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opening extract from

The Pain and the Great One: Friend or Fiend?

written by

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published by

Pan Macmillan

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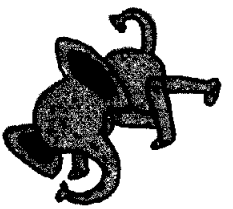
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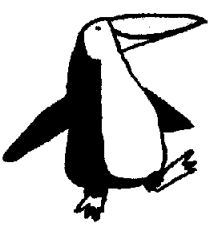
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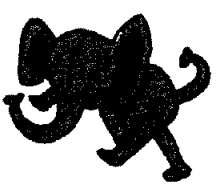
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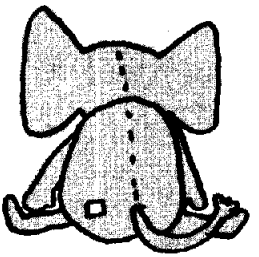








Meet the Pain



My sister's name is Abigail. I call her *The Great One* because she thinks she's so great. She says, "I don't think it, I know it!" When she says that I laugh like crazy. Then she gets mad. It's fun to make her mad. Who cares if she's in third grade and I'm just in first? That doesn't make her faster. Or stronger. Or even smarter. I don't get why Mom and Dad act like she's so special. Sometimes I think they love her more than me.



Meet the Great One



My brother's name is Jacob but everyone calls him Jake. Everyone but me. I call him *The Pain* because that's what he is. He's a first-grade pain. And he will always be a pain – even if he lives to be a hundred. Even then, I'll be two years older than him. I'll still know more about everything. And I'll always know exactly what he's thinking. That's just the way it is. I don't get why Mom and Dad act like he's so special. Sometimes I think they love him more than me.

Ben Is My Fiend



The Pain

Today at school my teacher, Mary, called my group to the reading circle. Everyone else read at their tables or in the book corner. Mary said, "Justin, will you start?" When we go to the reading circle we read from a special book called *People and Pets*. Justin read a story about a dog named Goldie.

Then Lila read about a cat called Sammy. Sammy the cat wasn't anything



like my cat. "I could write a better story about Fluzzy," I told Mary.

Mary said, "I'd like to see that story, Jake." Then she asked me to read. Just as I was about to start, another teacher came into our room and whispered something to

Mary. "I have to step into the hall for a minute," Mary told our group. "I'll be right back." She looked at me. "Go ahead, Jake."

"The name of this story is 'Ben'," I said. I cleared my throat twice. "*Ben is my fiend.*" Maggie laughed. I didn't know why. So I kept reading. "*I'm glad he's my fiend because . . .*"

Everyone but David laughed this time. Justin laughed so hard he fell off his chair. When he did, his chair toppled over too. That made everyone laugh harder.

"What?" I said to my group.

"*Fiend?*" Maggie said. "Ben is your *fiend*?"

My group couldn't stop laughing. Even David laughed.

Wendy, our helper teacher, came across the room. She sat in Mary's chair. "What's up?" she asked.

"He thinks . . ." Maggie started to say.



"He thinks . . ." But she was laughing so hard she couldn't finish.

So Lila finished for her. "He thinks Ben is his *fiend*."

"What's a fiend?" David asked.

I was wondering the same thing.

"Justin, pick up your chair," Wendy said. Then she looked at me. "Jake, do you know what a fiend is?"

"No," I said.

"Can anyone help us?" Wendy asked.

Justin didn't raise his hand. He just spit it out. "A fiend is a monster! A fiend is evil."

I felt my face turn hot. I felt really stupid.

"Jake," Wendy said, "look at the picture of the two boys in the story."

The boys in the picture were laughing. They looked like friends. "Now . . . why don't you start reading again," Wendy said.

"*Ben is my fiend*," I began. I meant to say

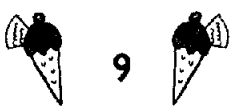
friend. But *fiend* just slipped out.

Now my group was out of control.

"Let's settle down, please," Wendy said. She printed both words on the board. "Jake, can you find the difference between *friend* and *fiend*?"

I looked at both words. They looked almost the same. But one had an *r* and one didn't. So I said, "Oh, I get it! A *fiend* is a *friend* without the *r*."

Now my group went crazy. Wendy couldn't get them to stop. I wanted to disappear. I pictured myself walking out of class, down the hall, out the front door and all the way home. Instead I just sat there. When Maggie laughs it sounds like she's screaming. When David laughs he sounds like a seal. Justin holds his breath when he laughs. His face gets so red it looks like he's about to explode.



The rest of the class was wondering what was going on. You could hear them whispering.

Wendy clapped her hands. "OK, that's enough! Maggie, take a turn reading, please."

"Where should I start?" Maggie asked when she finally calmed down.

"Why don't you start at the beginning of the story," Wendy said.

Maggie took a big breath. Then she started to read. "*Ben is my* fiend. *I'm glad he's my* fiend *because . . .*"

But no one was listening. They were shrieking and stomping their feet. Lila held her stomach. "It hurts . . ." she cried. "It hurts to laugh so hard!"

Wendy said, "Maggie . . . the word is *friend*!" You could tell from her voice that she'd had enough.

"I know!" Maggie said.

