That's What Friends Are For

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"My mom was painting our house this weekend. She fell off the ladder and broke her arm."

"Yeah, well, my dad fell off the barn roof and broke his leg!"

I don't know why I felt the need to one-up everyone. Maybe I was trying to impress them, maybe I just wanted to be better than them; I really don't know. I had done it a hundred times before this and no one had ever questioned me. We were kids, we took everything as truth. Yet, this was the first lie I was caught in. I was in kindergarten, which seems like I should have been old enough to know that lying was wrong. I did know it, but it made my life that much more interesting.

That afternoon, after lying to my classmates and teacher, my dad picked me up from school, without crutches or a cast. Needless to say I was in a lot of trouble. After that, I wasn't as confident with myself when telling lies. People were starting to call my bluff, which made me sort of an outsider. My friends didn't like to hang out with me as much as they used to, which was okay with me because they started to make me uncomfortable as well. All I had was me.

Becky, one of my classmates, had an imaginary friend named Stella. Apparently, Stella was from Italy, but she had heard such wonderful things about Becky that Stella moved in with her. Stella is what we referred to as "a big kid," someone who was older than us; she was 12. Most of the time Becky couldn't play with us because Stella didn't like to play with little kids; Becky frequently played alone. This seemed very interesting to me because I couldn't see why an imaginary friend would be more fun to play with than real friends, but Becky always seemed to be having a great time. She would play with the blocks and talk to Stella about how beautiful she looked in her expensive dresses, and they never talked about any of the same TV shows that I watched. They watched Days of Our Lives and Another World, two shows I had never even heard of. I assumed she was making it up.
Another thing I noticed was that everyone was copying Becky and Stella. Everyday, someone else was coming to school with an imaginary friend who just moved in with them. Even the boys were coming in with imaginary friends and imaginary pets. One boy actually scared us into staying off the swings because he was afraid his pet bear, Ogre, would attack us. I was the only one without an imaginary friend, and to be honest I was afraid to get one. I had been caught by my teacher and my parents for lying once before. As much as Becky and the others wanted to believe that their friends were real, I knew they were not. I ridiculed all of them for coming up with such stupid fake friends when they had real ones that they refused to play with. It was adding insult to injury to know I was being replaced by fake people.

I told my parents about how stupid people were being. I didn't tell Mom that no one wanted to play with me; I was too embarrassed. She just laughed and told me that they had overactive imaginations, which meant that they like to make up things in order to feel special. Now I was totally confused; I had made up things in order to feel special and I was punished. These people were coming up with pretend people to play with and all the adults thought it was funny. I just didn't understand; I tried my hardest to fit in with them again, but they are all too into their new friends.

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He showed up one day out of the blue. I was playing in my backyard when I first noticed him. It was a cool day, but very sunny. I don't know why I was outside alone; I was usually accompanied my brothers. Yet there he was; he came through the tree line in the backyard very casually, as if he had known me all his life. He was about my age, really skinny, with brown hair.

"Hi," he said. "My name's Adam. I live behind you."

I knew this was a lie. We lived in the country, so the people who lived behind me lived about a mile away. Plus we went to the same babysitter, so I knew them pretty well. I gave him a suspicious look, but he just smiled. When I looked where he was pointing, an old, rusty trailer was parked in the middle of a field behind my house. It had appeared out of nowhere. He told me how he knew me. "We've lived behind you forever. You never noticed us?"

He said he was too poor to go to school, so that was why I had never seen him there. He and his twin brother took care of themselves while their mom was at work. They didn't have any friends besides each other and they wanted to make new friends. I looked around for someone else, but there was no one to be found. I asked him where his brother was and he whistled toward the trees. A skinny, black haired boy walked out cautiously. I introduced myself and he did the same. His name was Josh. He didn't look at me often; he was extremely shy.

I was extremely skeptical. I had never seen either of these two boys before.
Then it occurred to me: I had known them all of my life. They were me, both of them. They were my imaginary friends. I had created my own imaginary friends, which meant I could have my own imaginary world.

We talked and played for a while, until at least dark when my mom called me inside for dinner. “Hey, you guys should come back tomorrow when I’m done with school.”

“Sure,” Adam smiled. Josh gave me a shy smile, and then they disappeared behind the trees.

As promised, they were waiting for me when I returned home from school. I told them about my day at school, all of the things I had learned and was going to learn the next day. They seemed so interested in everything I had to say. It was great to finally have imaginary friends of my own.

I never told anyone about Adam and Josh. Even though most of my real friends had imaginary friends, I didn’t want to get in trouble for lying again. If my mom caught me talking to them I would tell her I was playing with my dolls. At school, I still made fun of everyone for their imaginary friends, and I remained an outsider. Mom would ask what I did at school and I always gave her a very general response: “It was fine. We did this, and then we learned how to do that.” She would ask about my friends, but I was too embarrassed to tell her that no one wanted to play with me. I knew it was wrong, and that if they caught me I would be in even more trouble, but I would lie and tell them how much fun we were having.

Josh and Adam were the only people I could really talk to. They were my confidants, and they understood all of my problems. They were sympathetic instead of insensitive to my feelings. They hated my friends for the same reasons I did. It was wonderful. No matter how much I felt like an outsider at school, I always had Josh and Adam.

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Josh and Adam were two twin brothers I had made up, yet they are so real. They have their own personalities, their own likes and dislikes, their own unique personalities. It seems to me that most imaginary friends are carbon copies of their creators, yet mine were different.

Adam is the wild one. He always does things he knows are wrong. He likes rock music, action movies, motorcycles, and girls. He plays the guitar now, along with Josh; they are looking forward to starting a band. When we were younger, he was the one who wanted to do those things that we knew we could get in trouble for doing. For example, jumping on the bed: that was his favorite thing to do when we were little. A very no nonsense person, he always told me straight to my face if I was being overdramatic. I found this to be a very admirable characteristic. As we grew older, he took on more and more frustrating characteristics. In junior high, he was the jerk: the one who
was always making fun of the girls, the jock, just plain full of himself. In high school he was carefree. He dated a lot of interesting girls, and indulged in a lot of shady activities. He started to experiment with drugs, which infuriated Josh and me, and blew us off for almost a year.

Josh appeared to be a very dark person. He had dark hair and a dark complexion, but he was probably the happier of the two. He was quiet and shy, but he loved to laugh and loved to make Adam and me laugh the most. He is the cautious one; he always told us we would get in trouble for jumping on the bed and would refuse to participate. He was always right, of course, but sometime Adam and I just couldn’t resist. He was the most sensitive person I have ever met. He always sympathized with me, even if he knew I was wrong or if I was being selfish. He was very shy when we first met, not wanted to talk too much or do too much with us, but as we grew older he seemed to come out of his shell. Adam and I slowly grew apart as time went on, but Josh and I grew closer and closer.

I needed them then, just as I need them now sometimes. Since they didn’t go to school, I would come home and teach them everything I had learned that day. I would recite my ABC’s to them, and make them repeat it back to me. I would read to them and teach them how to read and write, and they would listen intently. They help me when I am feeling down, confused, excited, lonely, and scared. They are the lucky rabbits’ feet I secretly carry with me at all times; they are security blankets.

When I look back at the way they changed, I realized that was my way of dealing with the changes around me. In high school, I no longer ran with some of my childhood friends. Many had dropped out, some experimented with drugs, and some had just changed. I used Adam to mirror this change so I could deal with it in my own way, and used Josh to tell me what I was feeling wasn’t bad. I didn’t understand everything that was changing around me; they were my way of coping.

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They faded as time went on, once everyone’s imaginary friends moved out. I had my real friends back now and wanted to concentrate on them. Still, I would often wonder what it would be like if Josh and Adam could play with my friends. As I said, they never really disappeared, just faded in and out.

I have found old papers where I had used to teach Adam and Josh to write. I laugh when I see them, but anyone else who would look at it would just think it was a child’s scribbles. Those papers mean a lot to me; it was a time in my life when I had no one but myself, and these two creatures helped me through that.

Some nights I lie awake, too scared, confused or sad to sleep, and one of them will appear out of no where. Sometimes Adam will sit next to me and
say, “Get over it. Was it really that important anyway?” I realize how silly I am being and I do get over it. Other times, Josh will lie next to me and stroke my hair and whisper, “It’s okay. It’ll be fine, I promise.” I believe him because he is never wrong. It is comforting to have them there, knowing that no matter what I do they will always be there for me. No matter what kind of lies I tell they will believe me. It sounds crazy to even admit that I still have imaginary friends, but they are there for me in ways no one else can be. I love them so much.