

The story the portrait  
of the lady by  
khushwant singh  
essay sample



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The story The Portrait of the Lady by Khushwant Singh revolves around the story of the author and his relationship with his grandmother. The author's mother was a deeply religious woman who was very kind hearted. She epitomised purity and peace of mind which is very well written as an expanse of pure white serenity. Though she wasn't beautiful physically, she possessed deep spiritual beauty. She took great delight in feeding birds and animals.

The story begins with the narrator describing how old his grandmother was. The thought of the author's old grandmother being young and pretty, in early years of her life, raised a conflict in the mind of the author. Her hair was white as snow and she had a little stoop in her back.

When Singh was a child and his parents were away he was brought up by his grandmother who used to wake him up and get him ready for school. While performing this daily chore, she used to sing prayers which she wanted him to learn by heart but in vain. She would walk with him to and from his school. On their way back, they would throw chappatis to the village dogs.

When his parents settled in the city Singh went to stay in the city with her. This was a turning point in the relationship he shared with her. He disliked many things taught in the school. She could no longer help him with his lessons. A small gap had developed between them which wasn't very prominent. She didn't accompany him to school any long.

With the passage of time , Singh went to the university with which ended the last string of attachment which held them together. His grandmother started spending more time on the spinning wheel. This shows the author's

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grandmother's passive submission to her secluded life. She surrendered to her situation of separation from her family members, especially the author. She became friendly to the sparrows and fed them little pieces of bread. The birds in turn loved her company and would sit on her shoulders and even on her head.

Next came a phase when Singh decided to go to abroad to study for five years. He contemplated on his grandmother not being alive till the time he came back. However, she went to receive him in the station when he was back. She welcomed him by singing songs on drums with the other ladies of the colony, for several hours.

Next morning she fell very ill. The doctors had given up. She rested in bed, peacefully, telling her beads, not wasting her time in reminiscing her life with anybody. Suddenly she breathed her last, the rosary falling from her hand. She was covered with a red shroud. The most notable fact about the day she died was how thousands of sparrows gathered mournfully on the verandah, all silent. The sparrows paid no heed to the bread crumbs the author's mother gave them and flew away when the grandmother's body was taken away.