

**The Miniature**  
By  
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THE MINIATURE.

By L. E. L.

“‘No, leave it open to-night, Charles.’

“‘But the damp air, dear mother!’

“‘Only revives me!’

“The youth left the lattice, and, for a moment, buried his face in his hands behind the curtains of the bed. ‘Charles, dear,’ said his mother, and again he resumed his station at her side. It was a small low room, whose whitewashed walls and small grate—there was a fire there, though it was July—spoke the extreme of poverty; yet were there some slight marks of that refined taste which lingers after all that once cherished it is gone. On the little table, near the bed, stood a glass filled with flowers; and a box of mignonette in the window touched every breath of air that entered with sweetness. The dim light threw a shadow over the meanness of the place, and softness and quietness hallowed the agony of the hour; for Charles Seymour was looking for the last time on the face of the mother he had idolized—his young, his beautiful mother, whose small exquisite features, and dark length of hair, might rather have suited a lovely sister dying beneath her first sorrow, than one to whom many a year of grief and care would have made the grave seem a hope and a home, but for those she left behind. By her side, in the deep sleep of infancy, healthy, and coloured like the rose, was a child of four years old. ‘God help thee, my poor Lolotte!’ and the anxiety of a mother’s love overcame the quiet of that calm which almost ever precedes the last struggle. ‘Alas, Charles! a sorrowful and anxious heritage is yours!’

“‘A sacred one, mother!’ and, in his heart, he vowed to be father and mother to the orphan child; and thrice tenderly did the cold hand he held press his, as he kissed the little creature so blessed in its unconsciousness.

“Deeper and deeper fell the shadows, and deeper and deeper the silence, when the few clouds that had gathered, gradually broke away, and the room was filled with the clear moonlight. Suddenly there came the sound of martial music—the tramp of measured steps. Mrs Seymour started unaided from her pillow. ‘It is the march of your father’s regiment—they played it that last morning—for pity’s sake, don’t let them play it now!’

“ Her head fell on Charles’s shoulder ; a strange sound was heard, such as comes from human mouth but once—it was the death-rattle, and a corpse lay heavily on his bosom.

“ ‘ Mistress has wanted nothing, I hope?’ said an old woman, opening the door gently ; one look told her that her mistress would never know earthly want again.

“ Disuniter of all affection—awful seal to life’s nothingness—warning and witness of power and judgment—Death has always enow of terror and sorrow, even when there are many to comfort the mourner, when the path has been smoothed for the sufferer, and life offers all its best and brightest to soothe the survivor ; even then, its tears are the bitterest the eye can ever shed, and its misery the deepest heart can ever know. But what must it be when poverty has denied solace even to the few wants of sickness ; and when the grave, in closing, closes on the only being there was to love us in the cold wide world ?

“ Charles Seymour stood by while the old woman laid out the body, and paused in her grief to admire so beautiful a corpse. He had to let his little sister sleep in his arms, for their mother was laid out on their only bed ; he had to order the coffin in which himself placed the body ; their short and scant meals were taken in presence of the dead ; he heard them drive the nails in the coffin, he stood alone by the grave, and wept his first tears when he reflected that he had not wherewithal to pay for even a stone to mark the spot.

“ He went home to meet a talkative broker, who came to buy their two or three articles of furniture ; and he leant by the window, in a room empty of every thing, but a little bed for his sister, who had crept to his side, with that expression of fear and wonder so painful to witness on the face of a child ; and Charles Seymour was but just sixteen.

“ His father had fallen in the battle of the Pyrenees, and his mother was left with the bare pension of a captain's widow, only one week before the banker, where all their private fortune was deposited, had failed. A few months brought Mrs Seymour to the brink of destitution and the grave; her pension died with her, and Charles was left, with the poor Lolotte, entirely dependent on the small salary he received as clerk in Mr Russel's office; and even this poor situation had been procured for him by the chance interest he had inspired in the apothecary, who had, from mere humanity, attended his mother. His future prospects destroyed—confined to his desk the whole day—debarred from intellectual acquirement—shut out from his former pursuits—with all the feelings of birth and station strong within him, young Seymour would have despaired, but for his sister; for her sake he exerted himself, for her sake he hoped. They lived on in their little back room over the grocer's shop, kept by the widow of a soldier in his father's regiment; he knew he could confide in the old woman's kindness to the child during his unavoidable absence; and, though it was a long walk night and morning to the city, he thought only how healthy the air of Hampstead was for Lolotte; however weary, he was still the companion of her evening walk, or else was up early to accompany her on the heath. In her he centred all the pride of better days; she was always dressed with scrupulous neatness; his leisure hours were devoted to giving her something of education, and every indulgence did he deny himself in order to bring her home the pretty toy or book, to reconcile her to the solitude of their lonely chamber; and patiently did the little creature make her own pleasure or employment till his return, and then quite forgot that she had sometimes looked from the window, and thought how merrily the children played in the street.

“ Three years had thus passed away, and brought with them but added anxiety. Charles felt that over-exertion was undermining his health; and Lolotte—the graceful, the fairy-like—how little would he be able to give her those accomplishments, for which her delicate hand, her light step, and her sweet voice, seemed made! and worse, how little would they suit her future prospects, if he could! It was her seventh birthday, and he was bringing her a young rose-tree as a present, but he felt languid and desponding—

even the slight tree seemed a weight almost too heavy to bear. As he went up stairs, he heard Lolotte talking so gaily—a listener is such a pleasure to a child! He entered, and saw her seated on the knee of an elderly man, in whose face something of sadness was mixed with the joyful and affectionate attention with which he was bending to his pretty companion.

“ How a few words change the destiny of a life ! A few, a very few words told Charles Seymour that Mr de Lisle, his mother’s brother, stood before him, just arrived from India—a few words gave him an almost father, a fortune, and friends; for Mr de Lisle had sought the orphans, to be the children of his heart and his home.

“ Another year had passed away. Charles Seymour’s brow was still darkened with thought, but not anxiety; and his cheek, though pale, had no hue of sickness. He was seated in the little study, peculiarly his own; books, drawings, papers, were scattered round, and not a favourite author but found a place on his shelves. To-day his solitude was often broken in upon—it was Lolotte’s birthday; and a sunny face and buoyant step entered his room, to show the many treasures heaped on that anniversary.

“ There was a little female art in this. Lolotte, amid all her gay presents, felt half sorry, half surprised, to find none from her brother. Had he forgotten!—to show him her gifts, might remind him of his own: still, Charles offered her no remembrance of the day. A child’s ball was too new and too gay, not to banish all thought but of itself; but when Lolotte went into her room for the night, and saw her table covered with presents, and still none from her brother, it was too much; and she sat down on her little stool, where, when Charles entered, he found her crying.

“ ‘ My own sweet sister, you were not forgotten, but my birthday remembrance was too sad a one. I could not spoil your day of pleasure by a gift so sorrowful.’

“ He presented her with a little packet, and the cheek which he kissed as he said, Good night, was wet with his tears.

“ Lolotte opened the paper—it contained a miniature, and she knew that the beautiful face was that of her mother. It was not till the morning that she saw the following lines were with it:

“ Your birthday, my sweet sister,—  
What shall my offering be?  
Here 's the red grape from the vineyard,  
And roses from the tree.

“ But these are both too passing,  
Fruit and flowers soon decay,  
And the gift must be more lasting  
I offer thee to-day.

“ 'Tis a joyful day, thy birthday—  
A sunny morn in spring;  
Yet thy sweet eyes will be sadden'd  
By the mournful gift I bring.

“ Alas! my orphan sister,  
You'll not recall the face,  
Whose meek and lovely likeness  
These treasured lines retrace.

“ It is your mother's picture;  
You are so like her now—  
With eyes of tearful dimness,  
And grave and earnest brow!

“ Oh! be like her, my sister!  
But less in face than mind;  
I would you could remember  
One so tender and so kind.

“ Oh, weep that angel mother!  
Such tears are not in vain;  
Yet dry them in the hope, love,  
We all shall meet again.

“ And keep this gentle monitor,  
And when you kneel in prayer,  
Deem an angel's eye is on you—  
That your mother watches there.

“ I'll believe that she rejoices  
O'er her darling child to-day;  
God bless thee, dearest sister!  
'Tis all that I can say.”