

Arcana Magi Zero Arc 3 - c.5

by H-M Brown

Alysia sat on her knees beside her mother. Marissa lay on her back with a makeshift brace around her neck, staring up at the stars. Alysia kept her head low, avoiding eye contact. Her own eyes were red from the crying, and her face was also red and dry. Her heartbeat was pounding her chest hard, and her hands trembled.

"Look at me Alysia."

Alysia shook her head no. Shame racked her face. "What am I doing?"

Marissa's eyes focused on Alysia and she took a deep breath. "What do you mean?"

"I just wanted to be a hero." She lifted her eyes and saw the captain and his team talking over a radio. "I just wanted to help people. How did I let all of this happen?"

"This is not your—"

"IT IS! ...Mom." Alyssia turned her head to her Marissa. "I feel it in my soul. I made this choice. I did with my own words."

"No honey." Marissa struggled to lift her arm up to take Alysia's hand. "Valdegaurd tricked you and you sister."

"She didn't trick."

"Listen to me." Marissa successfully clutched Alysia's hand. "I saw what happened. I saw it in Meg's memories back at the shrine. You thought you were just doing a simple drop off, but monster forcefully ripped out your souls against your will... by force."

Alysia shook her head again saying no and she felt light tug.

"Look... at... me..." Marissa said although her voice was weak, but strong enough to command her daughter to look at her. "It is not your fault."

Marissa took a deep breath wincing in pain. She saw Alysia panic as the crow came by dropping off Saga. Marissa willed herself

to take the staff, her fingers pulled it closer and the crow assisted. She lifted it before Alysia, holding to her face.

"What you are doing?" Marissa said. "Is being a hero... and I am so proud of you and Megumi. I understand now, that bad things will happen to you when you fight, but you alone have to choose what you want to do."

Marissa shed a tear, tightening her grip on the staff. "You're not a child anymore. You're not even a teen... you're an adult now and you have to learn to take the bad with the good."

Marissa taps Alysia's chest with the staff and smiled. "This... right here within your chest is what makes you better than those Arcadians. And this staff, is your guide, these spirits that you pray to. I trust them. I trust they will not abandon. That they will be by your side... like your father and I."

Alysia took the staff by hand and heard loud voices coming from the captain and the team. She saw the group run towards them and slid on their knees creating a human barrier.

"GET DOWN!" The captain pushed Alysia on top of her mother and the rest formed a huddle.

As the crow made his way into the huddle, Alysia felt a strong wind building up and saw the mist drawing closer to them. Looking at her mother's eyes, she focused her Mana. Her magic circle appeared underneath every as the captain and his team channeled their Mana. Alysia raised the staff over the huddle and together everyone created a barrier. The wind blew past them and the grey mist surrounded them. Everyone felt the force of the mist pushing into the barrier and they all screamed.

Alysia opened her eyes and looked at her mother. She saw it in her mother's eyes... encouragement and confidence. Alysia broke from the huddle catching the captain's attention.

"Get back in here! You'll break the barrier!"

"It's all right!" Alysia held Saga up over her head and expanded the barrier. The grey mist pushed back. Everyone broke away from the huddle and Marissa smiled at what she saw. Alysia closed her eyes taking a deep breath. She channeled her grey mana and felt the

Manasphere within her. "DISPERSE!"

She pushed the barriers that the captain and the team made creating and opening to the sky above. The mist held in place, settling down. She released the spell and everyone was free to move.

"Good job Alysia."

"Thank you. Don't get close to the grey mist."

"Okay." The captain activated his radio and called in.

Marissa looked up at the night sky and saw the clear stars. Alysia sat next to her, taking her hand.

"Are you okay mom?"

"Yes. It's beautiful sky."

Alysia looked up at the stars. "It is."

"The whole city is covered in grey Mana." The captain said getting Alysia and Marissa's attention.

"Go." Marissa said.

"Mom."

"You and Meg have a job to do. Go. I'll be okay."

Marissa slid her hand slowly away from Alysia's. She saw Alysia's face express hesitation. She nudged Alysia to go and made her eyes point to leave. Without an answer, Alysia slowly got up to her feet keeping her eyes locked on her mother. Marissa turned her eyes away and Alysia walked away. She closed her eyes shedding a tear. She cracked a smile.

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At the shrine of Hikari, Megumi stood before the grey Mana held in place. The opening above them showed the trees covered in the mist. She turned around observing the captain and his team analyzing Mana, and talking on the radio. She tried to think of what to do, but Arturo's anger got her attention. She saw him kicking the fence to the shrine of Hikari. Megumi hurried to him.

"Dad, what's the matter?"

Arturo stopped, and left a dent on the old wooden fence. He rested his hands on the hinge and stared at the small housing structure.

"I feel useless."

"What do you mean?" Megumi looked up to him.

"I look at this and I'm asking myself, how can I help you and Alysia?"

Megumi tilted her head and he sighed. "Dad, I'm scared."

He turned to Megumi. "So am I."

"Really?"

"Yes. I don't want you girls to get hurt, but I stood by and let it happen."

"This is our job." Megumi placed her hand on his shoulder but he shook his head no.

"This..." he pointed to the captain and his team. "This is their job. You and Alysia are children... teens. This is not something you do. And yet you two sneak out and come back injuries and..."

Arturo made a fist. "And yet, we can't punish you two because you're helping people. What you and your sister do is not wrong. That's why I feel useless. What kind of father am I to tell you not to help people yet, keep you safe and healthy?"

Arturo took Fable from the air beside Megumi and stared at the book. He lifted his head to Megumi. She had some injuries, yet still standing before him.

"When I first met, you were this tall." Arturo placed his in the air to show her height. "I saw a confident kid on the surface, yet I could see in your eyes you were truly scared and alone. I felt I had to try my best to be a dad when adopted. Seeing you for the past couple of years grow — both psychically and mentally — It was a privilege."

"Dad."

"I was hoping that you and Alysia would be teens, getting into trouble, hanging out with friends, heh... boys. Instead, you both became adults too fast, and I am so sorry I stood by and let that happen. I should have put foot down harder than I could have. I failed."

"No you didn't." Megumi took a step forward and look him in the eyes. "You were there for me at school. You celebrated my birthday. You took me and Alysia to the Shore and ice cream and the movies

and to slumber parties. I had fun. I was happy for all of it. I just..."

Megumi took Fable to her hand. "I just happen to have a job. Maybe we could do it part time, but what I am doing, is no different from you and mom going to work. Perhaps, we could work something out. But don't you failed to be my dad. You're doing great. You're here with me now. I couldn't ask for a great dad. I love you."

Megumi hugged Arturo and she felt his hug. She looked out at the shrine with Arturo. There was silence for a moment. Megumi felt Arturo's hand on her shoulder.

"It's not your fault."

"I know, but I do feel partly responsible." Megumi said. "I feel I have to make thins right.

"We'll make it right together, as a family."

"I'm worried about Alysia." Megumi looked up to Arturo. "She gets emotional at times and loses herself."

"Your sister will be fine. She's with your mother. She knows how to handle Alysia." Arturo's eyes trailed off for a second and he turned Megumi. "On second thought, let's find out if we could reach them and see if their okay."

"Of course."

Megumi and Arturo approached the captain as he got off the radio. "The whole city is covered in this grey mana."

"It's from the Manasphere." Megumi said. "Does this mean that the people in the city are covered in grey? Are they turned to stone?"

"No I just finished talking with Captain Saito. She said there are people walking in the streets, but the Nocturne are a big problem, and we have no sighting of them."

Megumi looked at the wall of mist and she channeled her Mana which became grey. "I know I can got through this, but I don't know what it would do to any of you."

"We got no choice." The captain said. "It's stable so we're fine for now."

"Captain." Arturo said. "Can you reach my wife over at the other shrine? I have to know if wife and daughter are okay."

Megumi translated his words into Japanese and the captain nodded.

"I'll try." The captain activated the radio and called. There was a response and they spoke.

Arturo looked to Megumi for translation and saw her eyes water. "What's the matter?"

"It's mom." Megumi listened as the captain relayed the message of the situation. She translated it to English. "Mom is paralyzed. Alysia was taken over by Kurai and she tried to kill mom. Alysia broke free and used a heal spell, but it left mom paralyzed."

Arturo snatched the radio. "MARISSA! MARISSA TALK TO ME!"

"Dad." Alysia said over the radio.

"Alysia..." Arturo lifted his head. "Put your mother on!"

"Hold on."

Arturo waited as he saw Megumi cry with her hands over her face. He pulled her into his arms as he heard Marissa's voice.

"Arturo."

"Marissa, what happened honey?"

"I'm okay. I'm on my back and looking out to the sky."

"Please tell me what happened."

As Marissa explained what happened, Megumi looked up at the sky and saw birds flying in a panic away. She walked away from Arturo noticing an odd light in the night sky.

"You see that?"

"Yeah." The captain looked up and noticed it. A loud horn echoed out of the sky. The crow returned, landing on Fable in Megumi's arms.

"A large purple beam shot out above the buildings in the city. Something big is rising from the grey mana."

"What?" Megumi looked up at the open sky.

"Arturo what was that?" Marissssa said from the radio.

"I don't know. Some monster is in the grey mana."

"MEG!" Alysia said over the radio and her sister took it from Arturo.

"I'm here."

"We have to go fight it!"

"I'm on my way." Megumi ran channeling her grey Mana.

"Wait!" Arturo said and Megumi looked back. "You two be careful and get home safely."

"We will." Megumi jumped up and cast her spell. "Mana Glider."

Arturo watched Megumi fly out of the opening with Fable floating alongside.

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Back at the Shrine of Kurai, Alysia knelt down by her mother and kissed her on the forehead.

"I have to go." Alysia picked up Saga, staring at the teal jewel between the wings.

Marissa saw maturity in her daughter's eyes. "Alysia?"

"Yes mom?"

"Win." Marissa smiled and Alysia returned the smile.

Alysia stood up channeling her grey Mana and her magic circle appeared under feet. She jumped up. "MANA GLIDER!"

She flew up toward the opening, looking to the stars. She made it above and saw the whole region covered in grey mana. It was a long way, but she was able to make out a large head stretching above the buildings. Its purple lines stopped glowing as grey Mana seeped from its mouth. Alysia looked back at her mother below and nodded.

"I will make this right... and I will save everyone." Alysia saw the distance of the city. "If I can make it in time."

Alysia flew onward to the city where she saw another star in the air heading towards the giant creature that planted its hand on the roof.

THE END.

