Rosenthal's Houses
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Rosenthal's Houses

by Dendritic_Trees

Summary

The Wizarding World has moved on since The Battle of Hogwarts. The Muggle World has moved on a lot faster. Teddy Lupin's and his new classmates are about to give each other an up close demonstration of the differences.

Let's hope they appreciate them, because not everyone does and they'll have to learn that too.

Notes

The title comes from the Rosenthal effect. The idea that children will often rise or fall in ability to meet external expectations.

I had to give Blue Team regular last names and its bizarre and uncomfortable.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Reality is a bad statistician

Chapter Notes

I've now updated this story so the character last names match the new information from the Halo Channel. Blue Team having surnames is still weird.

Statistically, it is not possible for five children with IQs of over 150 and far too much energy to all be born in the same smallish suburb, but reality is, on occasion, a terrible statistician, so it happened anyway. This came as a great relief to both the children in question, who were all bored out of their respective minds and also to their parents, since hearing “chess got boring, its too easy to win” out of your six year old is only a good thing until you consider the logistics. It is a statistical certainty that five energetic genius children living in the same quiet suburb will become best friends. That happened too.

So John met Sam and Kelly who knew Fred who knew Linda and the result was a roving pack of children no one quite knew what to do with. The martial arts thing started because John, as everyone was quick to remind them all, needed to learn how to not break anyone else’s arms. But Sam, Fred, Kelly and Linda, being six, weren’t going to not do something John was doing, so it became the designated group activity. The thing they all did even when they cycled through disciplines and got old enough to have different schedules. Still, no one else got their wrist broken playing capture the flag, so it worked. Even if they people did go from calling them “that lot” to “those alarming children” when they thought no one was listening. They were wrong of course, because Linda heard them and told all the others.

Those alarming children were in the park on a Saturday two days after John’s eleventh birthday, when a plump woman, with flyaway hair bustled over to them. “Excuse me,” she asked Fred, “Are you John Daniels?” Probably because he was the only one sitting still, deeply absorbed in the magic trick he was practicing.

“No,” he said, looking up, “Hey John!”

John turned to look, and was, as a result, flipped onto the ground and pinned by a triumphant Sam. “Get off,” he muttered, squirming out from under his bigger friend and trotting over, “I’m John.” Sam followed him, and Kelly, who had been sprinting around the park jogged over to see what the fuss was about.

“Oh, hello dear,” said the woman. “My name is Professor Pomona Sprout. I’ve come to tell you something quite important, are your parents here?”

“They’re at home,” said John.

Professor Sprout looked a little perturbed. “Well, why don’t we go and talk with them. I’m sure your friends will wait for you.”

“Why are you trying to kidnap John?” Asked Linda, dropping out of the tree she’d been climbing. “It’s creepy.”
Professor Sprout jumped and squeaked a little, then turned to face Linda, “Oh my, I didn’t see you there my dear.”

Linda stared flatly straight into Professor Sprout’s eyes until the professor looked away and turned back to John. “I’m not trying to kidnap anyone. I’m a teacher at a rather special school which you’ve been invited to.” She smiled at John and handed him his Hogwarts letter.

John turned the letter over in his hands. It was made of old-fashioned parchment and sealed in wax, which was a more than a little weird for a school acceptance letter. He was very not sure about this woman, schools with special programs came to your house, or your class, they didn’t track you down in parks. Besides, she couldn’t meet Linda’s gaze, and she called people dear, and those were not traits he liked in an adult. “If you’re from a special school, you must want to talk to all of us,” he said.

Professor Sprout frowned at him. “Well, no dear, I’ve just got a letter here for you.”

John looked up at her. “Well, I don’t think I want to go to a school without my friends. Sorry.” Then he handed the letter back. “Come on guys, let’s go.”

Then John, Kelly, Linda, Sam and Fred turned and dashed off. Professor Sprout heard the tall girl with the long blue braid shout “Race you!” as they disappeared around the corner.

“And so I was quite at a loss Minerva,” Pomona explained, “I couldn’t very well chase after them, they were already suspicious. The boy barely looked at the letter, I’ve never heard of such a thing, and quite odd children they were too.”

Minerva put her head in her hands, “No Pomona, I quite agree, I’m not quite certain what I would have said to that either. What was that name again? Daniels?” she asked, digging around in her desk for her list of new students. “In Elsingford?”

Pomona nodded briskly.

“Oh my,” Minerva muttered, as she looked at her list, “It seems someone will be quite a number of trips to Elsingford in the next little while. How peculiar.”

Poppy visibly steeled herself.

“No don’t worry Poppy. I think I’ll take care of these ones, they will clearly require a firm hand.” Minerva said, trading grimaces with Pomona as her friend headed back to the greenhouses.

Faced with the prospect of five trips to Elsingford in three months Minerva elected to wait and deliver her news all in one go and waited for the eighteenth of May, when the last of the letters was
due to be delivered. By that time John and his friends had almost completely forgotten about the woman from the park so they were as surprised as Linda’s mother when Minerva McGonagall arrived on the doorstep. Minerva, for her part, was quite surprised to find not one child, but five and a pile of sleeping bags arrayed around the room when she arrived.

“Hello,” said Minerva, “My name is Professor Minerva McGonagall and I’m looking for Linda Pravdin. Is she here?”

Linda’s mother, for her part, handled the whole situation rather well. “I’m Kathleen, Linda is my daughter, can I help you?”

Minerva stepped inside. “Hello Mrs. Pravdin, I’m the Headmistress of a very unique school and I’m very pleased to say that your daughter has been accepted.” She pulled Linda’s letter out of her pocket, and Linda stepped up to take it. Unlike Professor Sprout, she met Linda’s gaze squarely. Linda smiled.

Sam, John, Kelly and Fred all immediately crowded around her to have a look at it.

“Linda, Sam, John, Kelly, Fred, go upstairs while I talk to the professor.” Kathleen rattled off, “and don’t just sit on the stairs and eavesdrop. I’ll call you when we’re done,” she added.

Naturally, Linda led everyone upstairs and into the bathroom, where you could hear everything going on in the living room through the heating vent if you laid down on the floor.

“Well Professor, I’m not quite sure what to tell you. We’ve considered sending Linda to a number of special programs in the past, but she’s doing so well here and making friends that I just don’t think that moving her would be worth it.” Kathleen explained.

Minerva, who had no idea about Muggle gifted programs, IQ tests or academic enrichment, let alone Linda’s specific history with them, frowned briefly at Kathleen before continuing, “I can assure you that Hogwarts is nothing like any other school you may have considered in the past. Hogwarts is a school of Magic and I’m happy to say that your daughter is a witch.” This was a well-practiced speech for Minerva, and she gave Kathleen a quarter of a minute to stare at her before moving on. “I understand how fantastical this must sound to you. Don’t be concerned, I am perfectly well prepared to offer you proof.” Then she turned the settee into a tiger.

Kathleen yelped like there was a tiger in her living room and all five children skittered back downstairs.

“Is that real?” Asked Sam, leaning over the bannister.

“Quite real I assure you, Mr –“ Minerva inquired, pursing her lips and resting her hands on her hips.

Sam either didn’t notice or chose to ignore the hint, thumped down the stairs and held out his hand. “Sam Adler.”

It took Minerva a full ten seconds to compose herself and shake Sam’s hand. “I beg your pardon, but did you just say Adler?”

“Yes that’s me,” said Sam, grinning.

“And I don’t suppose you live at 37 Clematis St?” Minerva asked.

“Yeah,” said Sam, “how did you know? Or is that another magic trick.”
Technically Hogwarts acceptance letters were addressed by magic, but Minerva shook her head. “No, it seems that I have a letter for you too.” She fished the letter in question out of her pocket and handed it to Sam, who darted back up to show it to his friends.

“Was that other Professor from Hogwarts too?” John asked, from where he was standing at the top of the stairs, “Pomona Sprout?”

“John Daniels I presume,” asked Minerva, with only the slightest of delays this time. After only a moment more she also managed to ask, quite graciously “And I don’t suppose you two are Kelly Berman and Frederick Ellsworth?”

Kelly nodded brightly.

“Its Fred,” said Fred, but he came and took the letter anyway.

Kathleen spared Linda of total despair before she turned back to Professor McGonagall. “I’m sorry, I’m going to need some more time here. You lot, why don’t you all go and get your parents. And get away from that.” She said, turning to the kids who were deeply involved in patting the tiger, which had started purring.

They left, but only after a certain amount of preadolescent eye rolling.

Kathleen turned back to Professor McGonagall. “Could I please have my settee back?”

Minerva rather distractedly turned the tiger back into a settee, which was left in the middle of the living-room rug. Kathleen sat down on it with a sigh. “A witch? Linda? Really?”

“I’m quite certain. Surely your daughter has, at some point done something you can’t explain? Something remarkable?”

“Well that’s just the thing isn’t it. Linda does remarkable things all the time. We bought her some Lego when she was four, and she built a working catapult. We hid them so she wouldn’t throw things at people, and she found it again, three times! Those five are ahead in every class you know, they’re all brilliant, we checked.” Kathleen explained. “I don’t know, maybe I shouldn’t be surprised. I haven’t been able to explain anything Linda does for years, I’m just a hair dresser. I love my daughter, but I can’t claim to understand her all that well, I’m afraid.”

Minerva nodded slowly. “Well, I can assure you that she will find Hogwarts to be a very stimulating place and she may well find more people like her.”

While Minerva was trying to reassure Linda’s mother, Linda and her friends had elected to wander through the neighbourhood collecting their parents in sequence rather than parallel to give themselves a chance to talk.

“So that did just happened right?” Sam asked.

“Well, I suppose we could all be hallucinating the same tiger.” Said Fred, “and the lady calling us wizards. And the crazy lady from the other day, and Linda’s mother could be too.”

“Well the other option is magic.” Linda pointed out. “I’m pretty sure I’ve never done magic.”

“Well there was that time with that teacher.” John pointed out, “remember Mrs. Shelby, you were in her cupboard and she looked straight at you, and she never saw you.”
Linda frowned, tilting her head this way and that as though she could jog the memory loose. “She was pretty oblivious, but you have a point.”

They stopped then, to tell John’s parents that Linda’s mom wanted to speak to them. Then continued down the street to Sam’s. Kelly tore her envelope open and pulled out the letter so they could have a look at it. “Robes and a magic wand? Student may bring an owl?” She asked as she read down the list. “This is a bit much.”

“Tiger.” John reminded her, as they stopped at Sam’s house.

“Oh I dunno,” said Fred, “It could be fun, unless you don’t think you’re up for it.”

“I,” said Kelly, flipping her long blue braid over her shoulder, “I’m up for everything, and if we’re going to go and learn magic, I’m going to learn more than you.”

John didn’t point out that Fred made a point of never being the best at anything if he could help it. He still hadn’t decided what he thought. A new school and a new set of subjects would be a good challenge, but wands and robes and pointed hats did sound silly.

Kelly dashed ahead to reach her house before them and then dashed back just because she could. They continued on to Fred’s.

In short order everyone was back at Linda’s. Minerva described the situation to the adults and the children were once again banished, and listened in via the bathroom vent. In slightly longer order decisions were made and trips to Diagon Alley were organized. And that was that.
“Okay, the train is adorable, and the candy is cool, but these I’m not sure about,” said Kelly, holding out the sleeve of her new robes. “They don’t give a girl much to work with.”

“You say that about every school uniform,” said Sam.

“Well its easier for you. You’re going to start seeing it my way now you don’t get to wear trousers.” Said Kelly, pulling a pair of leggings on under her robes.

John watched his friends and frowned. Kelly had moved on to stretching and kicking to get a feel for her new robes, Fred was trying to trip her up and failing, Sam was laughing at them. Linda was ignoring them all and reading *A Standard Book of Spells (Grade 1)* with the cover tilted up to cover her face; which was her way of declaring ‘alone time’ in an enclosed space. If she had been worried, she’d have been reading something familiar.

John wasn’t worried, precisely, because he was reasonably sure that he and his friends could do anything, he was just a little, concerned. That was it, he was concerned. The new school with the new subjects couldn’t be any harder than that time they’d reprogrammed all the school computers. But Diagon Alley, with its odd shops and odder people had been a lot like a trip to fairy-land. John had read enough fairytale stories to know that the rules were different in fairy-land. How could they win if they didn’t know any of the rules?

“We will be reaching Hogwarts in five minutes time,” said a disembodied voice, “please leave your luggage on the train. It will be taken to the school separately.”

The train eventually pulled into a shabby little platform. A huge, shaggy headed man was standing at one end with a lantern. “Firs’ years over ‘ere!” he called, “firs’ years over ‘ere!” The huge man led them down a twisty, slippery path to a dock surrounded by a bobbing cluster of little boats. “Now no more ‘an four to a boat. Now,” said the man, who still hadn’t bothered to give a name and took up one entire boat himself.

Everyone crowded towards the boats. John immediately turned to volunteer to be the odd one out, but Linda was already climbing into a boat with two other people. “I’ll be fine.” She called, and made an ‘okay’ gesture at him as the boat pulled away. She’d always been tougher than the rest of them that way. John, Fred, Kelly and Sam packed themselves into the next boat, which promptly started gliding towards the opposite shore. Unlike the almost self-conscious quirkiness of Diagon Alley, and the incredibly quaint red steam train, the looming silhouette of Hogwarts castle was properly eerie and impressive. It was also a touch intimidating, John immediately started running through a list of everything he’d heard about Hogwarts, trying to figure out what they were going to have to do, and what might go wrong.

Then Kelly leant abruptly in front of him, making the boat tilt alarmingly. “Stop being so serious,” she mock-intoned, grabbing his face, “your face is gonna stick that way.”

Fred and Sam burst out laughing, which made the boat rock even more. John briefly considered shoving them all in the lake, but couldn’t think of a way to do it without getting soaking wet.
They reached the other side of the lake, and traipsed up a flight of stairs through a huge pair of wooden doors and into an equally large entrance hall, where a very short man with a tuft of white hair was waiting for them.

“Ah, thank you Hagrid,” the short man squeaked.

“Not a problem, Professor Flitwick.” Said Hagrid.

“Welcome to Hogwarts,” said Flitwick, “my name is Professor Flitwick. Before we can begin our start of term feast you must first be Sorted into one of Hogwarts four houses: Gryffindor, Slytherin, Hufflepuff and my own House, Ravenclaw. While you are students at Hogwarts, you will work, study and make friends with your Housemates and you will compete with each other to earn your house points in the House Cup with your successes and achievements. Each of the Houses has its own proud history and has produced many fine, and upstanding wizards.”

The funny stresses made no sense to John, and Kelly and Sam, standing on either side of him looked just as confused, but some of the other kids started muttering. John caught ‘yeah, right’ and ‘sure, like, -’ but nothing that made sense.

Then Professor Flitwick cut them off with a chipper “Form a line and follow me please,” and led them through the doors into the Great Hall.

The Great Hall had no roof. Then it started to rain and John realized that the Great Hall had a magic roof. He got a good look at it as the new students lined up in front of a stage containing a stool, on which was balanced, a mouldy looking, pointed hat. When the hat started to sing, it was actually a bit less weird.

In what is now the distant past, four great friends came together

With different values but the same intent

They sought to found a school and share their knowledge

Due to their great friendship they could foresee no dissent.

Yet at first it seemed their plan was doomed to fail

For though they sought to teach, they disagreed on who

For students, daring Gryffindor desired those of chivalry and courage

Whilst wise Ravenclaw sought only the brightest

The wily wizard Slytherin sought the cunning and ambitious, but was partial too, to those of pure descent.

And through it all kind Hufflepuff taught those willing to learn and cared for their background not the slightest.
So it was, the school was split so that each could teach their favourites
And though the Founders have passed on, still this tradition lingers
I was made to House you all
To split you by the traits that each one favoured.

My makers are all gone now,
And I fear some don't remember
That though each was great alone
Their best work was together

Then Professor Flitwick stepped up and called out “Abel, Janine.”

A tiny girl with her hair in pigtails bobbed up to the stool and Flitwick pointed his wand at the Hat causing it to float, and lowered it onto her head. There was a brief pause and the hat called out “HUFFLEPUFF!”

As Janine Abel bounced off the stepstool her robes sprouted a yellow patch and a table full of similarly yellow-patched students cheered. John’s stomach sank. What if his friends were split up. They were best together, like the people in the song. “Samuel Adler.” Called out Professor Flitwick.

Sam spun round and grinned at John as he walked up to the stage. John nodded absently back and kept right on frowning. Sam kept trying to catch his friend’s eye as the hat was put on his head. ‘Hmmm…’ said the Hat. ‘Very concerned about your friend, aren’t you?’

‘Well John likes to keep track of us all. He gets worried sometimes.’ Thought Sam.

‘You’re not worried at all, though. Takes more than a talking hat to rattle you.’

‘Nope, not even a telepathic talking hat.’

‘Very loyal, and very brave, where should I put you though? Any preferences?’

‘How should I know?’

‘Oh good, the unbiased ones are my favourite, and they’re so rare these days. In that case.’

“GRYFFINDOR.” Yelled the Sorting Hat.

Sam got up, took the hat off his head, and walked to the table that had started yelling with a shrug.

Three more A names, Kara Ahn, who went to Slytherin, Fahjad Alfarsi, a Gryffindor, and Mary Alquist, another Hufflepuff fell between Sam’s name and Kelly’s. ‘So how does this work?’ she
wondered as the Sorting Hat was lowered onto her head. ‘Wouldn’t you like to know.’ Replied the Hat. ‘You’re a curious one though, aren’t you? You’d do well in Ravenclaw, they’ll appreciate that. But you want to do all sorts of things with all those things you know too, don’t you?’

‘People already appreciate me.’ Thought Kelly. ‘And this is goofy.’

‘Snippy, snippy, there’s a healthy dose of courage there. And you do love your friends, I can tell.’ Underneath the Sorting Hat’s wide, floppy brim Kelly glowered.

‘Well, if you insist on rushing me,’ muttered the Hat, ‘then I guess I’ll have to say –

“RAVENCLAW!”

The table full of people with blue badges burst into applause, and Kelly hopped off to join them at half her usual speed, trying to figure out why a talking hat, of all things, had made her skin crawl. Her hair matched her robes though, and that was hilarious.

Unlike Kelly, John knew exactly why he didn’t like the stupid Sorting Hat. He had no idea exactly who was sorted between Kelly getting off the stage and Professor Flitwick calling him up because he was too busy peering from table to table, trying to see how Kelly and Sam were doing. When Professor Flitwick called out “Daniels, John.” He ascended the stage with a certain amount of bad grace. ‘Hmm,’ said the Hat’s voice in his head, ‘and what shall I do with you?’

‘You’ve already split up my friends, makes it difficult.’

‘Oh, you’re very loyal, your friends mentioned that actually… Brave too… And more thoughtful than you look… And you just can’t stand to lose, which must make this very frustrating for you. It seems that I, once again, have a lot of leeway. This is going to be an interesting year.’

‘I want to stay with my friends.’ John reiterated, somewhat pointlessly.

‘Then consider that your challenge. It’ll be more difficult than you think. But unless you care to volunteer an opinion… no… well then, I think I’ll go with…’

“GRYFFINDOR!” The hat yelled.

John got up and sat went to sit with Sam, who slung an arm around his shoulders and grinned while the rest of the table clapped.

John’s sorting was followed by immediately Richard Davis, who went to Ravenclaw. Then Fred was called up. The Sorting Hat was quiet for a very long moment after it was placed on Fred’s head. ‘Now now, don’t be shy’ said the hat. ‘You’ve got a lot of interesting qualities buried in here. Stop thinking about everyone else, think about where you want to go.’

‘How would I know, I learned about these houses like ten minutes ago.’

‘You could do great things.’

‘Well yeah, but I don’t need the attention.’

‘Then I know just where to put you...’
'HUFFLEPUFF!' Yelled the hat.

Fred hopped off the stage. He was too far away to do more than wave at John, Sam and Kelly, but he ruffled Linda’s hair as he walked past her, and got a gentle punch on the shoulder in return.

Then Malcolm Flint was sorted into Slytherin and everyone sitting around John and Sam hissed again. John peered about trying to catch someone’s eye and maybe ask what was going on, but everyone was focused on the Sorting Hat, including the teachers, who didn’t seem to have noticed the outburst of hissing. John was too busy with that to pay much attention to who was sorted next, a few new students joined his table including a boy who’s name John didn’t catch with bright blue hair like Kelly’s who sat down directly across from him.

Linda kept a perfectly straight face as she climbed onto the stage. ‘Oh, here’s another one who isn’t afraid of me. Plenty to work with here isn’t there? Not easily rattled, and certainly clever, devoted to your friends… But what’s this? Spying on your teachers? Well, that is very interesting. I think that settles it then, its got to be “SLYTHERIN.”

Linda listened to the analysis without comment, took the hat off her head and looked down with mild interest as her robes developed a green and silver snake patch and walked to the Slytherin table without saying a word. She heard the booing from the Gryffindors, but elected to ignore it.

John didn’t ignore it. He spent the rest of what was left of the sorting peering about trying to catch Fred or Kelly or Linda’s eyes and figure out who the hell had been booing at Linda so he could be sure to never speak to them.

As the Sorting wound down, Professor McGonagall stood up and took the stage. “Attention everyone,” she said briskly, and a little unnecessarily, since everyone had gone silent when she stood up. “Welcome to our new students and welcome back to the rest of you. First some announcements. First years should know that no one should enter the Forbidden Forest, that magic is not to be practiced in the hallways between classes and that our caretaker, Mr Filch, has posted a list on his office door of prohibited items which will be confiscated. I would like to be able to say that the rest of you know this already, but I am fully aware that you require reminding.”

She paused to glower at them for a moment. No one moved. “I will also remind you that while Hogwarts has many fine traditions, its oldest and most sacred is that of providing a place where all students can learn magic together. I will ask of all of you that while you are here, on being your best, not only as students and as witches and wizards. Our world has faced many challenges in recent years but no purpose is served by endlessly repeating them, so I will also ask that you all endeavour to leave old grudges outside when you enter these walls.”

That provoked whispers, most of them waspishly angry. ‘Not likely’, ‘oh right like I’m forgiving those people.’, ‘who does she think she’s kidding’, ‘fat chance’.

John looked at Sam and grimaced, but this time Sam was frowning too. “This might be a problem,” Sam muttered.

Professor McGonagall started talking again before he could continue. But for tonight, I simply ask
that you enjoy the feast.”

When she said that the dishes on the tables filled abruptly with food. John took advantage of the break in conversation while everyone started eating to sort through what had just happened. He wished that someone would come out and say what these ‘many challenges’ were. His brain was conjuring up everything from Smaug the dragon to pictures of Afghanistan from the newspaper but the only thing he actually knew was that a lot of people were angry and it had to do with people booing at Linda, and he wasn’t even sure about that. Around him, conversations were beginning to start up.

“Ooh,” gasped a dark haired girl sitting across the table and two seats down, “where did it come from?”

“From the kitchen,” replied the girl sitting next to her. “Muggle born are you? No Wizard family?”

The dark haired girl nodded vigorously. “I only found out in June,” she whispered.

“Don’t worry, we’ll show you how things work. I’m Molly.” Said her friend, holding out her hand.

“Grace,” said Grace, looking very relieved. “Are you’re parents wizards then?”

“Yes,” said Molly. “Two of my grandparents are Muggles though. So I still know how to, like, use a phone and things.”

Grace gaped. “Do Wizards really not use phones? How can you not know how to use a phone?”

“It’s true,” said a slim Asian girl sitting on Sam’s other side. “My Mum’s family are all Witches and Wizards and she never used a phone ‘til she met my Dad. I’m Vinh by the way.”

John and Sam exchanged looks of slight horror.

“Teddy,” said the blue-haired boy sitting across from John. “And Wizards don’t need phones though, we have floo powder,” said the blue-haired boy sitting across from John. “Isn’t your fire-place connected to the floo system if you’re a half-blood?”

“Course it is,” said Vinh, “But my Muggle grandparents fireplace isn’t, so we have both, floo and the phoneline.”

“Oh right,” said Teddy, “I didn’t think of that, my Grandma and Godfather’s family are all Wizards.”

John had a terrible thought and fished his mobile phone out of his pocket. It was displaying ‘no signal’ and the screen was flickering slightly.

“What’s that?” asked Teddy, leaning across the table.

“My mobile?” replied John.

“That’s a telephone?” Teddy gasped, “it’s so tiny!”

Yes. This was going to be a problem.
The conversation wound its way away from technology after that. Tiny phones are only interesting when they’re working and John’s had a magical invisible ceiling to contend with.

An older boy at the far end of the table stood up as the desserts literally vanished from the serving dishes. “First years,” he called, “all new Gryffindors with me please.” He called.

John and Sam joined the flock of Gryffindors jostling their way out of the Great Hall. The trip up to Gryffindor tower was impressive. A lot of the kids, the ones with Wizard parents, didn’t seem particularly interested in either the talking paintings on the walls, or the fact that with half the group standing on one flight of stairs, it very abruptly swivelled ninety degrees and connected to a totally different ledge. Sam wondered if it would balance out and having the portraits to give directions would make up for the problem with the stairs.

Their disorganized little gaggle finally came to a halt in front of a painting of a rather fat woman in a pink dress. “Ah, new students,” said the Fat Lady, “welcome to Gryffindor.”

Their leader, whose name Sam had missed in the commotion turned to them and said very clearly, “the password is Mugwort.”

“Righty-ho,” said the Fat Lady, and her portrait swung forward.

“This is the Gryffindor Common Room,” their guide explained. “You’ll spend most of your time here. And your dormitories will be on the third floor up those stairs, boys on the left, girls on the right, the house elves will already have brought your things up. Have a good night you lot.”

They trooped upstairs. The room they’d been directed to contained four big four-poster beds, with red bedspreads and curtains. Their trunks had already been placed at the feet of the beds. John sat down cross-legged on the end of his and pulled his phone back out.

“What are you looking at?” Sam asked him, “you look like one of those dogs with too much skin.”

“Its still not working,” John sighed, “I can’t call Kelly or Linda or Fred.”

“We’ll see them at breakfast,” said Sam.

John sighed again.

Sam chomped on a laugh, “oh my God. You have separation anxiety. You are like one of those dogs.”

John just glared.

“No,” said Sam. “Doesn’t work, I’m immune. Linda has inoculated me.”

John threw his phone at Sam’s head. Sam caught it.

“Hey, wow, this thing is actually broken,” said Sam.

“Yeah,” said John, “I think the magic castle is messing with it or something. Is yours working?”

Sam fished his mobile out of his pocket. It was flickering the way John’s was. “You might be right.”
John groaned and flopped backwards onto the bed.

“Something wrong?” Asked Teddy, “or did you just eat too much trifle.”

“The castle has broken our mobiles,” Sam explained.

Teddy stared for a split second before he seemed to remember something and lit back up, “Oh, oh yes, I remember because Auntie Hermione told me that magic interferes with technology or ecklecticery or something like that. So your tiny phone won’t work.”

“Electricity,” said John without getting up. “You mean electricity.”

“Yeah,” said Teddy, distractedly, “that’s right.”

“You’re joking right?” Sam asked, “please, please tell me that you’re joking.”

“No, I really don’t think any of that stuff works here. But, I mean, my whole family’s magic, so I’ve never really used any of that Muggle stuff before. Looks really tricky though.”

“Its really not,” said Sam, “although, I guess they can be a little hard to get used to,” he back-tracked, thinking about how many times he’d had to show his Grandmother how to use a mobile phone. “But seriously, no phones, no computers?”

“What’s a computer?” asked Teddy, “is that the thing that does sums for you.”

“Do you mean a calculator?” asked Sam.

“Yeah,” said Teddy, “I got to muck about with one of those once. Seemed dead useful.”

“Well, I mean, technically a calculator is a sort of a computer, but its not a computer computer. And, hey wait, you don’t have calculators here? Are we going to have to do all our maths by hand?”

Teddy blinked at him. “We don’t take maths at Hogwarts, although I guess the older students can take arithmancy, that’s a sort of math, I think. Its to do with numbers anyway.”

“Huh,” said Sam, “so we really just do magic here. Nothing else. Turtles all the way down. Linda and Kelly are going to be so annoyed, they love math.”

Teddy frowned. “How long do Muggles have to study maths for? Does it really take you that long to learn to do sums?”

There was really not a lot to say to that, “no, there’s, you know, all the other kinds of math.” Sam explained.

Teddy blinked at him again, looking utterly bemused, “how many kinds of math can there be? I mean, they’re just numbers,” he said.

And there was absolutely nothing to say to that.

In Ravenclaw tower Kelly was having a similar experience. “So wait, how are we going to do any research? We will be doing that, right?”

“You mean like essays?” asked Evan, who she’d been sitting next to at dinner. “Sure, of course. Hogwarts has one of the best magical libraries in Europe. There’s all sorts of books here you
wouldn’t be able to find anywhere else.” He beamed genuinely up at Kelly when he said it.

“Books?” Kelly squeaked.

A rather short boy with dark hair turned to look at her briefly, and then turned back to the people he’d been speaking to and said rather loudly, “see this is exactly what I mean, how can you take people like that, and expect them to do well here. We’d all be better if they went back when they came from.”

Evan gave her a stricken look and pulled her into the corner away from the other boy. “Do you not write essays in Muggle schools?” he asked.

Kelly scrunches her nose at Evan, “of course we do, we just do it on computers, because its 2009, not 1987.”

“Computer? Those are those Muggle number machines right?” Asked Evan’s sister Meghan.

Kelly then attempted to explain the entire history of computers and the Internet at the same time, which came out as a strangled “Yeah-up.”

Evan and Meghan looked at her funny in unison.

“You can search for specific information on computers,” she settled for explaining, “and you can write essays too.”

“So its like a book,” Meghan asked.

“No its like all the books, but faster and more up-to-date and you know, better.”

“That sounds wicked,” said Meghan.

“So what’s his problem?” Kelly asked, nodding in the direction of the boy who’d been making rude comments earlier.

Meghan and Evan looked at each other, and then at the ground.

“Well, um –“

“He’s just –“

“Never mind –“

“being rude.”

“I’m sure he’s not –“

“He’s probably –“

“Talking about you?”

“Just a jerk.”

They babbled over each other.

“Sure,” said Kelly, totally sarcastically, “right, you’ve absolutely convinced me. No, seriously, what is his problem?” She fished her mobile out of her robes, meaning to text Fred about the rapidly
escalating weirdness, and stared at the flickering screen in horror.

“What’s that?” asked Meghan.

“Its my mobile phone,” said Kelly, “and I think its broken.”

“Oh don’t worry,” said Evan. “I read about that. Muggle technology doesn’t work when there’s lots of magic around. It turns it off or something, I don’t know why.”

“Oh great,” muttered Kelly.

Fred’s mobile phone was also broken, of course, but he was, at least, spared having to explain what a mobile phone was.

“Oh Lord, is yours broken too?” Asked a short red-haired boy, peering over his arm.

“Yeah,” said Fred, “is yours sort of flickering a bit.”

“Is yours doing that too?” asked the girl standing on Fred’s other side.

Fred nodded and held the phone out to show her. She held hers out next to it, so they could compare. The red-headed boy held his phone out too so they could all see three identically flickering screens.

They had all been walking quite fast and had ended up at the front of their little huddle of first years so when they got distracted, slowed down and spread out to walk side by side, they created a traffic jam. A few paces later, the older student leading them, a girl named Abigail noticed that she’d left them behind.

“Merlin’s beard you’re all slow,” said Abigail, “did you all eat too much pudding at the - hey, what have you all got there?” she asked.

“Our mobiles aren’t working,” explained the girl standing next to Fred.

Abigail stared at their mobile phones with her mouth open. “Merlin’s beard, what are those funny little things?” she asked.

Fred goggled at her, and he could see his two new friends doing the same.

“They’re telephones,” explained the girl. “You know? You talk to people who are far away with them?” She ended the explanation in a squeaky question mark.

“Oh those are muggle things right?” asked Abigail, with a pleased smile. “Don’t worry ah –“

“Taraji Rienner,” the girl prompted.

“Don’t worry Taraji,” Abigail said, “you won’t need one of those here. The school has plenty of owls so you can write your parents whenever if you don’t have one of your own. No need to worry.” She was smiling reassuringly at all of them, seemingly unaware of the looks of horrified confusion she was getting in return. “I can show you where the owlry is in the morning. But don’t worry about it tonight. Come on, we’re almost there, the common room is just… here.” She stopped in front of a large stack of barrels. “Now, to get in, you just tap this one here, so it sounds like Helga Hufflepuff.” She clapped the rhythm, to show them and then tapped it on lid of the barrel in the middle of the second row, two from the bottom. The barrels all slid forward, apparently of their own
Abigail led them through the gap behind the barrels into a big circular room decorated in earthy yellows. “Alright, when you’re ready for bed, the girls go through that door on the right, boys, that other one on the left your trunks will be there already,” she said, and then left them to go talk to her friends.

Fred took a long look around and turned to Taraji, “we are literally living in an actual Hobbit hole.” He said. “Hi, I’m Fred,” he added.

“Oh my God, you’re right,” said the other boy he’d been talking too. “I love that book. Oh, and I’m Cleon.”

“I know,” said Fred, “and I can’t even tell my friends. I mean, I guess I can tell them at breakfast, but I’d like to be able to take a photo.”

“I know,” said Taraji. “I promised my little sister I’d let her know what it was like here. So I guess I’m going to have to get good at writing letters, huh? Letters.” She repeated.

“Maybe it’ll be an adventure?” suggested Fred.

But even he wasn’t very convinced.

Linda would not realize that her mobile phone was broken until the next morning. The gaggle of Slytherin first years were led back out into the entrance hall, through a smaller door and down a flight of stairs into the basement. When they went down a second flight of stairs below that, she gave up on all hope of a useable cell signal.

The sub-basement they walked through was a dungeon. There were bars on the doors, which no one commented on. She couldn’t think of a reason to build a school with a dungeon that wasn’t creepy, but John was probably going to get all excited about finding out why, and then tell them all.

They came to a straggling halt in front of a blank stretch of wall. They were being led by a tall older girl called Anna Rosier who said, “beetle eyes”, loudly and clearly.

A section of the wall slid back and Anna shepherded them through the opening. They came out into a long low room with rough stone walls and green and silver furnishings. There were a few thick windows set high in the wall casting greenish, underwater light into the room. “This is the Slytherin common room,” Anna explained. “You’ll be spending most of your free time here. Now, your bags will be in your rooms already, boys you’ll be heading off to the left over there,” she pointed, “and girls over there to the right.”

A few people started to stand up. “Stay here please,” said Anna. “Now, before you all go to bed we need to discuss a few things. You all know what people say about Slytherins, and I know that you know. And I also know its not true. Slytherin is just as good as any other house. We aren’t all cowards, and we aren’t all Dark Wizards either. But that isn’t going to change what everyone else thinks about us. No one else is going to cut us any slack at all, so we all need to be twice as good and three times as well behaved as everyone else if we want any credit.”

But Linda didn’t know what people said about Slytherins. She looked around. A few people were pouting, or looking mutinous, and a few people were looking sadly at their shoes, but no one else looked as confused as she felt.
Anna kept on talking, “and if any of you start living down to everyone’s expectations,” she practically snarled, “and I find out about it; which I will, you’re going to really, really, regret it.” Then she grinned broadly and abruptly and announced, “if you ever have any trouble, just ask your older housemates, any time. But I don’t think you’ll have any trouble. After all, we’re Slytherins.”

Everyone stood still for a few moments longer, until Anna dismissed them with a little wave of her hand. Linda followed the rest of the girls into their dorm room. Their trunks had each been placed at the end of one of the big four-poster beds, which all had green bedspreads, and heavy green curtains. Linda clambered onto her bed and drew the curtains. They blocked out most of the light, and also the chatter of the other girls. She ran her hands over the lining of the curtains. The fabric was heavy, but not that heavy, so the curtains had probably been magicked. Which was actually pretty cool. And it was nice to have her own quiet space. The dining hall had been incredibly loud.
Kelly woke up at three minutes past five out of sheer excitement, stared at the ceiling for fifteen minutes and then gave up and dragged her trunk out from under her bed to read until someone else woke up. They were officially not allowed out of their dormitories at night, and she didn’t want to start figuring out exactly how early in the morning still counted as ‘at night’ until she could make Fred do it with her. Besides, there’d been a reference to colour changing charms in the back of her charms book, and she wanted to figure out if she could use it on her hair instead of dye.

She had just starting to doze off again over her book, when Meghan stuck her head through her curtains and reached out to shake her. So she was still rather sleepy as she started down the stairs with Meghan and Evan.

“Our Dad was a Gryffindor,” Evan explained, as they walked down the stairs. He had been talking since he’d met them in the common room and his eyes were very wide. Kelly thought it might be nerves, making him a sort of inverse John, who was probably going to start speaking again sometime around Saturday.

“And he said he would be happy just so long as we weren’t in Slytherin, but he was Quiddaaraarrghh,” Even suddenly yelled as his leg suddenly sunk into the step and he just about pitched down the stairs on his face.”

Kelly was so baffled that she just stopped and stared. Meghan seemed totally unbothered. She hopped over the stair that had just eaten Evan’s leg, grabbed both his arms and pulled him out. “It’s just a trick stair. They’re all over,” she explained.

“Do we need to tell someone?” Kelly asked, hopping two stairs just to be safe, “so they can come and fix it.”

“Oh, no, they’re just like that,” said Meghan.

“Right,” said Kelly, so nonplussed she forgot to ask Evan what the problem was with Slytherin.

Evan also didn’t seem especially upset by the attack-stairs and picked up his monologue midsentence,

“Quidditch captain for Gryffindor for years, so I reckon he’ll be fine when we owl him, but his head’ll explode once Quidditch season starts up. Won’t know who to cheer for, you know?” He didn’t even give Kelly a chance to nod before he started up again. “Not that we’ll be playing Quidditch this year, first years never do, well, except for Harry Potter, but that’s Harry Potter, you know?”

Kelly didn’t know.

By the time they reached the entrance hall a few more people had trickled down the stairs, but they were still some of the first people into the Great Hall. There wasn’t as much food as there had been the other night, but there was still a lot of food. There were stacks of toast and pancakes, bacon, sausages, eggs and big tureens full of oatmeal and fruit, and jam, butter and syrup and tea, coffee and pitchers of juice, like whoever ran the kitchen lived in terror that someone might have to go though the morning without their favourite breakfast food.

She grabbed a stack of pancakes and bacon and dumped syrup over the lot of it, and then poured tea
and some surprisingly dark orange juice, which she gulped. “This isn’t orange juice,” she grumbled. Instead of being bright and tangy, the juice was sort of thick and sweet and vaguely spiced.

“That’s pumpkin juice,” said Meghan. And then her eyes went as wide as Evan’s still were, “Ohhhh, that’s right, you’re a Muggleborn! Do Muggles not have pumpkin juice?”

“Not as far as I know,” said Kelly. She took another gulp of pumpkin juice and rolled it around in her mouth. It was actually pretty nice, now that she was expecting it. She reached for her phone to text everyone about the not-orange juice, and then remembered that her phone didn’t work, and stopped.

“Do you not know about Quidditch either?” Meghan asked.

“No.” Said Kelly.

“Oh, that’s terrible, its just the best…”

While Meghan and Evan started to explain Quidditch in stereo, apparently it was a sport played on broomsticks, Kelly alternated shoving food into her mouth and hopping up to look around for Linda, Fred or Sam and John. But by then the hall was starting to get crowded with older students, and even Sam didn’t stand out in the crowd.

Kelly shoved the last of her food into her mouth and stood up, with her mouth still full to go and find everyone, but Meghan tugged her back down, “where are you going?” she asked.

“To find my friends, I haven’t seen them since last night, I wanna know what all the other houses look like inside.”

Meghan looked at her like she’d just said a lot of really bad words in quick succession.

“What, is it secret?” she said.

Kelly didn’t think she’d experienced sarcasm failure, but Meghan nodded solemnly. Kelly was on the verge of just taking her robes back from where Meghan was still holding them and leaving anyway, when the girl who had walked them up to the common room the night before started passing sheets of parchment out. Timetables.

“Awww, no flying until Friday,” Meghan whined.

“Charms first though,” said Evan, “and Flitwick is supposed to be great.”
Teddy was starting his first day at Hogwarts sleepy, disappointed and confused. Sleepy, because he’d been too wound up to fall asleep, disappointed and confused because his new year mates were really weird. He’d heard stories about the Marauders and about Harry and Uncle Ron and Auntie Hermione meeting at Hogwarts since before he could remember, and he’d thought that meeting his new roommates would be auspicious somehow, or at least, a little exciting. But after his one short and bizarre discussion with his two Muggleborn roommates, the fourth Gryffindor fourth year, a boy named Clark Cresswell had wandered upstairs, nodded to him briefly and gone straight to sleep. He was starting to feel cheated.

Teddy had sat down next to the two muggleborns, Sam, and his friend whose name Teddy couldn’t remember, in the hopes of maybe getting to know them a bit better, but they had sat down across each other and seemed to be conducting a conversation that involved lots of eye-rolling and no words. Clark had sat down a few seats away from all of them and was totally absorbed in his eggs and sausages.

Unable to come up with a conversation starter more interesting than ‘how’s the bacon’, Teddy focused on his own food until one of the older prefects passed around the class schedules.

“So, we have Transfiguration first thing,” Teddy said, “I’ve heard that Professor McMillan is supposed to be really strict.”

“Hm,” said Sam.

“I can’t believe they still make us take classes with the Slytherins,” Clark said, so pointedly that it cut through the other conversations.

Sam’s friend - John, that was his name - suddenly swivelled his head to stare straight at him. Teddy thought he looked exactly like an owl who had heard a mouse. But he didn’t say anything, and Clark didn’t notice. After a moment, John went back to staring at his timetable like he had to memorize it right away.

Teddy only knew Professor McMillan in passing, he stopped around for tea a Harry’s sometimes when Teddy was there, but they didn’t usually talk. But he still smiled at Teddy when he came in, just a whisker before the clock chimed the start of class. One or two of the butterflies that had been swirling around in Teddy’s stomach went away, the rest kept fluttering.

“Welcome to Hogwarts everyone,” said Professor McMillan, “I’m Professor McMillan. As much as I’m sure you’d all like to get started, Transfiguration is a difficult and potentially dangerous subject and so we’ll be beginning by understanding some of the theory.”

And they did.

Teddy had thought he had an affinity for transfiguration, it had been the one subject he was confident he could do well in, but he could barely keep up with the pages and pages of baffling theory, and it wasn’t even interesting. Was everything going to be like this?

They were eventually allowed to put away their books and attempt to turn a match into a needle. By the end of class Teddy’s match was still just a match. But Vinh, the dark-haired girl he’d spoken to the night before had turned hers into a shiny needle, and Sam had managed to at least make his
match pale and shiny. Teddy left to find the Defence Against the Dark Arts feeling more than a little hard-done-by, and didn’t offer to show anyone else the way, even though it was one classroom he could already find.

“Hello Teddy, how’s Harry and your Grandma?” Professor Longbottom asked warmly, when he came into the room. No one else was there yet, so it wasn’t embarrassing to be greeted by name.

“They’re great,” said Teddy, “Uncle Harry said to tell you hi, and Aunt Hermione says to floo over when you have a free afternoon. And my Gran’s good too.”

“That’s wonderful. I’ll owl Hermione and let her know that teachers getting free afternoon’s is a myth and I’ll be lucky to see her before Christmas break. How are you finding Hogwarts?”

“Its good,” said Teddy, automatically, “really its - its good.”

There was a clatter outside the classroom of people heading towards it.

“You know what,” said Neville, “lets finish this after class, we’ve only got a minute before it starts.”

Defence Against the Dark Arts was much better than Transfiguration had been. Neville greeted the class of first years with a big smile and said “Hello everyone, I’m Neville Longbottom. I’m teaching Defence Against the Dark Arts this year.”

Vinh put her hand up. “Is it true that the Defence Against the Dark Arts post is cursed?” she asked, when Neville nodded to her,

“Well miss -ah,”

“Vinh Tran.”

Neville opened his mouth, paused, then started, “I suspect a lot of you have heard this rumour. There is some truth to this. At one point, we do believe someone did place a curse on this post. In fact, when I went to school here we had a different Defence Against the Dark Arts Professor every single year. But I promise, the curse is broken, and I am not in any danger. Actually, does anyone else have anything they’d like to ask before we start. Why don’t we just get this all sorted out now.”

A forest of hand went up in the air.

“Did you really go to school with Harry Potter?” Grace asked.

“Is it true you were part of Dumbledore’s army?”

“What’s Dumbledore’s Army?”

After that things dissolved into a babble, because people started trying to explain, over the people asking questions.

“Did you really kill Death Eaters during the Battle?” Clark asked loudly, over the noise.

Neville put a finger to his lips and waited for them to settle down. Once people notice, it didn’t actually take that long.
“Clearly you all have a lot more questions than I thought,” he said, “unfortunately, I don’t have time today to explain the whole history of the Battle of Hogwarts. So I’m just going to say this briefly. I did go to school with Harry, he’s a good friend of mine. I was part of Dumbledore’s Army. As for the details of the Battle of Hogwarts, I don’t want to discuss those in detail today. You’ll learn about some of these things in History of Magic, and I’ll probably describe some of them in lessons, but a lot of the stories you want are very personal. So I’m just going to say that yes, I was there, I fought at the Battle of Hogwarts, and I hope I never have any need to do anything like it again. I also hope that you’ll never use most of what I teach you in this class. But it’s better to know it. So today I’m going to start by teaching you a basic shield charm. Then we’ll cover some other basic counter-hexes and defensive charms. Later on in the semester we’ll cover defending yourself from dark creatures. Now if everyone could stand up but don’t take your wands out yet. We’re going to start by just practicing the name of the charm which is ‘protego’. Everyone say that with me a few times.”

The class dutifully recited ‘protego, protego, protego’, along with Neville until he was happy and waved for them to stop.

Teddy didn’t see how anyone could take that long, it wasn’t a very difficult word. Next the class stumbled through creating the charm. People seemed to find that a little harder. Teddy managed to produce a pale gold disk after only a few tries, even if it was flickering a bit occasionally. But Vinh on his left, and Clark on his right were both struggling to produce more than a whisp. Eventually Neville called time, and said they’d be trying again next class and everyone else packed up and headed to lunch, while Teddy loitered.

“So,” said Neville, as he walked around straightening the desks, “why don’t you tell me, what it is that’s bothering you after not even a day?”

“Nothing’s bothering me,” Teddy protested.

“You’ve got really good at controlling the colour, but your hair stands up more when you’re upset. You’re also just not a very good liar,” Neville finished up, adjusting the last desk and coming to sit down on one next to Teddy.

“I’m not upset,” said Teddy, “I just - I don’t know, Uncle Harry always tells stories about coming to Hogwarts and how he met Uncle Ron and Aunt Hermione here, and about my Dad and the other Marauders and -“

“And you thought coming to Hogwarts would be a bit more exciting?” Neville asked.

“Kind of,” Teddy admitted.

“I was totally terrified to come to Hogwarts,” Neville admitted, “I thought no one would like me, and I would be bad at everything. And I was. I think I probably begged my Gran to let me just give up and go home once a week during the first term. And I don’t know exactly how Harry and Ron met, but your Aunt Hermione definitely took a while to make friends. I don’t think I felt like I was friends with anyone until nearly Christmas. So try and give yourself some time to settle in at least. Sometimes these things just work themselves out, and if they don’t my office is always open.”

“Did you really ask to go home?” Teddy asked, gaping a little. Neville had always seemed so impressive, he couldn’t really imagine him asking to leave school.

Neville nodded solemnly, “of course, she said that if I did I’d bring disgrace on my whole family and so she wouldn’t even consider it. And I’m glad she didn’t, it worked out in the end. And don’t be too hard on yourself, you did really well today. Now go to lunch or everyone will wonder where you’ve gone.”
Teddy walked slowly down to the Great Hall for lunch. Most people were already there, and the halls were quiet. He thought about what Neville had said. Neville had been so scared to come to Hogwarts he’d wanted to go home? It was sort of like hearing that Aunt Hermione had used to hate reading. He took a seat at the farthest end of the Gryffindor table and focused on eating his bacon sandwich and listening to a couple of older students complain about a particularly tricky Arithmancy assignment, and tried, like Neville had suggested, to not worry about if his new year mates liked him or not. He didn’t succeed.

After lunch they were scheduled to have Charms, which Teddy was looking forward to, and History of Magic, which he wasn’t.

When he walked into the Charms classroom, there were feathers on each of the desk, and Teddy knew instantly what they were going to be doing. Like Professor McMillan, Flitwick made them take a few pages of notes about the theory of Charms before they started practicing, but they seemed easier than the Transfiguration notes. Teddy levitated his feather on only the second try. He’d heard so many stories about it that it was easy. But Professor Flitwick still caught his eye and nodded encouragingly at him, and it still felt good.

History of Magic was exactly what he’d expected. Everyone filed into the empty History of Magic, and ghostly Professor Binns wafted through the blackboard as they were getting out their books. Binns didn’t bother introducing himself to the class, or didn’t realize he had to, and just began talking about the Medieval Giant Wars, forcing all the students who hadn’t been warned about Binns and weren’t expecting such an abrupt start to scramble to catch up. Teddy tried his best to take notes but it was just, so boring that he was sure he missed a lot.

So he ended the day like he’d started it. Sleepy, confused, and feeling let down.
Potions

Linda made it through her entire first day of classes without speaking to anyone. This was, as far as she was concerned, a perfectly satisfactory arrangement. She had four new classes surrounded with her new, Slytherin classmates and she didn’t want to deal with meeting new people at the same time as new classes.

Wizard school classes were a little bit shocking and different, and a little bit boring and ordinary. On the first day, Professor Longbottom frowned the whole class while he taught them to make a magical shield. They attempted to make a feather float in a class taught by a tiny man called Professor Flitwick. They were lectured at in a monotone for an hour about ‘early magical history’ by a ghost. Professor McMillan warned them no less than five times that transfiguration was dangerous and that people who made trouble would face serious consequences while he attempted to teach them how to turn a match into a needle.

The feather and the needle and the oddly lovely glowing golden shield were very new. She knew it was real, but her brain hadn’t quite received the message. But the rest of it, the suspicious teachers, the cluster of students who acted bored but couldn't keep up and the girl who glared at her when she summoned magical shield before anyone else did. Those all seemed familiar and boring.

She wanted to compare notes with her friends, but by the end of the day, the school had made it through its fourth consecutive mealtime without anyone visiting another House’s table. If there was some sort of school rule about that, that no one had mentioned she didn’t feel like riling up the teachers by doing it before she had to. Hogwarts achieved its consecutive fifth mealtime free of inter-house interactions at breakfast the next morning. After breakfast, though, Linda caught up with John and Sam before their shared potions lesson.

“So wizard school seems, kind of bizarre,” said Sam.

“Still school-like,” Linda replied.

“Extremely,” said John.

“John is planning an exorcism of the History teacher,” Sam explained.

“He’s awful, I think I’ll teach the class myself next time,” said John.

“That will involve public speaking,” Sam pointed out.

John seethed about that entertainingly for the rest of the trip down to the dungeons. He was dramatic that way.

The potions classroom was down in the dungeons, but in a different corridor from the Slytherin common room. It was roomy, but low-ceilinginged. A set of cauldrons were already arranged over lit fires in a horseshoe around the teachers desk. John, Sam and Linda gathered around a single cauldron, and started playing rock-paper-scissors for who would have to go find a different partner when the potions teacher came into the room.

The potions teacher was a walrus-y man, with a head like an egg. He edged through the cauldrons to the front of the classroom and looked over them all for a moment before saying, “Good morning everyone. Welcome to Potions class, I’m Professor Slughorn. If we could sort ourselves out so its two to a cauldron that would be grand and we can get started.”
There was a little flurry of activity as everyone sorted themselves out, and Sam, who had unwisely picked paper strolled across the room to the remaining available space next to a curly-haired girl from Slytherin.

Professor Slughorn watched Sam’s progress across the room and ruffled his moustache.

"Actually," he said, “if you don’t mind, I’d prefer to keep the houses separate, I find it keeps things - less chaotic."

He made a little shooing motion with his hand to direct Sam back the way he had come.

John got a look on his face like he was considering saying that he did mind. Linda trotted over to take Sam’s place next to the curly-headed girl before he could say anything.

“That’s better,” said Slughorn, “now, if you could all open up your books to page twenty, we’re going to jump right into making a Hair-Raising Potion. Best to get right into the thick of things I find. The trick with this potion is to ensure that all your ingredients are cut to very even sizes, to ensure an even mixing, but we’ll leave the theory for after, in the mean time, the supplies you don’t have are in the cupboard, and at the end of class I have a small prize for whoever can get their hair the highest.”

Linda pulled the supplies she had out of her kit, set them out across the desk and retrieved the rest from the supply cupboard. By then her new lab mate had managed to get her book open and seemed to be trying to chop the dandelion roots. But her hands were shaking and she was sort of shredding them into bits instead of chopping them into even pieces.

“Here,” said Linda. She pulled the cutting board away before the girl could do any more damage, and handing her the willow sap instead. Then almost immediately had to pull her hand back to keep her from adding it too early. After a second near mishap involving billywig wings (whatever a billywig was) Linda pulled the textbook across to her side of the bench and finished the potion herself. It was easier than trying to read it aloud to her partner while she worked.

Slughorn called time thirty minutes before the end of class, while people were still scrambling to add ingredients.

"That’s about as much time as we have", he called, “now if each pair could pick a volunteer we’ll go one by one and see how well you’ve done. If you’re not done, have a spoonful anyway, it won’t poison you.”

Linda and her partner immediately exchanged looks. Linda’s hair was as short as she could get it without actually shaving it off, but the other girl had a mop of messy ring-shaped curls that fell halfway down her back. The other girl gave a shaky little smile then scooped up a spoonful of potion and gulped it.

There was a beat where nothing happened, then her hair slowly lifted towards the ceiling, starting from the roots and pulling up until the curls started to straighten.

Across the room, Sam’s hair was also standing up straight, although it was short and straight and not nearly as impressive. The rest of the class had mixed results. Some people’s hair had lifted half way up, starting off vertical and going limp half-way along the strand. A couple of pairs were awkwardly standing around with their hair exactly as it had started out.

Slughorn made his way around the room, looking into everyone’s cauldrons and making comments to the pairs who’s potions had failed.

“Oh that’s very good,” he said, when he reached Linda, “very fine work indeed Ms. Kendrick and,
He looked expectantly towards Linda.


“Oh, er, I don’t think I’ve heard that name before,” Slughorn, “did your parents perhaps, attend school on the Continent?”

“No,” said Linda.

“Oh,” said Slughorn, “overseas then?”

“They can’t do magic,” Linda clarified.

Slughorn looked a bit taken aback. He was having trouble meeting Linda’s eyes, but so did a lot of people.

“Well,” he said, after a moment, “you seem to be off to an excellent start, and Ms. Kendrick here can certainly show you the ropes.”

The other girl - Kendrick - opened her mouth like she was going to start talking, but Slughorn was already making his way to the Gryffindors and she just stole a glance over at Linda, went red and looked down at her shoes.

Linda ignored her and started tidying up.

“Well this seems like a most promising start to the year,” said Slughorn, “don’t be discouraged if you didn’t get the results you were hoping for, you’ve all got lots of times to turn things around. Now, I promised a reward, and so to Ms. Kendrick, and her friend Ms Pravdin I have these Fizzing Whizzbees and I have some more, for anyone who can tell me why I’m giving these out?”

A few people put their hands up. Slughorn pointed to a dark-haired Gryffindor girl, “Ms. Tran?”

“Fizzing Whizzbees have billywigs in them,” Tran said, “and so does Hair Raising Potion. They give the levitation.”

“Perfectly correct,” said Slughorn, “ten points to Gryffindor.”

He handed her one package of what turned out to be hard, pale-blue candies, and then passed on to Linda and another to her partner and then dismissed the class.

As soon as Slughorn’s back was turned, her partner handed her her package of candy, “sorry,” she whispered, “I’m really sorry, I just got so nervous.”

“I won’t hold it against you,” said Linda.

“Thank you,” she said, she had a voice like a mouse, “that’s really nice of you. You seem really nice. I’m Amarante.”

“Linda,” said Linda, holding out her hand.

Amarante shook it, her hands were still trembling.

Amarante glued herself to her side on the way from Potions back to the Great Hall for lunch. She seemed to have decided that Linda would look out for her.
“Do you really have muggle parents?” Amarante asked, when they were sitting down.

Linda nodded.

Amarante’s eyes got even wider, which was probably a health risk, and she didn’t say anything for long enough that Linda felt compelled to actually comment on it.

“Me and five of my friends,” said Linda, “it can’t be that uncommon.”

Amarante chewed on her lower lip, “it’s not rare” she said finally, in a whisper, “it’s just rare in Slytherin. I didn’t know muggleborns got Sorted here.”

“I’m sneaky, apparently,” said Linda, who couldn’t figure out either the connection between having non-magical parents and not being cunning and ambitious, or why it was worth whispering about.

“Yeah, but, I mean,” Amarante stopped, and sucked in a huge breath and whatever courage she had, “I shouldn’t really say, but some people don’t like muggleborn’s very much. And back when my Mom was in school they were all in Slytherin, and she said they didn’t let muggleborns in here, and I wrote to tell her I was in Slytherin but she hasn’t written back yet and I’m afraid she’s really m-mad.”

She ended the last sentence with a little hiccup, and then started crying.

Linda didn’t even know what to do when people she actually knew started crying.

“You send mail by bird,” She said, “there’s no way she has the letter yet.”

It didn’t help. Linda made herself very interested in her lunch.
Homework

First years were given Friday afternoons off, so John waited outside the Great Hall and rounded up his friends as they came out after lunch. The roved about the school in a cluster, too busy looking around to talk much until they found an empty classroom and filed inside.

“That was strange, yesterday, right?” John asked, looking at Linda.

“Apparently people from Slytherin are racist against people who can’t do magic,” Linda said, “or people think they are. There was some crying, it wasn’t clear.”

“Well that sure explains a very strange conversation I had,” said Kelly.

John turned to look at her, but she just shrugged.

“Relax,” said Kelly, “someone, who’s name I haven’t bothered to learn made a very strange remark and now I understand why everyone was so eager to distract me.”

“That would rule out it being a Slytherin thing,” Linda noted.

“I’m over this Houses thing,” said Sam. “It was fun for about seven seconds. And now I’d like to be able to decide where I sit.”

John thought it all seemed a bit bigger than they were making it, but he didn’t want to be the one who brought it up, so he just nodded and said, “well, still no harder than non-magical class, we’ll have lots of free time.”

Kelly laughed.

“Well,” she said, “I don’t think the tables thing is actually a rule, I’m pretty sure it’s just a thing, so I say we sit wherever we like, and see what happens.”

“Should we maybe get through a full week before antagonizing the staff?” Fred suggested, “just in case it is a rule.”

“Mmmmm,” said Kelly, “fine. One week.”

She slugged Fred on the shoulder and they tussled a bit, but it only lasted until Fred ended up dumped onto the floor and they remembered they were on a stone floor.

“Speaking of,” said Kelly, while Fred rubbed his hip and winced embarrassedly, “I have belt exams to pass and so I need to find somewhere to practice.”

“Maybe there’s a spell that makes floors soft,” Sam suggested.

As soon as she mentioned it John suddenly realized how few chances to actually move around he’d had for the past four days.

“It’s still warm,” he suggested, “we can just go outside and find a mat later.”

A lot of the older students were in class, so they were alone except for the portraits on the wall when they made their way down to the entrance hall and outside. It was starting to get cool, but they were all heavily dressed, and they found a corner of the grounds by the side of the castle where they could tumble around. It felt nice to move and run around and John could stop thinking about this weird
new place full of weird new people with rules they wouldn’t talk about.

They didn’t talk too much after that. John comprehensively failed to stop Kelly from pinning him to the ground in an arm lock no matter what he tried, so she probably didn’t actually have to worry about passing her exam at Christmas. They kept going until they all wore themselves out, then flopped over on the grass. John moved over so he was next to Linda and they could talk quietly.

“Are you sure everything’s alright,” he asked her.

“If they don’t like me I just won’t talk to them,” she said, “I don’t care. Why are you planning to murder the history teacher.”

“I can’t murder him,” said John, “he’s already a ghost. I’m going to exorcise him, so they’ll hire someone who knows how to teach history correctly.”

“I’m sure that will go exactly to plan,” said Linda.

“I think exorcism probably counts as ghost murder,” said Fred, dropping down next to them, “personally, I’m planning to ignore the whole class and wait for you to tell me about it.”

“What if I’ve ignored the whole class too?” John asked, “the one we had was pretty horrific.”

“You’ll know it anyway, I’ve met you,” said Fred, “we can all sleep through it and you can tell us later.”

“I guess,” said John, but the idea did make him feel better, “actually I’ll do that. Coming.”

Finding the library was a much bigger adventure than getting outside from the empty classroom had been.

They were half-way up a staircase to the third floor, when the staircase gave an alarming groan, pivoted ninety degrees, and connected to a totally different hallway with a thud. They turned to get back to where they’d originally meant to go, and found that that lead them to a classroom where a group of older students were practicing something that involved a casting a lot of brightly coloured lights over something that looked like a old, dented astrolabe.

“This building is made of nonsense,” Kelly whispered delightedly, as they backed away.

They ended up backtracking, finding a second stair case up to the forth floor, and trying to cut across, couldn’t find a way back down (the staircases had moved again) and had to get directions from a portrait of five fat monks, that might have been a joke because they involved travelling up to the sixth floor, cutting through a huge empty room with beautiful stain-glass windows that John mentally filed away for later use, and then travelling back down to the other side of the third floor via three different staircases.

The library was a storybook library to match the storybook castle. Huge, with vaulted ceilings and rows and rows of shelves of heavy, leather-bound books.

“I’ll start on the history books, if you guys start on the potions and transfiguration notes,” John said, and wandered into the stacks.
The library might be beautiful, but it was also the least organized library in the world. There was a hanging sign indicating the history books, but the books didn’t seem to be organized beyond that. They weren’t organized by topic, or author. Zhagreb’s *History of the Giant Wars* was squeezed onto an overfull shelf between Miller’s *Wizarding Households in the 1790s* and Ashcroft’s *Recent Developments in Potion-making*. He pulled the last one down, to see if it might be useful for their potions homework, checked the publication dates, and found that ‘recent’ meant the 1940s, and put it back. This seemed to be an ongoing problem with the collection. He pulled out volume after volume of ‘recent’ history that all ended before the first world war.

Eventually, he mentally declared defeat and went to find the librarian.

The Hogwarts librarian was a very thin woman with her hair drawn severely back from her face, who glowered at him when he walked up to her desk.

“’Scuse me,” John started, “do you have a cataloguing system I could look through.”

“What are you looking for?” she asked coolly.

“Medieval history,” John said, “and the cataloguing system.”

“I’m hardly going to let some nasty little boy go rifling through my catalogue, dirtying things and putting them out of order,” she hissed.

She got up from behind the desk, stalked back into the far end of the history section, and pulled out three large books and handed them to John, in a way that suggested this was all a huge imposition.

“Thanks,” John said to her retreating back.

She didn’t respond.

He went back to their table, where everyone else was already writing out pages of notes.

“We decided to split these,” Sam “we can each do a subject, then switch notes. You’re stuck doing history because its a horrible subject and we outvoted you.”

“Okay,” said John, already leafing through his pile of books, “have none of these people heard of timelines?”

Faced with piles of outdated old text to wade through John went back to his original textbook, and started rewriting the chapter they had gone over in class which was, at least, more organized than Professor Binn’s mumbled summaries.

“The school lets us borrow owls right?” he said, once he’d finished the chapter, “because I need to compare this to some normal history. Those are done by the way,” he added, waving at the notes.

“Oh hey,” said Kelly, grabbing them, “they make sense now, we’re saved.”

End Notes

Okay, so this probably merits an explanation. In Halo the SPARTAN-II’s were selected, pre-training, pre-augmentation, pre-war, to be very, very special. They were never normal
children, they were always a bunch of hyper-competitive genius people. And I really really find that interesting, but the ideal fic for writing about it would be something like a high-school AU. But high-school AU’s bore me senseless. And really smart kids would have so much more interaction with and understanding of Muggle technology than regular ones, so Blue Team is just perfect for Harry Potter fics about Wizards having to deal with tech-savvy new Muggleborn students.

And then this happened, it a Halo High-School AU/Harry Potter Next Gen cross over, which is ridiculous, and I'm not in the slightest bit sorry.

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