

Severus' lips pursed. "The older students... it is inordinately clear to me which of them were involved in Potter's little club." He leaned back, arm settling around Remus' shoulders. "It's quite astonishing, to be completely honest. I had no idea how much work he'd managed to do with them. How quickly they all must have progressed to be as proficient as they are now." Most of his sixth years were already capable of non-verbal casting, while a good number of his seventh years seemed more competent than half the aurors he'd seen in recent years. Those in his fifth year classes who had studied under Potter could take their DADA OWL tomorrow and get at least an E, and while there were only a handful of fourth years who had been involved, the difference between them and their contemporaries was entirely too clear.

And if some of the whispers he'd heard were to be believed, the club had resumed once more. At this rate, Potter would be doing half his job for him.

"Didn't you talk to him about it over the summer?" Remus asked, one eyebrow raised. Severus shook his head.

"By the time I knew I would be taking over the class, we had bigger things to worry about," he said. "And truthfully, I did not expect it to matter quite so much." He had not expected those students to be so far ahead of their peers. "Harry told me he'd taught them the basics — shields, disarming, stunning. He never mentioned the rest." Once again, Harry Potter had downplayed his skills.

"I suppose you weren't there to see them fighting at the Ministry," Remus mused. "Then you might have seen what they're capable of, thanks to Harry." He kissed Severus' cheek, and swiped another biscuit. "I suppose you're just being even more of an evil git to the ones who already know the curriculum, to stop them getting too much of an ego about it," he teased. Severus' lips pursed.

"I am pushing them harder than their peers," he agreed slowly. "But..." and here was something he wouldn't admit to anyone other than Remus, "I confess, I'm not quite as stern as one might expect. I am keeping up appearances, of course. I certainly can't *praise* them for their abilities. But damn it all, I find I'm actually somewhat proud of the little buggers. They saw they needed to take their education into their own hands, and they did so without any of us figuring them out." He glared at his partner. "I blame you for this, you know. I never used to give a damn about most of my students before you shoved your way back into my life." A handful of students who were decent at Potions and didn't shrink under his death-stare, that was all he'd had the capacity to approve of before. Other than his Slytherins, of course. But even so, he'd never felt like this about students before Remus — before Harry, and the boy's earnest desire to better himself, to make Severus proud, to pass on that knowledge to his friends with the hopes it might keep them safe.

Remus did his best to look solemn, but his eyes were laughing. "I'm awfully sorry I've brought so much joy into that shrivelled up heart of yours that you're finding it difficult to be a dick to children."

Severus scowled, and Remus chuckled, cupping his jaw for a kiss. "It's not a bad thing, to care," he murmured fondly. "Especially not in the position you're in now. You may have to hide what you're truly doing, but you've got the chance to help Harry teach these kids to survive."