

## Figment or Friend – Mila, Year 5, NSW

I told my mum that I would try to make more friends than just the school librarian, but considering I'm still eating alone and talking to myself, I'm not exactly succeeding. Sitting listlessly in class, not even a smile on my face to distract me, I focused on reading my novel instead of feeling lonely. And I assume it worked, because I realize that the protagonist, Inge Maria Jensen, and I would get along so well, eating Angelina Nordstrup's orange cake and sharing stories we wrote on the fairy tale hills of Bornholm.

That's what I tried explaining to my mum, but she said that fictional characters don't count, so I'm back to being friendless.

A week later, I slouch into my mattress, exhausted from all the energy I burned working up the courage to talk to one of the other girls in my year, and then failing. My eyes could be deceiving me, but Pippi Longstocking has now appeared right beside me, snug as a bug under my eiderdown quilt. I think she's talking to me, but I can't hear what she's saying as her feet are resting where her head is supposed to be! I giggle, then I too tuck my head under the blanket just like my friend taught me.

"Don't worry Clara, I believe in you," Pippi comforts me. Oh, how I wished she went to Belleview Primary too.

Sadly, things didn't improve the following week. Because I had moved here halfway through the term, all the other kids had already chosen their groups for the science fair competition. My teacher assigned me to a group with Tracey, Emily and Zoe, who were all part of the popular clique of Year 5 girls.

Maybe I had garlic breath, or maybe they just didn't like new students, but those girls only talked to me once, to order me to just stand aside and watch the experts at work. My mum tells me to be kind, but I still reckon we would've gotten a higher grade if we did it as a collaboration.

After my rotten experience in science, I accidentally enter the principal's office instead of the maths classroom. I couldn't tell from first glance, but I find that I'm not alone. In here is not only the principal, Mrs Madden, but a freckled girl with two braids the colour of carrots, smiling right at me.

I'm used to my imagination by now, so I continue sulking as I ask, "Oh Anne. What did Gilbert Blythe do this time?"

But the girl's cheery face looks utterly confused.

"Clara, this is Belle, Belle, this is Clara. Belle is the new transfer student," Mrs Madden informs me. "And as much as I'd love you two to get to know each other now, I ask that you get back to class."

The bell rings for break time, and I scurry away to my usual spot on the hill before it gets too crowded. I brace myself for yet another depressing solitary lunch time when suddenly a familiar face plonks down next to me.

“Hi, I’m Belle, we met earlier in the office. I hope it’s ok if I sit here, I don’t know anyone else yet.”

I close my writing journal before she thinks I’m a total nerd and runs off. However, she actually seems kind of disappointed.

“Did you write all those stories yourself?” she asks.

I gaze upon the ground and nod shyly. She looks in awe as she flips through my book.

“I write a lot as well. Hey, do you wanna eat together tomorrow? I can bring in some of my stories too.”

“Yes!” I reply and am relieved that I have met someone who also enjoys reading.

As we shared our books the next day, my heart felt light, filled with the promise of a new friendship.