

## Chapter 101

While it was often tempting to avoid the Great Hall and all the attention that came with it, Harry tried to make a point of putting in at least a short appearance at every meal — both for the people who might worry for his safety, and the people who were waiting for a sign of his weakness to begin picking apart.

So Harry hadn't been down to the kitchens in a fair while. The route was familiar enough, though, and he couldn't help but grin as the giggling pear in the fruit bowl painting allowed him entry, revealing the hive of activity within. Several elves stopped to stare at him with their huge eyes. "Master Snakey is in need of food?" one elf asked, making Harry stifle a chuckle — Hannah had told him about the new form of address since their taking of the wards, getting a great amount of amusement over being called 'Missy Badger' by the tiny creatures.

"No, not food right now, thanks; lunch was brilliant, I'm still stuffed," he assured them, scanning the crowd for the bright explosion of colour that usually signified his elf friend. "I'm here for two reasons, actually. I— I was looking for Dobby. And also... whichever one of you is in charge? If you have a system like that?" He wasn't sure of the hierarchy of house elves, or if they even had one.

A quiet pop, and suddenly Dobby was at his side, wearing a pair of lurid green football shorts beneath a bright pink unicorn-printed tank top. "Harry Potter sir is needing Dobby?"

At the same time, an elderly elf shuffled through the crowd — this one wore the same white toga-like uniform as the rest of the elves, printed with the Hogwarts crest on the bottom. "I is being Lula, Master Snakey. I is the oldest elf at Hoggwarts."

"Oh, brilliant. It's nice to meet you, Lula." Harry smiled at the elf, who looked at him like he was just as strange as Dobby. "Can we— will you sit with me? I have some questions. If I'm not interrupting anything, of course."

Lula eyed him appraisingly, then nodded. Harry and the two elves went over to the small table nearby — they both looked deeply uncomfortable at sitting on stools at the same table as a wizard. All around the kitchen, elves were watching them.

"Well, the first thing I wanted to ask... I'm sure you're all aware of the war, right?" Several heads bobbed, not just Lula and Dobby. "Okay. Well, I'm fairly sure there's going to be fighting at Hogwarts, when it happens. Probably quite soon. And, well, I wanted to make sure you were all safe. And ask if there was anything you all would be willing to do to help."

Dobby almost fell off his stool with the force of his gasp. "Harry Potter sir is asking elves to fight with wizards?"

"Not if you don't want to," Harry hurried to assure. "It's our fight, not yours. I won't have you putting yourselves in danger for our sakes. But... there might be people in the castle who don't want to fight, either. Or people who are too young to fight." Harry couldn't guarantee