lower her head.

"Then from learn this and never repeat it."

Azure nodded, and Sora rubbed her helmet and spoke with a calm voice. "Jeez, you such a handful Azure. Come on, gather your stuff and let's get to the evacuation room."

Azure grabbed her black artbook, she stared at it for a moment, and hugged it.

Ciel spoke. "Are you sure you're going to be okay?"

"When I save my parents." Azure finished packing and stood before Ciel. "I'm ready to return Ciel."

"What?"

"If I stay out here too long, you're going to get exhausted. You need to save your strength."

"Azure, I don't like the idea that you are my spell. I don't want to send you back."

"It's okay. You need to rest until Patricia can fix this."

"She's right Ciel." Patricia said. "Once we get away from this area, I'm taking you to emergency immediately."

Ciel nodded and made her Blood Circle appear. Azure stood straight as her body glowed and vanished into the circle.

TO BE CONTINUED...

