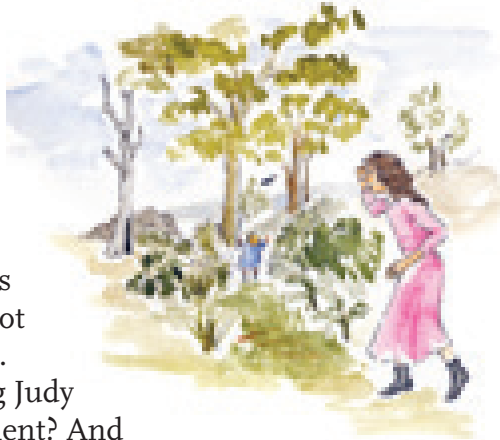


"I think Judy is great! I wish I was
as brave as she is." Alysson, 11

A word of warning – if you are expecting to read a story about model children, you'd better read something else. Not one of the seven children in this story is truly good – Australian children never are.

The Woolcot children enjoy a life of fun and adventure in their rambling riverside home, despite frequent reprimands from their strict father, Captain Woolcot.

However, when one of Judy's escapades tests the Captain's patience to the limit, he decides that extreme measures are called for and sends her away to boarding school. But this leads to consequences not even he could anticipate. How will the headstrong Judy respond to her punishment? And how will this family recover from the disaster that strikes them?



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SEVEN LITTLE AUSTRALIANS Ethel Turner



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Ethel Turner



Retold by James Bean and Gillian Flaherty
Illustrated by Jenny Masters

SEVEN LITTLE AUSTRALIANS

ETHEL TURNER



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CONTENTS

The Characters	4
Seven Little Australians	7
Taking things further	55

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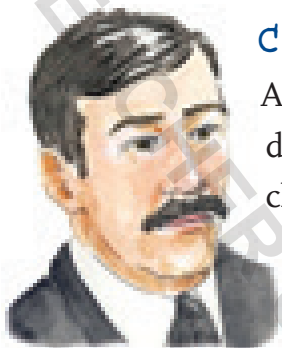
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THE CHARACTERS



Captain Woolcot

A stern military man, Captain Woolcot doesn't understand his spirited children and their need to behave as children. How far will he go to keep order in his household?

Esther Woolcot

Only twenty, Esther is Captain Woolcot's second wife. Her youth and soft-heartedness make it hard for her to be mother to seven unruly children. How will she cope?



Judy

Thirteen-year-old Judy is the naughtiest of the seven children. With a lively imagination and intelligence, she springs from one adventure to another. Where will Judy's mischievous spirit lead her?



Pip

Pip is fourteen – the smart, handsome eldest son. He is Judy's 'partner in crime', and together they test the Captain's patience to the limit. Can Pip live up to his father's high expectations?

Meg

The eldest of the seven, sixteen-year-old Meg loves her brothers and sisters dearly, but is ready to leave her own childhood behind. How will she cope with looking after her younger siblings?



Bunty

A lazy, chubby boy, six-year-old Bunty is always on the lookout for extra food. He is often caught out lying. Can Bunty keep the biggest secret of his life?



Nell, Baby and the General

Nell, aged ten, is the darling of the family. Baby is a sweet and cuddly four-year-old girl. The General is a jolly toddler. How will they cope when their family is torn apart?



SEVEN LITTLE AUSTRALIANS

‘It isn’t fair!’ said Pip. ‘Father and Esther are down there having roast chicken, and here we are with just bread and butter.’

‘But remember, we had a big meal earlier,’ said his sister Meg.

‘Boiled mutton!’ replied Pip. ‘Why shouldn’t we have roast chicken? They’ve got plenty.’ He took his plate and went downstairs.

The Woolcot children were having nursery tea. Normally, Australian families dine all together, but with seven noisy children in this family – and a strict, irritable father – the adults and children had their meals separately.

A word of warning before you read any further – if you are expecting to read a story about model children, you’d better read something else. Not one of the seven children in this story is truly good – Australian children never are. In this part of the world there is a sparkle of joyousness and rebellion and mischief in nature, and the children have it too.



Meg, the eldest, was sixteen. She had long fair hair and a sweet face with pretty freckles. Pip was fourteen, a handsome, tall boy with a good opinion of himself.

The next was thirteen-year-old Judy, a thin girl with bright eyes and untidy, curly hair. Energetic and imaginative, she was the naughtiest of the seven. Then came Nell, aged ten, angelic-looking with curls of gold hair and soft hazel eyes.

Six-year-old Bunty was a fat, lazy boy, seldom seen with a clean face. 'Baby', aged four, was a cuddly little girl with great smiling eyes. But she was not the baby of the family. The youngest child, who had just learned to walk, was called the 'General'.

As Pip came back into the nursery, the others were surprised to see a portion of roast chicken on his plate. 'Father wasn't pleased,' said Pip, 'but he couldn't refuse. Colonel Bryant's having dinner with them, and Father didn't want a scene in front of such an important guest. Here, Judy, you have half.'

'Oh,' said Nell, 'I'm going down to ask for a wing. I believe he'd give it to me.' So downstairs she went with her plate.

In the dining room, the children's father, Captain Woolcot, his wife Esther, and their guest Colonel Bryant turned to see Nell approaching with her hands behind her back. The Colonel smiled. 'Shake hands with me, little maid.'



Back in time

Ethel Mary Turner was born in England in 1870. When she was nine, her widowed mother brought her and her two sisters to Australia to begin a new life. They settled in Sydney, and the next year her mother remarried. As a girl, Ethel developed a love of literature, and at high school she and her sister Lilian started up their own magazine. On leaving school, Ethel began a career as a writer, contributing stories to Australian magazines and newspapers. In 1891 the family moved from inner Sydney to a large house in the bushland just outside the city – perhaps a model for the Woolcots' family home 'Misrule'.

Ethel Turner kept a diary, and in January 1893 she wrote in it: '... started a new story that I shall call *Seven Little Australians*.' In October of that year, she wrote: 'Finished *7 Little Australians*. Hurrah. I thought I'd never get to the end ...' Taken up by the English publishers Ward, Lock & Bowden, the book was published in London in 1894. It was an instant success both in England and in Australia. It has never been out of print since.

Seven Little Australians is set in the 1880s. At that time, Australia was a group of six separate colonies within the British Empire, and Sydney was in the colony of New South Wales. In the 1890s, when Turner was writing *Seven Little Australians*, there was growing sentiment in favour of the idea that the colonies should federate, or come together to create a single country. A sense of idealistic nationalism was stirring, and in much of the literature of the time there was a determination to establish a uniquely Australian identity.

This nationalistic sentiment can perhaps be seen in the comments near the start of *Seven Little Australians* describing the unique characteristics of Australian children. Turner writes that there is a 'sparkle of joyousness and rebellion and mischief in nature' in Australia. In *Seven Little Australians* this is most evident in the character of irrepressible, self-reliant Judy, the 'naughtiest of the seven'.

Judy certainly challenges some the norms of society at that time. When she suggests leaving the General with Captain Woolcot at the Barracks so that she and Pip can enjoy an afternoon at the beach, she asks, 'Shouldn't a father look after his