

The Victorians

A comfortable life? Emily and the beetle

By Sue Reid

EMILY:

My name is Emily Ann Barr and I'm 13 years old. Mama says that I'm a lucky girl. Maybe you will think so too when I tell you that I live in a big house with my family and we have servants to do the work and a carriage to ride in. But my life is a quiet one. I spend most of my time in the schoolroom with my governess, Miss Stevens. She teaches me - things that I don't really much enjoy - like sewing and the piano.

MISS STEVENS:

Very good, now play it again, please, Emily.

EMILY:

Yes, Miss Stevens.

This morning I had to practice my writing by copying a chapter out of a book. But it was very dull and I found it hard to attend to my work. I slid open the lid of the matchbox I had on my lap. Inside it was my brother Bertie's beetle. We'd found it in the garden on Bertie's last morning and I'd promised him to look after it while he was away at school...

MISS STEVENS:

Emily! Have you still not finished your work?

EMILY:

No, Miss Stevens. I think I will give you a name, little Beetle. What shall I call you?

I quite forgot Miss Stevens - until suddenly she was at my shoulder.





- MISS STEVENS: Emily! Who are you talking to?
- EMILY: N-no one, Miss Stevens!
- MISS STEVENS: What's that in your hand? Show me, please.
- EMILY: It's nothing...really Miss Stevens...
- I held out the matchbox. But my hand was trembling so much that it slipped to the floor and the beetle fell out and landed – plop! - on Miss Stevens' foot!
- MISS STEVENS: What is it? The horrid, horrid thing.
- EMILY: It's just Bertie's beetle, Miss Stevens. I'm looking after it for him. Until he comes back from school.
- EMILY: I watched as the beetle crawled away across the floor. I hadn't looked after it very well. What would Bertie say when I told him?
- MISS STEVENS: Pick it up please, Emily, before it escapes.
- EMILY: Yes...miss...if I can.
- MISS STEVENS: Thank you. Now put it back in the matchbox and shut the lid tight.
- EMILY: Yes, Miss Stevens...
- MISS STEVENS: You will take the matchbox out to the garden and empty it. Beetles belong in the garden, not in the house.
- EMILY: I can't do that, Miss Stevens. I can't!
- MISS STEVENS: You will do as you're told, Emily.





- EMILY: Miss Stevens, I can't put the beetle in the garden. I'm looking after it for Bertie. I made a promise!
- MISS STEVENS: I will not accept this behavior from you, Emily. You don't attend to your work. And now you disobey me. If you won't do as I ask, you will have to explain why to your papa this evening.
- EMILY: Miss Stevens was as good as her word. She took me down to the drawing room as usual to say goodnight to Mama and Papa and how my heart was thumping as she pushed open the door.. Papa put down his paper. His face was very stern. He nodded to Miss Stevens.
- PAPA: Thank you, Miss Stevens. You may leave Emily here.
- MISS STEVENS: Very good, sir. Goodnight, sir. Goodnight, madam.
- MAMA: Goodnight, Miss Stevens.
- EMILY: My toes curled in my shoes. What would he say?
- PAPA: Emily. Miss Stevens tells me that you have disobeyed her. Is that true?
- EMILY: Yes, Papa. No, Papa. I mean - well, I - I didn't mean to.
- PAPA: Have you put the beetle back in the garden?
- EMILY: No, Papa.
- PAPA: That is not the answer I was expecting. You must learn to do as you are told, Emily. You have made your Mama and I very sad.





MAMA: It is important you learn to obey your elders, Emily. Before you go to bed I would like you to apologize to Miss Stevens. Is that understood?

EMILY: Yes...Mama...

MAMA: You will be a good girl now, and do as you are told?

EMILY: Yes...Mama...

MAMA: Goodnight, child.

EMILY: Goodnight, Mama.

EMILY: She kissed me goodnight and I went upstairs. As I entered the nursery I saw Miss Stevens.

I'd...I'd like to apologize for my behavior, Miss Stevens.

MISS STEVENS: Very well, Emily, apology accepted. And now we shall forget all about it, shall we?

EMILY: Yes, Miss Stevens. Thank you.

MISS STEVENS: You may not always think so, Emily, but you are a lucky girl. You have a Mama and Papa who love you and a brother too.

EMILY: Yes...I'm very lucky...

Before I went to bed I watched Miss Stevens sitting in her chair. There was a book on her lap, but she wasn't reading it, she was staring straight ahead. She looked so sad and lonely. Suddenly I felt sorry for her. Miss Stevens isn't like me. She doesn't have a family to care for her. She has to earn her own living. In a way we are all the family she has.

