

THE
LONELY DOLL



STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY
DARE WRIGHT

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Once there was a little doll. Her name was Edith. She lived in a nice house and had everything she needed except someone to play with. She was lonely! Then one morning Edith looked into the garden and there stood two bears! Since it was first published in 1957, The Lonely Doll has established itself as a unique children's classic. Through innovative photography Dare Wright brings the world of dolls to life and entertains us with much more than just a story. Edith, the star of the show, is a doll from Wright's childhood, and Wright selected the bear family with the help of her brother. With simple poses and wonderful expressions, the cast of characters is vividly brought to life to tell a story of friendship.

The Lonely Doll Details

Date : Published September 28th 1998 by HMH Books for Young Readers (first published 1957)

ISBN : 9780395899267

Author : Dare Wright

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From Reader Review The Lonely Doll for online ebook

Lisa Vegan says

This one disturbed me when I was a child, although the pictures were amazing.

Melissa says

I had this book as a child -- still own it as a matter of fact. I had the doll as well. I was looking for a new copy for my granddaughter when I ran across some rather surprising reviews. Seems the general consensus is that the author, Dare Wright, had a troubled childhood and it is reflected in her books. I guess when viewed from todays pc society, the books don't fit into what is right for "today's" kids -- I mean there is an instance of the father bear spanking the little bear when he disobeyed and of "Edith" begging for forgiveness promising to "do anything he wanted" just to not be left. I loved this book as a child and I read it to my children. It must not have affected my daughter because she doesn't even remember it! It was written in 1957 and back then, children got spanked. And, did any of them ever cry and say they would do anything just don't take the toy away, put me in timeout, whatever? I think most of the reviews are just being over analytical and trying to put a human spin on what is obviously a fictional children's book -- it is after all, a doll and a couple of stuffed bears -- ok, one is a Steiff but still. I won't buy the book for my granddaughter but I think it is a shame -- it is a cute book. Plus, after perusing the children's section of my local bookshop I have to say that "today's" children's books are really not good. Plus, I found an awful lot of books involving subject matter that I would have nixed for my 70's children!

Iva says

Peter Monn read this to us on his bookTube channel and it was an unforgettable once in a lifetime experience go and enjoy it at: <http://youtube.com/peterlikesbooks>

karen says

my thanks to boyd for answering my call for "more creepy doll books". it seems everyone knew about this but me. and its great! i got the two still in print, and will track down the rest. and while i was buying them, my cashier-friend commanded me to read the bio, which i will also do. this book is beautiful and sad and just so well-posed. theres a lot more conveyed than meets the eye at first glance. these photos need to be really examined, not just paged through. another book i am baffled that children are exposed to.

N.N. Light says

This was one of my favorite books growing up. As an only child, I could relate to Edith's loneliness. It's a children's book from the 1950's with black and white photographs depicting a doll (Edith) and two teddy bears (a dad and kid) who come to stay with her.

I was shocked when I read through some of the reviews!

"Creepy."

"Downright sexual."

"Abusive."

Listen, this book was written in the 1950's where everyone spanked their kids, especially when the kid had been bad. Context is a beautiful thing.

I know I'll probably be slammed here for saying how much I love this book but there it is.

My Rating: 5 stars

Annie says

I'm conflicted about this book: my five year old daughter is a little obsessed with it right now, and it's not hard to see why. The illustrations are beautiful black and white photographs of toys in perfect settings. It's as if all those horrible YouTube videos she likes to watch were remade as an attractive book with a coherent plot. I know I would have loved it as a kid.

But...the photos (and the story itself) are a more than a little creepy. There's something kinky about the bear spanking Edith. I mean, there's something kinky about spanking in general, which is why it's tricky when it comes up in picture books. Also, trying to figure out what the roles really are—are the bears her friends? Why does Mr. Bear have all this authority? It seems like Edith is in the submissive role in an abusive co-dependent relationship. We've been talking a lot at our house about what the hell is up with THAT.

Lillian seems not so hung up on what the actual roles are: friend? Surrogate parent? She doesn't care. But she definitely wants to know what the hell is up with the spanking.

Suvi says

You know, if you read this at a surface level, it might seem innocent and pretty normal. However, underneath there's something creepy, and I'm glad I'm not the only one who noticed that. The beautifully constructed photographs evoke in turn loneliness and subjugation, and the text itself tells us how Edith is so lonely, that she lets complete strangers inside the house and take over her life. Occasionally she seems to have fun, but then she gets spanked for doing a naughty thing. There's no one else in the world but them (and a couple of rude pigeons).

Is the doll an adult or a child? She lives alone, so she must represent an adult. But then the spanking scene

becomes kind of kinky and strange. If Edith is a child, then it's equally odd that she would just happen to let two bears enter into her life. What the hell? Then again, having heard a few things about Wright's life I suppose I couldn't have expected anything less. After reading the biography I'm probably going to be even more weirded out.

Apparently, the interpretation of the story depends on the reader's background and age. For me, the pink covers are deceptive. Wright's world is sad and weird, but I think I like it just the way it is. Despite the length there's a lot of room for further examination on the next round of reading.

PS. Oh great, now **Bette Davis** in *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* popped into my head. I think I've had enough of dolls for a while. Then again, I also feel like throwing my own giant blank faced bear to the balcony. Jesus.

PPS. To lighten the mood, here's a lovely Finnish animation about thin ice and a drowning bear:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SaoLk...>

jesse says

When a lonely doll living by herself gets an unexpected visit she is euphoric. From that point on she has friends to play with, Mr. Bear and Little Bear. Doesn't sound very exciting right?

Except when you look at the context... that's when it becomes deeply unsettling. Dare Wright grew up fairly isolated by a smothering, overbearing mother who pushed her into the spotlight as a model. They even shared the same bed as adults. Jean Nathan, her biographer, reckons that Wright remained a virgin her whole life, except for the rape by a homeless man whom she had previously befriended.

Anyways, I don't belong to the group who read this classic as a kid, feeling all warm and fuzzy, because this is my first time reading it, but I can clearly see how off-putting it might be when revisiting 'The Lonely Doll' as an adult.

Back to the book:

Once when Mr. Bear goes away for a short while, Edith and Little Bear excitedly explore the house, trying on high heels, lipstick and a new dress. Mr. Bear has been watching. WHAT? It just screams pedobear to me...

Little Bear though used to the punishments doled out by Mr. Bear is visibly terrified of the repercussions, just like Edith. Of course he punishes the both of them with a firm spanking which is by far the most famous scene. After some apologising for fear of being abandoned, everything is peace love and understanding. With Mr. Bear touching her on the head or shoulder or standing inappropriately close. #ew #goosebumps #swallow

Reading only the text without the accompanying pictures, it mightn't seem so repulsive... I don't think. The combination of the writing and visuals is what makes this utterly compelling. It sort of reminded me of

Tender Morsels which I couldn't finish though I've heard nothing but praise about it.

There is just something so upsetting and disgusting when something that should be considered a safe haven for a child gets subverted and violated. In "Lonely Doll" it's the bears that come for a seemingly friendly visit and then decide to stay indefinitely. It's just bears, you might say and normally I would agree with you wholeheartedly, but again: context!!! Edith is depicted showing an interest in her sexuality when putting on lipstick and jewellery which is completely natural. You'll feel chilled though, when an undressed Edith gets touched, by Mr. Bear who clearly is a father figure to her.

Let me rephrase Patricia Arquette's quote by saying "(..) what is deviant is when [someone] decides that they can break into your sexuality, steal that from you [and] insert themselves".

Reading this disturbing work just made me sad and mad for the lonely doll and Wright herself. The point of view is that of a child doll, so you get the sense that the ominous scenes of abuse are downplayed. Edith feels like a 'bad girl', displeasing Mr. Bear and fears that she might lose his affection, thus she endures the physical violence inflicted by him. It's heartbreaking to witness because it's obvious that 'if not 'when' she breaks away it's going to take a lot of self-strength/will. After all, the Mr. Bears it seems, are good at picking victims and exploiting their weaknesses.

I can definitely see the appeal for audiences and why "The Lonely Doll" has stayed a classic thus far. It's haunting. It truly is.

karenbee says

Never read *The Lonely Doll* as a kid, somehow acquired a biography of Dare Wright (still unread), saw this displayed in the kiddie section at the library and snatched it up. I read it this morning because I needed to take it back to the library.

This is a children's book that involves a story, told through photographs, of a doll who is desperate for friends until one day two bears mysteriously show up. There's a large bear who ends up being a father figure and a little bear who ends up being the doll's partner in crime. The text is simple and brief and the photographs are dreamy black-and-white shots.

I think as a kid I would have thought it was just a cute story and been inspired to tell a similar story with my dolls, but as an adult I found it terribly sad and a little creepy. (And it would be creepy even without the oft-mentioned spanking scene.) It's pretty, though.

Peter Monn says

Go check out my review and video of me reading this book out loud on my booktube channel
<http://YouTube.com/peterlikesbooks>

Sam Quixote says

The Lonely Doll is one of the creepiest books I've ever read. That it's supposed to be a kid's book only makes it creepier.

It's a 1950s book made up of black and white photos - that's right, no colour for you damn kids! - starring a disturbed, sad doll as two terrifying teddy bears, the youngest of whom is blank faced making him even more scary, and an adult bear, who has what can only be described as a crazy expression, move into the doll's house so she's no longer alone.

The phrase "Just wait and see what fun we'll have!" uttered by the bears is one of the most haunting lines I've ever read.

When the doll and the little bear behave like all kids (I assume the doll herself is supposed to be a kid - the alternative is that she's mentally handicapped. But then why is she allowed to live alone?), they are beaten by the adult bear. It's at this point that I began formulating my own plot about this book: the doll wants company and out of desperation (and probably a potent combo of liquor and prescription drugs) makes a bad decision and takes in a couple of transients who proceed to take over her house and hold her hostage.

Later when the adult bear leaves, the doll and the little bear attempt to escape the house which they've now become prisoners in. They fail and wind up trying to have as much fun as they can before the crazy adult bear returns. The photo of when they're playing dress-up and the adult bear is in the background standing in the doorway with that expression on his face - that is straight up, 100% legit, horror. The adult bear then proceeds to beat them. Then later, in a case of Stockholm syndrome and/or cultish devotion, they believe they've done wrong and apologise to the adult bear for their non-transgressions!

The fact that this book is presented with dead toys in chilling black and white photos with a chintzy dress pattern on the background cover, makes it even more disturbing to read. And if you look into the author Dare Wright's sad life where she had a domineering and insane mother and an allegedly incestuous relationship with her brother, the only man she could be close to, it just adds that extra layer of terror to the book.

This is a kid's book that I wouldn't ever think in a million years to give to a kid - it's like reading a book a mental patient in Bellevue wrote which somehow got published and became a serial killer's bible. The photos, the story, it's all just nightmare fuel. This is the anti-Toy Story.

Just wait and see what fun we'll have...

Licha says

What a strange book. When my 15yr. old daughter saw me checking this out of the library, she looked at me like I was crazy. As soon as she opened it, she immediately called it weird and creepy and decided to read it on the spot. She definitely picked up on the very weird vibe of this book, calling it disturbing and "porny".

I have to agree that the book teeters on the edge of inappropriateness. The book was written in 1957. It a story told in black and white photographs about a doll, Edith, who is lonely. Along come a dad/son duo, Mr. Bear and Little Bear, who end up moving into Edith's house. Mr. Bear immediately takes control of the

house and of Edith. *Lesson: Don't open the door if your parent's are not home and Don't let strangers in.*

Some of the pictures are downright scary and creepy. You see Mr. Bear chasing Edith, who seems to have a terrified look on her face. There's a bit of pictures of creepy Mr. Bear right up on Edith's behind. There's a bit of tension in the book that not all is right in this household. Mr. Bear goes on an errand and while he's away, Edith and Little Bear go into a room where they start to play dress-up. Edith dons high heels, a ruffled petticoat, does her hair up in a knot **She tried making it into a knot. That looked very grown up.** She also puts on some, *gasp!*, lipstick. In walks Mr. Bear and you see him staring at Edith through the reflection in the mirror. He looks like such a creepy peeping tom, like he'd been staring at Edith for a while. **So on went on the lipstick! But in the mirror Edith saw Mr. Bear watching!** In the next pages you see a picture of Mr. Bear spanking Edith on the behind, now undressed to her underclothes, bent over his knee, staring at her butt and punishing her for what she just did. It's all so voyeuristic in a very disturbing way.

How did Mr. Bear manage to infiltrate Edith's house? He has exerted his rules on the household and on Edith, sneaked into her life an affections. I really don't think this is necessarily a children's book. Or maybe it's just the time we live in that made me look at this book the wrong way.

This book was recommended to me by Miriam.

Miriam says

Edith lives in a lovely house and has everything she needs -- except company. She is desperately lonely, praying every night for friends and trying to talk with the small animals who seem to be the only living things left in this deserted world. Perhaps there has been some apocalypse, some epidemic which wiped out all mammals. Edith is on the verge of going mad from isolation when finally two strange bears appear. Father and son? They do not say. Possibly Mr Bear appropriated and "adopted" Little Bear in the same manner as he quickly assumes the parental role over Edith, monitoring her behavior and controlling her activities. When the formerly-independent Edith resists Mr Bear's domination, she is punished, never more severely than on the instance in which she attempts to shed her submissive, child-like trappings and dress as an adult, putting on lipstick and highheeled shoes. Physically beaten and terrified of abandonment, she kowtows to patriarchal authority.

I did not encounter this book as a child. I think it would have disturbed me then, too, since I grew up in a large city and was aware of dangers such as kidnapping and child molestation at a very young age. As an adult I do not **like** the book, but find it fascinating as a psychological artifact and a creative product. The text story is creepy enough on its own -- a little doll all alone is so desperate for friends that she lets in strangers who quickly take control of her home and life. The accompanying photos are even more revealing, intense and disturbing. They alternate between scenes of isolation and even desolation, and uneasy, claustrophobic closeness. Often the two bears seem to press themselves onto Edith from either side, touching her and pulling at her hair and clothing. Although no violence is explicit except for the infamous "spanking scene," too many of Edith and Little Bear's behavioral and personality elements correspond with those of abused children, as do Mr Bear's with those of an abuser -- obsessive control and watchfulness, thwarting of other social contacts, violent or irrational behavior coupled with assertions of love and protection, resistance to the "children" growing up.

My review of the sequel The Lonely Doll Learns a Lesson:
<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

Lise Petruskas says

I both loved this book and found it creepy. I don't know if the creepiness was what appealed to me, actually. I read a feature on Dare Wright in Tin House years ago that confirmed that she was herself lonely and a bit odd.

This is in that category of books that were very influential but about which I have mixed feelings. The photographs themselves and the doll (why are certain dolls creepy?) are well done and very innovative. I have always responded to children's books that are illustrated with photographs of toys, dolls, live animals and people. They have been a big inspiration for my own photography and illustration.

Jessica says

how many of you were sucked into Dare Wright's world as a child? What a world! Black and white photographs of a doll stepping into an old abandoned house, meeting a friendly old turtle, riding on his back to the outside, befriending 2 teddy bears, a nice one and a grumpy one...at one point she takes off her clothes and they dress her in fern leaves...what a world. Beautiful and mysterious and a bit kinky. I think we should start a Dare Wright Club and call it Under the Influence. I know her own life was sheltered and sad and under the shadow of her mother who treated her like a doll... there's a biography out now I've read a long excerpt of.

note: the edition I read (and still have) was not pink...but black and white and grey and rather imposing.
