

The Seven Little Sisters

Who Live on the Round Ball That Floats in the Air

by Jane Andrews
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with original illustrations and new illustrations

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Perhaps the readers and lovers of this book will be glad of a few pages which shall show them somewhat of Miss Andrews herself, and of her way of writing and teaching, as an old friend and schoolmate may try to tell it; and, to begin with, a glimpse of the happy day when she called a few of her friends together to listen to the stories contained in this volume, before they were offered to a publisher.

Picture to yourselves a group of young ladies in one of the loveliest of old-fashioned parlors, looking out on a broad, elm-shaded street. The room is large, with wide mahogany seats in the four deep windows, ancient mahogany chairs, and great bookcases across one side of the room, with dark tables, and a large mirror,—all of ancestral New England solidity and rich simplicity; some portraits on the wall, an easel in the corner accounting for fine bits of coloring on canvas, crayon drawings about the room, and a gorgeous firescreen of autumn tints; nasturtium vines in bloom glorifying the south window, and German ivy decorating the north corner; choice books here and there, with an air of quiet refinement and the very essence of cultured hominess pervading all;—this is the outline of a room, which, having once sat within, you would wish never to see changed.

It was into this circle of congenial and expectant young people were drawn together in the room to listen to the first reading of the rough draft of "The Seven Little Sisters." They were all friends, and in a very eager attitude of mind, you may well believe; for in the midst, by the centre-table, sits Jane, who has called them together; and knowing that she has really written a book, each one feels almost that she herself has written it in some unconscious way, because each feels identified with Jane's work, and is ready to be as proud of it, and as sure of it, as all the world is now of the success of Miss Jane Andrews's writings for the boys and girls in these little stories of geography and history which bear her name.

I can see Jane sitting there, as I wish you could, with her manuscript on the table at her side. She is very sweet and noble-looking, with heavy braids of light-brown hair carefully arranged on her head; her forehead is full and broad; her eyes large, dark blue, and commanding, but with very gentle expression; her features are classic in outline, with merriment in the smile, illuminated by a dazzle of well-set teeth; her complexion fresh and pure, and the whole aspect of her face kind, courageous, and inspiring. Her whole demeanor is so benevolent, that no one could be offended by her.

But there she sits looking up at her friends, with her papers in hand, and the pretty businesslike air that so well became her, and bespeaks the extreme criticism of her hearers upon what she shall read, because she really wants to know how it affects them, and what mistakes or faults can be detected; for she must do her work as well as possible, and is sure they are willing to help. "You see," says Jane, "I have dedicated the book to the children I told the stories to first, when the plan was only partly in my mind, and they seemed to grow by telling, till at last they finished themselves; and the children seemed to care so much for them, that I thought if they were put into a book other children might care for them too, and they might possibly do some good in the world."

I wish I could remember exactly what was said by that critical circle; for there were some quick and brilliant minds, some pungent powers of appreciation, and some keen-witted young women in that group. I only recall the enthusiastic delight with which chapter after chapter was greeted; we declared that it was a fairy tale of geography, and a work of genius in its whole conception, and in its absorbing interest of detail and individuality; and that any publisher would demonstrate himself an idiot who did not want to publish it. I remember Jane's quick tossing back of the head, and puzzled brow which broke into a laugh, as she said: "Well, girls, it can't be as good as you say; there must be some faults in it."

But we all exclaimed that we had done our best at finding fault,—that there wasn't a fault in it. For the incarnate beauty and ideality and truthfulness of her little stories had melted into our being, and left us spellbound, till we were one with each other and her; one with the Seven Little Sisters, too, and they seemed like our very own little sisters. So they have rested in our imagination and affection as we have seen them grow into the imagination and affection of generations of children since, and as they will continue to grow until the old limitations and barrenness of the study of geography shall be transfigured, and the earth seem to the children an Eden which love has girdled, when Gemila, Agoonack, and the others shall have won them to a knowledge of the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God.

THE BALL ITSELF.



Dear children, I have heard of a wonderful ball, which floats in the sweet blue air, and has little soft white clouds about it, as it swims along.

There are many charming and astonishing things to be told of this ball, and some of them you shall hear.

In the first place, you must know that it is a very big ball; far bigger than the great soft ball, of bright colors, that little Charlie plays with on the floor,—yes, indeed; and bigger than cousin Oliver's largest football, that he brought home from college in the spring; bigger, too, than that fine round globe in the schoolroom, that Emma turns about so carefully, while she twists her bright face all into wrinkles as she searches for Afghanistan or the Bosphorus Straits. Long names, indeed; they sound quite grand from her little mouth, but they mean nothing to you and me now.

Let me tell you about *my* ball. It is so large that trees can grow on it; so large that cattle can graze, and wild beasts roam, upon it; so large that men and women can live on it, and little children too,—as you already know, if you have read the title-page of this book. In some places it is soft and green, like the long meadow between the hills, where the grass was so high last summer that we almost lost Marnie when she lay down to roll in it; in some parts it is covered with tall and thick forests, where you might wander like the "babes in the wood," nor ever find your way out; then, again, it is steep and rough, covered with great hills, much higher than that high one behind the schoolhouse,—so high that when you look up ever so far you can't see the tops of them; but in some parts there are no hills at all, and quiet little ponds of blue water, where the white water-lilies grow, and silvery

fishes play among their long stems. Bell knows, for she has been among the lilies in a boat with papa.

Now, if we look on another side of the ball, we shall see no ponds, but something very dreary. I am afraid you won't like it. A great plain of sand,—sand like that on the seashore, only here there is no sea,—and the sand stretches away farther than you can see, on every side; there are no trees, and the sunshine beats down, almost burning whatever is beneath it.

Perhaps you think this would be a grand place to build sand-houses. One of the little sisters lives here; and, when you read of her, you will know what she thinks about it. Always the one who has tried it knows best.

Look at one more side of my ball, as it turns around. Jack Frost must have spent all his longest winter nights here, for see what a palace of ice he has built for himself. Brave men have gone to those lonely places, to come back and tell us about them; and, alas! some heroes have not returned, but have lain down there to perish of cold and hunger. Doesn't it look cold, the clear blue ice, almost as blue as the air? And look at the snow, drifts upon drifts, and the air filled with feathery flakes even now.

We won't look at this side longer, but we shall come back again to see Agoonack in her little sledge. Don't turn over yet to find the story; we shall come to it all in good time.

Now, what do you think of my ball, so white and cold, so soft and green, so quiet and blue, so dreary and rough, as it floats along in the sweet blue air, with the flocks of white clouds about it?

I will tell you one thing more. The wise men have said that this earth on which we live is nothing more nor less than just such a ball. Of this we shall know when we are older and wiser; but here is the sweet little baby waiting for us.

THE SWEET LITTLE BABY.

Far away in the warm country lives a little girl baby; she has a sweet little brown face, little golden brown hands and fingers, brown body, arms, and legs, and even her little toes are also brown.

And this baby wears no little dress, no little petticoat, no shoes,—nothing at all but a string of beads around her neck; for the sun shines very warmly there, and she needs no clothes to keep her from the cold.

Her hair is straight and black, hanging softly down each side of her small brown face; nothing at all like Bell's golden curls, or Marnie's sunny brown ones.

Would you like to know how she lives among the flowers and the birds?

She rolls in the long soft grass, where the gold-colored snakes are at play; she watches the young monkeys chattering and swinging among the trees, hung by the tail; she chases the splendid green parrots that fly among the trees; and she drinks the sweet milk of the cocoanut from a round cup made of its shell.

When night comes, the mother takes her baby and tosses her up into the little swinging bed in the tree, which her father made for her from the twisting vine that climbs among the branches. And the wind blows and rocks the little bed; and the mother sits at the foot of the tree singing a mild sweet song, and this baby falls asleep. Then the stars come out and peep through the leaves at her. The birds, too, are all asleep in the tree; the mother-bird spreading her wings over the young ones in the nest, and the father-bird sitting on a twig close by with his head under his wing. Even the chattering monkey has curled himself up for the night.

Soon the large round moon comes up. She, too, must look into the swinging bed, and shine upon the closed eyes of the little sweet baby. She is very gentle, and sends her soft light among the branches and thick green leaves, kissing tenderly the small brown feet, and the crest on the head of the mother-bird, who opens one eye and looks quickly about to see if any harm is coming to the young ones. The bright little stars, too, twinkle down through the shadows to bless the sleeping child. All this while the wind blows and rocks the little bed, singing also a low song through

the trees; for the baby's mother has fallen asleep herself, and left the night-wind to take care of her baby.



So the night moves on, until, all at once, the rosy dawn breaks over the earth; the birds lift up their heads, and sing and sing; the great round sun springs up, and, shining into the tree, lifts the shut lids of the baby's eyes. She rolls over and falls into her mother's arms, who dips her into the pretty running brook for a bath, and rolls her in the grass to dry, and then she may play among the birds and flowers all

day long; for they are like merry brothers and sisters to the happy child, and she plays with them on the bosom of the round earth, which seems to love them all like a mother.

This is the sweet little baby.

Do you think you would like to meet her some day?