

THE SEVEN LITTLE SISTERS

**Who Live on the Round Ball
that Floats in the Air**

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A ROUND BALL

THAT FLOATS
IN THE

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**WHO LIVE ON THE ROUND
BALL THAT FLOATS IN THE AIR**

BY

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with an Introduction by

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FOR
My Three Little Friends
MARNIE, BELL, AND GEORDIE,
I HAVE WRITTEN THESE STORIES

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 Charley plays with on the floor,—yes, indeed; and bigger than cousin Frank'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 titlepage 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

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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

THE BALL ITSELF

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 little brown baby waiting for us.

THE LITTLE BROWN BABY

THE YOUNGEST OF THE SEVEN SISTERS

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

And this baby wears no little frock nor apron, no little petticoat, nor even stockings and shoes,—nothing at all but a string of beads around her neck, as you wear your coral; 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.



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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 brown 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 brown 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 brown 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 brown baby's eyes. She rolls over and falls into her mother's

THE LITTLE BROWN BABY

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 little brown baby. Do you love her? Do you think you would know her if you should meet her some day?

A funny little brown sister. Are all of them brown?

We will see, for here comes Agoonack and her sledge.

AGOONACK, THE ESQUIMAU SISTER

AND HOW SHE LIVED THROUGH THE LONG DARKNESS

WHAT is this odd-looking mound of stone? It looks like the great brick oven that used to be in our old kitchen, where, when I was a little girl, I saw the fine large loaves of bread and the pies and puddings pushed carefully in with a long, flat shovel, or drawn out with the same when the heat had browned them nicely.

Is this an oven standing out here alone in the snow?

You will laugh when I tell you that it is not an oven, but a house; and here lives little Agoonack.

Do you see that low opening, close to the ground? That is the door; but one must creep on hands and knees to enter. There is another smaller hole above the door: it is the window. It has no glass, as ours do; only a thin covering of something which Agoonack's father took from the inside of a seal, and her mother stretched over the window-hole, to keep out the cold and to let in a little light.

AGOONACK, THE ESQUIMAU SISTER

Here lives our little girl; not as the brown baby does, among the trees and the flowers, but far up in the cold countries amid snow and ice.

If we look off now, over the ice, we shall see a funny little clumsy thing, running along as fast as its short, stout legs will permit, trying to keep up with its mother. You will hardly know it to be a little girl, but might rather call it a white bear's cub, it is so oddly dressed in the white, shaggy coat of the bear which its father killed last month. But this is really Agoonack; you can see her round, fat, greasy little face, if you throw back the white jumper-hood which covers her head. Shall I tell you what clothes she wears?

Not at all like yours, you will say; but, when one lives in cold countries, one must dress accordingly.

First, she has socks, soft and warm, but not knit of the white yarn with which mamma knits yours. Her mamma has sewed them from the skins of birds, with the soft down upon them to keep the small brown feet very warm. Over these come her moccasins of sealskin.

If you have been on the seashore, perhaps you know the seals that are sometimes seen swimming in the sea, holding up their brown heads, which look much like dogs' heads, wet and dripping.

The seals love best to live in the seas of the cold countries: here they are, huddled together on the sloping rocky shores, or swimming about under the ice, thousands and thousands of silver-gray coated creatures, gentle seal-mothers and brave fathers with

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all their pretty seal-babies. And here the Esquimaux (for that is the name by which we call these people of the cold countries) hunt them, eat them for dinner, and make warm clothes of their skins. So, as I told you, Agoonack has sealskin boots.

Next she wears leggings, or trousers, of white bear-skin, very rough and shaggy, and a little jacket or frock, called a jumper, of the same. This jumper has a hood, made like the little red riding-hoods which I dare say you have all seen. Pull the hood up over the short, black hair, letting it almost hide the fat, round face, and you have Agoonack dressed.

Is this her best dress, do you think?

Certainly it is her best, because she has no other, and when she goes into the house—but I think I won't tell you that yet, for there is something more to be seen outside.

Agoonack and her mother are coming home to dinner, but there is no sun shining on the snow to make it sparkle. It is dark like night, and the stars shine clear and steady like silver lamps in the sky, but far off, between the great icy peaks, strange lights are dancing, shooting long rosy flames far into the sky, or marching in troops as if each light had a life of its own, and all were marching together along the dark, quiet sky. Now they move slowly and solemnly, with no noise, and in regular, steady file; then they rush all together, flame into golden and rosy streamers, and mount far above the cold, icy mountain peaks that glitter in their light; we hear a sharp sound like *Dsah! dsah!* and the ice

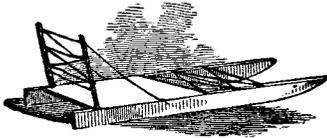


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glows with the warm color, and the splendor shines on the little white-hooded girl as she trots beside her mother.

It is far more beautiful than the fireworks on Fourth of July. Sometimes we see a little of it here, and we say there are northern lights, and we sit at the window watching all the evening to see them march and turn and flash; but in the cold countries they are far more brilliant than any we have seen.

It is Agoonack's birthday, and there is a present for her before the door of the house. I will make you a picture of it. "It is a sled," you exclaim. Yes, a sled;



but quite unlike yours. In the faraway cold countries no trees grow; so her father had no wood; and he took the bones of the walrus and the

whale, bound them together with strips of sealskin, and he has built this pretty sled for his little daughter's birthday.

It has a back to lean against and hold by, for the child will go over some very rough places, and might easily fall from it. And then, you see, if she fell, it would be no easy matter to jump up again and climb back to her seat; for the little sled would have run away from her before she should have time to pick herself up. How could it run? Yes, that is the wonderful thing about it; for when her father made the sled he said to himself, "By the time this is finished, the two little brown dogs will be

AGOONACK, THE ESQUIMAU SISTER

old enough to draw it, and Agoonack shall have them; for she is a princess, the daughter of a great chief.”

Now you can see that, with two such brisk little dogs as the brown puppies harnessed to the sled, Agoonack must keep her seat firmly, that she may not roll over into the snow and let the dogs run away with it.

You can imagine what gay frolics she has with her brother who runs at her side, or how she laughs and shouts to see him drive his bone ball with his bone bat or hockey, skimming it over the crusty snow.

Now we will creep into the low house with the child and her mother, and see how they live.

Outside it is very cold, colder than you have ever known it to be in the coldest winter’s day; but inside it is warm, even very hot. And the first thing Agoonack and her mother do is to take off their clothes, for here it is as warm as the place where the brown baby lives, who needs no clothes.

It isn’t the sunshine that makes it warm, for you remember I told you it was as dark as night. There is no furnace in the cellar; indeed, there is no cellar, neither is there a stove. But all this heat comes from a sort of lamp, with long wicks of moss and plenty of walrus fat to burn. It warms the small house, which has but one room, and over it the mother hangs a shallow dish in which she cooks soup; but most of the meat is eaten raw, cut into long strips, and eaten much as one might eat a stick of candy.

They have no bread, no crackers, no apples nor

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potatoes; nothing but meat, and sometimes the milk of the reindeer, for there are no cows in the far, cold northern countries. But the reindeer gives them a great deal: he is their horse as well as their cow; his skin and his flesh, his bones and horns, are useful when he is dead, and while he lives he is their kind, gentle, and patient friend.

There is some one else in the hut when Agoonack comes home; a little dark ball, rolled up on one corner of the stone platform which is built all around three sides of the house, serving for seats, beds, and table. This rolled-up ball unrolls itself, tumbles off the seat, and runs to meet them. It is Sip-su, the baby brother of Agoonack,—a round little boy, who rides sometimes, when the weather is not too cold, in the hood of his mother's jumper, hanging at her back, and peering out from his warm nestling-place over the long icy plain to watch for his father's return from the bear-hunt.

When the men come home dragging the great Nannook, as they call the bear, there is a merry feast. They crowd together in the hut, bringing in a great block of snow, which they put over the lamp-fire to melt into water; and then they cut long strips of bear's meat, and laugh and eat and sing, as they tell the long story of the hunt of Nannook, and the seals they have seen, and the foot-tracks of the reindeer they have met in the long valley.

Perhaps the day will come when pale, tired travellers will come to their sheltering home, and tell them wonderful stories, and share their warmth for a

AGOONACK, THE ESQUIMAU SISTER

while, till they can gain strength to go on their journey again.

Perhaps while they are so merry there all together, a very great snowstorm will come and cover the little house, so that they cannot get out for several days. When the storm ends, they dig out the low doorway, and creep again into the starlight; and Agoonack slips into her warm clothes and runs out for Jack Frost to kiss her cheeks, and leave roses wherever his lips touch. If it is very cold indeed, she must stay in, or Jack Frost will give her no roses, but a cold, frosty bite.

This is the way Agoonack lives through the long darkness. But I have to tell you more of her in another chapter, and you will find it is not always dark in the cold Northern countries.

HOW AGOONACK LIVES THROUGH THE LONG SUNSHINE

It is almost noon one day when Agoonack's mother wraps the little girl in her shaggy clothes and climbs with her a high hill, promising a pleasant sight when they shall have reached the top.

It is the sun, the beautiful, bright, round sun, which shines and smiles at them for a minute, and then slips away again below the far, frozen water.

They haven't seen him for many months, and now they rejoice,—for the next day he comes again and stays longer, and the next, and the next, and every day longer and longer, until at last he moves above them in one great, bright circle, and does not even go away at all at night. His warm rays melt the snow and awaken the few little hardy flowers that can grow in this short summer. The icy coat breaks away from the clear running water, and great flocks of birds with soft white plumage come, like a snowstorm of great feathery flakes, and settle among the black rocks along the seashore. Here they lay their eggs in the many safe little corners and shelves of the rock; and here they circle about in the sunshine, while the Esquimau boys make ready their long-handled nets, and creep and climb out upon the

AGOONACK THROUGH THE LONG SUNSHINE

ledges of rock, and, holding up the net as the birds fly by, catch a netful to carry home for supper.

The sun shines all day long, and all night long, too; and yet he can't melt all the highest snowdrifts, where the boys are playing bat-and-ball,—long bones for sticks, and an odd little round one for a ball.

It is a merry life they all live while the sunshine stays; for they know the long, dark winter is coming, when they can no longer climb among the birds, nor play ball among the drifts.

The seals swim by in the clear water, and the walrus and her young one are at play; and, best of all, the good reindeer has come, for the sun has uncovered the crisp moss upon which he feeds, and he is roaming through the valleys where it grows among the rocks.

The old men sit on the rocks in the sunshine, and laugh and sing, and tell long stories of the whale and the seal, and the great white whale, that many years ago, when Agoonack's father was a child, came swimming down from the far north, where they look for the northern lights, swimming and diving through the broken ice; and they watched her in wonder, and no one would throw a harpoon at this white lady of the Greenland seas, for her visit was a good omen, promising a mild winter.

Little Agoonack comes from her play to crouch among the rocky ledges and listen to the stories. She has no books; and, if she had, she couldn't read them. Neither could her father or mother read to her: their stories are told and sung, but never written. But she is

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a cheerful and contented little girl, and tries to help her dear friends; and sometimes she wonders a great while by herself about what the pale stranger told them.

And now, day by day, the sun is slipping away from them; gone for a few minutes to-day, to-morrow it will stay away a few more, until at last there are many hours of rosy twilight, and few, very few, of clear sunshine.

But the children are happy: they do not dread the winter, but they hope the tired travellers have reached their homes; and Agoonack wants, oh, so much! to see them and help them once more. The father will hunt again, and the mother will tend the lamp and keep the house warm; and, although they will have no sun, the moon and stars are bright, and they will see again the streamers of the great northern light.

Would you like to live in the cold countries, with their long darkness and long sunshine?

It is very cold, to be sure; but there are happy children there, and kind fathers and mothers, and the merriest sliding on the very best of ice and snow.