

been that way. When you are a solitary child you find an imaginary friend.

There was no Elsie. There was no one like Elsie. Things were much lonelier than that.

I spent most of my school years sitting on the railings outside the school gates in the breaks. I was not a popular or a likeable child; too spiky, too angry, too intense, too odd. The churchgoing didn't encourage school friends, and school situations always pick out the misfit. Embroidering THE SUMMER IS ENDED AND WE ARE NOT YET SAVED on my gym bag made me easy to spot.

But even when I did make friends I made sure it went wrong . . .

If someone liked me, I waited until she was off guard, and then I told her I didn't want to be her friend any more. I watched the confusion and upset. The tears. Then I ran off, triumphantly in control, and very fast the triumph and the control leaked away, and then I cried and cried, because I had put myself on the outside again, on the doorstep again, where I didn't want to be.

Adoption is outside. You act out what it feels like to be the one who doesn't belong. And you act it out by trying to do to others what has been done to you. It is impossible to believe that anyone loves you for yourself.

I never believed that my parents loved me. I tried to love them but it didn't work. It has taken me a long time to learn how to love – both the giving and the receiving. I have written about love obsessively, forensically, and I know/knew it as the highest value.

