

## My Last Duchess

### Ferrara

#### -Robert Browning

THAT'S my last Duchess painted on the wall,  
Looking as if she were alive. I call  
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands  
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.  
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said  
"Frà Pandolf" by design, for never read  
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,  
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,  
But to myself they turned (since none puts by  
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)  
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,  
How such a glance came there; so, not the first  
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not  
Her husband's presence only, called that spot  
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps  
Frà Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps  
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint  
Must never hope to reproduce the faint  
Half-flush that dies along her throat": such stuff  
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough  
For calling up that spot of joy. She had  
A heart – how shall I say? – too soon made glad.  
Too easily impressed: she liked whate'er  
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.  
Sir, 'twas all one! My favor at her breast,  
The dropping of the daylight in the West,



# SUMMARY

## Lines 1-15

Alfonso shows the painting of his deceased Duchess exhibited on the wall. He feels that the image is alive and remarks the painting as a remarkable achievement. He reveals that the artist is Fra Pandolf who spent a day to complete the portrait. His artistry has resulted in the life like image of the Duchess and he asks the emissary to examine the painting.

The Duke acknowledges that whenever strangers look at the painting, they want to ask how the artist was able to achieve such depth in emotion. So, he answers the emissary without a question being asked. Moreover, the Duke is the only one who can unveil the curtain of the painting and answer the questions as no else is allowed to go near the painting.

Alfonso explains that his last Duchess expressed joy not only in the presence of her husband [the Duke], but also when others are present. It is the reason for her cheeks to express joy in the presence of Fra Pandolf.

## Lines 16-35

Alfonso tries to explain the smile on the face of his wife with the use of imaginary claims. He thinks that Fra Pandolf might have said that the cloak of the Duchess covers the wrists [a way of flirting] or remarking that such

beauty can never be reproduced by paints. The Duke says that such words were enough to produce a smile on her face as she believed that they were the words of courteousness. She was the one who would derive gladness from anything quickly. She admired everything and her sight could derive happiness from everywhere.

To the Duchess, according to the Duke, his expensive gift at her breast, setting sun, cherries presented by a fool, riding on her mule, etc. were things of joy and she blushed to enjoy any of them. Alfonso believes that she thanked many men, but in a suspicious way. He could not believe that she thinks other gifts equivalent to the proud family name given by the Duke. However, Alfonso expresses that it is too low to bend to her level and try to mend her ways even if it is possible.

### Lines 36-56

The Duke goes on to explain that three factors stood in his way for advising the Duchess – he claims his inability to deliver a good speech than can change the predicament of his wife, even if he achieves it would be shameful if the wife gives out an excuse to escape and lastly Alfonso says that he will not be stooping down for anything.

Alfonso admits to the emissary that his wife smiled at him as a mark of love, but he felt that the same smile was

produced to anyone who passes her by. As this indiscriminate behaviour of the Duchess grew, the Duke couldn't bear it and gave orders to silence her. After narrating a compelling story about the death of his wife, the Duke shows the emissary the painting by Fra Pandolf where one can find the life like image of her.

The Duke resumes to business and asks the emissary to come with him to join the others. He emphasizes that the emissary's master – a Count, is a rich man and he expects to get a good amount as dowry. However, Alfonso also states that the Count's daughter is more important to him than dowry. On the way down, Alfonso points out at another art piece – Neptune taming a sea-horse. The bronze statue was made by Claus of Innsbruck.

Reference to context:

1. Looking as if she were alive.

**Context:** The above line is taken from the poem "My Last Duchess" composed by Robert Browning. The poem is an example of dramatic monologue whereby the recently widowed Duke addresses an emissary.

**Explanation:**