



The Victorians

A comfortable life? Emily at the seaside

By Sue Reid.

EMILY:

My name is Emily Ann Barr and I am 13 years old. Mama and Papa say I am a lucky girl. That's because I live in a big house and don't have to go to work, like most girls my age do. But I am often lonely and I don't see much of my parents. And I know so little of the world outside the schoolroom.

Today though Mama took me to the seaside by train with Miss Stevens. Imagine! A whole day with my mama! A whole day by the sea! I felt I must be the luckiest girl in the world.

I had hardly ever been on a train before...and I was so excited as we stood on the platform, waiting for our train to arrive. The platform was very busy and Mama took me by the hand...

MAMA:

Keep close by me, Emily. I don't want to lose you.

EMILY:

Yes, Mama.

I looked down the platform. Our train was hissing into the station – like a great green and black dragon blowing steam out of its nostrils! People pushed past us and Miss Stevens, my governess, got quite upset.

MAMA:

Porter, can you direct us please to the first class carriage?





PORTER: Of course, Madam – kindly follow me.

EMILY: Then we climbed aboard and sat down in a carriage all to ourselves! Mama opened her book. The guard's whistle blew...and the train pulled slowly out of the station. We were off! Shh-shh the train went. Ssh-Ssh. Ssh-Ssh! I looked out of the window...

Mama! Look! Look, Miss Stevens.

MISS STEVENS: What can you see, Emily?

EMILY: We're crossing over the river. It feels as if we're flying!

We left the city behind. Even though we were travelling through the countryside now everything near the track looked dirty – all black and grimy. Miss Stevens says it's because of the smoke and dirt from the trains.

I was longing to see the sea. And then, suddenly, there it was, shining in the sunshine like a sparkly silver blanket...

Oh, Mama. There it is. The sea! Do look!

The sun was shining as the train drew into the station. And as we rode down to the promenade in a carriage I knew I was going to have a lovely day...

MAMA: Come along, Emily. Do keep up!





EMILY:

But at first all we did was walk up and down the promenade, looking down at the sea. Up and down. Up and down. How I wanted to skip and run across the sand. I wanted to stop and look at everything. The stalls selling whelks...the postcards and souvenirs...the pier, stretching out to sea. And the Punch and Judy show, on the beach...

Please can I stop and watch, Mama. Please. It's funny.

But they wouldn't let me. Mama says Punch and Judy is vulgar.

MAMA:

Emily, come along! Don't dawdle.

EMILY:

Finally Mama said she was tired, and wanted to sit down. So Miss Stevens went off and found chairs. I dug the sand with my fingers. Further along the beach I could see the oddest things – like tiny houses or caravans. People were climbing in and out of them. Some of the little houses were being pulled into the sea by horses. I asked Mama what they were...but her face went a bit pink as if she was embarrassed. Then quietly Miss Stevens told me they were bathing machines...

MISS STEVENS:

They are for ladies and gentlemen who wish to bathe. You change your clothes inside the bathing machine. Then the horse pulls the machine out into the sea and you climb down a little ladder into the water to bathe.

EMILY:

I took off my straw hat to fan myself. But Mama saw.





- MAMA: Put your hat back on, Emily. Or you'll get freckles.
- EMILY: But I'm so hot, Mama. Please may I paddle? Please.
- MAMA: Oh very well, Emily. But be careful not to get your clothes wet. Only up to your ankles. And don't go too far away.
- EMILY: I unlaced my boots quickly before Mama could change her mind. I held up my pinafore and dress as much as I dared so they wouldn't get wet and I ran down to the sea. The water felt lovely and cool.
- I found a cockle shell in a rock pool and I brought it back to show Mama...
- EMILY: Look what I've found. Hold it to your ear, Mama. You can hear the sea!
- MAMA: Why - so you can.
- EMILY: I was sad when it was time to go home. I looked out of the window of the train to catch a final glimpse of the sea. I've learned a lot today - about trains and the seaside. And whenever I want to remember it all, I'll hold my shell to my ear. I'll listen to the sea and shut my eyes and remember how it sparkled in the sunshine.

