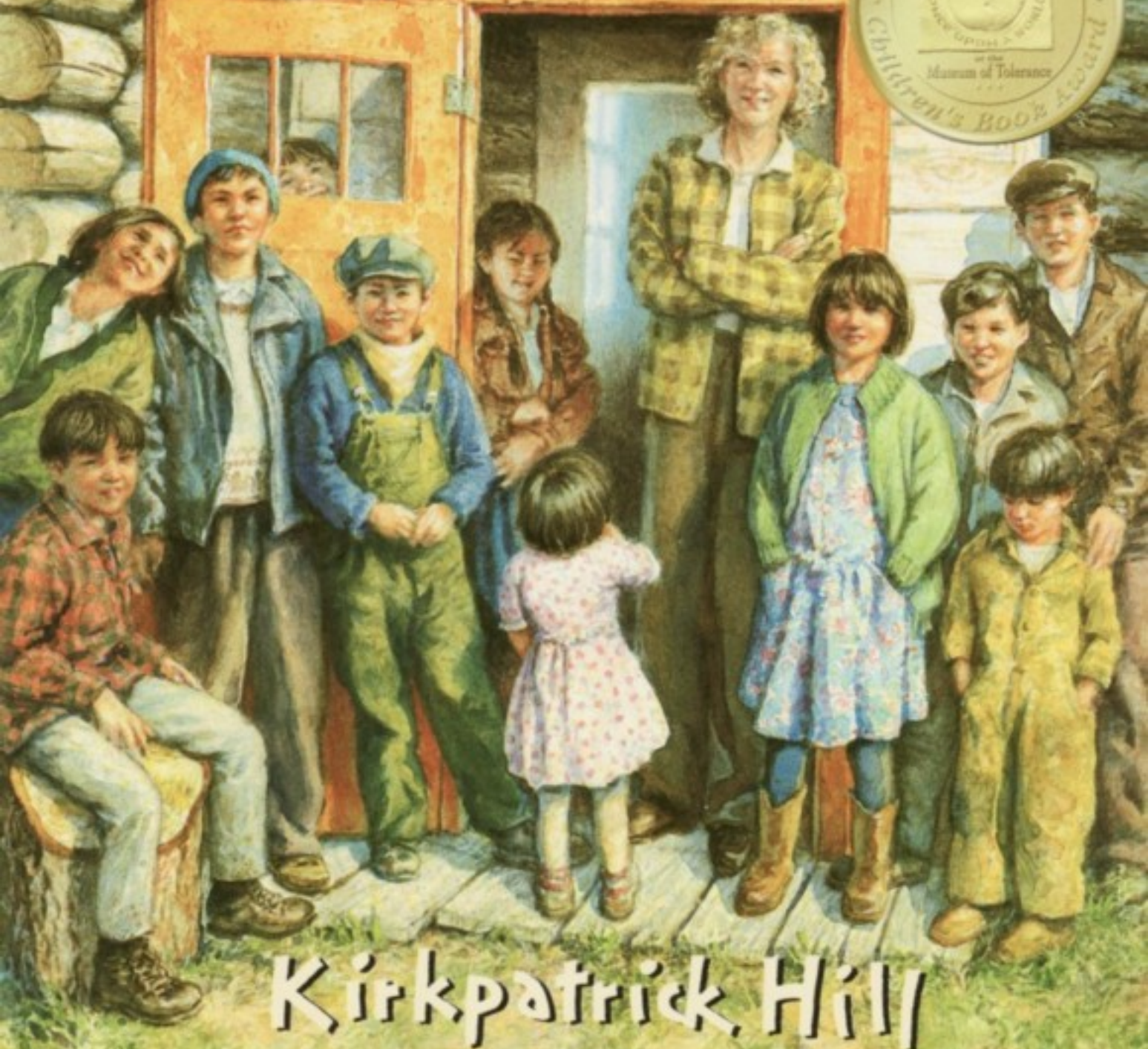


"The genius . . . lies in the characters' absolute presence."

—*New York Times Book Review*

The Year of Miss Agnes



Kirkpatrick Hill



Chapter 1

“What will happen now?” I asked Mamma as we watched the plane take the teacher away.

“Maybe no more school.” Mamma twitched her shoulder a little to show she didn’t care. Mamma never went to school much, just a few months here and there when her family wasn’t trapping or out at spring muskrat camp. She said she hated school when she was little.

The little plane circled our village and then flew low over Andreson’s store and waggled its wings at us. That was Sam White, the pilot, saying good-bye to us.

It was Sam White laughing, too. Sam thought nearly everything was funny. He had just landed

with the mail and there the new teacher was, waiting for him when he opened the door of the cockpit. She pushed right through the rest of us and started talking before Sam even got to say hello.

“Wait for me, it will only take a minute,” she’d said. “Please. Take me back to town. I can’t stay in this place for another second.”

And he’d waited, and she’d come tumbling out of her little cabin, leaving the door open, leaving everything behind but the two suitcases she carried. It was kind of funny, how she looked. I could tell Sam thought so, the way he winked at us. And then Sam had helped her into the plane and the engine had roared and they were up and over the spruce trees and on their way.

I knew what she would tell Sam. She’d tell how Amy Barrington had got mad and had busted in her door because the teacher bought mukluks from Julia Pitka instead of her. And she’d tell about the big boys who didn’t listen. And she’d tell about the fish.

When we brought our lunch to school, it

would always be fish. Salmon strips or *kk'oontseek*, dried fish eggs, to eat on pilot crackers. Or half-dried fish. The oil would get on the little kids' faces and on the desks.

"Heavens, don't you ever eat anything but fish?" And she'd make us go to the basin and try to scrub the fish smell away with lots of Fels Naptha soap, and then with a bad face she'd scrub the oily ring from the washbasin.

That one time, she pushed Plasker away from her desk when she was helping him with his arithmetic.

"You smell of *fish*," she said, real mad, with her teeth together. Plasker looked scared.

"I was helping my old man bale whitefish," he said. He was pretty nervous, wiping his hands on his pants as if that would help.

The teacher told him to sit down, and she didn't even help him with his arithmetic. There were tears in her eyes. Right there we knew she was not going to stay with us.

We had a whole bunch of teachers since they started the school here, back when I was six.

A year they'll never forget

Ten-year-old Frederika (Fred for short) doesn't have much faith that the new teacher in town will last very long. After all, they never do. Most teachers who come to their one-room schoolhouse in remote, Alaska leave at the first smell of fish, claiming that life there is just too hard.

But Miss Agnes is different—she doesn't get frustrated with her students, and she throws away old textbooks and reads *Robin Hood* instead! For the first time, Fred and her classmates begin to enjoy their lessons and learn to read and write—but will Miss Agnes be like all the rest and leave as quickly as she came?

AWARDS AND PRAISE FOR *THE YEAR OF MISS AGNES*

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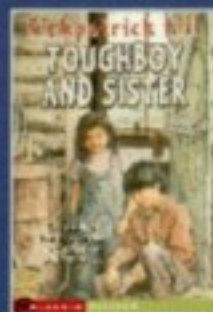
Riverbank Review Children's Book of Distinction finalist

A School Library Journal Best Book

★ "An inspirational story about Alaska, the old and new ways, a very special teacher, and the influence she has over everyone she meets."

—*School Library Journal*, starred review.

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