

**The Betrothed:**  
A Tale of the Times of Maria Theresa  
By  
Letitia Elizabeth Landon  
(L. E. L.)

From  
The Amulet, 1832  
Compiled  
by  
Peter J. Bolton

## THE BETROTHED.

A TALE OF THE TIMES OF MARIA THERESA.

BY L. E. L.

THE empress and her daughter stood together : alike, singularly alike, as they were, in height, in the same high, finely-cut features, the same clear blue eyes, the same fair Saxon complexion, yet the likeness, which seemed so strong at the first look, became almost a contrast as that look was prolonged into observation. It was not the difference of age, for the mother's eye was as bright, and her cheek as rich in colour, as her daughter's ; but the sweetness which was in Maria Theresa's smile only, was in every line of the archduchess's face. The azure depths of the eyes, in the one, mirrored every thought and every feeling ; those of the other expressed but what they chose should appear. Each had the same fair broad forehead ; but in the elder one a slight contraction of the brow had become habitual. Both stepped with the stately bearing of a noble race ; but Maria Theresa moved as if over

the neck of a prostrate world, while Josepha seemed as if she would have turned aside rather than crush the meanest worm on her path. Both were splendidly dressed—the young princess as a bride; the diamond tiara was surmounted by a chaplet of orange flowers, the white velvet train embroidered with pearls, and a veil of silver tissue fell almost to her feet. The bright and gay appearance of the youthful archduchess was little in unison with the rest of the scene. The huge and dark chamber was hung with crimson damask worked with gold; but the gold had been long tarnished, and the brilliancy had passed away from the crimson. Portraits in massive frames, the gilding as dim as the colours, covered the walls. Most of them were garbed in black velvet, according to the Spanish taste, and the heavy brow and thick lip all bespoke their Austrian descent. At the upper end of the room was a purple canopy which had been raised over a temporary altar; towards this the empress led her daughter, and the shadow of the canopy fell dark upon the young bride. A small group, gathered round—staid, grave-looking men—who, whatever of fierce passion might be in the heart, had long banished all betrayal of it from the face. The face of the emperor, who, till summoned to give his daughter's hand, stood in the background, was the only one that had aught of the expression of humanity—and that expression was

only of its weakness. But where was the bridegroom? Miles and miles away. The royal lover woos by an envoy and wins by a treaty. In his place, his ambassador stood forth—an aged nobleman, who, having spent a whole life in the observance of forms, held them to be the highest attributes of human nature.

The ceremony proceeded, and, at its close, the ambassador dropped on his knee and kissed the hand of the Duchess of Parma. Josepha turned, and would have knelt to her mother, but this the empress prevented, and, folding her in her arms, pressed her lips to her brow, and wished her many years of happiness. Very ungracefully, but very affectionately, the emperor pressed forward; by this time he had forgotten all the advantages of the alliance, and every thing but that he was about to lose his favourite child. Maria Theresa evidently endured this display very impatiently; her husband met her eye, and—with that species of experience which must be peculiarly adapted to fools, for it is they who are said to learn by it—read its meaning, and shrunk back into silence and himself. The Marquis di Placentia now gave a signal to an attendant, and a page stepped forward with a casket; its contents the ambassador again knelt to offer to his new sovereign. It was the portrait of the Duke of Parma, fastened to a chain of brilliants. The

empress herself took the picture, and placed it round her daughter's neck.

A collation was spread in the adjoining room, and thither the party adjourned. Many others of the court were now admitted to offer their congratulations, and it was late in the day before the Duchess of Parma could be permitted to retire. Weary with fatigue, and oppressed by heat, Josepha gladly withdrew to her own chamber. Summoning her attendants, she hastened to put off her cumbrous dress.

"I will put on my canoness robe," said the duchess; a costume frequently worn both by herself and sisters.

"Nay," exclaimed Pauline, a favourite attendant, "not black upon your wedding-day, it is so very unlucky!"

The princess persisted, and, after helping her on with the loose black silk robe, at her command Pauline withdrew. Josepha seated herself by the open case-ment, and for the first time gazed on the miniature she wore. The duke's face was one of uncommon beauty and intelligence; the softness of the enamel and the skill of the painter might have added something to the beauty, but you felt the expression was copied, not given. The bride felt a sense of happiness and security steal over her as she watched the open and kindly meaning of the eyes, that seemed

to answer to her own. Perhaps, too, the outward influences of the lovely evening-time might give something of their own soothing sweetness. The air came through the window, with the odours of the garden below and the freshness of the dews above—for the heat was melting in a gentle rain. Suddenly a strain of music floated upon the air; it was from a band belonging to the palace, and they played a slow and beautiful Italian air. There were words belonging to the song—Josepha knew them—they spoke of passionate and happy love; she blushed as she glanced at the portrait, and then leaned back, half to listen to the distant tones, and half to dream of the future, as the young dream when hope prophesies by the imagination. She was yet lost in fantasies so vivid that truth itself seemed not so actual, when the door of her apartment slowly opened, and she started from her seat in wonder to see the empress. Maria Theresa was cold and haughty in her general manner; one too who brooked not that her will should meet with question, much less opposition: little marvel was it, therefore, that her child rose with an attitude rather of deference than of affection. But her mother's manner was kind even to softness, and when Josepha drew forwards the large arm-chair she refused it, and, gently taking her daughter's hand, placed herself too in the window-seat.

“Those books are Italian, and the music I hear in the distance is Italian. Ah, my child, even now you are striving to forget us! Alas! our station too much separates those gentler ties which, in lowlier life, bind so closely! How often must I, even to you, my own beloved girl, have seemed stern and severe; for I know a life of anxiety and struggle leaves its own harshness behind. But when, Josepha, in another country you think of your mother, remember with what difficulties that mother has had to contend.”

Josepha's only answer was to catch the hand, now placed caressingly amid her beautiful hair, and to cover it with kisses, ay, and also tears.

“A parting like ours,” resumed the empress, “is like one beside the grave; let it be in all love and charity. Forgive me, my child, if aught of reproach you have against your mother.”

The duchess flung herself at Maria Theresa's feet. “Nay, forgive me, my beloved and revered parent, if ever the petulance of my age has caused me to forget the love and duty I owed! Bless me, my mother!”

“God bless you, my beloved Josepha!” said the empress tenderly and solemnly.

The pause of feeling in both was broken by Maria Theresa looking at the miniature of the Duke of Parma.

“I like the expression of this face—it agrees with what I have heard of his character; and yet, when I think of the distance which will be between, I seem to dread thus trusting your happiness beyond my control. As yet, you know so little the dangers and the difficulties of a position like yours.”

“But, my mother,” said the duchess, “surely I might be aided by your knowledge.”

“The young submit not willingly to be guided by the old. Youth has but a half experience—it has seen but the bright side, and makes no allowance for the coming shadows. How often have I known the sage counsels which would have averted danger treated not only with indifference but even scorn!”

“But not by me,” exclaimed her hearer earnestly; “your words will be treasured in my heart like gold.”

“My dearest Josepha, I doubt your will to obey as little as I do your love; but I fear the natural thoughtlessness of youth. I could almost now regret that an unwillingness to weigh down the bright brief period of your life has prevented my depressing your young spirits by ever communicating the weight on my own mind. I have been over prudent. I fear you are ill fitted to meet all the exigencies of your novel situation. Beautiful, and with a mind like yours (I have observed its powers, Josepha, more than you may deem), your influence over your husband must be—will be—absolute. Think not, dearest



child, that I undervalue your desire to know and follow the right; but oh, that I could give you some of my experience!"

"Can you not, dear mother and sovereign? You know not how reverentially I should hear, and how carefully I should follow, your advice!"

This was the very point to which the empress wished to bring her daughter. First kissing the beautiful face which was bent towards her in the earnestness of entreaty, she began speaking. Her natural gifts of persuasion were great; her voice mingled sweetness and firmness; and her smile—it was that for whose sake the gallant chivalry of Hungary swore to die. At first her listener seemed to yield the most earnest and confiding attention; gradually the eloquent countenance of the duchess changed to surprise, wonder, doubt, and finally to almost indignation.

"Say no more!" exclaimed Josepha, throwing herself at the empress's feet: "register every act, penetrate into every thought, of my husband's, to give prompt intelligence of them to the court of Austria!—seek affection the better to betray it! Is this—can this—be my duty to my husband, or my love—"

"Nay," interrupted her mother, repressing the indignation already darkening in her eyes, "I was not prepared for this burst of romance."

“Madam,” said the duchess, slowly rising from her knee, “the task of a spy is no task for your daughter.”

Her figure was drawn to its utmost height; her brow was contracted; the likeness between herself and her mother was stronger than ever, and in that likeness Maria Theresa saw an end to her well-laid scheme of making the bride of the Duke of Parma a tool in her hands.

“Truly,” said she with a scornful smile, “this ducal coronet has turned your head. Wilful and disobedient! We speak on this subject no more.”

“Not in anger, my mother,” exclaimed Josepha, striving to detain her, “not in anger must you part from me!”

Coldly the empress disengaged her hand: their eyes met—and the young princess staggered back, at the stern and deadly resentment in the pale face of Maria Theresa, and sank on the window-seat.

“It is broken!” said Josepha faintly, as the chain to which hung the portrait of the Duke of Parma fell in glittering fragments at her side. It had caught to the empress’s dress, and was shattered. The young duchess leaned against the casement and wept.

To the young it is a very bitter pang to know that their best feelings have been excited merely to be worked upon; but sorrow and shame were soon merged in a vague and terrible fear. The evening

came on, and deepened into night. Still, amid the shadows, did Josepha fancy she could see the threatening brow of the empress, pale with anger. Solitude became insupportable, and she called her attendants. But human faces, and human voices, the cheerfulness of the lights, or even her favourite Pauline's bird-like song, were of no avail against the terror which every moment seemed to weigh more heavily on her spirits. With hurried and yet timid steps, starting, though she knew not why, at the least noise, Josepha began to pace the room. A low rap at the door interrupted her walk, and the confessor of the empress entered the apartment. Martini's features were chiselled with the perfection of sculpture, and his high brow bore the impress of mental power and thought far beyond his years, which were yet in their summer; his step was soft and humble—his voice low and sweet; yet fear was the sensation he always inspired. No one ever met his cold and cruel eye—so calm, so colourless—without saying, "That man delights in human misery."

He approached the duchess, and said, as he looked at her black dress, "I rejoice to see, my daughter, you have not waited for me to remind you of the pious duty to-night calls upon you to fulfil."

"What do you mean, father?" said the princess faintly, "I changed my dress on account of the heat."

“I had hoped, my daughter, it was in voluntary humiliation; ill do the gay robes of the bride suit with the meek prayers to be offered in the presence of the dead.”

“I pray you to speak your meaning at once!” and Josepha grew pale as marble.

“Your royal highness knows it is your turn to watch and pray by the tomb of the Archduchess Caroline.”

Josepha sank fainting against the wainscot of the room.

“The empress will never permit it,” cried Pauline, as she sprung to support her mistress; “why, we all know that the archduchess died of the small-pox, and not a creature will enter the chapel.”

“I have her grace’s commands, who wills that so pious a duty be not neglected. I am sent by her even now to conduct the Duchess of Parma to pay the last duty to her illustrious house.”

“Your father—appeal to him,” whispered the girl, “but I know that will be of no avail. I conjure you, see your mother yourself!”

“I have seen her,” said the duchess, “we parted just now.”

Pauline hid her face in her hands.

“I wait your highness’s pleasure to conduct you to the chapel.”

Josepha rose and prepared to follow.

“I will go with you. At night and alone—it is too terrible!” said the affectionate girl.

“Her highness’s vigil must be solitary; thus it has ever been!” replied the priest.

Josepha descended to the chapel; her attendants accompanied her to the door—as it opened it showed the thick hot atmosphere, through which the dim tapers seemed scarcely able to penetrate. The duchess turned round and embraced Pauline, and entered the chapel. They saw her kneel before the altar, and the doors were closed. Late in the night was it before the royal council broke up; then, not till then, did Pauline succeed in conveying the intelligence to the emperor that his favourite daughter had passed the night beside the infectious tomb of her cousin. He rushed himself to the chapel; and there was the duchess as they had left her—kneeling before the altar, and her face bowed in prayer. She had fallen a little forward, so that the steps supported her. They spoke—but she answered not; they raised her in their arms—but found she was dead.

[The substance of this story is true. The Archduchess Josepha died from a midnight vigil in a chapel where a relative was buried: a punishment, it was said, for some intractability she had shown towards the empress’s counsels as to the management of her betrothed husband. Her next sister became Duchess of Parma.]