

# BETTY REN WRIGHT

## THE DOLLHOUSE MURDERS

*The dolls didn't forget...*



 SCHOLASTIC



1.

*"She Can't Help the Way She Is"*

Amy Treloar kicked off her shoes and climbed onto a cushioned bench in the middle of Regents Mall. The mall was crowded with Friday-evening shoppers, some of whom turned to stare.

"Can you see her?" Ellen Kramer asked. "You ought to be able to see her. She's so—"

"Big," Amy finished and hopped down from the bench. It was true; she should have been able to find Louann's bright blue windbreaker, even in a crowd. At eleven, Louann was two inches taller than twelve-year-old Amy, and she weighed twenty pounds more. She was the biggest girl in her class at the Stadler School for Exceptional Children.

"My mother is going to kill me," Amy moaned. "She

hangs on to Louann every single minute when they go shopping together.”

“Did she ever wander away before?”

“Only about a million times,” Amy said. It was the first time she’d gone shopping with Ellen—the first time they’d planned to do something together after school. Ellen was new in Claiborne, and Amy was eager to have her for a friend. *This’ll probably finish it, Amy thought. We’re wasting the whole afternoon. This’ll be the shortest friendship on record.*

“What can we do? Does she know how to make a phone call home?” Ellen was looking at a window display of designer jeans, probably wishing she’d come to the mall alone.

“She gets mixed up,” Amy said. “Besides, my mother isn’t home yet. Let’s go down to the crosswalk. She might be around the corner where we can’t see her.”

As they neared the crosswalk, a squawking sound cut through the piped-in music. A moment passed before Amy realized that the squawking was voices.

“Oh, no,” she groaned. She’d recognized two words: *Louann Treloar*. There was a ripple of childish laughter.

Amy darted ahead. Around the corner, a thick carpet had been laid down the center of the walk, and a puppet stage was set up at one end. A crowd of small children and their mothers sat on the carpet and looked up at the stage, where a hawk-nosed puppet was shrieking questions at the audience. In the center of the group stood Louann, her face shining with excitement. She was an-



swering the puppet in a voice as shrill as his own.

Amy felt rather than saw Ellen step back around the corner. If only she could back away, too! But she couldn't. Already some of the mothers were looking annoyed.

"Louann!" Amy worked her way through the audience, trying not to step on small fingers. "I'm sorry. Excuse me, please." She grasped a sleeve of the blue windbreaker and tugged. "Come on!"

Louann turned, her broad face radiant. "The puppet talks to me, Amy," she said. "He asks my name."

"Louann, move! This is for little kids." She gripped her sister's wrist. Louann let herself be dragged away, but her eyes didn't leave the stage.

"Bye," she called. "Bye-bye, puppet."

"Bye, sweetie," the puppet replied. "Come back soon." There was laughter and some exasperated sighs from the mothers. "Who else is going to talk to me?" the puppet demanded.

A chorus of little voices sounded behind them as Amy pulled Louann into the main part of the mall. Ellen was several stores away, examining a display of shoes. Her face was carefully blank when they joined her, and she didn't look at Louann at all.

"What shall we do now?" Amy asked quickly. "Do you want to shop for something special, Ellen?"

Ellen shrugged. "We could go to the Casual Shop and check out their sweaters," she said. "If you think it's all right." She risked a hasty glance at Louann.





## ***"It's waiting."***

It was just an old dollhouse. Hidden away in the attic—collecting dust. Amy didn't know that the dollhouse held a secret. A deadly secret that hadn't been talked about in years. And now, the dolls have decided that Amy should be the one to know the truth. The truth about the night of the murder...

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"The combination of a beautiful, fascinating dollhouse, dark family secrets, ghostly events, danger and suspense are sufficient enough to make this a likely choice...."

—*School Library Journal*

"...successful, full-bodied work."

—*Booklist*

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