



**L**T is very hard, when you have been accustomed to go to the seaside every summer ever since you were quite little, to be made to stay in London just because an aunt and an uncle choose to want to come and stay at your house to see the Royal Academy and go to the summer sales.

Selim and Thomasina felt that it was very hard indeed. And aunt and uncle were not the nice kind, either. If it had been Aunt Emma, who dressed dolls and told fairy-tales—or Uncle Reggie, who took you to the Crystal Palace, and gave you five bob at a time, and never even asked what you spent it on, it would have been different. But it was Uncle Thomas and Aunt Selina.

Aunt Selina was all beady, and sat bolt upright, and told you to mind what you were told, and Selim had been named after her—as near as they could get. And Uncle Thomas was the one Thomasina had been named after: he was deaf, and he always told you what the moral of everything was, and the housemaid said he was “near.”

“I know he is, worse luck,” said Thomasina.

“I mean, miss,” explained the housemaid, “he’s none too free with his chink.”

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Selim groaned. “He never gave me but a shilling in his life,” said he, “and that turned out to be bad when I tried to change it at the ginger-beer shop.”

The children could not understand why this aunt and uncle were allowed to interfere with everything as they did: and they quite made up their minds that when they were grown up they would never allow an aunt or an uncle to cross their doorsteps. They never thought—poor, dear little things—that some day they would grow up to be aunts and uncles in their turn, or, at least, one of each.

It was very hot in London that year: the pavement was like hot pie, and the asphalt was like hot pudding, and there was a curious wind that collected dust and straw and dirty paper, and then got tired of its collection, and threw it away in respectable people’s areas and front gardens. The blind in the nursery had never been fixed up since the day when the children took it down to make a drop-scene for a play they were going to write and never did. So the hot afternoon sun came burning in through the window, and the children got hotter and hotter, and crosser and crosser, till at last Selim slapped Thomasina’s arms till she cried, and Thomasina kicked Selim’s legs till he screamed.

Then they sat down in different corners of the nursery and cried, and called each other names, and said they wished they were dead. This is very naughty indeed, as, of course, you know; but you must remember how hot it was.

When they had called each other all the names they could think of, Thomasina said, suddenly: "All right, Silly" (that was Selim's pet name)—"cheer up."

"It's too hot to cheer up," said Selim, gloomily.

"We've been very naughty," said Thomasina, rubbing her eyes with the paint rag, "but it's all the heat. I heard Aunt Selina telling mother the weather wore her nerves to fiddle-strings. That just meant she was cross."

"Then it's not *our* fault," said Selim. "People say be good and you'll be happy. Uncle Reggy says, 'Be happy, and perhaps you'll be good.' I could be good if I was happy."

"So could I," said Thomasina.

"What *would* make you happy?" said a thick, wheezy voice from the toy cupboard, and out rolled the big green and red india-rubber ball that Aunt Emma had sent them last week. They had not played with it much, because the garden was so hot and sunny—and when they wanted to play with it in the street, on the shady side, Aunt Selina had said it was not like respectable children, so they weren't allowed.

Now the Ball rolled out very slowly—and the bright light on its new paint seemed to make it wink at them. You will think that they were surprised to hear a Ball speak. Not at all. As you grow up, and more and more strange things happen to you, you will find that the more astonishing a thing is the less it surprises you. (I wonder why this is. Think it over, and write and tell me what you think.)

Selim stood up, and said, "Halloa"; but that was only out of politeness. Thomasina answered the Ball's question.

"We want to be at the seaside—and no aunts—and none of the things we don't like—and no uncles, of course," she said.

"Well," said the Ball, "if you think you can be good, why not set me bouncing?"

"We're not allowed in here," said Thomasina, "because of the crinkly ornaments people give me on my birthdays."

"Well, the street then," said the Ball; "the nice shady side."

"It's not like respectable children," said Selim, sadly.

The Ball laughed. If you have never heard an india-rubber ball laugh you won't understand. It's the sort of quicker, quicker, quicker, softer, softer, softer chuckle of a bounce that it gives when it's settling down when you're tired of bouncing it.

"The garden, then," it said.

"I don't mind, if you'll go on talking," said Selim, kindly.

So they took the Ball down into the garden and began to bounce it in the sun, on the dry, yellowy grass of the lawn.

"Come on," said the Ball. "You do like me!"

"What?" said the children.

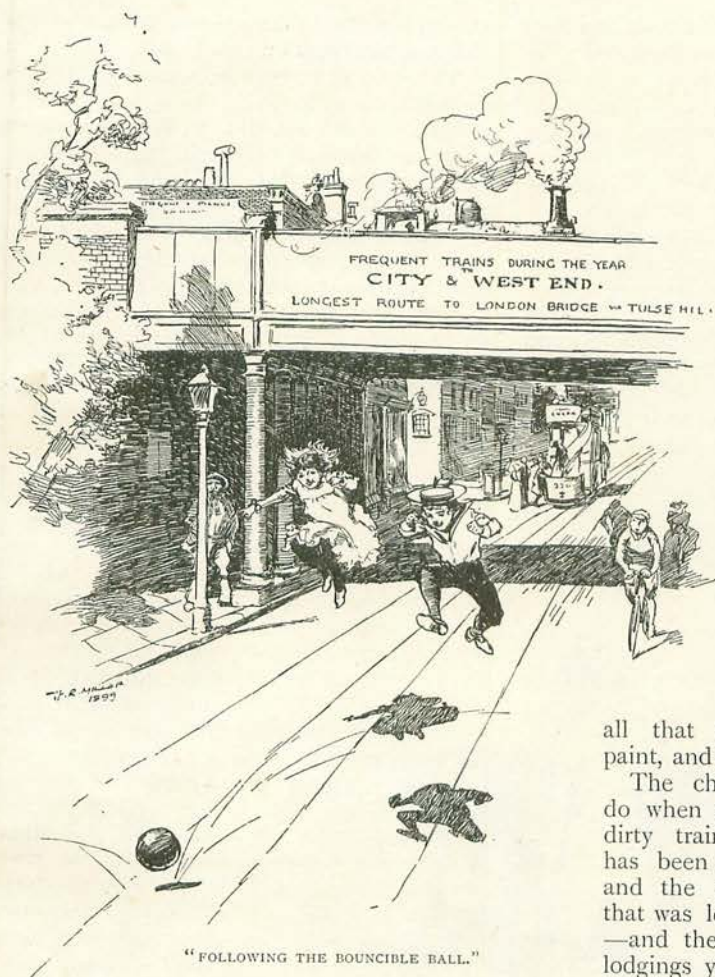
"Why, do like I do—bounce!" said the Ball. "That's right—higher, higher, higher!"

For then and there the two children had begun bouncing as if their feet were india-rubber balls, and you have no idea what a delicious sensation that gives you.

"Higher, higher," cried the green and red ball, bouncing excitedly. "Now, follow me, higher, higher." And off it bounced down the blackened gravel of the path, and the children bounced after it, shrieking with delight at the new feeling. They bounced over the wall—all three of them—and the children looked back just in time to see Uncle Thomas tapping at the window, and saying, "Don't."

You have not the least idea how glorious it is to feel full of bouncibleness; so that, instead of dragging one foot after the other, as you do when you feel tired or naughty, you bounce along, and every time your feet touch the ground you bounce higher, and all without taking any trouble or tiring yourself. You have perhaps heard of the Greek gentleman who got new strength every time he fell down. His name was Antæos, and I believe he was an india-rubber ball, green on one side where he touched the earth, and red on the other where he felt the sun. But enough of classical research.

Thomasina and Selim bounced away, following the Bouncible Ball. They went over fences and walls, and through parched, dry gardens and burning-hot streets; they passed the region where fields of cabbages and rows of yellow brick cottages mark the division between London and the suburbs. They bounced through the suburbs, dusty and neat, with geraniums in the front gardens, and all the blinds pulled half-way down; and then the lamp-posts in the road got fewer and fewer, and the fields got greener and the hedges thicker—it was real, true country—with lanes instead of roads; and



"FOLLOWING THE BOUNCIBLE BALL."

down the lanes the green and red Ball went bouncing, bouncing, bouncing and the children after it. Thomasina, in her white, starched frock, very prickly round the neck, and Selim, in his everyday sailor-suit, a little tight under the arms. His Sunday one was a size larger. No one seemed to notice them, but they noticed and pitied the children who were being "taken for a walk" in the gritty suburban roads.

"Where are we going?" they asked the Ball, and it answered, with a sparkling green and red smile:—

"To the most delightful place in the world."

"What's it called?" asked Selim.

"It's called Whereyouwantogoto," the Ball answered, and on they went. It was a wonderful journey—up and down, looking through the hedges and over them, looking in at the doors of cottages, and then in at the

top windows, up and down—bounce—bounce—bounce.

And at last they came to the sea. And the Bouncible Ball said, "Here you are! Now be good, for there's nothing here but the things that make people happy." And with that he curled himself up like a ball in the shadow of a wet sea-weedy rock, and went to sleep, for he was tired out with his long journey. The children stopped bouncing, and looked about them.

"Oh, Tommy!" said Selim.

"Oh, Silly!" said Thomasina. And well they might! In the place to which the Ball had brought them was

all that your fancy can possibly paint, and a great deal more beside.

The children feel exactly as you do when you've had the long, hot, dirty train journey—and everyone has been so cross about the boxes and the little brown portmanteau that was left behind at the junction—and then when you get to your lodgings you are told that you may run down and have a look at the

sea if you're back by tea-time, and mother and nurse will unpack.

Only Thomasina and her brother had not had a tiresome journey—and there were no nasty, stuffy lodgings for them, and no tea, with oily butter and a new pot of marmalade.

"There's silver-sand," said she—"miles of it."

"And rocks," said he.

"And cliffs."

"And caves in the cliffs."

"And how cool it is," said Thomasina.

"And yet it's nice and warm too," said Selim.

"And what shells!"

"And seaweed."

"And the downs behind!"

"And trees in the distance!"

"And here's a dog, to go after sticks. Here, Rover, Rover."

A big black dog answered at once to the

name, because he was a retriever, and they are all called Rover.

"And spades!" said the girl.

"And pails!" said the boy.

"And what pretty sea-poppies," said the girl.

"And a basket—and grub in it!" said the boy. So they sat down and had lunch.

It was a lovely lunch. Lobsters and ice-creams (strawberry and pine-apple), and toffee and hot buttered toast and ginger-beer. They ate and ate, and thought of the aunt and uncle at home, and the minced veal and sago pudding, and they were very happy indeed.

Just as they were finishing their lunch they saw a swirling, swishing, splashing commotion in the green sea a little way off, and they tore off their clothes and rushed into the water to see what it was. It was a seal. He was very kind and convenient. He showed them how to swim and dive.

golden sealskin coats over its arm, and the children put them on.

"Thank you very much," they said. "You are kind."

I am almost sure that it has never been your luck to wear a fur coat that fitted you like a skin, and that could not be spoiled with sand or water, or jam, or bread and milk, or any of the things with which you mess up the nice new clothes your kind relations buy for you. But if you like, you may try to imagine how jolly the little coats were.

Thomasina and Selim played all day on the beach, and when they were tired they went into a cave, and found supper—salmon and cucumber, and welsh-rabbit and lemonade—and then they went to bed in a great heap of straw and grass and fern and dead leaves, and all the delightful things you have often wished to sleep in. Only you have never been allowed to.

In the morning there were plum-pudding for breakfast, and roast duck and lemon jelly, and the day passed like a happy dream, only broken by surprising and delightful meals. The Ball woke up and showed them how to play water-polo; and they bounced him on the sand, with shrieks of joy and pleasure. You know, a Ball likes to be bounced by people

he is fond of—it is like slapping a friend on the shoulder.

There were no houses in "Whereyou-wantogoto," and no bathing machines or bands, no nursemaids or policemen or aunts or uncles. You could do

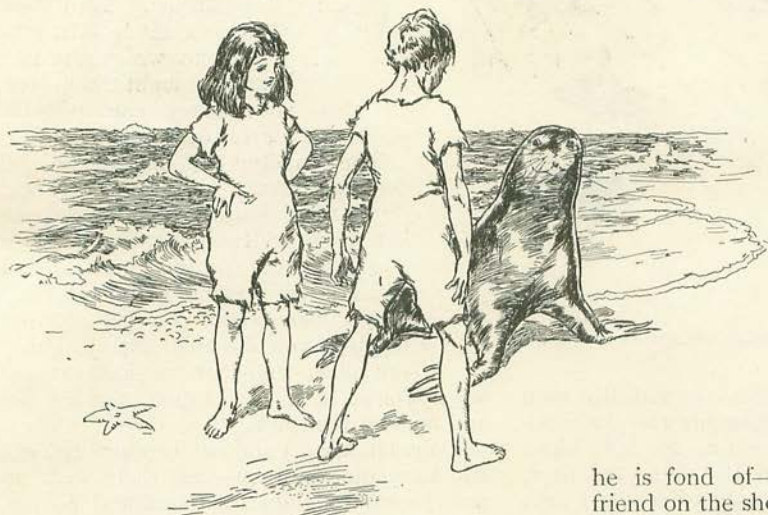
exactly what you liked as long as you were good.

"What will happen if we're naughty?" Selim asked. The Ball looked very grave, and answered:—

"I must not tell you; and I very strongly advise you not to try to find out."

"We won't—indeed, we won't," said they, and went off to play rounders with the rabbits on the downs—who were friendly fellows, and very keen on the game.

On the third evening Thomasina was



"'THANK YOU VERY MUCH,' THEY SAID. 'YOU ARE KIND.'"

"But won't it make us ill to bathe so soon after meals? Isn't it wrong?" asked Thomasina.

"Not at all," said the seal. "Nothing is wrong here—as long as you're good. Let me teach you water-leapfrog—a most glorious game, so cool, yet so exciting. You try it."

At last the seal said: "I suppose you wear man-clothes. They're very inconvenient. My two eldest have just outgrown their coats. If you'll accept them—"

And it dived, and came up with two

rather silent, and the Ball said: "What's the matter, girl-bouncer? Out with it."

So she said: "I was wondering how mother is, and whether she has one of her bad headaches."

The Ball said, "Good little girl! Come with me and I'll show you something."

He bounced away, and they followed him, and he flopped into a rocky pool, frightening the limpets and sea-anemones dreadfully, though he did not mean to.

"Now look," he called, from under the water—and the children looked, and the pool was like a looking-glass, only it was not their own faces they saw in it.

They saw the drawing-room at home, and father and mother, who were both quite well, only they looked tired—and the aunt and uncle were there—and Uncle Thomas was saying: "What a blessing those children are away."

"Then they know where we are?" said Selim to the Ball.

"They think they know," said the Ball—"or you think they think they know. Anyway, they're happy enough. Good-night."

And he curled himself up like a ball in his favourite sleeping-place. The two children crept into their pleasant, soft, sweet nest of straw and leaves and fern and grass, and went to sleep. But Selim was vexed with Thomasina because she had thought of mother before he had, and he said she had taken all the fern—and they went to sleep rather cross. They woke crosser. So far they had both helped to make the bed every morning, but to-day neither wanted to.

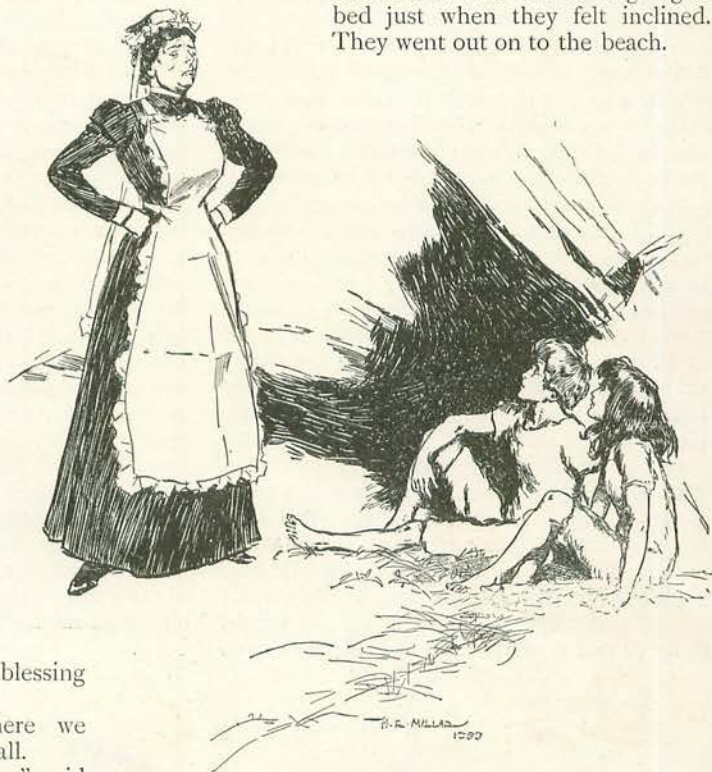
"I don't see why I should make the beds," said he; "it's a girl's work, not a boy's."

"I don't see why I should do it," said Thomasina; "it's a servant's work, not a young lady's."

And then a very strange and terrible thing happened. Quite suddenly, out of nothing and out of nowhere, appeared a housemaid—large and stern and very neat indeed, and she said:—

"You are quite right, miss: it is my place to make the beds. And I am instructed to see that you are both in bed by seven."

Think how dreadful this must have been to children who had been going to bed just when they felt inclined. They went out on to the beach.



"OUT OF NOWHERE APPEARED A HOUSEMAID."

"You see what comes of being naughty," said Thomasina; and Selim said, "Oh, shut up, do!"

They cheered up towards dinner-time—it was roast pigeons that day and bread sauce, and whitebait and syllabubs—and for the rest of the day they were as good as gold, and very polite to the Ball. Selim told it all about the dreadful apparition of the housemaid, and it shook its head (I know *you've* never seen a ball do that, and very likely you never will) and said:—

"My Bouncible Boy, you may be happy here for ever and ever if you're contented and good. Otherwise—well, it's a quarter to seven—you've got to go."

And, sure enough, they had to. And the housemaid put them to bed, and washed them with yellow soap, and some of it got in their eyes. And she lit a night-light, and sat with them till they went to sleep, so that they couldn't talk, and were ever so much longer getting to sleep than they would have

been if she had not been there. And the beds were iron, with mattresses and hot, stuffy, fluffy sheets and many more new blankets than they wanted.

The next day they got out as early as they could and played water football with the seal and the Bouncible Ball, and when dinner-time came it was lobster and ices. But Thomasina was in a bad temper. She said, "I wish it was duck." And before the words had left her lips it was cold mutton and rice-pudding, and they had to sit up to table and eat it properly too, and the housemaid came round to see that they didn't leave any bits on the edges of their plates, or talk with their mouths full.

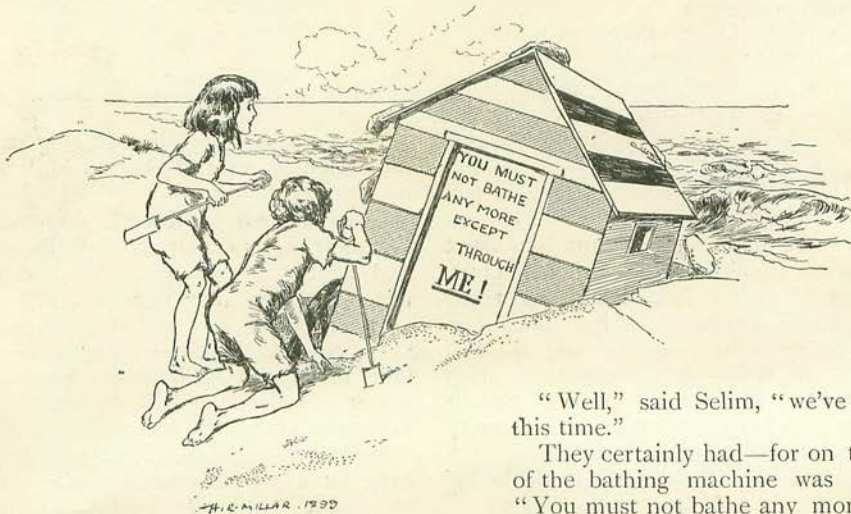
There were no more really nice meals after that: only the sort of things you get at home. But it is possible to be happy even without really nice meals. But you have to be very careful. The days went by pleasantly enough. All the sea and land creatures were most kind and attentive. The seal taught them all it knew, and was always ready to play with them. The star-fish taught them astronomy, and the jelly-fish taught them fancy cooking. The limpets taught them dancing, as well as they could for their lameness. The sea-birds taught them to make nests—a knowledge they have

this all would have been well. But they weren't.

"Let's dig a bath," said Selim, "and the sea will come in and fill it, and then we can bathe in it."

So they fetched their spades, and dug—and there was no harm in that, as you very properly remark.

But when the hole was finished, and the sea came creep, creep, creeping up—and at last a big wave thundered up the sand and swirled into the hole, Thomasina and Selim were struggling on the edge, fighting which should go in first, and the wave drew sandily back into the sea, and neither of them had bathed in the new bath. And now it was all wet and sandy, and its nice sharp edges rounded off, and much shallower. And as they looked at it angrily, the sandy bottom of the bath stirred and shifted and rose up—as if some great sea-beast were heaving underneath with his broad back. The wet sand slipped back in slabs at each side, and a long pointed thing like a thin cow's back came slowly up. It showed broader and broader, and presently the flakes of wet sand were dropping heavily off the top of a brand-new bathing machine that stood on the sand over where their bath had been.



"WE'VE DONE IT THIS TIME."

never needed to apply—and if the oysters did not teach them anything it was only because oysters are so very stupid, and not from any lack of friendly feeling.

The children bathed every day in the sea—and if they had only been content with

"Well," said Selim, "we've done it this time."

They certainly had—for on the door of the bathing machine was painted: "You must not bathe any more except through me."

So there was no more running into the sea just when and how they liked. They had to use the bathing machine, and it smelt of stale salt water and other people's wet towels.

After this the children did not seem to care so much about the seaside, and they played more on the downs, where the rabbits

were very kind and hospitable, and in the woods, where all sorts of beautiful flowers grew wild—and there was nobody to say “Don’t,” when you picked them. The children thought of what Uncle Thomas would have said if he had been there, and they were very, very happy.

But one day Thomasina had pulled a lot of white convolvulus and some pink geraniums and calceolarias—the kind you are never allowed to pick at home—and she had made a wreath of them and put it on her head.

Then Selim said: “You *are* silly! You look like a Bank Holiday.”

And his sister said: “I can’t help it. They’d look lovely on a hat, if they were only artificial. I wish I had a hat.”

And she had. A large stiff hat that hurt her head just where the elastic was sewn on, and she had her stiff white frock that scratched, her tiresome underclothing, all of it, and stockings and heavy boots; and Selim had his sailor suit—the every-day one that was too tight in the arms; and they had to wear them always, and their fur coats were taken away.

They went sadly, all stiff and uncomfortable, and told the Bouncible Ball. It looked very grave, and great tears of salt water rolled down its red and green cheeks as it sat by the wet, seaweed-covered rock.

“Oh, you silly children,” it said, “haven’t you been warned enough? You’ve everything a reasonable child could wish for. Can’t you be contented?”

“Of course we can,” they said—and so they were—for a day and a half. And then it wasn’t exactly discontent but real naughtiness that brought them to grief.

They were playing on the downs by the edge of the wood under the heliotrope tree. A hedge of camellia bushes cast a pleasant shadow, and out in the open sunlight on the downs the orchids grew like daisies, and the carnations like buttercups. All about was that kind of turf on which the gardener does not like you to play, and they had pulled arm-

fuls of lemon verbena and made a bed of it. But Selim’s blouse was tight under the arms. So when Thomasina said:—

“Oh, Silly dear, how beautiful it is, just like fairyland,” he said:—

“Silly yourself. There’s no such thing as fairyland.”

Just then a fairy, with little bright wings the colour of a peacock’s tail, fluttered across the path, and settled on a magnolia flower.

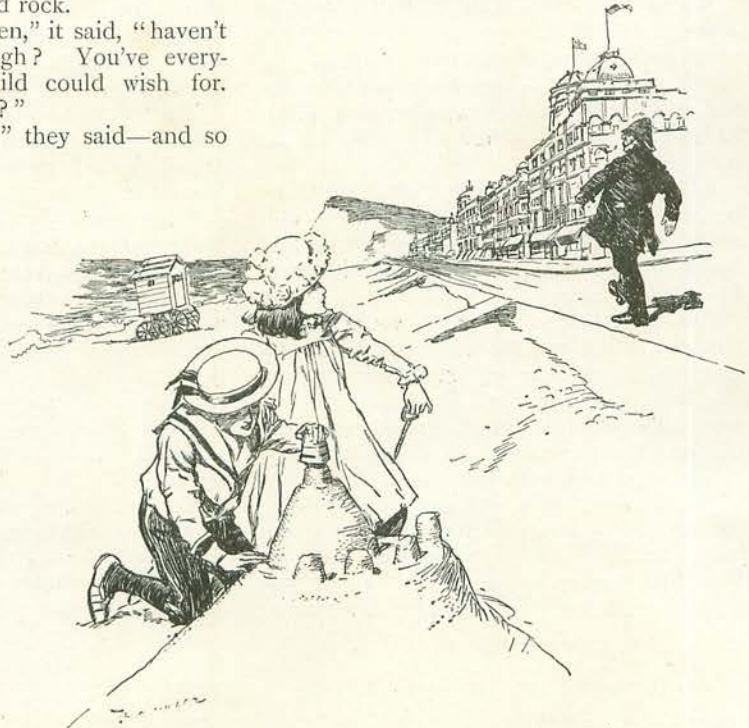
“Oh! Silly darling,” cried Thomasina, “it *is* fairyland, and there’s a fairy, such a beautiful dear. Look—there she goes.”

But Selim would not look—he turned over and hid his eyes.

“There’s no such thing as fairyland, I tell you,” he grunted, “and I don’t believe in fairies.”

And then, quite suddenly and very horribly the fairy turned into a policeman—because everyone knows there are such things as policemen, and anyone can believe in *them*.

And all the rare and beautiful flowers withered up and disappeared, and only thorns and thistles were left, and the misty, twiny, trim little grass path that led along the top of the cliffs turned into a parade, and the policeman walked up and down it incessantly, and watched the children at their play, and you know how difficult it is



“THE POLICEMAN WALKED UP AND DOWN INCESSANTLY.”

to play when anyone is watching you, especially a policeman. Selim was extremely vexed : that was why, he said, there couldn't possibly be glow-worms as big as bicycle lamps, which, of course, there were in "Whereyouwantogoto." It was after that that the gas-lamps were put all along the parade, and a pier sprang up, on purpose to be lighted with electricity, and a band played, because it is nonsense to have a pier without a band.

"Oh, you naughty, silly children," said the Bouncible Ball, turning red with anger, except in the part where he was green with disgust ; "it makes me bounce with rage to see how you've thrown away your chances, and what a seaside resort you're making of 'Whereyouwantogoto.'"

And he did bounce, angrily, up and down the beach, till the housemaid looked out of the cave and told the children not to be so noisy, and the policeman called out :—

"Now then, move along there, move along. You're obstructing of the traffic."

And now I have something to tell you which you will find it hard to make any excuses for. I can't make any myself. I can only ask you to remember how hard it is to be even moderately good, and how easy it is to be extremely naughty.

When the Bouncible Ball stopped bouncing, Selim said :—

"I wonder what makes him bounce."

"Oh, no, *don't!*" cried Thomasina, for she had heard her brother wonder that about balls before, and she knew all too well what it ended in.

"Oh, *don't,*" she said, "oh, Silly, he brought us here, he's been so kind." But Selim said, "Nonsense ; balls can't feel, and it will be almost as good to play with after I've looked inside it."

And then, before Thomasina could prevent him, he pulled out the knife Uncle Reggy gave him last holiday but one, and catching the Ball up, he plunged the knife into its side. The Bouncible Ball uttered one whiffing squeak of pain and grief, then with a low, hissing sigh its kindly spirit fled, and it lay, a lifeless mass of paint and india-rubber in the hands of its assassin. Thomasina burst into tears—but the heartless Selim tore open the Ball, and looked inside. You know well enough what he found there. Emptiness ;

the little square patch of india-rubber that makes the hard lump on the outside of the ball which you feel with your fingers when the ball is alive and his own happy, bouncing, cheerful self.

The children stood looking at each other.

"I—I almost wish I hadn't," said Selim at last ; but before Thomasina could answer he had caught her hand.

"Oh, look," he cried, "look at the sea."

It was, indeed, a dreadful sight. The beautiful dancing, sparkling blue sea was drying up before their eyes—in less than a moment it was quite flat and dusty. It hurriedly laid down a couple of railway lines, ran up a signal-box and telegraph-poles, and became the railway at the back of their house at home.

The children, gasping with horror, turned to the downs. From them tall, yellow brick houses were rising, as if drawn up by an invisible hand. Just as treacle does in cold weather if you put your five fingers in and pull them up. But, of course, you are never allowed to do this. The beach got hard—it was a pavement. The green downs turned grey—they were slate roofs—and Thomasina and Selim found themselves at the iron gate of their own number in the terrace—and there was Uncle Thomas at the window knocking for them to come in, and Aunt Selina calling out to them how far from respectable it was to play in the streets.

They were sent to bed at once—that was Aunt Selina's suggestion—and Uncle Thomas arranged that they should have only dry bread for tea.

Selim and Thomasina have never seen "Whereyouwantogoto" again, nor the Bouncible Ball—not even his poor body—and they don't deserve to either. Of course, Thomasina was not so much to blame as Selim, but she was punished just the same. I can't help that. This is really the worst of being naughty. You not only have to suffer for it yourself, but someone else always has to suffer too, generally the person who loves you best.

You are intelligent children, and I will not insult you with a moral. I am not Uncle Thomas. Nor will I ask you to remember what I have told you. I am not Aunt Selina.