

Adult Child/Dead Child was first presented at the Finborough Theatre Club, London, on 5 June 1987, before touring nationally.

Performed by Claire Dowie
Directed by Colin Watkeys

Author's Note
Adult Child/Dead Child was written without gender in mind and can therefore be performed by either sex.

When you are a child
and you don't get any love, when there is no love
when you get this feeling that you can't explain
this feeling that's inside you but you can't explain
you don't know what it is, you can't say it's lack of love
because you don't have those words
you only have the feeling but you don't have those words
those words that say nobody loves me. I am unloved
all you have is the feeling
and the feeling is an empty feeling, a hole in your stomach
you feel this hole in your stomach that you can't explain
because you don't have the words, only the feeling, the
empty feeling
and the feeling hurts, you feel hurt because you can't explain
you feel hurt and frustrated that there is no love
and you can't explain, you feel trapped in your feelings
trapped in your feelings of hurt and frustration and lack of love
lack of love that makes you hit out.

Clean house, tidy house
spotless
nothing out of place
except me
can't seem to please them
can't win for losing
my mother despaired of me
I despaired of me.

My sister was an angel
never put a foot wrong
always clean, always tidy
a perfect child, a joy to behold.

A spotless, squeaky-clean hall floor
muddy shoes tramped from school
footprints -- my mother's anger
my mother's annoyance
I would've walked on the ceiling if I could

bedroom and jumped on him with my tomahawk he woke up. Didn't act like a cowboy, acted like an angry father.

Clumsy, I was clumsy
I was a clumsy child
knocked things, broke things
a clumsy child
always falling over, breaking things
trying to avoid running into things
swerving round things
trying not to be clumsy
trying to walk through the gap in the doorframe
instead of into the doorframe
trying to stop my body moving before it was too late
it was always too late
I was a clumsy child
clumsy.

Never a day would go by that I wasn't walking into things, tripping up, knocking things over and banging and crashing my way about the house. It worried me. It drove my parents crazy.

Fidgeting was another habit I couldn't seem to shake-off which annoyed my parents intensely. Once my dad got so mad about it that he tied me down rigidly to a chair for a while. Strangely it didn't stop me feeling fidgety, just stopped me being fidgety.

And the cupboard, the cupboard under the stairs

I wasn't abused

I was never what you'd call an abused child
not abused

not by any stretch of the imagination

but there was the cupboard, the cupboard under the stairs
dark, silent, claustrophobic

nothing to do, nothing to say, nothing to be but lifeless,
invisible

nowhere, nothing

sitting in the cupboard till I 'learn to behave myself and show some respect'

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like spiderman
but I expect the ceiling was squeaky-clean too.

My father was an actor
professional pretender
pretended to be a father
pretended to have feelings
pretended enthusiasm
demanded perfection
demanded perfection
One hundred per cent do it right, do it the best
be brainy, be sporty, be talented, be good
academic athlete
well-mannered, polite, know it all, do it all
One hundred per cent do it right, do it the best
I cried, I would cry
I would cry and I failed
always failed
for my professional pretending father
and his daughter, the apple of his eye
who could do no wrong.

I remember being in the garden of our old house. I was about six or seven and there were friends of my parents visiting. I can't remember now who, but somebody gave me a cowboy and Indian set. This was a cowboy hat and gun and holster and a tin star with the word 'sheriff' on it and an Indian feather thing with a band on it for a hat and a tomahawk and my dad said let's play with it and first he was the cowboy and I was the Indian and everybody was watching and I ran at him with my tomahawk but he shot me so I lost and then we changed round and I was the cowboy and my dad was the Indian but before I could shoot him he threw the tomahawk and it hit my head and he said it was Custer's last stand and everybody laughed (I thought he said 'custard' and I didn't understand) and he said I was hopeless because I died twice and I didn't want to play with my cowboy and Indian set any more but later on that night I decided to be the Indian and sneak up on him quietly but when I sneaked into their

in the cupboard under the stairs
and eye for eye and tooth for tooth punishments
my parents were great believers in
'see how you like it'

eye for eye and tooth for tooth punishments

I was never abused

not what you'd call an abused child

not abused

everything I got I deserved

except the cupboard, the cupboard under the stairs

I never locked anyone in a cupboard

but my parents did.

I remember when we moved I was about eight and my sister
and I went to stay with friends of my parents for a week,
probably to get us out of the way while the moving was sorted
out. The friends of my parents had a son called Andrew, who
was I think, a couple of years older and when nobody was
around he'd punch me and pinch me. His parents wouldn't
believe me.

Before we moved I asked my mum where London was and
she said it was a hundred miles away. I was very worried
about it, staying with these friends of my parents and
Andrew. A hundred miles is a long way to run when you're
eight.

I remember being very relieved that there wasn't a cupboard
under the stairs at our new flat in London. Then I found out
there was a broom cupboard which was much smaller.

You want to hit out because of this lack of love that you can't
explain

so you hit out because of this lack of love

you hit out at the people around you

hit out at the people, the adults around you

the adults around you when you are a child

because when you are a child the adults have the power

the adults have the power and they know everything

they know everything so they know your feelings

adults understand feelings, they can explain your feelings

because adults have the power to explain feelings

to know what you are feeling so you hit out
you hit out because they won't help you with your feelings
because you have these feelings but they won't help
they won't help you with these empty feelings
these empty feelings that hurt but you can't explain
this hurt and frustration because you can't explain
so you stop trusting the adults.

My invisible friend

a voice in my head

I could talk to her

I played with her

we understood each other

she is reliable.

Show me I think when I was four or five

or maybe earlier, who knows

but by the age of seven

she was with me always

chattering away, making jokes

telling stories

poking fun at family and visitors

making me laugh at all times

at lonely times, good times

boring times, embarrassing times

and awkward times

when I giggled

and my parents wondered about me

and punished me for being bad-mannered

impolite or stupid

I didn't give my invisible friend a name till I was eight. I

don't know why, I don't know why she was a girl either, she

just was and she was just nameless till we moved to London. I

hated London. I hated the school I had to go to because they

beat me up because I talked funny. I hated the flat we'd

moved to because it was smaller and so was the cupboard.

And I hated the street where we lived because it was snobby

and stuck up but I loved my lady. My lady lived down the

road from us and she was always pottering around her front

garden with her dog Benji, stopping to chat to people as they

passed including me. She called me 'scallywag' and she smiled and spoke nicely to me. She made me feel special and I loved her even though I didn't know what 'scallywag' meant, but I knew it was a nice name because she also called Benji a scallywag and I could tell that she loved him very much and never hurt or ignored him even though she also called him a monster and a horror and a terror. I would spend hours sometimes going up and down the road so that my lady could say 'hello, scallywag' and I could say 'hello' back. Sometimes she would say 'off on your travels, scallywag?' when I passed and sometimes she would say 'jaunting again, scallywag?'. One thing she never asked was why I was always walking up and down the road. One day I was coming down the road trying to make up my mind if I was travelling or jaunting when I passed my next-door neighbours, the Bannermans. They had been talking to my lady and as I passed I overheard Mr Bannerman say 'she's a stupid old cow, isn't she'.

Well, I was angry. I was angry
I was so upset and too confused
to look her in the eye and say hello
I was just so angry
I had to run, had to pass her
couldn't stop, couldn't smile
I just ran, just so angry
what he said, how could he say that
about my lady, my lovely lady
just got so upset, so angry
couldn't say hello, couldn't pretend to smile
just had to run
just had to run to my house and sit in My Place
just had to run and sit in My Place.

(My Place incidentally was the narrow gap between the shed and the fence where nobody thought of looking.)

And I sat in My Place and my invisible friend sat in My Place and we fumed about the Bannermans and my invisible friend said 'Something's got to be done'. I agreed but didn't know

what, so we sat in silence for a while till my invisible friend decided that if they were going down the road (which they were) it must mean that they were going out, and if they were going out (which they must have been) then that means that they're not in and if they are not in (which they weren't) then we should put a brick through their window and since I can't because I'm invisible (which she was) then you'll have to do it (which I didn't want to do because it was wrong and I was scared). This was when we started arguing and my invisible friend told me that if I didn't put a brick through the Bannerman's window she was going to go away and never speak to me again.

My invisible friend
the voice in my head
I talked to her
I played with her
we understood each other
she was reliable.
She threatened to leave
she said she'd go
I was only eight
I didn't realise what was happening
what was beginning
I was just scared at that point
of loneliness
of immediate loneliness
I didn't realise what was happening
what was beginning
what would happen later on
but that was the starting point
that's when I began to lose control.

So of course finally I had to agree and finally I did put a brick through the Bannermans' window after making sure first that my father was still out and my mother was engrossed in the Hoovering. So I threw a brick through the Bannermans' window. After I'd thrown the brick and heard the glass shatter I ran back to My Place and waited five or ten minutes to see if the sky would fall in or (worse) my father would

appear. It didn't and he didn't and nobody started shouting and nothing happened and everything was still all right even though I'd done a wrong thing. And not only that but I also felt triumphant and happy and giggled uncontrollably for ages. My invisible friend giggled uncontrollably too and then she told me she had loads of ideas that would be really funny to do in the future. I wasn't so sure and asked her if they were wrong things but she just giggled some more and said 'wait and see'. So it was then that I decided that my invisible friend was really, when all was said and done, a monster and a horror and a terror and I called her Benji.

You stop trusting the adults because they have the power they have the power but won't help so you don't trust them, they are against you and they are against you because they won't help and they have the power to help but they won't help so you don't trust them, because they won't help so you start to hate them because you don't trust them you start to hate them because they won't help you hit out because you hate them

My parents had always known about my invisible friend. She sat next to me at the dinner table (and she didn't like cabbage either). Occasionally, through me she'd ask them a question, they'd answer. By the time I was eight and had called her Benji, they were telling me I was too old for imaginary friends. Stupid. Benji was still there, I could hear her, I could feel her, she talked to me, I played with her, and we did things together.

Little things, easy things
so what if that ornament got broken
it just sat there anyway
didn't do anything
and if they asked me well
I dunno, wasn't me
I was nowhere near it
and what money?
I don't know anything about any money

and so what if my sister lost her charm bracelet it was a horrible charm bracelet it rattled anyway I don't know maybe she just dropped it somewhere maybe it just fell off I don't know.

We got away with it for a long time, mostly because Benji was a good liar and would tell me what to say if anyone asked. One day my mother said:

You just broke that picture.
What?

You just broke it.

No I didn't.

Yes you did, I saw you.

No, it was an accident.

No it wasn't, I saw you.

It was an accident.

You picked it up and threw it on the floor.

No I didn't.

I just saw you.

It was an accident.

I saw you.

Benji did it.

Oh, don't be so stupid.

She did.

Will you stop that Benji stuff, it was you.

No, it was Benji.

Look, it was you, now just stop it, you're too old for all that rubbish.

But she did.

I was too old for imaginary friends but Benji was still with me, even so I got the blame, and the cupboard for telling lies.

And so it started.

Slowly
a little bit at a time
a little more each day

moving away further and further making it more difficult to understand each other making it more difficult to try they were far away from me over that side: parents, sister, teachers everybody.

Benji and I were on this side

My lady I could still reach, still connect with, she was in the middle.

But then she left.

I knew she was leaving she told me

I was sad about it but didn't show it

Just wanted to buy her a leaving present a remembrance of me

a dog

an ornament of a dog

but it was expensive, couldn't afford it

had no money

couldn't afford anything with no money.

Benji got hold of some money

we bought the dog the day before

give it to her in the morning

we said, we thought

I got up early especially

I was washed, I was dressed

I didn't want any breakfast.

But then my mother starts.

She's going on and on about some money missing from her purse, she wants to know, my dad joins in, my sister sits there all innocent and perfect, they're on at me, on at me, I don't want to know, not now, I just want to go up the road and give my lady her present, I can't be bothered with this money business right now, when I get home from school fair enough, but not now, its getting on my nerves all their questions, accusations, fingers pointing in my face, Benji's getting annoyed, Benji's getting angry, I can feel her, not now, I don't want this kind of thing now, I just want to go up the road and give my lady her present, she's leaving, I've got to

give it to her before she leaves, before it's too late. My mother going on and on, my father poking his nose in, my sister sitting there smug and silent, Benji goes mad, I can't control her. I've lost control of her, can't control her outburst, it's not helping, my parents have really got something to say now, really got it in for me now, and I don't want this. I just want to go up the road before she leaves.

I didn't know her name, I never did know her name. I don't think she knew mine either, she just called me 'scallywag' and I was happy with that. I couldn't explain it to my parents, I couldn't tell them about her, never had, she was my secret, they didn't know and if I'd tried to explain they would probably have thought I was making it up as an excuse or something, a lie, and they certainly wouldn't have believed that it was Benji who took the money.

My dad drove me to school that morning because I was late with all the arguing. I didn't bother listening to his lecture, just looked out of the window with my hand in my pocket holding the ornament. I couldn't see too much of my lady's house as we passed it because of the big Pickford's van in front but I caught a glimpse of Benji peeing against the tree in the garden. When I came home from school the house was empty, my lady was gone, I'd missed her. I didn't know what to do with the ornament so I posted it through her letterbox. I heard it break as it hit the floor (no carpets). It didn't matter, I had no use for it anyway.

You build a wall of anger and mistrust and hatred and you build a wall because they wouldn't help you and you hate these adults because they made you build a wall they made you build a wall of hatred because they wouldn't help

and you hit out because they made you build the wall

you hit out in hatred because of the wall that you built

and the wall gets stronger because your hatred grows

and your hatred grows as awareness comes.

Further and further away, no understanding, no communication. Just me and Benji in our own little world and all the rest of them in theirs. Miles apart and no bridges.

The only time our worlds collided was when Benji did something wrong and I got the blame for it. At school I had to see a child psychologist. (What an idiot.)

Benji loved words like outlaw, hooligan, gangster, delinquent, vandal - she thought they sounded good, romantic, exciting.

Benji would swear. It wouldn't have been so bad if it was just swearing, if it was just swearing, if Benji just swore, it wouldn't have been so bad. But it wasn't, wasn't just swearing, Benji stole. She stole. She stole money, from my parents, from my school mates, from everybody, she needn't, she didn't have to, she didn't need it. And shoplifting, shoplifting and stealing things, silly things, she didn't need them, she stole a toy car once, she didn't need it, she didn't even like it, she threw it away later, and travelling, going off jaunting, playing truant from school, not turning up, just jaunting off anywhere, travelling around. And she shouted. And she shouted at people and threw things, she'd go mad and shout at people and throw things, tantrums, she had tantrums and shouted at people and threw things, threw things at the wall, all over the room, threw the furniture and the ornaments at the walls and all over the room and at people, she threw things at people and shouted at them and swore at them, she swore, it wouldn't have been so bad if she just swore but she didn't. She was wild, uncontrollable. She thought it was funny. I didn't. I never wanted to get into trouble, I never did want to get into all that trouble. They wouldn't believe me that it was Benji so I stopped telling them. It was just trouble all the time, trouble all the time and Benji was laughing. I couldn't control her. I couldn't stop her. She scared me.

Mr Kent
he was a woodwork teacher
and a bastard
by now I was thirteen
and hated by everybody
including Mr Kent

it was about a year since my lady left and I'd been at war with Benji on and off since then I was at war with Benji

and everybody was at war with me.

I was making a toast rack in woodwork

Mr Kent said I was an idiot

I was proud of my toast rack

Mr Kent said it was crap

Mr Kent said I was useless

Mr Kent said I was a worthless specimen of a human being

Mr Kent went on and on and on

till Benji jumped out

and threw a hammer at him.

Everybody was further away from me. Everybody and everything way off in the distance. I couldn't connect at all, not at all. I didn't even know how to try. I didn't know anything because I was on this side, way over here and Benji, Benji was in the middle now, in control. Benji was in control of everything now, and I hated her.

Luckily it missed

but I was sent to the headmaster

he started shouting

but I couldn't understand

couldn't make sense of it.

Benji understood cus she was answering him

but I don't know what she said

because I couldn't understand

couldn't make sense of it

I doubt if she was apologising though.

I'm aware that he's phoning my parents

I don't understand what's happening

I'm aware that they're out

because he doesn't talk to the telephone.

He says they will be contacted

and asked to come to the school

it's filtering through but it makes no sense.

Benji understands cus she's smirking

I am aware of that.
 I get sent home
 I go home
 in the evening they get the phone call
 they are asked to go but they don't know why
 just that they have to discuss me
 I am to be discussed
 they have to go to discuss me
 they asked me why
 I didn't answer
 I said I don't know
 because I didn't, really
 it doesn't make sense
 but I am aware
 that they are looking at me
 with hatred.

All night, it was a long night, it was black and then it was dawn. All night, a long night, I am awake, or sort of awake, or something, I'm not sure, I don't know what's happening with me. Benji doesn't stop talking, doesn't stop telling me that my dad's going to kill me when he finds out, all night, I can't sleep. Benji won't shut up, I don't know what's happening to me, I can't seem to sort anything out, I can't seem to understand anything, all night, and Benji keeps telling me, keeps talking, an eye for an eye, he's going to kill you when he finds out, all night, a long night, such a long night, and Benji telling me over and over, remember when you kicked your sister how he kicked you, remember when you threw stones at those boys how he threw stones at you, an eye for an eye, tooth for tooth, remember when you broke his record, he broke your toys, remember when you broke his wing mirror he broke your bike, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, remember when you smashed the radio he smashed your record player, remember when you wrecked the living room he wrecked your bedroom, all night, all night, and I never did those things, I never did, Benji did them, it was Benji, I don't know what's happening. I don't, and the cupboard after, the cupboard after, the cupboard, cupboard, he's

going to kill you, see how you like it, remember the ashtray, the ashtray, you threw it at him, it was the same, you threw the ashtray, remember it didn't hit him did it, it didn't hit him, but he was going to hit you wasn't he, he was, you could tell couldn't you, ah yes, you could tell, he was going to hit you with the ashtray, wasn't he, he was, she stopped him, remember she stopped him, she said don't, and she stopped him, but he was going to, he was going to hit you with the ashtray remember he was, he would have if she hadn't stopped him, and now look what you've done. I didn't do anything, it was you, you threw it, it was you, you did it, but they won't believe you will they, they never do, they never did, you threw the hammer, what's he going to do, think about it, what's he going to do. I can't think, shut up please, leave me alone, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, you threw the hammer, what's he going to do, think about it, he's going to kill you when he finds out, he's going to kill you, eye for eye, and tooth for tooth, remember and then the cupboard, what're you going to do, what are you going to do now, remember, remember the ashtray, he's going to kill you now that's what, unless you kill him first, unless you do it first, to save yourself, to defend yourself, eye for eye, defend yourself, tooth for tooth, when he finds out, what are you going to do, you're going to die that's what you'll do, when he finds out, you'll die, he'll kill you, he'll kill you when he finds out, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, you've got to defend yourself, you've got to find the hammer first, before he finds out, you've got to find the hammer, you've got to defend yourself, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, and then the cupboard, and then the cupboard, find the hammer, eye for eye he's going to kill you when he finds out, remember, remember the ashtray, remember, all night, all night, it was a long night, all night and I don't know. I can't understand any more. I don't know what's happening to me and Benji won't shut up. And I do remember the ashtray. I do remember that. I do remember that she stopped him. And I don't know anymore. I can't understand, I can't think right. I don't know and it's all night, all night, it's black and then it's dawn and then I'm there in their bedroom with the hammer and I don't know

how. I don't know. I don't understand and then I hit him with it. I hit him. I don't understand. I don't know what's happening. And then he wakes up, he wakes up.

He woke up.

I hit him.

I caught him on the head and he woke up
it woke him, it hurt.

I dropped the hammer

I turned and left the room
left the flat

I went travelling

Benji took me travelling

we went miles

I don't know where we went

we just travelled

and the police picked me up
my mom fetched me.

after the police had phoned

it was late, they found me wandering

I was just travelling, just jaunting

Benji took me, we just went

and then my mom picked me up

collected me from the police station

and brought me home

and she stopped at a shop and bought me a Mars bar and a
packet of crisps

and I knew then that I'd be in the cupboard all night
and it didn't matter.

You start to hit out in hatred because they have the power
you hit out in hatred but you still can't explain
you still can't explain because they've never helped you
they had the power but they never helped you
so you hit out in hatred but you can't explain
you can't explain this hatred, this feeling of hatred
this feeling of hatred and mistrust for these people
these adults who had the power but wouldn't help
so you build a wall around you.

Lunatic

lunacy

loony

mad

insane

I didn't know anything about psychiatrists
or mental health

or anything

except what I'd heard

and read

and watched on television.

Deranged

psychopath

psycho.

And then I had to see one

had to see a psychiatrist

not for hitting my dad

but for hitting

myself

loony

mad

crazy.

It was mad. Totally out of hand. I didn't know what else to
do really. I was under virtual house arrest at home, it was
barmy. I'd been suspended from school for two weeks

because Mr Kent and the headmaster couldn't take a joke,
well all right, it wasn't funny, no, it was very dangerous, but

it had missed and he had asked for it. Anyway my parents

decided to keep an eye on me. I think basically they were

scared stiff of me. I don't blame them really I was pretty

loopy around that time, but if anything's guaranteed to drive

you mad it's having your parents and sister tiptoeing around

the place, glancing sidelong at you all the time, locking your

bedroom door every night, not saying anything about

anything, and then trying to pretend that nothing's

happened and everything's hunky dory. We should have

talked about it, somebody should have said something, done

something, anything. I was feeling terrible about it, I didn't know what to do, how to apologise. Nothing happened, nobody said a word, nobody did a thing, they just watched me, kept me in the house, hardly spoke a word to me and watched me, and locked my bedroom door at night. What could I do, how could I explain, it was mad, it was driving me mad, and Benji. I had to put up with Benji. I could feel her bubbling under all the time with all the tension. I knew she was going to explode soon if something didn't happen. She couldn't bear it. I couldn't bear it, we couldn't go on like that, with my parents tiptoeing around not knowing what to do with me, being scared of me, watching me, my dad sitting there with a big purple bruise on his head as if nothing had happened. And Benji inside me, bubbling, beginning to get restless, starting to rage about the atmosphere. Couldn't go on like that, somebody had to do something, somebody had to make a move, stop the tension, do something before Benji did. So I did. I did something. I did what they wanted to do, did what my dad should have done, get it over with, get it out of the way, clear the air, make amends, even the score, so, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. I hit myself with the hammer. That made something happen, made somebody say something, do something. It did. They sent me to a psychiatrist.

Lunatic.

I was scared. I was scared because the psychiatrist was asking me questions, talking to me and making complete sense to me. I could understand what he was getting at. I thought I'm not going to answer otherwise he'll find out I'm a loony and he'll put me in the snake pit.

The Snake Pit.

I saw a film once called *The Snake Pit* it was a film about a loony bin it was horrible, awful, scary

I was scared to go to the Snake Pit

I thought I'd get sent to the Snake Pit
get put in the Snake Pit
in the loony bin

couldn't answer his questions or he'd know he'd know I was loony and I'd get put in the loony bin in the Snake Pit.

And he asked about the hammer, and I got scared then. He said first you tried to hammer the woodwork teacher, then you hammered your father, then you hammered yourself.

Norman Bates
Jekyll and Hyde
the Boston Strangler
Crippen and me.

First you tried to hammer the woodwork teacher, then you hammered your father, then you hammered yourself. Me a hammer murderer. I wanted to explain that it wasn't how it sounded, I wanted to explain that it wasn't one, two, three, hammer, hammer, hammer without a pause for breath, like he was saying it, like I was a hammer murderer on the rampage. I wanted to explain that it didn't happen like that and then he said, 'Why did you choose a hammer?'

Oh lord, I was scared then
I had to say over and over
I didn't choose a hammer
I never chose a hammer
it wasn't that I chose a hammer.

Norman Bates
Jekyll and Hyde
the Boston Strangler
Crippen and me
the hammer murderer
all in the Snake Pit
together.

(I was getting scared.)

I went to the psychiatrist and we all went to family therapy, and my parents talked and my sister talked and I said nothing, and when the therapist asked me anything I said I

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dunno. And I sat in the sessions like I sat in the cupboard just waiting for the time to go round.
 And the weeks passed and the time went round.
 And my parents slowly stopped pressing me
 and my parents slowly stopped getting at me
 and my parents slowly stopped nagging and criticising me
 and my parents slowly stopped punishing me
 my parents slowly stopped.
 And the school was tipped off and eased off
 and my sister called me a loony when no one was around
 and when the therapist asked if things were better
 I said yes.
 And they never asked about Benji
 and then I stopped going to the psychiatrist.
 And the weeks passed and the time went round.
 And when Benji and I felt like travelling we went.
 And I didn't get into trouble any more
 and I never went into the cupboard again
 and the eye for eye retributions stopped
 and my schoolwork wasn't that important any more
 in fact my schoolwork wasn't important at all
 nobody asked
 and my parents expected nothing from me
 and my sister called me a loony when no one was around
 and the teachers chose to ignore me
 and I chose to ignore the teachers
 and Benji still sometimes stole but not often
 and Benji still sometimes swore but only quietly
 and we travelled a lot
 and the time went round
 and it still wasn't right.
 You become aware of your lack of love
 the lack of love you had as a child
 you are aware of the lack of love as a child
 and the anger grows because you are aware of the lack of love
 and the wall gets stronger as awareness grows
 the anger grows and the wall gets stronger

because you are aware of the lack of love
 and the wall gets stronger and the anger grows
 because you are aware of the adult power
 you are aware of adult power and the lack of love
 and the anger grows and the wall gets stronger
 because frustration comes.

When I was seventeen I thought the best thing to do was get
 out, get away, leave home.
 I had always been a disappointment to my parents, a waste
 of effort, now I was a waste of space.
 They let me do what I liked, put up with me, made me feel
 guilty.
 It would be better. I would feel better. I could sort myself
 out. I could be happy.
 I thought.

It wasn't like that.

I lived in a bedsit
 at first I had a job and then I didn't
 I had no job, no money, no friends
 I sat in my bedsit
 my parents were quite good
 sent me the odd tenner
 through the post
 never visited
 I sat in my bedsit
 sat in my bedsit
 and slowly
 went mad in my bedsit.

It started off fine, I felt good, relieved, relaxed. I had no
 television but I wasn't worried, I had the library and I had
 Benji. She could come and go as she pleased now. I no longer
 had to be careful of her coming or going. I was no longer
 guarded, or worried of how she or I would appear to others,
 there were no others. I sat and talked for hours with Benji,
 talking about the past and the future, how much better
 things were, a million things we talked about and we laughed
 a lot and went travelling, travelling was cheap, we ate what

we wanted to eat when we wanted to eat it and if we didn't feel like getting up in the morning we didn't. Occasionally I would think that I was too old for imaginary friends, but mostly I didn't think about it at all. It started off fine. I felt good, relieved, relaxed. Then Benji started getting restless, I could feel her, things weren't really good, things weren't really all right, we weren't happy. We started arguing and she got on my nerves as I got on her nerves and we argued and we weren't happy, this wasn't what we wanted. And we'd sit in silence for hours, sit in silence, sit in a chair in silence, sit in a chair in a bedsit in silence for hours. We went out less and less until we couldn't go out at all, didn't feel like eating, didn't feel like reading, didn't feel like travelling, didn't feel like talking. Sat in a chair in a bedsit in silence for hours. Benji was restless, she said the bedsit was just a big cupboard, we were just sitting in a big cupboard waiting for the time to go round and it was claustrophobic, we ought to get out, go travelling, do something. We sat in a chair in a bedsit in silence for hours and couldn't move couldn't get out, couldn't raise the energy. Benji was restless, started shouting, arguing, the neighbours complained and Benji got more restless, started arguing with them, started singing at the top of her voice in the middle of the night. The neighbours complained more and banged the walls and the door. Benji swore and shouted and banged back. And the neighbours complained and banged and threatened and argued and Benji shouted and sang and swore and screamed at all hours of the day and night and then the police came and I was sectioned.

Mental hospitals aren't that bad, they're not bad at all, quite nice really, and not a bit like the Snake Pit. I was there for six weeks and they gave me some drugs to calm me down and I did calm down and I relaxed and Benji calmed down and faded a bit and I got a grip of myself and felt a lot better. Everybody (well, nearly everybody) was very nice and friendly and all the staff, the doctors and nurses and therapists and everybody said that if I had a problem I could always talk to them about it, which was very nice of them, very kind. There were a lot of people in that place

that I could talk to if I had a problem. But I kept quiet and got calmer and got a grip of Benji and myself and felt better.

My parents and sister visited me once. That was embarrassing.

And then out with a promise to keep taking the medication and go to outpatients and do a little gardening job and stay in the hostel.

It was decided

I should live in a hostel be independent but have help close by

if required somebody there if I needed them if I had a problem if I had another breakdown.

The hostel warden was a bloke called Peter. Peter never once said if I had a problem I could talk to him about it. Peter never once assumed that I had a problem. Peter never mentioned problems either to me or to the other ex-patients. Peter would just chat. Anytime, all the time, whenever. Peter helped.

Peter was a friend, all the people in the hostel were friends, it was a very friendly atmosphere. I liked it. I felt like seven ex-mental patients, a few staff members and Peter were my family. An odd family. A friendly family though.

And I lived with them for two years and Benji was there

in the background at first

cus of the drugs but as I slowly felt better more secure

less in need
 false security
 I stopped taking them
 thought I could manage without them
 so Benji got stronger
 more prominent
 more out front
 but friendly though
 she was friendly for weeks
 very popular
 no trouble
 false security.
 Something went wrong
 somebody did or said something wrong
 or something happened. I'm not sure
 but she started
 angry, tantrum
 flying off, sounding off
 the usual
 yelling and screaming and swearing
 at my friends
 my hostel family
 at Peter
 mostly at Peter
 my friend
 who stood there blinking
 while Benji sounded off
 while Benji threw a spanner in the works
 while Benji ruined it all again
 While Benji upset the balance
 upset the family
 upset my friends
 upset me
 cus I thought I'd be thrown out
 cus I thought I'd be back in the bin
 cus I thought she'd never die down
 calm down, stay down.

After she'd done her worst, burnt herself out, let me through, let me get control, let me speak, I apologised, tried to, spluttered and stuttered and tried to say sorry. Felt ashamed, felt terrible.

Peter said: we all get angry sometimes, it's natural.

No.

Yes.

No you don't understand.

It's all right, no damage done.

But you don't understand.

Don't worry about it.

But I do.

You shouldn't, it's OK, you were just letting off steam, that's all.

No it isn't . . . it's Benji.

And I told him.

I told him about Benji, I told him all about Benji, how she was, who she was, where she came from, everything. I told him about how I decided to stop taking my medication weeks ago even though I knew I wasn't supposed to. I told him about my family, my real family, my parents always demanding perfection, always expecting everything, how I couldn't do it, how Benji ruined it for me. How I loved my parents, how my parents hated me. I told him about my lady and how I'd loved her and how I missed her even now and I never knew her name. And I told him about everything, everything I could think of just came pouring out for hours and hours all day. He listened. He listened and never once said I was too old for imaginary friends and he never said I was a loony and he never said I shouldn't have stopped taking the drugs, he listened, and over the days afterwards when I wanted to say some more he listened. And when sometimes it was garbled and didn't make sense he still listened but just asked me to speak slower because he wanted to know because he wanted to listen. And I told him. He never once said I was too old for imaginary friends, he never once said I was loony, he never once said I shouldn't have

stopped taking the drugs, he said once that maybe Benji was only expressing what I felt. I didn't understand at first but it made me think about it.

It made me think a lot.

Frustration comes because you are no longer a child you are no longer a child but you feel like a child you feel like a child because you need love like a child you need love like a child because the child needed love and the anger grows because the child needed love and the anger grows because you need love like a child and the anger grows because you are an adult and the anger grows because frustration comes and frustration comes because you are an adult you are an adult but the child needs love and the anger grows and the wall won't break and the wall won't break because the anger won't stop and the anger won't stop because you need love like a child the child needs love to stop the anger and you need love like a child to break the wall you need to break the wall and stop the anger but you can't say

you can't say you need love like a child

you can't say because you are an adult

you can't say, you can't ask for love like a child

you can't ask because you are adult.

I know now that I'm too old for imaginary friends, I know that now.

I went back on the medication after the little upset at the hostel, felt it was for the best.

And then I got a flat, after the hostel, felt I was ready, too old for imaginary friends, hadn't needed Benji, hadn't even thought about Benji, I had real friends now, proper ones, not imaginary, and my doctor agreed, said I was ready and they got me a flat, a lovely flat and all my friends from the hostel and Peter came and helped me decorate and arrange the furniture, it was good, I felt good, much too old for imaginary friends.

But I was lonely in my flat I missed my friends and Peter at the hostel the noise and the commotion and the friendliness.

I'd visit them though

and they'd visit me, often

but after they'd gone

I couldn't bear it

the emptiness and silence

of just me

I'd never been on my own before

always had Benji

never been on my own.

Then I thought, this is silly, I'm just being silly. I'm sure everybody feels like this when they move into a new place, bound to. I've just got to get used to it, bound to feel strange, just got to keep busy, keep myself occupied, not think about it.

Didn't know what to do

then I thought 'why not go travelling?'

I've always enjoyed travelling

always made me feel better

cheered me up.

But I couldn't

I tried

I did try

but I couldn't go

not without Benji

I missed her

couldn't go without her

Benji *was* travelling

couldn't bear it

I don't know, must have panicked

ran back

something

couldn't travel alone.

I didn't know what to do, couldn't stay in and couldn't go out. I was beginning to get quite depressed. I was too old for imaginary friends but I couldn't cope on my own. I felt I just

couldn't do it. And it was just at that point, just at that point when I thought I can't do it, can't cope, have to go back to hospital or something, it was just at that point that I had this brilliant idea.

I thought 'why not get a dog?'
and I did.

I got a dog

and it's been brilliant

best thing I've ever done.

I simply got a dog

and I can go travelling now

we go travelling, we go miles

me and my dog

and it's easy, no problem

I don't worry or panic

I don't even think about it

just off we go

and not dirty streets or buses any more

like with Benji

but parks and commons and places

I feel so healthy now too

I simply got a dog

should have done it years ago.

I'm so happy now, she makes me so happy.

And the flat. It doesn't seem empty or silent or anything now, she doesn't say anything but the flat feels so. I just love it, I love going home to my flat now. And it's all because of my dog.

And she's a real dog, she's not imaginary. She is because I got her from Battersea Dogs' Home and I couldn't imagine that place it's so sad, so it's like I rescued her, felt a real hero straight away.

I'm happy now, she's a great dog.

And it's funny cos ever since I've had her I get this feeling that I'm close to my lady again, not physically or anything I don't mean that cos I don't know where she is or anything, couldn't look her up even don't know her name, but I mean in spirit or something, like we connect again, that she's a carer, with me.

I don't know, maybe it's because we've both got dogs, maybe we connect through our dogs or something. I don't know but it's just good to know she's there, with me.
So I'm happy now.

And she's a great dog, not perfect though thank God, nothing pedigree, just a scruffy mongrel type, always into things, a real scallywag. And we do everything together, always together, just like Benji was.

I do sometimes have this urge though, to stop taking the medication, just for a while. I don't mean for ever but just for a little while, just so Benji could meet her. I'd really like Benji to meet her, just to see what she thought, to see if they'd get on, cos I'm sure they would, cos Benji's always liked dogs too, ever since we met my lady and her dog, Benji. In fact Benji was dead proud to be called after Benji the dog, so I'm sure she'd like her. Cos she's a great dog.

I'd also like Benji to come back just one more time, just for the last time, because I feel I want to apologise to her. I feel I need to say sorry, cos I know now that it wasn't Benji really. I know now that it was me really, my anger, my emotion that caused all that trouble, all that wasted time, and I just feel I want to say sorry for blaming her. Cos it wasn't her it was me as I feel awful for blaming her. I mean she was my best friend, she was, she was my best friend and I blamed her all those years, so I would just like to say sorry.

And I'd like to say good-bye.

But I can't. I can't even think about it. I mustn't think about it, cos I'm too old for imaginary friends. I've got to keep taking the medication cos it is for the best, so I shouldn't think about Benji or the past or anything. I should just think about my dog, well I do think about my dog in fact, I do, I concentrate on my dog and try to make her happy, cos she makes me happy, she does, she's a great dog, a real scallywag, always into

everything, messing up the flat with her dog hairs and everything, I can't keep the place clean I can't, every time I try to clean the floor or anything she's there with her paw prints all over it. She's a real monster and a horror and a terror she is. I call her Lady.

It's just a name.