

Thornhill Academy

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The Weave.

By the time the glowing lines of the map get me to Lecture Hall A, the room is already full. Dozens of students fill the tiered rows, uniforms crisp and their voices buzzing like a hive as sparks of magic flicker across fingertips or hover lazily over parchment. My stomach tightens as I scan the room. Of course, the only empty seat was in the back. I climb the steps two at a time, my bag knocking against my hip, and slide into the seat without hesitation. The boy beside me looks up the moment I sit down. He is all sharp edges and smirks, with shaggy, dark hair that looked like a weapon all on its own. His eyes are dark brown with a strange auburn gleam that catches the light like smouldering coals. Mischief glints there, bold and unashamed. Great. Precisely the kind of boy I have no interest in dealing with. I shove my bag onto the desk, keeping my head down, ignoring him completely. His smirk only widens, but he doesn't speak... Yet. The door at the front of the hall creaks open, and a hush sweeps through the room. A tall woman strides inside, her silver robes catching the light like ripples of water. Her hair is bone-white, braided down her back, and her skin shimmers faintly with scales along the edges of her cheekbones. Her eyes, sharp and glassy, are an uncanny shade of pale teal. "Good morning, everyone," she says, voice calm but commanding. "It seems we have a new student today. So I will introduce myself again. I am Professor Elara Vey, and I will be your instructor for Arcane Theory."

The title suits her. Vey moves like someone who has centuries coiled inside her bones. When she reaches the front, she lays one hand on the lectern. Magic sparks faintly along her fingers, the air crackling as the wood responds to her touch. “Let us begin,” she continues, scanning the hall with eyes that miss nothing. “Arcane Theory is not about how you cast, but about why magic behaves as it does. You all wield it, yes, but power without understanding is a blade in the hands of a child.” The guy beside me lets out a low chuckle, and I feel his eyes on me. I keep mine locked on the professor. “First,” Vey says, flicking her hand. A glowing lattice of light springs into the air, filling the front of the room. Threads of gold and blue weave together like a spider’s web, pulsing faintly. “This is the Weave. It binds all things: the air you breathe, the ground you walk on, even the thoughts in your head. Magic is not created, it is drawn from the Weave.” Students scribble furiously in their notebooks. I just stare, trying and failing not to gape. “Each magical race has a different connection to it,” she goes on. “Shifters pull instinctively from their bloodlines, witches through spoken craft, fae through bargains and oaths. Warlocks...” her eyes flicked to a cluster of them in the front row, “are much like witches and seers, of course, glimpse the Weave’s flow into what might be.” I swallow hard. No mention of siphons. No hint that someone like me even exists. Vey’s voice sharpens. “But the Weave is not infinite. Every thread pulled takes a toll. Use too much, and you burn yourself. Bend it the wrong way, and it snaps back with consequences.” She lets that hang in the air a moment before closing her hand. The lattice of light collapses into a single glowing spark, hovering above her palm. “That,” she says softly, “is Arcane Theory. Understanding not only the gift you hold, but the cost it demands.” The room goes silent

with dozens of wide eyes, scribbling quills, and sparks of restless magic. Beside me, the boy with the shaggy black hair leans just close enough for his voice to brush my ear. “Looks like you’re already taking notes, stray. Didn’t think you’d care.” I stiffen, clutching my pen tighter. Notes? No... But I was listening to every word, because if the Council think they own me, I need to know exactly what they plan to use me for.

Professor Vey lets another spark of magic hover above her palm for a long moment, the pale-blue light casting sharp shadows across her fae features. Then she flicks her fingers, and the spark shoots upward, weaving itself into a thin strand of glowing gold. “Most of you,” she says, “believe magic is yours. That it sits inside you, waiting to be bent to your will.” The strand thickened into a rope, stretching taut between her hands. “But in truth, you borrow it. You take from the Weave, and you owe it a price.” With another sharp twist of her hand, the rope lashes outward into the shape of a spear. Energy hums through the hall, sharp and electric, and the hairs on my arms stand up. Students lean forward, wide-eyed and enchanted. “Now,” Vey murmurs, her voice almost too soft to catch, “what happens when you take more than you can repay?” She hurls the spear across the room. It strikes the stone wall with a boom that rattles the benches. Gasps and nervous laughter ripple through the students until the spear snaps back like a rubber band, slamming into Vey’s chest with brutal force. The impact sends sparks crackling across her body, lighting her robes in a shimmer of blue fire. She staggers a single step, but her sharp smile never falters. With a flick, the magic gutters out, leaving nothing but smoke curling in the air. A hush falls over the room again. “That,” she says coolly, brushing imaginary dust from her sleeve, “is

the Weave's answer to arrogance. The greater the theft, the greater the backlash. History is littered with corpses of fools who thought themselves greater than the law that binds us all."

My grip on my pen tightens so much that my knuckles go white. If what she is saying is true, then how the hell had I survived siphoning all these years? A hand shoots up near the front row. "How does this apply to us?" he asks, voice carrying easily through the hall. "Shifters power comes from blood, not some... magic net in the sky." A ripple of murmurs follows, with half the class nodding in agreement. Professor Vey's expression doesn't change. If anything, the faint curve of her lips sharpens. "A fair question, and you are correct, shifters do not cast in the traditional sense. Your magic is bound in the marrow, written into the bloodline itself. You are the Weave made flesh." The boy puffs his chest as if she'd complimented him. "But, you are not exempt. The Weave still governs you. Every shift, every flare of enhanced strength or speed, is a thread you tug. Push too far, too often, and even your blood betrays you. The beast will then consume." So even shifters could burn out. The Weave really doesn't give a damn what species you are; it always demanded its cut.