

Oscar
Wilde



THE PICTURE
OF DORIAN GRAY

 GIUNTI CLASSICS


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OSCAR WILDE

The Picture of Dorian Gray

Edited with an Introduction by
Luciana Pirè

 **GIUNTI**

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Introduction

“I have put my genius into my life; I have put only my talent into my work” remarked Oscar Wilde in one of his provocative aphorisms. His life was a real work of art, something infinitely flexible that he modelled according to his own inclinations. His double image of rebel and dandy was a dazzling creation of language and style which could not help but be noticed. Nevertheless, much was genuine in Wilde’s studied frivolity and affectations. The story of his life dramatically proves it.

Oscar Fingal O’Flahertie Wills Wilde (1854-1900) was born in Dublin of noble Celtic parentage. His father William was knighted for his work as eminent surgeon specialized in ear and eye disease; and Lady Jane Francesca Elgee, his mother, was a gifted linguist with a working knowledge of the major European languages and revolutionary poetess who, under the pseudonym ‘Speranza’, had advocated Ireland’s independence. Consequently, we cannot be surprised when we find the young Wilde continually challenging his contemporaries with his scandals and eccentric postures.

A precocious interest in Greek literature in his teens enabled him to distinguish himself first at Trinity College, Dublin, then at Magdalen College, Oxford, where he won a prize for his poem *Ravenna*. Yet the popularity of his *Poems*, with which he commenced his life as an author in 1881, was really due more to his public figure than to his poetry. He made his name as one of the leaders of the ‘Aesthetic’ movement, or cult of the beautiful, in London. As an aesthete, he wanted to stir the town, to startle it. He was said to walk along the streets wearing long curly locks and dressing in fancy suits of velveteen, “with a poppy or a lily” in his hand.

His flamboyant extravagance attracted such a degree of attention that by the time he was 27 he was well known enough to be caricatured on the stage as the poet Bunthorne in Gilbert and Sullivan’s satirical opera, *Patience* (1881). By that time he was already his own public relations agent. “Success”, he wrote in a letter, “is a science: if you have the conditions, you get the result”; and he ironically added, “Strange that a pair of silk stockings should so upset a nation!” There are critics who

try to persuade us that he was “the century’s first pop celebrity”, in the manner of Elvis Presley or Paul McCartney. It is dizzying to consider the actors who have portrayed Wilde on the stage and on the screen, from Robert Morley to Liam Neeson, from Peter Finch to the last convincing interpretation by Stephen Fry.

By all accounts Wilde was a witty conversationalist, with the effect that he was soon the most desired guest for smart London hostesses. The celebrated Irish poet, W.B. Yeats, one of Wilde’s best friends, once said that he had never heard a man speak in such perfect sentences, as if he had written them out and corrected them the night before. He invented a genial nonsense which has passed into English speech and writing ever since. He delighted his listeners by uttering outrageous opinions as, for example, his solemn affirmation that Queen Victoria was one of the three women he most admired and whom he would have married “with pleasure” (the other two were Sarah Bernhardt, the actress, and Lily Langtry, reputedly a mistress of Victoria’s son Edward, Prince of Wales).

In his effort of self-promotion as the apostle of art, Wilde sailed for New York in 1882 to travel across the United States and deliver a series of lectures on “the aesthetics”. The fifty-lecture tour, originally planned to last four months, eventually stretched to nearly a year, with 140 lectures given in 260 days. For his highly successful American tour he composed a lecture, *The English Renaissance of Art*, in which he stressed with great boldness the importance of art as the ultimate value in life to be cherished with a religious devotion. Art, we are told, must never have a “useful purpose”; it is an end in itself.

In 1883, Wilde returned to London bursting with exuberance from his year long lecture tour. Full of talent, passion and, most of all, full of himself, he began to build his career as a writer. The essayist came before the dramatist. Among all the essays which appeared in the book he called *Intentions* (1891), the most original are in the form of imaginary dialogue: specifically, *The Critic as Artist* emphasizes criticism as a mode of recreation; and *The Decay of Lying*, perhaps the most elaborate statement of Wilde’s critical position, asserts the importance of formal values in conscious crafting in verse and prose, thus anticipating the modernist movement of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Although Wilde cannot be said to have ever been the follower of a definite political creed, in the well-argued essay, *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, he makes an attempt to reintegrate art and society. One more remarkable essay, *The Portrait of Mr W.H.*, deals with the identity of the unknown person by whom William Shakespeare was inspired to create his *Sonnets*.

Wilde’s succession of brilliant essays captivated the public and within few years he was in great demand for reviews and became the

editor of *Woman's World*, a monthly for "women of culture and position", through which "they will express their views". Furthermore, he published three volumes of short-stories, *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime* (1891), *A House of Pomegranates* (1891), and *The Happy Prince* (1888), written for his son. The latter, which was Wilde's favourite fairy-tale, tells of a swallow who, en route to Egypt, pauses at the golden statue of the Happy Prince. The Prince weeps because he sees the poverty and need in his city and asks the swallow to help by taking to the needy, first, jewels (including his eyes), and then the gold leaf which adorns him. The swallow, devoted to the Prince, remains there through the winter and therefore dies.

But the true source of his notoriety was as a playwright who could produce both comedies of high wit and the pagan tragedy *Salomé* (1893), which he wrote in French. *Salomé* (now known chiefly by Richard Strauss's opera) was refused a licence, but performed in Paris in 1896 and published in 1894 in an English translation by Lord Alfred Douglas, whose name was indelibly associated with Wilde. The play was triumphantly revived in Berlin by Max Reinhardt in 1903. The *Salomé* legend, beginning in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, relates the beheading of John the Baptist at the instigation of Herodias; in both accounts, Herodias uses her daughter as the instrument of the prophet's destruction. Through modes of expression favoured by his beloved Greeks, Wilde achieves a masterpiece of drama in which language and symbol are one.

The comedy that best shows his dramatic skill is *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), whose plot turns on a pun built on the double meaning of the Christian name, Ernest, and the moral quality, earnestness. It is generally regarded as his masterpiece and, although the author was pleased with the light-hearted tone of his play, he wished it might have had a "higher seriousness of intent". Wilde valued the code of manners that smoothes the intercourse between individuals of equal rank; and yet, through the polished brilliance of the paradoxical dialogue and its aphoristic impertinences he meditated over Victorian hypocrisy and priggishness and the false pretences of upper class society. In all his comedies – such as *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), and *An Ideal Husband* (1895) – the witty language is not only the means by which the characters' feelings and beliefs are expressed but also an important part of the play in its own right.

Whereas essays and comedies represent the pinnacle of Wilde's precipitous ascent, the publication of his only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) which aroused scandalized protest, represents the beginning of his precipitous descent. In 1884 he had courted and married the beautiful Constance Lloyd; they had two sons in quick succession

but their relationship did not lead to domestic tranquillity. This marriage was one long misery to Wilde until he met, in 1891, Lord Alfred Douglas, nicknamed 'Bosie', a bundle of malice and vanity wrapped up in attractive features. Oscar was mesmerised by the dashing and intelligent young man and began the passionate and stormy *affair* which was to consume and ultimately destroy him.

In following the capricious and amoral Bosie, Oscar neglected his wife and children. His private life became increasingly public within the context of the decidedly anti-homosexual conventions of late Victorian society. As his literary career flourished, the risk of a huge scandal grew ever larger. Bosie's father, the cantankerous Marquess of Queensberry, furiously pursued his son and his son's famous lover whose "unmanly" behaviour he despised. In 1895, days after the triumphant first night of *The Importance Of Being Earnest*, Queensberry stormed into Wilde's club, 'The Albemarle', and finding him absent left a card with its notorious misspelled note, "For Oscar Wilde posing as Somdomite". Bosie, who hated his father, persuaded Oscar to sue the Marquess for libel. As homosexuality was itself illegal, Queensberry was able to destroy Oscar's case at the trial by calling as witnesses rent boys who would describe Wilde's sexual encounters in open court.

Oscar lost the libel case and, as a victim of British prejudice against homosexuality, he was found guilty of acts of gross indecency with other males and sentenced to two years' imprisonment with hard labour. It was easy to blame Wilde for his sins and he became the scapegoat of a peculiarly Victorian complex which was associated with the idea of sexual guilt. Constance took the children to Switzerland and reverted to an old family name of Holland. The trial and the circumstances of imprisonment were severe. Unreformed Dickensian prison conditions caused a calamitous series of illnesses and brought Wilde to death's door. Society expressed its outrage against "the obscene impostor" by first exiling him and then by suppressing his plays during his lifetime – though revivals began to appear as soon as he had purified his art by dying.

The Ballad of Reading Gaol (1898) and the long letter of bitter reproach to Bosie – more an essay – known as *De Profundis* (published incomplete in 1905) date from this period. Wilde uses here the confessional overtones inherent in the epistolary form to record on paper the two-year torment which had broken his spirit and health; in it he also provided an apologia for his own conduct, claiming to have stood "in symbolic relations to the art and culture" of his age. Released from prison in 1897, he was utterly incapable of facing the world he had once so defiantly commanded, and he spent the last five years of his life on the Continent. Here he continued to help his prison friends, and his letters to the press about conditions in prison are rational arguments for reform.

In exile he adopted the name Sebastian Melmoth – Sebastian to recall the martyr transfixed by arrows, and Melmoth after the diabolical hero of the famous gothic novel by Charles Robert Maturin. He had been sold up as a bankrupt, and was an entirely ruined man, more or less deserted by everyone. At no time in his life could he bear to be alone. Poor and rejected, he died in Paris attended by a hotel manager. Curiously enough, he is buried in the same cemetery as the poet Charles Baudelaire, whose *Fleurs du Mal*, banned as offensive to public morals, had profoundly affected his attitudes toward life and literature.

Around his idea of the individual human being – living in the personal world that has been given to him and following his own inner laws and impulses – all Wilde's activities revolve. In the pagan worship of pleasure as well as in the depths of his pitiful suffering, even in his very debaucheries and follies, he had sought the liberation of his own self. This one belief became the standard by which he measured all life and thought and art. He held it consistently in all his apparent inconsistencies of life. His mythology of Ego development was high indeed, up to the point of self-sacrifice. The very gesture that ruined him – his action against the Marquess of Queensbury – was in many ways an act of rebellion. His multisided and unhidden sensibility of rebel and dandy was, more than anything, what made Wilde seem so dangerous in the twilight of the Victorian era, an age that had been built on sturdy certainties. Paradox, Wilde insisted, is the very root of all existence.

The Picture of Dorian Gray

The sad history of Dorian Gray hardly needs to be recollected. Dorian Gray, rich and exquisitely beautiful, has his portrait painted by Basil Hallward. Dorian longs to remain eternally beautiful and young like the picture. When he initially confronts Basil's finished portrait he makes no secret of his yearning for an eternal beauty: "I shall grow old and horrible, but this picture will never be older. If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old, I would give my soul for that!" The wish is granted, and he lives a life of vices and self-indulgence without losing his looks or his youth, while the picture records his depravity in terms of physical decay.

In his search for new sensations, Dorian becomes more and more dissolute, and free from any moral scruple. Years pass and, one evening, Hallward visits Dorian who takes him to see the portrait. Because it is horribly disfigured and aged, the painter cannot recognize it as his own work except for the signature. Realizing that, in reality, the painting

has revealed the nature of his own nasty soul, Dorian stabs Hallward. He finally decides to destroy the portrait, abandon the faith of hedonism and to seek a rebirth. But something unbelievable happens when he slashes the picture. The servants hear a horrible cry and when they enter the room, Dorian Gray is lying on the floor with a knife in his chest. They have some difficulty in identifying the body, for it is horribly wrinkled. Only by his rings can they know for sure that it is their master. On the wall hangs a handsome painting of the young man as he had always appeared to them in life.

The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891) received, in general, unfavourable critical comments from Wilde's contemporaries when it appeared in *Lippincott's Magazine*. Those who attacked the work pointed to the "perversity" and "insincerity" with which certain aspects of it were contrived, such as the cruel circumstances under which the actress, Sibyl Vane, commits suicide. In a comment he made about his novel, Wilde wrote, "I cannot understand how they can treat Dorian Gray as immoral". As he further maintained, there is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book, and the only real 'aesthetic' test should be the perfection of its language.

The goal to which all Wilde's intentions turn is to be found in his doctrine and practice of "Art for Art's sake", expounded in the famous *Preface* to his novel. Believing that only the aesthetic experience could prevent the death of the soul, Wilde recommends to the artist to capture beauty for its own sake. However, attaining pure beauty in the field of both literary and existential values is a difficult task, an ideal aloof from reality, independent of any hindrance or responsibility.

According to the new generations of wits, there was no longer any intellectual life in England, and acceptance of the French hedonistic Decadence of the turn of the century was a possible response to the way of the times. The belief that Paris was the world capital of the Modernist arts was familiar enough from the 1880's onward. It became commonplace for English artists and intellectuals to spend an apprenticeship phase in Paris and there was an abiding British population there, mostly consisting of painters; in consequence, most of the new Parisian tendencies in painting and writing acquired English adherents and were quickly assimilated. The word 'decadence' had been making its way into the language, and Wilde, further stimulated by his stay in France and his acquaintances among French Decadents, embodied all that was summed up in that word in the characterization of Dorian Gray. We can see the importance of the French vogue even in the language, dress, furniture, and interior decoration of this novel.

The core theme of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is the quest for immortality, accompanied by appropriate speculations on the danger

ambiguity between Art and Life. Life should commence by imitating and thereby embodying the patterned structure of a work of art, rather than the reverse. As the effete Dorian comes to live in the static immutable kingdom of art, the picture becomes ever more life-like. But attempting to live entirely by a self-induced set of sensory principles and moral indifference, Dorian mixes beauty and cruelty. In this way the novel is the record, as Wilde put it, of the 'terrible pleasure' of 'a double life'.

The gilded Dorian "used to wonder at the shallow psychology of those who conceive the Ego in man as a thing simple, permanent, reliable, and of one essence. To him, man was a being with myriad lives and myriad sensations, a complex, multiform creature". Here, Dorian Gray assimilates the intellectual preaching and opinions which Wilde himself was claiming at this time; namely, his concerns with the deep essence of the human being, and of that unconscious fountain from which spring desires and needs a thousand times stronger than those to which we can admit. Accordingly, Dorian is praised for never falling "into the error of arresting his intellectual development by any formal acceptance of creed or system".

Each man, declares Wilde, should seek to make himself perfect; but at the height of his beauty-seeking folly, Dorian Gray leads a path of sin and crime. Struggling to make himself perfect, he does not find liberation but only failure. He chooses to ape an aristocratic life-style, though he is not an aristocrat like the sophisticated and cynical Lord Henry Wotton, the epicure who shapes the soul of Dorian Gray. After the standard pygmalionism of the Nineties, Lord Wotton continues to direct the youth toward pleasure and sensual intensity, never fully caring about the consequences. To exist at this level of intensity clearly requires something akin to a sacrificial victim.

On their second meeting in July 1891, Wilde gave a copy of this book to Lord Alfred Douglas, the young man who in so many ways is prefigured in the character of Dorian Gray and who would be the catalyst of Wilde's ill fortune. Eventually Wilde called him a 'monster' and 'evil', and he repudiated him in his long melodramatic poem *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. Bosie lived long enough to see Wilde's reputation restored. The greatest irony is that the self-satisfied Victorian age came to an end along with its conventional morality, whereas Wilde's great novel of decadence and corruption remains "a classic, and deservedly so". In his immense self-consciousness, Wilde had acutely prefigured this outcome.

The Picture of Dorian Gray

The Preface

The artist is the creator of beautiful things.

To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim.

The critic is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things.

The highest, as the lowest, form of criticism is a mode of autobiography.

Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault.

Those who find beautiful meanings in beautiful things are the cultivated. For these there is hope.

They are the elect to whom beautiful things mean only Beauty.

There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book.

Books are well written, or badly written. That is all.

The nineteenth century dislike of Realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass.

The nineteenth century dislike of Romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass.

The moral life of man forms part of the subject-matter of the artist, but the morality of art consists in the perfect use of an imperfect medium.

No artist desires to prove anything. Even things that are true can be proved.

No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style.

No artist is ever morbid. The artist can express everything.

Thought and language are to the artist instruments of an art.

*Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art.
From the point of view of form, the type of all the arts is the art
of the musician. From the point of view of feeling, the actor's
craft is the type.*

All art is at once surface and symbol.

Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril.

Those who read the symbol do so at their peril.

It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors.

*Diversity of opinion about a work of art shows that the work
is new, complex, and vital.*

*When critics disagree the artist is in accord with himself.
We can forgive a man for making a useful thing as long as he
does not admire it. The only excuse for making a useless thing
is that one admires it intensely.*

All art is quite useless.

OSCAR WILDE

CHAPTER 1

The studio was filled with the rich odour of roses, and when the light summer wind stirred amidst the trees of the garden, there came through the open door the heavy scent of the lilac, or the more delicate perfume of the pink-flowering thorn.

From the corner of the divan of Persian saddle-bags on which he was lying, smoking, as was his custom, innumerable cigarettes, Lord Henry Wotton could just catch the gleam of the honey-sweet and honey-coloured blossoms of a laburnum, whose tremulous branches seemed hardly able to bear the burden of a beauty so flame-like as theirs; and now and then the fantastic shadows of birds in flight flitted across the long tussore-silk curtains that were stretched in front of the huge window, producing a kind of momentary Japanese effect, and making him think of those pallid jade-faced painters of Tokio who, through the medium of an art that is necessarily immobile, seek to convey the sense of swiftness and motion. The sullen murmur of the bees shouldering their way through the long unmown grass, or circling with monotonous insistence round the dusty gilt horns of the straggling woodbine, seemed to make the stillness more oppressive. The dim roar of London was like the bourdon note of a distant organ.

In the centre of the room, clamped to an upright easel, stood the full-length portrait of a young man of extraordinary personal beauty, and in front of it, some little distance away, was sitting the artist himself, Basil Hall-

ward, whose sudden disappearance some years ago caused, at the time, such public excitement, and gave rise to so many strange conjectures.

As the painter looked at the gracious and comely form he had so skilfully mirrored in his art, a smile of pleasure passed across his face, and seemed about to linger there. But he suddenly started up, and, closing his eyes, placed his fingers upon the lids, as though he sought to imprison within his brain some curious dream from which he feared he might awake.

“It is your best work, Basil, the best thing you have ever done,” said Lord Henry, languidly. “You must certainly send it next year to the Grosvenor. The Academy is too large and too vulgar. Whenever I have gone there, there have been either so many people that I have not been able to see the pictures, which was dreadful, or so many pictures that I have not been able to see the people, which was worse. The Grosvenor is really the only place.”

“I don’t think I shall send it anywhere,” he answered, tossing his head back in that odd way that used to make his friends laugh at him at Oxford. “No: I won’t send it anywhere.”

Lord Henry elevated his eyebrows and looked at him in amazement through the thin blue wreaths of smoke that curled up in such fanciful whorls from his heavy opium-tainted cigarette. “Not send it anywhere? My dear fellow, why? Have you any reason? What odd chaps you painters are! You do anything in the world to gain a reputation. As soon as you have one, you seem to want to throw it away. It is silly of you, for there is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about. A portrait like this would set you far above all the young men in England, and make the old men quite jealous, if old men are ever capable of any emotion.”

“I know you will laugh at me,” he replied, “but I really can’t exhibit it. I have put too much of myself into it.”

Lord Henry stretched himself out on the divan and laughed.

“Yes, I knew you would; but it is quite true, all the same.”

“Too much of yourself in it! Upon my word, Basil, I didn’t know you were so vain; and I really can’t see any resemblance between you, with your rugged strong face and your coal-black hair, and this young Adonis, who looks as if he was made out of ivory and rose-leaves. Why, my dear Basil, he is a Narcissus, and you – well, of course you have an intellectual expression, and all that. But beauty, real beauty, ends where an intellectual expression begins. Intellect is in itself a mode of exaggeration, and destroys the harmony of any face. The moment one sits down to think, one becomes all nose, or all forehead, or something horrid. Look at the successful men in any of the learned professions. How perfectly hideous they are! Except, of course, in the Church. But then in the Church they don’t think. A bishop keeps on saying at the age of eighty what he was told to say when he was a boy of eighteen, and as a natural consequence he always looks absolutely delightful. Your mysterious young friend, whose name you have never told me, but whose picture really fascinates me, never thinks. I feel quite sure of that. He is some brainless, beautiful creature who should be always here in winter when we have no flowers to look at, and always here in summer when we want something to chill our intelligence. Don’t flatter yourself, Basil: you are not in the least like him.”

“You don’t understand me, Harry,” answered the artist. “Of course I am not like him. I know that perfectly well. Indeed, I should be sorry to look like him. You shrug your shoulders? I am telling you the truth. There is a fatality about all physical and intellectual distinction, the sort of fatality that seems to dog through history the faltering steps of kings. It is better not to be different from one’s fellows. The ugly and the stupid have the best of it in

this world. They can sit at their ease and gape at the play. If they know nothing of victory, they are at least spared the knowledge of defeat. They live as we all should live, undisturbed, indifferent, and without disquiet. They neither bring ruin upon others, nor ever receive it from alien hands. Your rank and wealth, Harry; my brains, such as they are – my art, whatever it may be worth; Dorian Gray's good looks – we shall all suffer for what the gods have given us, suffer terribly.”

“Dorian Gray? Is that his name?” asked Lord Henry, walking across the studio towards Basil Hallward.

“Yes, that is his name. I didn't intend to tell it to you.”

“But why not?”

“Oh, I can't explain. When I like people immensely I never tell their names to anyone. It is like surrendering a part of them. I have grown to love secrecy. It seems to be the one thing that can make modern life mysterious or marvellous to us. The commonest thing is delightful if one only hides it. When I leave town now I never tell my people where I am going. If I did, I should lose all my pleasure. It is a silly habit, I daresay, but somehow it seems to bring a great deal of romance into one's life. I suppose you think me awfully foolish about it?”

“Not at all,” answered Lord Henry, “not at all, my dear Basil. You seem to forget that I am married, and the one charm of marriage is that it makes a life of deception absolutely necessary for both parties. I never know where my wife is, and my wife never knows what I am doing. When we meet – we do meet occasionally, when we dine out together, or go down to the Duke's – we tell each other the most absurd stories with the most serious faces. My wife is very good at it – much better, in fact, than I am. She never gets confused over her dates, and I always do. But when she does find me out, she makes no row at all. I sometimes wish she would; but she merely laughs at me.”

“I hate the way you talk about your married life, Harry,”

said Basil Hallward, strolling towards the door that led into the garden. "I believe that you are really a very good husband, but that you are thoroughly ashamed of your own virtues. You are an extraordinary fellow. You never say a moral thing, and you never do a wrong thing. Your cynicism is simply a pose."

"Being natural is simply a pose, and the most irritating pose I know," cried Lord Henry, laughing; and the two young men went out into the garden together, and ensconced themselves on a long bamboo seat that stood in the shade of a tall laurel bush. The sunlight slipped over the polished leaves. In the grass, white daisies were tremulous.

After a pause, Lord Henry pulled out his watch. "I am afraid I must be going, Basil," he murmured, "and before I go, I insist on your answering a question I put to you some time ago."

"What is that?" said the painter, keeping his eyes fixed on the ground.

"You know quite well."

"I do not, Harry."

"Well, I will tell you what it is. I want you to explain to me why you won't exhibit Dorian Gray's picture. I want the real reason."

"I told you the real reason."

"No, you did not. You said it was because there was too much of yourself in it. Now, that is childish."

"Harry," said Basil Hallward, looking him straight in the face, "every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter. The sitter is merely the accident, the occasion. It is not he who is revealed by the painter; it is rather the painter who, on the coloured canvas, reveals himself. The reason I will not exhibit this picture is that I am afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my own soul."

Lord Henry laughed. "And what is that?" he asked.

“I will tell you,” said Hallward; but an expression of perplexity came over his face.

“I am all expectation, Basil,” continued his companion, glancing at him.

“Oh, there is really very little to tell, Harry,” answered the painter; “and I am afraid you will hardly understand it. Perhaps you will hardly believe it.”

Lord Henry smiled, and, leaning down, plucked a pink-petalled daisy from the grass and examined it. “I am quite sure I shall understand it,” he replied, gazing intently at the little golden white-feathered disk, “and as for believing things, I can believe anything, provided that it is quite incredible.”

The wind shook some blossoms from the trees, and the heavy lilac-blooms, with their clustering stars, moved to and fro in the languid air. A grasshopper began to chirrup by the wall, and like a blue thread a long thin dragon-fly floated past on its brown gauze wings. Lord Henry felt as if he could hear Basil Hallward’s heart beating, and wondered what was coming.

“The story is simply this,” said the painter after some time. “Two months ago I went to a crush at Lady Brandon’s. You know we poor artists have to show ourselves in society from time to time, just to remind the public that we are not savages. With an evening coat and a white-tie, as you told me once, anybody, even a stock-broker, can gain a reputation for being civilized. Well, after I had been in the room about ten minutes, talking to huge, overdressed dowagers and tedious Academicians, I suddenly became conscious that someone was looking at me. I turned half-way round, and saw Dorian Gray for the first time. When our eyes met, I felt that I was growing pale. A curious sensation of terror came over me. I knew that I had come face to face with someone whose mere personality was so fascinating that, if I allowed it to do so, it would absorb my whole nature, my whole soul, my

very art itself. I did not want any external influence in my life. You know yourself, Harry, how independent I am by nature. I have always been my own master; had at least always been so, till I met Dorian Gray. Then – but I don't know how to explain it to you. Something seemed to tell me that I was on the verge of a terrible crisis in my life. I had a strange feeling that Fate had in store for me exquisite joys and exquisite sorrows. I grew afraid, and turned to quit the room. It was not conscience that made me do so: it was a sort of cowardice. I take no credit to myself for trying to escape.”

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

“I don't believe that, Harry, and I don't believe you do either. However, whatever was my motive – and it may have been pride, for I used to be very proud – I certainly struggled to the door. There, of course, I stumbled against Lady Brandon. ‘You are not going to run away so soon, Mr. Hallward?’ she screamed out. You know her curiously shrill voice?”

“Yes; she is a peacock in everything but beauty,” said Lord Henry, pulling the daisy to bits with his long nervous fingers.

“I could not get rid of her. She brought me up to Royal-ties, and people with Stars and Garters, and elderly ladies with gigantic tiaras and parrot noses. She spoke of me as her dearest friend. I had only met her once before, but she took it into her head to lionize me. I believe some picture of mine had made a great success at the time, at least had been chattered about in the penny newspapers, which is the nineteenth-century standard of immortality. Suddenly I found myself face to face with the young man whose personality had so strangely stirred me. We were quite close, almost touching. Our eyes met again. It was reckless of me, but I asked Lady Brandon to introduce

me to him. Perhaps it was not so reckless, after all. It was simply inevitable. We would have spoken to each other without any introduction. I am sure of that. Dorian told me so afterwards. He, too, felt that we were destined to know each other."

"And how did Lady Brandon describe this wonderful young man?" asked his companion. "I know she goes in for giving a rapid *précis* of all her guests. I remember her bringing me up to a truculent and red-faced old gentleman covered all over with orders and ribbons, and hissing into my ear, in a tragic whisper which must have been perfectly audible to everybody in the room, the most astounding details. I simply fled. I like to find out people for myself. But Lady Brandon 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."

"Poor Lady Brandon! You are hard on her, Harry!" said Hallward, listlessly.

"My dear fellow, she tried to found a *salon*, and only succeeded in opening a restaurant. How could I admire her? But tell me, what did she say about Mr. Dorian Gray?"

"Oh, something like, 'Charming boy – poor dear mother and I absolutely inseparable. Quite forget what he does – afraid he – doesn't do anything – oh, yes, plays the piano – or is it the violin, dear Mr. Gray?' Neither of us could help laughing, and we became friends at once."

"Laughter is not at all a bad beginning for a friendship, and it is far the best ending for one," said the young lord, plucking another daisy.

Hallward shook his head. "You don't understand what friendship is, Harry," he murmured – "or what enmity is, for that matter. You like everyone; that is to say, you are indifferent to everyone."

"How horribly unjust of you!" cried Lord Henry, tilting

his hat back, and looking up at the little clouds that, like ravelled skeins of glossy white silk, were drifting across the hollowed turquoise of the summer sky. "Yes; horribly unjust of you. I make a great difference between people. I choose my friends for their good looks, my acquaintances for their good characters, and my enemies for their good intellects. A man cannot be too careful in the choice of his enemies. I have not got one who is a fool. They are all men of some intellectual power, and consequently they all appreciate me. Is that very vain of me? I think it is rather vain."

"I should think it was, Harry. But according to your category I must be merely an acquaintance."

"My dear old Basil, you are much more than an acquaintance."

"And much less than a friend. A sort of brother, I suppose?"

"Oh, brothers! I don't care for brothers. My elder brother won't die, and my younger brothers seem never to do anything else."

"Harry!" exclaimed Hallward, frowning.

"My dear fellow, I am not quite serious. But I can't help detesting my relations. I suppose it comes from the fact that none of us can stand other people having the same faults as ourselves. I quite sympathize with the rage of the English democracy against what they call the vices of the upper orders. The masses feel that drunkenness, stupidity, and immorality should be their own special property, and that if anyone of us makes an ass of himself he is poaching on their preserves. When poor Southwark got into the Divorce Court, their indignation was quite magnificent. And yet I don't suppose that ten per cent of the proletariat live correctly."

"I don't agree with a single word that you have said, and, what is more, Harry, I feel sure you don't either."

Lord Henry stroked his pointed brown beard, and