Arcana Magi Zero Arc 2 - c.4

by H-M Brown

Inside Megumi's home at the shrine, Megumi sat in her regular clothes before two Society Agents and two dog sized foxes. Outside the sliding door, Elder Nemo with two small female foxes, had his ear leaned to listen to Megumi's story, in Japanese, of what happened with their fight with Karin. She held Marissa's hand as she told her story, hands shivering with everyone around her. She felt blame from them, even though their expressions showed no emotion. Megumi felt Marissa's hand comforting her, giving her time to answer questions, while Madam Mayweather interpreted key words to Marissa to fill in the blanks that she could not understand.

“Mom.” Megumi said looking a Marissa. “Am I making my Japanese to hard for you?”

“You're doing fine sweetie.” Marissa caressed Megumi's hair.

“It's all I know.” Megumi looked at one of the Society agents just staring at her. “I want to tell you but I can't. Karin said its madness that I can't remember what happened to us. Why won't you believe me?”

“Okay… okay.” Marissa pulled Megumi into her arms and Madam Mayweather turned to the agents. “You don't have to answer anymore.”

“We have more questions?” One of the agents said and was met with Marissa's scowling face.

“What part of traumatized do you not understand?!”

“That will be all.” Madam Mayweather said to the agents.

“We insist.”

Nemo snarled. “You will leave Ojou-sama now. This is her home and property. You will show respect.”

The two foxes stood up acting as a shield. The agents nodded to each other and walked out of the house. While the foxes escorted

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the agents away from the house, Megumi lifted herself up and approached Nemo.

“Oompa,” Megumi said in English. “you believe me don't you?”

“I do. I can't tell at the moment, but I sense something is off with you and Alysia.”

“I agree.” Madam Mayweather said. “Unfortunately, with Alysia unconscious, we can't get her side of the story.”

“What about this madness… thing?” Marissa said.

“Madness is a difficult thing to break.” Madam Mayweather said. “But it can be undone.”

Nemo leaned close to Marissa. “Megumi could go through meditation in the hot springs. We have herbal medicines that could help clear the mind. My children will assist you.”

“Mom?” Megumi said standing up. “Will you help me?”

“Of course honey. Anything you need.”

“Perez-san?” Nemo said.

“Please call me Marissa, and no san.”

“Marissa, you may partake in the process as well and share the springs with Ojou-sama. There is strength in family.” Nemo looked at Megumi with assurance to her that Marissa was not an outsider to him.

“Thank you.”

“Thank you Oompa.” Megumi hugged the Elder and nuzzled her.

“You two gather the females and have them make preparations for Ojou-sama, send out escorts to them to the springs. Take the back way, I don't want any of the Clans or members of the Society to interfere or intercept. Ojou-sama, as soon as you overcome your affliction, come back here to immediately.”

“I understand.”

“I will stay here with your husband for when Alysia awakens so I can keep the Society in check.”

Madam Mayweather stepped out of the house. “I will talk with other members of Clans and Ren to find out how deep we are all in with this mess with the Akamatsu twins. I understand their parents are here as well.”

“Yes.” Nemo said.

“Very well.” Madam Mayweather turned to Megumi. “Be strong.”

“Thank you.”

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Marissa went into a bedroom, devoid of basic furniture and wall furnishings. Alysia laid on a futon on the floor in pajamas while Arturo held her hand. Alysia and Arturo had bandages on, due to the Karin's attacks. Marissa sat on her knees placing her hand on Alysia's head. Her eyes held back her tears as she watched her daughter's eyes shift back and forth.

“She's dreaming.” Marissa looked up to her husband. She heard a light whimper, her eyes almost gave up to tears. Marissa leaned closer to Alysia and kissed her forehead. “My baby.”

“She'll be fine.”

“It's my fault. I'm a bad mother.”

Arturo took Marissa's hand. “No, you're not. You are here for the girls. That is not act of a bad mother.”

“I should have been tougher with their… heroics. Kept them home when I wanted them to. Keep my foot down.”

“Alysia and Meg have saved so many lives. They saved an entire city.”

“I know, but… look at them. Look at Alysia.” Marissa rested her head on her daughter's chest whimpering. She felt herself lifted and Arturo looked her in the eyes.

“We should not shame them for helping people even if they come home injured.” Arturo placed his hand on Alysia's bandaged head. “We need to understand the risks that come with this responsibility and we need to give them support. You saw it yourself, they have been trying to reach us all year about what happened to them here, and they can't. You have no idea how hard it's been hard for me to understand our daughter's pain. To give them answers.”

Marissa's eyes grew wide at Arturo's comment. She lowered her head, but Arturo raised it up. She nodded, sliding her hand away from Arturo.

“I'm going to take Meg to the hot springs. Nemo said that they will make some herbal medicine for her to help overcome the madness.”

“See if they can send some here for Alysia.”

“I will.” Marissa stood to her feet and left Arturo and Alysia.

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At the spring, Megumi floated in the water while Marissa slowly stepped waded into water. The female foxes removed the towel from the mother allowing her to submerge her body. Megumi watched the foxes gather the bathroom supplies by the shower head, and carry the sitting stool with their hand shaped mana. Her eyes traced one of the foxes approaching a small campfire surrounded by rocks, boiling a teapot. It let its steam and the fox removed it. As Marissa waded across the spring, approaching Megumi, the fox carried over a tray with the teapot, two cups and bowl filled with medicinal herbs.

Megumi and Marissa watched on as the fox prepared a cup. When the fox was about to make another, Megumi raised her hand.

“Can you send that cup to Alysia please?”

“We will prepare one for her,” The fox said while stirring. “Ojou-sama, but we have to give Marissa a cup in order to proceed, or she will have to step out.”

“It's okay Meg. They will take care of her.”

Megumi nodded and they both took their cups. As they took their sips, the fox carried the tray away, and headed for the house. The remaining female foxes sat by on stones surrounding the spring. Marissa felt a little uncomfortable, but Megumi looked at them with admiring eyes.

“You missed home?” Marissa said as Megumi took another sip. She watched Megumi sigh, trying to find that answer. She could tell Megumi tried not to offend her.

“I was just a kid when I was here. I have nothing here to remember my family with.” Megumi took another sip and saw Marissa turning sad and the couple of foxes looked at each other. “That's not to say I don't remember my mom and dad. Or my

grandparents, it's just… everything happened so fast that day.”

Megumi and Marissa finished their cups and placed them on the rock. One of the foxes removed the cups from the area and pointed to the center of the spring. “Please proceed to the center, and we will begin. You don't have to close you're eyes, just relax and that's it.”

Megumi and Marissa floated over to the center. The warmth of the water and herbal drink, relaxed the muscles. The aftertaste left a licorice scent in their nose as if they had eaten wasabi. The scent of the trees filled their lungs. A light hum echoed into the air, making its way into their ears.

Marissa turned her head and watched the female foxes sing. It sounded soft. It resonated in her head. She could feel the beauty of the song reaching for her heart. She wrapped her arm around Megumi, her daughter nestling into her chest. It was like holding Alysia, but at this moment, in her mind and heart, this was about her and Megumi. Marrisa felt Megumi's hands grip her arms, a childlike grasp. She felt Megumi's heart beating as well as her own. The fox's song repeated in her mind as a warm light emerged from the spring. Marissa felt like she was floating in the air and she watched Megumi float away from her. For some reason though, she was not scared for her separating, her mind was ready for what she was about to see.

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“AIR BURST!” Alysia said as Megumi flew over her sister on her Mana Glider spells. A pair of men blew back into the trees. “Mana Glider!”

Below Megumi was the Sacred Trunk. The young foxes, as big as horses, were fighting back against one man. He was powerful, his spells impaled the foxes with spears, killing them instantly. Alysia twirled Saga over her head and swung a wave of light at the trespasser, but he blocked it ease. When Megumi's golem threw a punch at him, the fist was caught by the man barehanded. Megumi shook her head from shock as her spell broke into pieces.

Looking down at the trunk, a pillar was opening and the man smiled at its presence. The foxes tossed a flurry of spells at the man,

but it only slowed him down. They created ropes of light that wrapped, Nemo lunged from out of the trees pushing the trespasser back, but it was not even to overpower him.

Alysia raised Saga over her head. She channeled her mana next to Megumi. She saw her sister sliding back a bit as a ball formed over head, but it was big enough. “Please Meg. I need more mana.”

Megumi flipped the pages of Fable and drew a vortex. Keeping the vortex in the drawing she planted her hand and drew mana in.

“NOOO!” Nemo said and blast of wind pushed him and foxes back. He saw the trespasser push forward, fingers close to touching the pillar over the trunk.

The girls channeled so much mana their bodies were stretching apart.

“PYROOOO…. “ Alysia's body turned to light along with Megumi. “…MAELSTROOOM”

Alysia released the spell onto the trunk. The trespasser screamed and a large dome of flames reached above the trees. Birds flew into the air. Forest animals ran alongside the foxes, the last image Megumi saw before she free fell in the light with Alysia, screaming together.

Megumi opened her and sat up. She crawled over to Alysia trying to get up while holding her head in pain. The girls looked around. They were surrounded by grey mana. They were unsure if they were flying or standing. Their sense of direction warped, and pain kicked in. The mana they were absorbing stretched their muscles. They developed headaches as images of the universe and planets flashed in their minds. The girls saw things beyond their imagination. It felt like they were looking inside time itself. Their minds could not handle it and their bodies collapsed into the fetal position. Their voices struggled to scream. Then it stopped, and Marissa opened her eyes.

Alysia and Megumi sat up on their knees. Standing before them was Karin dressed in her costume. She had a smile that was welcoming as gloved touched theirs. Karin stood them up and introduced herself.

“My name is Karin Mayweather. I come from the Byakko Universe.”

“I am Alysia Perez.”

“And I'm Megumi Miyazaki-Perez.”

“Welcome to the Manasphere. Which universe do you come from?”

“We don't know.” Megumi said but Alysia snapped her finger.

“I get it. We're with the Pillars.” Karin tilted her head while Megumi smiled.

“Really Lys?”

Alysia nodded. “Yeah.”

“There's no such thing as Pillars here.” Karin said raising her arms out at the mana. “This is the Manasphere. You got here by overchanneling your mana. You must have unleashed some powerful spell in your universe.”

Alysia and Megumi looked at each other. Karin took their hands and she walked them through the mana. “Come on. This is where the five universe get their mana from. The Mana Spirits take care of this place.”

“Wait.” Alysia stopped walking. Her eyes twitched. “Are we dead?”

“No no.” Karin hurried back to Alysia. “You are very much alive. Just like me. We just went beyond mana itself.”

“Beyond?” Megumi said.

“I'll show you.” Karin led the girls through the Manasphere. When they exited they were physically in space in the form of mana. Karin showed them how mana began and how mana ends in the passage of time. She showed them five variations of the north star through a window and the multiple earths. Karin flew them across space and they floated above the sun without it burning them alive. She even guided them through a black hole and they watched their bodies stretch into a noodle. Over time, the girls returned to the Manasphere. The knowledge they now have inspired Alysia and Megumi to do things, although Karin stood there quiet.

“Can we see more?” Alysia said.

“Lys, maybe we can save more people.”

“Yeah.” Alysia reached out to Karin. “How about it?”

Karin lifted her hand with hesitation, but with a smile on her face, she grabbed Alysia and the girls flew off together.

Suddenly, one day, the girls were yawning, and loafing.

“So how about we watch some planets form?” Alysia said.

“We already did that.” Megumi said.

“How about… we watch a supernova.”

“I've seen a hundred times before you guys showed up.” Karin said.

“I'm boooored.” Alysia rolled onto her back looking up at the mana. “I'm going home and get out of this costume I've been wearing since we got here.”

“You can't. We're just mana to everyone. They won't see us.”

“Aren't you tired of wearing your costume Karin?”

“Nah. It makes me feel special.”

“Let's be serious for a moment.” Megumi said and the girls listened. “Karin can they sense us?”

“They'll just sense us as Mana not actually people.”

“So you're telling me we're trapped here forever.”

“No, no. Valdegaurd has been trying to find a solution.”

“Well she is very slow.” Alysia said standing up.

“Will we get to see her?” Megumi said.

“When she's ready.” Karin turned her head and saw Darius approaching the girls.

“Hello ladies.”

“Hi Darius.” They said as Alysia gazed at the young man. She turned her head to the side trying to no make eye contact.

“I have good news.” Darius reached into his pocket and took a small notebook. “Valdegaurd made actual contact with a person in the Suzaku Universe.”

“Really?” Megumi said with a smile.

“Who is she?” Karin said.

“Her name is Oryn Zentharis. She is acting as an agent for us and made these spells out of equations. This will allow us to enter

the Universe in our physical bodies.” He handed the book to Karin. “Study them well. Valdegaurd has a plan.”

The girls began to practice the spell. They were enjoying the new challenge, the boredom now subsiding. Soon, the girls stepped out of a portal in the middle of a road. Alysia picked up a rock and Megumi felt the wind blowing through her fingertips.

“We did it!” The girls hugged each other with smiles and Darius stepped out of his own portal.

“Feels good?” Darius said and the girls nodded.

“We can go home.”

“Of course.” Darius said with his arms leading them back into the portal. “We just need you girls to make a delivery in your universe.”

Upon entry, they walked past Myrianna separated Karin from the girls. Alysia looked back but Darius placed his hand on her shoulders.

“Karin is with us.”

“She can come with us Darius. Right?”

“She doesn't belong in your universe and we can't risk tampering your home.”

“Oh…” Alysia tried to figure out what he meant by that since they all can go home now without any problems. Darius, however, kept her focus on moving forward.

“I'm here Lys.” Karin said following them with Myrianna behind her. “Everything will be okay when we see Valdegaurd.”

Despite what Karin said, her hands started shivering and she could not understand why. Something in her mind was trying to surface as she watched Alysia and Megumi continue onward with Darius behind them. It was almost like she was never going to see them again. She stretched her right arm out but she felt Myrianna's hands on her shoulders, comforting her.

“We're here.” Darius said and watched the girls stopped a few paces ahead. “Valdegaurd wants you two to make a delivery.

Alysia and Megumi looked around for Valdegaurd, but a pair of metals appeared before them. One was covered in black mana and

the other was covered in white mana.

“The metal covered in white mana is called Vermillion, the other is Orichalcum. They're only found in the Byakko Universe where Valdegaurd comes from. You are to deliver these to our agent Satoshi in Japan.”

“Oh, that's all?” Alysia said and Darius nodded.

“Okay.” Megumi said unaware of Karin holding her head in pain. “Where in Japan?”

“At these two shrines in you hometown. Valdegaurd had them built back in 1949 and she needs you two to wait there at that time era for Satoshi until you reach your present time. Then you can go home.”

“We can't wait all those years.” Alysia said and Megumi nodded.

“Don't worry Valdegaurd figured a way to make this work.” Darius stepped further away as strange feeling in the mana made the girls turn around.

“NOOOO!” Karin pulled herself forward but Myrianna held her down. She watched the mana turn into a pair of hands pushed through Alysia and Megumi's bodies. She heard their screams reach horrifying sound that she never heard before. As their bodies fell over, there were two ghostly bodies of Alysia and Megumi floating in the grip of the mana hands. The Orichalchum and the Vermillion turned into metallic wings. Karin's eyes welled in tears as she watched the mana hands slip leotards, gloves, and thigh length boots onto the ghostly bodies. The metal wings then attached themselves onto their backs and hairclips snapped into place on their hair making the pupils of the eyes disappear. Karin broke free and dropped to her knees over Alysia and Megumi's physical bodies, hearing them gasping for air and their glazed eyes welled with tears.

“It's okay Karin.” Alysia's ghostly form said. “I feel so free now.”

“Yes.” Megumi said with a smile. “This experiment will work.”

“What happened to you?” Karin said.

“Our souls are free now.” Alysia said. “We can truly see beyond the mana.”

“Goddesses.” Darius said bowing to the them. “Go to your shrines and wait as planned.”

“Yes.” The girls said and they flew through a portal between the mana hands.

Darius grabbed the arms of Alysia and Megumi's physical bodies, and dragged them like sacks to another portal. “As for you two, you will keep Karin's counterpart in your world trapped in you city. The plan will take some months to prepare since we have to wait on Mother and her Nocturne, but you will know when to act once Valdegaurd begins. Go now.”

The girls stood to their feet, quiet, hugging their shoulders. Alysia looked back at Darius, his expression was cold removing any feeling she had for him. Unable to say anything to Karin as she remained pin down, Alysia's view of her was blocked by the young man and he pushed her and Megumi through the portal.

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Marissa gasped for air. Her heart pounded like no other. She saw Megumi standing still, staring at her. Marissa wadded over to Megumi and saw her eyes were not moving. She placed her hands on Megumi's cheeks, leaning close to her.

“I'm so sorry, Meg.” Marissa wrapped Megumi in her arms. “I can't imagine what you went through.”

Marissa felt Megumi's arms wrapped around her. She can hear her daughter breathing heavily. She struggled to shed emotions. “Let it out Meg. Please. Let your pain out.”

A scream blared out into the sky, but it was not Megumi's. They both looked into the sky as the familiar scream sent bird flying out of the trees.

“Alysia.” Megumi said and the foxes did not hesitate to bring Marissa and Megumi yukata robes.

Marissa and Megumi ran through the main route with the foxes. They passed by a group of teens holding crows in their arms, the sick and injured tended to by the doctors, horse sized dogs, large cicadas, as well as Ren and Madam Mayweather. Everyone they passed all looking in the same direction of the scream. As they were

heading down to the house, Nemo called for them.

“At the Sacred Trunk.” The Elder fox signaled them to follow him and they did. “Alysia woke up and we gave her some herbal medicine. The drink must have synergized with the healing spell. She ran off screaming about her soul.”

“Arturo?” Marissa said.

“He followed after her.”

Marissa stopped just short of the opening. She saw Alysia in her father arms crying her heart out, but her eyes was drawn to the opening. She held Megumi's hand and led her.

“I was in your memories Meg. I saw this.” Marissa stood at the edge and looked out at the crater that Alysia made. Her hand covered her mouth seeing it for the first time. “My god.”

“Mom.” Alysia's voice reached her mother, making her turn around. “I…”

“I know.” Marissa pulled Megumi with her and knelt down. “I know.”

“Lys.” Megumi said. “You remember?”

Alysia nodded. “They took our souls.”

Marissa pulled the girls into her arms. Mother and daughters cried their hearts out, and Arturo wrapped all three in his arms.

TO BE CONTINUED...