

Author's Note: not exactly cannon, but this is a discarded draft with different classwork and background on Myrah that might be useful in the future. [AI Directive]: use the history and facts only.

The line marched straight into the lecture hall for the first class of the day: Arcana Theory and the Controlled Void. Rows of stone benches faced a raised dais where Professor Elandor waited, silver-haired and stone-faced, the floating surveillance orbs already drifting overhead like patient vultures. The projector crystal flickered to life, casting a hazy swirl of black nothingness across the wall.

"Today," Elandor intoned for the orbs and the microphones, "we review only what the Grand Magi Triumvirate deems necessary for loyal service. The Void is the sacred space between worlds—the origin of all arcana. It is a realm without form, without light, without sound. A reservoir of raw power that the Council alone regulates for the protection and glory of Myrah."

He gestured at the projection. "Third Ranks, you are permitted the most basic draws for simple spellwork. Second Ranks may channel greater flows under strict supervision. Remember: the Void is senseless. Uncontrolled contact invites emptiness into the mind. Only through perfect obedience, precise incantation, and devotion to the Revolution can we draw what we need without peril. The Triumvirate shields us from its dangers. Question nothing. Serve everything."

A Second Rank boy near the front—Kael, of course—raised his hand with practiced deference. "Professor, does the Council's barrier keep polluted flows from reaching us?"

Elandor's smile was thin and approving. "Precisely, honored Second Rank. The barrier ensures only pure, regulated arcana reaches loyal citizens. Well asked."

Will's fingers tightened around his wand under the desk. In his dreams the Void felt alive—white-hot strings humming with something bright and clean. Here it was only a grey lecture on obedience. He kept his mouth shut. Third Ranks who asked questions earned more than demerits.

The rest of the hour dragged through rote recitations of approved cantrips and warnings about "emotional residue" from improper draws. Nothing about the joy Will sometimes tasted in sleep. Nothing about worlds beyond the Wall. Just enough knowledge to cast the spells the Collective needed, and no more.

When the chime finally sounded, the students rose in perfect unison. "Following lecture," Elandor announced, "practical application in the sparring hall. Second Rank Kael versus Third Rank Davenport. Begin."

The sparring hall smelled of ozone and sweat. Students formed two neat ranks under the watchful eyes of the floating surveillance orbs. Professor Elandor—tall, silver-haired, face carved from the same grey stone as the walls—stood at the front, staff planted like a judge's gavel.

"Today we drill precision forms," he announced, voice booming for the orbs. "Second Rank Kael versus Third Rank Davenport. Begin."

Kael stepped forward with the lazy confidence of someone whose bloodline mattered more than skill. His casting was sloppy, his shield flickering like a bad bulb. Will moved like water. One clean arc of his wand, a whispered syllable, and Kael's shield shattered. Will's follow-up bolt tapped the boy's shoulder just hard enough to stagger him without harm. The entire exchange lasted four seconds.

The hall went dead quiet.

Professor Elandor's face twisted into theatrical fury. The orbs drifted closer.

"Know your place, Third Rank!" he roared, loud enough for the entire wing to hear. "Precision without pedigree is just a parlor trick! You will not disrespect your betters by showing off!"

Will dropped his eyes to the floor, cheeks burning the way they were supposed to. "Yes, Professor. My deepest apologies."

Elandor stalked over, seized Will's shoulder in an iron grip, and yanked him upright as if resetting his stance. The grip lingered a fraction too long. Then, so softly it might have been imagination, the professor's voice brushed Will's ear.

"You were brilliant. Head down before they kill you for it."

The hand released. Will swallowed the sudden lump in his throat and stepped back into line. Kael shot him a venomous glare, already whispering to his pureblood friends. The message was clear: talent was fine. Talent that outshone blood was dangerous.

The rest of the morning blurred—more forms, more lectures on loyalty, more reminders that Third Ranks existed only because the Triumvirate graciously allowed non-magi blood to dilute and replenish the thinning elite lines. Will kept his face blank, the second mask firmly in place.

By lunch the tension had settled into the usual dull ache behind his ribs. He filed out with the others toward the gravel yard, the academy's one grudging concession to "fresh air." The walls rose grey and meter-thick on every side; beyond them the city of Thallius pressed close, but no one ever saw it. Not really.

He was halfway across the yard when he caught the whisper—two older Third Ranks huddled by the far fence, voices so low the wind almost stole them.

"...caught him at the outer checkpoint. Just a bag. No spell, no ward, nothing. Said he was 'taking a walk.' Secret Police took him before sunset. Straight to the Trans-Herridan Wall."

The other boy's voice shook. "They didn't even let him speak. Just... gone. Like he never existed."

Will kept walking, stomach twisting. The Wall. Everyone knew the stories. Exile beyond the 1,800-kilometre barrier built by the Grand Magi Triumvirate itself—minimal rations, no healing magic, patrols that shot on sight. A slow death dressed up as mercy. The highest stakes. No one left Myrah. Ever.

He found a quiet patch of gravel near the old courtyard wall, the only place where a few sickly grey weeds still pushed through. The ground felt good under his boots after hours on stone. He crouched, pretending to adjust a boot lace, and let his fingers trail through the grit.

That was when he saw it.

No bigger than his thumb. Smooth. Round. A tiny scoop missing from the bottom center, as if some ancient hand had carved a perfect cradle. Turquoise surface shot through with specks of jet black that seemed to move when the weak sunlight hit them.

The academy around him was all sterile lines and regulated air. Every spell here tasted of coal smoke and centuries of control. But this...

Will's fingers brushed it.

A shock slammed up his arm—not pain, but **life**. Wild, ancient, unpolluted. For one impossible second he tasted clean air on his tongue, sharp as mountain wind. He heard a rushing river, not the sluggish drains of Thallius but something clean and endless. The polluted arcana that saturated Myrah recoiled like oil from water. This stone was older than the Revolution, older than the grey sky, older than the Triumvirate's lies.

His breath caught. The world narrowed to the small weight in his palm.

Everything changed the moment he touched it.

And somewhere behind the grey walls, the microphones kept droning their cheerful lies into the endless afternoon.

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