

“I can’t guarantee anything. I’ve not even taken my OWLs yet, so I can’t promise you’ll pass them. But we can all agree that sitting around reading bloody Slinkhard books while Umbridge tells us to shut up and trust Fudge isn’t going to get anyone very far.”

“Hear, hear!” George crowed.

“I’ve faced Voldemort, in some form or another, four times, and lived to tell the tale. Which I will do, sometime when I’m not taking up valuable Hogsmeade time. I can’t promise I can teach you to fight him, but I can teach you everything I do know. I can tell you what it’s like to stare death in the face, but I can’t *show* you how it feels. But, if you work hard, then you should know enough spells to hopefully come out the other side the first time you discover what it feels like for yourself.”

His voice was hard, and every single person in the crowd was captivated. “This has to be secret. Umbridge can’t hear about what we’re doing here. None of the teachers can.” He reached into his jacket pocket, pulling out the roll of spelled parchment. “Everyone who wants to learn needs to sign this, before I tell you where we’re going to meet. It’ll help us keep the secret. You won’t like what happens to you if you try and spill the beans, once you’ve signed.”

That sent a wave of unease through the crowd. “I won’t force you, but I also won’t teach you if you don’t. I’ll be expelled if Umbridge knows I’m doing this, or worse. I refuse to put my neck out for anyone who doesn’t trust me.”

“I’ll sign,” Susan called out, stepping forward. Harry transfigured a branch into a short, somewhat stubby-looking table. As soon as he set the contract down on it, Susan pulled a quill from her bag. Naturally, she read the contract carefully, but by the end of it she was scrawling her name with a flourish. “Nicely worded, Harry,” she complimented, making him grin.

Right behind her, Neville signed, not even bothering to read the contract — which made sense, since he’d helped Harry write it.

The twins were next, and they too didn’t stop to read it. When Harry raised an eyebrow, they grinned at him. “We trust you!” they declared in unison, George passing his quill to Lee so he could sign too.

One by one, every single one of them signed their name on the contract — even Zacharias Smith, though he made a face as he did so. Once the last person had signed, Harry reached for it.

“Hang on, Potter; you didn’t sign it,” Zacharias called. Harry resisted the urge to roll his eyes — who had brought him??

“If we want to add any future members, I need to be able to tell them about it, don’t I?” he pointed out patiently. “All the rest of you will be able to do is tell them to come talk to me. Besides, I’m the one with most to lose out of this; I’m not likely to go to Umbridge about it.”