

that the fighting would wait until the students left — or that the students would even be *able* to leave. “I was hoping the elves might be willing to help move them to somewhere safe. I know you can’t take students off the grounds, but if you could grab all the young students and take them to the same place — maybe down here, where the fighting isn’t likely to touch. And maybe be willing to help injured people up to the Hospital Wing? Your ability to travel within the wards is really amazing.” They could save lives, with that kind of speed.

Lula frowned at him, huge blue eyes a little rheumy. “Master Snakey is... asking? These is not orders?”

“Merlin, no! Like I said, it’s not your fight. If you all want to huddle up down here, that’s absolutely fine by me. Wizard magic is dangerous. But... this castle is your home, too. You deserve the chance to help defend it, if you want.” He looked over the crowd of elves, almost all of whom had stopped their work to listen in. “If any of you are willing to help, we would be in your debt for it. But regardless, we’ll do what we can to keep this castle safe. Keep your home safe.”

With elves like Dobby amongst them, Harry didn’t doubt that the Hogwarts elves knew exactly how many of the people on Voldemort’s side treated their elves. They wouldn’t want the castle to be taken any more than he did.

Lula hummed, tugging at their ears. “Elves will discuss. Think it over. We is... never has a wizard spoken so plainly to an elf. Like equals.” Many elves nodded, muttering quietly to each other. Harry flashed a grin.

“Well, that’s something we’ll have to work on once the war’s over, then,” he said cheerfully. “This castle would be nothing without you lot!” The food, the laundry, the cleaning — the hundreds of other things the elves kept in order that he probably didn’t even consider in his day to day life.

“Dobby will fight with Harry Potter sir,” Dobby declared boldly. “Dobby would be honoured to help!”

“Thanks, Dobby,” Harry said, patting the elf on his skinny back. “I appreciate it.”

Dobby looked like he might faint from joy.

“Master Snakey is saying he wants to talk about two things,” Lula piped up, somewhat hesitant, like Harry’s second request might be so much bigger than his first. Harry chuckled, running a hand through his hair.

“Oh, the other thing is simple, really,” he assured. “See, I’m planning a little birthday party...”

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Draco was used to his birthday being somewhat overshadowed, as a student. June 5th might not be an exam day itself, but it was close enough to it — usually by now everyone was far too busy studying to do anything in particular.