

The Portrait That Smiled



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Lily loved her grandmother's long hallway. The wooden floor creaked softly under her red sneakers, and afternoon light fell in warm stripes across the walls. On one wall hung a big painting in a gold frame carved with tiny roses. It showed an elderly woman in a deep-blue dress with a lace collar, and the woman was smiling.



Grandmother Rose said the portrait was very old. “She has watched this house for many years,” she said, her wire-rimmed glasses glinting. Lily noticed something strange. When Mum brought Grandmother Rose a cup of tea, the painted smile seemed a little wider. When Dad told a funny joke, the rosy painted cheeks looked brighter.



One evening, Lily was sure. Grandmother Rose thanked Dad for fixing the squeaky door, and the painted woman beamed. Lily touched her grandmother's thin silver bracelet on her wrist. "Grandmother," she whispered, "I think the lady in the painting smiles when we are kind." Grandmother Rose nodded slowly. "Some paintings have long memories, my dear."



But soon the house grew noisy in a different way. Mum and Dad began to argue about bills and messy rooms. Mum's phone rang during dinner, and her tired brown eyes grew cross. Dad sighed and left the table. In the hallway, Lily looked up at the portrait. The painted smile had faded. The lady looked sad.



Lily felt a small ache in her chest. She studied the portrait closely. The painted eyes seemed to droop, and the corners of the painted mouth turned down. She ran to find Grandmother Rose in the kitchen. "The lady is sad now," Lily said. "Can we make her smile again?" Grandmother Rose set down her wooden walking stick. "Kindness is like sunshine," she said. "It warms everything it touches."



That night, Lily made a plan. She took a sheet of paper and drew a row of little smiling faces. At the top she wrote, “Kindness List.” She taped it to the hallway wall beneath the portrait. Then she waited for morning, her heart fluttering like a small bird, hoping her family would notice.



At breakfast, Lily started small. "Thank you, Mum, for the toast," she said, loudly and clearly. Mum blinked. "Oh," she said, surprised. "You're welcome, sweetheart." Lily pointed to the list. "Can we each do one kind thing today?" Dad smiled. "I'll try," he said. In the hallway, the painted lady's mouth seemed to lift, just a little.



Mum came home tired that evening, her black ponytail loose. Lily met her at the door. "Dad washed the dishes," she said. "All of them!" Mum raised her eyebrows. "Really?" She peeked into the kitchen and saw the clean, shining sink. "Thank you," she said to Dad, and her voice was soft. Upstairs, the portrait's painted cheeks looked a little rosier.



The next day, Mum helped Dad find his lost keys. “They were under the couch,” she said, laughing. Dad laughed too. He made everyone hot chocolate and even put extra marshmallows in Grandmother Rose’s cup. Lily watched the hallway. The painted lady’s smile was growing, like a flower opening in the sun. Lily clapped her hands.



But old habits are stubborn. By Friday, Mum and Dad argued again about whose turn it was to fold the laundry. Their voices rose, and Lily heard sharp words. She hurried to the hallway. The portrait looked sad and grey. Its painted mouth drooped, and even the gold frame seemed dull. Lily's shoulders sank.



Lily did not give up. She knocked on Mum's door. "Mum," she said gently, "can we say thank you to Dad for folding the socks? Even the matching ones?" Mum paused, then nodded. "You're right," she said. "I forgot to notice." She walked to the kitchen. "Thank you for the socks," she said. Dad's tired face broke into a grin.



Grandmother Rose joined in. She told stories at dinner about when Mum was little. Everyone laughed. Then Mum said, "Let's take turns. I'll fold Tuesdays, you take Thursdays." Dad agreed. Lily raised her glass of milk. "To kindness," she said. The family clinked their cups. In the hallway, the painted lady's smile began to glow, warm and wide and bright.



Over the next weeks, the house changed. Dad said thank you for the coffee. Mum praised Lily's drawings. Grandmother Rose left little notes on the fridge. The hallway felt lighter and brighter. Lily often stopped beneath the portrait. Each day, the painted lady's smile returned, fuller and warmer, until it shone like sunshine through a window.



One evening, the whole family gathered in the hallway. "Look," Lily whispered. The painted lady was beaming, her rosy cheeks glowing and her painted eyes bright. "She's happy again," said Mum softly. Dad put his arm around Mum. Grandmother Rose squeezed Lily's hand. "The lady reflects our home," she said. "And our home is full of kindness now."



Lily touched her silver bracelet and smiled her gap-toothed smile. “Kindness is like a garden,” she said. “We have to water it every day.” Mum hugged her tight. “Thank you for helping us remember.” The portrait glowed softly above them, smiling its warm, painted smile, as if it had been waiting all along for this happy, cheerful moment.



From that day on, the hallway was Lily's favorite place. She learned that small kind words can change a whole house. A thank-you, a helping hand, a shared laugh—each one made the painted lady smile. And every time Lily saw that smile, she knew her family was growing kinder, one small, warm act at a time.