

Arcana Magi Pure Vol.6 - c.1

by H-M Brown

Ayane turned her body around, looking large grassy field surrounded by trees with brown leaves. Her jacket kept her warm from the breezy wind, but the cool air had no effect on her even if she did stop wearing her jacket. She turned back to her club, all lounging on a blanket relaxing, and Sayako rubbing her shoulders, blowing heat into her hand.

"Takashi" Ayane said getting the tack captain's attention. "Let's gather some wood and building a fire so we can stay warm."

"You can't" Hideki said, cutting off Takashi. "This forest is sacred. The Karasu will not appreciate it, and they will get upset."

Ayane looked at Hideki, walked away, and Tomiko punched Hideki in the shoulder making him raise his hands innocently. Ayane marched right in front of a forest, catching Hideki's attention. She saw a pair of glowing eyes beyond the shrubs and trees. She waved politely with a smile on her face, the shadow rose higher.

"Hello, Karasu-san."

"Ayane, be careful." Hideki said running towards her with everyone following behind.

"We are feeling cold and would like some wood to start a fire, please." Ayane bowed before him as her friends gathered behind her. The shadow slunk back down without an answer, but the sound clanging lifted Ayane's head. Before her was a pile of wood. The sound of more wood piling up along the edge of field had the sound of dominoes falling over as everyone turned their heads. Ayane looked back at the Karasu, who bowed back to her, and lumber away with thumping sound for each step. She turned back seeing Hideki blowing air in relief. "You know, it doesn't hurt to ask you know."

"I know." Hideki said. "But not all of them are nice."

"Have you even talked to them?"

"Well... no."

"There you go." Ayane said, picking up the wood and handed to Hideki. Tomiko, Sayako, and Takashi split off to pick up the other piles. Ayane walked alongside Hideki back to their campsite, and she chuckled a bit. "It's so weird."

"What is?"

"All this time, you chasing a crow away from the window, it was your friend."

"Well I had to keep him away from revealing myself. It's dangerous for the Society or the Clans to know. It's still is."

"Who cares?" Ayane stood before the blanket and placed the wood in a large. "Them keeping things a secret is why we have this problem in the first place."

"It's not easy as you think."

"I can see that, but that's not my point."

Sayako arrived with an armful of rocks. At first Ayane wanted to laugh, but she had her attention to Hideki. Sayako surrounded the wood with the rocks.

"The Karasu spilled this out of the forest so we can contain the fire."

"That's great."

"I couldn't help overhearing your conversation."

"Well join in." Ayane said reaching into her bag and taking out a box of matches.

"Be careful." Sayako said as Takashi and Tomiko returned with more wood.

"It's just fire."

"That can hurt." Sayako inched back slowly and Ayane nodded.

"I'll be careful." The breeze picked up before she lit the match and Takashi stood in the wind's direction to act as a shield. "Thank you."

Tomiko provided a little grass to help ignite the flames better, and the campfire built up. Everyone sat a little closer feeling the warmth. Ayane pulled the blanket over and passed it to Sayako.

"Cover yourself to stay warm."

"Thank you." Sayako pulled the blanket around her back and Tomiko jumped in to share the blanket.

"Yes." Tomiko said. "Some warm heat."

Takashi took out prepared food and utensils. Suddenly, the Cooking Club followed suit, much to Sayako's shock. She kept her mouth shut watching small pots and pans removed from inside their bookbags, but she still could not comprehend how prepared they were to make a fancy meal.

"mmm... Camp Food." Tomiko said.

"That's too rich for camp food!" Sayako said and Takashi tossed a spatula to Hideki.

"How much longer do we have to wait, Hideki?" Takashi said.

"Sorry, but I had to go through this too. Ren kind of has a thing with watching us. Being around nature and understanding it is part of the training."

"Why?"

"He likes to observe people." Hideki jabbed a potato into a skewer. "It's a quirk of his, like he is getting to know you."

Beyond the trees, Ren smoked his pipe with four crows gathered around him. Gon, Hideki's Wisp, landed next to the Elder, watching the smoke float into the air.

"They're mellow." Ren said.

"They're nice." Gon said trembling. "They help each other out."

"I know little dude." Ren took a puff and offered a pipe. "Is the cold getting to you?"

Gon took a puff, with eyes closed, and he exhaled. "Yeah, Autumn, is not too kind."

"All right then." Ren looked at the four crows. "Ready?"

The four crows nodded and they flew with Gon leading the way. Ren hopped forward but he stopped as a Karasu in the shadows got his attention. They looked at each other as Ren took another puff. He nodded, waving the Karasu to go, and he turned to the Cooking Club and Sayako watching them talk with his crows.

* * *

The town in the distance grew further away with each step. Forest began to envelop the area. Mayumi and Keiko walk side by side along a path. Emi and Rumiko tailed behind them. Goro was ahead of the girls sniffing the area. Yuri crawled up a tree looking to get to high ground. Nina followed Koi, making sure she would not get into trouble. Everyone was quiet. The silence was what got their attention, for the only was them and the cool breezy wind blowing past the girls' jackets.

"Shouldn't there be animals?" Emi said.

"This is too weird." Mayumi said as she sped up to Goro. "Did you find anything?"

"No." Goro said looking up. "Yuri?"

"I only see the town!" She said. "But there is something strange ahead of us, but I can't tell what it is!"

"Yuri!" Keiko said with her hand cup over her mouth. "Come down here! Let's not separate too far!"

"Okay!" As Yuri flew down Rumiko and Emi gathered around with Nina carrying Koi by the teeth. The large cicada landed on Goro's head as he towered over the girls. "I don't like what I am seeing ahead."

"Is it dangerous?" Nina said.

"No, but, I'm scared to go that direction."

Emi felt Koi climb her arm and felt her shivering over her shoulder. Emi caressed her long body to calm her. "Koi is scared too."

"I think we should turn back." Goro said.

"I hate to say it," Rumiko said. "but, I agree. Something is wrong with this forest, even the wind. I have never felt it this cold at this time of year."

"Well it is Autumn." Mayumi said and Keiko nodded.

"Maybe its just one of those cold snaps." Keiko looked back towards the direction of the town and saw the two men the Society sent to follow, just waiting in the distance. "I'm surprised they haven't come to drag us back."

Rumiko and the girls looked at the men. "They probably want to

see what we find. I wouldn't be surprised if they ran out of clues at this point."

"Still..." Mayumi said. "it creeps me out seeing them there."

"I say we lose them." Emi said looking forward in the direction they were heading.

"No." Rumiko said walking past Emi. "They could be of use to us. As long as they're not making any moves toward us, there's no point in ditching them."

Everyone followed Rumiko, and the two members of Society kept their distance talking on the radio.

As the group walked deeper into the forest, the sun had shifted, noting that it was the afternoon. Rumiko was atop a tree and no longer saw the town in the distance, but can see the mountains nearby. It was like Mayumi described it, but it look so far away. Once she climbed down to regroup, the smell in the air had a thickness to it. It caught the Clan members off guard as they struggled to breathe, their bodies shivering violent as they were fighting the flu. The girls did not know what do. Goro lifted his head up with teeth gnashing at what was ahead.

"What is this feeling?" The dog said as his body unwilling stepped back away from the direction they were going.

"Something..."

"Why...?" Nina looked at herself while Yuri flew behind her like a shield. "Why do I have the urge to leave?"

"The air is so thick." Yuri said.

Emi held Koi tight, despite clawing to break free. "Koi stay still. You're safe."

"Yeeeeehhh." Koi pulled herself free and ran towards the men.

"KOI!"

Goro growled in frustration pounding the ground, but Keiko hugged him, looked him in the eyes and nodded. "We'll be okay. Go. Don't push yourself."

"But..."

"Take Yuri and Nina out of here and get Koi before we lose her."

"Mayumi?" Nina said with tears in her eyes.

"Keiko's right. Go. Tell everyone when you get to town."

"That's your mission." Rumiko told Yuri placing her friend on Goro's back. Mayumi rested Nina on the dog's back as well. "Koi is not too far. Now go."

"I'm sorry." Nina said, but Mayumi shook her head in rejection.

"It's not your fault."

The girls watched, the Clan member scurry away past the Society soldiers. They felt their hearts weighed down, by what happened. Emi took a deep breath.

"They were in pain." Emi felt Rumiko's hand on her shoulder.

"Something ahead got to them." Rumiko faced the direction they were going. "The air has a thickness to it that only they can sense."

"Now we know why the animals in the forest are gone." Emi walked forward and the girls followed until the sound of jogging from behind caught up to them. They turned to the men from the Society and they kept their distance.

"We're taking you girls home." The soldier on the left said.

"We've seen enough, this area is dangerous now."

"We can't." Emi said. "We have to get to the valley and find out what happened to the Mukado."

"Ma'am," The man on the right spoke into the radio. "the girls are refusing to come back."

"Put them on." Mrs. Saito's voice echoed from the radio and the man held it before the girls pressing the button.

"Saito-san we can't go back." Emi said.

"There is no discussion. All of four of you are to return to town immediately. I have a search to retrieve Nina and the others, if they haven't scattered."

"But we need to know."

"Akamatsu-san." Mrs. Saito's words silenced the girl. "We are taking care of this. We have helicopters ready to fly over the area and we have crew that is going the valley you mentioned."

"You don't understand."

"Emi." Mayumi said getting her sisters attention. "We should... we should listen this time. You saw what happened to Nina and the

others.”

Just as Emi was about to speak, a loud chirping sound echoed in the air. The sound of something breaking turned everyone's heads to the left. A small plum of dust rose off a tree. Rumiko took a step but the right guard pulled her back and went himself. As his partner reported over the radio, the guard found stone pieces on the ground. He picked it up and found stone wings, bird feet, and a beak. He looked back at everyone and the mist enveloped everybody.

However, the mist left a wide open area around the girls and the guard. The other guard screamed out loud. It was a scream unlike any other. It was not even human. As the girls looked at the mist around them the other guard approached his partner calling into to Mrs. Saito.

“There is a mist around us...” He said walking through the miss out of sight. “and something happened to...”

His scream echoed across the sky. Mayumi stepped forward, but Emi gripped her sister's shoulder, trembling like a leaf. Keiko and Rumiko took long deep breaths as they all listened to the scream. Mayumi and Emi took small steps forward, but when Rumiko looked back, the mist was right on her and Keiko's back. Rumiko pulled Keiko into the twins and she fell over. The mist moved close to them but stopped short. Keiko and Rumiko sat up and realized why it stopped moving when they turned to Mayumi and Emi hiding their faces in a hug.

“Come in.” Mrs. Saito said over the radio. “Is anybody there?!”

“no...” Rumiko said. She and Keiko saw the statue of the guard with the radio in hand. His body twisted in convulsion, his face in total pain, frozen in time forever.

TO BE CONTINUED...

