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Emma Clifford, or, Impatient Curiosity Punished

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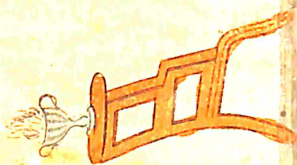
EMMA CLIFFORD;

OR,

IMPATIENT CURIOSITY PUNISHED.

Embellished with a Magic Lantern Exhibition.

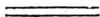
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EMMA CLIFFORD;

OR,

IMPATIENT CURIOSITY PUNISHED.



MR. AND MRS. MANLY, FREDERIC, EDWARD,
AND CAROLINE.

CAROLINE.

WE are all here except Sophy, where can she be? I am very impatient to hear another of papa's pretty stories—do, Edward, go and bring her in.—Oh! here she comes.

FREDERIC (*pulling her in*).

Come along, Sophy—but—look here, look here—why, what have you been about? your frock is stained with wine, or cherries, or—

MRS. MANLY.

Oh! fie, Sophy.—Nay you need not tell me; I know extremely well how this has happened: you could not wait patiently until the morning to know what I had put into the basket of Mary Banks, but have been pulling every thing out to the very last parcel, I have no doubt, and have taken the cork out of the red lavender, merely to satisfy your curiosity and impatience.

SOPHY.

Pray pardon me, my dear mamma, I have done worse, for I have broken the bottle; though I did not know that any of the lavender had fallen upon my frock, if I had I should have been afraid to show myself.

MRS. MANLY.

I hope you would not have denied it: that would have been doing worse than breaking a thousand bottles of lavender.

SOPHY.

No indeed, mamma, I certainly would have told you the whole truth; but I should have been glad

if I had not interrupted papa, when he is so good as to amuse us, or made my brother and sister wait for what gives them so much pleasure.

EDWARD.

My dear uncle, I caught a glimpse of something very pretty; why have you drawn it away in such haste?

MR. MANLY.

Because I recollect having one which will be more apropos for this evening's entertainment. Sophy's accident made me think of it; and I hope, added to what has happened to herself, it will serve as a lesson to her in future, and make her see the impropriety of giving way to sudden fits of curiosity, and that she will learn to wait patiently her mamma's time to be made acquainted with any thing she wishes to know.

But it is time to begin, that our Magic Lantern may not interfere with other matters.—I beg you will observe that young lady kneeling before a small work trunk.

FREDERIC.

Oh! how she is tumbling the things over!

pray observe her. I am sure she has no business with that trunk.

EDWARD.

And I am very certain you guess right, Frederic; for her companion appears to be watching lest they should be surprised; and I think by her attitude they are in some danger of it, and that she is giving the alarm to the other.

CAROLINE.

So she does; but I am much mistaken if that other attends to the signal, for she is too intent upon rummaging to listen to any thing.

MR. MANLY.

I am glad I have been so fortunate in painting my figures; they certainly were meant to express what you describe, for Emma Clifford could not be prevailed upon to quit the trunk till she had got quite to the bottom of it, and had done the mischief I am going to tell you of.

It was Mrs. Clifford's custom to make a present to her children on their birth-day, and it being within a day of that of Emma, her second daughter, she ordered her carriage and drove to

the next town, where having purchased what she thought would be most agreeable to her taste, she returned home, and went immediately up stairs ; not, however, unperceived by Emma, whose impatience to know what pretty thing her mamma had destined for her birth-day present, had prevented her attending to any thing the whole morning except watching her return to the next town, concluding she could have had no other reason for going, and that she had but to make known her wish in order to be fully satisfied.

Mrs. Clifford was not, however, disposed to indulge her curious dispositon, and told her she must wait until the next morning, when she would receive a nosegay, and a present from each of the family.

Emma knew very well it would be vain to urge her mamma to show her what she had bought, after having said she must wait, and went down to the garden determined to endeavour to forget the longing desire she had to be sooner informed ; but she could think of nothing else—she sauntered about from one walk to another, sat down in the arbour, admired the flowers, went into the poultry yard, and looked at her bantums. But nothing would do ; the birth-day present was all she could think of, and her head was filled entirely with conjectures of what it could be : some-

times she supposed it would be a new muslin frock ; then perhaps it might be books, or a canary bird in a gilt cage,—no, it could not be that, for her mamma had brought it home in her muff, and she could not put a cage in her muff.—What could it be ? it was impossible to guess ! and how to wait till the next morning before she could satisfy her curiosity was, she fancied, equally impossible, though she knew not how to avoid it.

CAROLINE.

What a silly girl she was ! certainly she could not avoid~~ing~~ waiting, since her mamma did not think proper to tell her what she had bought ; but the time would have appeared much shorter if, instead of sauntering about the garden, she had sat down to her music, or had taken up a book. If she had done so, she would soon have found herself too much interested in what she was reading to think any more of the birth-day or the present till supper time ; and then she would have gone to bed, have fallen asleep, and only have had time to dress herself in the morning, say her prayers, and meet the family in the breakfast room, before she would have received her present, and all cause for curiosity would have been over.

MR. MANLY.

You are extremely right, my dear Caroline; but Emma Clifford wanted resolution, and instead of fixing on some amusement which would have occupied her mind, and by which she would have subdued her silly curiosity, she did nothing but wander about, and suffered her thoughts to dwell on no other subject; till, scarcely knowing how she came there, or why she came, where she had no business, she found herself in her mamma's room, standing before the work trunk, where she had no doubt the present was deposited; and seeing two or three small keys tied together with a ribbon laying on the table, and concluding that one of them would open it, this naughty girl suffered her impatience so far to get the better of her as to determine on committing one of the most unworthy actions a young lady could be guilty of.

SOPHY.

Is it possible! surely, she would not dare to unlock another person's trunk?

EDWARD.

She might as well peep into a letter, and no one

would do that. I am sorry for her, I did not think she was so bad.

MR. MANLY.

She never had been thought an ill-disposed child, very far from it, she was greatly beloved, for she had never shown any evil propensity ; but you see how dangerous it is to give way, in the smallest degree to improper inclinations : had she seriously checked her curiosity the moment she perceived her mamma wished her to wait, she would never have been tempted to commit so mean an action. /

The sight of the keys, however made her forget every thing except the pleasure of being satisfied ; but fearing she should be interrupted, or rather that she might be surprised, in the midst of her unworthy occupation, she thought she had best make her sister a party concerned in the business, that she might stand by the door, and make her a signal in case of alarm.

Miss Mary Clifford was a very sensible girl, and seeing the impropriety of her sister's wishes made no scruple of telling her so ; and though she did not like to call up her mamma, knowing how extremely displeased she would be, positively refused having any thing to do with it, or even

to stay in the room, and was endeavouring by the most earnest entreaties to dissuade her sister from doing what she said she was sure, even should it not be discovered, she never would forgive herself for, when she perceived Emma in the attitude you now see her in, and her mamma's trunk wide open.

Poor Miss Clifford, instead of quitting the room to avoid being accused, if they should be caught, of being as much in fault as her sister, now thought of nothing but saving her; and seeing no way of prevailing on her to leave the trunk but by frightening her, gave her a false alarm. Emma, concluding she heard some one coming up the stairs, and wishing to bundle every thing in, that she might shut down the cover of the trunk, gave a sudden jerk with her hand, and knocked down a bottle of permanent ink which her mamma had bought to mark her linen with, and which meeting with a small netting case, broke in pieces, and its black contents were scattered over every thing which lay near it: all was entirely spoilt, and Emma's birth-day present rendered quite useless.

She had wished very much for some lace to trim a muslin frock which her aunt had brought her from London; and Mrs. Clifford had been so good and indulgent to her undeserving child as to have bought her some fine lace for that purpose.

which was now lost, and the netting box, which broke the bottle, was also designed as a present to Emma.

It was to be sure a great pity, for it was beautiful: it was lined with white satin and contained a number of pretty useful things in ivory, with a neat silver thimble, and a pair of highly polished scissors, as well as a small knife, with a silver blade, and a mother of pearl handle inlaid with silver. The outside of the box was inlaid with different coloured wood, and, as I said before, it was the handsomest box of the kind that had ever been seen in that part of the country; but there it lay stained with ink, and so disfigured that it was almost impossible to say what colour it had been. Emma hoping to save it, hastily drew out the sliding cover; but she made the matter still worse, for the ink now ran all over the white satin lining, over the ivory,—in short it was quite spoilt,—and she now saw, with dismay, the fault she had committed. She no longer listened, or feared a surprise, so much was she shocked at what she had done, and Mrs. Clifford came into the room whilst she was still on her knees before the trunk, crying and wringing her hands.

As soon as she could speak, she, however, acquitted her sister of any share in her fault; and acknowledged that, on the contrary, she had said every thing she could to prevent her committing it.

The loss of her birth-day present was of little consequence to Emma, when compared to the pain she felt from her mamma's displeasure, and the continual mortification she had to suffer for a long time. Nobody liked to trust a little girl, who had not scrupled to unlock her mamma's trunk; nobody would leave a letter in her way, lest she should look into it: and they had every reason to suppose her curiosity would lead her even to break the seal of a letter, if she thought it contained any thing she wished to know. She was very unhappy, and repented severely of her fault; but nobody attended to that: she had made herself suspected, and they would not for a long time be persuaded she was sorry for it, and had determined never to commit such a fault again. Such is the consequence of having a bad name.

FREDERIC.

I think she well deserved all she suffered, and am only surprised that she was ever received into favour again by her papa, mamma, or any of her acquaintance.

I know very well that I am often enough in fault, because I am apt to do a thing first, and think, when I have done it, whether it was right or wrong; instead of which I ought to reflect first: and I hope I shall very soon bring myself to

do so ; it would save me a great deal of vexation, for I never can go to sleep comfortably when I have, in my eagerness and impatience, done any thing I ought not to have done, and made my papa and mamma angry with me. Of one thing, however, I am very certain ; which is, that no eagerness or impatience will ever tempt me to open a lock belonging to another person, or to read a line that was not my own, though it was to lay a whole day open on the table.