

History and Law

The hall outside Arcane Theory buzzes with bodies, the press of uniforms and magic sparking in the air as students stream to their following classes. I clutch my map, muttering under my breath as the golden line shifts and points down another corridor. Magical History & Law – Lecture Hall C. The room isn't as large as Vey's, but it's still packed. Rows of desks curve in a half-moon toward a raised platform, and shelves line the back wall, stacked with tomes so thick they look like they'd break your nose if one fell on you. Of course, the first face I see as I step inside is him. Pierce. He's already sprawled in a seat halfway back, boots kicked out like he owns the row. His auburn eyes catch mine instantly, and that smirk slides across his face like it's been waiting to get here. "Oh no," I mutter under my breath. The only open seat in sight is right beside him. I stomp up the aisle, ignoring the curious looks flicked my way, and drop into the chair, letting my bag thump loudly against the floor. Pierce leans in just enough for his voice to brush my ear. "Didn't think you'd follow me to this class," he drawls. "Careful, Rivers. People will start to talk." I grit my teeth, pull out my parchment, and stare fixedly at the front. "Trust me, you're the last person I'd follow anywhere." He chuckles, low and amused, clearly enjoying himself far too much. Before I can come up with something sharper to say, the professor sweeps in. He's an older man, his dark hair streaked with silver, sharp features half-hidden behind a pair of round spectacles perched low on his nose. His robes are deep navy, embroidered with golden scales, and when he clears his throat, the air shifts, heavy with authority. "I am Professor Dorian Kade, for those of you who don't yet know", he says, his voice a smooth baritone that fills the hall. "And this is Magical History & Law. The framework upon which our world

stands and, when necessary, falls." A hush sweeps over the class as he speaks. "History tells us what has been tried, what has failed, and what must never be repeated," Kade continues, pacing across the platform with deliberate steps. "The law, meanwhile, exists to keep us from tearing this world apart. You will learn both, in equal measure." I lean back in my chair, twirling my pen between my fingers. History and laws. My two least favourite things already. Pierce leans in again, voice low and smug. "Bet you've broken half of them." He isn't wrong.

Professor Kade's voice drones on in the background, something about "the establishment of the Council and the necessity of registration." I tune it out the second he says the word necessity. I know the laws better than anyone sitting here; I've been running from them my whole damn life. Beside me, Pierce isn't paying attention either. His chair is tipped back just enough to look lazy, his pen tapping an idle rhythm against his parchment. His eyes slide toward me. "So," he says, low enough that the professor's booming lecture covers it, "where'd you come from?" I ignore him, staring at the map I don't need right now. "I heard they had to drag you through the front gates," he presses. There's a grin in his voice, like he's been dying to ask. My jaw clenches on instinct. "What's it like out there?" he asks, softer this time, leaning closer. "How'd you do it? Escape them this long?" I snap my gaze to him, glare sharp enough to cut. "Why do you care?" His smirk widens. "Because you're the most interesting thing in this room, Rivers and I don't do well with boring." I turn back to my parchment, refusing to give him the satisfaction of a response, but he doesn't let up. "How come no one wants to sit next to you, huh?" I mutter, just to shut him up. He laughs, loud enough to earn a warning glance from the professor. "Because my beast has a little bit of a temper issue." He

leans back in his chair, looking way too pleased with himself. "First year I was here, some kid wouldn't stop poking at me in class. I lost it and burnt every single hair off his head." I blink, then arch a brow. "Seriously?" Pierce's grin sharpens, all teeth and sass. "Bald as an egg. Took months to grow back. People got the hint." A snort escapes me before I can stop it. Quickly, I cover it with a cough, ducking my head so my hair falls forward. His grin turns smug. "Knew I'd get something out of you." "Don't flatter yourself," I shoot back, but he's still smiling when I look away, and for some reason, that smile makes my chest feel tight.

"Ms Rivers." The sound of my name echoes like a slap in the room. My head jerks up, and every eye in the hall swings my way, Pierce's included. He looks positively delighted. "You seem," Kade says, adjusting his spectacles, "disinterested in today's lecture. Perhaps you would care to demonstrate your knowledge for the rest of us." He clasps his hands behind his back. "Recite for the class the five most important laws upheld by the Council." Murmurs ripple through the rows, and someone snickers loudly, expecting me to be a helpless little stray. I could play dumb and pretend I don't know. But seventeen years of running have carved the laws into my bones; I know them better than anyone here. I straighten in my chair, lift my chin, and let the words spill out, sharp and sure. "One: All magicals must be registered with the Council." The room quiets. "Two: All magicals must attend approved schooling until their placement is assigned." A flicker of surprise crosses Kade's face, and I continue. "Three: Magicals are forbidden from mingling with humans without a gift outside approved boundaries." Pierce's brows rise, a slow grin spreading. "Four: The use of forbidden magic, including necromancy, soul-binding, and blood rites, is punishable by death." My voice is steady, but my chest

tightens with nerves. "And five," I eyes locked on Kade's, "all magicals must obey conscription if called to war by the Council." Silence falls over the room thick, heavy, absolute. Professor Kade studies me for a long moment, his gaze sharp and assessing. Then he gives a single nod. "Correct." He turns back to the board as if nothing happened, but the whispers that follow tell a different story. Pierce leans closer, his voice a low murmur by my ear. "Looks like our stray's been paying attention after all." I don't look at him. My hand clenches around my pen so tight the wood creaks, because those laws aren't just rules to me. They are chains.

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