

strategy master of their group, after all.

They said their goodbyes, Tonks ruffling Sully's hair fondly, and then the pair of them headed to the edge of the wards to apparate home.

"I didn't know you and Sully were friends," Harry commented, and Tonks smiled.

"Sully's a good kid," he replied. "Needs a bit of help figuring some things out. But we're getting there."

Harry blinked at him, then shook his head slightly, leaning into Tonks' side ready to apparate home.

Again; none of his business.

.-.-.-.

There were five cauldrons simmering at once, and Severus went over his mental checklist, wondering if he had time to start anything else before lunch.

"Remind me again why you're doing this and not Slughorn?" Remus asked from his usual chair in the corner, brows drawn together in amusement. Severus scowled.

"Because Horace has been retired for fifteen years and I don't trust his ability to brew more than one cauldron at a time," he retorted evenly. This was all the regular stock for the Hospital Wing, and he wanted to make sure it was up to standard. Especially with the year ahead looking so fraught.

He anticipated a lot of his Slytherins ending up under Pomfrey's care, and he'd be damned if he let them take inferior medication.

Remus snorted quietly. "Albus might make suspect decisions, but I'm sure he wouldn't hire Slughorn back to teach Potions if he wasn't still competent."

"Debatable," Severus retorted, levitating some powdered bicorn horn with his wand, making sure the exact amount entered every cauldron at the exact same time, turning the liquid inside a vivid red. He reversed the direction of the stirring rods, keen eyes watching every cauldron. "I don't believe that getting me into the Defence position was Dumbledore's only reason for hiring that old social climber."

He saw Remus' gaze narrow. "What do you mean?"

Severus paused, wondering how best to word things so he didn't unnecessarily alarm his partner. "There are other Potions Masters who would quite happily take a position teaching at Hogwarts, even under the current political climate. Ones who wouldn't be quite as... high maintenance as Horace Slughorn." The face Remus made had a soft snort escaping Severus; they both remembered all too well what Slughorn was like, trying to ingratiate himself with any student he thought might have a future in something he could profit off. He was a passable brewer, but Severus knew better. He certainly knew better Masters who would not insist on collecting students like trophies.