

# Inside Out

## **Malpas the Dragon**

By Ann Cattanach (Review: Rebecca Atherton)

*Jessica Kingsley Publishers, £8.99*

For therapists working with children, one of the main obstacles to effective treatment is the difficulty of finding an appropriate means of communication, both in terms of the child's expression of thoughts and feelings, and in their understanding of what the therapist is trying to convey to them.

Play and drama therapist Ann Cattanach, has written a book to aid this process of communication. *Malpas the Dragon* is a picture book about loss and survival, ideal for children who find it hard to love and be loved. Read with an adult, it may act as a starting point for conversation about feelings that are difficult to express.

The implications are obvious - Malpas is a very angry dragon. From the outside, he isn't very nice and he doesn't have any friends. Brought up to be scary and bad, and thrown out of home by uncaring parents at an early age, this isn't really his fault.

Initially, Malpas enjoys his reign of terror, because it makes him feel brave and strong. But he soon grows bored, and feelings of loneliness start to creep in. Switching his focus, he moves to a secluded hilltop cave to try his hand at kidnapping little girls instead.

Neglected by her own parents, Haley, the kidnapped maiden, attempts to set up home with Malpas, making the best of a bad situation. Sadly, her generous efforts to care for him are coldly rebuked, and, frustrated by the lack of an armoured knight on the horizon, she decides to rescue herself.

Alone again, Malpas finally realises exactly what Haley had offered him and is filled with regret. He begs her to return, sending her his tears by way of apology. She refuses to come back to him, but still values his gifts, taking each one and passing it on to other sad and lonely children in turn. These small tokens of understanding make the children feel special, and the warm glow at the centre of each tear, when touched, gently warms their hearts.

Malpas may not get the happy ending he yearns for, and I can't help feeling sad for our lonely dragon: we leave him standing alone on a mountain, sending tear after unhappy tear to his only friend in world and receiving nothing but her silence in return. But, ultimately, we learn that through the act of sharing his pain with others, Malpas is, in fact, helping them. Which is a happy ending in its own right.