

Jacob and the Polar Bears

Janet Graber

Sandra Salzillo-Shields, Illustrator

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Sometimes, like the wrong wallpaper pattern for a small room, the idea for a children's book can go awry and be, well, too busy or too cute. Happily, this is not the case with this story, which focuses on the pattern on a boy's pajamas—a pattern that comes to life.

When Jacob's mother purchases the green PJs at a thrift store, the owner warns with a twinkle in her eye that the white polar bears in the pattern can be naughty. She gives the boy a dingy stuffed bear, King, from among the treasures on her shelves to help him watch over the bears while he sleeps. The fun, guaranteed to make small children giggle, begins immediately. Poor Jacob tickles and itches. How can he possibly sleep when his bed is full of tiny polar bears? Of course, they won't listen to him. They are all over the bed and out the front door, with Jacob in his plain green, bearless pajamas, following in the snow.

He pleads with them to come back, but they're headed for the swimming hole. He enlists the stuffed bear's help, and they go out in the snowy night until they find the naughty bears cavorting in frigid water. Jacob bellows, "OUT." ("The word popped out of his mouth like a puff of smoke.") The little bears scramble out of the water and march rather obediently after Jacob, who is riding back home on King. Alas, they still won't get back on his pajamas. "We want to play, play, play," they squeal.

Jacob has the perfect solution—a bathtub filled with very cold water. Once they are finished having a wonderful time, which involves a wonderful mess, the tired polar bears resume their places on the green pajamas.

The author grew up in northern England and worked for World Wide Pictures and 20th Century Fox in London before emigrating to the United States. She is an instructor for The Institute of Children's Literature. The illustrator has several children's books to her credit. Her whimsical bears are full of energy and humor, and she offers delightful touches such as a claw-foot tub and a bear-shaped container of honey on the breakfast table. Occasional bits of border design, like wallpaper, add story detail, such as how Jacob gets on King's back.

Appealing to the dual impulses of naughtiness and responsibility in young children, this charming story is likely to be read again and again.

LINDA SALISBURY (November / December 2002)

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