OSCAR WILDE

THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

'When we are happy, we are always good,' says Lord Henry, 'but when we are good, *we are not always* happy.'

Lord Henry's lazy, clever words lead the young Dorian Gray into a world where it is better to be beautiful than to be good; a world where *anything* can be forgiven – even murder – if it can make people laugh at a dinner party.

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The Picture of Dorian Gray

Oscar Wilde

retold by Jill Nevile

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The Artist

'I have put too much of myself into this painting.'

1

Through the open windows of the room came the rich scent of summer flowers. Lord Henry Wotton lay back in his chair and smoked his cigarette. Beyond the soft sounds of the garden he could just hear the noise of London.

In the centre of the room there was a portrait of a very beautiful young man, and in front of it stood the artist himself, Basil Hallward.

'It's your best work, Basil, the best portrait that you've ever painted,' said Lord Henry lazily. 'You must send it to the best art gallery in London.'

'No,' Basil said slowly. 'No, I won't send it anywhere.'

Lord Henry was surprised. 'But my dear Basil, why not?' he asked. 'What strange people you artists are! You want to be famous, but then you're not happy when you *are* famous. It's bad when people talk about you – but it's much worse when they *don't* talk about you.'

'I know you'll laugh at me,' replied Basil, 'but I can't exhibit the picture in an art gallery. I've put too much of myself into it.'

Lord Henry laughed. 'Too much of yourself into it! You don't look like him at all. He has a fair and beautiful face. And you – well, you look intelligent, of course, but with

'It's the best portrait that you've ever painted,' said Lord Henry.

your strong face and black hair, you are not beautiful.'

'You don't understand me, Harry,' replied Basil. (Lord Henry's friends always called him Harry.) 'Of course I'm not like him,' Basil continued. 'In fact, I prefer not to be beautiful. Dorian Gray's beautiful face will perhaps bring him danger and trouble.'

'Dorian Gray? Is that his name?' asked Lord Henry.

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

'Why not?'

'Oh, I can't explain,' said Basil. 'When I like people a lot, I never tell their names to my other friends. I love secrets, that's all.'

'Of course,' agreed his friend. 'Life is much more exciting when you have secrets. For example, I never know where my wife is, and my wife never knows what I'm doing. When we meet – and we do meet sometimes – we tell each other crazy stories, and we pretend that they're true.'

'You pretend all the time, Harry,' said Basil. 'I think that you're probably a very good husband, but you like to hide your true feelings.'

'Oh, don't be so serious, Basil,' smiled Lord Henry. 'Let's go into the garden.'

2

In the garden the leaves shone in the sunlight, and the flowers moved gently in the summer wind. The two young men sat on a long seat under the shadow of a tall tree.

'Before I go,' said Lord Henry, '*you* must answer my *question*, Basil. Why won't you exhibit Dorian Gray's portrait in an art gallery?' He looked at his friend and smiled. 'Please give me the *real* reason, now. Not the answer that *you* gave me before.'

'Harry, when an artist feels strongly about a portrait, it becomes a portrait of himself, not of the sitter. The artist paints the face and body of the sitter, *but in* fact he shows his *own* feelings. The reason why I won't exhibit this portrait is because I'm afraid it shows the secret of my heart.'

Lord Henry laughed. 'And what *is* this secret of *your* heart?'

His friend was silent. Lord Henry picked a flower and looked at it with interest.

'Two months ago,' Basil *said at last*, 'I was at a party at Lady Brandon's house. I was talking to friends when I realized that someone was watching me. I turned and saw Dorian Gray for the first time. We looked at each other, *and I felt* a sudden, very *strong* fear. I felt that this person could change my life . . . could bring me happiness – and unhappiness. Later, Lady Brandon introduced us. We laughed at something that she said, and became friends *at once*.'

He stopped. Lord Henry smiled. 'Tell me more,' he said. 'How often do you see him?'

'Every day,' answered Basil. 'I'm not happy if I don't see him *every day* – he's necessary to my life.'

'But I thought you only cared about your art,' said Lord Henry.

'He *is* all my art now,' *replied* Basil, seriously. 'Since I met Dorian Gray, the work that I've done is good, the best work

'I'm afraid that the picture shows the secret of my heart,' said Basil.

of my life. Because of him I see art in a different way, a new way. When I'm with him, I paint wonderful pictures.'

'Basil, this is extraordinary. I must meet Dorian Gray,' said Lord Henry.

Basil got up and walked up and down the garden. 'So that's my secret. Dorian doesn't know about my feelings. And I can't let people see the portrait, because it shows what's in my heart. There's too much of myself in it, Harry, too much!'

Lord Henry looked at Basil's face before he spoke. 'Tell me, does Dorian Gray care about you?'

The artist thought for a few moments. 'He likes me,' he said at last. 'I know he likes me. Usually he's very friendly to me, but sometimes he seems to enjoy hurting me. He says unkind things that give me pain, Harry. And then I feel that I've given myself to somebody who thinks my heart is a pretty flower. A flower that he can enjoy for a summer's day, and can forget tomorrow.'

'Summer days, Basil,' said Lord Henry with a smile, 'can sometimes be too long. Perhaps you'll become tired sooner than he will.'

'Harry, don't talk like that. While I live, Dorian Gray will be important to me. You change your feelings too quickly. You can't feel what I feel.'

'My dear Basil, how unkind you are!' Lord Henry was amused. How interesting other people's lives were, he thought. Slowly he pulled a flower to pieces with his long fingers. 'I remember now,' he continued. 'I think my aunt knows Dorian Gray. I'd like to meet him very much.'

'But I don't want you to meet him,' said Basil.

A servant came across the garden towards them.

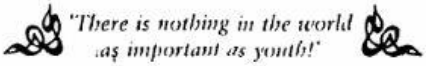
'Mr Dorian Gray has arrived, sir,' he said to Basil.

'You have to introduce me now,' laughed Lord Henry.

Basil turned to him. 'Dorian Gray is my dearest friend,' he said quietly. 'He's a good person and he's young – only twenty. Don't change him. Don't try to influence him. Your clever words are very amusing, of course, but you laugh at serious things. Don't take him away from me. He's necessary to my life as an artist.'

Lord Henry smiled. 'You worry too much, my friend,' he said, and together they walked back into the house.

The Friend



'There is nothing in the world as important as youth!'

3

As they entered the house, they saw Dorian Gray. He was sitting by the window and turning some pages of music.

'You must lend me this music, Basil,' he said. Then he turned and saw Lord Henry. 'Oh, I'm sorry, Basil. I didn't realize . . .'

'Dorian, this *is* Lord Henry Wotton,' said Basil. 'He's an old friend of mine.'

Dorian Gray shook hands with Lord Henry, and while they talked, Lord Henry studied the young man. Yes, he was very good-looking indeed, with his bright blue eyes and his gold hair. He had an open, honest face. There were no dark secrets in that face. Lord Henry could understand Basil's feelings for him.

Basil was getting his paints ready. Now he looked at Lord Henry. 'Harry,' he said, 'I want to *finish* this portrait of Dorian today. I'm afraid I must ask you to go away.'

Lord Henry smiled and looked at Dorian Gray. 'Should I go, Mr Gray?' he asked.

'Oh, please don't leave, Lord Henry. Basil never talks when he's painting, and it's so boring. Please stay. I'd like you to talk to me.'

'Well, Basil?' Lord Henry asked.

The *artist* bit his lip. 'Very well, Harry. Stay . . . if you must.'

While Basil painted, Lord Henry talked, and the young man listened. The words filled Dorian's head like music – wild, exciting music. What a beautiful voice Lord Henry has, he thought. They are only words, but how terrible they are! How bright and dangerous! You cannot escape from words. Dorian began to understand things about himself that he had never understood before. Why had he never seen himself so clearly, he wondered?

Lord Henry watched Dorian, and smiled. He knew when to speak, and when to be silent. He felt very interested in this young man, with his wonderful face.

Later they walked in the garden together, while Basil worked at the portrait. The rich scent of the flowers was all around them. Dorian looked at the older man, and wondered about him. He was tall, with a thin dark face and cool white hands. Dorian liked him, but why did he feel a little afraid of him?

'You must come out of the *sun*, Mr Gray,' said Lord Henry. 'A brown skin isn't fashionable and it won't suit you.'

'Oh, it doesn't matter,' laughed Dorian.

'But it *should* matter to you, Mr Gray.'

'Why?' asked Dorian.

'Because you're young, and being young is wonderful. Ah, you *smile*. You don't think so now, but one day you'll understand what I mean – when you're old, and tired, and no longer beautiful. You have a wonderfully beautiful face, Mr Gray. It's true. Don't shake your head at me. And there's nothing more important, more valuable than beauty. When

'When your youth goes, your beauty will go with it,' said Lord Henry.

your youth goes, your beauty will go with it. Then you'll suddenly discover that your life is empty – there will be nothing to enjoy, nothing to hope for. Time is your enemy, Mr Gray. It will steal everything from you. People are afraid of themselves today. Afraid to live. But you, with your face and your youth, there's nothing that you cannot do. You must live! Live the wonderful life that is in you! We can never be young again. Youth! Ah, there is nothing in the world as important as youth!'

Dorian Gray listened and wondered. New ideas filled his head. He felt strange, different.

At that moment Basil called them from the house. Lord Henry turned to Dorian. 'You're happy that you've met me, Mr Gray,' he said.

'Yes, I'm happy now. Will I always be happy, I wonder?'

'Always!' Lord Henry smiled. 'What a terrible word! Women use it much too often. What does it mean? It's today that is important.'

4

In the house Basil Hallward stood in front of the portrait of Dorian Gray. 'It's finished,' he said. He wrote his name in the corner of the picture.

Lord Henry studied the picture carefully. 'Yes,' he said. 'It's your best work. It's excellent. Mr Gray, come and look at yourself.'

Dorian looked at the picture for a long time. He smiled as he saw the beautiful face in front of him, and for a moment

he felt happy. But then he remembered Lord Henry's words. 'How long', he thought, 'will I look like the picture? Time will steal my beauty from me. I will grow old, but the picture will always be young.' And his heart grew cold with fear.

'Don't you like it, Dorian?' asked Basil at last.

'Of course he likes it,' said Lord Henry. 'It's a very fine work of art. I'd like to buy it myself.'

'It's not mine to sell, Harry. The picture is Dorian's.'

'I wish,' cried Dorian suddenly, 'I wish that I could always stay young and that the picture could grow old.'

Lord Henry laughed. 'I don't think you would like that, Basil, would you?'

'No, I wouldn't like it at all,' agreed Basil with a smile.

Dorian turned, his face red and angry. 'Yes, you like your art better than your friends,' he said to Basil. 'How long will you like me? Only while I'm beautiful, I suppose. Lord Henry is right. Youth is the most important thing in the world. Oh, why did you paint this picture? Why should it stay young while I grow old? I wish the picture could change, and I could stay as I am. I would give anything, yes, anything, for that.' He hid his face in his hands.

'Dorian, Dorian!' said Basil unhappily. 'Don't talk like that. You're my dearest friend.' He turned to Lord Henry. 'What have you been teaching him?' he asked angrily. 'Why didn't you go away when I asked you?'

Lord Henry smiled. 'It's the real Dorian Gray – that's all.'

Basil turned and walked quickly over to the portrait. 'It's my best work, but now I hate it. I will destroy it now, before it destroys our friendship.' He picked up a long knife.

'I wish that I could always stay young and that the picture could grow old,' cried Dorian.