

THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

By

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Adapted from the Novel by Oscar Wilde

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THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

Description of characters

Lord Henry Wotton - A distinguished man in his late 20s/early 30s (ten years older than Dorian Gray) of considerable wealth and position.

Basil Hallward - An artist in his late 20s/early 30s; friend and former classmate of Lord Henry at Cambridge.

Dorian Gray - A young man (age 18-20) of extraordinary physical beauty.

Sibyl Vane - A shy, gentle young woman (age 18-20); a promising actress with exquisite beauty; graceful.

Mrs. Vane - A faded, tired-looking woman (age mid-40s); once an Actress; Sibyl's mother.

James Vane - A young man (age 16-18) who's bound for Australia to be a sailor; a sullen youth, in coarse ill-fitting clothes; Sibyl's brother.

Alan Campbell - A clever, young man (age mid-30s); educated at Cambridge to be a medical doctor.

Mr. Isaacs - A hideous, obnoxious (age 50-60s) Jewish merchant.

Lord Fermor - A genial, if somewhat rough-mannered, old bachelor (age early 50s), who is a wealthy uncle to Lord Henry.

Lady Agatha - A woman in her mid-50s, who likes to foster young men as her proteges.

Victor - Dorian's butler, mid-40s.

A Young woman/Prostitute - A once beautiful (age late teens), but now haggard looking woman, late-30s.

Author's note - With the exception of Dorian Gray, all of the characters will show the signs of age as the play progresses. Dorian's extremely youthful and handsome looks remain untouched. Second, it is more effective if Dorian Gray's portrait remains unseen by the audience. It requires the audience to use their imagination, which is much more powerful.

ACT 1

SCENE 1

TIME: EARLY 1880S

PLACE: BASIL HALLWARD'S STUDIO

In the darkness, a haunting waltz (something similar to a Tchaikovsky's or a Schumann's waltz) is heard. As the intensity of the music builds, the audience sees a bare, dark stage with the lights focused on a blank canvas, resting on a large easel at the center of the stage. Slowly, colors appear on the canvas and evolve into the youthful portrait of Dorian Gray. After a couple of moments, the music starts to fade as the lights dim.

Act 1

Scene 2

TIME: EARLY 1880S

PLACE: BASIL HALLWARD'S STUDIO

The set should be very simple: a dark/black stage with only a few pieces of furniture on it, upholster with rich, dark colors, preferably in burgundies. At the center of the stage, a large, upright easel stands with a canvas resting on it. As he stands at the easel, Basil Hallward paints the final touches on a picture. Off to the side, Lord Henry Wotton sits on a divan, admiring the picture as he smokes a cigarette.

LORD HENRY

It is your best work, Basil . . . the best work you've ever done. You'll have to enter it at the Grosvenor. The Academy is too large and too vulgar. The times that I've been there, there have either been so many people that I haven't been able to see the pictures, which was dreadful, or so many pictures that I have been able to see the people, which was worse. The Grosvenor is really the only place.

BASIL

I don't think I will send it anywhere.
(Stands back and looks at the picture.)
No, I won't send it anywhere.

LORD HENRY

Not send it anywhere? My dear fellow, why?

BASIL

I know you will laugh at me but I really can't exhibit it. I have too much of myself in it.

LORD HENRY

(Starts to laugh.)
Really, Basil. I didn't know you were so vain.
(Stands up and walks toward the picture.)
There is no resemblance between you and this young Adonis.
(beat)
Beauty . . . real beauty ends where an intellectual expression begins. I mean . . . you have the intellect and it shows.
(beat)
On the other hand, your mysterious young friend in your fascinating picture is some brainless, beautiful creature, who should always be here in the winter when we have not flowers to look at and in the summer when we need something to chill our intelligence. No, Basil . . . don't flatter

yourself. You don't look at all like him.

(Basil stops painting and turns to Lord Henry.)

BASIL

I know I don't. As a matter of fact, I should be sorry to look like him.

LORD HENRY

Why is that?

BASIL

Because . . . there is too much importance placed on an individual's beauty and intelligence. It is better not to be too different. In fact, the ugly and stupid have the best of it in this world. They can sit at their ease and watch the rest of us. If they know nothing of victory, they are at least spared the knowledge of defeat and rejection. They live their lives, as we should, in peace and harmony, without disturbance and conflict. They don't harm or bring ruin upon others, nor do they receive it from alien hands. They don't have your rank and wealth, Harry; my brains . . . such as they are . . . my art, whatever it is worth; and Dorian Gray's good looks. We all suffer for what the gods have given us.

LORD HENRY

Dorian Gray? Is that his name?

BASIL

(Resumes painting.)

Yes . . . but I didn't want to tell you.

LORD HENRY

Why not?

BASIL

Because I like him, Henry. And with other people that I like, I don't tell their names. It is like giving them up . . . and I don't want to. I want to protect them in secrecy.

LORD HENRY

You don't have to worry, my dear Basil. I am a married man.

BASIL

So? That hasn't stopped you before.

LORD HENRY

You're right. It hasn't.

(beat)

One of the charms of marriage is that it makes a life of deception absolutely necessary. I never

know where my wife is, and my wife doesn't know what I am doing. No questions are ever asked. So you see . . . marriage has given me a legitimate alibi to do whatever I want . . . and to whom I want to do it.

BASIL

I know it sounds naive of me . . . but I want to believe that you are a good husband and that you are thoroughly ashamed of your lack of virtue. I also want to believe that your cynicism is simply a pose.

LORD HENRY

Virtue is simply a pose and the most irritating pose I know.

(beat)

Now Basil, I want you to tell me the reason why you won't exhibit Dorian Gray's picture. I want the real reason.

BASIL

I've told you already.

LORD HENRY

No, you said that there was too much of yourself in it, which is childish.

BASIL

Harry . . . every portrait that is painted is a portrait of the artist rather than the sitter. He is merely the accident, the occasion.

LORD HENRY

I wouldn't mind getting into an accident with Mr. Gray.

BASIL

You're making fun of me.

LORD HENRY

I'm not either. You're being too sensitive . . . again. If you would only tell me the truth . . .

BASIL

I will not exhibit the picture because I'm afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my own soul.

LORD HENRY

And what is that?

BASIL

About two months ago I went to a party at Lord Brandon's. After I had been in the room about ten minutes, I suddenly became conscious of someone looking at me. I turned around and saw Dorian Gray for the first time. Our eyes met and I can only

tell you that a curious sensation of terror came over me. I knew that I had come face to face with someone who, if I allowed him to, would take over my whole life . . . my soul . . . my very art itself. Then something seemed to tell me that I was on the verge of some crisis in my life. I had a strange feeling that fate had in store both exquisite joys and exquisite sorrows. I grew afraid and turned away to get out of the room. It wasn't conscience but cowardice of some kind.

LORD BASIL

Conscience and cowardice are really the same things, Basil. Conscience is the trade-name of the firm. That's all.

BASIL

I don't believe that, Harry, and I don't believe you do either. As I tried to get my way out of the door I ran into Lady Brandon. "You're not going so soon, Mr. Hallward?" she screamed in that way of hers.

LORD HENRY

Yes, she's a regular peacock in everything, except beauty.

BASIL

Anyway, I couldn't get rid of her. Suddenly I found myself face to face with the young man whose personality had so strangely stirred me. We were so close, almost touching. Our eyes met again. I know it was reckless of me, but I had to find who he was. And so I asked Lady Brandon to introduce me.

LORD HENRY

And how did Lady Brandon describe this wonderful young man? She usually treats her guests exactly as an auctioneer treats his goods. She either explains them entirely away, or tells one everything about them except what one wants to know.

BASIL

You're rather hard on her, Harry!

LORD HENRY

Come now, my dear fellow, the woman tried to found a salon and only succeeded in opening a restaurant. How could anyone admire her? But tell me, what did she say about Mr. Dorian Gray.

BASIL

Oh something like, "Charming boy. I quite forget what he does . . . afraid he . . . doesn't do anything . . . oh yes, plays the piano . . . or is it the violin, dear Mr. Gray?" Both of us started to laugh at that one and we became best friends at once.

LORD HENRY

Laughter is not at all a bad beginning for a friendship, and it is far the best ending for one.

BASIL

You don't understand what friendship is, Harry. Or what animosity is, for that matter. You like everyone; that's to say, you're indifferent to everyone.

LORD HENRY

You simplify things. I choose my friends for their good looks, my acquaintances for their good characters, and my enemies for their good intellect. A man can't be too careful of his enemies. I haven't got one who is a fool. They are all men of some intellectual power, and consequently, they all appreciate me.

(beat)

Tell me more of Dorian Gray. How often do you see him?

BASIL

Every day. I couldn't be happy if I didn't see him every day. He is absolutely necessary to me.

LORD HENRY

I thought you would never care for anything but your art.

BASIL

He is my art now. I sometimes think that there are only two eras of artistic importance. The first is the appearance of a new medium . . . such as the invention of oil-painting to the Venetians. And the second is the appearance of a new personality to express it . . . like the face of Antinous was to the late Greeks . . . and what Dorian Gray will someday be to me. But he's more than a sitter or model to me. Oh Harry, if you only knew what he is to me.

LORD HENRY

I must see him . . .

BASIL

You might see nothing in him; whereas I see everything.

LORD HENRY

Then why don't you exhibit the portrait?

BASIL

Because, without intending it, I have put into the portrait some expression of my worship of his physical beauty. I have never told him how much I love him or how much he means to me. And he will

never know anything about it. But the world will guess it and I will not bare my soul . . . or my heart to their shallow prying eyes. We live in an age when men treat art as if it were meant to be a form of autobiography. I don't want that for him or myself.

LORD HENRY

Is he fond of you?

BASIL

I think he likes me. But I don't know for sure. Now and then, he is horribly thoughtless and seems to take delight in giving me pain. At times, I feel that I have given away my whole soul to someone who treats it as if it were a flower to put in his coat, a bit of decoration to charm his vanity, an ornament for a summer day.

LORD HENRY

Days in summer, Basil, are apt to linger. Perhaps you will tire sooner than he will. Remember . . . genius lasts longer than beauty.

(Walks over and comforts Basil.)

Someday you will look at your friend, and he will seem to you to be a little distorted, or you won't like his tone of color, or something. You will bitterly reproach him in your own heart, and seriously think that he has behaved very badly to you. The next time he calls, you will be cold and indifferent. It will be a great pity, for it will alter you. What you have told me is quite a romance . . . a romance of art; and the worst of having a romance of any kind is that it leaves one so unromantic.

BASIL

You can't feel what I feel. You change too often.

LORD HENRY

That is exactly why I can feel it. Those who are faithful know only the trivial side of love. It is the faithless who love love's tragedies.

(beat)

I've just remembered . . .

BASIL

What?

LORD HENRY

The name. My aunt, Lady Agatha, told me she'd discovered a wonderful young man who's going to help her in the East End and that his name was Dorian Gray. She never told me that he was good-looking. I wish I had known it was your friend.

BASIL
I'm very glad you didn't, Harry.

LORD HENRY
Why?

BASIL
I don't want you to meet him.

LORD HENRY
You don't want me to meet him?

BASIL
No.

(Off stage, the waltz music is being
played at the piano.)

LORD HENRY
Who is playing that beautiful music?

(Basil looks away, ignoring Harry.)

LORD HENRY
(continuing; beat)
He's here, isn't he? You will have to introduce me
now.

BASIL
No.

LORD HENRY
Why not?

(The piano music stops.)

BASIL
Dorian Gray is my dearest friend. He has a simple
and beautiful nature. Don't try to influence him.
Your influence would be bad. The world is full of
marvelous people of whom you can take your pick
from. Don't take away from me the one person who
gives my art whatever charm it possesses; my life as
an artist depends upon him. Please, Harry, I trust
you.

LORD HENRY
What nonsense you talk!

(Dorian Gray makes his entrance into
the studio, carrying some piano sheet
music with him.)

DORIAN

You must lend me these. They're perfectly charming.
(Looks up and sees Lord Henry.)
I beg your pardon, Basil, I didn't know you had
anyone with you.

BASIL

This is Lord Henry Wotton, Dorian, an old Oxford
friend of mine.

(Lord Henry gently pushes Basil to the
side and walks over to greet Dorian.)

LORD HENRY

He's just been telling me what a fine model you are.
(Extends his hand to Dorian and holds Dorian's
hand in his for a while.)
You're on my aunt's preferred list of people.

DORIAN

Lady Agatha Wotten?
(beat)
I'm afraid I'll be taken off of her preferred list.

LORD HENRY

How so?

DORIAN

I promised to go to a club in Whitechapel with her
last Tuesday. Do you know. . . I forgot all about
it? I don't know what she will say to me and I'm too
frightened to call. I'm very sorry.

LORD HENRY

(Puts his arm around Dorian as if to comfort
him.)
Oh . . . don't worry. I'll make peace with my aunt.

DORIAN

I would appreciate that, sir.

LORD HENRY

You don't have to call me, "sir." Please call me,
Harry.

DORIAN

Yes. . . Harry.

LORD HENRY

Now I'm beginning to understand why my aunt is so
devoted to you. And I don't think it really matters
about you not being there.

(Looks at Dorian intensely and smiles.)
You know. . .you're far too handsome and charming to
go into philanthropy, Mr. Gray . . . far too

charming. And besides it's such a waste of time.

DORIAN

You think so?

LORD HENRY

I know so.

(Lord Henry sits down on the divan and opens his cigarette-case. Basil watches the scene with contempt as he mixes his paints and gets his brushes ready.)

BASIL

Harry . . . I want to finish this picture today. Would you think it awfully rude of me if I asked you to go away?

(Lord Henry looks over at Dorian and smiles.)

LORD HENRY

Do you want me to go, Dorian?

DORIAN

Please don't go. I don't think I can bear to sit through one of Basil's sulky moods.

LORD HENRY

You don't really mind, Basil, do you? You've often told me you like your models to have someone to talk to.

BASIL

If Dorian wishes it, of course you must stay. Dorian's whims are laws to everybody, except for him.

(Lord Henry picks up his hat and gloves as he gets up from the divan.)

LORD HENRY

You are very inviting, Basil, but I'm afraid I must go.

DORIAN

Basil, if Lord Henry goes, I shall go too. Ask him to stay. I insist upon it.

BASIL

Stay, Henry, to oblige Dorian . . . and oblige me.

LORD HENRY

If you insist.

BASIL

(To Dorian.)
And you, Dorian, get upon the platform and don't move about too much or pay any attention to what he says. He's such a bad influence over all of his friends except for me . . .

DORIAN
Are you really as bad as Basil says you are?

LORD HENRY
There is no such thing as a good influence, Dorian.

DORIAN
Why?

LORD HENRY
To influence a person is to give one's own soul. The one who takes it in is unnatural. Like his thoughts or passions, his virtues are not real to him. His sins are borrowed ones, the actor of a part that's not written for him.

(beat)
To realize one's own nature as perfectly as one can . . . that's what we're for. People have forgotten the highest of all duties . . . the duty that one owes to oneself. We tend to be charitable while allowing our own souls to starve and go naked. Courage has gone out of our race.

(beat)
Perhaps we never really had it.

BASIL
(Concentrating in his painting.)
Just turn your head a little more to the right, Dorian. That's it.

LORD HENRY
Yet, I believe that if one man were to live out his life fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream, the world would forget all of its past maladies and return to the Hellenic ideal.

(beat)
But man is afraid of himself and is punished for his self-denial. Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind and poisons us. The body sins once and is done with it, for action is a mode of purification. Nothing remains then but the recollection of a pleasure or the luxury of a regret. The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden itself, with the desire for things that laws have prohibited and made unlawful. It is in the brain and only the brain where the great sins of the world take place.

(Gets up from the divan as he speaks directly

to Dorian.)
You must know that, Dorian. You must have had
passions that have made you afraid, thoughts that
filled you with terror, dreams whose mere memory
might stain your cheek with shame.

DORIAN

(To Lord Henry.)
Please stop! I don't know what to say right now.
I'd like to think about it. Or not to . . .
(Brief moment of silence as Basil works on the
painting.)
Basil. . . I'm getting very weary standing up here.

BASIL

Just a few more . . .

DORIAN

It's stifling here. I must get some air . . .

BASIL

(Stops painting.)
Dorian . . . I am so sorry. When I am painting, I
can't think of anything else.
(Dorian steps off of the platform.)
I don't know what Harry has been saying to you . .
. but you shouldn't believe a word of it.

DORIAN

(Looks at Lord Henry.)
They weren't compliments.

(Basil resumes painting.)

LORD HENRY

(To Dorian.)
You know it is the truth.

DORIAN

(To Lord Henry.)
Maybe I don't want to believe it.

(Exits through the French doors into
the garden.)

LORD HENRY

(To Basil.)
It is terribly hot in your studio, Basil. I'll just
go out in the garden with Dorian and get some air.

BASIL

Don't . . .

(Basil grabs Lord Henry's arm.)

LORD HENRY

Yes?

BASIL

Don't keep him out to long.

(The lights fade on Basil as Lord Henry exits through the doors and stops to watch Dorian standing in the sunlight, thinking. Lord Henry quietly walks over to Dorian.)