

# Arcana - Chapter I

By Avarice

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Â Sarai was sat against one of the many wooden walls of the slums, but instead of begging, she was in an isolated little alley, glaring at a rock. It was a weird rock, with a shiny cast and blue veins spreading across its grey surface like those on a leaf. It was light, despite being the size of her fist, and looked deceptively delicate. She knew it was â€˜deceptivelyâ€™ delicate, because on her finding it, she had thrown the bag and the rock on the floor in annoyance.

She couldnâ€™t get any money from something like this, and now everyone was taking cover in their own warm homes from the storm, and she was left victimless and shelterless, as she bore with the chilling winds. She needed to be out of it for at least tonight, which was going to be the worst of the coming days, but how was she supposed to find shelter from the storm with no money? She could survive by hiding in this alley, but if it got really bad, she might just freeze to death in her sleep.

Her gaze turned even more bitter as she regarded the rock, and she could just imagine the satisfaction of chucking it right over the wall and back onto the owners head. That, of course, was impossible. Number one the wall was too high, and number two the guards would probably shoot her down in suspicion, or just because they had an excuse to.

Maybe the owner treasured it for some reason, and if she went to give it back, he would pay her. Sarai smirked at such an ideal outcome; he would just report her to the guards for robbery, not bother paying her first when it would be returned on her capture.

She dropped the peculiar stone onto the dirt, and glared at the grey thing as it sat in contrast to the brown muckiness, rain dripping down its sides in rivulets. It wasnâ€™t a precious gem of any kind, as it lacked the see-through shininess she had seen in those on sale in the upper market, and neither did it seem stronger than your average road side rock, to be of any use. The blue veins were the only weird thing about it. *When in need, life gives you rocks*, she thought bitterly, turning her gaze towards the rolling sky. She found it a fitting phrase for her life so far. Or maybe pebbles would be better.

But, the fact of her situation had long settled in, so she no longer dwelled on what could have been, like some people she had met. Always wanting more than the rubbish life gave you, always striving for more; she didnâ€™t know how those people got by without falling into despair.

Her old friend, Jose, had been like that. Until one of the slave traders had grabbed him late one night.

Sarai winced and pushed the year old memory from the front of her mind, like she did every time it resurfaced. If she ignored it, she could somehow pretend it didnâ€™t happen. Almost like those on the other side of the poverty line; closing the gates on the poor and pretending they donâ€™t exist. Maybe if she stood in the very centre of that square and froze to death in front of their eyes, they might realise they had a problem. Sarai shook her head; they wouldnâ€™t even care.

Driven by the freezing winds, Sarai stood and decided to search for an abandoned building. The guards might catch her trespassing, and thieves might meet in it also, but at least she would be warm. She hunched against the pouring rain and freezing winds, pulling her cloak tighter around her, as she made her way through the streets alone. She glanced up at the sky, and realised that it would soon be too dark to see her own feet.

Sarai quickened her steps, glancing around endlessly at the slums, waiting to meet one run down enough to be abandoned. They werenâ€™t common, and if there were any, she would most likely not be the only one taking shelter inside. Her cloak was soon saturated by the rain as she searched, and her breath made white puffs in front of her freezing nose. *This is hopeless*, she thought, before her eyes trained on a small shed with a collapsing roof. She hurried towards it, the cloak billowing about her in her haste, letting the cold wind and rain prick her legs like millions of semi-visible needles.

There was no door, just an open doorway, and peaking in, she realised she had gotten lucky. It was abandoned, and too shabby for anyone to really want to take shelter in, when there might be better elsewhere. Sarai was desperate, and it was getting late, so with a small huff she stepped over the fallen planks on the floor and into the small room. It was sandwiched between two houses which were decent considering they were in the slums, with just this one small room, hidden from sight at first glance because of the shadow. In the night it would be invisible.

Unfortunately, that also meant it was almost impossible to see anything past her own nose, so Sarai nearly tripped more than once, and dropped the rock on the floor a few times. She didnâ€™t know why she picked it up again, rather than just leaving it on the floor, but for some reason it seemed a waste just to throw it away.

Settling herself on one of the fallen planks in the roomâ€™s corner, she set about to tying the bag around her waist. It wasnâ€™t heavy, and you never know, she might just find a use for it, if not just to smash it over a guards head in â€˜self defenceâ€™. The bag was comfy on her side, and shivering, she bought the sodden cloak about her huddled form, prepared to wait out the night thus so. The howling winds passed through the doorway and to the corner she took refuge in, the diminished chill keeping her limbs shaking, and every now and then a droplet hit the thin fabric of protection she clung to. It was going to be a long night.

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