

## SARA AND ANNA

Alma W. Swinton

My mother, Sara, and her sister Anna, who lived in the new settlement of Vermontville, Southern Michigan, about the year 1850, were **not** only sisters but the best of friends and companions. Sara was aggressive, imaginative, daring. Anna, four years younger, was her faithful follower, even if sometimes a little dubious as to the outcome of Sara's schemes and plans. Also Anna was credulous, and I am afraid that often Sara took advantage of that fact, not maliciously, but for a little quiet fun.

Cotton cloth in those days was narrow, and consequently sheets had a seam down the middle. That middle seam was also supposed to mark the **ex**act middle of the bed, so that two little girls, sleeping together, could each have an exact half of the space for her very own. When Sara made the bed (they took turns) she sometimes put the seam way over on Anna's side. Anna would feel the wall on one side -- the seam on the other -- and complain: "Sate, I don't seem to have any room at all!"

"Well," my mother would reply with apparent irrefutable logic--"there's the seam!"

"Yes, I guess it is," Anna would sigh and try to accommodate herself to the unusually narrow quarters.

The next day, my mother's conscience having troubled her greatly, she would do penance by moving the center seam way over on her own side so that Anna, in turn would have at least three-quarters of the allotted space.

"Sate," Anna would say wonderingly, "I am sure I have lots more **room** than I had last night." Firmly would my mother reply: "There's the seam." The matter was settled.

One day my mother remarked to her sister, "Annie, do you know that you make perfectly dreadful faces when you comb your hair or wring out the clothes or screw on a bottle top? Your mouth clamps shut and goes over to one side and you scowl--". Anna was quite distressed at this picture of herself and faithfully practiced day after day to keep her face in repose when her hands were **working**. But some time later she came on my mother, performing a difficult task -- with her face all screwed up in tension. In perfect astonishment, Anna cried, "What, Sate, you twist your face us exactly as you said I do!"

"Of course," replied my mother nonchalantly, "I always have!"

From some source there came into the household a little book on astronomy. My mother seized upon it with avidity. She learned it from cover to cover and insisted that Anna learn it too. She told in later years that there was a good reason for this -- to teach Anna. She had to be one pace ahead herself. So the little girls spent many happy evenings identifying Orion, the Big and Little Dippers, finding the Bear and the Pleiades. My mother's imagination soared to new heights; she peopled **the** planets with strange and wonderful inhabitants and entertained her brothers and sister by the hour with her stories.