

If the Walls Could Speak

Deirdre M. Silvestri

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Three children travel to Ireland and learn that their late father's tales of magic were all true in this Harry Potter-esque story.

Dragons and destiny, sorcery and schoolmates, and fantasy and family are run of the mill at Wickum Manor in Ireland, but for thirteen-year-old Finn O'Brine, everything is brand-new and confusing. In *If the Walls Could Speak*, book 1 of The Wickum Manor Collection, Deirdre M. Silvestri introduces the indomitable and magically talented O'Brine clan, their wolfhound guardians, and the ever-changing wonders of Wickum.

Finn, his twin sister, Neave, and their little brother, Jack, are still grieving the loss of their father when their mother reveals shocking news: not only are all of Da's wondrous stories and yarns true, but they are about to become the center of their lives. Now that Finn has come of age, the family will travel from America to Ireland to learn ancestral magic.

If the Walls Could Speak incorporates many fun facts about Ireland as well as a plethora of enchantments, spells, and astonishing creatures. The O'Brine children enjoy fresh scones, games of hollyhox, and summer evenings filled with daylight while attempting to wrap their heads around the existence of telepathic dragons, talking bats, and flying teapots.

Understandably, Finn and his siblings have myriad questions about Wickum Manor and what it means to be an O'Brine. Too often, though, the answers are not forthcoming. Adults tend to placate the youngsters with variations of "I don't have time to explain it right now," "In time you will know how and why," or simply "You will see." This, combined with much of Finn's magical education taking place behind closed doors, causes some frustration when explanations and clarifications remain elusive.

Although many exciting jaunts and adventures occur, the rambling narrative would benefit from some organization, either in the form of chapters, which would help to orient younger readers; a map of the immense grounds that make up the Wickum Manor estate and academy; a family tree to keep the expansive number of aunts, uncles, and cousins (all named O'Brine) straight; or perhaps even all three.

Silvestri commendably handles Da's death by allowing the family, and particularly the children, to talk about his life and passing in a healthy, open way. This attitude of positivity, embraced in the O'Brine philosophy—"We try to bring love, light, and laughter to all that we meet every day"—shines through all the drama and high emotion Finn, Neave, Jack, and Ma have been dealing with in the face of so many recent changes.

As the first installment of the Wickum Manor Collection, Silvestri's *If the Walls Could Speak* successfully introduces the O'Brine family and all of their extraordinary trappings and companions. Hopefully, book 2 will follow with more details and insight into the Manor's goings-on and Finn's role amid it all. Children and tweens jonesing for a fresh Harry Potter-style story line may find a new home at Wickum.

PALLAS GATES MCCORQUODALE (January 26, 2015)

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