

Simply glance at it, you grovel  
 60 Hand and foot in Belial's<sup>o</sup> gripe:  
 If I double down its pages  
 At the woeful sixteenth print,  
 When he gathers his greengages,  
 Ope a sieve and slip it in't?

the devil's

9  
 65 Or, there's Satan!—one might venture  
 Pledge one's soul to him, yet leave  
 Such a flaw in the indenture  
 As he'd miss till, past retrieve,  
 Blasted lay that rose-acacia<sup>9</sup>  
 70 We're so proud of! Hy, Zy, Hine<sup>1</sup>  
 'St, there's Vespers!<sup>2</sup> *Plena gratiâ*  
*Ave, Virgo!*<sup>3</sup> Gr-r-r—you swine!

ca. 1839

1842

My Last Duchess<sup>1</sup>

Ferrara

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<sup>2</sup> hands  
 Worked busily a day, and there she stands.  
 5 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  
 10 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  
 15 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  
 20 Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough

9. The speaker would pledge his own soul to Satan in return for blasting Lawrence and his "rose-acacia," but the pledge would be so cleverly worded that the speaker would not have to pay his debt to Satan. There would be an escape clause ("flaw in the indenture") for himself.

1. Perhaps the opening of a mysterious curse against Lawrence.

2. Evening prayers.

3. Full of grace, Hail, Virgin! (Latin). The speaker's twisted state of mind may be reflected in

his mixed-up version of the prayer to Mary: "Ave, Maria, gratia plena."

1. The poem is based on incidents in the life of Alfonso II, Duke of Ferrara in Italy, whose first wife, Lucrezia, a young woman, died in 1561 after three years of marriage. Following her death, the duke negotiated through an agent to marry a niece of the Count of Tyrol. Browning represents the duke as addressing this agent.

2. Friar Pandolf, an imaginary painter.

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.  
 25 Sir, 'twas all one! My favor 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  
 30 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  
 35 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  
 40 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set  
 Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse  
 —E'en then 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  
 45 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  
 50 Is ample warrant that no just pretense  
 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,  
 55 Taming a sea horse, thought a rarity,  
 Which Claus of Innsbruck<sup>3</sup> cast in bronze for me!

1842

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### The Lost Leader<sup>1</sup>

Just for a handful of silver he left us,<sup>2</sup>

Just for a riband<sup>3</sup> to stick in his coat—

Found the one gift of which fortune bereft us,

3. An unidentified or imaginary sculptor. The Count of Tyrol had his capital at Innsbruck.

1. William Wordsworth, who had been an ardent liberal in his youth, had become a political conservative in later years. In old age, when he accepted a grant of money from the government and the office of poet laureate, he alienated some

of his young admirers such as Browning, whose liberalism was then as passionate as Wordsworth's had once been.

2. Browning here alludes to the "thirty pieces of silver" for which Judas betrayed Jesus (Matthew 26.14–16).

3. Symbol of the office of poet laureate.