

“Harry Potter sir is shaking in his sleep,” he said. “Having bad dreams.” Then he paused, wringing his hands. “Dobby is still looking out for Harry Potter sir, even though he is having another elf doing that for him now.”

Harry’s sleep-fogged mind took a minute to catch up. “Another... oh. You mean Ceri?” A quick nod. “She isn’t really my elf. She’s my godfather’s. She just... helps.” He blinked again, watching the way Dobby seemed to shrink into himself. “Dobby, it doesn’t mean I’m not happy to see you. You’re still my friend.” He realised guiltily that he hadn’t seen the elf all term. “I’m sorry I haven’t been down to visit; I’ve been really busy lately.”

“Dobby knows,” the elf said with another nod, looking a bit brighter. “Dobby is seeing Harry Potter spending lots of time in the Come and Go Room.”

Confusion drifted through Harry’s brain. “You mean the Room of Requirement?” Surely Dobby couldn’t be referring to the Chamber, which was the only other place Harry had been frequenting.

“Another name for it, yes.” Dobby’s tennis-ball eyes stared up at him. “Harry Potter sir is truly not upset with Dobby?”

“What? No! Why would I be upset?”

Dobby wrung his hands anxiously. “Harry Potter sir is spending more time with Master Draco. Master Draco will tell Harry Potter sir that Dobby is a bad elf.”

Harry choked, red in the face at the insinuation that Dobby had been *watching* him and Draco meet up.

“No, no, Dobby; Draco isn’t like that at all! He— he isn’t like his father, I promise. And he doesn’t think you’re a bad elf.” Draco likely didn’t think of Dobby at all. “You can’t tell anyone that I talk to him, though. It’s a secret. His father would get very angry with Draco if he found out.”

Dobby’s eyes became fearful; he knew what happened when Lucius Malfoy got angry. “Dobby is keeping Harry Potter’s secrets. Dobby is a good elf.”

“A good friend,” Harry corrected, smiling when the small creature blushed. “And, look — I know Ceri is around. And she’s great. But she doesn’t look after me like you do. She hasn’t saved my life like you have.” Or endangered it like Dobby had, but the danger came from a place of caring. Suddenly, he was struck with a thought. “Listen, Dobby. You can say no if you want — I know you like working at Hogwarts, but... I’m too young for an elf of my own right now. I’m in school all the time, I don’t really need anything. But maybe, after I graduate... if you wanted to come with me, I would like that.”

The elf’s jaw dropped. “Harry Potter sir is asking Dobby to be his personal elf?” he breathed, awed.

“Only if you want to. I can’t promise you’d have much work to do. But I’ll pay you whatever wages you want. You can still be a free elf.” The idea of leaving Dobby at Hogwarts after