

*My Last Duchess*  
Robert Browning

1842

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That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,  
Looking as if she were alive. I call  
That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands  
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.  
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said  
"Fra 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  
Fra 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 favour at her breast,  
The dropping of the daylight in the West,  
The bough of cherries some officious fool  
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule  
She rode with round the terrace--all and each  
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,  
Or blush, at least. She thanked men--good! but thanked  
Somehow--I know not how--as if she ranked  
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name  
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame

This sort of trifling? Even had you skill  
In speech (which I have not) to make your will  
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this  
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,  
Or there exceed the mark"--and if she let  
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set  
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,  
E'en that would be some stooping; and I choose  
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,  
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without  
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;  
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands  
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet  
The company below, then. I repeat,  
The Count your master's known munificence  
Is ample warrant that no just pretence  
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;  
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed  
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go  
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,  
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,  
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!