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The Picture of Dorian Gray

OSCAR WILDE





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OXFORD BOOKWORMS

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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.

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. (Word count 10,245)



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