

Fra Lippo Lippi Summary

Writer: Robert Browning | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

"Fra Lippo Lippi" is another notable dramatic monologue by Robert Browning. This poem was published in *Men and Women* in 1855. Each of its lines follows iambic pentameter. It is a biographical poem. Once Robert Browning visited Florence, Italy. There he saw a painting of the Virgin Mary that fascinated him. He thought of studying the painter's life. That painter was Lippo Lippi. Browning writes "Fra Lippo Lippi" about his biography.

At the beginning of the poem Lippo Lippi is caught by the watchmen from an ill-reputed (prostitution) place. Lippo tells the Watchmen that he is a poor monk. He holds a high position in a place called Carmine Monastery. So they should not mistreat him. He also asks them to go and investigate his workplace so that they can understand what kind of person he is.

Monks never marry. But they have a physical need. That's why they come to this brothel every night. He compares monks to rats. Just as rats crawl into any hole, monks do the same.

He warns the Watchmen to treat him with respect. And also tell that he is a good painter. He is currently with Consimo of the Medici. There he is doing a painting. Hearing this, the watchmen let him go. He thinks of saying more about him. He looks at every watchman and says which famous faces they have in common. One watchman's face resembles the face of Judas, and another watchman's face resembles King Harold. He tells them that if they bring chalk now, he can draw their pictures. In fact, he wants to show how good a painter he is. One of them recognizes him (having heard his name before as a good painter). Then he starts telling everyone his story.

He is looking out the window from the house where he is painting. He sees three prostitutes and begins to follow them. At one point he goes to a place with them and spends some time. On his way back, he is caught by these watchmen.

He starts telling them stories of his childhood. His parents died when he was very young. He continues to spend his days in great difficulty. Then, at the age of eight, a lady named Napacya finds him. After some time the woman leaves him in a church. He stays in the church because there he can eat. It can be said that he is forced to stay in the church to get rid of the pain of hunger. He is not very interested in church work, he loves to paint. The head of the church allows him to paint on one of the walls of the church.

He starts painting various realistic pictures on that wall. In these pictures, the real picture of the church at that time, i.e. the corruption of the church, is clearly revealed. Seeing this, the head of the church gets angry and asks him to delete those pictures. He does so with a broken heart. Because at that time he did not have the power to go against the Church. Now he has gained a lot of fame. He plans to paint a new painting for the church after six months. He will paint the image of the Virgin Mary and some angels covering her. He believes this art will bring a lot of appreciation for him. Finally, he departs, apologizing to the Watchmen for any unintentional mistakes he may have made.

LxNotes