

KATHERINE PATERSON

# Lyddie

By the author of the  
Newbery Medal-winning  
*Jacob Have I Loved*



# 1

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## The Bear

The bear had been their undoing, though at the time they had all laughed. No, Mama had never laughed, but Lyddie and Charles and the babies had laughed until their bellies ached. Lyddie still thought of them as the babies. She probably always would. Agnes had been four and Rachel six that November of 1843—the year of the bear.

It had been Charles's fault, if fault there was. He had fetched in wood from the shed and left the door ajar. But the door had not shut tight for some time, so perhaps he'd shut it as best he could. Who knows?

At any rate, Lyddie looked up from the pot of oatmeal she was stirring over the fire, and there in the doorway was a massive black head, the nose up and smelling, the tiny eyes bright with hungry anticipation.

"Don't nobody yell," she said softly. "Just back up slow and quiet to the ladder and climb up to the loft. Charlie, you get Agnes, and Mama, you take Rachel." She heard her mother whimper. "Shhh," she continued, her voice absolutely even. "It's all right long as nobody gets upset. Just take it nice and gentle, ey? I'm watching him all the way, and I'll yank the ladder up after me."

They obeyed her, even Mama, though Lyddie could hear her sucking in her breath. Behind Lyddie's back, the ladder

creaked, as two by two, first Charles and Agnes, then Mama and Rachel, climbed up into the loft. Lyddie glared straight into the bear's eyes, daring him to step forward into the cabin. Then when the ladder was silent and she could hear the slight rustling above her as the family settled themselves on the straw mattresses, she backed up to the ladder and, never taking her eyes off the bear, inched her way up to the loft. At the top she almost fell backward onto the platform. Charles dragged her onto the mattress beside her mother.

The racket released the bear from the charm Lyddie seemed to have placed on him. He banged the door aside and rushed in toward the ladder, but Charles snatched it. The bottom rungs swung out, hitting the beast in the nose. The blow startled him momentarily, giving Lyddie a chance to help Charles haul the ladder up onto the platform and out of reach. The old bear roared in frustration and waved at the empty air with his huge paws, then reared up on his hind legs. He was so tall that his nose nearly touched the edge of the loft. The little girls cried out. Their mother screamed, "Oh Lord, deliver us!"

"Hush," Lyddie commanded. "You'll just make him madder." The cries were swallowed up in anxious gasps of breath. Charles's arms went around the little ones, and Lyddie put a firm grip on her mother's shoulder. It was trembling, so Lyddie relaxed her fingers and began to stroke. "It's all right," she murmured. "He can't reach us."

But could he climb the supports? It didn't seem likely. Could he, in his frustration, take a mighty leap and . . . No, she tried to breathe deeply and evenly and keep her eyes fixed on those of the beast. He fell to all fours and, tossing his head, broke off from her gaze as though embarrassed. He began to explore the cabin. He was hungry, obviously, and looking for the source of the smell that had drawn him in. He knocked over the churning jug and licked tentatively at the blade, but Lyddie

had cleaned it too well after churning that morning and the critter soon gave up trying to find nourishment in the wood.

Before he found the great pot of oatmeal in the kettle over the fire, he had turned over the table and the benches and upended the spinning wheel. Lyddie held her breath, praying that he wouldn't break anything. Charles and she would try to mend, but he was only ten and she thirteen. They hadn't their father's skill or experience. *Don't break nothing*, she begged silently. They couldn't afford to replace any of the household goods.

Next the beast knocked over a jar of apple butter, but the skin lid was tied on tightly, and, flail away at it as he might with his awkward paw, he could not dislodge it. He smacked it across the floor where it hit the overturned bench, but, thank the Lord, the heavy pottery did not shatter.

At last he came to the oatmeal, bubbling—by the smell of it, scorching—over the fire. He thrust his head deep into the kettle and howled with pain as his nose met the boiling porridge. He threw back his head, but in doing so jerked the kettle off the hook, and when he turned, he was wearing it over his head like a black pumpkin. The bear was too stunned, it seemed, simply to lower his neck and let the kettle fall off. He danced about the room in pain on four, then two legs, the kettle covering his head, the boiling oatmeal raining down his thick neck and coat.

He knocked about, searching for the way out, but when he found the open door, managed to push it shut. Battering the door with his kettle-covered head, he tore it off its leather hinges and loped out into the dark. For a long time they could hear him crashing through the bush until, at last, the November night gathered about them once more with its accustomed quiet.

Then they began to laugh. Rachel first, throwing back her dark curls and showing the spaces where her pretty little teeth

# Lyddie's life may be tough— but so is she.

**H**er parents are gone, and her brother and sisters sent to live with other people. Lyddie Worthen is on her own. When Lyddie hears about the mill jobs in Lowell, Massachusetts, she heads there with the goal of earning enough money to reunite her family. Six days a week from dawn to dusk Lyddie and the other girls run weaving looms in the murky dust- and lint-filled factory. Lyddie learns to read—and to handle the menacing overseer. But when the working conditions begin to affect her friends' health, she has to make a choice. Will she speak up for better working conditions and risk her job—and her dream? Or will she stay quiet until it is perhaps too late?

“A superb story of grit, determination, and personal growth.”  
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