

The painter's studio

What follows is an extract from the first pages of the novel. Two characters are portrayed: Basil Hallward, the painter, and his friend Lord Henry Wotton.

1

The studio was filled with the rich odour of roses, and when the light summer wind stirred amidst the trees¹ 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-bags² on which he was lying, smoking, as was his custom, innumerable cigarettes, Lord Henry Wotton could just catch the gleam³ of the honey-sweet and honey-coloured blossoms of a laburnum⁴, 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 flitted⁵ across the long tussore-silk⁶ 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-faced⁷ painters of Tokyo who, through the medium of an art that is necessarily immobile, seek to convey the sense of swiftness⁸ and motion. The sullen⁹ murmur of the bees shouldering their way through the long unmown¹⁰ grass, or circling with monotonous insistence round the dusty gilt¹¹ horns of the straggling woodbine¹², seemed to make the stillness more oppressive. The dim roar of London¹³ was like the bourdon¹⁴ note of a distant organ.

2

In the centre of the room, clamped¹⁴ to an upright easel¹⁵, stood the full-length¹⁶ portrait of a young man of extraordinary personal beauty, and in front of it, some little distance away, was sitting the artist himself, Basil Hallward, 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 comely¹⁷ form he had so skilfully mirrored in his art, a smile of pleasure passed across his face, and seemed about to linger¹⁸ there. But he suddenly started up, and, closing his eyes, placed his fingers upon the lids¹⁹, as though he sought to imprison within his brain some curious dream from which he feared he might awake.

3

'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 Grosvenor²⁰. 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, tossing²¹ 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 wreaths²² of smoke that curled up in such fanciful whirls²³ from his heavy opium-tainted cigarette. 'Not send it anywhere? My dear fellow, why? Have you any reason? What odd chaps²⁴ 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

Oscar Wilde
The Picture
of Dorian Gray
(1891)

Chapter 1

4.7

it deals with the description of Basil studio. The atmosphere is sensual and decadent while the setting is vividly described with words appealing to all the senses.

- 1 stirred amidst the trees. Mosse leggermente gli alberi.
- 2 saddle-bags. Cuscini.
- 3 gleam. Bagliore.
- 4 laburnum. Maggiociondolo (arbusto con fiori gialli).
- 5 flitted. Svolazzavano.
- 6 tussore-silk. Di seta ruvida.
- 7 jade-faced. Dal volto verde giada.
- 8 swiftness. Velocità.
- 9 sullen. Cupo.
- 10 unmown. Non tagliata.
- 11 gilt. Dorati.
- 12 straggling woodbine. Caprifoglio rigoglioso.
- 13 bourdon. Bassa.
- 14 clamped. Fissato.
- 15 easel. Cavalletto.
- 16 full-length. A figura intera.
- 17 comely. Attraente.
- 18 to linger. Indugiare.
- 19 lids. Palpebre.
- 20 Grosvenor. Una galleria d'arte.
- 21 tossing. Scuotendo.
- 22 wreaths. Anelli (di fumo).
- 23 whirls. Spirali.
- 24 chaps. Individui.

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.'

40 '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.'

45 '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 rugged²⁵ strong face and your coal-black hair, and this young Adonis²⁶, who looks as if he was made out of ivory and rose-leaves. Why, my dear Basil, he is a Narcissus²⁷, 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

50 successful men in any of the learned professions. How perfectly hideous²⁸ they are! [...]

25 rugged. Dura, segnata.

26 Adonis. Adone (nella mitologia greca, era un giovane amato da Afrodite per la sua grande bellezza).

27 Narcissus. Narciso (personaggio mitologico greco che si innamorò della sua immagine riflessa in una sorgente, vi si gettò e annegò).

28 hideous. Orribili.