

Arcana Magi Pure Vol.6 - c.4

by H-M Brown

"It can't be." Emi stood before the shrine. Identical to the Shrine of Hikari. "I don't understand."

Rumiko helped Mrs. Saito bring out the injured pilot and co-pilot as Keiko held onto Mayumi, who was struggling to approach the shrine. "A little help here Emi."

"Oh, sorry." Emi hurried to aide Keiko and Rumiko stared at the shrine as Mrs. Saito talked with the pilot and co-pilot.

Rumiko felt a strange presence. It affected everyone and Mayumi's hand reached out to the shrine. A large hand made of mist grabbed the co-pilot and he screamed out turning to stone. Mrs. Saito helped pull the pilot away from the mist and it started moving close to them.

Rumiko stood quiet, staring out at Mayumi slowly approaching the shrine. Keiko cast a spell at the structure before them while Emi stood before her sister calling out to her and Mrs. Saito struggled to pull Mayumi away. The sound of Keiko screaming out for Rumiko was faint and distant. Her mind just clicked like a light and a memory began. Rumiko stood before a woman, sitting on her knees behind a curtain, barely seen in her kimono. The teen fond herself in her new costume, that Natsume made, and surrounded by other adults in ninja garbs. Their specialized knives, the kunai, aimed at her. Two old people, also in kimonos sat behind Rumiko, their piercing stare kept her from raising her head.

"Forgive me." Rumiko said. "I had to do it. It was an emergency."

"Excuses." The old lady said.

"Grandmother, please understand. The city is at stake. Everyone's lives may be in danger. I have to go with my—"

"Irrelevant." The old man said.

"Father, please." The woman said before Rumiko. "Let her report

and I shall judge accordingly.”

“She is a curse and has used her Magic Circle.”

“She knew better.” Grandmother said and Rumiko's mother raised her hand up to silence everyone.

“Speak... my daughter.”

Rumiko told them everything that has happened. When she finished, the crowd whispered amongst themselves and the grandparents clenched their hands on their kimonos.

“I see.” Mother said. “And you realize the danger you bring to our family by exposing your Magic Circle.”

“Yes.” Rumiko said lowering her head to the floor. “Please, if the city is in danger, I must help and protect us all.”

The silence in the room got to Rumiko. Tears welled up, despite her restraint. She closed her eyes prepared for her punishment, then suddenly she saw a light underneath her.

“Sit up.” Grandmother said and Rumiko complied, wiping her tears. “We shall restrain you for violating our ways.”

Rumiko watched a pair of shackles latch onto her wrists. She closed her taking a deep breath, and nodded in acceptance.

“Now for your mission.” Her mother said. “You will aide your friends and investigate this valley. You may keep this outfit and your spells are restricted to level one.”

Rumiko saw the number one on the shackles her eyes grew wide. Her smile widened.

“Don't be too happy.” Grandfather said erasing Rumiko's smile. “This is an important situation. Do not take it lightly.”

“Yes grandfather.” Rumiko said with a bow.

“Leave us.” Mother said and all the adults slinked into the darkness, the sound of doors closing echoed the chamber. Mother turned to Rumiko and pulled the curtain revealing herself. She stood up and walked toward Rumiko. She took her daughters hand, the skin tone in contrast to each other. The grandparents took a long deep breath, and their eyes pierced once again. “You are punished for violating our family's rule.”

“I understand.”

"It will be administered after you return and report."

"I understand."

"If you do not return, we will kill you."

"I understand."

Rumiko's mother looked toward her parents and they nodded.

"We are aware of the situation."

"What?" Rumiko's lifted her head, her eyes frozen.

"Information is not beyond us." Mother caressed Rumiko's cheek with gentleness. "Now that we have this new information, thank you."

Rumiko pulled her hands away, but her mother yanked them back, exposing the shackles placed on her.

"You will serve us well." Mother said as the shackles glowed bright, lighting up the room more.

The brightness blurred Rumiko's vision and it corrected to Keiko casting another spell with her staff.

"Flamethrower!" The stream of fire bounced off the shrine. She looked back at Rumiko staring at them. "DO SOMETHING!"

Natsume's voice echoed in Rumiko's mind. "I never knew you could cast spells."

Standing before the girls in Natsume's room, Rumiko turned her head, struggling to admit her abilities. "It's not something I tell everyone."

"There's nothing to be ashamed of." Keiko said approaching Rumiko with a smile on her face. "We're in this together."

As Keiko's hands reached out, Rumiko saw Natsume's room change to the shrine and Keiko's hands held up Rumiko's to snap her out.

"What's wrong?" Keiko said unaware of Rumiko channeling Mana.

"Help me." Rumiko whispered with tears and her hands pressed on Keiko's stomach. "Lightning Ball."

Electricity enveloped Keiko and she stumbled back, writhing in pain. Emi saw what happened. "NOOOO!"

Mrs. Saito rushed towards Rumiko channeling Mana, but

Rumiko flicked her hands. "Kunai Bolt."

Electricity shaped like the kunai knife flew and struck Mrs. Saito. She dropped to her knees and saw a magic circle underneath her on the ground. For a brief second she saw the runes on the outer edge, and a pair of claws shaped like lightning reaching out to a star drawn in the middle. She looked up at tear soaked teen, her eyes showing a struggle. Mrs. Saito raised her hand up, causing Rumiko to pause. She saw the shackles on Rumiko's wrists and her hand covered her mouth.

"Oh dear, no." Mrs. Saito stretched her hand out. "It's not your-"

"Cold Shock." Rumiko's hand reached out to the sky and blue lightning struck Mrs. Saito. The spell ended and some ice covered Mrs. Saito's body. Rumiko's chest heaved as she looked up at Emi holding Mayumi back.

Keiko lifted her head, struggling to her feet. She pointed her staff at Rumiko, but then she heard a strange noise. It was the sound of stone scrapping the ground. She looked up and saw coming from the mist, a large stone Mukado. Gunshots struck the stone monster, it came from the pilot. A small stone Mukado emerged and he shot it into pieces. He crawled away as best as he could firing at each one. Emi, hugging her sister to slow her down, took a deep breath watching each stone shatter. With anger in eyes, she looked directly at Mayumi.

"Fight her."

"I... can't..." Mayumi said. "The city... is in danger..."

"No, don't listen." Suddenly, Emi had a vision. It came from the Shrine of Hikari. She saw the city surrounded by white mist. The shrine invoked fear of its invasion and Emi experienced that emotion. "No... I... I don't what to do."

"Please..." Mayumi said with tears in her eyes. "Our parent... our friends... Kurai will kill... them..."

Emi looked at Mrs. Saito lying injured, Rumiko struggling in shackle, Keiko barely standing fighting off the stone creature with the pilot. She hugged Mayumi. "I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault." Mayumi her body relaxed. "Kurai knew what

she was doing.

"Goddess Hikari called for me." Emi said stepping back.

"Does she know about Kurai's plan?"

"Yes." Emi looked back at the stone creatures pausing before Mrs Saito and pilot, Keiko nursing her shoulder, and Rumiko shivering in shock. "I thought we stopped them."

"Will it hurt?" Mayumi said and Emi turned to her sister. "The ritual."

Emi looked at her left wrist, the runes etched on her skin. With a deep breath she nodded. "Is there another way? Is there?!"

Emi looked out Mrs. Saito as Mayumi approached the Shrine. "How do we stop Kurai from destroying the city?!"

Mrs. Saito shook her negatively. "I don't know."

"Run." Mayumi said as she stood before the structure, and she opened her arms out before the Shrine and a burst of wind blew into her.

Emi ran to girls and followed Mrs. Saito and the pilot through the parting mist. As they navigated around the stone Mukado, the mist pulled towards the Shrine. Each pass of the mist ached Emi's heart. She felt Keiko's hand pulling her along, keeping Emi from slowing down. They made their way down the hill, endless mist moving past them. There was no end.

Rumiko stopped walking. Everyone looked back. Her eyes wide and frozen, looking at her wrists. She turned to the mist and Mrs. Saito understood what she thought.

"NO RUMIKO!"

Rumiko jumped into the mist. She stood with her eyes closed, expecting pain. Welcoming death. It never happened. She turned her head towards everyone and realized she was not harmed. Rumiko looked back at the shrine watching the mist pull towards Mayumi. She turned to Mrs. Saito, her shackles glowed bright.

"Rumiko, I can help you." Mrs. Saito reached out with her hand as Keiko turned to the woman shocked at her kindness. "Those shackles are hurting you. I can undo them and arrest whoever did this to you."

"What do you mean?" Keiko said.

Rumiko eyes trembled with fear. She reached out at first but she pulled back. She hugged her shoulders and turned around, walking to the Shrine.

"Rumi-chan." Emi said. "What happened to you?!"

Emi voice never reached Rumiko as mist took her out of sight. She felt Mrs. Saito pulled her close and led her away.

It was a long walk. The mist had no end. They followed trail, down a slope. There was no sense of direction. Even the sky was blocked. Their injuries drained most of their energy. Mrs. Saito stopped and set the pilot on the floor. She waved the girls closer, sitting them down.

"Mayumi." Emi said and the mist died down. The sky cleared up. They were surrounded by stone. Plant life, wildlife, even the river. The moon made the area look like a graveyard.

Mrs. Saito checked her comm. It was broken. Shorted out from the crash. She leaned back on a stone deer, in near breakdown. The pilot sat himself up, checking his injury.

"Are you all right?" Mrs. Saito said.

"My leg is broken." The pilot said.

"Mrs. Saito," Emi said. "what happened to Rumi-chan?"

"She betrayed us." Keiko said.

"No." Mrs. Saito looked at the girls. "Those shackles are suppressants. She is being controlled by someone. Oh jeez, how could I be so stupid and not see it?"

"See what?"

"When she was at my house with all of you."

"Don't beat yourself ma'am." The pilot said. "I don't think these girls knew it either."

"I don't know what to believe anymore." Keiko said.

"Believe in me." Mayumi said from above the sky. There she floated in a similar costume as Emi's orchalchalm suit, but it was colored black and red, her eyes blue as the sky, and strange metal like wings floating behind her back that was luminescent and coated with white mist. "I shall lead you to the truth."

"Oh my..." Mrs. Saito said.

"What is that metal thing?" Emi said. "It doesn't look like orichalcum."

"It's vermillion."

The sound of a helicopter in the distance got Mayumi's attention. She was so bright in the night sky she stood out. Distracted, Emi raised her arm up, channeling her Mana. "SHADOW BLAST!"

A blast of purple and black shadow shot out of Emi's fingers. It struck Mayumi in the stomach, sending her in a freefall. Suddenly, someone caught her in the air. She landed with Mayumi nursing her pain, the light shine over Rumiko.

"Rumi-Chan." Emi said.

"Leave." Rumiko said, leading Mayumi away, and the helicopter's searchlight scanned the area. Rumiko was signaled by Mayumi to stop and the priestess turned to Emi.

"Goddess Kurai demands a duel with Hikari."

"What?"

"As priestess you will tell you Goddess, or we will destroy the city."

"No!" Emi said. "I won't go back, and I won't fight you."

Mayumi slipped her hands under Rumiko's arms and flew her off back to the Shrine. All Emi could do was watch helpless with Keiko by her side, and Mrs. Saito flagged the helicopter towards them.

TO BE CONCLUDED...

