THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

BY

OSCAR WILDE

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.

THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

CHAPTER I

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 saddlebags 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 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 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 would 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 stockbroker, can gain a reputation for

being civilised. Well, after I had been in the room about ten minutes,

talking to huge over-dressed dowagers and tedious Academicians, I

suddenly became conscious that someone was looking at me. I turned

halfway 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 Royalties, and people

with Stars and Garters, and elderly ladles 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 lionise 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 \_precis\_ 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 sympathise

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 tapped the toe of his

patent-leather boot with a tasselled ebony cane. "How English you are,

Basil! That is the second time you have made that observation. If one

puts forward an idea to a true Englishman--always a rash thing to do--he

never dreams of considering whether the idea is right or wrong. The only

thing he considers of any importance is whether one believes it oneself.

Now, the value of an idea has nothing whatsoever to do with the

sincerity of the man who expresses it. Indeed, the probabilities are

that the more insincere the man is, the more purely intellectual will

the idea be, as in that case it will not be coloured by either his

wants, his desires, or his prejudices. However, I don't propose to

discuss politics, sociology, or metaphysics with you. I like persons

better than principles, and I like persons with no principles better

than anything else in the world. Tell me more about Mr. Dorian Gray. How

often do you see him?"

"Every day. I couldn't be happy if I didn't see him every day. He is

absolutely necessary to me."

"How extraordinary! I thought you would never care for anything but your

art."

"He is all my art to me now," said the painter, gravely. "I sometimes

think, Harry, that there are only two eras of any importance in the

world's history. The first is the appearance of a new medium for art,

and the second is the appearance of a new personality for art also. What

the invention of oil-painting was to the Venetians, the face of Antinous

was to late Greek sculpture, and the face of Dorian Gray will some day

be to me. It is not merely that I paint from him, draw from him, sketch

from him. Of course I have done all that. But he is much more to me

than a model or a sitter. I won't tell you that I am dissatisfied with

what I have done of him, or that his beauty is such that Art cannot

express it. There is nothing that Art cannot express, and I know that

the work I have done, since I met Dorian Gray, is good work, is the best

work of my life. But in some curious way--I wonder will you understand

me?--his personality has suggested to me an entirely new manner in art,

an entirely new mode of style. I see things differently, I think of them

differently. I can now recreate life in a way that was hidden from me,

before. 'A dream of form in days of thought:'--who is it who says that?

I forget; but it is what Dorian Gray has been to me. The merely visible

presence of this lad--for he seems to me little more than a lad, though

he is really over twenty--his merely visible presence--ah! I wonder can

you realise all that that means? Unconsciously he defines for me the

lines of a fresh school, a school that is to have in it all the passion

of the romantic spirit, all the perfection of the spirit that is Greek.

The harmony of soul and body--how much that is! We in our madness have

separated the two, and have invented a realism that is vulgar, an

ideality that is void. Harry! if you only knew what Dorian Gray is to

me! You remember that landscape of mine, for which Agnew offered me such

a huge price, but which I would not part with? It is one of the best

things I have ever done. And why is it so? Because, while I was painting

it, Dorian Gray sat beside me. Some subtle influence passed from him to

me, and for the first time in my life I saw in the plain woodland the

wonder I had always looked for, and always missed."

"Basil, this is extraordinary! I must see Dorian Gray."

Hallward got up from the seat, and walked up and down the garden. After

some time he came back. "Harry," he said, "Dorian Gray is to me simply

a motive in art. You might see nothing in him. I see everything in him.

He is never more present in my work than when no image of him is there.

He is a suggestion, as I have said, of a new manner. I find him in the

curves of certain lines, in the loveliness and subtleties of certain

colours. That is all."

"Then why won't you exhibit his portrait?" asked Lord Henry.

"Because, without intending it, I have put into it some expression of

all this curious artistic idolatry, of which, of course, I have never

cared to speak to him. He knows nothing about it. He shall never know

anything about it. But the world might guess it; and I will not bare my

soul to their shallow prying eyes. My heart shall never be put under

their microscope. There is too much of myself in the thing, Harry--too

much of myself!"

"Poets are not so scrupulous as you are. They know how useful passion is

for publication. Nowadays a broken heart will run to many editions."

"I hate them for it," cried Hallward. "An artist should create beautiful

things, but should put nothing of his own life into them. We live in an

age when men treat art as if it were meant to be a form of

autobiography. We have lost the abstract sense of beauty. Some day I

will show the world what it is; and for that reason the world shall

never see my portrait of Dorian Gray."

"I think you are wrong, Basil, but I won't argue with you. It is only

the intellectually lost who ever argue. Tell me, is Dorian Gray very

fond of you?"

The painter considered for a few moments. "He likes me," he answered,

after a pause; "I know he likes me. Of course I flatter him dreadfully.

I find a strange pleasure in saying things to him that I know I shall be

sorry for having said. As a rule, he is charming to me, and we sit in

the studio and talk of a thousand things. Now and then, however, he is

horribly thoughtless, and seems to take a real delight in giving me

pain. Then I feel, Harry, 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's day."

"Days in summer, Basil, are apt to linger," murmured Lord Henry.

"Perhaps you will tire sooner than he will. It is a sad thing to think

of, but there is no doubt that Genius lasts longer than Beauty. That

accounts for the fact that we all take such pains to over-educate

ourselves. In the wild struggle for existence, we want to have something

that endures, and so we fill our minds with rubbish and facts, in the

silly hope of keeping our place. The thoroughly well-informed man--that

is the modern ideal. And the mind of the thoroughly well-informed man is

a dreadful thing. It is like a bric-a-brac shop, all monsters and dust,

with everything priced above its proper value. I think you will tire

first, all the same. Some day you will look at your friend, and he will

seem to you to be a little out of drawing, or you won't like his tone of

colour, 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 perfectly 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 one might call it, and the worst of having a romance of

any kind is that it leaves one so unromantic."

"Harry, don't talk like that. As long as I live, the personality of

Dorian Gray will dominate me. You can't feel what I feel. You change too

often."

"Ah, my dear Basil, that is exactly why I can feel it. Those who are

faithful know only the trivial side of love: it is the faithless who

know love's tragedies." And Lord Henry struck a light on a dainty silver

case, and began to smoke a cigarette with a self-conscious and satisfied

air, as if he had summed up the world in a phrase. There was a rustle of

chirruping sparrows in the green lacquer leaves of the ivy, and the

blue cloud-shadows chased themselves across the grass like swallows. How

pleasant it was in the garden! And how delightful other people's

emotions were!--much more delightful than their ideas, it seemed to him.

One's own soul, and the passions of one's friends--those were the

fascinating things in life. He pictured to himself with silent amusement

the tedious luncheon that he had missed by staying so long with Basil

Hallward. Had he gone to his aunt's he would have been sure to have met

Lord Goodbody there, and the whole conversation would have been about

the feeding of the poor, and the necessity for model lodging-houses.

Each class would have preached the importance of those virtues, for

whose exercise there was no necessity in their own lives. The rich would

have spoken on the value of thrift, and the idle grown eloquent over the

dignity of labour. It was charming to have escaped all that! As he

thought of his aunt, an idea seemed to strike him. He turned to

Hallward, and said, "My dear fellow, I have just remembered."

"Remembered what, Harry?"

"Where I heard the name of Dorian Gray."

"Where was it?" asked Hallward, with a slight frown.

"Don't look so angry, Basil. It was at my aunt, Lady Agatha's. She told

me she had discovered a wonderful young man, who was going to help her

in the East End, and that his name was Dorian Gray. I am bound to state

that she never told me he was good-looking. Women have no appreciation

of good looks; at least, good women have not. She said that he was very

earnest, and had a beautiful nature. I at once pictured to myself a

creature with spectacles and lank hair, horribly freckled, and tramping

about on huge feet. I wish I had known it was your friend."

"I am very glad you didn't, Harry."

"Why?"

"I don't want you to meet him."

"You don't want me to meet him?"

"No."

"Mr. Dorian Gray is in the studio, sir," said the butler, coming into

the garden.

"You must introduce me now," cried Lord Henry, laughing.

The painter turned to his servant, who stood blinking in the sunlight.

"Ask Mr. Gray to wait, Parker: I shall be in in a few moments." The man

bowed, and went up the walk.

Then he looked at Lord Henry. "Dorian Gray is my dearest friend," he

said. "He has a simple and a beautiful nature. Your aunt was quite right

in what she said of him. Don't spoil him. Don't try to influence him.

Your influence would be bad. The world is wide, and has many marvellous

people in it. Don't take away from me the one person who gives to my art

whatever charm it possesses; my life as an artist depends on him. Mind,

Harry, I trust you." He spoke very slowly, and the words seemed wrung

out of him almost against his will.

"What nonsense you talk!" said Lord Henry, smiling, and, taking Hallward

by the arm, he almost led him into the house.

CHAPTER II

As they entered they saw Dorian Gray. He was seated at the piano, with

his back to them, turning over the pages of a volume of Schumann's

"Forest Scenes." "You must lend me these, Basil," he cried. "I want to

learn them. They are perfectly charming."

"That entirely depends on how you sit to-day, Dorian."

"Oh, I am tired of sitting, and I don't want a life-sized portrait of

myself," answered the lad, swinging round on the music-stool, in a

wilful, petulant manner. When he caught sight of Lord Henry, a faint

blush coloured his cheeks for a moment, and he started up. "I beg your

pardon, Basil, but I didn't know you had anyone with you."

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

just been telling him what a capital sitter you were, and now you have

spoiled everything."

"You have not spoiled my pleasure in meeting you, Mr. Gray," said Lord

Henry, stepping forward and extending his hand. "My aunt has often

spoken to me about you. You are one of her favourites, and, I am afraid,

one of her victims also."

"I am in Lady Agatha's black books at present," answered Dorian, with a

funny look of penitence. "I promised to go to a club in Whitechapel with

her last Tuesday, and I really forgot all about it. We were to have

played a duet together--three duets, I believe. I don't know what she

will say to me. I am far too frightened to call."

"Oh, I will make your peace with my aunt. She is quite devoted to you.

And I don't think it really matters about your not being there. The

audience probably thought it was a duet. When Aunt Agatha sits down to

the piano she makes quite enough noise for two people."

"That is very horrid to her, and not very nice to me," answered Dorian,

laughing.

Lord Henry looked at him. Yes, he was certainly wonderfully handsome,

with his finely-curved scarlet lips, his frank blue eyes, his crisp gold

hair. There was something in his face that made one trust him at once.

All the candour of youth was there, as well as all youth's passionate

purity. One felt that he had kept himself unspotted from the world. No

wonder Basil Hallward worshipped him.

"You are too charming to go in for philanthropy, Mr. Gray--far too

charming." And Lord Henry flung himself down on the divan, and opened

his cigarette-case.

The painter had been busy mixing his colours and getting his brushes

ready. He was looking worried, and when he heard Lord Henry's last

remark he glanced at him, hesitated for a moment, and then said, "Harry,

I want to finish this picture to-day. Would you think it awfully rude of

me if I asked you to go away?"

Lord Henry smiled, and looked at Dorian Gray. "Am I to go, Mr. Gray?" he

asked.

"Oh, please don't, Lord Henry. I see that Basil is in one of his sulky

moods; and I can't bear him when he sulks. Besides, I want you to tell

me why I should not go in for philanthropy."

"I don't know that I shall tell you that, Mr. Gray. It is so tedious a

subject that one would have to talk seriously about it. But I certainly

shall not run away, now that you have asked me to stop. You don't really

mind, Basil, do you? You have often told me that you liked your sitters

to have someone to chat to."

Hallward bit his lip. "If Dorian wishes it, of course you must stay.

Dorian's whims are laws to everybody, except himself."

Lord Henry took up his hat and gloves. "You are very pressing, Basil,

but I am afraid I must go. I have promised to meet a man at the Orleans.

Good-bye, Mr. Gray. Come and see me some afternoon in Curzon Street. I

am nearly always at home at five o'clock. Write to me when you are

coming. I should be sorry to miss you."

"Basil," cried Dorian Gray, "if Lord Henry Wotton goes I shall go too.

You never open your lips while you are painting, and it is horribly dull

standing on a platform and trying to look pleasant. Ask him to stay. I

insist upon it."

"Stay, Harry, to oblige Dorian, and to oblige me," said Hallward, gazing

intently at his picture. "It is quite true, I never talk when I am

working, and never listen either, and it must be dreadfully tedious for

my unfortunate sitters. I beg you to stay."

"But what about my man at the Orleans?"

The painter laughed. "I don't think there will be any difficulty about

that. Sit down again, Harry. And now, Dorian, get up on the platform,

and don't move about too much, or pay any attention to what Lord Henry

says. He has a very bad influence over all his friends, with the single

exception of myself."

Dorian Gray stepped up on the dais, with the air of a young Greek

martyr, and made a little \_moue\_ of discontent to Lord Henry, to whom he

had rather taken a fancy. He was so unlike Basil. They made a delightful

contrast. And he had such a beautiful voice. After a few moments he said

to him, "Have you really a very bad influence, Lord Henry? As bad as

Basil says?"

"There is no such thing as a good influence, Mr. Gray. All influence is

immoral--immoral from the scientific point of view."

"Why?"

"Because to influence a person is to give him one's own soul. He does

not think his natural thoughts, or burn with his natural passions. His

virtues are not real to him. His sins, if there are such things as sins,

are borrowed. He becomes an echo of someone else's music, an actor of a

part that has not been written for him. The aim of life is

self-development. To realise one's nature perfectly--that is what each

of us is here for. People are afraid of themselves, nowadays. They have

forgotten the highest of all duties, the duty that one owes to one's

self. Of course they are charitable. They feed the hungry, and clothe

the beggar. But their own souls starve, and are naked. Courage has gone

out of our race. Perhaps we never really had it. The terror of society,

which is the basis of morals, the terror of God, which is the secret of

religion--these are the two things that govern us. And yet----"

"Just turn your head a little more to the right, Dorian, like a good

boy," said the painter, deep in his work, and conscious only that a look

had come into the lad's face that he had never seen there before.

"And yet," continued Lord Henry, in his low, musical voice, and with

that graceful wave of the hand that was always so characteristic of him,

and that he had even in his Eton days, "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--I believe

that the world would gain such a fresh impulse of joy that we would

forget all the maladies of medi?valism, and return to the Hellenic

ideal--to something finer, richer, than the Hellenic ideal, it may be.

But the bravest man amongst us is afraid of himself. The mutilation of

the savage has its tragic survival in the self-denial that mars our

lives. We are punished for our refusals. Every impulse that we strive to

strangle broods in the mind, and poisons us. The body sins once, and has

done with its sin, 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 to

itself, with desire for what its monstrous laws have made monstrous and

unlawful. It has been said that the great events of the world take place

in the brain. It is in the brain, and the brain only, that the great

sins of the world take place also. You, Mr. Gray, you yourself, with

your rose-red youth and your rose-white boyhood, you have had passions

that have made you afraid, thoughts that have filled you with terror,

day-dreams and sleeping dreams whose mere memory might stain your cheek

with shame----"

"Stop!" faltered Dorian Gray, "stop! you bewilder me. I don't know what

to say. There is some answer to you, but I cannot find it. Don't speak.

Let me think. Or, rather, let me try not to think."

For nearly ten minutes he stood there, motionless, with parted lips, and

eyes strangely bright. He was dimly conscious that entirely fresh

influences were at work within him. Yet they seemed to him to have come

really from himself. The few words that Basil's friend had said to

him--words spoken by chance, no doubt, and with wilful paradox in

them--had touched some secret chord that had never been touched before,

but that he felt was now vibrating and throbbing to curious pulses.

Music had stirred him like that. Music had troubled him many times. But

music was not articulate. It was not a new world, but rather another

chaos, that it created in us. Words! Mere words! How terrible they were!

How clear, and vivid, and cruel! One could not escape from them. And yet

what a subtle magic there was in them! They seemed to be able to give a

plastic form to formless things, and to have a music of their own as

sweet as that of viol or of lute. Mere words! Was there anything so real

as words?

Yes; there had been things in his boyhood that he had not understood.

He understood them now. Life suddenly became fiery-coloured to him. It

seemed to him that he had been walking in fire. Why had he not known it?

With his subtle smile, Lord Henry watched him. He knew the precise

psychological moment when to say nothing. He felt intensely interested.

He was amazed at the sudden impression that his words had produced, and,

remembering a book that he had read when he was sixteen, a book which

had revealed to him much that he had not known before, he wondered

whether Dorian Gray was passing through a similar experience. He had

merely shot an arrow into the air. Had it hit the mark? How fascinating

the lad was!

Hallward painted away with that marvellous bold touch of his, that had

the true refinement and perfect delicacy that in art, at any rate, comes

only from strength. He was unconscious of the silence.

"Basil, I am tired of standing," cried Dorian Gray, suddenly. "I must go

out and sit in the garden. The air is stifling here."

"My dear fellow, I am so sorry. When I am painting, I can't think of

anything else. But you never sat better. You were perfectly still. And I

have caught the effect I wanted--the half-parted lips, and the bright

look in the eyes. I don't know what Harry has been saying to you, but he

has certainly made you have the most wonderful expression. I suppose he

has been paying you compliments. You mustn't believe a word that he

says."

"He has certainly not been paying me compliments. Perhaps that is the

reason that I don't believe anything he has told me."

"You know you believe it all," said Lord Henry, looking at him with his

dreamy, languorous eyes. "I will go out to the garden with you. It is

horribly hot in the studio. Basil, let us have something iced to drink,

something with strawberries in it."

"Certainly, Harry. Just touch the bell, and when Parker comes I will

tell him what you want. I have got to work up this background, so I

will join you later on. Don't keep Dorian too long. I have never been in

better form for painting than I am to-day. This is going to be my

masterpiece. It is my masterpiece as it stands."

Lord Henry went out to the garden, and found Dorian Gray burying his

face in the great cool lilac-blossoms, feverishly drinking in their

perfume as if it had been wine. He came close to him, and put his hand

upon his shoulder. "You are quite right to do that," he murmured.

"Nothing can cure the soul but the senses, just as nothing can cure the

senses but the soul."

The lad started and drew back. He was bareheaded, and the leaves had

tossed his rebellious curls and tangled all their gilded threads. There

was a look of fear in his eyes, such as people have when they are

suddenly awakened. His finely-chiselled nostrils quivered, and some

hidden nerve shook the scarlet of his lips and left them trembling.

"Yes," continued Lord Henry, "that is one of the great secrets of

life--to cure the soul by means of the senses, and the senses by means

of the soul. You are a wonderful creation. You know more than you think

you know, just as you know less than you want to know."

Dorian Gray frowned and turned his head away. He could not help liking

the tall, graceful young man who was standing by him. His romantic

olive-coloured face and worn expression interested him. There was

something in his low, languid voice that was absolutely fascinating. His

cool, white, flower-like hands, even, had a curious charm. They moved,

as he spoke, like music, and seemed to have a language of their own. But

he felt afraid of him, and ashamed of being afraid. Why had it been left

for a stranger to reveal him to himself? He had known Basil Hallward for

months, but the friendship between them had never altered him. Suddenly

there had come someone across his life who seemed to have disclosed to

him life's mystery. And, yet, what was there to be afraid of? He was not

a schoolboy or a girl. It was absurd to be frightened.

"Let us go and sit in the shade," said Lord Henry. "Parker has brought

out the drinks, and if you stay any longer in this glare you will be

quite spoiled, and Basil will never paint you again. You really must not

allow yourself to become sunburnt. It would be unbecoming."

"What can it matter?" cried Dorian Gray, laughing, as he sat down on the

seat at the end of the garden.

"It should matter everything to you, Mr. Gray."

"Why?"

"Because you have the most marvellous youth, and youth is the one thing

worth having."

"I don't feel that, Lord Henry."

"No, you don't feel it now. Some day, when you are old and wrinkled and

ugly, when thought has seared your forehead with its lines, and passion

branded your lips with its hideous fires, you will feel it, you will

feel it terribly. Now, wherever you go, you charm the world. Will it

always be so?... You have a wonderfully beautiful face, Mr. Gray. Don't

frown. You have. And Beauty is a form of Genius--is higher, indeed, than

Genius, as it needs no explanation. It is of the great facts of the

world, like sunlight, or spring-time, or the reflection in dark waters

of that silver shell we call the moon. It cannot be questioned. It has

its divine right of sovereignty. It makes princes of those who have it.

You smile? Ah! when you have lost it you won't smile.... People say

sometimes that Beauty is only superficial. That may be so. But at least

it is not so superficial as Thought is. To me, Beauty is the wonder of

wonders. It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The

true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.... Yes, Mr.

Gray, the gods have been good to you. But what the gods give they

quickly take away. You have only a few years in which to live really,

perfectly, and fully. When your youth goes, your beauty will go with it,

and then you will suddenly discover that there are no triumphs left for

you, or have to content yourself with those mean triumphs that the

memory of your past will make more bitter than defeats. Every month as

it wanes brings you nearer to something dreadful. Time is jealous of

you, and wars against your lilies and your roses. You will become

sallow, and hollow-cheeked, and dull-eyed. You will suffer horribly....

Ah! realise your youth while you have it. Don't squander the gold of

your days, listening to the tedious, trying to improve the hopeless

failure, or giving away your life to the ignorant, the common, and the

vulgar. These are the sickly aims, the false ideals, of our age. Live!

Live the wonderful life that is in you! Let nothing be lost upon you. Be

always searching for new sensations. Be afraid of nothing.... A new

Hedonism--that is what our century wants. You might be its visible

symbol. With your personality there is nothing you could not do. The

world belongs to you for a season.... The moment I met you I saw that

you were quite unconscious of what you really are, of what you really

might be. There was so much in you that charmed me that I felt I must

tell you something about yourself. I thought how tragic it would be if

you were wasted. For there is such a little time that your youth will

last--such a little time. The common hill-flowers wither, but they

blossom again. The laburnum will be as yellow next June as it is now. In

a month there will be purple stars on the clematis, and year after year

the green night of its leaves will hold its purple stars. But we never

get back our youth. The pulse of joy that beats in us at twenty, becomes

sluggish. Our limbs fail, our senses rot. We degenerate into hideous

puppets, haunted by the memory of the passions of which we were too much

afraid, and the exquisite temptations that we had not the courage to

yield to. Youth! Youth! There is absolutely nothing in the world but

youth!"

Dorian Gray listened, open-eyed and wondering. The spray of lilac fell

from his hand upon the gravel. A furry bee came and buzzed round it for

a moment. Then it began to scramble all over the oval stellated globe of

the tiny blossoms. He watched it with that strange interest in trivial

things that we try to develop when things of high import make us afraid,

or when we are stirred by some new emotion for which we cannot find

expression, or when some thought that terrifies us lays sudden siege to

the brain and calls on us to yield. After a time the bee flew away. He

saw it creeping into the stained trumpet of a Tyrian convolvulus. The

flower seemed to quiver, and then swayed gently to and fro.

Suddenly the painter appeared at the door of the studio, and made

staccato signs for them to come in. They turned to each other, and

smiled.

"I am waiting," he cried. "Do come in. The light is quite perfect, and

you can bring your drinks."

They rose up, and sauntered down the walk together. Two green-and-white

butterflies fluttered past them, and in the pear-tree at the corner of

the garden a thrush began to sing.

"You are glad you have met me, Mr. Gray," said Lord Henry, looking at

him.

"Yes, I am glad now. I wonder shall I always be glad?"

"Always! That is a dreadful word. It makes me shudder when I hear it.

Women are so fond of using it. They spoil every romance by trying to

make it last for ever. It is a meaningless word, too. The only

difference between a caprice and a life-long passion is that the caprice

lasts a little longer."

As they entered the studio, Dorian Gray put his hand upon Lord Henry's

arm. "In that case, let our friendship be a caprice," he murmured,

flushing at his own boldness, then stepped up on the platform and

resumed his pose.

Lord Henry flung himself into a large wicker arm-chair and watched him.

The sweep and dash of the brush on the canvas made the only sound that

broke the stillness, except when, now and then, Hallward stepped back to

look at his work from a distance. In the slanting beams that streamed

through the open doorway the dust danced and was golden. The heavy scent

of the roses seemed to brood over everything.

After about a quarter of an hour Hallward stopped painting, looked for a

long time at Dorian Gray, and then for a long time at the picture,

biting the end of one of his huge brushes, and frowning. "It is quite

finished," he cried at last, and stooping down he wrote his name in long

vermilion letters on the left-hand corner of the canvas.

Lord Henry came over and examined the picture. It was certainly a

wonderful work of art, and a wonderful likeness as well.

"My dear fellow, I congratulate you most warmly," he said. "It is the

finest portrait of modern times. Mr. Gray, come over and look at

yourself."

The lad started, as if awakened from some dream. "Is it really

finished?" he murmured, stepping down from the platform.

"Quite finished," said the painter. "And you have sat splendidly to-day.

I am awfully obliged to you."

"That is entirely due to me," broke in Lord Henry. "Isn't it, Mr. Gray?"

Dorian made no answer, but passed listlessly in front of his picture,

and turned towards it. When he saw it he drew back, and his cheeks

flushed for a moment with pleasure. A look of joy came into his eyes, as

if he had recognised himself for the first time. He stood there

motionless and in wonder, dimly conscious that Hallward was speaking to

him, but not catching the meaning of his words. The sense of his own

beauty came on him like a revelation. He had never felt it before. Basil

Hallward's compliments had seemed to him to be merely the charming

exaggerations of friendship. He had listened to them, laughed at them,

forgotten them. They had not influenced his nature. Then had come Lord

Henry Wotton with his strange panegyric on youth, his terrible warning

of its brevity. That had stirred him at the time, and now, as he stood

gazing at the shadow of his own loveliness, the full reality of the

description flashed across him. Yes, there would be a day when his face

would be wrinkled and wizen, his eyes dim and colourless, the grace of

his figure broken and deformed. The scarlet would pass away from his

lips, and the gold steal from his hair. The life that was to make his

soul would mar his body. He would become dreadful, hideous, and uncouth.

As he thought of it, a sharp pang of pain struck through him like a

knife, and made each delicate fibre of his nature quiver. His eyes

deepened into amethyst, and across them came a mist of tears. He felt as

if a hand of ice had been laid upon his heart.

"Don't you like it?" cried Hallward at last, stung a little by the lad's

silence, not understanding what it meant.

"Of course he likes it," said Lord Henry. "Who wouldn't like it? It is

one of the greatest things in modern art. I will give you anything you

like to ask for it. I must have it."

"It is not my property, Harry."

"Whose property is it?"

"Dorian's, of course," answered the painter.

"He is a very lucky fellow."

"How sad it is!" murmured Dorian Gray, with his eyes still fixed upon

his own portrait. "How sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible, and

dreadful. But this picture will remain always young. It will never be

older than this particular day of June.... If it were only the other

way! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was

to grow old! For that--for that--I would give everything! Yes, there is

nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for

that!"

"You would hardly care for such an arrangement, Basil," cried Lord

Henry, laughing. "It would be rather hard lines on your work."

"I should object very strongly, Harry," said Hallward.

Dorian Gray turned and looked at him. "I believe you would, Basil. You

like your art better than your friends. I am no more to you than a green

bronze figure. Hardly as much, I daresay."

The painter stared in amazement. It was so unlike Dorian to speak like

that. What had happened? He seemed quite angry. His face was flushed and

his cheeks burning.

"Yes," he continued, "I am less to you than your ivory Hermes or your

silver Faun. You will like them always. How long will you like me? Till

I have my first wrinkle, I suppose. I know, now, that when one loses

one's good looks, whatever they may be, one loses everything. Your

picture has taught me that. Lord Henry Wotton is perfectly right. Youth

is the only thing worth having. When I find that I am growing old, I

shall kill myself."

Hallward turned pale, and caught his hand. "Dorian! Dorian!" he cried,

"don't talk like that. I have never had such a friend as you, and I

shall never have such another. You are not jealous of material things,

are you?--you who are finer than any of them!"

"I am jealous of everything whose beauty does not die. I am jealous of

the portrait you have painted of me. Why should it keep what I must

lose? Every moment that passes takes something from me, and gives

something to it. Oh, if it were only the other way! If the picture could

change, and I could be always what I am now! Why did you paint it? It

will mock me some day--mock me horribly!" The hot tears welled into his

eyes; he tore his hand away, and, flinging himself on the divan, he

buried his face in the cushions, as though he was praying.

"This is your doing, Harry," said the painter, bitterly.

Lord Henry shrugged his shoulders. "It is the real Dorian Gray--that is

all."

"It is not."

"If it is not, what have I to do with it?"

"You should have gone away when I asked you," he muttered.

"I stayed when you asked me," was Lord Henry's answer.

"Harry, I can't quarrel with my two best friends at once, but between

you both you have made me hate the finest piece of work I have ever

done, and I will destroy it. What is it but canvas and colour? I will

not let it come across our three lives and mar them."

Dorian Gray lifted his golden head from the pillow, and with pallid face

and tear-stained eyes looked at him, as he walked over to the deal

painting-table that was set beneath the high curtained window. What was

he doing there? His fingers were straying about among the litter of tin

tubes and dry brushes, seeking for something. Yes, it was for the long

palette-knife, with its thin blade of lithe steel. He had found it at

last. He was going to rip up the canvas.

With a stifled sob the lad leaped from the couch, and, rushing over to

Hallward, tore the knife out of his hand, and flung it to the end of the

studio. "Don't, Basil, don't!" he cried. "It would be murder!"

"I am glad you appreciate my work at last, Dorian," said the painter,

coldly, when he had recovered from his surprise. "I never thought you

would."

"Appreciate it? I am in love with it, Basil. It is part of myself. I

feel that."

"Well, as soon as you are dry, you shall be varnished, and framed, and

sent home. Then you can do what you like with yourself." And he walked

across the room and rang the bell for tea. "You will have tea, of

course, Dorian? And so will you, Harry? Or do you object to such simple

pleasures?"

"I adore simple pleasures," said Lord Henry. "They are the last refuge

of the complex. But I don't like scenes, except on the stage. What

absurd fellows you are, both of you! I wonder who it was defined man as

a rational animal. It was the most premature definition ever given. Man

is many things, but he is not rational. I am glad he is not, after all:

though I wish you chaps would not squabble over the picture. You had

much better let me have it, Basil. This silly boy doesn't really want

it, and I really do."

"If you let anyone have it but me, Basil, I shall never forgive you!"

cried Dorian Gray; "and I don't allow people to call me a silly boy."

"You know the picture is yours, Dorian. I gave it to you before it

existed."

"And you know you have been a little silly, Mr. Gray, and that you don't

really object to being reminded that you are extremely young."

"I should have objected very strongly this morning, Lord Henry."

"Ah! this morning! You have lived since then."

There came a knock at the door, and the butler entered with a laden

tea-tray and set it down upon a small Japanese table. There was a rattle

of cups and saucers and the hissing of a fluted Georgian urn. Two

globe-shaped china dishes were brought in by a page. Dorian Gray went

over and poured out the tea. The two men sauntered languidly to the

table, and examined what was under the covers.

"Let us go to the theatre to-night," said Lord Henry. "There is sure to

be something on, somewhere. I have promised to dine at White's, but it

is only with an old friend, so I can send him a wire to say that I am

ill, or that I am prevented from coming in consequence of a subsequent

engagement. I think that would be a rather nice excuse: it would have

all the surprise of candour."

"It is such a bore putting on one's dress-clothes," muttered Hallward.

"And, when one has them on, they are so horrid."

"Yes," answered Lord Henry, dreamily, "the costume of the nineteenth

century is detestable. It is so sombre, so depressing. Sin is the only

real colour-element left in modern life."

"You really must not say things like that before Dorian, Harry."

"Before which Dorian? The one who is pouring out tea for us, or the one

in the picture?"

"Before either."

"I should like to come to the theatre with you, Lord Henry," said the

lad.

"Then you shall come; and you will come too, Basil, won't you?"

"I can't really. I would sooner not. I have a lot of work to do."

"Well, then, you and I will go alone, Mr. Gray."

"I should like that awfully."

The painter bit his lip and walked over, cup in hand, to the picture. "I

shall stay with the real Dorian," he said, sadly.

"Is it the real Dorian?" cried the original of the portrait, strolling

across to him. "Am I really like that?"

"Yes; you are just like that."

"How wonderful, Basil!"

"At least you are like it in appearance. But it will never alter,"

sighed Hallward. "That is something."

"What a fuss people make about fidelity!" exclaimed Lord Henry. "Why,

even in love it is purely a question for physiology. It has nothing to

do with our own will. Young men want to be faithful, and are not; old

men want to be faithless, and cannot: that is all one can say."

"Don't go to the theatre to-night, Dorian," said Hallward. "Stop and

dine with me."

"I can't, Basil."

"Why?"

"Because I have promised Lord Henry Wotton to go with him."

"He won't like you the better for keeping your promises. He always

breaks his own. I beg you not to go."

Dorian Gray laughed and shook his head.

"I entreat you."

The lad hesitated, and looked over at Lord Henry, who was watching them

from the tea-table with an amused smile.

"I must go, Basil," he answered.

"Very well," said Hallward; and he went over and laid down his cup on

the tray. "It is rather late, and, as you have to dress, you had better

lose no time. Good-bye, Harry. Good-bye, Dorian. Come and see me soon.

Come to-morrow."

"Certainly."

"You won't forget?"

"No, of course not," cried Dorian.

"And... Harry!"

"Yes, Basil?"

"Remember what I asked you, when we were in the garden this morning."

"I have forgotten it."

"I trust you."

"I wish I could trust myself," said Lord Henry, laughing. "Come, Mr.

Gray, my hansom is outside, and I can drop you at your own place.

Good-bye, Basil. It has been a most interesting afternoon."

As the door closed behind them, the painter flung himself down on a

sofa, and a look of pain came into his face.

CHAPTER III

At half-past twelve next day Lord Henry Wotton strolled from Curzon

Street over to the Albany to call on his uncle, Lord Fermor, a genial if

somewhat rough-mannered old bachelor, whom the outside world called

selfish because it derived no particular benefit from him, but who was

considered generous by Society as he fed the people who amused him. His

father had been our ambassador at Madrid when Isabella was young, and

Prim unthought of, but had retired from the Diplomatic Service in a

capricious moment of annoyance at not being offered the Embassy at

Paris, a post to which he considered that he was fully entitled by

reason of his birth, his indolence, the good English of his despatches,

and his inordinate passion for pleasure. The son, who had been his

father's secretary, had resigned along with his chief, somewhat

foolishly as was thought at the time, and on succeeding some months

later to the title, had set himself to the serious study of the great

aristocratic art of doing absolutely nothing. He had two large town

houses, but preferred to live in chambers, as it was less trouble, and

took most of his meals at his club. He paid some attention to the

management of his collieries in the Midland counties, excusing himself

for this taint of industry on the ground that the one advantage of

having coal was that it enabled a gentleman to afford the decency of

burning wood on his own hearth. In politics he was a Tory, except when

the Tories were in office, during which period he roundly abused them

for being a pack of Radicals. He was a hero to his valet, who bullied

him, and a terror to most of his relations, whom he bullied in turn.

Only England could have produced him, and he always said that the

country was going to the dogs. His principles were out of date, but

there was a good deal to be said for his prejudices.

When Lord Henry entered the room, he found his uncle sitting in a rough

shooting coat, smoking a cheroot, and grumbling over \_The Times\_. "Well,

Harry," said the old gentleman, "what brings you out so early? I thought

you dandies never got up till two, and were not visible till five."

"Pure family affection, I assure you, Uncle George. I want to get

something out of you."

"Money, I suppose," said Lord Fermor, making a wry face. "Well, sit down

and tell me all about it. Young people, nowadays, imagine that money is

everything."

"Yes," murmured Lord Henry, settling his buttonhole in his coat; "and

when they grow older they know it. But I don't want money. It is only

people who pay their bills who want that, Uncle George, and I never pay

mine. Credit is the capital of a younger son, and one lives charmingly

upon it. Besides, I always deal with Dartmoor's tradesmen, and

consequently they never bother me. What I want is information; not

useful information, of course; useless information."

"Well, I can tell you anything that is in an English Blue-book, Harry,

although those fellows nowadays write a lot of nonsense. When I was in

the Diplomatic, things were much better. But I hear they let them in now

by examination. What can you expect? Examinations, sir, are pure humbug

from beginning to end. If a man is a gentleman, he knows quite enough,

and if he is not a gentleman, whatever he knows is bad for him."

"Mr. Dorian Gray does not belong to Blue-books, Uncle George," said Lord

Henry, languidly.

"Mr. Dorian Gray? Who is he?" asked Lord Fermor, knitting his bushy

white eyebrows.

"That is what I have come to learn, Uncle George. Or rather, I know who

he is. He is the last Lord Kelso's grandson. His mother was a Devereux;

Lady Margaret Devereux. I want you to tell me about his mother. What was

she like? Whom did she marry? You have known nearly everybody in your

time, so you might have known her. I am very much interested in Mr. Gray

at present. I have only just met him."

"Kelso's grandson!" echoed the old gentleman.--"Kelso's grandson!... Of

course.... I knew his mother intimately. I believe I was at her

christening. She was an extraordinarily beautiful girl, Margaret

Devereux; and made all the men frantic by running away with a penniless

young fellow; a mere nobody, sir, a subaltern in a foot regiment, or

something of that kind. Certainly. I remember the whole thing as if it

happened yesterday. The poor chap was killed in a duel at Spa, a few

months after the marriage. There was an ugly story about it. They said

Kelso got some rascally adventurer, some Belgian brute, to insult his

son-in-law in public; paid him, sir, to do it, paid him; and that the

fellow spitted his man as if he had been a pigeon. The thing was hushed

up, but, egad, Kelso ate his chop alone at the club for some time

afterwards. He brought his daughter back with him, I was told, and she

never spoke to him again. Oh, yes; it was a bad business. The girl died

too; died within a year. So she left a son, did she? I had forgotten

that. What sort of boy is he? If he is like his mother he must be a

good-looking chap."

"He is very good-looking," assented Lord Henry.

"I hope he will fall into proper hands," continued the old man. "He

should have a pot of money waiting for him if Kelso did the right thing

by him. His mother had money too. All the Selby property came to her,

through her grandfather. Her grandfather hated Kelso, thought him a mean

dog. He was, too. Came to Madrid once when I was there. Egad, I was

ashamed of him. The Queen used to ask me about the English noble who was

always quarrelling with the cabmen about their fares. They made quite a

story of it. I didn't dare to show my face at Court for a month. I hope

he treated his grandson better than he did the jarvies."

"I don't know," answered Lord Henry. "I fancy that the boy will be well

off. He is not of age yet. He has Selby, I know. He told me so. And...

his mother was very beautiful?"

"Margaret Devereux was one of the loveliest creatures I ever saw, Harry.

What on earth induced her to behave as she did, I never could

understand. She could have married anybody she chose. Carlington was mad

after her. She was romantic, though. All the women of that family were.

The men were a poor lot, but, egad! the women were wonderful. Carlington

went on his knees to her. Told me so himself. She laughed at him, and

there wasn't a girl in London at the time who wasn't after him. And by

the way, Harry, talking about silly marriages, what is this humbug your

father tells me about Dartmoor wanting to marry an American? Ain't

English girls good enough for him?"

"It is rather fashionable to marry Americans just now, Uncle George."

"I'll back English women against the world, Harry," said Lord Fermor,

striking the table with his fist.

"The betting is on the Americans."

"They don't last, I am told," muttered his uncle.

"A long engagement exhausts them, but they are capital at a

steeplechase. They take things flying. I don't think Dartmoor has a

chance."

"Who are her people?" grumbled the old gentleman. "Has she got any?"

Lord Henry shook his head. "American girls are as clever at concealing

their parents as English women are at concealing their past," he said,

rising to go.

"They are pork-packers, I suppose?"

"I hope so, Uncle George, for Dartmoor's sake. I am told that

pork-packing is the most lucrative profession in America, after

politics."

"Is she pretty?"

"She behaves as if she was beautiful. Most American women do. It is the

secret of their charm."

"Why can't these American women stay in their own country? They are

always telling us that it is the Paradise for women."

"It is. That is the reason why, like Eve, they are so excessively

anxious to get out of it," said Lord Henry. "Good-bye, Uncle George. I

shall be late for lunch, if I stop any longer. Thanks for giving me the

information I wanted. I always like to know everything about my new

friends, and nothing about my old ones."

"Where are you lunching, Harry?"

"At Aunt Agatha's. I have asked myself and Mr. Gray. He is her latest

\_protege\_."

"Humph! tell your Aunt Agatha, Harry, not to bother me any more with her

charity appeals. I am sick of them. Why, the good woman thinks that I

have nothing to do but to write cheques for her silly fads."

"All right, Uncle George, I'll tell her, but it won't have any effect.

Philanthropic people lose all sense of humanity. It is their

distinguishing characteristic."

The old gentleman growled approvingly, and rang the bell for his

servant. Lord Henry passed up the low arcade into Burlington Street, and

turned his steps in the direction of Berkeley Square.

So that was the story of Dorian Gray's parentage. Crudely as it had been

told to him, it had yet stirred him by its suggestion of a strange,

almost modern romance. A beautiful woman risking everything for a mad

passion. A few wild weeks of happiness cut short by a hideous,

treacherous crime. Months of voiceless agony, and then a child born in

pain. The mother snatched away by death, the boy left to solitude and

the tyranny of an old and loveless man. Yes; it was an interesting

background. It posed the lad, made him more perfect as it were. Behind

every exquisite thing that existed, there was something tragic. Worlds

had to be in travail, that the meanest flower might blow.... And how

charming he had been at dinner the night before, as, with startled eyes

and lips parted in frightened pleasure, he had sat opposite to him at

the club, the red candleshades staining to a richer rose the wakening

wonder of his face. Talking to him was like playing upon an exquisite

violin. He answered to every touch and thrill of the bow.... There was

something terribly enthralling in the exercise of influence. No other

activity was like it. To project one's soul into some gracious form, and

let it tarry there for a moment; to hear one's own intellectual views

echoed back to one with all the added music of passion and youth; to

convey one's temperament into another as though it were a subtle fluid

or a strange perfume; there was a real joy in that--perhaps the most

satisfying joy left to us in an age so limited and vulgar as our own, an

age grossly carnal in its pleasures, and grossly common in its aims....

He was a marvellous type, too, this lad, whom by so curious a chance he

had met in Basil's studio; or could be fashioned into a marvellous type,

at any rate. Grace was his, and the white purity of boyhood, and beauty

such as old Greek marbles kept for us. There was nothing that one could

not do with him. He could be made a Titan or a toy. What a pity it was

that such beauty was destined to fade!... And Basil? From a

psychological point of view, how interesting he was! The new manner in

art, the fresh mode of looking at life, suggested so strangely by the

merely visible presence of one who was unconscious of it all; the silent

spirit that dwelt in dim woodland, and walked unseen in open field,

suddenly showing herself, Dryad-like and not afraid, because in his soul

who sought for her there had been wakened that wonderful vision to

which alone are wonderful things revealed; the mere shapes and patterns

of things becoming, as it were, refined, and gaining a kind of

symbolical value, as though they were themselves patterns of some other

and more perfect form whose shadow they made real: how strange it all

was! He remembered something like it in history. Was it not Plato, that

artist in thought, who had first analysed it? Was it not Buonarotti who

had carved it in the coloured marbles of a sonnet-sequence? But in our

own century it was strange.... Yes; he would try to be to Dorian Gray

what, without knowing it, the lad was to the painter who had fashioned

the wonderful portrait. He would seek to dominate him--had already,

indeed, half done so. He would make that wonderful spirit his own. There

was something fascinating in this son of Love and Death.

Suddenly he stopped, and glanced up at the houses. He found that he had

passed his aunt's some distance, and, smiling to himself, turned back.

When he entered the somewhat sombre hall the butler told him that they

had gone in to lunch. He gave one of the footmen his hat and stick, and

passed into the dining-room.

"Late as usual, Harry," cried his aunt, shaking her head at him.

He invented a facile excuse, and having taken the vacant seat next to

her, looked round to see who was there. Dorian bowed to him shyly from

the end of the table, a flush of pleasure stealing into his cheek.

Opposite was the Duchess of Harley; a lady of admirable good-nature and

good temper, much liked by everyone who knew her, and of those ample

architectural proportions that in women who are not Duchesses are

described by contemporary historians as stoutness. Next to her sat, on

her right, Sir Thomas Burdon, a Radical member of Parliament, who

followed his leader in public life, and in private life followed the

best cooks, dining with the Tories, and thinking with the Liberals, in

accordance with a wise and well-known rule. The post on her left was

occupied by Mr. Erskine of Treadley, an old gentleman of considerable

charm and culture, who had fallen, however, into bad habits of silence,

having, as he explained once to Lady Agatha, said everything that he had

to say before he was thirty. His own neighbour was Mrs. Vandeleur, one

of his aunt's oldest friends, a perfect saint amongst women, but so

dreadfully dowdy that she reminded one of a badly bound hymn-book.

Fortunately for him she had on the other side Lord Faudel, a most

intelligent middle-aged mediocrity, as bald as a Ministerial statement

in the House of Commons, with whom she was conversing in that intensely

earnest manner which is the one unpardonable error, as he remarked once

himself, that all really good people fall into, and from which none of

them ever quite escape.

"We are talking about poor Dartmoor, Lord Henry," cried the Duchess,

nodding pleasantly to him across the table. "Do you think he will really

marry this fascinating young person?"

"I believe she has made up her mind to propose to him, Duchess."

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Lady Agatha. "Really, someone should

interfere."

"I am told, on excellent authority, that her father keeps an American

dry-goods store," said Sir Thomas Burdon, looking supercilious.

"My uncle has already suggested pork-packing, Sir Thomas."

"Dry-goods! What are American dry-goods?" asked the Duchess, raising her

large hands in wonder, and accentuating the verb.

"American novels," answered Lord Henry, helping himself to some quail.

The Duchess looked puzzled.

"Don't mind him, my dear," whispered Lady Agatha. "He never means

anything that he says."

"When America was discovered," said the Radical member, and he began to

give some wearisome facts. Like all people who try to exhaust a subject,

he exhausted his listeners. The Duchess sighed, and exercised her

privilege of interruption. "I wish to goodness it never had been

discovered at all!" she exclaimed. "Really, our girls have no chance

nowadays. It is most unfair."

"Perhaps, after all, America never has been discovered," said Mr.

Erskine. "I myself would say that it had merely been detected."

"Oh! but I have seen specimens of the inhabitants," answered the

Duchess, vaguely. "I must confess that most of them are extremely

pretty. And they dress well, too. They get all their dresses in Paris. I

wish I could afford to do the same."

"They say that when good Americans die they go to Paris," chuckled Sir

Thomas, who had a large wardrobe of Humour's cast-off clothes.

"Really! And where do bad Americans go to when they die?" inquired the

Duchess.

"They go to America," murmured Lord Henry.

Sir Thomas frowned. "I am afraid that your nephew is prejudiced against

that great country," he said to Lady Agatha. "I have travelled all over

it, in cars provided by the directors, who, in such matters, are

extremely civil. I assure you that it is an education to visit it."

"But must we really see Chicago in order to be educated?" asked Mr.

Erskine, plaintively. "I don't feel up to the journey."

Sir Thomas waved his hand. "Mr. Erskine of Treadley has the world on his

shelves. We practical men like to see things, not to read about them.

The Americans are an extremely interesting people. They are absolutely

reasonable. I think that is their distinguishing characteristic. Yes,

Mr. Erskine, an absolutely reasonable people. I assure you there is no

nonsense about the Americans."

"How dreadful!" cried Lord Henry. "I can stand brute force, but brute

reason is quite unbearable. There is something unfair about its use. It

is hitting below the intellect."

"I do not understand you," said Sir Thomas, growing rather red.

"I do, Lord Henry," murmured Mr. Erskine, with a smile.

"Paradoxes are all very well in their way...." rejoined the Baronet.

"Was that a paradox?" asked Mr. Erskine. "I did not think so. Perhaps it

was. Well, the way of paradoxes is the way of truth. To test Reality we

must see it on the tight-rope. When the Verities become acrobats we can

judge them."

"Dear me!" said Lady Agatha, "how you men argue! I am sure I never can

make out what you are talking about. Oh! Harry, I am quite vexed with

you. Why do you try to persuade our nice Mr. Dorian Gray to give up the

East End? I assure you he would be quite invaluable. They would love his

playing."

"I want him to play to me," cried Lord Henry, smiling, and he looked

down the table and caught a bright answering glance.

"But they are so unhappy in Whitechapel," continued Lady Agatha.

"I can sympathise with everything, except suffering," said Lord Henry,

shrugging his shoulders. "I cannot sympathise with that. It is too ugly,

too horrible, too distressing. There is something terribly morbid in the

modern sympathy with pain. One should sympathise with the colour, the

beauty, the joy of life. The less said about life's sores the better."

"Still, the East End is a very important problem," remarked Sir Thomas,

with a grave shake of the head.

"Quite so," answered the young lord. "It is the problem of slavery, and

we try to solve it by amusing the slaves."

The politician looked at him keenly. "What change do you propose, then?"

he asked.

Lord Henry laughed. "I don't desire to change anything in England except

the weather," he answered. "I am quite content with philosophic

contemplation. But, as the nineteenth century has gone bankrupt through

an over-expenditure of sympathy, I would suggest that we should appeal

to Science to put us straight. The advantage of the emotions is that

they lead us astray, and the advantage of Science is that it is not

emotional."

"But we have such grave responsibilities," ventured Mrs. Vandeleur,

timidly.

"Terribly grave," echoed Lady Agatha.

Lord Henry looked over at Mr. Erskine. "Humanity takes itself too

seriously. It is the world's original sin. If the caveman had known how

to laugh, History would have been different."

"You are really very comforting," warbled the Duchess. "I have always

felt rather guilty when I came to see your dear aunt, for I take no

interest at all in the East End. For the future I shall be able to look

her in the face without a blush."

"A blush is very becoming, Duchess," remarked Lord Henry.

"Only when one is young," she answered. "When an old woman like myself

blushes, it is a very bad sign. Ah! Lord Henry, I wish you would tell me

how to become young again."

He thought for a moment. "Can you remember any great error that you

committed in your early days, Duchess?" he asked, looking at her across

the table.

"A great many, I fear," she cried.

"Then commit them over again," he said, gravely. "To get back one's

youth, one has merely to repeat one's follies."

"A delightful theory!" she exclaimed. "I must put it into practice."

"A dangerous theory!" came from Sir Thomas's tight lips. Lady Agatha

shook her head, but could not help being amused. Mr. Erskine listened.

"Yes," he continued, "that is one of the great secrets of life. Nowadays

most people die of a sort of creeping common sense, and discover when it

is too late that the only things one never regrets are one's mistakes."

A laugh ran round the table.

He played with the idea, and grew wilful; tossed it into the air and

transformed it; let it escape and recaptured it; made it iridescent with

fancy, and winged it with paradox. The praise of folly, as he went on,

soared into a philosophy, and Philosophy herself became young, and

catching the mad music of Pleasure, wearing, one might fancy, her

wine-stained robe and wreath of ivy, danced like a Bacchante over the

hills of life, and mocked the slow Silenus for being sober. Facts fled

before her like frightened forest things. Her white feet trod the huge

press at which wise Omar sits, till the seething grape-juice rose round

her bare limbs in waves of purple bubbles, or crawled in red foam over

the vat's black, dripping, sloping sides. It was an extraordinary

improvisation. He felt that the eyes of Dorian Gray were fixed on him,

and the consciousness that amongst his audience there was one whose

temperament he wished to fascinate, seemed to give his wit keenness, and

to lend colour to his imagination. He was brilliant, fantastic,

irresponsible. He charmed his listeners out of themselves, and they

followed his pipe laughing. Dorian Gray never took his gaze off him, but

sat like one under a spell, smiles chasing each other over his lips, and

wonder growing grave in his darkening eyes.

At last, liveried in the costume of the age, Reality entered the room in

the shape of a servant to tell the Duchess that her carriage was

waiting. She wrung her hands in mock despair. "How annoying!" she cried.

"I must go. I have to call for my husband at the club, to take him to

some absurd meeting at Willis's Rooms, where he is going to be in the

chair. If I am late, he is sure to be furious, and I couldn't have a

scene in this bonnet. It is far too fragile. A harsh word would ruin it.

No, I must go, dear Agatha. Good-bye, Lord Henry, you are quite

delightful, and dreadfully demoralising. I am sure I don't know what to

say about your views. You must come and dine with us some night.

Tuesday? Are you disengaged Tuesday?"

"For you I would throw over anybody, Duchess," said Lord Henry, with a

bow.

"Ah! that is very nice, and very wrong of you," she cried; "so mind you

come;" and she swept out of the room, followed by Lady Agatha and the

other ladies.

When Lord Henry had sat down again, Mr. Erskine moved round, and taking

a chair close to him, placed his hand upon his arm.

"You talk books away," he said; "why don't you write one?"

"I am too fond of reading books to care to write them, Mr. Erskine. I

should like to write a novel certainly; a novel that would be as lovely

as a Persian carpet, and as unreal. But there is no literary public in

England for anything except newspapers, primers, and encyclop?dias. Of

all people in the world the English have the least sense of the beauty

of literature."

"I fear you are right," answered Mr. Erskine. "I myself used to have

literary ambitions, but I gave them up long ago. And now, my dear young

friend, if you will allow me to call you so, may I ask if you really

meant all that you said to us at lunch?"

"I quite forget what I said," smiled Lord Henry. "Was it all very bad?"

"Very bad indeed. In fact I consider you extremely dangerous, and if

anything happens to our good Duchess we shall all look on you as being

primarily responsible. But I should like to talk to you about life. The

generation into which I was born was tedious. Some day, when you are

tired of London, come down to Treadley, and expound to me your

philosophy of pleasure over some admirable Burgundy I am fortunate

enough to possess."

"I shall be charmed. A visit to Treadley would be a great privilege. It

has a perfect host, and a perfect library."

"You will complete it," answered the old gentleman, with a courteous

bow. "And now I must bid good-bye to your excellent aunt. I am due at

the Athen?um. It is the hour when we sleep there."

"All of you, Mr. Erskine?"

"Forty of us, in forty arm-chairs. We are practising for an English

Academy of Letters."

Lord Henry laughed, and rose. "I am going to the Park," he cried.

As he was passing out of the door Dorian Gray touched him on the arm.

"Let me come with you," he murmured.

"But I thought you had promised Basil Hallward to go and see him,"

answered Lord Henry.

"I would sooner come with you; yes, I feel I must come with you. Do let

me. And you will promise to talk to me all the time? No one talks so

wonderfully as you do."

"Ah! I have talked quite enough for to-day," said Lord Henry, smiling.

"All I want now is to look at life. You may come and look at it with me,

if you care to."

CHAPTER IV

One afternoon, a month later, Dorian Gray was reclining in a luxurious

arm-chair, in the little library of Lord Henry's house in Mayfair. It

was, in its way, a very charming room, with its high-panelled

wainscoting of olive-stained oak, its cream-coloured frieze and ceiling

of raised plaster-work, and its brickdust felt carpet strewn with silk

long-fringed Persian rugs. On a tiny satinwood table stood a statuette

by Clodion, and beside it lay a copy of "\_Les Cent Nouvelles\_," bound

for Margaret of Valois by Clovis Eve, and powdered with the gilt daisies

that Queen had selected for her device. Some large blue china jars and

parrot-tulips were ranged on the mantel-shelf, and through the small

leaded panels of the window streamed the apricot-coloured light of a

summer day in London.

Lord Henry had not yet come in. He was always late on principle, his

principle being that punctuality is the thief of time. So the lad was

looking rather sulky, as with listless fingers he turned over the pages

of an elaborately-illustrated edition of "\_Manon Lescaut\_" that he had

found in one of the bookcases. The formal monotonous ticking of the

Louis Quatorze clock annoyed him. Once or twice he thought of going

away.

At last he heard a step outside, and the door opened. "How late you are,

Harry!" he murmured.

"I am afraid it is not Harry, Mr. Gray," answered a shrill voice.

He glanced quickly round, and rose to his feet. "I beg your pardon. I

thought----"

"You thought it was my husband. It is only his wife. You must let me

introduce myself. I know you quite well by your photographs. I think my

husband has got seventeen of them."

"Not seventeen, Lady Henry?"

"Well, eighteen, then. And I saw you with him the other night at the

Opera." She laughed nervously as she spoke, and watched him with her

vague forget-me-not eyes. She was a curious woman, whose dresses always

looked as if they had been designed in a rage and put on in a tempest.

She was usually in love with somebody, and, as her passion was never

returned, she had kept all her illusions. She tried to look picturesque,

but only succeeded in being untidy. Her name was Victoria, and she had a

perfect mania for going to church.

"That was at 'Lohengrin,' Lady Henry, I think?"

"Yes; it was at dear 'Lohengrin.' I like Wagner's music better than

anybody's. It is so loud that one can talk the whole time without other

people hearing what one says. That is a great advantage: don't you think

so, Mr. Gray?"

The same nervous staccato laugh broke from her thin lips, and her

fingers began to play with a long tortoise-shell paper-knife.

Dorian smiled, and shook his head: "I am afraid I don't think so, Lady

Henry. I never talk during music, at least, during good music. If one

hears bad music, it is one's duty to drown it in conversation."

"Ah! that is one of Harry's views, isn't it, Mr. Gray? I always hear

Harry's views from his friends. It is the only way I get to know of

them. But you must not think I don't like good music. I adore it, but I

am afraid of it. It makes me too romantic. I have simply worshipped

pianists--two at a time, sometimes, Harry tells me. I don't know what it

is about them. Perhaps it is that they are foreigners. They all are,

ain't they? Even those that are born in England become foreigners after

a time, don't they? It is so clever of them, and such a compliment to

art. Makes it quite cosmopolitan, doesn't it? You have never been to any

of my parties, have you, Mr. Gray? You must come. I can't afford

orchids, but I spare no expense in foreigners. They make one's rooms

look so picturesque. But here is Harry!--Harry, I came in to look for

you, to ask you something--I forget what it was--and I found Mr. Gray

here. We have had such a pleasant chat about music. We have quite the

same ideas. No; I think our ideas are quite different. But he has been

most pleasant. I am so glad I've seen him."

"I am charmed, my love, quite charmed," said Lord Henry, elevating his

dark crescent-shaped eyebrows and looking at them both with an amused

smile. "So sorry I am late, Dorian. I went to look after a piece of old

brocade in Wardour Street, and had to bargain for hours for it. Nowadays

people know the price of everything, and the value of nothing."

"I am afraid I must be going," exclaimed Lady Henry, breaking an awkward

silence with her silly sudden laugh. "I have promised to drive with the

Duchess. Good-bye, Mr. Gray. Good-bye, Harry. You are dining out, I

suppose? So am I. Perhaps I shall see you at Lady Thornbury's."

"I daresay, my dear," said Lord Henry, shutting the door behind her, as,

looking like a bird of paradise that had been out all night in the rain,

she flitted out of the room, leaving a faint odour of frangipanni. Then

he lit a cigarette, and flung himself down on the sofa.

"Never marry a woman with straw-coloured hair, Dorian," he said, after a

few puffs.

"Why, Harry?"

"Because they are so sentimental."

"But I like sentimental people."

"Never marry at all, Dorian. Men marry because they are tired; women,

because they are curious; both are disappointed."

"I don't think I am likely to marry, Henry. I am too much in love. That

is one of your aphorisms. I am putting it into practice, as I do

everything that you say."

"Who are you in love with?" asked Lord Henry, after a pause.

"With an actress," said Dorian Gray, blushing.

Lord Henry shrugged his shoulders. "That is a rather commonplace

\_debut\_."

"You would not say so if you saw her, Harry."

"Who is she?"

"Her name is Sibyl Vane."

"Never heard of her."

"No one has. People will some day, however. She is a genius."

"My dear boy, no woman is a genius. Women are a decorative sex. They

never have anything to say, but they say it charmingly. Women represent

the triumph of matter over mind, just as men represent the triumph of

mind over morals."

"Harry, how can you?"

"My dear Dorian, it is quite true. I am analysing women at the present,

so I ought to know. The subject is not so abstruse as I thought it was.

I find that, ultimately, there are only two kinds of women, the plain

and the coloured. The plain women are very useful. If you want to gain a

reputation for respectability, you have merely to take them down to

supper. The other women are very charming. They commit one mistake,

however. They paint in order to try and look young. Our grandmothers

painted in order to try and talk brilliantly. \_Rouge\_ and \_esprit\_ used

to go together. That is all over now. As long as a woman can look ten

years younger than her own daughter, she is perfectly satisfied. As for

conversation, there are only five women in London worth talking to, and

two of these can't be admitted into decent society. However, tell me

about your genius. How long have you known her?"

"Ah! Harry, your views terrify me."

"Never mind that. How long have you known her?"

"About three weeks."

"And where did you come across her?"

"I will tell you, Harry; but you mustn't be unsympathetic about it.

After all, it never would have happened if I had not met you. You filled

me with a wild desire to know everything about life. For days after I

met you, something seemed to throb in my veins. As I lounged in the

Park, or strolled down Piccadilly, I used to look at every one who

passed me, and wonder, with a mad curiosity, what sort of lives they

led. Some of them fascinated me. Others filled me with terror. There was

an exquisite poison in the air. I had a passion for sensations.... Well,

one evening about seven o'clock, I determined to go out in search of

some adventure. I felt that this grey, monstrous London of ours, with

its myriads of people, its sordid sinners, and its splendid sins, as you

once phrased it, must have something in store for me. I fancied a

thousand things. The mere danger gave me a sense of delight. I

remembered what you had said to me on that wonderful evening when we

first dined together, about the search for beauty being the real secret

of life. I don't know what I expected, but I went out and wandered

eastward, soon losing my way in a labyrinth of grimy streets and black,

grassless squares. About half-past eight I passed by an absurd little

theatre, with great flaring gas-jets and gaudy play-bills. A hideous

Jew, in the most amazing waistcoat I ever beheld in my life, was

standing at the entrance, smoking a vile cigar. He had greasy ringlets,

and an enormous diamond blazed in the centre of a soiled shirt. 'Have a

box, my Lord?' he said, when he saw me, and he took off his hat with an

air of gorgeous servility. There was something about him, Harry, that

amused me. He was such a monster. You will laugh at me, I know, but I

really went in and paid a whole guinea for the stage-box. To the

present day I can't make out why I did so; and yet if I hadn't--my dear

Harry, if I hadn't, I should have missed the greatest romance of my

life. I see you are laughing. It is horrid of you!"

"I am not laughing, Dorian; at least I am not laughing at you. But you

should not say the greatest romance of your life. You should say the

first romance of your life. You will always be loved, and you will

always be in love with love. A \_grande passion\_ is the privilege of

people who have nothing to do. That is the one use of the idle classes

of a country. Don't be afraid. There are exquisite things in store for

you. This is merely the beginning."

"Do you think my nature so shallow?" cried Dorian Gray, angrily.

"No; I think your nature so deep."

"How do you mean?"

"My dear boy, the people who love only once in their lives are really

the shallow people. What they call their loyalty, and their fidelity, I

call either the lethargy of custom or their lack of imagination.

Faithfulness is to the emotional life what consistency is to the life of

the intellect--simply a confession of failures. Faithfulness! I must

analyse it some day. The passion for property is in it. There are many

things that we would throw away if we were not afraid that others might

pick them up. But I don't want to interrupt you. Go on with your story."

"Well, I found myself seated in a horrid little private box, with a

vulgar drop-scene staring me in the face. I looked out from behind the

curtain, and surveyed the house. It was a tawdry affair, all Cupids and

cornucopias, like a third-rate wedding cake. The gallery and pit were

fairy full, but the two rows of dingy stalls were quite empty, and there

was hardly a person in what I suppose they called the dress-circle.

Women went about with oranges and ginger-beer, and there was a terrible

consumption of nuts going on."

"It must have been just like the palmy days of the British Drama."

"Just like, I should fancy, and very depressing. I began to wonder what

on earth I should do, when I caught sight of the play-bill. What do you

think the play was, Harry?"

"I should think 'The Idiot Boy, or Dumb but Innocent.' Our fathers used

to like that sort of piece, I believe. The longer I live, Dorian, the

more keenly I feel that whatever was good enough for our fathers is not

good enough for us. In art, as in politics, \_les grandperes ont toujours

tort\_."

"This play was good enough for us, Harry. It was 'Romeo and Juliet.' I

must admit that I was rather annoyed at the idea of seeing Shakespeare

done in such a wretched hole of a place. Still, I felt interested, in a

sort of way. At any rate, I determined to wait for the first act. There

was a dreadful orchestra, presided over by a young Hebrew who sat at a

cracked piano, that nearly drove me away, but at last the drop-scene was

drawn up, and the play began. Romeo was a stout elderly gentleman, with

corked eyebrows, a husky tragedy voice, and a figure like a beer-barrel.

Mercutio was almost as bad. He was played by the low-comedian, who had

introduced gags of his own and was on most friendly terms with the pit.

They were both as grotesque as the scenery, and that looked as if it had

come out of a country-booth. But Juliet! Harry, imagine a girl, hardly

seventeen years of age, with a little flower-like face, a small Greek

head with plaited coils of dark-brown hair, eyes that were violet wells

of passion, lips that were like the petals of a rose. She was the

loveliest thing I had ever seen in my life. You said to me once that

pathos left you unmoved, but that beauty, mere beauty, could fill your

eyes with tears. I tell you, Harry, I could hardly see this girl for the

mist of tears that came across me. And her voice--I never heard such a

voice. It was very low at first, with deep mellow notes, that seemed to

fall singly upon one's ear. Then it became a little louder, and sounded

like a flute or a distant hautbois. In the garden-scene it had all the

tremulous ecstasy that one hears just before dawn when nightingales are

singing. There were moments, later on, when it had the wild passion of

violins. You know how a voice can stir one. Your voice and the voice of

Sibyl Vane are two things that I shall never forget. When I close my

eyes, I hear them, and each of them says something different. I don't

know which to follow. Why should I not love her? Harry, I do love her.

She is everything to me in life. Night after night I go to see her play.

One evening she is Rosalind, and the next evening she is Imogen. I have

seen her die in the gloom of an Italian tomb, sucking the poison from

her lover's lips. I have watched her wandering through the forest of

Arden, disguised as a pretty boy in hose and doublet and dainty cap. She

has been mad, and has come into the presence of a guilty king, and given

him rue to wear, and bitter herbs to taste of. She has been innocent,

and the black hands of jealousy have crushed her reed-like throat. I

have seen her in every age and in every costume. Ordinary women never

appeal to one's imagination. They are limited to their century. No

glamour ever transfigures them. One knows their minds as easily as one

knows their bonnets. One can always find them. There is no mystery in

any of them. They ride in the Park in the morning, and chatter at

tea-parties in the afternoon. They have their stereotyped smile, and

their fashionable manner. They are quite obvious. But an actress! How

different an actress is! Harry! why didn't you tell me that the only

thing worth loving is an actress?"

"Because I have loved so many of them, Dorian."

"Oh, yes, horrid people with dyed hair and painted faces."

"Don't run down dyed hair and painted faces. There is an extraordinary

charm in them, sometimes," said Lord Henry.

"I wish now I had not told you about Sibyl Vane."

"You could not have helped telling me, Dorian. All through your life you

will tell me everything you do."

"Yes, Harry, I believe that is true. I cannot help telling you things.

You have a curious influence over me. If I ever did a crime, I would

come and confess it to you. You would understand me."

"People like you--the wilful sunbeams of life--don't commit crimes,

Dorian. But I am much obliged for the compliment, all the same. And now

tell me--reach me the matches, like a good boy: thanks:--what are your

actual relations with Sibyl Vane?"

Dorian Gray leaped to his feet, with flushed cheeks and burning eyes.

"Harry! Sibyl Vane is sacred!"

"It is only the sacred things that are worth touching, Dorian," said

Lord Henry, with a strange touch of pathos in his voice. "But why should

you be annoyed? I suppose she will belong to you some day. When one is

in love, one always begins by deceiving one's self, and one always ends

by deceiving others. That is what the world calls a romance. You know

her, at any rate, I suppose?"

"Of course I know her. On the first night I was at the theatre, the

horrid old Jew came round to the box after the performance was over, and

offered to take me behind the scenes and introduce me to her. I was

furious with him, and told him that Juliet had been dead for hundreds of

years, and that her body was lying in a marble tomb in Verona. I think,

from his blank look of amazement, that he was under the impression that

I had taken too much champagne, or something."

"I am not surprised."

"Then he asked me if I wrote for any of the newspapers. I told him I

never even read them. He seemed terribly disappointed at that, and

confided to me that all the dramatic critics were in a conspiracy

against him, and that they were every one of them to be bought."

"I should not wonder if he was quite right there. But, on the other

hand, judging from their appearance, most of them cannot be at all

expensive."

"Well, he seemed to think they were beyond his means," laughed Dorian.

"By this time, however, the lights were being put out in the theatre,

and I had to go. He wanted me to try some cigars that he strongly

recommended. I declined. The next night, of course, I arrived at the

place again. When he saw me he made me a low bow, and assured me that I

was a munificent patron of art. He was a most offensive brute, though he

had an extraordinary passion for Shakespeare. He told me once, with an

air of pride, that his five bankruptcies were entirely due to 'The

Bard,' as he insisted on calling him. He seemed to think it a

distinction."

"It was a distinction, my dear Dorian--a great distinction. Most people

become bankrupt through having invested too heavily in the prose of

life. To have ruined one's self over poetry is an honour. But when did

you first speak to Miss Sibyl Vane?"

"The third night. She had been playing Rosalind. I could not help going

round. I had thrown her some flowers, and she had looked at me; at least

I fancied that she had. The old Jew was persistent. He seemed determined

to take me behind, so I consented. It was curious my not wanting to know

her, wasn't it?"

"No; I don't think so."

"My dear Harry, why?"

"I will tell you some other time. Now I want to know about the girl."

"Sibyl? Oh, she was so shy, and so gentle. There is something of a child

about her. Her eyes opened wide in exquisite wonder when I told her what

I thought of her performance, and she seemed quite unconscious of her

power. I think we were both rather nervous. The old Jew stood grinning

at the doorway of the dusty greenroom, making elaborate speeches about

us both, while we stood looking at each other like children. He would

insist on calling me 'My Lord,' so I had to assure Sibyl that I was not

anything of the kind. She said quite simply to me, 'You look more like a

prince. I must call you Prince Charming.'"

"Upon my word, Dorian, Miss Sibyl knows how to pay compliments."

"You don't understand her, Harry. She regarded me merely as a person in

a play. She knows nothing of life. She lives with her mother, a faded

tired woman who played Lady Capulet in a sort of magenta

dressing-wrapper on the first night, and looks as if she had seen better

days."

"I know that look. It depresses me," murmured Lord Henry, examining his

rings.

"The Jew wanted to tell me her history, but I said it did not interest

me."

"You were quite right. There is always something infinitely mean about

other people's tragedies."

"Sibyl is the only thing I care about. What is it to me where she came

from? From her little head to her little feet, she is absolutely and

entirely divine. Every night of my life I go to see her act, and every

night she is more marvellous."

"That is the reason, I suppose, that you never dine with me now. I

thought you must have some curious romance on hand. You have; but it is

not quite what I expected."

"My dear Harry, we either lunch or sup together every day, and I have

been to the Opera with you several times," said Dorian, opening his blue

eyes in wonder.

"You always come dreadfully late."

"Well, I can't help going to see Sibyl play," he cried, "even if it is

only for a single act. I get hungry for her presence; and when I think

of the wonderful soul that is hidden away in that little ivory body, I

am filled with awe."

"You can dine with me to-night, Dorian, can't you?"

He shook his head. "To-night she is Imogen," he answered, "and to-morrow

night she will be Juliet."

"When is she Sibyl Vane?"

"Never."

"I congratulate you."

"How horrid you are! She is all the great heroines of the world in one.

She is more than an individual. You laugh, but I tell you she has

genius. I love her, and I must make her love me. You, who know all the

secrets of life, tell me how to charm Sibyl Vane to love me! I want to

make Romeo jealous. I want the dead lovers of the world to hear our

laughter, and grow sad. I want a breath of our passion to stir their

dust into consciousness, to wake their ashes into pain. My God, Harry,

how I worship her!" He was walking up and down the room as he spoke.

Hectic spots of red burned on his cheeks. He was terribly excited.

Lord Henry watched him with a subtle sense of pleasure. How different he

was now from the shy, frightened boy he had met in Basil Hallward's

studio! His nature had developed like a flower, had borne blossoms of

scarlet flame. Out of its secret hiding-place had crept his Soul, and

Desire had come to meet it on the way.

"And what do you propose to do?" said Lord Henry, at last.

"I want you and Basil to come with me some night and see her act. I have

not the slightest fear of the result. You are certain to acknowledge her

genius. Then we must get her out of the Jew's hands. She is bound to him

for three years--at least for two years and eight months--from the

present time. I shall have to pay him something, of course. When all

that is settled, I shall take a West End theatre and bring her out

properly. She will make the world as mad as she has made me."

"That would be impossible, my dear boy?"

"Yes, she will. She has not merely art, consummate art-instinct, in her,

but she has personality also; and you have often told me that it is

personalities, not principles, that move the age."

"Well, what night shall we go?"

"Let me see. To-day is Tuesday. Let us fix to-morrow. She plays Juliet

to-morrow."

"All right. The Bristol at eight o'clock; and I will get Basil."

"Not eight, Harry, please. Half-past six. We must be there before the

curtain rises. You must see her in the first act, where she meets

Romeo."

"Half-past six! What an hour! It will be like having a meat-tea, or

reading an English novel. It must be seven. No gentleman dines before

seven. Shall you see Basil between this and then? Or shall I write to

him?"

"Dear Basil! I have not laid eyes on him for a week. It is rather horrid

of me, as he has sent me my portrait in the most wonderful frame,

specially designed by himself, and, though I am a little jealous of the

picture for being a whole month younger than I am, I must admit that I

delight in it. Perhaps you had better write to him. I don't want to see

him alone. He says things that annoy me. He gives me good advice."

Lord Henry smiled. "People are very fond of giving away what they need

most themselves. It is what I call the depth of generosity."

"Oh, Basil is the best of fellows, but he seems to me to be just a bit

of a Philistine. Since I have known you, Harry, I have discovered that."

"Basil, my dear boy, puts everything that is charming in him into his

work. The consequence is that he has nothing left for life but his

prejudices, his principles, and his common-sense. The only artists I

have ever known, who are personally delightful, are bad artists. Good

artists exist simply in what they make, and consequently are perfectly

uninteresting in what they are. A great poet, a really great poet, is

the most unpoetical of all creatures. But inferior poets are absolutely

fascinating. The worse their rhymes are, the more picturesque they look.

The mere fact of having published a book of second-rate sonnets makes a

man quite irresistible. He lives the poetry that he cannot write. The

others write the poetry that they dare not realise."

"I wonder is that really so, Harry?" said Dorian Gray, putting some

perfume on his handkerchief out of a large gold-topped bottle that stood

on the table. "It must be, if you say it. And now I am off. Imogen is

waiting for me. Don't forget about to-morrow. Good-bye."

As he left the room, Lord Henry's heavy eyelids drooped, and he began to

think. Certainly few people had ever interested him so much as Dorian

Gray, and yet the lad's mad adoration of some one else caused him not

the slightest pang of annoyance or jealousy. He was pleased by it. It

made him a more interesting study. He had been always enthralled by the

methods of natural science, but the ordinary subject-matter of that

science had seemed to him trivial and of no import. And so he had begun

by vivisecting himself, as he had ended by vivisecting others. Human

life--that appeared to him the one thing worth investigating. Compared

to it there was nothing else of any value. It was true that as one

watched life in its curious crucible of pain and pleasure, one could not

wear over one's face a mask of glass, nor keep the sulphurous fumes from

troubling the brain, and making the imagination turbid with monstrous

fancies and misshapen dreams. There were poisons so subtle that to know

their properties one had to sicken of them. There were maladies so

strange that one had to pass through them if one sought to understand

their nature. And, yet, what a great reward one received! How wonderful

the whole world became to one! To note the curious hard logic of

passion, and the emotional coloured life of the intellect--to observe

where they met, and where they separated, at what point they were in

unison, and at what point they were at discord--there was a delight in

that! What matter what the cost was? One could never pay too high a

price for any sensation.

He was conscious--and the thought brought a gleam of pleasure into his

brown agate eyes--that it was through certain words of his, musical

words said with musical utterance, that Dorian Gray's soul had turned to

this white girl and bowed in worship before her. To a large extent the

lad was his own creation. He had made him premature. That was something.

Ordinary people waited till life disclosed to them its secrets, but to

the few, to the elect, the mysteries of life were revealed before the

veil was drawn away. Sometimes this was the effect of art, and chiefly

of the art of literature, which dealt immediately with the passions and

the intellect. But now and then a complex personality took the place and

assumed the office of art; was indeed, in its way, a real work of art,

Life having its elaborate masterpieces, just as poetry has, or

sculpture, or painting.

Yes, the lad was premature. He was gathering his harvest while it was

yet spring. The pulse and passion of youth were in him, but he was

becoming self-conscious. It was delightful to watch him. With his

beautiful face, and his beautiful soul, he was a thing to wonder at. It

was no matter how it all ended, or was destined to end. He was like one

of those gracious figures in a pageant or a play, whose joys seem to be

remote from one, but whose sorrows stir one's sense of beauty, and whose

wounds are like red roses.

Soul and body, body and soul--how mysterious they were! There was

animalism in the soul, and the body had its moments of spirituality.

The senses could refine, and the intellect could degrade. Who could say

where the fleshly impulse ceased, or the physical impulse began? How

shallow were the arbitrary definitions of ordinary psychologists! And

yet how difficult to decide between the claims of the various schools!

Was the soul a shadow seated in the house of sin? Or was the body really

in the soul, as Giordano Bruno thought? The separation of spirit from

matter was a mystery, and the union of spirit with matter was a mystery

also.

He began to wonder whether we could ever make psychology so absolute a

science that each little spring of life would be revealed to us. As it

was, we always misunderstood ourselves, and rarely understood others.

Experience was of no ethical value. It was merely the name men gave to

their mistakes. Moralists had, as a rule, regarded it as a mode of

warning, had claimed for it a certain ethical efficacy in the formation

of character, had praised it as something that taught us what to follow

and showed us what to avoid. But there was no motive power in

experience. It was as little of an active cause as conscience itself.

All that it really demonstrated was that our future would be the same as

our past, and that the sin we had done once, and with loathing, we would

do many times, and with joy.

It was clear to him that the experimental method was the only method by

which one could arrive at any scientific analysis of the passions; and

certainly Dorian Gray was a subject made to his hand, and seemed to

promise rich and fruitful results. His sudden mad love for Sibyl Vane

was a psychological phenomenon of no small interest. There was no doubt

that curiosity had much to do with it, curiosity and the desire for new

experiences; yet it was not a simple but rather a very complex passion.

What there was in it of the purely sensuous instinct of boyhood had been

transformed by the workings of the imagination, changed into something

that seemed to the lad himself to be remote from sense, and was for

that very reason all the more dangerous. It was the passions about whose

origin we deceived ourselves that tyrannised most strongly over us. Our

weakest motives were those of whose nature we were conscious. It often

happened that when we thought we were experimenting on others we were

really experimenting on ourselves.

While Lord Henry sat dreaming on these things, a knock came to the door,

and his valet entered, and reminded him it was time to dress for dinner.

He got up and looked out into the street. The sunset had smitten into

scarlet gold the upper windows of the houses opposite. The panes glowed

like plates of heated metal. The sky above was like a faded rose. He

thought of his friend's young fiery-coloured life, and wondered how it

was all going to end.

When he arrived home, about half-past twelve o'clock, he saw a telegram

lying on the hall table. He opened it, and found it was from Dorian

Gray. It was to tell him that he was engaged to be married to Sibyl

Vane.

CHAPTER V

"Mother, mother, I am so happy!" whispered the girl, burying her face in

the lap of the faded, tired-looking woman who, with back turned to the

shrill intrusive light, was sitting in the one arm-chair that their

dingy sitting-room contained. "I am so happy!" she repeated, "and you

must be happy too!"

Mrs. Vane winced, and put her thin bismuth-whitened hands on her

daughter's head. "Happy!" she echoed, "I am only happy, Sibyl, when I

see you act. You must not think of anything but your acting. Mr. Isaacs

has been very good to us, and we owe him money."

The girl looked up and pouted. "Money, mother?" she cried, "what does

money matter? Love is more than money."

"Mr. Isaacs has advanced us fifty pounds to pay off our debts, and to

get a proper outfit for James. You must not forget that, Sibyl. Fifty

pounds is a very large sum. Mr. Isaacs has been most considerate."

"He is not a gentleman, mother, and I hate the way he talks to me," said

the girl, rising to her feet, and going over to the window.

"I don't know how we could manage without him," answered the elder

woman, querulously.

Sibyl Vane tossed her head and laughed. "We don't want him any more,

mother. Prince Charming rules life for us now." Then she paused. A rose

shook in her blood, and shadowed her cheeks. Quick breath parted the

petals of her lips. They trembled. Some southern wind of passion swept

over her, and stirred the dainty folds of her dress. "I love him," she

said, simply.

"Foolish child! foolish child!" was the parrot-phrase flung in answer.

The waving of crooked, false-jewelled fingers gave grotesqueness to the

words.

The girl laughed again. The joy of a caged bird was in her voice. Her

eyes caught the melody, and echoed it in radiance; then closed for a

moment, as though to hide their secret. When they opened, the mist of a

dream had passed across them.

Thin-lipped wisdom spoke at her from the worn chair, hinted at prudence,

quoted from that book of cowardice whose author apes the name of common

sense. She did not listen. She was free in her prison of passion. Her

prince, Prince Charming, was with her. She had called on Memory to

remake him. She had sent her soul to search for him, and it had brought

him back. His kiss burned again upon her mouth. Her eyelids were warm

with his breath.

Then Wisdom altered its method and spoke of espial and discovery. This

young man might be rich. If so, marriage should be thought of. Against

the shell of her ear broke the waves of worldly cunning. The arrows of

craft shot by her. She saw the thin lips moving, and smiled.

Suddenly she felt the need to speak. The wordy silence troubled her.

"Mother, mother," she cried, "why does he love me so much? I know why I

love him. I love him because he is like what Love himself should be. But

what does he see in me? I am not worthy of him. And yet--why, I cannot

tell--though I feel so much beneath him, I don't feel humble. I feel

proud, terribly proud. Mother, did you love my father as I love Prince

Charming?"

The elder woman grew pale beneath the coarse powder that daubed her

cheeks, and her dry lips twitched with a spasm of pain. Sibyl rushed to

her, flung her arms round her neck, and kissed her. "Forgive me, mother.

I know it pains you to talk about our father. But it only pains you

because you loved him so much. Don't look so sad. I am as happy to-day

as you were twenty years ago. Ah! let me be happy for ever!"

"My child, you are far too young to think of falling in love. Besides,

what do you know of this young man? You don't even know his name. The

whole thing is most inconvenient, and really, when James is going away

to Australia, and I have so much to think of, I must say that you should

have shown more consideration. However, as I said before, if he is

rich...."

"Ah! Mother, mother, let me be happy!"

Mrs. Vane glanced at her, and with one of those false theatrical

gestures that so often become a mode of second nature to a stage-player,

clasped her in her arms. At this moment the door opened, and a young lad

with rough brown hair came into the room. He was thick-set of figure,

and his hands and feet were large, and somewhat clumsy in movement. He

was not so finely bred as his sister. One would hardly have guessed the

close relationship that existed between them. Mrs. Vane fixed her eyes

on him, and intensified the smile. She mentally elevated her son to the

dignity of an audience. She felt sure that the \_tableau\_ was

interesting.

"You might keep some of your kisses for me, Sibyl, I think," said the

lad, with a good-natured grumble.

"Ah! but you don't like being kissed, Jim," she cried. "You are a

dreadful old bear." And she ran across the room and hugged him.

James Vane looked into his sister's face with tenderness. "I want you to

come out with me for a walk, Sibyl. I don't suppose I shall ever see

this horrid London again. I am sure I don't want to."

"My son, don't say such dreadful things," murmured Mrs. Vane, taking up

a tawdry theatrical dress, with a sigh, and beginning to patch it. She

felt a little disappointed that he had not joined the group. It would

have increased the theatrical picturesqueness of the situation.

"Why not, mother? I mean it."

"You pain me, my son. I trust you will return from Australia in a

position of affluence. I believe there is no society of any kind in the

Colonies, nothing that I would call society; so when you have made your

fortune you must come back and assert yourself in London."

"Society!" muttered the lad. "I don't want to know anything about that.

I should like to make some money to take you and Sibyl off the stage. I

hate it."

"Oh, Jim!" said Sibyl, laughing, "how unkind of you! But are you really

going for a walk with me? That will be nice! I was afraid you were going

to say good-bye to some of your friends--to Tom Hardy, who gave you that

hideous pipe, or Ned Langton, who makes fun of you for smoking it. It is

very sweet of you to let me have your last afternoon. Where shall we go?

Let us go to the Park."

"I am too shabby," he answered, frowning. "Only swell people go to the

Park."

"Nonsense, Jim," she whispered, stroking the sleeve of his coat.

He hesitated for a moment. "Very well," he said at last, "but don't be

too long dressing." She danced out of the door. One could hear her

singing as she ran upstairs. Her little feet pattered overhead.

He walked up and down the room two or three times. Then he turned to the

still figure in the chair. "Mother, are my things ready?" he asked.

"Quite ready, James," she answered, keeping her eyes on her work. For

some months past she had felt ill at ease when she was alone with this

rough, stern son of hers. Her shallow secret nature was troubled when

their eyes met. She used to wonder if he suspected anything. The

silence, for he made no other observation, became intolerable to her.

She began to complain. Women defend themselves by attacking, just as

they attack by sudden and strange surrenders. "I hope you will be

contented, James, with your sea-faring life," she said. "You must

remember that it is your own choice. You might have entered a

solicitor's office. Solicitors are a very respectable class, and in the

country often dine with the best families."

"I hate offices, and I hate clerks," he replied. "But you are quite

right. I have chosen my own life. All I say is, watch over Sibyl. Don't

let her come to any harm. Mother, you must watch over her."

"James, you really talk very strangely. Of course I watch over Sibyl."

"I hear a gentleman comes every night to the theatre, and goes behind to

talk to her. Is that right? What about that?"

"You are speaking about things you don't understand, James. In the

profession we are accustomed to receive a great deal of most gratifying

attention. I myself used to receive many bouquets at one time. That was

when acting was really understood. As for Sibyl, I do not know at

present whether her attachment is serious or not. But there is no doubt

that the young man in question is a perfect gentleman. He is always most

polite to me. Besides, he has the appearance of being rich, and the

flowers he sends are lovely."

"You don't know his name, though," said the lad, harshly.

"No," answered his mother, with a placid expression in her face. "He has

not yet revealed his real name. I think it is quite romantic of him. He

is probably a member of the aristocracy."

James Vane bit his lip. "Watch over Sibyl, mother," he cried, "watch

over her."

"My son, you distress me very much. Sibyl is always under my special

care. Of course, if this gentleman is wealthy, there is no reason why

she should not contract an alliance with him. I trust he is one of the

aristocracy. He has all the appearance of it, I must say. It might be a

most brilliant marriage for Sibyl. They would make a charming couple.

His good looks are really quite remarkable; everybody notices them."

The lad muttered something to himself, and drummed on the window-pane

with his coarse fingers. He had just turned round to say something, when

the door opened, and Sibyl ran in.

"How serious you both are!" she cried. "What is the matter?"

"Nothing," he answered. "I suppose one must be serious sometimes.

Good-bye, mother; I will have my dinner at five o'clock. Everything is

packed, except my shirts, so you need not trouble."

"Good-bye, my son," she answered, with a bow of strained stateliness.

She was extremely annoyed at the tone he had adopted with her, and there

was something in his look that had made her feel afraid.

"Kiss me, mother," said the girl. Her flower-like lips touched the

withered cheek, and warmed its frost.

"My child! my child!" cried Mrs. Vane, looking up to the ceiling in

search of an imaginary gallery.

"Come, Sibyl," said her brother, impatiently. He hated his mother's

affectations.

They went out into the flickering wind-blown sunlight, and strolled down

the dreary Euston Road. The passers-by glanced in wonder at the sullen,

heavy youth, who, in coarse, ill-fitting clothes, was in the company of

such a graceful, refined-looking girl. He was like a common gardener

walking with a rose.

Jim frowned from time to time when he caught the inquisitive glance of

some stranger. He had that dislike of being stared at which comes on

geniuses late in life, and never leaves the commonplace. Sibyl, however,

was quite unconscious of the effect she was producing. Her love was

trembling in laughter on her lips. She was thinking of Prince Charming,

and, that she might think of him all the more, she did not talk of him

but prattled on about the ship in which Jim was going to sail, about

the gold he was certain to find, about the wonderful heiress whose life

he was to save from the wicked, red-shirted bushrangers. For he was not

to remain a sailor, or a super-cargo, or whatever he was going to be.

Oh, no! A sailor's existence was dreadful. Fancy being cooped up in a

horrid ship, with the hoarse, hump-backed waves trying to get in, and a

black wind blowing the masts down, and tearing the sails into long

screaming ribands! He was to leave the vessel at Melbourne, bid a polite

good-bye to the captain, and go off at once to the gold-fields. Before a

week was over he was to come across a large nugget of pure gold, the

largest nugget that had ever been discovered, and bring it down to the

coast in a waggon guarded by six mounted policemen. The bushrangers were

to attack them three times, and be defeated with immense slaughter. Or,

no. He was not to go to the gold-fields at all. They were horrid places,

where men got intoxicated, and shot each other in bar-rooms, and used

bad language. He was to be a nice sheep-farmer, and one evening, as he

was riding home, he was to see the beautiful heiress being carried off

by a robber on a black horse, and give chase, and rescue her. Of course

she would fall in love with him, and he with her, and they would get

married, and come home, and live in an immense house in London. Yes,

there were delightful things in store for him. But he must be very good,

and not lose his temper, or spend his money foolishly. She was only a

year older than he was, but she knew so much more of life. He must be

sure, also, to write to her by every mail, and to say his prayers each

night before he went to sleep. God was very good, and would watch over

him. She would pray for him, too, and in a few years he would come back

quite rich and happy.

The lad listened sulkily to her, and made no answer. He was heart-sick

at leaving home.

Yet it was not this alone that made him gloomy and morose.

Inexperienced though he was, he had still a strong sense of the danger

of Sibyl's position. This young dandy who was making love to her could

mean her no good. He was a gentleman, and he hated him for that, hated

him through some curious race-instinct for which he could not account,

and which for that reason was all the more dominant within him. He was

conscious also of the shallowness and vanity of his mother's nature, and

in that saw infinite peril for Sibyl and Sibyl's happiness. Children

begin by loving their parents; as they grow older they judge them;

sometimes they forgive them.

His mother! He had something on his mind to ask of her, something that

he had brooded on for many months of silence. A chance phrase that he

had heard at the theatre, a whispered sneer that had reached his ears

one night as he waited at the stage-door, had set loose a train of

horrible thoughts. He remembered it as if it had been the lash of a

hunting-crop across his face. His brows knit together into a wedge-like

furrow, and with a twitch of pain he bit his under-lip.

"You are not listening to a word I am saying, Jim," cried Sibyl, "and I

am making the most delightful plans for your future. Do say something."

"What do you want me to say?"

"Oh! that you will be a good boy, and not forget us," she answered,

smiling at him.

He shrugged his shoulders. "You are more likely to forget me, than I am

to forget you, Sibyl."

She flushed. "What do you mean, Jim?" she asked.

"You have a new friend, I hear. Who is he? Why have you not told me

about him? He means you no good."

"Stop, Jim!" she exclaimed. "You must not say anything against him. I

love him."

"Why, you don't even know his name," answered the lad. "Who is he? I

have a right to know."

"He is called Prince Charming. Don't you like the name? Oh! you silly

boy! you should never forget it. If you only saw him, you would think

him the most wonderful person in the world. Some day you will meet him:

when you come back from Australia. You will like him so much. Everybody

likes him, and I... love him. I wish you could come to the theatre

to-night. He is going to be there, and I am to play Juliet. Oh! how I

shall play it! Fancy, Jim, to be in love and play Juliet! To have him

sitting there! To play for his delight! I am afraid I may frighten the

company, frighten or enthrall them. To be in love is to surpass one's

self. Poor dreadful Mr. Isaacs will be shouting 'genius' to his loafers

at the bar. He has preached me as a dogma; to-night he will announce me

as a revelation. I feel it. And it is all his, his only, Prince

Charming, my wonderful lover, my god of graces. But I am poor beside

him. Poor? What does that matter? When poverty creeps in at the door,

love flies in through the window. Our proverbs want re-writing. They

were made in winter, and it is summer now; spring-time for me, I think,

a very dance of blossoms in blue skies."

"He is a gentleman," said the lad, sullenly.

"A Prince!" she cried, musically. "What more do you want?"

"He wants to enslave you."

"I shudder at the thought of being free."

"I want you to beware of him."

"To see him is to worship him, to know him is to trust him."

"Sibyl, you are mad about him."

She laughed, and took his arm. "You dear old Jim, you talk as if you

were a hundred. Some day you will be in love yourself. Then you will

know what it is. Don't look so sulky. Surely you should be glad to think

that, though you are going away, you leave me happier than I have ever

been before. Life has been hard for us both, terribly hard and

difficult. But it will be different now. You are going to a new world,

and I have found one. Here are two chairs; let us sit down and see the

smart people go by."

They took their seats amidst a crowd of watchers. The tulip-beds across

the road flamed like throbbing rings of fire. A white dust, tremulous

cloud of orris-root it seemed, hung in the panting air. The

brightly-coloured parasols danced and dipped like monstrous butterflies.

She made her brother talk of himself, his hopes, his prospects. He spoke

slowly and with effort. They passed words to each other as players at a

game pass counters. Sibyl felt oppressed. She could not communicate her

joy. A faint smile curving that sullen mouth was all the echo she could

win. After some time she became silent. Suddenly she caught a glimpse of

golden hair and laughing lips, and in an open carriage with two ladies

Dorian Gray drove past.

She started to her feet. "There he is!" she cried.

"Who?" said Jim Vane.

"Prince Charming," she answered, looking after the victoria.

He jumped up, and seized her roughly by the arm. "Show him to me. Which

is he? Point him out. I must see him!" he exclaimed; but at that moment

the Duke of Berwick's four-in-hand came between, and when it had left

the space clear, the carriage had swept out of the Park.

"He is gone," murmured Sibyl, sadly. "I wish you had seen him."

"I wish I had, for as sure as there is a God in heaven, if he ever does

you any wrong I shall kill him."

She looked at him in horror. He repeated his words. They cut the air

like a dagger. The people round began to gape. A lady standing close to

her tittered.

"Come away, Jim; come away," she whispered. He followed her doggedly, as

she passed through the crowd. He felt glad at what he had said.

When they reached the Achilles Statue she turned round. There was pity

in her eyes that became laughter on her lips. She shook her head at him.

"You are foolish, Jim, utterly foolish; a bad-tempered boy, that is all.

How can you say such horrible things? You don't know what you are

talking about. You are simply jealous and unkind. Ah! I wish you would

fall in love. Love makes people good, and what you said was wicked."

"I am sixteen," he answered, "and I know what I am about. Mother is no

help to you. She doesn't understand how to look after you. I wish now

that I was not going to Australia at all. I have a great mind to chuck

the whole thing up. I would, if my articles hadn't been signed."

"Oh, don't be so serious, Jim. You are like one of the heroes of those

silly melodramas mother used to be so fond of acting in. I am not going

to quarrel with you. I have seen him, and oh! to see him is perfect

happiness. We won't quarrel. I know you would never harm anyone I love,

would you?"

"Not as long as you love him, I suppose," was the sullen answer.

"I shall love him for ever!" she cried.

"And he?"

"For ever, too!"

"He had better."

She shrank from him. Then she laughed and put her hand on his arm. He

was merely a boy.

At the Marble Arch they hailed an omnibus, which left them close to

their shabby home in the Euston Road. It was after five o'clock, and

Sibyl had to lie down for a couple of hours before acting. Jim insisted

that she should do so. He said that he would sooner part with her when

their mother was not present. She would be sure to make a scene, and he

detested scenes of every kind.

In Sibyl's own room they parted. There was jealousy in the lad's heart,

and a fierce, murderous hatred of the stranger who, as it seemed to him,

had come between them. Yet, when her arms were flung round his neck,

and her fingers strayed through his hair, he softened, and kissed her

with real affection. There were tears in his eyes as he went downstairs.

His mother was waiting for him below. She grumbled at his unpunctuality,

as he entered. He made no answer, but sat down to his meagre meal. The

flies buzzed round the table, and crawled over the stained cloth.

Through the rumble of omnibuses, and the clatter of street-cabs, he

could hear the droning voice devouring each minute that was left to him.

After some time, he thrust away his plate, and put his head in his

hands. He felt that he had a right to know. It should have been told to

him before, if it was as he suspected. Leaden with fear, his mother

watched him. Words dropped mechanically from her lips. A tattered lace

handkerchief twitched in her fingers. When the clock struck six, he got

up, and went to the door. Then he turned back, and looked at her. Their

eyes met. In hers he saw a wild appeal for mercy. It enraged him.

"Mother, I have something to ask you," he said. Her eyes wandered

vaguely about the room. She made no answer. "Tell me the truth. I have a

right to know. Were you married to my father?"

She heaved a deep sigh. It was a sigh of relief. The terrible moment,

the moment that night and day, for weeks and months, she had dreaded,

had come at last, and yet she felt no terror. Indeed in some measure it

was a disappointment to her. The vulgar directness of the question

called for a direct answer. The situation had not been gradually led up

to. It was crude. It reminded her of a bad rehearsal.

"No," she answered, wondering at the harsh simplicity of life.

"My father was a scoundrel then?" cried the lad, clenching his fists.

She shook her head. "I knew he was not free. We loved each other very

much. If he had lived, he would have made provision for us. Don't speak

against him, my son. He was your father, and a gentleman. Indeed he was

highly connected."

An oath broke from his lips. "I don't care for myself," he exclaimed,

"but don't let Sibyl.... It is a gentleman, isn't it, who is in love

with her, or says he is? Highly connected, too, I suppose."

For a moment a hideous sense of humiliation came over the woman. Her

head drooped. She wiped her eyes with shaking hands. "Sibyl has a

mother," she murmured; "I had none."

The lad was touched. He went towards her, and stooping down he kissed

her. "I am sorry if I have pained you by asking about my father," he

said, "but I could not help it. I must go now. Good-bye. Don't forget

that you will only have one child now to look after, and believe me that

if this man wrongs my sister, I will find out who he is, track him down,

and kill him like a dog. I swear it."

The exaggerated folly of the threat, the passionate gesture that

accompanied it, the mad melodramatic words, made life seem more vivid to

her. She was familiar with the atmosphere. She breathed more freely, and

for the first time for many months she really admired her son. She would

have liked to have continued the scene on the same emotional scale, but

he cut her short. Trunks had to be carried down, and mufflers looked

for. The lodging-house drudge bustled in and out. There was the

bargaining with the cabman. The moment was lost in vulgar details. It

was with a renewed feeling of disappointment that she waved the tattered

lace handkerchief from the window, as her son drove away. She was

conscious that a great opportunity had been wasted. She consoled herself

by telling Sibyl how desolate she felt her life would be, now that she

had only one child to look after. She remembered the phrase. It had

pleased her. Of the threat she said nothing. It was vividly and

dramatically expressed. She felt that they would all laugh at it some

day.

CHAPTER VI

"I suppose you have heard the news, Basil?" said Lord Henry that

evening, as Hallward was shown into a little private room at the Bristol

where dinner had been laid for three.

"No, Harry," answered the artist, giving his hat and coat to the bowing

waiter. "What is it? Nothing about politics, I hope? They don't interest

me. There is hardly a single person in the House of Commons worth

painting; though many of them would be the better for a little

white-washing."

"Dorian Gray is engaged to be married," said Lord Henry, watching him as

he spoke.

Hallward started, and then frowned. "Dorian engaged to be married!" he

cried. "Impossible!"

"It is perfectly true."

"To whom?"

"To some little actress or other."

"I can't believe it. Dorian is far too sensible."

"Dorian is far too wise not to do foolish things now and then, my dear

Basil."

"Marriage is hardly a thing that one can do now and then, Harry."

"Except in America," rejoined Lord Henry, languidly. "But I didn't say

he was married. I said he was engaged to be married. There is a great

difference. I have a distinct remembrance of being married, but I have

no recollection at all of being engaged. I am inclined to think that I

never was engaged."

"But think of Dorian's birth, and position, and wealth. It would be

absurd for him to marry so much beneath him."

"If you want to make him marry this girl tell him that, Basil. He is

sure to do it, then. Whenever a man does a thoroughly stupid thing, it

is always from the noblest motives."

"I hope the girl is good, Harry. I don't want to see Dorian tied to some

vile creature, who might degrade his nature and ruin his intellect."

"Oh, she is better than good--she is beautiful," murmured Lord Henry,

sipping a glass of vermouth and orange-bitters. "Dorian says she is

beautiful; and he is not often wrong about things of that kind. Your

portrait of him has quickened his appreciation of the personal

appearance of other people. It has had that excellent effect, amongst

others. We are to see her to-night, if that boy doesn't forget his

appointment."

"Are you serious?"

"Quite serious, Basil. I should be miserable if I thought I should ever

be more serious than I am at the present moment."

"But do you approve of it, Harry?" asked the painter, walking up and

down the room, and biting his lip. "You can't approve of it, possibly.

It is some silly infatuation."

"I never approve, or disapprove, of anything now. It is an absurd

attitude to take towards life. We are not sent into the world to air our

moral prejudices. I never take any notice of what common people say, and

I never interfere with what charming people do. If a personality

fascinates me, whatever mode of expression that personality selects is

absolutely delightful to me. Dorian Gray falls in love with a beautiful

girl who acts Juliet, and proposes to marry her. Why not? If he wedded

Messalina he would be none the less interesting. You know I am not a

champion of marriage. The real drawback to marriage is that it makes one

unselfish. And unselfish people are colourless. They lack

individuality. Still, there are certain temperaments that marriage

makes more complex. They retain their egotism, and add to it many other

egos. They are forced to have more than one life. They become more

highly organised, and to be highly organised is, I should fancy, the

object of man's existence. Besides, every experience is of value, and,

whatever one may say against marriage, it is certainly an experience. I

hope that Dorian Gray will make this girl his wife, passionately adore

her for six months, and then suddenly become fascinated by someone else.

He would be a wonderful study."

"You don't mean a single word of all that, Harry; you know you don't. If

Dorian Gray's life were spoiled, no one would be sorrier than yourself.

You are much better than you pretend to be."

Lord Henry laughed. "The reason we all like to think so well of others

is that we are all afraid for ourselves. The basis of optimism is sheer

terror. We think that we are generous because we credit our neighbour

with the possession of those virtues that are likely to be a benefit to

us. We praise the banker that we may overdraw our account, and find good

qualities in the highwayman in the hope that he may spare our pockets. I

mean everything that I have said. I have the greatest contempt for

optimism. As for a spoiled life, no life is spoiled but one whose growth

is arrested. If you want to mar a nature, you have merely to reform it.

As for marriage, of course that would be silly, but there are other and

more interesting bonds between men and women. I will certainly encourage

them. They have the charm of being fashionable. But here is Dorian

himself. He will tell you more than I can."

"My dear Harry, my dear Basil, you must both congratulate me!" said the

lad, throwing off his evening cape with its satin-lined wings and

shaking each of his friends by the hand in turn. "I have never been so

happy. Of course it is sudden; all really delightful things are. And

yet it seems to me to be the one thing I have been looking for all my

life." He was flushed with excitement and pleasure, and looked

extraordinarily handsome.

"I hope you will always be very happy, Dorian," said Hallward, "but I

don't quite forgive you for not having let me know of your engagement.

You let Harry know."

"And I don't forgive you for being late for dinner," broke in Lord

Henry, putting his hand on the lad's shoulder, and smiling as he spoke.

"Come, let us sit down and try what the new \_chef\_ here is like, and

then you will tell us how it all came about."

"There is really not much to tell," cried Dorian, as they took their

seats at the small round table. "What happened was simply this. After I

left you yesterday evening, Harry, I dressed, had some dinner at that

little Italian restaurant in Rupert Street you introduced me to, and

went down at eight o'clock to the theatre. Sibyl was playing Rosalind.

Of course the scenery was dreadful, and the Orlando absurd. But Sibyl!

You should have seen her! When she came on in her boy's clothes she was

perfectly wonderful. She wore a moss-coloured velvet jerkin with

cinnamon sleeves, slim brown cross-gartered hose, a dainty little green

cap with a hawk's feather caught in a jewel, and a hooded cloak lined

with dull red. She had never seemed to me more exquisite. She had all

the delicate grace of that Tanagra figurine that you have in your

studio, Basil. Her hair clustered round her face like dark leaves round

a pale rose. As for her acting--well, you shall see her to-night. She is

simply a born artist. I sat in the dingy box absolutely enthralled. I

forgot that I was in London and in the nineteenth century. I was away

with my love in a forest that no man had ever seen. After the

performance was over I went behind, and spoke to her. As we were sitting

together, suddenly there came into her eyes a look that I had never seen

there before. My lips moved towards hers. We kissed each other. I can't

describe to you what I felt at that moment. It seemed to me that all my

life had been narrowed to one perfect point of rose-coloured joy. She

trembled all over, and shook like a white narcissus. Then she flung

herself on her knees and kissed my hands. I feel that I should not tell

you all this, but I can't help it. Of course our engagement is a dead

secret. She has not even told her own mother. I don't know what my

guardians will say. Lord Radley is sure to be furious. I don't care. I

shall be of age in less than a year, and then I can do what I like. I

have been right, Basil, haven't I, to take my love out of poetry, and to

find my wife in Shakespeare's plays? Lips that Shakespeare taught to

speak have whispered their secret in my ear. I have had the arms of

Rosalind around me, and kissed Juliet on the mouth."

"Yes, Dorian, I suppose you were right," said Hallward, slowly.

"Have you seen her to-day?" asked Lord Henry.

Dorian Gray shook his head. "I left her in the forest of Arden, I shall

find her in an orchard in Verona."

Lord Henry sipped his champagne in a meditative manner. "At what

particular point did you mention the word marriage, Dorian? And what did

she say in answer? Perhaps you forgot all about it."

"My dear Harry, I did not treat it as a business transaction, and I did

not make any formal proposal. I told her that I loved her, and she said

she was not worthy to be my wife. Not worthy! Why, the whole world is

nothing to me compared with her."

"Women are wonderfully practical," murmured Lord Henry--"much more

practical than we are. In situations of that kind we often forget to say

anything about marriage, and they always remind us."

Hallward laid his hand upon his arm. "Don't, Harry. You have annoyed

Dorian. He is not like other men. He would never bring misery upon

anyone. His nature is too fine for that."

Lord Henry looked across the table. "Dorian is never annoyed with me,"

he answered. "I asked the question for the best reason possible, for the

only reason, indeed, that excuses one for asking any question--simple

curiosity. I have a theory that it is always the women who propose to

us, and not we who propose to the women. Except, of course, in

middle-class life. But then the middle classes are not modern."

Dorian Gray laughed, and tossed his head. "You are quite incorrigible,

Harry; but I don't mind. It is impossible to be angry with you. When you

see Sibyl Vane you will feel that the man who could wrong her would be a

beast, a beast without a heart. I cannot understand how anyone can wish

to shame the thing he loves. I love Sibyl Vane. I want to place her on a

pedestal of gold, and to see the world worship the woman who is mine.

What is marriage? An irrevocable vow. You mock at it for that. Ah! don't

mock. It is an irrevocable vow that I want to take. Her trust makes me

faithful, her belief makes me good. When I am with her, I regret all

that you have taught me. I become different from what you have known me

to be. I am changed, and the mere touch of Sibyl Vane's hand makes me

forget you and all your wrong, fascinating, poisonous, delightful

theories."

"And those are...?" asked Lord Henry, helping himself to some salad.

"Oh, your theories about life, your theories about love, your theories

about pleasure. All your theories, in fact, Harry."

"Pleasure is the only thing worth having a theory about," he answered,

in his slow, melodious voice. "But I am afraid I cannot claim my theory

as my own. It belongs to Nature, not to me. Pleasure is Nature's test,

her sign of approval. When we are happy we are always good, but when we

are good we are not always happy."

"Ah! but what do you mean by good?" cried Basil Hallward.

"Yes," echoed Dorian, leaning back in his chair, and looking at Lord

Henry over the heavy clusters of purple-lipped irises that stood in the

centre of the table, "what do you mean by good, Harry?"

"To be good is to be in harmony with one's self," he replied, touching

the thin stem of his glass with his pale, fine-pointed fingers. "Discord

is to be forced to be in harmony with others. One's own life--that is

the important thing. As for the lives of one's neighbours, if one wishes

to be a prig or a Puritan, one can flaunt one's moral views about them,

but they are not one's concern. Besides, Individualism has really the

higher aim. Modern morality consists in accepting the standard of one's

age. I consider that for any man of culture to accept the standard of

his age is a form of the grossest immorality."

"But, surely, if one lives merely for one's self, Harry, one pays a

terrible price for doing so?" suggested the painter.

"Yes, we are overcharged for everything nowadays. I should fancy that

the real tragedy of the poor is that they can afford nothing but

self-denial. Beautiful sins, like beautiful things, are the privilege of

the rich."

"One has to pay in other ways but money."

"What sort of ways, Basil?"

"Oh! I should fancy in remorse, in suffering, in... well, in the

consciousness of degradation."

Lord Henry shrugged his shoulders. "My dear fellow, medi?val art is

charming, but medi?val emotions are out of date. One can use them in

fiction, of course. But then the only things that one can use in fiction

are the things that one has ceased to use in fact. Believe me, no

civilised man ever regrets a pleasure, and no uncivilised man ever

knows what a pleasure is."

"I know what pleasure is," cried Dorian Gray. "It is to adore someone."

"That is certainly better than being adored," he answered, toying with

some fruits. "Being adored is a nuisance. Women treat us just as

Humanity treats its gods. They worship us, and are always bothering us

to do something for them."

"I should have said that whatever they ask for they had first given to

us," murmured the lad, gravely. "They create Love in our natures. They

have a right to demand it back."

"That is quite true, Dorian," cried Hallward.

"Nothing is ever quite true," said Lord Henry.

"This is," interrupted Dorian. "You must admit, Harry, that women give

to men the very gold of their lives."

"Possibly," he sighed, "but they invariably want it back in such very

small change. That is the worry. Women, as some witty Frenchman once put

it, inspire us with the desire to do masterpieces, and always prevent us

from carrying them out."

"Harry, you are dreadful! I don't know why I like you so much."

"You will always like me, Dorian," he replied. "Will you have some

coffee, you fellows?--Waiter, bring coffee, and \_fine-champagne\_, and

some cigarettes. No: don't mind the cigarettes; I have some. Basil, I

can't allow you to smoke cigars. You must have a cigarette. A cigarette

is the perfect type of a perfect pleasure. It is exquisite, and it

leaves one unsatisfied. What more can one want? Yes, Dorian, you will

always be fond of me. I represent to you all the sins you have never had

the courage to commit."

"What nonsense you talk, Harry!" cried the lad, taking a light from a

fire-breathing silver dragon that the waiter had placed on the table.

"Let us go down to the theatre. When Sibyl comes on the stage you will

have a new ideal of life. She will represent something to you that you

have never known."

"I have known everything," said Lord Henry, with a tired look in his

eyes, "but I am always ready for a new emotion. I am afraid, however,

that, for me at any rate, there is no such thing. Still, your wonderful

girl may thrill me. I love acting. It is so much more real than life.

Let us go. Dorian, you will come with me. I am so sorry, Basil, but

there is only room for two in the brougham. You must follow us in a

hansom."

They got up and put on their coats, sipping their coffee standing. The

painter was silent and preoccupied. There was a gloom over him. He could

not bear this marriage, and yet it seemed to him to be better than many

other things that might have happened. After a few minutes, they all

passed downstairs. He drove off by himself, as had been arranged, and

watched the flashing lights of the little brougham in front of him. A

strange sense of loss came over him. He felt that Dorian Gray would

never again be to him all that he had been in the past. Life had come

between them.... His eyes darkened, and the crowded, flaring streets

became blurred to his eyes. When the cab drew up at the theatre, it

seemed to him that he had grown years older.

CHAPTER VII

For some reason or other, the house was crowded that night, and the fat

Jew manager who met them at the door was beaming from ear to ear with an

oily, tremulous smile. He escorted them to their box with a sort of

pompous humility, waving his fat jewelled hands, and talking at the top

of his voice. Dorian Gray loathed him more than ever. He felt as if he

had come to look for Miranda and had been met by Caliban. Lord Henry,

upon the other hand, rather liked him. At least he declared he did, and

insisted on shaking him by the hand, and assuring him that he was proud

to meet a man who had discovered a real genius and gone bankrupt over a

poet. Hallward amused himself with watching the faces in the pit. The

heat was terribly oppressive, and the huge sunlight flamed like a

monstrous dahlia with petals of yellow fire. The youths in the gallery

had taken off their coats and waistcoats and hung them over the side.

They talked to each other across the theatre, and shared their oranges

with the tawdry girls who sat beside them. Some women were laughing in

the pit. Their voices were horribly shrill and discordant. The sound of

the popping of corks came from the bar.

"What a place to find one's divinity in!" said Lord Henry.

"Yes!" answered Dorian Gray. "It was here I found her, and she is divine

beyond all living things. When she acts you will forget everything.

These common, rough people, with their coarse faces and brutal gestures,

become quite different when she is on the stage. They sit silently and

watch her. They weep and laugh as she wills them to do. She makes them

as responsive as a violin. She spiritualises them, and one feels that

they are of the same flesh and blood as one's self."

"The same flesh and blood as one's self! Oh, I hope not!" exclaimed Lord

Henry, who was scanning the occupants of the gallery through his

opera-glass.

"Don't pay any attention to him, Dorian," said the painter. "I

understand what you mean, and I believe in this girl. Anyone you love

must be marvellous, and any girl that has the effect you describe must

be fine and noble. To spiritualise one's age--that is something worth

doing. If this girl can give a soul to those who have lived without one,

if she can create the sense of beauty in people whose lives have been

sordid and ugly, if she can strip them of their selfishness and lend

them tears for sorrows that are not their own, she is worthy of all your

adoration, worthy of the adoration of the world. This marriage is quite

right. I did not think so at first, but I admit it now. The gods made

Sibyl Vane for you. Without her you would have been incomplete."

"Thanks, Basil," answered Dorian Gray, pressing his hand. "I knew that

you would understand me. Harry is so cynical, he terrifies me. But here

is the orchestra. It is quite dreadful, but it only lasts for about five

minutes. Then the curtain rises, and you will see the girl to whom I am

going to give all my life, to whom I have given everything that is good

in me."

A quarter of an hour afterwards, amidst an extraordinary turmoil of

applause, Sibyl Vane stepped on to the stage. Yes, she was certainly

lovely to look at--one of the loveliest creatures, Lord Henry thought,

that he had ever seen. There was something of the fawn in her shy grace

and startled eyes. A faint blush, like the shadow of a rose in a mirror

of silver, came to her cheeks as she glanced at the crowded,

enthusiastic house. She stepped back a few paces, and her lips seemed

to tremble. Basil Hallward leaped to his feet and began to applaud.

Motionless, and as one in a dream, sat Dorian Gray, gazing at her. Lord

Henry peered through his glasses, murmuring, "Charming! charming!"

The scene was the hall of Capulet's house, and Romeo in his pilgrim's

dress had entered with Mercutio and his other friends. The band, such as

it was, struck up a few bars of music, and the dance began. Through the

crowd of ungainly, shabbily-dressed actors, Sibyl Vane moved like a

creature from a finer world. Her body swayed, while she danced, as a

plant sways in the water. The curves of her throat were the curves of a

white lily. Her hands seemed to be made of cool ivory.

Yet she was curiously listless. She showed no sign of joy when her eyes

rested on Romeo. The few words she had to speak--

Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,

Which mannerly devotion shows in this;

For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,

And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss--

with the brief dialogue that follows, were spoken in a thoroughly

artificial manner. The voice was exquisite, but from the point of view

of tone it was absolutely false. It was wrong in colour. It took away

all the life from the verse. It made the passion unreal.

Dorian Gray grew pale as he watched her. He was puzzled and anxious.

Neither of his friends dared to say anything to him. She seemed to them

to be absolutely incompetent. They were horribly disappointed.

Yet they felt that the true test of any Juliet is the balcony scene of

the second act. They waited for that. If she failed there, there was

nothing in her.

She looked charming as she came out in the moonlight. That could not be

denied. But the staginess of her acting was unbearable, and grew worse

as she went on. Her gestures became absurdly artificial. She

over-emphasised everything that she had to say. The beautiful passage--

Thou knowest the mask of night is on my face,

Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek

For that which thou hast heard me speak to-night--

was declaimed with the painful precision of a schoolgirl who has been

taught to recite by some second-rate professor of elocution. When she

leaned over the balcony and came to those wonderful lines--

Although I joy in thee,

I have no joy of this contract to-night:

It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden;

Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be

Ere one can say, "It lightens." Sweet, good-night!

This bud of love by summer's ripening breath

May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet--

she spoke the words as though they conveyed no meaning to her. It was

not nervousness. Indeed, so far from being nervous, she was absolutely

self-contained. It was simply bad art. She was a complete failure.

Even the common, uneducated audience of the pit and gallery lost their

interest in the play. They got restless, and began to talk loudly and to

whistle. The Jew manager, who was standing at the back of the

dress-circle, stamped and swore with rage. The only person unmoved was

the girl herself.

When the second act was over there came a storm of hisses, and Lord

Henry got up from his chair and put on his coat. "She is quite

beautiful, Dorian," he said, "but she can't act. Let us go."

"I am going to see the play through," answered the lad, in a hard,

bitter voice. "I am awfully sorry that I have made you waste an evening,

Harry. I apologise to you both."

"My dear Dorian, I should think Miss Vane was ill," interrupted

Hallward. "We will come some other night."

"I wish she were ill," he rejoined. "But she seems to me to be simply

callous and cold. She has entirely altered. Last night she was a great

artist. This evening she is merely a commonplace, mediocre actress."

"Don't talk like that about anyone you love, Dorian. Love is a more

wonderful thing than Art."

"They are both simply forms of imitation," remarked Lord Henry. "But do

let us go. Dorian, you must not stay here any longer. It is not good for

one's morals to see bad acting. Besides, I don't suppose you will want

your wife to act. So what does it matter if she plays Juliet like a

wooden doll? She is very lovely, and if she knows as little about life

as she does about acting, she will be a delightful experience. There are

only two kinds of people who are really fascinating--people who know

absolutely everything, and people who know absolutely nothing. Good

heavens, my dear boy, don't look so tragic! The secret of remaining

young is never to have an emotion that is unbecoming. Come to the club

with Basil and myself. We will smoke cigarettes and drink to the beauty

of Sibyl Vane. She is beautiful. What more can you want?"

"Go away, Harry," cried the lad. "I want to be alone. Basil, you must

go. Ah! can't you see that my heart is breaking?" The hot tears came to

his eyes. His lips trembled, and, rushing to the back of the box, he

leaned up against the wall, hiding his face in his hands.

"Let us go, Basil," said Lord Henry, with a strange tenderness in his

voice; and the two young men passed out together.

A few moments afterwards the footlights flared up, and the curtain rose

on the third act. Dorian Gray went back to his seat. He looked pale, and

proud, and indifferent. The play dragged on, and seemed interminable.

Half of the audience went out, tramping in heavy boots, and laughing.

The whole thing was a \_fiasco\_. The last act was played to almost empty

benches. The curtain went down on a titter, and some groans.

As soon as it was over, Dorian Gray rushed behind the scenes into the

greenroom. The girl was standing there alone, with a look of triumph on

her face. Her eyes were lit with an exquisite fire. There was a radiance

about her. Her parted lips were smiling over some secret of their own.

When he entered, she looked at him, and an expression of infinite joy

came over her. "How badly I acted to-night, Dorian!" she cried.

"Horribly!" he answered, gazing at her in amazement--"horribly! It was

dreadful. Are you ill? You have no idea what it was. You have no idea

what I suffered."

The girl smiled. "Dorian," she answered, lingering over his name with

long-drawn music in her voice, as though it were sweeter than honey to

the red petals of her mouth--"Dorian, you should have understood. But

you understand now, don't you?"

"Understand what?" he asked, angrily.

"Why I was so bad to-night. Why I shall always be bad. Why I shall never

act well again."

He shrugged his shoulders. "You are ill, I suppose. When you are ill you

shouldn't act. You make yourself ridiculous. My friends were bored. I

was bored."

She seemed not to listen to him. She was transfigured with joy. An

ecstasy of happiness dominated her.

"Dorian, Dorian," she cried, "before I knew you, acting was the one

reality of my life. It was only in the theatre that I lived. I thought

that it was all true. I was Rosalind one night, and Portia the other.

The joy of Beatrice was my joy, and the sorrows of Cordelia were mine

also. I believed in everything. The common people who acted with me

seemed to me to be godlike. The painted scenes were my world. I knew

nothing but shadows, and I thought them real. You came--oh, my beautiful

love!--and you freed my soul from prison. You taught me what reality

really is. To-night, for the first time in my life, I saw through the

hollowness, the sham, the silliness of the empty pageant in which I had

always played. To-night, for the first time, I became conscious that the

Romeo was hideous, and old, and painted, that the moonlight in the

orchard was false, that the scenery was vulgar, and that the words I had

to speak were unreal, were not my words, were not what I wanted to say.

You had brought me something higher, something of which all art is but a

reflection. You had made me understand what love really is. My love! my

love! Prince Charming! Prince of life! I have grown sick of shadows. You

are more to me than all art can ever be. What have I to do with the

puppets of a play? When I came on to-night, I could not understand how

it was that everything had gone from me. I thought that I was going to

be wonderful. I found that I could do nothing. Suddenly it dawned on my

soul what it all meant. The knowledge was exquisite to me. I heard them

hissing, and I smiled. What could they know of love such as ours? Take

me away, Dorian--take me away with you, where we can be quite alone. I

hate the stage. I might mimic a passion that I do not feel, but I cannot

mimic one that burns me like fire. Oh, Dorian, Dorian, you understand

now what it signifies? Even if I could do it, it would be profanation

for me to play at being in love. You have made me see that."

He flung himself down on the sofa, and turned away his face. "You have

killed my love," he muttered.

She looked at him in wonder, and laughed. He made no answer. She came

across to him, and with her little fingers stroked his hair. She knelt

down and pressed his hands to her lips. He drew them away, and a shudder

ran through him.

Then he leaped up, and went to the door. "Yes," he cried, "you have

killed my love. You used to stir my imagination. Now you don't even stir

my curiosity. You simply produce no effect. I loved you because you

were marvellous, because you had genius and intellect, because you

realised the dreams of great poets and gave shape and substance to the

shadows of art. You have thrown it all away. You are shallow and stupid.

My God! how mad I was to love you! What a fool I have been! You are

nothing to me now. I will never see you again. I will never think of

you. I will never mention your name. You don't know what you were to me,

once. Why, once.... Oh, I can't bear to think of it! I wish I had never

laid eyes upon you! You have spoiled the romance of my life. How little

you can know of love, if you say it mars your art! Without your art you

are nothing. I would have made you famous, splendid, magnificent. The

world would have worshipped you, and you would have borne my name. What

are you now? A third-rate actress with a pretty face."

The girl grew white, and trembled. She clenched her hands together, and

her voice seemed to catch in her throat. "You are not serious, Dorian?"

she murmured. "You are acting."

"Acting! I leave that to you. You do it so well," he answered bitterly.

She rose from her knees, and, with a piteous expression of pain in her

face, came across the room to him. She put her hand upon his arm, and

looked into his eyes. He thrust her back. "Don't touch me!" he cried.

A low moan broke from her, and she flung herself at his feet, and lay

there like a trampled flower. "Dorian, Dorian, don't leave me!" she

whispered. "I am so sorry I didn't act well. I was thinking of you all

the time. But I will try--indeed, I will try. It came so suddenly across

me, my love for you. I think I should never have known it if you had not

kissed me--if we had not kissed each other. Kiss me again, my love.

Don't go away from me. I couldn't bear it. Oh! don't go away from me. My

brother.... No; never mind. He didn't mean it. He was in jest.... But

you, oh! can't you forgive me for to-night? I will work so hard, and try

to improve. Don't be cruel to me because I love you better than anything

in the world. After all, it is only once that I have not pleased you.

But you are quite right, Dorian. I should have shown myself more of an

artist. It was foolish of me; and yet I couldn't help it. Oh, don't

leave me, don't leave me." A fit of passionate sobbing choked her. She

crouched on the floor like a wounded thing, and Dorian Gray, with his

beautiful eyes, looked down at her, and his chiselled lips curled in

exquisite disdain. There is always something ridiculous about the

emotions of people whom one has ceased to love. Sibyl Vane seemed to him

to be absurdly melodramatic. Her tears and sobs annoyed him.

"I am going," he said at last, in his calm, clear voice. "I don't wish

to be unkind, but I can't see you again. You have disappointed me."

She wept silently, and made no answer, but crept nearer. Her little

hands stretched blindly out, and appeared to be seeking for him. He

turned on his heel, and left the room. In a few moments he was out of

the theatre.

Where he went to he hardly knew. He remembered wandering through

dimly-lit streets, past gaunt black-shadowed archways and evil-looking

houses. Women with hoarse voices and harsh laughter had called after

him. Drunkards had reeled by cursing, and chattering to themselves like

monstrous apes. He had seen grotesque children huddled upon doorsteps,

and heard shrieks and oaths from gloomy courts.

As the dawn was just breaking he found himself close to Covent Garden.

The darkness lifted, and, flushed with faint fires, the sky hollowed

itself into a perfect pearl. Huge carts filled with nodding lilies

rumbled slowly down the polished empty street. The air was heavy with

the perfume of the flowers, and their beauty seemed to bring him an

anodyne for his pain. He followed into the market, and watched the men

unloading their waggons. A white-smocked carter offered him some

cherries. He thanked him, and wondered why he refused to accept any

money for them, and began to eat them listlessly. They had been plucked

at midnight, and the coldness of the moon had entered into them. A long

line of boys carrying crates of striped tulips, and of yellow and red

roses, defiled in front of him, threading their way through the huge

jade-green piles of vegetables. Under the portico, with its grey

sun-bleached pillars, loitered a troop of draggled bareheaded girls,

waiting for the auction to be over. Others crowded round the swinging

doors of the coffee-house in the Piazza. The heavy cart-horses slipped

and stamped upon the rough stones, shaking their bells and trappings.

Some of the drivers were lying asleep on a pile of sacks. Iris-necked,

and pink-footed, the pigeons ran about picking up seeds.

After a little while, he hailed a hansom, and drove home. For a few

moments he loitered upon the doorstep, looking round at the silent

Square with its blank, close-shuttered windows, and its staring blinds.

The sky was pure opal now, and the roofs of the houses glistened like

silver against it. From some chimney opposite a thin wreath of smoke was

rising. It curled, a violet riband, through the nacre-coloured air.

In the huge gilt Venetian lantern, spoil of some Doge's barge, that hung

from the ceiling of the great oak-panelled hall of entrance, lights were

still burning from three flickering jets: thin blue petals of flame they

seemed, rimmed with white fire. He turned them out, and, having thrown

his hat and cape on the table, passed through the library towards the

door of his bedroom, a large octagonal chamber on the ground floor that,

in his new-born feeling for luxury, he had just had decorated for

himself, and hung with some curious Renaissance tapestries that had been

discovered stored in a disused attic at Selby Royal. As he was turning

the handle of the door, his eye fell upon the portrait Basil Hallward

had painted of him. He started back as if in surprise. Then he went on

into his own room, looking somewhat puzzled. After he had taken the

buttonhole out of his coat, he seemed to hesitate. Finally he came back,

went over to the picture, and examined it. In the dim arrested light

that struggled through the cream-coloured silk blinds, the face appeared

to him to be a little changed. The expression looked different. One

would have said that there was a touch of cruelty in the mouth. It was

certainly strange.

He turned round, and, walking to the window, drew up the blind. The

bright dawn flooded the room, and swept the fantastic shadows into dusky

corners, where they lay shuddering. But the strange expression that he

had noticed in the face of the portrait seemed to linger there, to be

more intensified even. The quivering, ardent sunlight showed him the

lines of cruelty round the mouth as clearly as if he had been looking

into a mirror after he had done some dreadful thing.

He winced, and, taking up from the table an oval glass framed in ivory

Cupids, one of Lord Henry's many presents to him, glanced hurriedly into

its polished depths. No line like that warped his red lips. What did it

mean?

He rubbed his eyes, and came close to the picture, and examined it

again. There were no signs of any change when he looked into the actual

painting, and yet there was no doubt that the whole expression had

altered. It was not a mere fancy of his own. The thing was horribly

apparent.

He threw himself into a chair, and began to think. Suddenly there

flashed across his mind what he had said in Basil Hallward's studio the

day the picture had been finished. Yes, he remembered it perfectly. He

had uttered a mad wish that he himself might remain young, and the

portrait grow old; that his own beauty might be untarnished, and the

face on the canvas bear the burden of his passions and his sins; that

the painted image might be seared with the lines of suffering and

thought, and that he might keep all the delicate bloom and loveliness of

his then just conscious boyhood. Surely his wish had not been fulfilled?

Such things were impossible. It seemed monstrous even to think of them.

And, yet, there was the picture before him, with the touch of cruelty in

the mouth.

Cruelty! Had he been cruel? It was the girl's fault, not his. He had

dreamed of her as a great artist, had given his love to her because he

had thought her great. Then she had disappointed him. She had been

shallow and unworthy. And, yet, a feeling of infinite regret came over

him, as he thought of her lying at his feet sobbing like a little child.

He remembered with what callousness he had watched her. Why had he been

made like that? Why had such a soul been given to him? But he had

suffered also. During the three terrible hours that the play had lasted,

he had lived centuries of pain, ?on upon ?on of torture. His life was

well worth hers. She had marred him for a moment, if he had wounded her

for an age. Besides, women were better suited to bear sorrow than men.

They lived on their emotions. They only thought of their emotions. When

they took lovers, it was merely to have someone with whom they could

have scenes. Lord Henry had told him that, and Lord Henry knew what

women were. Why should he trouble about Sibyl Vane? She was nothing to

him now.

But the picture? What was he to say of that? It held the secret of his

life, and told his story. It had taught him to love his own beauty.

Would it teach him to loathe his own soul? Would he ever look at it

again?

No; it was merely an illusion wrought on the troubled senses. The

horrible night that he had passed had left phantoms behind it. Suddenly

there had fallen upon his brain that tiny scarlet speck that makes men

mad. The picture had not changed. It was folly to think so.

Yet it was watching him, with its beautiful marred face and its cruel

smile. Its bright hair gleamed in the early sunlight. Its blue eyes met

his own. A sense of infinite pity, not for himself, but for the painted

image of himself, came over him. It had altered already, and would alter

more. Its gold would wither into grey. Its red and white roses would

die. For every sin that he committed, a stain would fleck and wreck its

fairness. But he would not sin. The picture, changed or unchanged, would

be to him the visible emblem of conscience. He would resist temptation.

He would not see Lord Henry any more--would not, at any rate, listen to

those subtle poisonous theories that in Basil Hallward's garden had

first stirred within him the passion for impossible things. He would go

back to Sibyl Vane, make her amends, marry her, try to love her again.

Yes, it was his duty to do so. She must have suffered more than he had.

Poor child! He had been selfish and cruel to her. The fascination that

she had exercised over him would return. They would be happy together.

His life with her would be beautiful and pure.

He got up from his chair, and drew a large screen right in front of the

portrait, shuddering as he glanced at it. "How horrible!" he murmured to

himself, and he walked across to the window and opened it. When he

stepped out on to the grass, he drew a deep breath. The fresh morning

air seemed to drive away all his sombre passions. He thought only of

Sibyl. A faint echo of his love came back to him. He repeated her name

over and over again. The birds that were singing in the dew-drenched

garden seemed to be telling the flowers about her.

CHAPTER VIII

It was long past noon when he awoke. His valet had crept several times

on tiptoe into the room to see if he was stirring, and had wondered what

made his young master sleep so late. Finally his bell sounded, and

Victor came softly in with a cup of tea, and a pile of letters, on a

small tray of old Sevres china, and drew back the olive-satin curtains,

with their shimmering blue lining, that hung in front of the three tall

windows.

"Monsieur has well slept this morning," he said, smiling.

"What o'clock is it, Victor?" asked Dorian Gray, drowsily.

"One hour and a quarter, Monsieur."

How late it was! He sat up, and, having sipped some tea, turned over his

letters. One of them was from Lord Henry, and had been brought by hand

that morning. He hesitated for a moment, and then put it aside. The

others he opened listlessly. They contained the usual collection of

cards, invitations to dinner, tickets for private views, programmes of

charity concerts, and the like, that are showered on fashionable young

men every morning during the season. There was a rather heavy bill, for

a chased silver Louis-Quinze toilet-set, that he had not yet had the

courage to send on to his guardians, who were extremely old-fashioned

people and did not realise that we live in an age when unnecessary

things are our only necessities; and there were several very courteously

worded communiations from Jermyn Street money-lenders offering to

advance any sum of money at a moment's notice and at the most reasonable

rates of interest.

After about ten minutes he got up, and, throwing on an elaborate

dressing-gown of silk-embroidered cashmere wool, passed into the

onyx-paved bathroom. The cool water refreshed him after his long sleep.

He seemed to have forgotten all that he had gone through. A dim sense of

having taken part in some strange tragedy came to him once or twice, but

there was the unreality of a dream about it.

As soon as he was dressed, he went into the library and sat down to a

light French breakfast, that had been laid out for him on a small round

table close to the open window. It was an exquisite day. The warm air

seemed laden with spices. A bee flew in, and buzzed round the

blue-dragon bowl that, filled with sulphur-yellow roses, stood before

him. He felt perfectly happy.

Suddenly his eye fell on the screen that he had placed in front of the

portrait, and he started.

"Too cold for Monsieur?" asked his valet, putting an omelette on the

table. "I shut the window?"

Dorian shook his head. "I am not cold," he murmured.

Was it all true? Had the portrait really changed? Or had it been simply

his own imagination that had made him see a look of evil where there had

been a look of joy? Surely a painted canvas could not alter? The thing

was absurd. It would serve as a tale to tell Basil some day. It would

make him smile.

And, yet, how vivid was his recollection of the whole thing! First in

the dim twilight, and then in the bright dawn, he had seen the touch of

cruelty round the warped lips. He almost dreaded his valet leaving the

room. He knew that when he was alone he would have to examine the

portrait. He was afraid of certainty. When the coffee and cigarettes

had been brought and the man turned to go, he felt a wild desire to tell

him to remain. As the door was closing behind him he called him back.

The man stood waiting for his orders. Dorian looked at him for a moment.

"I am not at home to anyone, Victor," he said, with a sigh. The man

bowed and retired.

Then he rose from the table, lit a cigarette, and flung himself down on

a luxuriously-cushioned couch that stood facing the screen. The screen

was an old one, of gilt Spanish leather, stamped and wrought with a

rather florid Louis-Quatorze pattern. He scanned it curiously, wondering

if ever before it had concealed the secret of a man's life.

Should he move it aside, after all? Why not let it stay there? What was

the use of knowing? If the thing was true, it was terrible. If it was

not true, why trouble about it? But what if, by some fate or deadlier

chance, eyes other than his spied behind, and saw the horrible change?

What should he do if Basil Hallward came and asked to look at his own

picture? Basil would be sure to do that. No; the thing had to be

examined, and at once. Anything would be better than this dreadful state

of doubt.

He got up, and locked both doors. At least he would be alone when he

looked upon the mask of his shame. Then he drew the screen aside, and

saw himself face to face. It was perfectly true. The portrait had

altered.

As he often remembered afterwards, and always with no small wonder, he

found himself at first gazing at the portrait with a feeling of almost

scientific interest. That such a change should have taken place was

incredible to him. And yet it was a fact. Was there some subtle affinity

between the chemical atoms, that shaped themselves into form and colour

on the canvas, and the soul that was within him? Could it be that what

that soul thought, they realized?--that what it dreamed, they made true?

Or was there some other, more terrible reason? He shuddered, and felt

afraid, and, going back to the couch, lay there, gazing at the picture

in sickened horror.

One thing, however, he felt that it had done for him. It had made him

conscious how unjust, how cruel, he had been to Sibyl Vane. It was not

too late to make reparation for that. She could still be his wife. His

unreal and selfish love would yield to some higher influence, would be

transformed into some nobler passion, and the portrait that Basil

Hallward had painted of him would be a guide to him through life, would

be to him what holiness is to some, and conscience to others, and the

fear of God to us all. There were opiates for remorse, drugs that could

lull the moral sense to sleep. But here was a visible symbol of the

degradation of sin. Here was an ever-present sign of the ruin men

brought upon their souls.

Three o'clock struck, and four, and the half-hour rang its double chime,

but Dorian Gray did not stir. He was trying to gather up the scarlet

threads of life, and to weave them into a pattern; to find his way

through the sanguine labyrinth of passion through which he was

wandering. He did not know what to do, or what to think. Finally, he

went over to the table, and wrote a passionate letter to the girl he had

loved, imploring her forgiveness, and accusing himself of madness. He

covered page after page with wild words of sorrow, and wilder words of

pain. There is a luxury in self-reproach. When we blame ourselves we

feel that no one else has a right to blame us. It is the confession, not

the priest, that gives us absolution. When Dorian had finished the

letter, he felt that he had been forgiven.

Suddenly there came a knock to the door, and he heard Lord Henry's voice

outside. "My dear boy, I must see you. Let me in at once. I can't bear

your shutting yourself up like this."

He made no answer at first, but remained quite still. The knocking

still continued, and grew louder. Yes, it was better to let Lord Henry

in, and to explain to him the new life he was going to lead, to quarrel

with him if it became necessary to quarrel, to part if parting was

inevitable. He jumped up, drew the screen hastily across the picture,

and unlocked the door.

"I am so sorry for it all, Dorian," said Lord Henry, as he entered. "But

you must not think too much about it."

"Do you mean about Sibyl Vane?" asked the lad.

"Yes, of course," answered Lord Henry, sinking into a chair, and slowly

pulling off his yellow gloves. "It is dreadful, from one point of view,

but it was not your fault. Tell me, did you go behind and see her, after

the play was over?"

"Yes."

"I felt sure you had. Did you make a scene with her?"

"I was brutal, Harry--perfectly brutal. But it is all right now. I am

not sorry for anything that has happened. It has taught me to know

myself better."

"Ah, Dorian, I am so glad you take it in that way! I was afraid I would

find you plunged in remorse, and tearing that nice curly hair of yours."

"I have got through all that," said Dorian, shaking his head, and

smiling. "I am perfectly happy now. I know what conscience is, to begin

with. It is not what you told me it was. It is the divinest thing in us.

Don't sneer at it, Harry, any more--at least not before me. I want to be

good. I can't bear the idea of my soul being hideous."

"A very charming artistic basis for ethics, Dorian! I congratulate you

on it. But how are you going to begin?"

"By marrying Sibyl Vane."

"Marrying Sibyl Vane!" cried Lord Henry, standing up, and looking at him

in perplexed amazement. "But, my dear Dorian----"

"Yes, Harry, I know what you are going to say. Something dreadful about

marriage. Don't say it. Don't ever say things of that kind to me again.

Two days ago I asked Sibyl to marry me. I am not going to break my word

to her. She is to be my wife!"

"Your wife! Dorian!... Didn't you get my letter? I wrote to you this

morning, and sent the note down, by my own man."

"Your letter? Oh, yes, I remember. I have not read it yet, Harry. I was

afraid there might be something in it that I wouldn't like. You cut life

to pieces with your epigrams."

"You know nothing then?"

"What do you mean?"

Lord Henry walked across the room, and, sitting down by Dorian Gray,

took both his hands in his own, and held them tightly. "Dorian," he

said, "my letter--don't be frightened--was to tell you that Sibyl Vane

is dead."

A cry of pain broke from the lad's lips, and he leaped to his feet,

tearing his hands away from Lord Henry's grasp. "Dead! Sibyl dead! It is

not true! It is a horrible lie! How dare you say it?"

"It is quite true, Dorian," said Lord Henry, gravely. "It is in all the

morning papers. I wrote down to you to ask you not to see anyone till I

came. There will have to be an inquest, of course, and you must not be

mixed up in it. Things like that make a man fashionable in Paris. But in

London people are so prejudiced. Here, one should never make one's

\_debut\_ with a scandal. One should reserve that to give an interest to

one's old age. I suppose they don't know your name at the theatre? If

they don't, it is all right. Did anyone see you going round to her room?

That is an important point."

Dorian did not answer for a few moments. He was dazed with horror.

Finally he stammered in a stifled voice, "Harry, did you say an

inquest? What did you mean by that? Did Sibyl----? Oh, Harry, I can't

bear it! But be quick. Tell me everything at once."

"I have no doubt it was not an accident, Dorian, though it must be put

in that way to the public. It seems that as she was leaving the theatre

with her mother, about half-past twelve or so, she said she had

forgotten something upstairs. They waited some time for her, but she did

not come down again. They ultimately found her lying dead on the floor

of her dressing-room. She had swallowed something by mistake, some

dreadful thing they use at theatres. I don't know what it was, but it

had either prussic acid or white lead in it. I should fancy it was

prussic acid, as she seems to have died instantaneously."

"Harry, Harry, it is terrible!" cried the lad.

"Yes; it is very tragic, of course, but you must not get yourself mixed

up in it. I see by \_The Standard\_ that she was seventeen. I should have

thought she was almost younger than that. She looked such a child, and

seemed to know so little about acting. Dorian, you mustn't let this

thing get on your nerves. You must come and dine with me, and afterwards

we will look in at the Opera. It is a Patti night, and everybody will be

there. You can come to my sister's box. She has got some smart women

with her."

"So I have murdered Sibyl Vane," said Dorian Gray, half to

himself--"murdered her as surely as if I had cut her little throat with

a knife. Yet the roses are not less lovely for all that. The birds sing

just as happily in my garden. And to-night I am to dine with you, and

then go on to the Opera, and sup somewhere, I suppose, afterwards. How

extraordinarily dramatic life is! If I had read all this in a book,

Harry, I think I would have wept over it. Somehow, now that it has

happened actually, and to me, it seems far too wonderful for tears. Here

is the first passionate love-letter I have ever written in my life.

Strange, that my first passionate love-letter should have been addressed

to a dead girl. Can they feel, I wonder, those white silent people we

call the dead? Sibyl! Can she feel, or know, or listen? Oh, Harry, how I

loved her once! It seems years ago to me now. She was everything to me.

Then came that dreadful night--was it really only last night?--when she

played so badly, and my heart almost broke. She explained it all to me.

It was terribly pathetic. But I was not moved a bit. I thought her

shallow. Suddenly something happened that made me afraid. I can't tell

you what it was, but it was terrible. I said I would go back to her. I

felt I had done wrong. And now she is dead. My God! my God! Harry, what

shall I do? You don't know the danger I am in, and there is nothing to

keep me straight. She would have done that for me. She had no right to

kill herself. It was selfish of her."

"My dear Dorian," answered Lord Henry, taking a cigarette from his case,

and producing a gold-latten matchbox, "the only way a woman can ever

reform a man is by boring him so completely that he loses all possible

interest in life. If you had married this girl you would have been

wretched. Of course you would have treated her kindly. One can always be

kind to people about whom one cares nothing. But she would have soon

found out that you were absolutely indifferent to her. And when a woman

finds that out about her husband, she either becomes dreadfully dowdy,

or wears very smart bonnets that some other woman's husband has to pay

for. I say nothing about the social mistake, which would have been

abject, which, of course, I would not have allowed, but I assure you

that in any case the whole thing would have been an absolute failure."

"I suppose it would," muttered the lad, walking up and down the room,

and looking horribly pale. "But I thought it was my duty. It is not my

fault that this terrible tragedy has prevented my doing what was right.

I remember your saying once that there is a fatality about good

resolutions--that they are always made too late. Mine certainly were."

"Good resolutions are useless attempts to interfere with scientific

laws. Their origin is pure vanity. Their result is absolutely \_nil\_.

They give us, now and then, some of those luxurious sterile emotions

that have a certain charm for the weak. That is all that can be said for

them. They are simply cheques that men draw on a bank where they have no

account."

"Harry," cried Dorian Gray, coming over and sitting down beside him,

"why is it that I cannot feel this tragedy as much as I want to? I don't

think I am heartless. Do you?"

"You have done too many foolish things during the last fortnight to be

entitled to give yourself that name, Dorian," answered Lord Henry, with

his sweet, melancholy smile.

The lad frowned. "I don't like that explanation, Harry," he rejoined,

"but I am glad you don't think I am heartless. I am nothing of the kind.

I know I am not. And yet I must admit that this thing that has happened

does not affect me as it should. It seems to me to be simply like a

wonderful ending to a wonderful play. It has all the terrible beauty of

a Greek tragedy, a tragedy in which I took a great part, but by which I

have not been wounded."

"It is an interesting question," said Lord Henry, who found an exquisite

pleasure in playing on the lad's unconscious egotism--"an extremely

interesting question. I fancy that the true explanation is this. It

often happens that the real tragedies of life occur in such an

inartistic manner that they hurt us by their crude violence, their

absolute incoherence, their absurd want of meaning, their entire lack of

style. They affect us just as vulgarity affects us. They give us an

impression of sheer brute force, and we revolt against that. Sometimes,

however, a tragedy that possesses artistic elements of beauty crosses

our lives. If these elements of beauty are real, the whole thing simply

appeals to our sense of dramatic effect. Suddenly we find that we are no

longer the actors, but the spectators of the play. Or rather we are

both. We watch ourselves, and the mere wonder of the spectacle enthralls

us. In the present case, what is it that has really happened? Someone

has killed herself for love of you. I wish that I had ever had such an

experience. It would have made me in love with love for the rest of my

life. The people who have adored me--there have not been very many, but

there have been some--have always insisted on living on, long after I

had ceased to care for them, or they to care for me. They have become

stout and tedious, and when I meet them they go in at once for

reminiscences. That awful memory of woman! What a fearful thing it is!

And what an utter intellectual stagnation it reveals! One should absorb

the colour of life, but one should never remember its details. Details

are always vulgar."

"I must sow poppies in my garden," sighed Dorian.

"There is no necessity," rejoined his companion. "Life has always

poppies in her hands. Of course, now and then things linger. I once wore

nothing but violets all through one season, as a form of artistic

mourning for a romance that would not die. Ultimately, however, it did

die. I forget what killed it. I think it was her proposing to sacrifice

the whole world for me. That is always a dreadful moment. It fills one

with the terror of eternity. Well--would you believe it?--a week ago, at

Lady Hampshire's, I found myself seated at dinner next the lady in

question, and she insisted on going over the whole thing again, and

digging up the past, and raking up the future. I had buried my romance

in a bed of asphodel. She dragged it out again, and assured me that I

had spoiled her life. I am bound to state that she ate an enormous

dinner, so I did not feel any anxiety. But what a lack of taste she

showed! The one charm of the past is that it is the past. But women

never know when the curtain has fallen. They always want a sixth act,

and as soon as the interest of the play is entirely over they propose to

continue it. If they were allowed their own way, every comedy would have

a tragic ending, and every tragedy would culminate in a farce. They are

charmingly artificial, but they have no sense of art. You are more

fortunate than I am. I assure you, Dorian, that not one of the women I

have known would have done for me what Sibyl Vane did for you. Ordinary

women always console themselves. Some of them do it by going in for

sentimental colours. Never trust a woman who wears mauve, whatever her

age may be, or a woman over thirty-five who is fond of pink ribbons. It

always means that they have a history. Others find a great consolation

in suddenly discovering the good qualities of their husbands. They

flaunt their conjugal felicity in one's face, as if it were the most

fascinating of sins. Religion consoles some. Its mysteries have all the

charm of a flirtation, a woman once told me; and I can quite understand

it. Besides, nothing makes one so vain as being told that one is a

sinner. Conscience makes egotists of us all. Yes; there is really no end

to the consolations that women find in modern life. Indeed, I have not

mentioned the most important one."

"What is that, Harry?" said the lad, listlessly.

"Oh, the obvious consolation. Taking someone else's admirer when one

loses one's own. In good society that always whitewashes a woman. But

really, Dorian, how different Sibyl Vane must have been from all the

women one meets! There is something to me quite beautiful about her

death. I am glad I am living in a century when such wonders happen. They

make one believe in the reality of the things we all play with, such as

romance, passion, and love."

"I was terribly cruel to her. You forget that."

"I am afraid that women appreciate cruelty, downright cruelty, more than

anything else. They have wonderfully primitive instincts. We have

emancipated them, but they remain slaves looking for their masters, all

the same. They love being dominated. I am sure you were splendid. I have

never seen you really and absolutely angry, but I can fancy how

delightful you looked. And, after all, you said something to me the day

before yesterday that seemed to me at the time to be merely fanciful,

but that I see now was absolutely true, and it holds the key to

everything."

"What was that, Harry?"

"You said to me that Sibyl Vane represented to you all the heroines of

romance--that she was Desdemona one night, and Ophelia the other; that

if she died as Juliet, she came to life as Imogen."

"She will never come to life again now," muttered the lad, burying his

face in his hands.

"No, she will never come to life. She has played her last part. But you

must think of that lonely death in the tawdry dressing-room simply as a

strange lurid fragment from some Jacobean tragedy, as a wonderful scene

from Webster, or Ford, or Cyril Tourneur. The girl never really lived,

and so she has never really died. To you at least she was always a

dream, a phantom that flitted through Shakespeare's plays and left them

lovelier for its presence, a reed through which Shakespeare's music

sounded richer and more full of joy. The moment she touched actual life,

she marred it, and it marred her, and so she passed away. Mourn for

Ophelia, if you like. Put ashes on your head because Cordelia was

strangled. Cry out against Heaven because the daughter of Brabantio

died. But don't waste your tears over Sibyl Vane. She was less real than

they are."

There was a silence. The evening darkened in the room. Noiselessly, and

with silver feet, the shadows crept in from the garden. The colours

faded wearily out of things.

After some time Dorian Gray looked up. "You have explained me to myself,

Harry," he murmured, with something of a sigh of relief. "I felt all

that you have said, but somehow I was afraid of it, and I could not

express it to myself. How well you know me! But we will not talk again

of what has happened. It has been a marvellous experience. That is all.

I wonder if life has still in store for me anything as marvellous."

"Life has everything in store for you, Dorian. There is nothing that

you, with your extraordinary good looks, will not be able to do."

"But suppose, Harry, I became haggard, and old, and wrinkled? What

then?"

"Ah, then," said Lord Henry, rising to go--"then, my dear Dorian, you

would have to fight for your victories. As it is, they are brought to

you. No, you must keep your good looks. We live in an age that reads too

much to be wise, and that thinks too much to be beautiful. We cannot

spare you. And now you had better dress, and drive down to the club. We

are rather late, as it is."

"I think I shall join you at the Opera, Harry. I feel too tired to eat

anything. What is the number of your sister's box?"

"Twenty-seven, I believe. It is on the grand tier. You will see her name

on the door. But I am sorry you won't come and dine."

"I don't feel up to it," said Dorian, listlessly. "But I am awfully

obliged to you for all that you have said to me. You are certainly my

best friend. No one has ever understood me as you have."

"We are only at the beginning of our friendship, Dorian," answered Lord

Henry, shaking him by the hand. "Good-bye. I shall see you before

nine-thirty, I hope. Remember, Patti is singing."

As he closed the door behind him, Dorian Gray touched the bell, and in a

few minutes Victor appeared with the lamps and drew the blinds down. He

waited impatiently for him to go. The man seemed to take an interminable

time over everything.

As soon as he had left, he rushed to the screen, and drew it back. No;

there was no further change in the picture. It had received the news of

Sibyl Vane's death before he had known of it himself. It was conscious

of the events of life as they occurred. The vicious cruelty that marred

the fine lines of the mouth had, no doubt, appeared at the very moment

that the girl had drunk the poison, whatever it was. Or was it

indifferent to results? Did it merely take cognizance of what passed

within the soul? He wondered, and hoped that some day he would see the

change taking place before his very eyes, shuddering as he hoped it.

Poor Sibyl! what a romance it had all been! She had often mimicked death

on the stage. Then Death himself had touched her, and taken her with

him. How had she played that dreadful last scene? Had she cursed him, as

she died? No; she had died for love of him, and love would always be a

sacrament to him now. She had atoned for everything, by the sacrifice

she had made of her life. He would not think any more of what she had

made him go through, on that horrible night at the theatre. When he

thought of her, it would be as a wonderful tragic figure sent on to the

world's stage to show the supreme reality of Love. A wonderful tragic

figure? Tears came to his eyes as he remembered her childlike look, and

winsome fanciful ways, and shy tremulous grace. He brushed them away

hastily, and looked again at the picture.

He felt that the time had really come for making his choice. Or had his

choice already been made? Yes, life had decided that for him--life, and

his own infinite curiosity about life. Eternal youth, infinite passion,

pleasures subtle and secret, wild joys and wilder sins--he was to have

all these things. The portrait was to bear the burden of his shame: that

was all.

A feeling of pain crept over him as he thought of the desecration that

was in store for the fair face on the canvas. Once, in boyish mockery of

Narcissus, he had kissed, or feigned to kiss, those painted lips that

now smiled so cruelly at him. Morning after morning he had sat before

the portrait, wondering at its beauty, almost enamoured of it, as it

seemed to him at times. Was it to alter now with every mood to which he

yielded? Was it to become a monstrous and loathsome thing, to be hidden

away in a locked room, to be shut out from the sunlight that had so

often touched to brighter gold the waving wonder of its hair? The pity

of it! the pity of it!

For a moment he thought of praying that the horrible sympathy that

existed between him and the picture might cease. It had changed in

answer to a prayer; perhaps in answer to a prayer it might remain

unchanged. And, yet, who, that knew anything about Life, would surrender

the chance of remaining always young, however fantastic that chance

might be, or with what fateful consequences it might be fraught?

Besides, was it really under his control? Had it indeed been prayer that

had produced the substitution? Might there not be some curious

scientific reason for it all? If thought could exercise its influence

upon a living organism, might not thought exercise an influence upon

dead and inorganic things? Nay, without thought or conscious desire,

might not things external to ourselves vibrate in unison with our moods

and passions, atom calling to atom in secret love of strange affinity?

But the reason was of no importance. He would never again tempt by a

prayer any terrible power. If the picture was to alter, it was to alter.

That was all. Why inquire too closely into it?

For there would be a real pleasure in watching it. He would be able to

follow his mind into its secret places. This portrait would be to him

the most magical of mirrors. As it had revealed to him his own body, so

it would reveal to him his own soul. And when winter came upon it, he

would still be standing where spring trembles on the verge of summer.

When the blood crept from its face, and left behind a pallid mask of

chalk with leaden eyes, he would keep the glamour of boyhood. Not one

blossom of his loveliness would ever fade. Not one pulse of his life

would ever weaken. Like the gods of the Greeks, he would be strong, and

fleet, and joyous. What did it matter what happened to the coloured

image on the canvas? He would be safe. That was everything.

He drew the screen back into its former place in front of the picture,

smiling as he did so, and passed into his bedroom, where his valet was

already waiting for him. An hour later he was at the Opera, and Lord

Henry was leaning over his chair.

CHAPTER IX

As he was sitting at breakfast next morning, Basil Hallward was shown

into the room.

"I am so glad I have found you, Dorian," he said, gravely. "I called

last night, and they told me you were at the Opera. Of course I knew

that was impossible. But I wish you had left word where you had really

gone to. I passed a dreadful evening, half afraid that one tragedy might

be followed by another. I think you might have telegraphed for me when

you heard of it first. I read of it quite by chance in a late edition of

\_The Globe\_, that I picked up at the club. I came here at once, and was

miserable at not finding you. I can't tell you how heartbroken I am

about the whole thing. I know what you must suffer. But where were you?

Did you go down and see the girl's mother? For a moment I thought of

following you there. They gave the address in the paper. Somewhere in

the Euston Road, isn't it? But I was afraid of intruding upon a sorrow

that I could not lighten. Poor woman! What a state she must be in! And

her only child, too! What did she say about it all?"

"My dear Basil, how do I know?" murmured Dorian Gray, sipping some

pale-yellow wine from a delicate gold-beaded bubble of Venetian glass,

and looking dreadfully bored. "I was at the Opera. You should have come

on there. I met Lady Gwendolen, Harry's sister, for the first time. We

were in her box. She is perfectly charming; and Patti sang divinely.

Don't talk about horrid subjects. If one doesn't talk about a thing, it

has never happened. It is simply expression, as Harry says, that gives

reality to things. I may mention that she was not the woman's only

child. There is a son, a charming fellow, I believe. But he is not on

the stage. He is a sailor, or something. And now, tell me about yourself

and what you are painting."

"You went to the Opera?" said Hallward, speaking very slowly, and with a

strained touch of pain in his voice. "You went to the Opera while Sibyl

Vane was lying dead in some sordid lodging? You can talk to me of other

women being charming, and of Patti singing divinely, before the girl you

loved has even the quiet of a grave to sleep in? Why, man, there are

horrors in store for that little white body of hers!"

"Stop, Basil! I won't hear it!" cried Dorian, leaping to his feet. "You

must not tell me about things. What is done is done. What is past is

past."

"You call yesterday the past?"

"What has the actual lapse of time got to do with it? It is only shallow

people who require years to get rid of an emotion. A man who is master

of himself can end a sorrow as easily as he can invent a pleasure. I

don't want to be at the mercy of my emotions. I want to use them, to

enjoy them, and to dominate them."

"Dorian, this is horrible! Something has changed you completely. You

look exactly the same wonderful boy who, day after day, used to come

down to my studio to sit for his picture. But you were simple, natural,

and affectionate then. You were the most unspoiled creature in the whole

world. Now, I don't know what has come over you. You talk as if you had

no heart, no pity in you. It is all Harry's influence. I see that."

The lad flushed up, and, going to the window, looked out for a few

moments on the green, flickering, sun-lashed garden. "I owe a great deal

to Harry, Basil," he said, at last--"more than I owe to you. You only

taught me to be vain."

"Well, I am punished for that, Dorian--or shall be some day."

"I don't know what you mean, Basil," he exclaimed, turning round. "I

don't know what you want. What do you want?"

"I want the Dorian Gray I used to paint," said the artist, sadly.

"Basil," said the lad, going over to him, and putting his hand on his

shoulder, "you have come too late. Yesterday when I heard that Sibyl

Vane had killed herself----"

"Killed herself! Good heavens! is there no doubt about that?" cried

Hallward, looking up at him with an expression of horror.

"My dear Basil! Surely you don't think it was a vulgar accident? Of

course she killed herself."

The elder man buried his face in his hands. "How fearful," he muttered,

and a shudder ran through him.

"No," said Dorian Gray, "there is nothing fearful about it. It is one of

the great romantic tragedies of the age. As a rule, people who act lead

the most commonplace lives. They are good husbands, or faithful wives,

or something tedious. You know what I mean--middle-class virtue, and all

that kind of thing. How different Sibyl was! She lived her finest

tragedy. She was always a heroine. The last night she played--the night

you saw her--she acted badly because she had known the reality of love.

When she knew its unreality, she died, as Juliet might have died. She

passed again into the sphere of art. There is something of the martyr

about her. Her death has all the pathetic uselessness of martyrdom, all

its wasted beauty. But, as I was saying, you must not think I have not

suffered. If you had come in yesterday at a particular moment--about

half-past five, perhaps, or a quarter to six--you would have found me in

tears. Even Harry, who was here, who brought me the news, in fact, had

no idea what I was going through. I suffered immensely. Then it passed

away. I cannot repeat an emotion. No one can, except sentimentalists.

And you are awfully unjust, Basil. You come down here to console me.

That is charming of you. You find me consoled, and you are furious. How

like a sympathetic person! You remind me of a story Harry told me about

a certain philanthropist who spent twenty years of his life in trying to

get some grievance redressed, or some unjust law altered--I forget

exactly what it was. Finally he succeeded, and nothing could exceed his

disappointment. He had absolutely nothing to do, almost died of \_ennui\_,

and became a confirmed misanthrope. And besides, my dear old Basil, if

you really want to console me, teach me rather to forget what has

happened, or to see it from the proper artistic point of view. Was it

not Gautier who used to write about \_la consolation des arts\_? I

remember picking up a little vellum-covered book in your studio one day

and chancing on that delightful phrase. Well, I am not like that young

man you told me of when we were down at Marlow together, the young man

who used to say that yellow satin could console one for all the miseries

of life. I love beautiful things that one can touch and handle. Old

brocades, green bronzes, lacquer-work, carved ivories, exquisite

surroundings, luxury, pomp, there is much to be got from all these. But

the artistic temperament that they create, or at any rate reveal, is

still more to me. To become the spectator of one's own life, as Harry

says, is to escape the suffering of life. I know you are surprised at my

talking to you like this. You have not realised how I have developed. I

was a schoolboy when you knew me. I am a man now. I have new passions,

new thoughts, new ideas. I am different, but you must not like me less.

I am changed, but you must always be my friend. Of course I am very fond

of Harry. But I know that you are better than he is. You are not

stronger--you are too much afraid of life--but you are better. And how

happy we used to be together! Don't leave me, Basil, and don't quarrel

with me. I am what I am. There is nothing more to be said."

The painter felt strangely moved. The lad was infinitely dear to him,

and his personality had been the great turning-point in his art. He

could not bear the idea of reproaching him any more. After all, his

indifference was probably merely a mood that would pass away. There was

so much in him that was good, so much in him that was noble.

"Well, Dorian," he said, at length, with a sad smile, "I won't speak to

you again about this horrible thing, after to-day. I only trust your

name won't be mentioned in connection with it. The inquest is to take

place this afternoon. Have they summoned you?"

Dorian shook his head and a look of annoyance passed over his face at

the mention of the word "inquest." There was something so crude and

vulgar about everything of the kind. "They don't know my name," he

answered.

"But surely she did?"

"Only my Christian name, and that I am quite sure she never mentioned to

anyone. She told me once that they were all rather curious to learn who

I was, and that she invariably told them my name was Prince Charming. It

was pretty of her. You must do me a drawing of Sibyl, Basil. I should

like to have something more of her than the memory of a few kisses and

some broken pathetic words."

"I will try and do something, Dorian, if it would please you. But you

must come and sit to me yourself again. I can't get on without you."

"I can never sit to you again, Basil. It is impossible!" he exclaimed,

starting back.

The painter stared at him. "My dear boy, what nonsense!" he cried. "Do

you mean to say you don't like what I did of you? Where is it? Why have

you pulled the screen in front of it? Let me look at it. It is the best

thing I have ever done. Do take the screen away, Dorian. It is simply

disgraceful of your servant hiding my work like that. I felt the room

looked different as I came in."

"My servant has nothing to do with it, Basil. You don't imagine I let

him arrange my room for me? He settles my flowers for me sometimes--that

is all. No; I did it myself. The light was too strong on the portrait."

"Too strong! Surely not, my dear fellow? It is an admirable place for

it. Let me see it." And Hallward walked towards the corner of the room.

A cry of terror broke from Dorian Gray's lips, and he rushed between the

painter and the screen. "Basil," he said, looking very pale, "you must

not look at it. I don't wish you to."

"Not look at my own work! you are not serious. Why shouldn't I look at

it?" exclaimed Hallward, laughing.

"If you try to look at it, Basil, on my word of honour I will never

speak to you again as long as I live. I am quite serious. I don't offer

any explanation, and you are not to ask for any. But, remember, if you

touch this screen, everything is over between us."

Hallward was thunderstruck. He looked at Dorian Gray in absolute

amazement. He had never seen him like this before. The lad was actually

pallid with rage. His hands were clenched, and the pupils of his eyes

were like disks of blue fire. He was trembling all over.

"Dorian!"

"Don't speak!"

"But what is the matter? Of course I won't look at it if you don't want

me to," he said, rather coldly, turning on his heel, and going over

towards the window. "But, really, it seems rather absurd that I

shouldn't see my own work, especially as I am going to exhibit it in

Paris in the autumn. I shall probably have to give it another coat of

varnish before that, so I must see it some day, and why not to-day?"

"To exhibit it? You want to exhibit it?" exclaimed Dorian Gray, a

strange sense of terror creeping over him. Was the world going to be

shown his secret? Were people to gape at the mystery of his life? That

was impossible. Something--he did not know what--had to be done at once.

"Yes; I don't suppose you will object to that. George Petit is going to

collect all my best pictures for a special exhibition in the Rue de

Seze, which will open the first week in October. The portrait will only

be away a month. I should think you could easily spare it for that time.

In fact, you are sure to be out of town. And if you keep it always

behind a screen, you can't care much about it."

Dorian Gray passed his hand over his forehead. There were beads of

perspiration there. He felt that he was on the brink of a horrible

danger. "You told me a month ago that you would never exhibit it," he

cried. "Why have you changed your mind? You people who go in for being

consistent have just as many moods as others have. The only difference

is that your moods are rather meaningless. You can't have forgotten that

you assured me most solemnly that nothing in the world would induce you

to send it to any exhibition. You told Harry exactly the same thing." He

stopped suddenly, and a gleam of light came into his eyes. He remembered

that Lord Henry had said to him once, half seriously and half in jest,

"If you want to have a strange quarter of an hour, get Basil to tell you

why he won't exhibit your picture. He told me why he wouldn't, and it

was a revelation to me." Yes, perhaps Basil, too, had his secret. He

would ask him and try.

"Basil," he said, coming over quite close, and looking him straight in

the face, "we have each of us a secret. Let me know yours and I shall

tell you mine. What was your reason for refusing to exhibit my

picture?"

The painter shuddered in spite of himself. "Dorian, if I told you, you

might like me less than you do, and you would certainly laugh at me. I

could not bear your doing either of those two things. If you wish me

never to look at your picture again, I am content. I have always you to

look at. If you wish the best work I have ever done to be hidden from

the world, I am satisfied. Your friendship is dearer to me than any fame

or reputation."

"No, Basil, you must tell me," insisted Dorian Gray. "I think I have a

right to know." His feeling of terror had passed away, and curiosity had

taken its place. He was determined to find out Basil Hallward's mystery.

"Let us sit down, Dorian," said the painter, looking troubled. "Let us

sit down. And just answer me one question. Have you noticed in the

picture something curious?--something that probably at first did not

strike you, but that revealed itself to you suddenly?"

"Basil!" cried the lad, clutching the arms of his chair with trembling

hands, and gazing at him with wild, startled eyes.

"I see you did. Don't speak. Wait till you hear what I have to say.

Dorian, from the moment I met you, your personality had the most

extraordinary influence over me. I was dominated, soul, brain, and power

by you. You became to me the visible incarnation of that unseen ideal

whose memory haunts us artists like an exquisite dream. I worshipped

you. I grew jealous of everyone to whom you spoke. I wanted to have you

all to myself. I was only happy when I was with you. When you were away

from me you were still present in my art.... Of course I never let you

know anything about this. It would have been impossible. You would not

have understood it. I hardly understood it myself. I only knew that I

had seen perfection face to face, and that the world had become

wonderful to my eyes--too wonderful, perhaps, for in such mad worships

there is peril, the peril of losing them, no less than the peril of

keeping them.... Weeks and weeks went on, and I grew more and more

absorbed in you. Then came a new development. I had drawn you as Paris

in dainty armour, and as Adonis with huntsman's cloak and polished

boar-spear. Crowned with heavy lotus-blossoms you had sat on the prow of

Adrian's barge, gazing across the green turbid Nile. You had leant over

the still pool of some Greek woodland, and seen in the water's silent

silver the marvel of your own face. And it had all been what art should

be, unconscious, ideal, and remote. One day, a fatal day I sometimes

think, I determined to paint a wonderful portrait of you as you actually

are, not in the costume of dead ages, but in your own dress and in your

own time. Whether it was the Realism of the method, or the mere wonder

of your own personality, thus directly presented to me without mist or

veil, I cannot tell. But I know that as I worked at it, every flake and

film of colour seemed to me to reveal my secret. I grew afraid that

others would know of my idolatry. I felt, Dorian, that I had told too

much, that I had put too much of myself into it. Then it was that I

resolved never to allow the picture to be exhibited. You were a little

annoyed; but then you did not realise all that it meant to me. Harry, to

whom I talked about it, laughed at me. But I did not mind that. When the

picture was finished, and I sat alone with it, I felt that I was

right.... Well, after a few days the thing left my studio, and as soon

as I had got rid of the intolerable fascination of its presence it

seemed to me that I had been foolish in imagining that I had seen

anything in it, more than that you were extremely good-looking, and that

I could paint. Even now I cannot help feeling that it is a mistake to

think that the passion one feels in creation is ever really shown in the

work one creates. Art is always more abstract than we fancy. Form and

colour tell us of form and colour--that is all. It often seems to me

that art conceals the artist far more completely than it ever reveals

him. And so when I got this offer from Paris I determined to make your

portrait the principal thing in my exhibition. It never occurred to me

that you would refuse. I see now that you were right. The picture cannot

be shown. You must not be angry with me, Dorian, for what I have told

you. As I said to Harry, once, you are made to be worshipped."

Dorian Gray drew a long breath. The colour came back to his cheeks, and

a smile played about his lips. The peril was over. He was safe for the

time. Yet he could not help feeling infinite pity for the painter who

had just made this strange confession to him, and wondered if he himself

would ever be so dominated by the personality of a friend. Lord Henry

had the charm of being very dangerous. But that was all. He was too

clever and too cynical to be really fond of. Would there ever be someone

who would fill him with a strange idolatry? Was that one of the things

that life had in store?

"It is extraordinary to me, Dorian," said Hallward, "that you should

have seen this in the portrait. Did you really see it?"

"I saw something in it," he answered, "something that seemed to me very

curious."

"Well, you don't mind my looking at the thing now?"

Dorian shook his head. "You must not ask me that, Basil. I could not

possibly let you stand in front of that picture."

"You will some day, surely?"

"Never."

"Well, perhaps you are right. And now good-bye, Dorian. You have been

the one person in my life who has really influenced my art. Whatever I

have done that is good, I owe to you. Ah! you don't know what it cost me

to tell you all that I have told you."

"My dear Basil," said Dorian, "what have you told me? Simply that you

felt that you admired me too much. That is not even a compliment."

"It was not intended as a compliment. It was a confession. Now that I

have made it, something seems to have gone out of me. Perhaps one should

never put one's worship into words."

"It was a very disappointing confession."

"Why, what did you expect, Dorian? You didn't see anything else in the

picture, did you? There was nothing else to see?"

"No; there was nothing else to see. Why do you ask? But you mustn't talk

about worship. It is foolish. You and I are friends, Basil, and we must

always remain so."

"You have got Harry," said the painter, sadly.

"Oh, Harry!" cried the lad, with a ripple of laughter. "Harry spends his

days in saying what is incredible, and his evenings in doing what is

improbable. Just the sort of life I would like to lead. But still I

don't think I would go to Harry if I were in trouble. I would sooner go

to you, Basil."

"You will sit to me again?"

"Impossible!"

"You spoil my life as an artist by refusing, Dorian. No man came across

two ideal things. Few come across one."

"I can't explain it to you, Basil, but I must never sit to you again.

There is something fatal about a portrait. It has a life of its own. I

will come and have tea with you. That will be just as pleasant."

"Pleasanter for you, I am afraid," murmured Hallward, regretfully. "And

now good-bye. I am sorry you won't let me look at the picture once

again. But that can't be helped. I quite understand what you feel about

it."

As he left the room, Dorian Gray smiled to himself. Poor Basil! how

little he knew of the true reason! And how strange it was that, instead

of having been forced to reveal his own secret, he had succeeded, almost

by chance, in wresting a secret from his friend! How much that strange

confession explained to him! The painter's absurd fits of jealousy, his

wild devotion, his extravagant panegyrics, his curious reticences--he

understood them all now, and he felt sorry. There seemed to him to be

something tragic in a friendship so coloured by romance.

He sighed, and touched the bell. The portrait must be hidden away at all

costs. He could not run such a risk of discovery again. It had been mad

of him to have allowed the thing to remain, even for an hour, in a room

to which any of his friends had access.

CHAPTER X

When his servant entered, he looked at him steadfastly, and wondered if

he had thought of peering behind the screen. The man was quite

impassive, and waited for his orders. Dorian lit a cigarette, and walked

over to the glass and glanced into it. He could see the reflection of

Victor's face perfectly. It was like a placid mask of servility. There

was nothing to be afraid of, there. Yet he thought it best to be on his

guard.

Speaking very slowly, he told him to tell the housekeeper that he wanted

to see her, and then to go to the frame-maker and ask him to send two of

his men round at once. It seemed to him that as the man left the room

his eyes wandered in the direction of the screen. Or was that merely his

own fancy?

After a few moments, in her black silk dress, with old-fashioned thread

mittens on her wrinkled hands, Mrs. Leaf bustled into the library. He

asked her for the key of the schoolroom.

"The old schoolroom, Mr. Dorian?" she exclaimed. "Why, it is full of

dust. I must get it arranged, and put straight before you go into it. It

is not fit for you to see, sir. It is not, indeed."

"I don't want it put straight, Leaf. I only want the key."

"Well, sir, you'll be covered with cobwebs if you go into it. Why, it

hasn't been opened for nearly five years, not since his lordship died."

He winced at the mention of his grandfather. He had hateful memories of

him. "That does not matter," he answered. "I simply want to see the

place--that is all. Give me the key."

"And here is the key, sir," said the old lady, going over the contents

of her bunch with tremulously uncertain hands. "Here is the key. I'll

have it off the bunch in a moment. But you don't think of living up

there, sir, and you so comfortable here?"

"No, no," he cried, petulantly. "Thank you, Leaf. That will do."

She lingered for a few moments, and was garrulous over some detail of

the household. He sighed, and told her to manage things as she thought

best. She left the room, wreathed in smiles.

As the door closed, Dorian put the key in his pocket, and looked round

the room. His eye fell on a large, purple satin coverlet heavily

embroidered with gold, a splendid piece of late seventeenth-century

Venetian work that his grandfather had found in a convent near Bologna.

Yes, that would serve to wrap the dreadful thing in. It had perhaps

served often as a pall for the dead. Now it was to hide something that

had a corruption of its own, worse than the corruption of death

itself--something that would breed horrors and yet would never die. What

the worm was to the corpse, his sins would be to the painted image on

the canvas. They would mar its beauty, and eat away its grace. They

would defile it, and make it shameful. And yet the thing would still

live on. It would be always alive.

He shuddered, and for a moment he regretted that he had not told Basil

the true reason why he had wished to hide the picture away. Basil would

have helped him to resist Lord Henry's influence, and the still more

poisonous influences that came from his own temperament. The love that

he bore him--for it was really love--had nothing in it that was not

noble and intellectual. It was not that mere physical admiration of

beauty that is born of the senses, and that dies when the senses tire.

It was such love as Michael Angelo had known, and Montaigne, and

Winckelmann, and Shakespeare himself. Yes, Basil could have saved him.

But it was too late now. The past could always be annihilated. Regret,

denial, or forgetfulness could do that. But the future was inevitable.

There were passions in him that would find their terrible outlet, dreams

that would make the shadow of their evil real.

He took up from the couch the great purple-and-gold texture that covered

it, and, holding it in his hands, passed behind the screen. Was the face

on the canvas viler than before? It seemed to him that it was unchanged;

and yet his loathing of it was intensified. Gold hair, blue eyes, and

rose-red lips--they all were there. It was simply the expression that

had altered. That was horrible in its cruelty. Compared to what he saw

in it of censure or rebuke, how shallow Basil's reproaches about Sibyl

Vane had been!--how shallow, and of what little account! His own soul

was looking out at him from the canvas and calling him to judgment. A

look of pain came across him, and he flung the rich pall over the

picture. As he did so, a knock came to the door. He passed out as his

servant entered.

"The persons are here, Monsieur."

He felt that the man must be got rid of at once. He must not be allowed

to know where the picture was being taken to. There was something sly

about him, and he had thoughtful, treacherous eyes. Sitting down at the

writing-table, he scribbled a note to Lord Henry, asking him to send him

round something to read, and reminding him that they were to meet at

eight-fifteen that evening.

"Wait for an answer," he said, handing it to him, "and show the men in

here."

In two or three minutes there was another knock, and Mr. Hubbard

himself, the celebrated frame-maker of South Audley Street, came in with

a somewhat rough-looking young assistant. Mr. Hubbard was a florid,

red-whiskered little man, whose admiration for art was considerably

tempered by the inveterate impecuniosity of most of the artists who

dealt with him. As a rule, he never left his shop. He waited for people

to come to him. But he always made an exception in favour of Dorian

Gray. There was something about Dorian that charmed everybody. It was a

pleasure even to see him.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Gray?" he said, rubbing his fat freckled

hands. "I thought I would do myself the honour of coming round in

person. I have just got a beauty of a frame, sir. Picked it up at a

sale. Old Florentine. Came from Fonthill, I believe. Admirably suited

for a religious subject, Mr. Gray."

"I am so sorry you have given yourself the trouble of coming round, Mr.

Hubbard. I shall certainly drop in and look at the frame--though I don't

go in much at present for religious art--but to-day I only want a

picture carried to the top of the house for me. It is rather heavy, so I

thought I would ask you to lend me a couple of your men."

"No trouble at all, Mr. Gray. I am delighted to be of any service to

you. Which is the work of art, sir?"

"This," replied Dorian, moving the screen back. "Can you move it,

covering and all, just as it is? I don't want it to get scratched going

upstairs."

"There will be no difficulty, sir," said the genial frame-maker,

beginning, with the aid of his assistant, to unhook the picture from the

long brass chains by which it was suspended. "And, now, where shall we

carry it to, Mr. Gray?"

"I will show you the way, Mr. Hubbard, if you will kindly follow me. Or

perhaps you had better go in front. I am afraid it is right at the top

of the house. We will go up by the front staircase, as it is wider."

He held the door open for them, and they passed out into the hall and

began the ascent. The elaborate character of the frame had made the

picture extremely bulky, and now and then, in spite of the obsequious

protests of Mr. Hubbard, who had the true tradesman's spirited dislike

of seeing a gentleman doing anything useful, Dorian put his hand to it

so as to help them.

"Something of a load to carry, sir," gasped the little man, when they

reached the top landing. And he wiped his shiny forehead.

"I am afraid it is rather heavy," murmured Dorian, as he unlocked the

door that opened into the room that was to keep for him the curious

secret of his life and hide his soul from the eyes of men.

He had not entered the place for more than four years--not, indeed,

since he had used it first as a play-room when he was a child, and then

as a study when he grew somewhat older. It was a large,

well-proportioned room, which had been specially built by the last Lord

Kelso for the use of the little grandson whom, for his strange likeness

to his mother, and also for other reasons, he had always hated and

desired to keep at a distance. It appeared to Dorian to have but little

changed. There was the huge Italian \_cassone\_, with its

fantastically-painted panels and its tarnished gilt mouldings, in which

he had so often hidden himself as a boy. There the satinwood bookcase

filled with his dog-eared schoolbooks. On the wall behind it was hanging

the same ragged Flemish tapestry, where a faded king and queen were

playing chess in a garden, while a company of hawkers rode by, carrying

hooded birds on their gauntleted wrists. How well he remembered it all!

Every moment of his lonely childhood came back to him as he looked

round. He recalled the stainless purity of his boyish life, and it

seemed horrible to him that it was here the fatal portrait was to be

hidden away. How little he had thought, in those dead days, of all that

was in store for him!

But there was no other place in the house so secure from prying eyes as

this. He had the key, and no one else could enter it. Beneath its purple

pall, the face painted on the canvas could grow bestial, sodden, and

unclean. What did it matter? No one could see it. He himself would not

see it. Why should he watch the hideous corruption of his soul? He kept

his youth--that was enough. And, besides, might not his nature grow

finer, after all? There was no reason that the future should be so full

of shame. Some love might come across his life, and purify him, and

shield him from those sins that seemed to be already stirring in spirit

and in flesh--those curious unpictured sins whose very mystery lent them

their subtlety and their charm. Perhaps, some day, the cruel look would

have passed away from the scarlet sensitive mouth, and he might show to

the world Basil Hallward's masterpiece.

No; that was impossible. Hour by hour, and week by week, the thing upon

the canvas was growing old. It might escape the hideousness of sin, but

the hideousness of age was in store for it. The cheeks would become

hollow or flaccid. Yellow crow's-feet would creep round the fading eyes

and make them horrible. The hair would lose its brightness, the mouth

would gape or droop, would be foolish or gross, as the mouths of old men

are. There would be the wrinkled throat, the cold, blue-veined hands,

the twisted body, that he remembered in the grandfather who had been so

stern to him in his boyhood. The picture had to be concealed. There was

no help for it.

"Bring it in, Mr. Hubbard, please," he said, wearily, turning round. "I

am sorry I kept you so long. I was thinking of something else."

"Always glad to have a rest, Mr. Gray," answered the frame-maker, who

was still gasping for breath. "Where shall we put it, sir?"

"Oh, anywhere. Here: this will do. I don't want to have it hung up. Just

lean it against the wall. Thanks."

"Might one look at the work of art, sir?"

Dorian started. "It would not interest you, Mr. Hubbard," he said,

keeping his eye on the man. He felt ready to leap upon him and fling him

to the ground if he dared to lift the gorgeous hanging that concealed

the secret of his life. "I shan't trouble you any more now. I am much

obliged for your kindness in coming round."

"Not at all, not at all, Mr. Gray. Ever ready to do anything for you,

sir." And Mr. Hubbard tramped downstairs, followed by the assistant, who

glanced back at Dorian with a look of shy wonder in his rough, uncomely

face. He had never seen anyone so marvellous.

When the sound of their footsteps had died away, Dorian locked the door,

and put the key in his pocket. He felt safe now. No one would ever look

upon the horrible thing. No eye but his would ever see his shame.

On reaching the library he found that it was just after five o'clock,

and that the tea had been already brought up. On a little table of dark

perfumed wood thickly encrusted with nacre, a present from Lady Radley,

his guardian's wife, a pretty professional invalid, who had spent the

preceding winter in Cairo, was lying a note from Lord Henry, and beside

it was a book bound in yellow paper, the cover slightly torn and the

edges soiled. A copy of the third edition of \_The St. James's Gazette\_

had been placed on the tea-tray. It was evident that Victor had

returned. He wondered if he had met the men in the hall as they were

leaving the house, and had wormed out of them what they had been doing.

He would be sure to miss the picture--had no doubt missed it already,

while he had been laying the tea-things. The screen had not been set

back, and a blank space was visible on the wall. Perhaps some night he

might find him creeping upstairs and trying to force the door of the

room. It was a horrible thing to have a spy in one's house. He had heard

of rich men who had been blackmailed all their lives by some servant who

had read a letter, or overheard a conversation, or picked up a card with

an address, or found beneath a pillow a withered flower or a shred of

crumpled lace.

He sighed, and, having poured himself out some tea, opened Lord Henry's

note. It was simply to say that he sent him round the evening paper, and

a book that might interest him, and that he would be at the club at

eight-fifteen. He opened \_The St. James's\_ languidly, and looked through

it. A red pencil-mark on the fifth page caught his eye. It drew

attention to the following paragraph:--

"INQUEST ON AN ACTRESS.--An inquest was held this morning at the

Bell Tavern, Hoxton Road, by Mr. Danby, the District Coroner, on

the body of Sibyl Vane, a young actress recently engaged at the

Royal Theatre, Holborn. A verdict of death by misadventure was

returned. Considerable sympathy was expressed for the mother of the

deceased, who was greatly affected during the giving of her own

evidence, and that of Dr. Birrell, who had made the post-mortem

examination of the deceased."

He frowned, and, tearing the paper in two, went across the room and

flung the pieces away. How ugly it all was! And how horribly real

ugliness made things! He felt a little annoyed with Lord Henry for

having sent him the report. And it was certainly stupid of him to have

marked it with red pencil. Victor might have read it. The man knew more

than enough English for that.

Perhaps he had read it, and had begun to suspect something. And, yet,

what did it matter? What had Dorian Gray to do with Sibyl Vane's death?

There was nothing to fear. Dorian Gray had not killed her.

His eye fell on the yellow book that Lord Henry had sent him. What was

it, he wondered. He went towards the little pearl-coloured octagonal

stand, that had always looked to him like the work of some strange

Egyptian bees that wrought in silver, and taking up the volume, flung

himself into an arm-chair, and began to turn over the leaves. After a

few minutes he became absorbed. It was the strangest book that he had

ever read. It seemed to him that in exquisite raiment, and to the

delicate sound of flutes, the sins of the world were passing in dumb

show before him. Things that he had dimly dreamed of were suddenly made

real to him. Things of which he had never dreamed were gradually

revealed.

It was a novel without a plot, and with only one character, being,

indeed, simply a psychological study of a certain young Parisian, who

spent his life trying to realise in the nineteenth century all the

passions and modes of thought that belonged to every century except his

own, and to sum up, as it were, in himself the various moods through

which the world-spirit had ever passed, loving for their mere

artificiality those renunciations that men have unwisely called virtue,

as much as those natural rebellions that wise men still call sin. The

style in which it was written was that curious jewelled style, vivid and

obscure at once, full of \_argot\_ and of archaisms, of technical

expressions and of elaborate paraphrases, that characterises the work of

some of the finest artists of the French school of \_Symbolistes\_. There

were in it metaphors as monstrous as orchids, and as subtle in colour.

The life of the senses was described in the terms of mystical

philosophy. One hardly knew at times whether one was reading the

spiritual ecstasies of some medi?val saint or the morbid confessions of

a modern sinner. It was a poisonous book. The heavy odour of incense

seemed to cling about its pages and to trouble the brain. The mere

cadence of the sentences, the subtle monotony of their music, so full as

it was of complex refrains and movements elaborately repeated, produced

in the mind of the lad, as he passed from chapter to chapter, a form of

reverie, a malady of dreaming, that made him unconscious of the falling

day and creeping shadows.

Cloudless, and pierced by one solitary star, a copper-green sky gleamed

through the windows. He read on by its wan light till he could read no

more. Then, after his valet had reminded him several times of the

lateness of the hour, he got up, and, going into the next room, placed

the book on the little Florentine table that always stood at his

bedside, and began to dress for dinner.

It was almost nine o'clock before he reached the club, where he found

Lord Henry sitting alone, in the morning-room, looking very much bored.

"I am so sorry, Harry," he cried, "but really it is entirely your fault.

That book you sent me so fascinated me that I forgot how the time was

going."

"Yes: I thought you would like it," replied his host, rising from his

chair.

"I didn't say I liked it, Harry. I said it fascinated me. There is a

great difference."

"Ah, you have discovered that?" murmured Lord Henry. And they passed

into the dining-room.

CHAPTER XI

For years, Dorian Gray could not free himself from the influence of this

book. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he never sought

to free himself from it. He procured from Paris no less than nine

large-paper copies of the first edition, and had them bound in different

colours, so that they might suit his various moods and the changing

fancies of a nature over which he seemed, at times, to have almost

entirely lost control. The hero, the wonderful young Parisian, in whom

the romantic and the scientific temperaments were so strangely blended,

became to him a kind of prefiguring type of himself. And, indeed, the

whole book seemed to him to contain the story of his own life, written

before he had lived it.

In one point he was more fortunate than the novel's fantastic hero. He

never knew--never, indeed, had any cause to know--that somewhat

grotesque dread of mirrors, and polished metal surfaces, and still

water, which came upon the young Parisian so early in his life, and was

occasioned by the sudden decay of a beauty that had once, apparently,

been so remarkable. It was with an almost cruel joy--and perhaps in

nearly every joy, as certainly in every pleasure, cruelty has its

place--that he used to read the latter part of the book, with its really

tragic, if somewhat over-emphasised, account of the sorrow and despair

of one who had himself lost what in others, and in the world, he had

most dearly valued.

For the wonderful beauty that had so fascinated Basil Hallward, and many

others besides him, seemed never to leave him. Even those who had heard

the most evil things against him, and from time to time strange rumours

about his mode of life crept through London and became the chatter of

the clubs, could not believe anything to his dishonour when they saw

him. He had always the look of one who had kept himself unspotted from

the world. Men who talked grossly became silent when Dorian Gray entered

the room. There was something in the purity of his face that rebuked

them. His mere presence seemed to recall to them the memory of the

innocence that they had tarnished. They wondered how one so charming and

graceful as he was could have escaped the stain of an age that was at

once sordid and sensual.

Often, on returning home from one of those mysterious and prolonged

absences that gave rise to such strange conjecture among those who were

his friends, or thought that they were so, he himself would creep

upstairs to the locked room, open the door with the key that never left

him now, and stand, with a mirror, in front of the portrait that Basil

Hallward had painted of him, looking now at the evil and ageing face on

the canvas, and now at the fair young face that laughed back at him from

the polished glass. The very sharpness of the contrast used to quicken

his sense of pleasure. He grew more and more enamoured of his own

beauty, more and more interested in the corruption of his own soul. He

would examine with minute care, and sometimes with a monstrous and

terrible delight, the hideous lines that seared the wrinkling forehead,

or crawled around the heavy sensual mouth, wondering sometimes which

were the more horrible, the signs of sin or the signs of age. He would

place his white hands beside the coarse bloated hands of the picture,

and smile. He mocked the misshapen body and the failing limbs.

There were moments, indeed, at night, when, lying sleepless in his own

delicately-scented chamber, or in the sordid room of the little

ill-famed tavern near the Docks, which, under an assumed name, and in

disguise, it was his habit to frequent, he would think of the ruin he

had brought upon his soul, with a pity that was all the more poignant

because it was purely selfish. But moments such as these were rare. That

curiosity about life which Lord Henry had first stirred in him, as they

sat together in the garden of their friend, seemed to increase with

gratification. The more he knew, the more he desired to know. He had mad

hungers that grew more ravenous as he fed them.

Yet he was not really reckless, at any rate in his relations to society.

Once or twice every month during the winter, and on each Wednesday

evening while the season lasted, he would throw open to the world his

beautiful house and have the most celebrated musicians of the day to

charm his guests with the wonders of their art. His little dinners, in

the settling of which Lord Henry always assisted him, were noted as much

for the careful selection and placing of those invited, as for the

exquisite taste shown in the decoration of the table, with its subtle

symphonic arrangements of exotic flowers, and embroidered cloths, and

antique plate of gold and silver. Indeed, there were many, especially

among the very young men, who saw, or fancied that they saw, in Dorian

Gray the true realisation of a type of which they had often dreamed in

Eton or Oxford days, a type that was to combine something of the real

culture of the scholar with all the grace and distinction and perfect

manner of a citizen of the world. To them he seemed to be of the company

of those whom Dante describes as having sought to "make themselves

perfect by the worship of beauty." Like Gautier, he was one for whom

"the visible world existed."

And, certainly, to him Life itself was the first, the greatest, of the

arts, and for it all the other arts seemed to be but a preparation.

Fashion, by which what is really fantastic becomes for a moment

universal, and Dandyism, which, in its own way, is an attempt to assert

the absolute modernity of beauty, had, of course, their fascination for

him. His mode of dressing, and the particular styles that from time to

time he affected, had their marked influence on the young exquisites of

the Mayfair balls and Pall Mall club windows, who copied him in

everything that he did, and tried to reproduce the accidental charm of

his graceful, though to him only half-serious, fopperies.

For, while he was but too ready to accept the position that was almost

immediately offered to him on his coming of age, and found, indeed, a

subtle pleasure in the thought that he might really become to the London

of his own day what to imperial Neronian Rome the author of the

"Satyricon" once had been, yet in his inmost heart he desired to be

something more than a mere \_arbiter elegantiarum\_, to be consulted on

the wearing of a jewel, or the knotting of a necktie, or the conduct of

a cane. He sought to elaborate some new scheme of life that would have

its reasoned philosophy and its ordered principles, and find in the

spiritualising of the senses its highest realisation.

The worship of the senses has often, and with much justice, been

decried, men feeling a natural instinct of terror about passions and

sensations that seem stronger than themselves, and that they are

conscious of sharing with the less highly organised forms of existence.

But it appeared to Dorian Gray that the true nature of the senses had

never been understood, and that they had remained savage and animal

merely because the world had sought to starve them into submission or to

kill them by pain, instead of aiming at making them elements of a new

spirituality, of which a fine instinct for beauty was to be the dominant

characteristic. As he looked back upon man moving through History, he

was haunted by a feeling of loss. So much had been surrendered! and to

such little purpose! There had been mad wilful rejections, monstrous

forms of self-torture and self-denial, whose origin was fear, and whose

result was a degradation infinitely more terrible than that fancied

degradation from which, in their ignorance, they had sought to escape,

Nature, in her wonderful irony, driving out the anchorite to feed with

the wild animals of the desert and giving to the hermit the beasts of

the field as his companions.

Yes: there was to be, as Lord Henry had prophesied, a new Hedonism that

was to recreate life, and to save it from that harsh, uncomely

puritanism that is having, in our own day, its curious revival. It was

to have its service of the intellect, certainly; yet, it was never to

accept any theory or system that would involve the sacrifice of any mode

of passionate experience. Its aim, indeed, was to be experience itself,

and not the fruits of experience, sweet or bitter as they might be. Of

the asceticism that deadens the senses, as of the vulgar profligacy that

dulls them, it was to know nothing. But it was to teach man to

concentrate himself upon the moments of a life that is itself but a

moment.

There are few of us who have not sometimes wakened before dawn, either

after one of those dreamless nights that make us almost enamoured of

death, or one of those nights of horror and misshapen joy, when through

the chambers of the brain sweep phantoms more terrible than reality

itself, and instinct with that vivid life that lurks in all grotesques,

and that lends to Gothic art its enduring vitality, this art being, one

might fancy, especially the art of those whose minds have been troubled

with the malady of reverie. Gradually white fingers creep through the

curtains, and they appear to tremble. In black fantastic shapes, dumb

shadows crawl into the corners of the room, and crouch there. Outside,

there is the stirring of birds among the leaves, or the sound of men

going forth to their work, or the sigh and sob of the wind coming down

from the hills, and wandering round the silent house, as though it

feared to wake the sleepers, and yet must needs call forth sleep from

her purple cave. Veil after veil of thin dusky gauze is lifted, and by

degrees the forms and colours of things are restored to them, and we

watch the dawn remaking the world in its antique pattern. The wan

mirrors get back their mimic life. The flameless tapers stand where we

had left them, and beside them lies the half-cut book that we had been

studying, or the wired flower that we had worn at the ball, or the

letter that we had been afraid to read, or that we had read too often.

Nothing seems to us changed. Out of the unreal shadows of the night

comes back the real life that we had known. We have to resume it where

we had left off, and there steals over us a terrible sense of the

necessity for the continuance of energy in the same wearisome round of

stereotyped habits, or a wild longing, it may be, that our eyelids might

open some morning upon a world that had been refashioned anew in the

darkness for our pleasure, a world in which things would have fresh

shapes and colours, and be changed, or have other secrets, a world in

which the past would have little or no place, or survive, at any rate,

in no conscious form of obligation or regret, the remembrance even of

joy having its bitterness, and the memories of pleasure their pain.

It was the creation of such worlds as these that seemed to Dorian Gray

to be the true object, or amongst the true objects, of life; and in his

search for sensations that would be at once new and delightful, and

possess that element of strangeness that is so essential to romance, he

would often adopt certain modes of thought that he knew to be really

alien to his nature, abandon himself to their subtle influences, and

then, having, as it were, caught their colour and satisfied his

intellectual curiosity, leave them with that curious indifference that

is not incompatible with a real ardour of temperament, and that indeed,

according to certain modern psychologists, is often a condition of it.

It was rumoured of him once that he was about to join the Roman Catholic

communion; and certainly the Roman ritual had always a great attraction

for him. The daily sacrifice, more awful really than all the sacrifices

of the antique world, stirred him as much by its superb rejection of

the evidence of the senses as by the primitive simplicity of its

elements and the eternal pathos of the human tragedy that it sought to

symbolise. He loved to kneel down on the cold marble pavement, and watch

the priest, in his stiff flowered vestment, slowly and with white hands

moving aside the veil of the tabernacle, or raising aloft the jewelled

lantern-shaped monstrance with that pallid wafer that at times, one

would fain think, is indeed the "\_panis c?lestis\_," the bread of angels,

or, robed in the garments of the Passion of Christ, breaking the Host

into the chalice, and smiting his breast for his sins. The fuming

censers, that the grave boys, in their lace and scarlet, tossed into the

air like great gilt flowers, had their subtle fascination for him. As he

passed out, he used to look with wonder at the black confessionals, and

long to sit in the dim shadow of one of them and listen to men and women

whispering through the worn grating the true story of their lives.

But he never fell into the error of arresting his intellectual

development by any formal acceptance of creed or system, or of

mistaking, for a house in which to live, an inn that is but suitable for

the sojourn of a night, or for a few hours of a night in which there are

no stars and the moon is in travail. Mysticism, with its marvellous

power of making common things strange to us, and the subtle

antinomianism that always seems to accompany it, moved him for a season;

and for a season he inclined to the materialistic doctrines of the

\_Darwinismus\_ movement in Germany, and found a curious pleasure in

tracing the thoughts and passions of men to some pearly cell in the

brain, or some white nerve in the body, delighting in the conception of

the absolute dependence of the spirit on certain physical conditions,

morbid or healthy, normal or diseased. Yet, as has been said of him

before, no theory of life seemed to him to be of any importance compared

with life itself. He felt keenly conscious of how barren all

intellectual speculation is when separated from action and experiment.

He knew that the senses, no less than the soul, have their spiritual

mysteries to reveal.

And so he would now study perfumes, and the secrets of their

manufacture, distilling heavily-scented oils, and burning odorous gums

from the East. He saw that there was no mood of the mind that had not

its counterpart in the sensuous life, and set himself to discover their

true relations, wondering what there was in frankincense that made one

mystical, and in ambergris that stirred one's passions, and in violets

that woke the memory of dead romances, and in musk that troubled the

brain, and in champak that stained the imagination; and seeking often to

elaborate a real psychology of perfumes, and to estimate the several

influences of sweet-smelling roots, and scented pollen-laden flowers, or

aromatic balms, and of dark and fragrant woods, of spikenard that

sickens, of hovenia that makes men mad, and of aloes that are said to be

able to expel melancholy from the soul.

At another time he devoted himself entirely to music, and in a long

latticed room, with a vermilion-and-gold ceiling and walls of

olive-green lacquer, he used to give curious concerts, in which mad

gypsies tore wild music from little zithers, or grave yellow-shawled

Tunisians plucked at the strained strings of monstrous lutes, while

grinning negroes beat monotonously upon copper drums, and, crouching

upon scarlet mats, slim turbaned Indians blew through long pipes of reed

or brass, and charmed, or feigned to charm, great hooded snakes and

horrible horned adders. The harsh intervals and shrill discords of

barbaric music stirred him at times when Schubert's grace, and Chopin's

beautiful sorrows, and the mighty harmonies of Beethoven himself, fell

unheeded on his ear. He collected together from all parts of the world

the strangest instruments that could be found, either in the tombs of

dead nations or among the few savage tribes that have survived contact

with Western civilisations, and loved to touch and try them. He had the

mysterious \_juruparis\_ of the Rio Negro Indians, that women are not

allowed to look at, and that even youths may not see till they have been

subjected to fasting and scourging, and the earthen jars of the

Peruvians that have the shrill cries of birds, and flutes of human bones

such as Alfonso de Ovalle heard in Chili, and the sonorous green jaspers

that are found near Cuzco and give forth a note of singular sweetness.

He had painted gourds filled with pebbles that rattled when they were

shaken; the long \_clarin\_ of the Mexicans, into which the performer does

not blow, but through which he inhales the air; the harsh \_ture\_ of the

Amazon tribes, that is sounded by the sentinels who sit all day long in

high trees, and can be heard, it is said, at a distance of three

leagues; the \_teponaztli\_, that has two vibrating tongues of wood, and

is beaten with sticks that are smeared with an elastic gum obtained from

the milky juice of plants; the \_yotl\_-bells of the Aztecs, that are hung

in clusters like grapes; and a huge cylindrical drum, covered with the

skins of great serpents, like the one that Bernal Diaz saw when he went

with Cortes into the Mexican temple, and of whose doleful sound he has

left us so vivid a description. The fantastic character of these

instruments fascinated him, and he felt a curious delight in the thought

that Art, like Nature, has her monsters, things of bestial shape and

with hideous voices. Yet, after some time, he wearied of them, and would

sit in his box at the Opera, either alone or with Lord Henry, listening

in rapt pleasure to "Tannhauser," and seeing in the prelude to that

great work of art a presentation of the tragedy of his own soul.

On one occasion he took up the study of jewels, and appeared at a

costume ball as Anne de Joyeuse, Admiral of France, in a dress covered

with five hundred and sixty pearls. This taste enthralled him for years,

and, indeed, may be said never to have left him. He would often spend a

whole day settling and resettling in their cases the various stones that

he had collected, such as the olive-green chrysoberyl that turns red by

lamp-light, the cymophane with its wire-like line of silver, the

pistachio-coloured peridot, rose-pink and wine-yellow topazes,

carbuncles of fiery scarlet with tremulous four-rayed stars, flame-red

cinnamon-stones, orange and violet spinels, and amethysts with their

alternate layers of ruby and sapphire. He loved the red gold of the

sunstone, and the moonstone's pearly whiteness, and the broken rainbow

of the milky opal. He procured from Amsterdam three emeralds of

extraordinary size and richness of colour, and had a turquoise \_de la

vieille roche\_ that was the envy of all the connoisseurs.

He discovered wonderful stories, also, about jewels. In Alphonso's

"Clericalis Disciplina" a serpent was mentioned with eyes of real

jacinth, and in the romantic history of Alexander, the Conqueror of

Emathia was said to have found in the vale of Jordan snakes "with

collars of real emeralds growing on their backs." There was a gem in the

brain of the dragon, Philostratus told us, and "by the exhibition of

golden letters and a scarlet robe" the monster could be thrown into a

magical sleep, and slain. According to the great alchemist, Pierre de

Boniface, the diamond rendered a man invisible, and the agate of India

made him eloquent. The cornelian appeased anger, and the hyacinth

provoked sleep, and the amethyst drove away the fumes of wine. The

garnet cast out demons, and the hydropicus deprived the moon of her

colour. The selenite waxed and waned with the moon, and the meloceus,

that discovers thieves, could be affected only by the blood of kids.

Leonardus Camillus had seen a white stone taken from the brain of a

newly-killed toad, that was a certain antidote against poison. The

bezoar, that was found in the heart of the Arabian deer, was a charm

that could cure the plague. In the nests of Arabian birds was the

aspilates, that, according to Democritus, kept the wearer from any

danger by fire.

The King of Ceilan rode through his city with a large ruby in his hand,

at the ceremony of his coronation. The gates of the palace of John the

Priest were "made of sardius, with the horn of the horned snake

inwrought, so that no man might bring poison within." Over the gable

were "two golden apples, in which were two carbuncles," so that the gold

might shine by day, and the carbuncles by night. In Lodge's strange

romance "A Margarite of America" it was stated that in the chamber of

the queen one could behold "all the chaste ladies of the world, inchased

out of silver, looking through fair mirrours of chrysolites, carbuncles,

sapphires, and greene emeraults." Marco Polo had seen the inhabitants of

Zipangu place rose-coloured pearls in the mouths of the dead. A

sea-monster had been enamoured of the pearl that the diver brought to

King Perozes, and had slain the thief, and mourned for seven moons over

its loss. When the Huns lured the king into the great pit, he flung it

away--Procopius tells the story--nor was it ever found again, though the

Emperor Anastasius offered five hundred-weight of gold pieces for it.

The King of Malabar had shown to a certain Venetian a rosary of three

hundred and four pearls, one for every god that he worshipped.

When the Duke de Valentinois, son of Alexander VI., visited Louis XII.

of France, his horse was loaded with gold leaves, according to Brantome,

and his cap had double rows of rubles that threw out a great light.

Charles of England had ridden in stirrups hung with four hundred and

twenty-one diamonds. Richard II. had a coat, valued at thirty thousand

marks, which was covered with balas rubies. Hall described Henry VIII.,

on his way to the Tower previous to his coronation, as wearing "a jacket

of raised gold, the placard embroidered with diamonds and other rich

stones, and a great bauderike about his neck of large balasses." The

favourites of James I. wore earrings of emeralds set in gold filigrane.

Edward II. gave to Piers Gaveston a suit of red-gold armour studded with

jacinths, a collar of gold roses set with turquoise-stones, and a

skull-cap \_parseme\_ with pearls. Henry II. wore jewelled gloves

reaching to the elbow, and had a hawk-glove sewn with twelve rubies and

fifty-two great orients. The ducal hat of Charles the Rash, the last

Duke of Burgundy of his race, was hung with pear-shaped pearls, and

studded with sapphires.

How exquisite life had once been! How gorgeous in its pomp and

decoration! Even to read of the luxury of the dead was wonderful.

Then he turned his attention to embroideries, and to the tapestries that

performed the office of frescoes in the chill rooms of the Northern

nations of Europe. As he investigated the subject--and he always had an

extraordinary faculty of becoming absolutely absorbed for the moment in

whatever he took up--he was almost saddened by the reflection of the

ruin that Time brought on beautiful and wonderful things. He, at any

rate, had escaped that. Summer followed summer, and the yellow jonquils

bloomed and died many times, and nights of horror repeated the story of

their shame, but he was unchanged. No winter marred his face or stained

his flower-like bloom. How different it was with material things! Where

had they passed to? Where was the great crocus-coloured robe, on which

the gods fought against the giants, that had been worked by brown girls

for the pleasure of Athena? Where, the huge velarium that Nero had

stretched across the Colosseum at Rome, that Titan sail of purple on

which was represented the starry sky, and Apollo driving a chariot drawn

by white gilt-reined steeds? He longed to see the curious table-napkins

wrought for the Priest of the Sun, on which were displayed all the

dainties and viands that could be wanted for a feast; the mortuary cloth

of King Chilperic, with its three hundred golden bees; the fantastic

robes that excited the indignation of the Bishop of Pontus, and were

figured with "lions, panthers, bears, dogs, forests, rocks,

hunters--all, in fact, that a painter can copy from nature;" and the

coat that Charles of Orleans once wore, on the sleeves of which were

embroidered the verses of a song beginning "\_Madame, je suis tout

joyeux\_," the musical accompaniment of the words being wrought in gold

thread, and each note, of square shape in those days, formed with four

pearls. He read of the room that was prepared at the palace at Rheims

for the use of Queen Joan of Burgundy, and was decorated with "thirteen

hundred and twenty-one parrots, made in broidery, and blazoned with the

king's arms, and five hundred and sixty-one butterflies, whose wings

were similarly ornamented with the arms of the queen, the whole worked

in gold." Catherine de Medicis had a mourning-bed made for her of black

velvet powdered with crescents and suns. Its curtains were of damask,

with leafy wreaths and garlands, figured upon a gold and silver ground,

and fringed along the edges with broideries of pearls, and it stood in a

room hung with rows of the queen's devices in cut black velvet upon

cloth of silver. Louis XIV. had gold embroidered caryatides fifteen feet

high in his apartment. The state bed of Sobieski, King of Poland, was

made of Smyrna gold brocade embroidered in turquoises with verses from

the Koran. Its supports were of silver gilt, beautifully chased, and

profusely set with enamelled and jewelled medallions. It had been taken

from the Turkish camp before Vienna, and the standard of Mohammed had

stood beneath the tremulous gilt of its canopy.

And so, for a whole year, he sought to accumulate the most exquisite

specimens that he could find of textile and embroidered work, getting

the dainty Delhi muslins, finely wrought with gold-thread palmates, and

stitched over with iridescent beetles' wings; the Dacca gauzes, that

from their transparency are known in the East as "woven air," and

"running water," and "evening dew"; strange figured cloths from Java;

elaborate yellow Chinese hangings; books bound in tawny satins or fair

blue silks, and wrought with \_fleurs de lys\_, birds, and images; veils

of \_lacis\_ worked in Hungary point; Sicilian brocades, and stiff

Spanish velvets; Georgian work with its gilt coins, and Japanese

\_Foukousas\_ with their green-toned golds and their marvellously-plumaged

birds.

He had a special passion, also, for ecclesiastical vestments, as indeed

he had for everything connected with the service of the Church. In the

long cedar chests that lined the west gallery of his house he had stored

away many rare and beautiful specimens of what is really the raiment of

the Bride of Christ, who must wear purple and jewels and fine linen that

she may hide the pallid macerated body that is worn by the suffering

that she seeks for, and wounded by self-inflicted pain. He possessed a

gorgeous cope of crimson silk and gold-thread damask, figured with a

repeating pattern of golden pomegranates set in six-petalled formal

blossoms, beyond which on either side was the pine-apple device wrought

in seed-pearls. The orphreys were divided into panels representing

scenes from the life of the Virgin, and the coronation of the Virgin was

figured in coloured silks upon the hood. This was Italian work of the

fifteenth century. Another cope was of green velvet, embroidered with

heart-shaped groups of acanthus-leaves, from which spread long-stemmed

white blossoms, the details of which were picked out with silver thread

and coloured crystals. The morse bore a seraph's head in gold-thread

raised work. The orphreys were woven in a diaper of red and gold silk,

and were starred with medallions of many saints and martyrs, among whom

was St. Sebastian. He had chasubles, also, of amber-coloured silk, and

blue silk and gold brocade, and yellow silk damask and cloth of gold,

figured with representations of the Passion and Crucifixion of Christ,

and embroidered with lions and peacocks and other emblems; dalmatics of

white satin and pink silk damask, decorated with tulips and dolphins and

\_fleurs de lys\_; altar frontals of crimson velvet and blue linen; and

many corporals, chalice-veils, and sudaria. In the mystic offices to

which such things were put, there was something that quickened his

imagination.

For these treasures, and everything that he collected in his lovely

house, were to be to him means of forgetfulness, modes by which he could

escape, for a season, from the fear that seemed to him at times to be

almost too great to be borne. Upon the walls of the lonely locked room

where he had spent so much of his boyhood, he had hung with his own

hands the terrible portrait whose changing features showed him the real

degradation of his life, and in front of it had draped the

purple-and-gold pall as a curtain. For weeks he would not go there,

would forget the hideous painted thing, and get back his light heart,

his wonderful joyousness, his passionate absorption in mere existence.

Then, suddenly, some night he would creep out of the house, go down to

dreadful places near Blue Gate Fields, and stay there, day after day,

until he was driven away. On his return he would sit in front of the

picture, sometimes loathing it and himself, but filled, at other times,

with that pride of individualism that is half the fascination of sin,

and smiling with secret pleasure, at the misshapen shadow that had to

bear the burden that should have been his own.

After a few years he could not endure to be long out of England, and

gave up the villa that he had shared at Trouville with Lord Henry, as

well as the little white walled-in house at Algiers where they had more

than once spent the winter. He hated to be separated from the picture

that was such a part of his life, and was also afraid that during his

absence someone might gain access to the room, in spite of the elaborate

bars that he had caused to be placed upon the door.

He was quite conscious that this would tell them nothing. It was true

that the portrait still preserved, under all the foulness and ugliness

of the face, its marked likeness to himself; but what could they learn

from that? He would laugh at anyone who tried to taunt him. He had not

painted it. What was it to him how vile and full of shame it looked?

Even if he told them, would they believe it?

Yet he was afraid. Sometimes when he was down at his great house in

Nottinghamshire, entertaining the fashionable young men of his own rank

who were his chief companions, and astounding the county by the wanton

luxury and gorgeous splendour of his mode of life, he would suddenly

leave his guests and rush back to town to see that the door had not been

tampered with, and that the picture was still there. What if it should

be stolen? The mere thought made him cold with horror. Surely the world

would know his secret then. Perhaps the world already suspected it.

For, while he fascinated many, there were not a few who distrusted him.

He was very nearly blackballed at a West End club of which his birth and

social position fully entitled him to become a member, and it was said

that on one occasion when he was brought by a friend into the

smoking-room of the Churchill, the Duke of Berwick and another gentleman

got up in a marked manner and went out. Curious stories became current

about him after he had passed his twenty-fifth year. It was rumoured

that he had been seen brawling with foreign sailors in a low den in the

distant parts of Whitechapel, and that he consorted with thieves and

coiners and knew the mysteries of their trade. His extraordinary

absences became notorious, and, when he used to reappear again in

society, men would whisper to each other in corners, or pass him with a

sneer, or look at him with cold searching eyes, as though they were

determined to discover his secret.

Of such insolences and attempted slights he, of course, took no notice,

and in the opinion of most people his frank debonair manner, his

charming boyish smile, and the infinite grace of that wonderful youth

that seemed never to leave him, were in themselves a sufficient answer

to the calumnies, for so they termed them, that were circulated about

him. It was remarked, however, that some of those who had been most

intimate with him appeared, after a time, to shun him. Women who had

wildly adored him, and for his sake had braved all social censure and

set convention at defiance, were seen to grow pallid with shame or

horror if Dorian Gray entered the room.

Yet these whispered scandals only increased, in the eyes of many, his

strange and dangerous charm. His great wealth was a certain element of

security. Society, civilised society at least, is never very ready to

believe anything to the detriment of those who are both rich and

fascinating. It feels instinctively that manners are of more importance

than morals, and, in its opinion, the highest respectability is of much

less value than the possession of a good \_chef\_. And, after all, it is a

very poor consolation to be told that the man who has given one a bad

dinner, or poor wine, is irreproachable in his private life. Even the

cardinal virtues cannot atone for half-cold \_entrees\_, as Lord Henry

remarked once, in a discussion on the subject; and there is possibly a

good deal to be said for his view. For the canons of good society are,

or should be, the same as the canons of art. Form is absolutely

essential to it. It should have the dignity of a ceremony, as well as

its unreality, and should combine the insincere character of a romantic

play with the wit and beauty that make such plays delightful to us. Is

insincerity such a terrible thing? I think not. It is merely a method by

which we can multiply our personalities.

Such, at any rate, was Dorian Gray's opinion. He 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

that bore within itself strange legacies of thought and passion, and

whose very flesh was tainted with the monstrous maladies of the dead. He

loved to stroll through the gaunt cold picture-gallery of his country

house and look at the various portraits of those whose blood flowed in

his veins. Here was Philip Herbert, described by Francis Osborne, in

his "Memoires on the Reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James," as one

who was "caressed by the Court for his handsome face, which kept him not

long company." Was it young Herbert's life that he sometimes led? Had

some strange poisonous germ crept from body to body till it had reached

his own? Was it some dim sense of that ruined grace that had made him so

suddenly, and almost without cause, give utterance, in Basil Hallward's

studio, to the mad prayer that had so changed his life? Here, in

gold-embroidered red doublet, jewelled surcoat, and gilt-edged ruff and

wrist-bands, stood Sir Anthony Sherard, with his silver-and-black armour

piled at his feet. What had this man's legacy been? Had the lover of

Giovanna of Naples bequeathed him some inheritance of sin and shame?

Were his own actions merely the dreams that the dead man had not dared

to realise? Here, from the fading canvas, smiled Lady Elizabeth

Devereux, in her gauze hood, pearl stomacher, and pink slashed sleeves.

A flower was in her right hand, and her left clasped an enamelled collar

of white and damask roses. On a table by her side lay a mandolin and an

apple. There were large green rosettes upon her little pointed shoes. He

knew her life, and the strange stories that were told about her lovers.

Had he something of her temperament in him? These oval heavy-lidded eyes

seemed to look curiously at him. What of George Willoughby, with his

powdered hair and fantastic patches? How evil he looked! The face was

saturnine and swarthy, and the sensual lips seemed to be twisted with

disdain. Delicate lace ruffles fell over the lean yellow hands that were

so over-laden with rings. He had been a macaroni of the eighteenth

century, and the friend, in his youth, of Lord Ferrars. What of the

second Lord Beckenham, the companion of the Prince Regent in his wildest

days, and one of the witnesses at the secret marriage with Mrs.

Fitzherbert? How proud and handsome he was, with his chestnut curls and

insolent pose! What passions had he bequeathed? The world had looked

upon him as infamous. He had led the orgies at Carlton House. The star

of the Garter glittered upon his breast. Beside him hung the portrait of

his wife, a pallid, thin-lipped woman in black. Her blood, also, stirred

within him. How curious it all seemed! And his mother with her Lady

Hamilton face, and her moist wine-dashed lips--he knew what he had got

from her. He had got from her his beauty, and his passion for the beauty

of others. She laughed at him in her loose Bacchante dress. There were

vine leaves in her hair. The purple spilled from the cup she was

holding. The carnations of the painting had withered, but the eyes were

still wonderful in their depth and brilliancy of colour. They seemed to

follow him wherever he went.

Yet one had ancestors in literature, as well as in one's own race,

nearer perhaps in type and temperament, many of them, and certainly with

an influence of which one was more absolutely conscious. There were

times when it appeared to Dorian Gray that the whole of history was

merely the record of his own life, not as he had lived it in act and

circumstance, but as his imagination had created it for him, as it had

been in his brain and in his passions. He felt that he had known them

all, those strange terrible figures that had passed across the stage of

the world and made sin so marvellous, and evil so full of subtlety. It

seemed to him that in some mysterious way their lives had been his own.

The hero of the wonderful novel that had so influenced his life had

himself known this curious fancy. In the seventh chapter he tells how,

crowned with laurel, lest lightning might strike him, he had sat, as

Tiberius, in a garden at Capri, reading the shameful books of

Elephantis, while dwarfs and peacocks strutted round him, and the

flute-player mocked the swinger of the censer; and, as Caligula, had

caroused with the green-shirted jockeys in their stables and supped in

an ivory manger with a jewel-frontleted horse; and, as Domitian, had

wandered through a corridor lined with marble mirrors, looking round

with haggard eyes for the reflection of the dagger that was to end his

days, and sick with that ennui, that terrible \_t?dium vit?\_, that comes

on those to whom life denies nothing; and had peered through a clear

emerald at the red shambles of the Circus, and then, in a litter of

pearl and purple drawn by silver-shod mules, been carried through the

Street of Pomegranates to a House of Gold, and heard men cry on Nero

C?sar as he passed by; and, as Elagabalus, had painted his face with

colours, and plied the distaff among the women, and brought the Moon

from Carthage, and given her in mystic marriage to the Sun.

Over and over again Dorian used to read this fantastic chapter, and the

two chapters immediately following, in which, as in some curious

tapestries or cunningly-wrought enamels, were pictured the awful and

beautiful forms of those whom Vice and Blood and Weariness had made

monstrous or mad: Filippo, Duke of Milan, who slew his wife, and painted

her lips with a scarlet poison that her lover might suck death from the

dead thing he fondled; Pietro Barbi, the Venetian, known as Paul the

Second, who sought in his vanity to assume the title of Formosus, and

whose tiara, valued at two hundred thousand florins, was bought at the

price of a terrible sin; Gian Maria Visconti, who used hounds to chase

living men, and whose murdered body was covered with roses by a harlot

who had loved him; the Borgia on his white horse, with Fratricide riding

beside him, and his mantle stained with the blood of Perotto; Pietro

Riario, the young Cardinal Archbishop of Florence, child and minion of

Sixtus IV., whose beauty was equalled only by his debauchery, and who

received Leonora of Aragon in a pavilion of white and crimson silk,

filled with nymphs and centaurs, and gilded a boy that he might serve at

the feast as Ganymede or Hylas; Ezzelin, whose melancholy could be cured

only by the spectacle of death, and who had a passion for red blood, as

other men have for red wine--the son of the Fiend, as was reported, and

one who had cheated his father at dice when gambling with him for his

own soul; Giambattista Cibo, who in mockery took the name of Innocent,

and into whose torpid veins the blood of three lads was infused by a

Jewish doctor; Sigismondo Malatesta, the lover of Isotta, and the lord

of Rimini, whose effigy was burned at Rome as the enemy of God and man,

who strangled Polyssena with a napkin, and gave poison to Ginevra d'Este

in a cup of emerald, and in honour of a shameful passion built a pagan

church for Christian worship; Charles VI., who had so wildly adored his

brother's wife that a leper had warned him of the insanity that was

coming on him, and who, when his brain had sickened and grown strange,

could only be soothed by Saracen cards painted with the images of Love

and Death and Madness; and, in his trimmed jerkin and jewelled cap and

acanthus-like curls, Grifonetto Baglioni, who slew Astorre with his

bride, and Simonetto with his page, and whose comeliness was such that,

as he lay dying in the yellow piazza of Perugia, those who had hated him

could not choose but weep, and Atalanta, who had cursed him, blessed

him.

There was a horrible fascination in them all. He saw them at night, and

they troubled his imagination in the day. The Renaissance knew of

strange manners of poisoning--poisoning by a helmet and a lighted torch,

by an embroidered glove and a jewelled fan, by a gilded pomander and by

an amber chain. Dorian Gray had been poisoned by a book. There were

moments when he looked on evil simply as a mode through which he could

realise his conception of the beautiful.

CHAPTER XII

It was on the ninth of November, the eve of his own thirty-eighth

birthday, as he often remembered afterwards.

He was walking home about eleven o'clock from Lord Henry's, where he had

been dining, and was wrapped in heavy furs, as the night was cold and

foggy. At the corner of Grosvenor Square and South Audley Street a man

passed him in the mist, walking very fast, and with the collar of his

grey ulster turned up. He had a bag in his hand. Dorian recognised him.

It was Basil Hallward. A strange sense of fear, for which he could not

account, came over him. He made no sign of recognition, and went on

quickly in the direction of his own house.

But Hallward had seen him. Dorian heard him first stopping on the

pavement, and then hurrying after him. In a few moments his hand was on

his arm.

"Dorian! What an extraordinary piece of luck! I have been waiting for

you in your library ever since nine o'clock. Finally I took pity on your

tired servant, and told him to go to bed, as he let me out. I am off to

Paris by the midnight train, and I particularly wanted to see you before

I left. I thought it was you, or rather your fur coat, as you passed me.

But I wasn't quite sure. Didn't you recognise me?"

"In this fog, my dear Basil? Why, I can't even recognise Grosvenor

Square. I believe my house is somewhere about here, but I don't feel at

all certain about it. I am sorry you are going away, as I have not seen

you for ages. But I suppose you will be back soon?"

"No: I am going to be out of England for six months. I intend to take a

studio in Paris, and shut myself up till I have finished a great picture

I have in my head. However, it wasn't about myself I wanted to talk.

Here we are at your door. Let me come in for a moment. I have something

to say to you."

"I shall be charmed. But won't you miss your train?" said Dorian Gray,

languidly, as he passed up the steps and opened the door with his

latch-key.

The lamp-light struggled out through the fog, and Hallward looked at his

watch. "I have heaps of time," he answered. "The train doesn't go till

twelve-fifteen, and it is only just eleven. In fact, I was on my way to

the club to look for you, when I met you. You see, I shan't have any

delay about luggage, as I have sent on my heavy things. All I have with

me is in this bag, and I can easily get to Victoria in twenty minutes."

Dorian looked at him and smiled. "What a way for a fashionable painter

to travel! A Gladstone bag, and an ulster! Come in, or the fog will get

into the house. And mind you don't talk about anything serious. Nothing

is serious nowadays. At least nothing should be."

Hallward shook his head as he entered, and followed Dorian into the

library. There was a bright wood fire blazing in the large open hearth.

The lamps were lit, and an open Dutch silver spirit-case stood, with

some siphons of soda-water and large cut-glass tumblers, on a little

marqueterie table.

"You see your servant made me quite at home, Dorian. He gave me

everything I wanted, including your best gold-tipped cigarettes. He is a

most hospitable creature. I like him much better than the Frenchman you

used to have. What has become of the Frenchman, by the bye?"

Dorian shrugged his shoulders. "I believe he married Lady Radley's

maid, and has established her in Paris as an English dressmaker.

\_Anglomanie\_ is very fashionable over there now, I hear. It seems silly

of the French, doesn't it? But--do you know?--he was not at all a bad

servant. I never liked him, but I had nothing to complain about. One

often imagines things that are quite absurd. He was really very devoted

to me, and seemed quite sorry when he went away. Have another

brandy-and-soda? Or would you like hock-and-seltzer? I always take

hock-and-seltzer myself. There is sure to be some in the next room."

"Thanks, I won't have anything more," said the painter, taking his cap

and coat off, and throwing them on the bag that he had placed in the

corner. "And now, my dear fellow, I want to speak to you seriously.

Don't frown like that. You make it so much more difficult for me."

"What is it all about?" cried Dorian, in his petulant way, flinging

himself down on the sofa. "I hope it is not about myself. I am tired of

myself to-night. I should like to be somebody else."

"It is about yourself," answered Hallward, in his grave, deep voice,

"and I must say it to you. I shall only keep you half an hour."

Dorian sighed, and lit a cigarette. "Half an hour!" he murmured.

"It is not much to ask of you, Dorian, and it is entirely for your own

sake that I am speaking. I think it right that you should know that the

most dreadful things are being said against you in London."

"I don't wish to know anything about them. I love scandals about other

people, but scandals about myself don't interest me. They have not got

the charm of novelty."

"They must interest you, Dorian. Every gentleman is interested in his

good name. You don't want people to talk of you as something vile and

degraded. Of course you have your position, and your wealth, and all

that kind of thing. But position and wealth are not everything. Mind

you, I don't believe these rumours at all. At least, I can't believe

them when I see you. Sin is a thing that writes itself across a man's

face. It cannot be concealed. People talk sometimes of secret vices.

There are no such things. If a wretched man has a vice, it shows itself

in the lines of his mouth, the droop of his eyelids, the moulding of his

hands even. Somebody--I won't mention his name, but you know him--came

to me last year to have his portrait done. I had never seen him before,

and had never heard anything about him at the time, though I have heard

a good deal since. He offered an extravagant price. I refused him. There

was something in the shape of his fingers that I hated. I know now that

I was quite right in what I fancied about him. His life is dreadful. But

you, Dorian, with your pure, bright, innocent face, and your marvellous

untroubled youth--I can't believe anything against you. And yet I see

you very seldom, and you never come down to the studio now, and when I

am away from you, and I hear all these hideous things that people are

whispering about you, I don't know what to say. Why is it, Dorian, that

a man like the Duke of Berwick leaves the room of a club when you enter

it? Why is it that so many gentlemen in London will neither go to your

house nor invite you to theirs? You used to be a friend of Lord

Staveley. I met him at dinner last week. Your name happened to come up

in conversation, in connection with the miniatures you have lent to the

exhibition at the Dudley. Staveley curled his lip, and said that you

might have the most artistic tastes, but that you were a man whom no

pure-minded girl should be allowed to know, and whom no chaste woman

should sit in the same room with. I reminded him that I was a friend of

yours, and asked him what he meant. He told me. He told me right out

before everybody. It was horrible! Why is your friendship so fatal to

young men? There was that wretched boy in the Guards who committed

suicide. You were his great friend. There was Sir Henry Ashton, who had

to leave England, with a tarnished name. You and he were inseparable.

What about Adrian Singleton, and his dreadful end? What about Lord

Kent's only son, and his career? I met his father yesterday in St.

James's Street. He seemed broken with shame and sorrow. What about the

young Duke of Perth? What sort of life has he got now? What gentleman

would associate with him?"

"Stop, Basil. You are talking about things of which you know nothing,"

said Dorian Gray, biting his lip, and with a note of infinite contempt

in his voice. "You ask me why Berwick leaves a room when I enter it. It

is because I know everything about his life, not because he knows

anything about mine. With such blood as he has in his veins, how could

his record be clean? You ask me about Henry Ashton and young Perth. Did

I teach the one his vices, and the other his debauchery? If Kent's silly

son takes his wife from the streets what is that to me? If Adrian

Singleton writes his friend's name across a bill, am I his keeper? I

know how people chatter in England. The middle classes air their moral

prejudices over their gross dinner-tables, and whisper about what they

call the profligacies of their betters in order to try and pretend that

they are in smart society, and on intimate terms with the people they

slander. In this country it is enough for a man to have distinction and

brains for every common tongue to wag against him. And what sort of

lives do these people, who pose as being moral, lead themselves? My dear

fellow, you forget that we are in the native land of the hypocrite."

"Dorian," cried Hallward, "that is not the question. England is bad

enough, I know, and English society is all wrong. That is the reason why

I want you to be fine. You have not been fine. One has a right to judge

of a man by the effect he has over his friends. Yours seem to lose all

sense of honour, of goodness, of purity. You have filled them with a

madness for pleasure. They have gone down into the depths. You led them

there. Yes: you led them there, and yet you can smile, as you are

smiling now. And there is worse behind. I know you and Harry are

inseparable. Surely for that reason, if for none other, you should not

have made his sister's name a by-word."

"Take care, Basil. You go too far."

"I must speak, and you must listen. You shall listen. When you met Lady

Gwendolen, not a breath of scandal had ever touched her. Is there a

single decent woman in London now who would drive with her in the Park?

Why, even her children are not allowed to live with her. Then there are

other stories--stories that you have been seen creeping at dawn out of

dreadful houses and slinking in disguise into the foulest dens in

London. Are they true? Can they be true? When I first heard them, I

laughed. I hear them now, and they make me shudder. What about your

country house, and the life that is led there? Dorian, you don't know

what is said about you. I won't tell you that I don't want to preach to

you. I remember Harry saying once that every man who turned himself into

an amateur curate for the moment always began by saying that, and then

proceeded to break his word. I do want to preach to you. I want you to

lead such a life as will make the world respect you. I want you to have

a clean name and a fair record. I want you to get rid of the dreadful

people you associate with. Don't shrug your shoulders like that. Don't

be so indifferent. You have a wonderful influence. Let it be for good,

not for evil. They say that you corrupt everyone with whom you become

intimate, and that it is quite sufficient for you to enter a house, for

shame of some kind to follow after. I don't know whether it is so or

not. How should I know? But it is said of you. I am told things that it

seems impossible to doubt. Lord Gloucester was one of my greatest

friends at Oxford. He showed me a letter that his wife had written to

him when she was dying alone in her villa at Mentone. Your name was

implicated in the most terrible confession I ever read. I told him that

it was absurd--that I knew you thoroughly, and that you were incapable

of anything of the kind. Know you? I wonder do I know you? Before I

could answer that, I should have to see your soul."

"To see my soul!" muttered Dorian Gray, starting up from the sofa and

turning almost white from fear.

"Yes," answered Hallward, gravely, and with deep-toned sorrow in his

voice--"to see your soul. But only God can do that."

A bitter laugh of mockery broke from the lips of the younger man. "You

shall see it yourself, to-night!" he cried, seizing a lamp from the

table. "Come: it is your own handiwork. Why shouldn't you look at it?

You can tell the world all about it afterwards, if you choose. Nobody

would believe you. If they did believe you, they would like me all the

better for it. I know the age better than you do, though you will prate

about it so tediously. Come, I tell you. You have chattered enough about

corruption. Now you shall look on it face to face."

There was the madness of pride in every word he uttered. He stamped his

foot upon the ground in his boyish insolent manner. He felt a terrible

joy at the thought that someone else was to share his secret, and that

the man who had painted the portrait that was the origin of all his

shame was to be burdened for the rest of his life with the hideous

memory of what he had done.

"Yes," he continued, coming closer to him, and looking steadfastly into

his stern eyes, "I shall show you my soul. You shall see the thing that

you fancy only God can see."

Hallward started back. "This is blasphemy, Dorian!" he cried. "You must

not say things like that. They are horrible, and they don't mean

anything."

"You think so?" He laughed again.

"I know so. As for what I said to you to-night, I said it for your good.

You know I have been always a staunch friend to you."

"Don't touch me. Finish what you have to say."

A twisted flash of pain shot across the painter's face. He paused for a

moment, and a wild feeling of pity came over him. After all, what right

had he to pry into the life of Dorian Gray? If he had done a tithe of

what was rumoured about him, how much he must have suffered! Then he

straightened himself up, and walked over to the fireplace, and stood

there, looking at the burning logs with their frost-like ashes and their

throbbing cores of flame.

"I am waiting, Basil," said the young man, in a hard, clear voice.

He turned round. "What I have to say is this," he cried. "You must give

me some answer to these horrible charges that are made against you. If

you tell me that they are absolutely untrue from beginning to end, I

shall believe you. Deny them, Dorian, deny them! Can't you see what I am

going through? My God! don't tell me that you are bad, and corrupt, and

shameful."

Dorian Gray smiled. There was a curl of contempt in his lips. "Come

upstairs, Basil," he said, quietly. "I keep a diary of my life from day

to day, and it never leaves the room in which it is written. I shall

show it to you if you come with me."

"I shall come with you, Dorian, if you wish it. I see I have missed my

train. That makes no matter. I can go to-morrow. But don't ask me to

read anything to-night. All I want is a plain answer to my question."

"That shall be given to you upstairs. I could not give it here. You will

not have to read long."

CHAPTER XIII

He passed out of the room, and began the ascent, Basil Hallward

following close behind. They walked softly, as men do instinctively at

night. The lamp cast fantastic shadows on the wall and staircase. A

rising wind made some of the windows rattle.

When they reached the top landing, Dorian set the lamp down on the

floor, and taking out the key turned it in the lock. "You insist on

knowing, Basil?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Yes."

"I am delighted," he answered, smiling. Then he added, somewhat harshly,

"You are the one man in the world who is entitled to know everything

about me. You have had more to do with my life than you think:" and,

taking up the lamp, he opened the door and went in. A cold current of

air passed them, and the light shot up for a moment in a flame of murky

orange. He shuddered. "Shut the door behind you," he whispered, as he

placed the lamp on the table.

Hallward glanced round him, with a puzzled expression. The room looked

as if it had not been lived in for years. A faded Flemish tapestry, a

curtained picture, an old Italian \_cassone\_, and an almost empty

bookcase--that was all that it seemed to contain, besides a chair and a

table. As Dorian Gray was lighting a half-burned candle that was

standing on the mantel-shelf, he saw that the whole place was covered

with dust, and that the carpet was in holes. A mouse ran scuffling

behind the wainscoting. There was a damp odour of mildew.

"So you think that it is only God who sees the soul, Basil? Draw that

curtain back, and you will see mine."

The voice that spoke was cold and cruel. "You are mad, Dorian, or

playing a part," muttered Hallward, frowning.

"You won't? Then I must do it myself," said the young man; and he tore

the curtain from its rod, and flung it on the ground.

An exclamation of horror broke from the painter's lips as he saw in the

dim light the hideous face on the canvas grinning at him. There was

something in its expression that filled him with disgust and loathing.

Good heavens! it was Dorian Gray's own face that he was looking at! The

horror, whatever it was, had not yet entirely spoiled that marvellous

beauty. There was still some gold in the thinning hair and some scarlet

on the sensual mouth. The sodden eyes had kept something of the

loveliness of their blue, the noble curves had not yet completely passed

away from chiselled nostrils and from plastic throat. Yes, it was Dorian

himself. But who had done it? He seemed to recognise his own brush-work,

and the frame was his own design. The idea was monstrous, yet he felt

afraid. He seized the lighted candle, and held it to the picture. In the

left-hand corner was his own name, traced in long letters of bright

vermilion.

It was some foul parody, some infamous, ignoble satire. He had never

done that. Still, it was his own picture. He knew it, and he felt as if

his blood had changed in a moment from fire to sluggish ice. His own

picture! What did it mean? Why had it altered? He turned, and looked at

Dorian Gray with the eyes of a sick man. His mouth twitched, and his

parched tongue seemed unable to articulate. He passed his hand across

his forehead. It was dank with clammy sweat.

The young man was leaning against the mantel-shelf, watching him with

that strange expression that one sees on the faces of those who are

absorbed in a play when some great artist is acting. There was neither

real sorrow in it nor real joy. There was simply the passion of the

spectator, with perhaps a flicker of triumph in his eyes. He had taken

the flower out of his coat, and was smelling it, or pretending to do so.

"What does this mean?" cried Hallward, at last. His own voice sounded

shrill and curious in his ears.

"Years ago, when I was a boy," said Dorian Gray, crushing the flower in

his hand, "you met me, flattered me, and taught me to be vain of my good

looks. One day you introduced me to a friend of yours, who explained to

me the wonder of youth, and you finished the portrait of me that

revealed to me the wonder of beauty. In a mad moment, that, even now, I

don't know whether I regret or not, I made a wish, perhaps you would

call it a prayer...."

"I remember it! Oh, how well I remember it! No! the thing is impossible.

The room is damp. Mildew has got into the canvas. The paints I used had

some wretched mineral poison in them. I tell you the thing is

impossible."

"Ah, what is impossible?" murmured the young man, going over to the

window, and leaning his forehead against the cold, mist-stained glass.

"You told me you had destroyed it."

"I was wrong. It has destroyed me."

"I don't believe it is my picture."

"Can't you see your ideal in it?" said Dorian, bitterly.

"My ideal, as you call it...."

"As you called it."

"There was nothing evil in it, nothing shameful. You were to me such an

ideal as I shall never meet again. This is the face of a satyr."

"It is the face of my soul."

"Christ! what a thing I must have worshipped! It has the eyes of a

devil."

"Each of us has Heaven and Hell in him, Basil," cried Dorian, with a

wild gesture of despair.

Hallward turned again to the portrait, and gazed at it. "My God! if it

is true," he exclaimed, "and this is what you have done with your life,

why, you must be worse even than those who talk against you fancy you to

be!" He held the light up again to the canvas, and examined it. The

surface seemed to be quite undisturbed, and as he had left it. It was

from within, apparently, that the foulness and horror had come. Through

some strange quickening of inner life the leprosies of sin were slowly

eating the thing away. The rotting of a corpse in a watery grave was not

so fearful.

His hand shook, and the candle fell from its socket on the floor, and

lay there sputtering. He placed his foot on it and put it out. Then he

flung himself into the rickety chair that was standing by the table and

buried his face in his hands.

"Good God, Dorian, what a lesson! what an awful lesson!" There was no

answer, but he could hear the young man sobbing at the window. "Pray,

Dorian, pray," he murmured. "What is it that one was taught to say in

one's boyhood? 'Lead us not into temptation. Forgive us our sins. Wash

away our iniquities.' Let us say that together. The prayer of your pride

has been answered. The prayer of your repentance will be answered also.

I worshipped you too much. I am punished for it. You worshipped yourself

too much. We are both punished."

Dorian Gray turned slowly around, and looked at him with tear-dimmed

eyes. "It is too late, Basil," he faltered.

"It is never too late, Dorian. Let us kneel down and try if we cannot

remember a prayer. Isn't there a verse somewhere, 'Though your sins be

as scarlet; yet I will make them as white as snow'?"

"Those words mean nothing to me now."

"Hush! don't say that. You have done enough evil in your life. My God!

don't you see that accursed thing leering at us?"

Dorian Gray glanced at the picture, and suddenly an uncontrollable

feeling of hatred for Basil Hallward came over him, as though it had

been suggested to him by the image on the canvas, whispered into his ear

by those grinning lips. The mad passions of a hunted animal stirred

within him, and he loathed the man who was seated at the table, more

than in his whole life he had ever loathed anything. He glanced wildly

around. Something glimmered on the top of the painted chest that faced

him. His eye fell on it. He knew what it was. It was a knife that he had

brought up, some days before, to cut a piece of cord, and had forgotten

to take away with him. He moved slowly towards it, passing Hallward as

he did so. As soon as he got behind him, he seized it, and turned round.

Hallward stirred in his chair as if he was going to rise. He rushed at

him, and dug the knife into the great vein that is behind the ear,

crushing the man's head down on the table, and stabbing again and again.

There was a stifled groan, and the horrible sound of someone choking

with blood. Three times the outstretched arms shot up convulsively,

waving grotesque stiff-fingered hands in the air. He stabbed him twice

more, but the man did not move. Something began to trickle on the floor.

He waited for a moment, still pressing the head down. Then he threw the

knife on the table, and listened.

He could hear nothing but the drip, drip on the threadbare carpet. He

opened the door and went out on the landing. The house was absolutely

quiet. No one was about. For a few seconds he stood bending over the

balustrade, and peering down into the black seething well of darkness.

Then he took out the key and returned to the room, locking himself in as

he did so.

The thing was still seated in the chair, straining over the table with

bowed head, and humped back, and long fantastic arms. Had it not been

for the red jagged tear in the neck, and the clotted black pool that was

slowly widening on the table, one would have said that the man was

simply asleep.

How quickly it had all been done! He felt strangely calm, and, walking

over to the window, opened it, and stepped out on the balcony. The wind

had blown the fog away, and the sky was like a monstrous peacock's tail,

starred with myriads of golden eyes. He looked down, and saw the

policeman going his rounds and flashing the long beam of his lantern on

the doors of the silent houses. The crimson spot of a prowling hansom

gleamed at the corner, and then vanished. A woman in a fluttering shawl

was creeping slowly by the railings, staggering as she went. Now and

then she stopped, and peered back. Once, she began to sing in a hoarse

voice. The policeman strolled over and said something to her. She

stumbled away, laughing. A bitter blast swept across the Square. The

gas-lamps flickered, and became blue, and the leafless trees shook their

black iron branches to and fro. He shivered, and went back, closing the

window behind him.

Having reached the door, he turned the key, and opened it. He did not

even glance at the murdered man. He felt that the secret of the whole

thing was not to realise the situation. The friend who had painted the

fatal portrait to which all his misery had been due, had gone out of his

life. That was enough.

Then he remembered the lamp. It was a rather curious one of Moorish

workmanship, made of dull silver inlaid with arabesques of burnished

steel, and studded with coarse turquoises. Perhaps it might be missed by

his servant, and questions would be asked. He hesitated for a moment,

then he turned back and took it from the table. He could not help seeing

the dead thing. How still it was! How horribly white the long hands

looked! It was like a dreadful wax image.

Having locked the door behind him, he crept quietly downstairs. The

woodwork creaked, and seemed to cry out as if in pain. He stopped

several times, and waited. No: everything was still. It was merely the

sound of his own footsteps.

When he reached the library, he saw the bag and coat in the corner. They

must be hidden away somewhere. He unlocked a secret press that was in

the wainscoting, a press in which he kept his own curious disguises, and

put them into it. He could easily burn them afterwards. Then he pulled

out his watch. It was twenty minutes to two.

He sat down, and began to think. Every year--every month, almost--men

were strangled in England for what he had done. There had been a madness

of murder in the air. Some red star had come too close to the earth....

And yet what evidence was there against him? Basil Hallward had left the

house at eleven. No one had seen him come in again. Most of the servants

were at Selby Royal. His valet had gone to bed.... Paris! Yes. It was to

Paris that Basil had gone, and by the midnight train, as he had

intended. With his curious reserved habits, it would be months before

any suspicions would be aroused. Months! Everything could be destroyed

long before then.

A sudden thought struck him. He put on his fur coat and hat, and went

out into the hall. There he paused, hearing the slow heavy tread of the

policeman on the pavement outside, and seeing the flash of the

bull's-eye reflected in the window. He waited, and held his breath.

After a few moments he drew back the latch, and slipped out, shutting

the door very gently behind him. Then he began ringing the bell. In

about five minutes his valet appeared half dressed, and looking very

drowsy.

"I am sorry to have had to wake you up, Francis," he said, stepping in;

"but I had forgotten my latch-key. What time is it?"

"Ten minutes past two, sir," answered the man, looking at the clock and

blinking.

"Ten minutes past two? How horribly late! You must wake me at nine

to-morrow. I have some work to do."

"All right, sir."

"Did anyone call this evening?"

"Mr. Hallward, sir. He stayed here till eleven, and then he went away to

catch his train."

"Oh! I am sorry I didn't see him. Did he leave any message?"

"No, sir, except that he would write to you from Paris, if he did not

find you at the club."

"That will do, Francis. Don't forget to call me at nine to-morrow."

"No, sir."

The man shambled down the passage in his slippers.

Dorian Gray threw his hat and coat upon the table, and passed into the

library. For a quarter of an hour he walked up and down the room biting

his lip, and thinking. Then he took down the Blue Book from one of the

shelves, and began to turn over the leaves. "Alan Campbell, 152,

Hertford Street, Mayfair." Yes; that was the man he wanted.

CHAPTER XIV

At nine o'clock the next morning his servant came in with a cup of

chocolate on a tray, and opened the shutters. Dorian was sleeping quite

peacefully, lying on his right side, with one hand underneath his cheek.

He looked like a boy who had been tired out with play, or study.

The man had to touch him twice on the shoulder before he woke, and as he

opened his eyes a faint smile passed across his lips, as though he had

been lost in some delightful dream. Yet he had not dreamed at all. His

night had been untroubled by any images of pleasure or of pain. But

youth smiles without any reason. It is one of its chiefest charms.

He turned round, and, leaning upon his elbow, began to sip his

chocolate. The mellow November sun came streaming into the room. The sky

was bright, and there was a genial warmth in the air. It was almost like

a morning in May.

Gradually the events of the preceding night crept with silent

blood-stained feet into his brain, and reconstructed themselves there

with terrible distinctness. He winced at the memory of all that he had

suffered, and for a moment the same curious feeling of loathing for

Basil Hallward that had made him kill him as he sat in the chair, came

back to him, and he grew cold with passion. The dead man was still

sitting there, too, and in the sunlight now. How horrible that was! Such

hideous things were for the darkness, not for the day.

He felt that if he brooded on what he had gone through he would sicken

or grow mad. There were sins whose fascination was more in the memory

than in the doing of them; strange triumphs that gratified the pride

more than the passions, and gave to the intellect a quickened sense of

joy, greater than any joy they brought, or could ever bring, to the

senses. But this was not one of them. It was a thing to be driven out of

the mind, to be drugged with poppies, to be strangled lest it might

strangle one itself.

When the half-hour struck, he passed his hand across his forehead, and

then got up hastily, and dressed himself with even more than his usual

care, giving a good deal of attention to the choice of his necktie and

scarf-pin, and changing his rings more than once. He spent a long time

also over breakfast, tasting the various dishes, talking to his valet

about some new liveries that he was thinking of getting made for the

servants at Selby, and going through his correspondence. At some of the

letters he smiled. Three of them bored him. One he read several times

over, and then tore up with a slight look of annoyance in his face.

"That awful thing, a woman's memory!" as Lord Henry had once said.

After he had drunk his cup of black coffee, he wiped his lips slowly

with a napkin, motioned to his servant to wait, and going over to the

table sat down and wrote two letters. One he put in his pocket, the

other he handed to the valet.

"Take this round to 152, Hertford Street, Francis, and if Mr. Campbell

is out of town, get his address."

As soon as he was alone, he lit a cigarette, and began sketching upon a

piece of paper, drawing first flowers, and bits of architecture, and

then human faces. Suddenly he remarked that every face that he drew

seemed to have a fantastic likeness to Basil Hallward. He frowned, and,

getting up, went over to the bookcase and took out a volume at hazard.

He was determined that he would not think about what had happened until

it became absolutely necessary that he should do so.

When he had stretched himself on the sofa, he looked at the title-page

of the book. It was Gautier's "Emaux et Camees," Charpentier's

Japanese-paper edition, with the Jacquemart etching. The binding was of

citron-green leather, with a design of gilt trellis-work and dotted

pomegranates. It had been given to him by Adrian Singleton. As he turned

over the pages his eye fell on the poem about the hand of Lacenaire, the

cold yellow hand "\_du supplice encore mal lavee\_," with its downy red

hairs and its "\_doigts de faune\_." He glanced at his own white taper

fingers, shuddering slightly in spite of himself, and passed on, till he

came to those lovely stanzas upon Venice:--

"Sur une gamme chromatique,

Le sein de perles ruisselant,

La Venus de l'Adriatique

Sort de l'eau son corps rose et blanc.

"Les domes, sur l'azur des ondes

Suivant la phrase au pur contour,

S'enflent comme des gorges rondes

Que souleve un soupir d'amour.

"L'esquif aborde et me depose,

Jetant son amarre au pilier,

Devant une facade rose,

Sur le marbre d'un escalier."

How exquisite they were! As one read them, one seemed to be floating

down the green water-ways of the pink and pearl city, seated in a black

gondola with silver prow and trailing curtains. The mere lines looked to

him like those straight lines of turquoise-blue that follow one as one

pushes out to the Lido. The sudden flashes of colour reminded him of the

gleam of the opal-and-iris-throated birds that flutter round the tall

honey-combed Campanile, or stalk, with such stately grace, through the

dim, dust-stained arcades. Leaning back with half-closed eyes, he kept

saying over and over to himself:--

"Devant une facade rose,

Sur le marbre d'un escalier."

The whole of Venice was in those two lines. He remembered the autumn

that he had passed there, and a wonderful love that had stirred him to

mad, delightful follies. There was romance in every place. But Venice,

like Oxford, had kept the background for romance, and, to the true

romantic, background was everything, or almost everything. Basil had

been with him part of the time, and had gone wild over Tintoret. Poor

Basil! what a horrible way for a man to die!

He sighed, and took up the volume again, and tried to forget. He read of

the swallows that fly in and out of the little cafe at Smyrna where the

Hadjis sit counting their amber beads and the turbaned merchants smoke

their long tasselled pipes and talk gravely to each other; he read of

the Obelisk in the Place de la Concorde that weeps tears of granite in

its lonely sunless exile, and longs to be back by the hot lotus-covered

Nile, where there are Sphinxes, and rose-red ibises, and white vultures

with gilded claws, and crocodiles, with small beryl eyes, that crawl

over the green steaming mud; he began to brood over those verses which,

drawing music from kiss-stained marble, tell of that curious statue that

Gautier compares to a contralto voice, the "\_monstre charmant\_" that

couches in the porphyry-room of the Louvre. But after a time the book

fell from his hand. He grew nervous, and a horrible fit of terror came

over him. What if Alan Campbell should be out of England? Days would

elapse before he could come back. Perhaps he might refuse to come. What

could he do then? Every moment was of vital importance. They had been

great friends once, five years before--almost inseparable, indeed. Then

the intimacy had come suddenly to an end. When they met in society now,

it was only Dorian Gray who smiled; Alan Campbell never did.

He was an extremely clever young man, though he had no real appreciation

of the visible arts, and whatever little sense of the beauty of poetry

he possessed he had gained entirely from Dorian. His dominant

intellectual passion was for science. At Cambridge he had spent a great

deal of his time working in the Laboratory, and had taken a good class

in the Natural Science Tripos of his year. Indeed, he was still devoted

to the study of chemistry, and had a laboratory of his own, in which he

used to shut himself up all day long, greatly to the annoyance of his

mother, who had set her heart on his standing for Parliament, and had a

vague idea that a chemist was a person who made up prescriptions. He was

an excellent musician, however, as well, and played both the violin and

the piano better than most amateurs. In fact, it was music that had

first brought him and Dorian Gray together--music and that indefinable

attraction that Dorian seemed to be able to exercise whenever he wished,

and indeed exercised often without being conscious of it. They had met

at Lady Berkshire's the night that Rubinstein played there, and after

that used to be always seen together at the Opera, and wherever good

music was going on. For eighteen months their intimacy lasted. Campbell

was always either at Selby Royal or in Grosvenor Square. To him, as to

many others, Dorian Gray was the type of everything that is wonderful

and fascinating in life. Whether or not a quarrel had taken place

between them no one ever knew. But suddenly people remarked that they

scarcely spoke when they met, and that Campbell seemed always to go away

early from any party at which Dorian Gray was present. He had changed,

too--was strangely melancholy at times, appeared almost to dislike

hearing music, and would never himself play, giving as his excuse, when

he was called upon, that he was so absorbed in science that he had no

time left in which to practise. And this was certainly true. Every day

he seemed to become more interested in biology, and his name appeared

once or twice in some of the scientific reviews, in connection with

certain curious experiments.

This was the man Dorian Gray was waiting for. Every second he kept

glancing at the clock. As the minutes went by he became horribly

agitated. At last he got up, and began to pace up and down the room,

looking like a beautiful caged thing. He took long stealthy strides. His

hands were curiously cold.

The suspense became unbearable. Time seemed to him to be crawling with

feet of lead, while he by monstrous winds was being swept towards the

jagged edge of some black cleft of precipice. He knew what was waiting

for him there; saw it indeed, and, shuddering, crushed with dank hands

his burning lids as though he would have robbed the very brain of sight,

and driven the eyeballs back into their cave. It was useless. The brain

had its own food on which it battened, and the imagination, made

grotesque by terror, twisted and distorted as a living thing by pain,

danced like some foul puppet on a stand, and grinned through moving

masks. Then, suddenly, Time stopped for him. Yes: that blind,

slow-breathing thing crawled no more, and horrible thoughts, Time being

dead, raced nimbly on in front, and dragged a hideous future from its

grave, and showed it to him. He stared at it. Its very horror made him

stone.

At last the door opened, and his servant entered. He turned glazed eyes

upon him.

"Mr. Campbell, sir," said the man.

A sigh of relief broke from his parched lips, and the colour came back

to his cheeks.

"Ask him to come in at once, Francis." He felt that he was himself

again. His mood of cowardice had passed away.

The man bowed, and retired. In a few moments Alan Campbell walked in,

looking very stern and rather pale, his pallor being intensified by his

coal-black hair and dark eyebrows.

"Alan! this is kind of you. I thank you for coming."

"I had intended never to enter your house again, Gray. But you said it

was a matter of life and death." His voice was hard and cold. He spoke

with slow deliberation. There was a look of contempt in the steady

searching gaze that he turned on Dorian. He kept his hands in the

pockets of his Astrakhan coat, and seemed not to have noticed the

gesture with which he had been greeted.

"Yes: it is a matter of life and death, Alan, and to more than one

person. Sit down."

Campbell took a chair by the table, and Dorian sat opposite to him. The

two men's eyes met. In Dorian's there was infinite pity. He knew that

what he was going to do was dreadful.

After a strained moment of silence, he leaned across and said, very

quietly, but watching the effect of each word upon the face of him he

had sent for, "Alan, in a locked room at the top of this house, a room

to which nobody but myself has access, a dead man is seated at a table.

He has been dead ten hours now. Don't stir, and don't look at me like

that. Who the man is, why he died, how he died, are matters that do not

concern you. What you have to do is this----"

"Stop, Gray. I don't want to know anything further. Whether what you

have told me is true or not true, doesn't concern me. I entirely decline

to be mixed up in your life. Keep your horrible secrets to yourself.

They don't interest me any more."

"Alan, they will have to interest you. This one will have to interest

you. I am awfully sorry for you, Alan. But I can't help myself. You are

the one man who is able to save me. I am forced to bring you into the

matter. I have no option. Alan, you are scientific. You know about

chemistry, and things of that kind. You have made experiments. What you

have got to do is to destroy the thing that is upstairs--to destroy it

so that not a vestige of it will be left. Nobody saw this person come

into the house. Indeed, at the present moment he is supposed to be in

Paris. He will not be missed for months. When he is missed, there must

be no trace of him found here. You, Alan, you must change him, and

everything that belongs to him, into a handful of ashes that I may

scatter in the air."

"You are mad, Dorian."

"Ah! I was waiting for you to call me Dorian."

"You are mad, I tell you--mad to imagine that I would raise a finger to

help you, mad to make this monstrous confession. I will have nothing to

do with this matter, whatever it is. Do you think I am going to peril my

reputation for you? What is it to me what devil's work you are up to?"

"It was suicide, Alan."

"I am glad of that. But who drove him to it? You, I should fancy."

"Do you still refuse to do this for me?"

"Of course I refuse. I will have absolutely nothing to do with it. I

don't care what shame comes on you. You deserve it all. I should not be

sorry to see you disgraced, publicly disgraced. How dare you ask me, of

all men in the world, to mix myself up in this horror? I should have

thought you knew more about people's characters. Your friend Lord Henry

Wotton can't have taught you much about psychology, whatever else he has

taught you. Nothing will induce me to stir a step to help you. You have

come to the wrong man. Go to some of your friends. Don't come to me."

"Alan, it was murder. I killed him. You don't know what he had made me

suffer. Whatever my life is, he had more to do with the making or the

marring of it than poor Harry has had. He may not have intended it, the

result was the same."

"Murder! Good God, Dorian, is that what you have come to? I shall not

inform upon you. It is not my business. Besides, without my stirring in

the matter, you are certain to be arrested. Nobody ever commits a crime

without doing something stupid. But I will have nothing to do with it."

"You must have something to do with it. Wait, wait a moment; listen to

me. Only listen, Alan. All I ask of you is to perform a certain

scientific experiment. You go to hospitals and dead-houses, and the

horrors that you do there don't affect you. If in some hideous

dissecting-room or fetid laboratory you found this man lying on a leaden

table with red gutters scooped out in it for the blood to flow through,

you would simply look upon him as an admirable subject. You would not

turn a hair. You would not believe that you were doing anything wrong.

On the contrary, you would probably feel that you were benefiting the

human race, or increasing the sum of knowledge in the world, or

gratifying intellectual curiosity, or something of that kind. What I

want you to do is merely what you have often done before. Indeed, to

destroy a body must be far less horrible than what you are accustomed to

work at. And, remember, it is the only piece of evidence against me. If

it is discovered, I am lost; and it is sure to be discovered unless you

help me."

"I have no desire to help you. You forget that. I am simply indifferent

to the whole thing. It has nothing to do with me."

"Alan, I entreat you. Think of the position I am in. Just before you

came I almost fainted with terror. You may know terror yourself some

day. No! don't think of that. Look at the matter purely from the

scientific point of view. You don't inquire where the dead things on

which you experiment come from. Don't inquire now. I have told you too

much as it is. But I beg of you to do this. We were friends once, Alan."

"Don't speak about those days, Dorian: they are dead."

"The dead linger sometimes. The man upstairs will not go away. He is

sitting at the table with bowed head and outstretched arms. Alan! Alan!

if you don't come to my assistance I am ruined. Why, they will hang me,

Alan! Don't you understand? They will hang me for what I have done."

"There is no good in prolonging this scene. I absolutely refuse to do

anything in the matter. It is insane of you to ask me."

"You refuse?"

"Yes."

"I entreat you, Alan."

"It is useless."

The same look of pity came into Dorian Gray's eyes. Then he stretched

out his hand, took a piece of paper, and wrote something on it. He read

it over twice, folded it carefully, and pushed it across the table.

Having done this, he got up, and went over to the window.

Campbell looked at him in surprise, and then took up the paper, and

opened it. As he read it, his face became ghastly pale, and he fell back

in his chair. A horrible sense of sickness came over him. He felt as if

his heart was beating itself to death in some empty hollow.

After two or three minutes of terrible silence, Dorian turned round, and

came and stood behind him, putting his hand upon his shoulder.

"I am so sorry for you, Alan," he murmured, "but you leave me no

alternative. I have a letter written already. Here it is. You see the

address. If you don't help me, I must send it. If you don't help me, I

will send it. You know what the result will be. But you are going to

help me. It is impossible for you to refuse now. I tried to spare you.

You will do me the justice to admit that. You were stern, harsh,

offensive. You treated me as no man has ever dared to treat me--no

living man, at any rate. I bore it all. Now it is for me to dictate

terms."

Campbell buried his face in his hands, and a shudder passed through him.

"Yes, it is my turn to dictate terms, Alan. You know what they are. The

thing is quite simple. Come, don't work yourself into this fever. The

thing has to be done. Face it, and do it."

A groan broke from Campbell's lips, and he shivered all over. The

ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece seemed to him to be dividing

Time into separate atoms of agony, each of which was too terrible to be

borne. He felt as if an iron ring was being slowly tightened round his

forehead, as if the disgrace with which he was threatened had already

come upon him. The hand upon his shoulder weighed like a hand of lead.

It was intolerable. It seemed to crush him.

"Come, Alan, you must decide at once."

"I cannot do it," he said, mechanically, as though words could alter

things.

"You must. You have no choice. Don't delay."

He hesitated a moment. "Is there a fire in the room upstairs?"

"Yes, there is a gas-fire with asbestos."

"I shall have to go home and get some things from the laboratory."

"No, Alan, you must not leave the house. Write out on a sheet of

note-paper what you want, and my servant will take a cab and bring the

things back to you."

Campbell scrawled a few lines, blotted them, and addressed an envelope

to his assistant. Dorian took the note up and read it carefully. Then he

rang the bell, and gave it to his valet, with orders to return as soon

as possible, and to bring the things with him.

As the hall door shut, Campbell started nervously, and, having got up

from the chair, went over to the chimney-piece. He was shivering with a

kind of ague. For nearly twenty minutes, neither of the men spoke. A fly

buzzed noisily about the room, and the ticking of the clock was like the

beat of a hammer.

As the chime struck one, Campbell turned round, and, looking at Dorian

Gray, saw that his eyes were filled with tears. There was something in

the purity and refinement of that sad face that seemed to enrage him.

"You are infamous, absolutely infamous!" he muttered.

"Hush, Alan: you have saved my life," said Dorian.

"Your life? Good heavens! what a life that is! You have gone from

corruption to corruption, and now you have culminated in crime. In doing

what I am going to do, what you force me to do, it is not of your life

that I am thinking."

"Ah, Alan," murmured Dorian, with a sigh, "I wish you had a thousandth

part of the pity for me that I have for you." He turned away as he

spoke, and stood looking out at the garden. Campbell made no answer.

After about ten minutes a knock came to the door, and the servant

entered, carrying a large mahogany chest of chemicals, with a long coil

of steel and platinum wire and two rather curiously-shaped iron clamps.

"Shall I leave the things here, sir?" he asked Campbell.

"Yes," said Dorian. "And I am afraid, Francis, that I have another

errand for you. What is the name of the man at Richmond who supplies

Selby with orchids?"

"Harden, sir."

"Yes--Harden. You must go down to Richmond at once, see Harden

personally, and tell him to send twice as many orchids as I ordered, and

to have as few white ones as possible. In fact, I don't want any white

ones. It is a lovely day, Francis, and Richmond is a very pretty place,

otherwise I wouldn't bother you about it."

"No trouble, sir. At what time shall I be back?"

Dorian looked at Campbell. "How long will your experiment take, Alan?"

he said, in a calm, indifferent voice. The presence of a third person in

the room seemed to give him extraordinary courage.

Campbell frowned, and bit his lip. "It will take about five hours," he

answered.

"It will be time enough, then, if you are back at half-past seven,

Francis. Or stay: just leave my things out for dressing. You can have

the evening to yourself. I am not dining at home, so I shall not want

you."

"Thank you, sir," said the man, leaving the room.

"Now, Alan, there is not a moment to be lost. How heavy this chest is!

I'll take it for you. You bring the other things." He spoke rapidly, and

in an authoritative manner. Campbell felt dominated by him. They left

the room together.

When they reached the top landing, Dorian took out the key and turned it

in the lock. Then he stopped, and a troubled look came into his eyes. He

shuddered. "I don't think I can go in, Alan," he murmured.

"It is nothing to me. I don't require you," said Campbell, coldly.

Dorian half opened the door. As he did so, he saw the face of his

portrait leering in the sunlight. On the floor in front of it the torn

curtain was lying. He remembered that, the night before he had

forgotten, for the first time in his life, to hide the fatal canvas, and

was about to rush forward, when he drew back with a shudder.

What was that loathsome red dew that gleamed, wet and glistening, on one

of the hands, as though the canvas had sweated blood? How horrible it

was!--more horrible, it seemed to him for the moment, than the silent

thing that he knew was stretched across the table, the thing whose

grotesque misshapen shadow on the spotted carpet showed him that it had

not stirred, but was still there, as he had left it.

He heaved a deep breath, opened the door a little wider, and with

half-closed eyes and averted head walked quickly in, determined that he

would not look even once upon the dead man. Then, stooping down, and

taking up the gold and purple hanging, he flung it right over the

picture.

There he stopped, feeling afraid to turn round, and his eyes fixed

themselves on the intricacies of the pattern before him. He heard

Campbell bringing in the heavy chest, and the irons, and the other

things that he had required for his dreadful work. He began to wonder if

he and Basil Hallward had ever met, and, if so, what they had thought of

each other.

"Leave me now," said a stern voice behind him.

He turned and hurried out, just conscious that the dead man had been

thrust back into the chair, and that Campbell was gazing into a

glistening yellow face. As he was going downstairs he heard the key

being turned in the lock.

It was long after seven when Campbell came back into the library. He was

pale, but absolutely calm. "I have done what you asked me to do," he

muttered. "And now, good-bye. Let us never see each other again."

"You have saved me from ruin, Alan. I cannot forget that," said Dorian,

simply.

As soon as Campbell had left, he went upstairs. There was a horrible

smell of nitric acid in the room. But the thing that had been sitting at

the table was gone.

CHAPTER XV

That evening, at eight-thirty, exquisitely dressed and wearing a large

buttonhole of Parma violets, Dorian Gray was ushered into Lady

Narborough's drawing-room by bowing servants. His forehead was throbbing

with maddened nerves, and he felt wildly excited, but his manner as he

bent over his hostess's hand was as easy and graceful as ever. Perhaps

one never seems so much at one's ease as when one has to play a part.

Certainly no one looking at Dorian Gray that night could have believed

that he had passed through a tragedy as horrible as any tragedy of our

age. Those finely-shaped fingers could never have clutched a knife for

sin, nor those smiling lips have cried out on God and goodness. He

himself could not help wondering at the calm of his demeanour, and for a

moment felt keenly the terrible pleasure of a double life.

It was a small party, got up rather in a hurry by Lady Narborough, who

was a very clever woman, with what Lord Henry used to describe as the

remains of really remarkable ugliness. She had proved an excellent wife

to one of our most tedious ambassadors, and having buried her husband

properly in a marble mausoleum, which she had herself designed, and

married off her daughters to some rich, rather elderly men, she devoted

herself now to the pleasures of French fiction, French cookery, and

French \_esprit\_ when she could get it.

Dorian was one of her special favourites, and she always told him that

she was extremely glad she had not met him in early life. "I know, my

dear, I should have fallen madly in love with you," she used to say,

"and thrown my bonnet right over the mills for your sake. It is most

fortunate that you were not thought of at the time. As it was, our

bonnets were so unbecoming, and the mills were so occupied in trying to

raise the wind, that I never had even a flirtation with anybody.

However, that was all Narborough's fault. He was dreadfully

short-sighted, and there is no pleasure in taking in a husband who never

sees anything."

Her guests this evening were rather tedious. The fact was, as she

explained to Dorian, behind a very shabby fan, one of her married

daughters had come up quite suddenly to stay with her, and, to make

matters worse, had actually brought her husband with her. "I think it is

most unkind of her, my dear," she whispered. "Of course I go and stay

with them every summer after I come from Homburg, but then an old woman

like me must have fresh air sometimes, and besides, I really wake them

up. You don't know what an existence they lead down there. It is pure

unadulterated country life. They get up early, because they have so much

to do, and go to bed early because they have so little to think about.

There has not been a scandal in the neighbourhood since the time of

Queen Elizabeth, and consequently they all fall asleep after dinner. You

shan't sit next either of them. You shall sit by me, and amuse me."

Dorian murmured a graceful compliment, and looked round the room. Yes:

it was certainly a tedious party. Two of the people he had never seen

before, and the others consisted of Ernest Harrowden, one of those

middle-aged mediocrities so common in London clubs who have no enemies,

but are thoroughly disliked by their friends; Lady Ruxton, an

over-dressed woman of forty-seven, with a hooked nose, who was always

trying to get herself compromised, but was so peculiarly plain that to

her great disappointment no one would ever believe anything against

her; Mrs. Erlynne, a pushing nobody, with a delightful lisp, and

Venetian-red hair; Lady Alice Chapman, his hostess's daughter, a dowdy

dull girl, with one of those characteristic British faces, that, once

seen, are never remembered; and her husband, a red-cheeked,

white-whiskered creature who, like so many of his class, was under the

impression that inordinate joviality can atone for an entire lack of

ideas.

He was rather sorry he had come, till Lady Narborough, looking at the

great ormolu gilt clock that sprawled in gaudy curves on the

mauve-draped mantel-shelf, exclaimed: "How horrid of Henry Wotton to be

so late! I sent round to him this morning on chance, and he promised

faithfully not to disappoint me."

It was some consolation that Harry was to be there, and when the door

opened and he heard his slow musical voice lending charm to some

insincere apology, he ceased to feel bored.

But at dinner he could not eat anything. Plate after plate went away

untasted. Lady Narborough kept scolding him for what she called "an

insult to poor Adolphe, who invented the \_menu\_ specially for you," and

now and then Lord Henry looked across at him, wondering at his silence

and abstracted manner. From time to time the butler filled his glass

with champagne. He drank eagerly, and his thirst seemed to increase.

"Dorian," said Lord Henry, at last, as the \_chaud-froid\_ was being

handed round, "what is the matter with you to-night? You are quite out

of sorts."

"I believe he is in love," cried Lady Narborough, "and that he is afraid

to tell me for fear I should be jealous. He is quite right. I certainly

should."

"Dear Lady Narborough," murmured Dorian, smiling, "I have not been in

love for a whole week--not, in fact, since Madame de Ferrol left town."

"How you men can fall in love with that woman!" exclaimed the old lady.

"I really cannot understand it."

"It is simply because she remembers you when you were a little girl,

Lady Narborough," said Lord Henry. "She is the one link between us and

your short frocks."

"She does not remember my short frocks at all, Lord Henry. But I

remember her very well at Vienna thirty years ago, and how \_decolletee\_

she was then."

"She is still \_decolletee\_," he answered, taking an olive in his long

fingers; "and when she is in a very smart gown she looks like an

\_edition de luxe\_ of a bad French novel. She is really wonderful, and

full of surprises. Her capacity for family affection is extraordinary.

When her third husband died, her hair turned quite gold from grief."

"How can you, Harry!" cried Dorian.

"It is a most romantic explanation," laughed the hostess. "But her third

husband, Lord Henry! You don't mean to say Ferrol is the fourth."

"Certainly, Lady Narborough."

"I don't believe a word of it."

"Well, ask Mr. Gray. He is one of her most intimate friends."

"Is it true, Mr. Gray?"

"She assures me so, Lady Narborough," said Dorian. "I asked her whether,

like Marguerite de Navarre, she had their hearts embalmed and hung at

her girdle. She told me she didn't, because none of them had had any

hearts at all."

"Four husbands! Upon my word that is \_trop de zele\_."

"\_Trop d'audace\_, I tell her," said Dorian.

"Oh! she is audacious enough for anything, my dear. And what is Ferrol

like? I don't know him."

"The husbands of very beautiful women belong to the criminal classes,"

said Lord Henry, sipping his wine.

Lady Narborough hit him with her fan. "Lord Henry, I am not at all

surprised that the world says that you are extremely wicked."

"But what world says that?" asked Lord Henry, elevating his eyebrows.

"It can only be the next world. This world and I are on excellent

terms."

"Everybody I know says you are very wicked," cried the old lady, shaking

her head.

Lord Henry looked serious for some moments. "It is perfectly monstrous,"

he said, at last, "the way people go about nowadays saying things

against one behind one's back that are absolutely and entirely true."

"Isn't he incorrigible?" cried Dorian, leaning forward in his chair.

"I hope so," said his hostess, laughing. "But really if you all worship

Madame de Ferrol in this ridiculous way, I shall have to marry again so

as to be in the fashion."

"You will never marry again, Lady Narborough," broke in Lord Henry. "You

were far too happy. When a woman marries again it is because she

detested her first husband. When a man marries again, it is because he

adored his first wife. Women try their luck; men risk theirs."

"Narborough wasn't perfect," cried the old lady.

"If he had been, you would not have loved him, my dear lady," was the

rejoinder. "Women love us for our defects. If we have enough of them

they will forgive us everything, even our intellects. You will never ask

me to dinner again, after saying this, I am afraid, Lady Narborough; but

it is quite true."

"Of course it is true, Lord Henry. If we women did not love you for your

defects, where would you all be? Not one of you would ever be married.

You would be a set of unfortunate bachelors. Not, however, that that

would alter you much. Nowadays all the married men live like bachelors,

and all the bachelors like married men."

"\_Fin de siecle\_," murmured Lord Henry.

"\_Fin du globe\_," answered his hostess.

"I wish it were \_fin du globe\_," said Dorian, with a sigh. "Life is a

great disappointment."

"Ah, my dear," cried Lady Narborough, putting on her gloves, "don't tell

me that you have exhausted Life. When a man says that one knows that

Life has exhausted him. Lord Henry is very wicked, and I sometimes wish

that I had been; but you are made to be good--you look so good. I must

find you a nice wife. Lord Henry, don't you think that Mr. Gray should

get married?"

"I am always telling him so, Lady Narborough," said Lord Henry, with a

bow.

"Well, we must look out for a suitable match for him. I shall go through

Debrett carefully to-night, and draw out a list of all the eligible

young ladies."

"With their ages, Lady Narborough?" asked Dorian.

"Of course, with their ages, slightly edited. But nothing must be done

in a hurry. I want it to be what \_The Morning Post\_ calls a suitable

alliance, and I want you both to be happy."

"What nonsense people talk about happy marriages!" exclaimed Lord Henry.

"A man can be happy with any woman, as long as he does not love her."

"Ah! what a cynic you are!" cried the old lady, pushing back her chair,

and nodding to Lady Ruxton. "You must come and dine with me soon again.

You are really an admirable tonic, much better than what Sir Andrew

prescribes for me. You must tell me what people you would like to meet,

though. I want it to be a delightful gathering."

"I like men who have a future, and women who have a past," he answered.

"Or do you think that would make it a petticoat party?"

"I fear so," she said, laughing, as she stood up. "A thousand pardons,

my dear Lady Ruxton," she added. "I didn't see you hadn't finished your

cigarette."

"Never mind, Lady Narborough. I smoke a great deal too much. I am going

to limit myself, for the future."

"Pray don't, Lady Ruxton," said Lord Henry. "Moderation is a fatal

thing. Enough is as bad as a meal. More than enough is as good as a

feast."

Lady Ruxton glanced at him curiously. "You must come and explain that to

me some afternoon, Lord Henry. It sounds a fascinating theory," she

murmured, as she swept out of the room.

"Now, mind you don't stay too long over your politics and scandal,"

cried Lady Narborough from the door. "If you do, we are sure to squabble

upstairs."

The men laughed, and Mr. Chapman got up solemnly from the foot of the

table and came up to the top. Dorian Gray changed his seat, and went and

sat by Lord Henry. Mr. Chapman began to talk in a loud voice about the

situation in the House of Commons. He guffawed at his adversaries. The

word \_doctrinaire\_--word full of terror to the British mind--reappeared

from time to time between his explosions. An alliterative prefix served

as an ornament of oratory. He hoisted the Union Jack on the pinnacles of

Thought. The inherited stupidity of the race--sound English common sense

he jovially termed it--was shown to be the proper bulwark for Society.

A smile curved Lord Henry's lips, and he turned round and looked at

Dorian.

"Are you better, my dear fellow?" he asked. "You seemed rather out of

sorts at dinner."

"I am quite well, Harry. I am tired. That is all."

"You were charming last night. The little Duchess is quite devoted to

you. She tells me she is going down to Selby."

"She has promised to come on the twentieth."

"Is Monmouth to be there too?"

"Oh, yes, Harry."

"He bores me dreadfully, almost as much as he bores her. She is very

clever, too clever for a woman. She lacks the indefinable charm of

weakness. It is the feet of clay that makes the gold of the image

precious. Her feet are very pretty, but they are not feet of clay. White

porcelain feet, if you like. They have been through the fire, and what

fire does not destroy, it hardens. She has had experiences."

"How long has she been married?" asked Dorian.

"An eternity, she tells me. I believe, according to the peerage, it is

ten years, but ten years with Monmouth must have been like eternity,

with time thrown in. Who else is coming?"

"Oh, the Willoughbys, Lord Rugby and his wife, our hostess, Geoffrey

Clouston, the usual set. I have asked Lord Grotrian."

"I like him," said Lord Henry. "A great many people don't, but I find

him charming. He atones for being occasionally somewhat over-dressed, by

being always absolutely over-educated. He is a very modern type."

"I don't know if he will be able to come, Harry. He may have to go to

Monte Carlo with his father."

"Ah! what a nuisance people's people are! Try and make him come. By the

way, Dorian, you ran off very early last night. You left before eleven.

What did you do afterwards? Did you go straight home?"

Dorian glanced at him hurriedly, and frowned. "No, Harry," he said at

last, "I did not get home till nearly three."

"Did you go to the club?"

"Yes," he answered. Then he bit his lip. "No, I don't mean that. I

didn't go to the club. I walked about. I forget what I did.... How

inquisitive you are, Harry! You always want to know what one has been

doing. I always want to forget what I have been doing. I came in at

half-past two, if you wish to know the exact time. I had left my

latch-key at home, and my servant had to let me in. If you want any

corroborative evidence on the subject you can ask him."

Lord Henry shrugged his shoulders. "My dear fellow, as if I cared! Let

us go up to the drawing-room. No sherry, thank you, Mr. Chapman.

Something has happened to you, Dorian. Tell me what it is. You are not

yourself to-night."

"Don't mind me, Harry. I am irritable, and out of temper. I shall come

round and see you to-morrow or next day. Make my excuses to Lady

Narborough. I shan't go upstairs. I shall go home. I must go home."

"All right, Dorian. I daresay I shall see you to-morrow at tea-time. The

Duchess is coming."

"I will try to be there, Harry," he said, leaving the room. As he drove

back to his own house he was conscious that the sense of terror he

thought he had strangled had come back to him. Lord Henry's casual

questioning had made him lose his nerves for the moment, and he wanted

his nerve still. Things that were dangerous had to be destroyed. He

winced. He hated the idea of even touching them.

Yet it had to be done. He realised that, and when he had locked the door

of his library, he opened the secret press into which he had thrust

Basil Hallward's coat and bag. A huge fire was blazing. He piled another

log on it. The smell of the singeing clothes and burning leather was

horrible. It took him three-quarters of an hour to consume everything.

At the end he felt faint and sick, and having lit some Algerian

pastilles in a pierced copper brazier, he bathed his hands and forehead

with a cool musk-scented vinegar.

Suddenly he started. His eyes grew strangely bright, and he gnawed

nervously at his under-lip. Between two of the windows stood a large

Florentine cabinet, made out of ebony, and inlaid with ivory and blue

lapis. He watched it as though it were a thing that could fascinate and

make afraid, as though it held something that he longed for and yet

almost loathed. His breath quickened. A mad craving came over him. He

lit a cigarette and then threw it away. His eyelids drooped till the

long fringed lashes almost touched his cheek. But he still watched the

cabinet. At last he got up from the sofa on which he had been lying,

went over to it, and, having unlocked it, touched some hidden spring. A

triangular drawer passed slowly out. His fingers moved instinctively

towards it, dipped in, and closed on something. It was a small Chinese

box of black and gold-dust lacquer, elaborately wrought, the sides

patterned with curved waves, and the silken cords hung with round

crystals and tasselled in plaited metal threads. He opened it. Inside

was a green paste, waxy in lustre, the odour curiously heavy and

persistent.

He hesitated for some moments, with a strangely immobile smile upon his

face. Then shivering, though the atmosphere of the room was terribly

hot, he drew himself up, and glanced at the clock. It was twenty minutes

to twelve. He put the box back, shutting the cabinet doors as he did so,

and went into his bedroom.

As midnight was striking bronze blows upon the dusky air, Dorian Gray

dressed commonly, and with a muffler wrapped round his throat, crept

quietly out of the house. In Bond Street he found a hansom with a good

horse. He hailed it, and in a low voice gave the driver an address.

The man shook his head. "It is too far for me," he muttered.

"Here is a sovereign for you," said Dorian. "You shall have another if

you drive fast."

"All right, sir," answered the man, "you will be there in an hour," and

after his fare had got in he turned his horse round, and drove rapidly

towards the river.

CHAPTER XVI

A cold rain began to fall, and the blurred street-lamps looked ghastly

in the dripping mist. The public-houses were just closing, and dim men

and women were clustering in broken groups round their doors. From some

of the bars came the sound of horrible laughter. In others, drunkards

brawled and screamed.

Lying back in the hansom, with his hat pulled over his forehead, Dorian

Gray watched with listless eyes the sordid shame of the great city, and

now and then he repeated to himself the words that Lord Henry had said

to him on the first day they had met, "To cure the soul by means of the

senses, and the senses by means of the soul." Yes, that was the secret.

He had often tried it, and would try it again now. There were

opium-dens, where one could buy oblivion, dens of horror where the

memory of old sins could be destroyed by the madness of sins that were

new.

The moon hung low in the sky like a yellow skull. From time to time a

huge misshapen cloud stretched a long arm across and hid it. The

gas-lamps grew fewer, and the streets more narrow and gloomy. Once the

man lost his way, and had to drive back half a mile. A steam rose from

the horse as it splashed up the puddles. The side-windows of the hansom

were clogged with a grey-flannel mist.

"To cure the soul by means of the senses, and the senses by means of the

soul!" How the words rang in his ears! His soul, certainly, was sick to

death. Was it true that the senses could cure it? Innocent blood had

been spilt. What could atone for that? Ah! for that there was no

atonement; but though forgiveness was impossible, forgetfulness was

possible still, and he was determined to forget, to stamp the thing out,

to crush it as one would crush the adder that had stung one. Indeed,

what right had Basil to have spoken to him as he had done? Who had made

him a Judge over others? He had said things that were dreadful,

horrible, not to be endured.

On and on plodded the hansom, going slower, it seemed to him, at each

step. He thrust up the trap, and called to the man to drive faster. The

hideous hunger for opium began to gnaw at him. His throat burned, and

his delicate hands twitched nervously together. He struck at the horse

madly with his stick. The driver laughed, and whipped up. He laughed in

answer, and the man was silent.

The way seemed interminable, and the streets like the black web of some

sprawling spider. The monotony became unbearable, and, as the mist

thickened, he felt afraid.

Then they passed by lonely brickfields. The fog was lighter here, and he

could see the strange bottle-shaped kilns with their orange fan-like

tongues of fire. A dog barked as they went by, and far away in the

darkness some wandering sea-gull screamed. The horse stumbled in a rut,

then swerved aside, and broke into a gallop.

After some time they left the clay road, and rattled again over

rough-paven streets. Most of the windows were dark, but now and then

fantastic shadows were silhouetted against some lamp-lit blind. He

watched them curiously. They moved like monstrous marionettes, and made

gestures like live things. He hated them. A dull rage was in his heart.

As they turned a corner a woman yelled something at them from an open

door, and two men ran after the hansom for about a hundred yards. The

driver beat at them with his whip.

It is said that passion makes one think in a circle. Certainly with

hideous iteration the bitten lips of Dorian Gray shaped and reshaped

those subtle words that dealt with soul and sense, till he had found in

them the full expression, as it were, of his mood, and justified, by

intellectual approval, passions that without such justification would

still have dominated his temper. From cell to cell of his brain crept

the one thought; and the wild desire to live, most terrible of all man's

appetites, quickened into force each trembling nerve and fibre. Ugliness

that had once been hateful to him because it made things real, became

dear to him now for that very reason. Ugliness was the one reality. The

coarse brawl, the loathsome den, the crude violence of disordered life,

the very vileness of thief and outcast, were more vivid, in their

intense actuality of impression, than all the gracious shapes of Art,

the dreamy shadows of Song. They were what he needed for forgetfulness.

In three days he would be free.

Suddenly the man drew up with a jerk at the top of a dark lane. Over the

low roofs and jagged chimney stacks of the houses rose the black masts

of ships. Wreaths of white mist clung like ghostly sails to the yards.

"Somewhere about here, sir, ain't it?" he asked huskily through the

trap.

Dorian started, and peered round. "This will do," he answered, and,

having got out hastily, and given the driver the extra fare he had

promised him, he walked quickly in the direction of the quay. Here and

there a lantern gleamed at the stern of some huge merchantman. The light

shook and splintered in the puddles. A red glare came from an

outward-bound steamer that was coaling. The slimy pavement looked like a

wet mackintosh.

He hurried on towards the left, glancing back now and then to see if he

was being followed. In about seven or eight minutes he reached a small

shabby house, that was wedged in between two gaunt factories. In one of

the top-windows stood a lamp. He stopped, and gave a peculiar knock.

After a little time he heard steps in the passage, and the chain being

unhooked. The door opened quietly, and he went in without saying a word

to the squat misshapen figure that flattened itself into the shadow as

he passed. At the end of the hall hung a tattered green curtain that

swayed and shook in the gusty wind which had followed him in from the

street. He dragged it aside, and entered a long, low room which looked

as if it had once been a third-rate dancing-saloon. Shrill flaring

gas-jets, dulled and distorted in the fly-blown mirrors that faced them,

were ranged round the walls. Greasy reflectors of ribbed tin backed

them, making quivering discs of light. The floor was covered with

ochre-coloured sawdust, trampled here and there into mud, and stained

with dark rings of spilt liquor. Some Malays were crouching by a little

charcoal stove playing with bone counters, and showing their white teeth

as they chattered. In one corner, with his head buried in his arms, a

sailor sprawled over a table, and by the tawdrily-painted bar that ran

across one complete side stood two haggard women mocking an old man who

was brushing the sleeves of his coat with an expression of disgust. "He

thinks he's got red ants on him," laughed one of them, as Dorian passed

by. The man looked at her in terror and began to whimper.

At the end of the room there was a little staircase, leading to a

darkened chamber. As Dorian hurried up its three rickety steps, the

heavy odour of opium met him. He heaved a deep breath, and his nostrils

quivered with pleasure. When he entered, a young man with smooth yellow

hair, who was bending over a lamp, lighting a long thin pipe, looked up

at him, and nodded in a hesitating manner.

"You here, Adrian?" muttered Dorian.

"Where else should I be?" he answered, listlessly. "None of the chaps

will speak to me now."

"I thought you had left England."

"Darlington is not going to do anything. My brother paid the bill at

last. George doesn't speak to me either.... I don't care," he added,

with a sigh. "As long as one has this stuff, one doesn't want friends. I

think I have had too many friends."

Dorian winced, and looked round at the grotesque things that lay in such

fantastic postures on the ragged mattresses. The twisted limbs, the

gaping mouths, the staring lustreless eyes, fascinated him. He knew in

what strange heavens they were suffering, and what dull hells were

teaching them the secret of some new joy. They were better off than he

was. He was prisoned in thought. Memory, like a horrible malady, was

eating his soul away. From time to time he seemed to see the eyes of

Basil Hallward looking at him. Yet he felt he could not stay. The

presence of Adrian Singleton troubled him. He wanted to be where no one

would know who he was. He wanted to escape from himself.

"I am going on to the other place," he said, after a pause.

"On the wharf?"

"Yes."

"That mad-cat is sure to be there. They won't have her in this place

now."

Dorian shrugged his shoulders. "I am sick of women who love one. Women

who hate one are much more interesting. Besides, the stuff is better."

"Much the same."

"I like it better. Come and have something to drink. I must have

something."

"I don't want anything," murmured the young man.

"Never mind."

Adrian Singleton rose up wearily, and followed Dorian to the bar. A

half-caste, in a ragged turban and a shabby ulster, grinned a hideous

greeting as he thrust a bottle of brandy and two tumblers in front of

them. The women sidled up, and began to chatter. Dorian turned his back

on them, and said something in a low voice to Adrian Singleton.

A crooked smile, like a Malay crease, writhed across the face of one of

the women. "We are very proud to-night," she sneered.

"For God's sake don't talk to me," cried Dorian, stamping his foot on

the ground. "What do you want? Money? Here it is. Don't ever talk to me

again."

Two red sparks flashed for a moment in the woman's sodden eyes, then

flickered out, and left them dull and glazed. She tossed her head, and

raked the coins off the counter with greedy fingers. Her companion

watched her enviously.

"It's no use," sighed Adrian Singleton. "I don't care to go back. What

does it matter? I am quite happy here."

"You will write to me if you want anything, won't you?" said Dorian,

after a pause.

"Perhaps."

"Good-night, then."

"Good-night," answered the young man, passing up the steps, and wiping

his parched mouth with a handkerchief.

Dorian walked to the door with a look of pain in his face. As he drew

the curtain aside a hideous laugh broke from the painted lips of the

woman who had taken his money. "There goes the devil's bargain!" she

hiccoughed, in a hoarse voice.

"Curse you!" he answered, "don't call me that."

She snapped her fingers. "Prince Charming is what you like to be called,

ain't it?" she yelled after him.

The drowsy sailor leapt to his feet as she spoke, and looked wildly

round. The sound of the shutting of the hall door fell on his ear. He

rushed out as if in pursuit.

Dorian Gray hurried along the quay through the drizzling rain. His

meeting with Adrian Singleton had strangely moved him, and he wondered

if the ruin of that young life was really to be laid at his door, as

Basil Hallward had said to him with such infamy of insult. He bit his

lip, and for a few seconds his eyes grew sad. Yet, after all, what did

it matter to him? One's days were too brief to take the burden of

another's errors on one's shoulders. Each man lived his own life, and

paid his own price for living it. The only pity was one had to pay so

often for a single fault. One had to pay over and over again, indeed. In

her dealings with man Destiny never closed her accounts.

There are moments, psychologists tell us, when the passion for sin, or

for what the world calls sin, so dominates a nature, that every fibre of

the body, as every cell of the brain, seems to be instinct with fearful

impulses. Men and women at such moments lose the freedom of their will.

They move to their terrible end as automatons move, Choice is taken from

them, and conscience is either killed, or, if it lives at all, lives but

to give rebellion its fascination, and disobedience its charm. For all

sins, as theologians weary not of reminding us, are sins of

disobedience. When that high spirit, that morning-star of evil, fell

from heaven, it was as a rebel that he fell.

Callous, concentrated on evil, with stained mind, and soul hungry for

rebellion, Dorian Gray hastened on, quickening his step as he went, but

as he darted aside into a dim archway, that had served him often as a

short cut to the ill-famed place where he was going, he felt himself

suddenly seized from behind, and before he had time to defend himself he

was thrust back against the wall, with a brutal hand round his throat.

He struggled madly for life, and by a terrible effort wrenched the

tightening fingers away. In a second he heard the click of a revolver,

and saw the gleam of a polished barrel pointing straight at his head,

and the dusky form of a short thick-set man facing him.

"What do you want?" he gasped.

"Keep quiet," said the man. "If you stir, I shoot you."

"You are mad. What have I done to you?"

"You wrecked the life of Sibyl Vane," was the answer, "and Sibyl Vane

was my sister. She killed herself. I know it. Her death is at your door.

I swore I would kill you in return. For years I have sought you. I had

no clue, no trace. The two people who could have described you were

dead. I knew nothing of you but the pet name she used to call you. I

heard it to-night by chance. Make your peace with God, for to-night you

are going to die."

Dorian Gray grew sick with fear. "I never knew her," he stammered. "I

never heard of her. You are mad."

"You had better confess your sin, for as sure as I am James Vane, you

are going to die." There was a horrible moment. Dorian did not know what

to say or do. "Down on your knees!" growled the man. "I give you one

minute to make your peace--no more. I go on board to-night for India,

and I must do my job first. One minute. That's all."

Dorian's arms fell to his side. Paralysed with terror, he did not know

what to do. Suddenly a wild hope flashed across his brain. "Stop," he

cried. "How long ago is it since your sister died? Quick, tell me!"

"Eighteen years," said the man. "Why do you ask me? What do years

matter?"

"Eighteen years," laughed Dorian Gray, with a touch of triumph in his

voice. "Eighteen years! Set me under the lamp and look at my face!"

James Vane hesitated for a moment, not understanding what was meant.

Then he seized Dorian Gray and dragged him from the archway.

Dim and wavering as was the wind-blown light, yet it served to show him

the hideous error, as it seemed, into which he had fallen, for the face

of the man he had sought to kill had all the bloom of boyhood, all the

unstained purity of youth. He seemed little more than a lad of twenty

summers, hardly older, if older indeed at all, than his sister had been

when they had parted so many years ago. It was obvious that this was not

the man who had destroyed her life.

He loosened his hold and reeled back. "My God! my God!" he cried, "and I

would have murdered you!"

Dorian Gray drew a long breath. "You have been on the brink of

committing a terrible crime, my man," he said, looking at him sternly.

"Let this be a warning to you not to take vengeance into your own

hands."

"Forgive me, sir," muttered James Vane. "I was deceived. A chance word I

heard in that damned den set me on the wrong track."

"You had better go home, and put that pistol away, or you may get into

trouble," said Dorian, turning on his heel, and going slowly down the

street.

James Vane stood on the pavement in horror. He was trembling from head

to foot. After a little while a black shadow that had been creeping

along the dripping wall, moved out into the light and came close to him

with stealthy footsteps. He felt a hand laid on his arm and looked round

with a start. It was one of the women who had been drinking at the bar.

"Why didn't you kill him?" she hissed out, putting her haggard face

quite close to his. "I knew you were following him when you rushed out

from Daly's. You fool! You should have killed him. He has lots of money,

and he's as bad as bad."

"He is not the man I am looking for," he answered, "and I want no man's

money. I want a man's life. The man whose life I want must be nearly

forty now. This one is little more than a boy. Thank God, I have not got

his blood upon my hands."

The woman gave a bitter laugh. "Little more than a boy!" she sneered.

"Why, man, it's nigh on eighteen years since Prince Charming made me

what I am."

"You lie!" cried James Vane.

She raised her hand up to heaven. "Before God I am telling the truth,"

she cried.

"Before God?"

"Strike me dumb if it ain't so. He is the worst one that comes here.

They say he has sold himself to the devil for a pretty face. It's nigh

on eighteen years since I met him. He hasn't changed much since then. I

have though," she added, with a sickly leer.

"You swear this?"

"I swear it," came in hoarse echo from her flat mouth. "But don't give

me away to him," she whined; "I am afraid of him. Let me have some money

for my night's lodging."

He broke from her with an oath, and rushed to the corner of the street,

but Dorian Gray had disappeared. When he looked back, the woman had

vanished also.

CHAPTER XVII

A week later Dorian Gray was sitting in the conservatory at Selby Royal

talking to the pretty Duchess of Monmouth, who with her husband, a

jaded-looking man of sixty, was amongst his guests. It was tea-time, and

the mellow light of the huge lace-covered lamp that stood on the table

lit up the delicate china and hammered silver of the service at which

the Duchess was presiding. Her white hands were moving daintily among

the cups, and her full red lips were smiling at something that Dorian

had whispered to her. Lord Henry was lying back in a silk-draped wicker

chair looking at them. On a peach-coloured divan sat Lady Narborough

pretending to listen to the Duke's description of the last Brazilian

beetle that he had added to his collection. Three young men in elaborate

smoking-suits were handing tea-cakes to some of the women. The

house-party consisted of twelve people, and there were more expected to

arrive on the next day.

"What are you two talking about?" said Lord Henry, strolling over to the

table, and putting his cup down. "I hope Dorian has told you about my

plan for rechristening everything, Gladys. It is a delightful idea."

"But I don't want to be rechristened, Harry," rejoined the Duchess,

looking up at him with her wonderful eyes. "I am quite satisfied with my

own name, and I am sure Mr. Gray should be satisfied with his."

"My dear Gladys, I would not alter either name for the world. They are

both perfect. I was thinking chiefly of flowers. Yesterday I cut an

orchid, for my buttonhole. It was a marvellous spotted thing, as

effective as the seven deadly sins. In a thoughtless moment I asked one

of the gardeners what it was called. He told me it was a fine specimen

of \_Robinsoniana\_, or something dreadful of that kind. It is a sad

truth, but we have lost the faculty of giving lovely names to things.

Names are everything. I never quarrel with actions. My one quarrel is

with words. That is the reason I hate vulgar realism in literature. The

man who could call a spade a spade should be compelled to use one. It is

the only thing he is fit for."

"Then what should we call you, Harry?" she asked.

"His name is Prince Paradox," said Dorian.

"I recognise him in a flash," exclaimed the Duchess.

"I won't hear of it," laughed Lord Henry, sinking into a chair. "From a

label there is no escape! I refuse the title."

"Royalties may not abdicate," fell as a warning from pretty lips.

"You wish me to defend my throne, then?"

"Yes."

"I give the truths of to-morrow."

"I prefer the mistakes of to-day," she answered.

"You disarm me, Gladys," he cried, catching the wilfulness of her mood.

"Of your shield, Harry: not of your spear."

"I never tilt against Beauty," he said, with a wave of his hand.

"That is your error, Harry, believe me. You value beauty far too much."

"How can you say that? I admit that I think that it is better to be

beautiful than to be good. But on the other hand no one is more ready

than I am to acknowledge that it is better to be good than to be ugly."

"Ugliness is one of the seven deadly sins, then?" cried the Duchess.

"What becomes of your simile about the orchid?"

"Ugliness is one of the seven deadly virtues, Gladys. You, as a good

Tory, must not underrate them. Beer, the Bible, and the seven deadly

virtues have made our England what she is."

"You don't like your country, then?" she asked.

"I live in it."

"That you may censure it the better."

"Would you have me take the verdict of Europe on it?" he inquired.

"What do they say of us?"

"That Tartuffe has emigrated to England and opened a shop."

"Is that yours, Harry?"

"I give it to you."

"I could not use it. It is too true."

"You need not be afraid. Our countrymen never recognise a description."

"They are practical."

"They are more cunning than practical. When they make up their ledger,

they balance stupidity by wealth, and vice by hypocrisy."

"Still, we have done great things."

"Great things have been thrust on us, Gladys."

"We have carried their burden."

"Only as far as the Stock Exchange."

She shook her head. "I believe in the race," she cried.

"It represents the survival of the pushing."

"It has development."

"Decay fascinates me more."

"What of Art?" she asked.

"It is a malady."

"Love?"

"An illusion."

"Religion?"

"The fashionable substitute for Belief."

"You are a sceptic."

"Never! Scepticism is the beginning of Faith."

"What are you?"

"To define is to limit."

"Give me a clue."

"Threads snap. You would lose your way in the labyrinth."

"You bewilder me. Let us talk of someone else."

"Our host is a delightful topic. Years ago he was christened Prince

Charming."

"Ah! don't remind me of that," cried Dorian Gray.

"Our host is rather horrid this evening," answered the Duchess,

colouring. "I believe he thinks that Monmouth married me on purely

scientific principles as the best specimen he could find of a modern

butterfly."

"Well, I hope he won't stick pins into you, Duchess," laughed Dorian.

"Oh! my maid does that already, Mr. Gray, when she is annoyed with me."

"And what does she get annoyed with you about, Duchess?"

"For the most trivial things, Mr. Gray, I assure you. Usually because I

come in at ten minutes to nine and tell her that I must be dressed by

half-past eight."

"How unreasonable of her! You should give her warning."

"I daren't, Mr. Gray. Why, she invents hats for me. You remember the one

I wore at Lady Hilstone's garden-party? You don't, but it is nice of you

to pretend that you do. Well, she made it out of nothing. All good hats

are made out of nothing."

"Like all good reputations, Gladys," interrupted Lord Henry. "Every

effect that one produces gives one an enemy. To be popular one must be a

mediocrity."

"Not with women," said the Duchess, shaking her head; "and women rule

the world. I assure you we can't bear mediocrities. We women, as someone

says, love with our ears, just as you men love with your eyes, if you

ever love at all."

"It seems to me that we never do anything else," murmured Dorian.

"Ah! then, you never really love, Mr. Gray," answered the Duchess, with

mock sadness.

"My dear Gladys!" cried Lord Henry. "How can you say that? Romance lives

by repetition, and repetition converts an appetite into an art. Besides,

each time that one loves is the only time one has ever loved. Difference

of object does not alter singleness of passion. It merely intensifies

it. We can have in life but one great experience at best, and the secret

of life is to reproduce that experience as often as possible."

"Even when one has been wounded by it, Harry?" asked the Duchess, after

a pause.

"Especially when one has been wounded by it," answered Lord Henry.

The Duchess turned and looked at Dorian Gray with a curious expression

in her eyes. "What do you say to that, Mr. Gray?" she inquired.

Dorian hesitated for a moment. Then he threw his head back and laughed.

"I always agree with Harry, Duchess."

"Even when he is wrong?"

"Harry is never wrong, Duchess."

"And does his philosophy make you happy?"

"I have never searched for happiness. Who wants happiness? I have

searched for pleasure."

"And found it, Mr. Gray?"

"Often. Too often."

The Duchess sighed. "I am searching for peace," she said, "and if I

don't go and dress, I shall have none this evening."

"Let me get you some orchids, Duchess," cried Dorian, starting to his

feet, and walking down the conservatory.

"You are flirting disgracefully with him," said Lord Henry to his

cousin. "You had better take care. He is very fascinating."

"If he were not, there would be no battle."

"Greek meets Greek, then?"

"I am on the side of the Trojans. They fought for a woman."

"They were defeated."

"There are worse things than capture," she answered.

"You gallop with a loose rein."

"Pace gives life," was the \_riposte\_.

"I shall write it in my diary to-night."

"What?"

"That a burnt child loves the fire."

"I am not even singed. My wings are untouched."

"You use them for everything, except flight."

"Courage has passed from men to women. It is a new experience for us."

"You have a rival."

"Who?"

He laughed. "Lady Narborough," he whispered. "She perfectly adores him."

"You fill me with apprehension. The appeal to Antiquity is fatal to us

who are romanticists."

"Romanticists! You have all the methods of science."

"Men have educated us."

"But not explained you."

"Describe us as a sex," was her challenge.

"Sphynxes without secrets."

She looked at him, smiling. "How long Mr. Gray is!" she said. "Let us go

and help him. I have not yet told him the colour of my frock."

"Ah! you must suit your frock to his flowers, Gladys."

"That would be a premature surrender."

"Romantic Art begins with its climax."

"I must keep an opportunity for retreat."

"In the Parthian manner?"

"They found safety in the desert. I could not do that."

"Women are not always allowed a choice," he answered, but hardly had he

finished the sentence before from the far end of the conservatory came

a stifled groan, followed by the dull sound of a heavy fall. Everybody

started up. The Duchess stood motionless in horror. And with fear in his

eyes Lord Henry rushed through the flapping palms to find Dorian Gray

lying face downwards on the tiled floor in a death-like swoon.

He was carried at once into the blue drawing-room, and laid upon one of

the sofas. After a short time he came to himself, and looked round with

a dazed expression.

"What has happened?" he asked. "Oh! I remember. Am I safe here, Harry?"

He began to tremble.

"My dear Dorian," answered Lord Henry, "you merely fainted. That was

all. You must have overtired yourself. You had better not come down to

dinner. I will take your place."

"No, I will come down," he said, struggling to his feet. "I would rather

come down. I must not be alone."

He went to his room and dressed. There was a wild recklessness of gaiety

in his manner as he sat at table, but now and then a thrill of terror

ran through him when he remembered that, pressed against the window of

the conservatory, like a white handkerchief, he had seen the face of

James Vane watching him.

CHAPTER XVIII

The next day he did not leave the house, and, indeed, spent most of the

time in his own room, sick with a wild terror of dying, and yet

indifferent to life itself. The consciousness of being hunted, snared,

tracked down, had begun to dominate him. If the tapestry did but tremble

in the wind, he shook. The dead leaves that were blown against the

leaded panes seemed to him like his own wasted resolutions and wild

regrets. When he closed his eyes, he saw again the sailor's face peering

through the mist-stained glass, and horror seemed once more to lay its

hand upon his heart.

But perhaps it had been only his fancy that had called vengeance out of

the night, and set the hideous shapes of punishment before him. Actual

life was chaos, but there was something terribly logical in the

imagination. It was the imagination that set remorse to dog the feet of

sin. It was the imagination that made each crime bear its misshapen

brood. In the common world of fact the wicked were not punished, nor the

good rewarded. Success was given to the strong, failure thrust upon the

weak. That was all. Besides, had any stranger been prowling round the

house he would have been seen by the servants or the keepers. Had any

footmarks been found on the flower-beds, the gardeners would have

reported it. Yes: it had been merely fancy. Sibyl Vane's brother had not

come back to kill him. He had sailed away in his ship to founder in some

winter sea. From him, at any rate, he was safe. Why, the man did not

know who he was, could not know who he was. The mask of youth had saved

him.

And yet if it had been merely an illusion, how terrible it was to think

that conscience could raise such fearful phantoms, and give them visible

form, and make them move before one! What sort of life would his be, if

day and night, shadows of his crime were to peer at him from silent

corners, to mock him from secret places, to whisper in his ear as he sat

at the feast, to wake him with icy fingers as he lay asleep! As the

thought crept through his brain, he grew pale with terror, and the air

seemed to him to have become suddenly colder. Oh! in what a wild hour of

madness he had killed his friend! How ghastly the mere memory of the

scene! He saw it all again. Each hideous detail came back to him with

added horror. Out of the black cave of Time, terrible and swathed in

scarlet, rose the image of his sin. When Lord Henry came in at six

o'clock, he found him crying as one whose heart will break.

It was not till the third day that he ventured to go out. There was

something in the clear, pine-scented air of that winter morning that

seemed to bring him back his joyousness and his ardour for life. But it

was not merely the physical conditions of environment that had caused

the change. His own nature had revolted against the excess of anguish

that had sought to maim and mar the perfection of its calm. With subtle

and finely-wrought temperaments it is always so. Their strong passions

must either bruise or bend. They either slay the man, or themselves die.

Shallow sorrows and shallow loves live on. The loves and sorrows that

are great are destroyed by their own plenitude. Besides, he had

convinced himself that he had been the victim of a terror-stricken

imagination, and looked back now on his fears with something of pity and

not a little of contempt.

After breakfast he walked with the Duchess for an hour in the garden,

and then drove across the park to join the shooting-party. The crisp

frost lay like salt upon the grass. The sky was an inverted cup of blue

metal. A thin film of ice bordered the flat reed-grown lake.

At the corner of the pine-wood he caught sight of Sir Geoffrey Clouston,

the Duchess's brother, jerking two spent cartridges out of his gun. He

jumped from the cart, and having told the groom to take the mare home,

made his way towards his guest through the withered bracken and rough

undergrowth.

"Have you had good sport, Geoffrey?" he asked.

"Not very good, Dorian. I think most of the birds have gone to the open.

I dare say it will be better after lunch, when we get to new ground."

Dorian strolled along by his side. The keen aromatic air, the brown and

red lights that glimmered in the wood, the hoarse cries of the beaters

ringing out from time to time, and the sharp snaps of the guns that

followed, fascinated him, and filled him with a sense of delightful

freedom. He was dominated by the carelessness of happiness, by the high

indifference of joy.

Suddenly from a lumpy tussock of old grass, some twenty yards in front

of them, with black-tipped ears erect, and long hinder limbs throwing it

forward, started a hare. It bolted for a thicket of alders. Sir Geoffrey

put his gun to his shoulder, but there was something in the animal's

grace of movement that strangely charmed Dorian Gray, and he cried out

at once, "Don't shoot it, Geoffrey. Let it live."

"What nonsense, Dorian!" laughed his companion, and as the hare bounded

into the thicket he fired. There were two cries heard, the cry of a hare

in pain, which is dreadful, the cry of a man in agony, which is worse.

"Good heavens! I have hit a beater!" exclaimed Sir Geoffrey. "What an

ass the man was to get in front of the guns! Stop shooting there!" he

called out at the top of his voice. "A man is hurt."

The head-keeper came running up with a stick in his hand.

"Where, sir? Where is he?" he shouted. At the same time the firing

ceased along the line.

"Here," answered Sir Geoffrey, angrily, hurrying towards the thicket.

"Why on earth don't you keep your men back? Spoiled my shooting for the

day."

Dorian watched them as they plunged into the alder-clump, brushing the

lithe, swinging branches aside. In a few moments they emerged, dragging

a body after them into the sunlight. He turned away in horror. It seemed

to him that misfortune followed wherever he went. He heard Sir Geoffrey

ask if the man was really dead, and the affirmative answer of the

keeper. The wood seemed to him to have become suddenly alive with faces.

There was the trampling of myriad feet, and the low buzz of voices. A

great copper-breasted pheasant came beating through the boughs overhead.

After a few moments, that were to him, in his perturbed state, like

endless hours of pain, he felt a hand laid on his shoulder. He started,

and looked round.

"Dorian," said Lord Henry, "I had better tell them that the shooting is

stopped for to-day. It would not look well to go on."

"I wish it were stopped for ever, Harry," he answered, bitterly. "The

whole thing is hideous and cruel. Is the man...?"

He could not finish the sentence.

"I am afraid so," rejoined Lord Henry. "He got the whole charge of shot

in his chest. He must have died almost instantaneously. Come; let us go

home."

They walked side by side in the direction of the avenue for nearly fifty

yards without speaking. Then Dorian looked at Lord Henry, and said, with

a heavy sigh, "It is a bad omen, Harry, a very bad omen."

"What is?" asked Lord Henry. "Oh! this accident, I suppose. My dear

fellow, it can't be helped. It was the man's own fault. Why did he get

in front of the guns? Besides, it's nothing to us. It is rather awkward

for Geoffrey, of course. It does not do to pepper beaters. It makes

people think that one is a wild shot. And Geoffrey is not; he shoots

very straight. But there is no use talking about the matter."

Dorian shook his head. "It is a bad omen, Harry. I feel as if something

horrible were going to happen to some of us. To myself, perhaps," he

added, passing his hand over his eyes, with a gesture of pain.

The elder man laughed. "The only horrible thing in the world is \_ennui\_,

Dorian. That is the one sin for which there is no forgiveness. But we

are not likely to suffer from it, unless these fellows keep chattering

about this thing at dinner. I must tell them that the subject is to be

tabooed. As for omens, there is no such thing as an omen. Destiny does

not send us heralds. She is too wise or too cruel for that. Besides,

what on earth could happen to you, Dorian? You have everything in the

world that a man can want. There is no one who would not be delighted to

change places with you."

"There is no one with whom I would not change places, Harry. Don't laugh

like that. I am telling you the truth. The wretched peasant who has just

died is better off than I am. I have no terror of Death. It is the

coming of Death that terrifies me. Its monstrous wings seem to wheel in

the leaden air around me. Good heavens! don't you see a man moving

behind the trees there, watching me, waiting for me?"

Lord Henry looked in the direction in which the trembling gloved hand

was pointing. "Yes," he said, smiling, "I see the gardener waiting for

you. I suppose he wants to ask you what flowers you wish to have on the

table to-night. How absurdly nervous you are, my dear fellow! You must

come and see my doctor, when we get back to town."

Dorian heaved a sigh of relief as he saw the gardener approaching. The

man touched his hat, glanced for a moment at Lord Henry in a hesitating

manner, and then produced a letter, which he handed to his master. "Her

Grace told me to wait for an answer," he murmured.

Dorian put the letter into his pocket. "Tell her Grace that I am coming

in," he said, coldly. The man turned round, and went rapidly in the

direction of the house.

"How fond women are of doing dangerous things!" laughed Lord Henry. "It

is one of the qualities in them that I admire most. A woman will flirt

with anybody in the world as long as other people are looking on."

"How fond you are of saying dangerous things, Harry! In the present

instance you are quite astray. I like the Duchess very much, but I don't

love her."

"And the Duchess loves you very much, but she likes you less, so you are

excellently matched."

"You are talking scandal, Harry, and there is never any basis for

scandal."

"The basis of every scandal is an immoral certainty," said Lord Henry,

lighting a cigarette.

"You would sacrifice anybody, Harry, for the sake of an epigram."

"The world goes to the altar of its own accord," was the answer.

"I wish I could love," cried Dorian Gray, with a deep note of pathos in

his voice. "But I seem to have lost the passion, and forgotten the

desire. I am too much concentrated on myself. My own personality has

become a burden to me. I want to escape, to go away, to forget. It was

silly of me to come down here at all. I think I shall send a wire to

Harvey to have the yacht got ready. On a yacht one is safe."

"Safe from what, Dorian? You are in some trouble. Why not tell me what

it is? You know I would help you."

"I can't tell you, Harry," he answered, sadly. "And I dare say it is

only a fancy of mine. This unfortunate accident has upset me. I have a

horrible presentiment that something of the kind may happen to me."

"What nonsense!"

"I hope it is, but I can't help feeling it. Ah! here is the Duchess,

looking like Artemis in a tailor-made gown. You see we have come back,

Duchess."

"I have heard all about it, Mr. Gray," she answered. "Poor Geoffrey is

terribly upset. And it seems that you asked him not to shoot the hare.

How curious!"

"Yes, it was very curious. I don't know what made me say it. Some whim,

I suppose. It looked the loveliest of little live things. But I am sorry

they told you about the man. It is a hideous subject."

"It is an annoying subject," broke in Lord Henry. "It has no

psychological value at all. Now if Geoffrey had done the thing on

purpose, how interesting he would be! I should like to know someone who

had committed a real murder."

"How horrid of you, Harry!" cried the Duchess. "Isn't it, Mr. Gray?

Harry, Mr. Gray is ill again. He is going to faint."

Dorian drew himself up with an effort, and smiled. "It is nothing,

Duchess," he murmured; "my nerves are dreadfully out of order. That is

all. I am afraid I walked too far this morning. I didn't hear what Harry

said. Was it very bad? You must tell me some other time. I think I must

go and lie down. You will excuse me, won't you?"

They had reached the great flight of steps that led from the

conservatory on to the terrace. As the glass door closed behind Dorian,

Lord Henry turned and looked at the Duchess with his slumberous eyes.

"Are you very much in love with him?" he asked.

She did not answer for some time, but stood gazing at the landscape. "I

wish I knew," she said at last.

He shook his head. "Knowledge would be fatal. It is the uncertainty

that charms one. A mist makes things wonderful."

"One may lose one's way."

"All ways end at the same point, my dear Gladys."

"What is that?"

"Disillusion."

"It was my \_debut\_ in life," she sighed.

"It came to you crowned."

"I am tired of strawberry leaves."

"They become you."

"Only in public."

"You would miss them," said Lord Henry.

"I will not part with a petal."

"Monmouth has ears."

"Old age is dull of hearing."

"Has he never been jealous?"

"I wish he had been."

He glanced about as if in search of something. "What are you looking

for?" she inquired.

"The button from your foil," he answered. "You have dropped it."

She laughed. "I have still the mask."

"It makes your eyes lovelier," was his reply.

She laughed again. Her teeth showed like white seeds in a scarlet fruit.

Upstairs, in his own room, Dorian Gray was lying on a sofa, with terror

in every tingling fibre of his body. Life had suddenly become too

hideous a burden for him to bear. The dreadful death of the unlucky

beater, shot in the thicket like a wild animal, had seemed to him to

prefigure death for himself also. He had nearly swooned at what Lord

Henry had said in a chance mood of cynical jesting.

At five o'clock he rang his bell for his servant and gave him orders to

pack his things for the night-express to town, and to have the brougham

at the door by eight-thirty. He was determined not to sleep another

night at Selby Royal. It was an ill-omened place. Death walked there in

the sunlight. The grass of the forest had been spotted with blood.

Then he wrote a note to Lord Henry, telling him that he was going up to

town to consult his doctor, and asking him to entertain his guests in

his absence. As he was putting it into the envelope, a knock came to the

door, and his valet informed him that the head-keeper wished to see him.

He frowned, and bit his lip. "Send him in," he muttered, after some

moments' hesitation.

As soon as the man entered Dorian pulled his chequebook out of a drawer,

and spread it out before him.

"I suppose you have come about the unfortunate accident of this morning,

Thornton?" he said, taking up a pen.

"Yes, sir," answered the gamekeeper.

"Was the poor fellow married? Had he any people dependent on him?" asked

Dorian, looking bored. "If so, I should not like them to be left in

want, and will send them any sum of money you may think necessary."

"We don't know who he is, sir. That is what I took the liberty of coming

to you about."

"Don't know who he is?" said Dorian, listlessly. "What do you mean?

Wasn't he one of your men?"

"No, sir. Never saw him before. Seems like a sailor, sir."

The pen dropped from Dorian Gray's hand, and he felt as if his heart had

suddenly stopped beating. "A sailor?" he cried out. "Did you say a

sailor?"

"Yes, sir. He looks as if he had been a sort of sailor; tattooed on both

arms, and that kind of thing."

"Was there anything found on him?" said Dorian, leaning forward and

looking at the man with startled eyes. "Anything that would tell his

name?"

"Some money, sir--not much, and a six-shooter. There was no name of any

kind. A decent-looking man, sir, but rough-like. A sort of sailor, we

think."

Dorian started to his feet. A terrible hope fluttered past him. He

clutched at it madly. "Where is the body?" he exclaimed. "Quick! I must

see it at once."

"It is in an empty stable in the Home Farm, sir. The folk don't like to

have that sort of thing in their houses. They say a corpse brings bad

luck."

"The Home Farm! Go there at once and meet me. Tell one of the grooms to

bring my horse round. No. Never mind. I'll go to the stables myself. It

will save time."

In less than a quarter of an hour Dorian Gray was galloping down the

long avenue as hard as he could go. The trees seemed to sweep past him

in spectral procession, and wild shadows to fling themselves across his

path. Once the mare swerved at a white gate-post and nearly threw him.

He lashed her across the neck with his crop. She cleft the dusky air

like an arrow. The stones flew from her hoofs.

At last he reached the Home Farm. Two men were loitering in the yard. He

leapt from the saddle and threw the reins to one of them. In the

farthest stable a light was glimmering. Something seemed to tell him

that the body was there, and he hurried to the door, and put his hand

upon the latch.

There he paused for a moment, feeling that he was on the brink of a

discovery that would either make or mar his life. Then he thrust the

door open, and entered.

On a heap of sacking in the far corner was lying the dead body of a man

dressed in a coarse shirt and a pair of blue trousers. A spotted

handkerchief had been placed over the face. A coarse candle, stuck in a

bottle, sputtered beside it.

Dorian Gray shuddered. He felt that his could not be the hand to take

the handkerchief away, and called out to one of the farm-servants to

come to him.

"Take that thing off the face. I wish to see it," he said, clutching at

the doorpost for support.

When the farm-servant had done so, he stepped forward. A cry of joy

broke from his lips. The man who had been shot in the thicket was James

Vane.

He stood there for some minutes looking at the dead body. As he rode

home, his eyes were full of tears, for he knew he was safe.

CHAPTER XIX

"There is no use your telling me that you are going to be good," cried

Lord Henry, dipping his white fingers into a red copper bowl filled with

rose-water. "You're quite perfect. Pray, don't change."

Dorian Gray shook his head. "No, Harry, I have done too many dreadful

things in my life. I am not going to do any more. I began my good

actions yesterday."

"Where were you yesterday?"

"In the country, Harry. I was staying at a little inn by myself."

"My dear boy," said Lord Henry, smiling, "anybody can be good in the

country. There are no temptations there. That is the reason why people

who live out of town are so absolutely uncivilised. Civilisation is not

by any means an easy thing to attain to. There are only two ways by

which man can reach it. One is by being cultured, the other by being

corrupt. Country people have no opportunity of being either, so they

stagnate."

"Culture and corruption," echoed Dorian. "I have known something of

both. It seems terrible to me now that they should ever be found

together. For I have a new ideal, Harry. I am going to alter. I think I

have altered."

"You have not yet told me what your good action was. Or did you say you

had done more than one?" asked his companion, as he spilt into his plate

a little crimson pyramid of seeded strawberries, and through a

perforated shell-shaped spoon snowed white sugar upon them.

"I can tell you, Harry. It is not a story I could tell to anyone else. I

spared somebody. It sounds vain, but you understand what I mean. She was

quite beautiful, and wonderfully like Sibyl Vane. I think it was that

which first attracted me to her. You remember Sibyl, don't you? How long

ago that seems! Well, Hetty was not one of our own class, of course. She

was simply a girl in a village. But I really loved her. I am quite sure

that I loved her. All during this wonderful May that we have been

having, I used to run down and see her two or three times a week.

Yesterday she met me in a little orchard. The apple-blossoms kept

tumbling down on her hair, and she was laughing. We were to have gone

away together this morning at dawn. Suddenly I determined to leave her

as flower-like as I had found her."

"I should think the novelty of the emotion must have given you a thrill

of real pleasure, Dorian," interrupted Lord Henry. "But I can finish

your idyll for you. You gave her good advice, and broke her heart. That

was the beginning of your reformation."

"Harry, you are horrible! You mustn't say these dreadful things. Hetty's

heart is not broken. Of course she cried, and all that. But there is no

disgrace upon her. She can live, like Perdita, in her garden of mint and

marigold."

"And weep over a faithless Florizel," said Lord Henry, laughing, as he

leant back in his chair. "My dear Dorian, you have the most curiously

boyish moods. Do you think this girl will ever be really contented now

with anyone of her own rank? I suppose she will be married some day to a

rough carter or a grinning ploughman. Well, the fact of having met you,

and loved you, will teach her to despise her husband, and she will be

wretched. From a moral point of view, I cannot say that I think much of

your great renunciation. Even as a beginning, it is poor. Besides, how

do you know that Hetty isn't floating at the present moment in some

star-lit mill-pond, with lovely water-lilies round her, like Ophelia?"

"I can't bear this, Harry! You mock at everything, and then suggest the

most serious tragedies. I am sorry I told you now. I don't care what you

say to me. I know I was right in acting as I did. Poor Hetty! As I rode

past the farm this morning, I saw her white face at the window, like a

spray of jasmine. Don't let us talk about it any more, and don't try to

persuade me that the first good action I have done for years, the first

little bit of self-sacrifice I have ever known, is really a sort of sin.

I want to be better. I am going to be better. Tell me something about

yourself. What is going on in town? I have not been to the club for

days."

"The people are still discussing poor Basil's disappearance."

"I should have thought they had got tired of that by this time," said

Dorian, pouring himself out some wine, and frowning slightly.

"My dear boy, they have only been talking about it for six weeks, and

the British public are really not equal to the mental strain of having

more than one topic every three months. They have been very fortunate

lately, however. They have had my own divorce-case, and Alan Campbell's

suicide. Now they have got the mysterious disappearance of an artist.

Scotland Yard still insists that the man in the grey ulster who left for

Paris by the midnight train on the ninth of November was poor Basil, and

the French police declare that Basil never arrived in Paris at all. I

suppose in about a fortnight we shall be told that he has been seen in

San Francisco. It is an odd thing, but everyone who disappears is said

to be seen at San Francisco. It must be a delightful city, and possess

all the attractions of the next world."

"What do you think has happened to Basil?" asked Dorian, holding up his

Burgundy against the light, and wondering how it was that he could

discuss the matter so calmly.

"I have not the slightest idea. If Basil chooses to hide himself, it is

no business of mine. If he is dead, I don't want to think about him.

Death is the only thing that ever terrifies me. I hate it."

"Why?" said the younger man, wearily.

"Because," said Lord Henry, passing beneath his nostrils the gilt

trellis of an open vinaigrette box, "one can survive everything nowadays

except that. Death and vulgarity are the only two facts in the

nineteenth century that one cannot explain away. Let us have our coffee

in the music-room, Dorian. You must play Chopin to me. The man with whom

my wife ran away played Chopin exquisitely. Poor Victoria! I was very

fond of her. The house is rather lonely without her. Of course married

life is merely a habit, a bad habit. But then one regrets the loss even

of one's worst habits. Perhaps one regrets them the most. They are such

an essential part of one's personality."

Dorian said nothing, but rose from the table and, passing into the next

room, sat down to the piano and let his fingers stray across the white

and black ivory of the keys. After the coffee had been brought in, he

stopped, and, looking over at Lord Henry, said, "Harry, did it ever

occur to you that Basil was murdered?"

Lord Henry yawned. "Basil was very popular, and always wore a Waterbury

watch. Why should he have been murdered? He was not clever enough to

have enemies. Of course he had a wonderful genius for painting. But a

man can paint like Velasquez and yet be as dull as possible. Basil was

really rather dull. He only interested me once, and that was when he

told me, years ago, that he had a wild adoration for you, and that you

were the dominant motive of his art."

"I was very fond of Basil," said Dorian, with a note of sadness in his

voice. "But don't people say that he was murdered?"

"Oh, some of the papers do. It does not seem to me to be at all

probable. I know there are dreadful places in Paris, but Basil was not

the sort of man to have gone to them. He had no curiosity. It was his

chief defect."

"What would you say, Harry, if I told you that I had murdered Basil?"

said the younger man. He watched him intently after he had spoken.

"I would say, my dear fellow, that you were posing for a character that

doesn't suit you. All crime is vulgar, just as all vulgarity is crime.

It is not in you, Dorian, to commit a murder. I am sorry if I hurt your

vanity by saying so, but I assure you it is true. Crime belongs

exclusively to the lower orders. I don't blame them in the smallest

degree. I should fancy that crime was to them what art is to us, simply

a method of procuring extraordinary sensations."

"A method of procuring sensations? Do you think, then, that a man who

has once committed a murder could possibly do the same crime again?

Don't tell me that."

"Oh! anything becomes a pleasure if one does it too often," cried Lord

Henry, laughing. "That is one of the most important secrets of life. I

should fancy, however, that murder is always a mistake. One should never

do any thing that one cannot talk about after dinner. But let us pass

from poor Basil. I wish I could believe that he had come to such a

really romantic end as you suggest; but I can't. I dare say he fell into

the Seine off an omnibus, and that the conductor hushed up the scandal.

Yes: I should fancy that was his end. I see him lying now on his back

under those dull-green waters with the heavy barges floating over him,

and long weeds catching in his hair. Do you know, I don't think he would

have done much more good work. During the last ten years his painting

had gone off very much."

Dorian heaved a sigh, and Lord Henry strolled across the room and began

to stroke the head of a curious Java parrot, a large grey-plumaged bird,

with pink crest and tail, that was balancing itself upon a bamboo perch.

As his pointed fingers touched it, it dropped the white scurf of

crinkled lids over black glass-like eyes, and began to sway backwards

and forwards.

"Yes," he continued, turning round, and taking his handkerchief out of

his pocket; "his painting had quite gone off. It seemed to me to have

lost something. It had lost an ideal. When you and he ceased to be great

friends, he ceased to be a great artist. What was it separated you? I

suppose he bored you. If so, he never forgave you. It's a habit bores

have. By the way, what has become of that wonderful portrait he did of

you? I don't think I have ever seen it since he finished it. Oh! I

remember your telling me years ago that you had sent it down to Selby,

and that it had got mislaid or stolen on the way. You never got it back?

What a pity! It was really a masterpiece. I remember I wanted to buy it.

I wish I had now. It belonged to Basil's best period. Since then, his

work was that curious mixture of bad painting and good intentions that

always entitles a man to be called a representative British artist. Did

you advertise for it? You should."

"I forget," said Dorian. "I suppose I did. But I never really liked it.

I am sorry I sat for it. The memory of the thing is hateful to me. Why

do you talk of it? It used to remind me of those curious lines in some

play--'Hamlet,' I think--how do they run?--

"'Like the painting of a sorrow,

A face without a heart.'

Yes: that is what it was like."

Lord Henry laughed. "If a man treats life artistically, his brain is his

heart," he answered, sinking into an arm-chair.

Dorian Gray shook his head, and struck some soft chords on the piano.

"'Like the painting of a sorrow,'" he repeated, "'a face without a

heart.'"

The elder man lay back and looked at him with half-closed eyes. "By the

way, Dorian," he said, after a pause, "'what does it profit a man if he

gain the whole world and lose'--how does the quotation run?--'his own

soul'?"

The music jarred and Dorian Gray started, and stared at his friend. "Why

do you ask me that, Harry?"

"My dear fellow," said Lord Henry, elevating his eyebrows in surprise,

"I asked you because I thought you might be able to give me an answer.

That is all. I was going through the Park last Sunday, and close by the

Marble Arch there stood a little crowd of shabby-looking people

listening to some vulgar street-preacher. As I passed by, I heard the

man yelling out that question to his audience. It struck me as being

rather dramatic. London is very rich in curious effects of that kind. A

wet Sunday, an uncouth Christian in a mackintosh, a ring of sickly white

faces under a broken roof of dripping umbrellas, and a wonderful phrase

flung into the air by shrill, hysterical lips--it was really very good

in its way, quite a suggestion. I thought of telling the prophet that

Art had a soul, but that man had not. I am afraid, however, he would not

have understood me."

"Don't, Harry. The soul is a terrible reality. It can be bought, and

sold, and bartered away. It can be poisoned, or made perfect. There is a

soul in each one of us. I know it."

"Do you feel quite sure of that, Dorian?"

"Quite sure."

"Ah! then it must be an illusion. The things one feels absolutely

certain about are never true. That is the fatality of Faith, and the

lesson of Romance. How grave you are! Don't be so serious. What have

you or I to do with the superstitions of our age? No: we have given up

our belief in the soul. Play me something. Play me a nocturne, Dorian,

and, as you play, tell me, in a low voice, how you have kept your youth.

You must have some secret. I am only ten years older than you are, and I

am wrinkled, and worn, and yellow. You are really wonderful, Dorian. You

have never looked more charming than you do to-night. You remind me of

the day I saw you first. You were rather cheeky, very shy, and

absolutely extraordinary. You have changed, of course, but not in

appearance. I wish you would tell me your secret. To get back my youth I

would do anything in the world, except take exercise, get up early, or

be respectable. Youth! There is nothing like it. It's absurd to talk of

the ignorance of youth. The only people to whose opinions I listen now

with any respect are people much younger than myself. They seem in front

of me. Life has revealed to them her latest wonder. As for the aged, I

always contradict the aged. I do it on principle. If you ask them their

opinion on something that happened yesterday, they solemnly give you the

opinions current in 1820, when people wore high stocks, believed in

everything, and knew absolutely nothing. How lovely that thing you are

playing is! I wonder did Chopin write it at Majorca, with the sea

weeping round the villa, and the salt spray dashing against the panes?

It is marvellously romantic. What a blessing it is that there is one art

left to us that is not imitative! Don't stop. I want music to-night. It

seems to me that you are the young Apollo, and that I am Marsyas

listening to you. I have sorrows, Dorian, of my own, that even you know

nothing of. The tragedy of old age is not that one is old, but that one

is young. I am amazed sometimes at my own sincerity. Ah, Dorian, how

happy you are! What an exquisite life you have had! You have drunk

deeply of everything. You have crushed the grapes against your palate.

Nothing has been hidden from you. And it has all been to you no more

than the sound of music. It has not marred you. You are still the same."

"I am not the same, Harry."

"Yes: you are the same. I wonder what the rest of your life will be.

Don't spoil it by renunciations. At present you are a perfect type.

Don't make yourself incomplete. You are quite flawless now. You need not

shake your head: you know you are. Besides, Dorian, don't deceive

yourself. Life is not governed by will or intention. Life is a question

of nerves, and fibres, and slowly built-up cells in which thought hides

itself and passion has its dreams. You may fancy yourself safe, and

think yourself strong. But a chance tone of colour in a room or a

morning sky, a particular perfume that you had once loved and that

brings subtle memories with it, a line from a forgotten poem that you

had come across again, a cadence from a piece of music that you had

ceased to play--I tell you, Dorian, that it is on things like these that

our lives depend. Browning writes about that somewhere; but our own

senses will imagine them for us. There are moments when the odour of

\_lilas blanc\_ passes suddenly across me, and I have to live the

strangest month of my life over again. I wish I could change places with

you, Dorian. The world has cried out against us both, but it has always

worshipped you. It always will worship you. You are the type of what the

age is searching for, and what it is afraid it has found. I am so glad

that you have never done anything, never carved a statue, or painted a

picture, or produced anything outside of yourself! Life has been your

art. You have set yourself to music. Your days are your sonnets."

Dorian rose up from the piano, and passed his hand through his hair.

"Yes, life has been exquisite," he murmured, "but I am not going to have

the same life, Harry. And you must not say these extravagant things to

me. You don't know everything about me. I think that if you did, even

you would turn from me. You laugh. Don't laugh."

"Why have you stopped playing, Dorian? Go back and give me the nocturne

over again. Look at that great honey-coloured moon that hangs in the

dusky air. She is waiting for you to charm her, and if you play she will

come closer to the earth. You won't? Let us go to the club, then. It has

been a charming evening, and we must end it charmingly. There is some

one at White's who wants immensely to know you--young Lord Poole,

Bournemouth's eldest son. He has already copied your neckties, and has

begged me to introduce him to you. He is quite delightful, and rather

reminds me of you."

"I hope not," said Dorian, with a sad look in his eyes. "But I am tired

to-night, Harry. I shan't go to the club. It is nearly eleven, and I

want to go to bed early."

"Do stay. You have never played so well as to-night. There was something

in your touch that was wonderful. It had more expression than I had ever

heard from it before."

"It is because I am going to be good," he answered, smiling, "I am a

little changed already."

"You cannot change to me, Dorian," said Lord Henry. "You and I will

always be friends."

"Yet you poisoned me with a book once. I should not forgive that. Harry,

promise me that you will never lend that book to any one. It does harm."

"My dear boy, you are really beginning to moralise. You will soon be

going about like the converted, and the revivalist, warning people

against all the sins of which you have grown tired. You are much too

delightful to do that. Besides, it is no use. You and I are what we are,

and will be what we will be. As for being poisoned by a book, there is

no such thing as that. Art has no influence upon action. It annihilates

the desire to act. It is superbly sterile. The books that the world

calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame. That is all.

But we won't discuss literature. Come round to-morrow. I am going to

ride at eleven. We might go together, and I will take you to lunch

afterwards with Lady Branksome. She is a charming woman, and wants to

consult you about some tapestries she is thinking of buying. Mind you

come. Or shall we lunch with our little Duchess? She says she never sees

you now. Perhaps you are tired of Gladys? I thought you would be. Her

clever tongue gets on one's nerves. Well, in any case, be here at

eleven."

"Must I really come, Harry?"

"Certainly. The Park is quite lovely now. I don't think there have been

such lilacs since the year I met you."

"Very well. I shall be here at eleven," said Dorian. "Good-night,

Harry." As he reached the door he hesitated for a moment, as if he had

something more to say. Then he sighed and went out.

CHAPTER XX

It was a lovely night, so warm that he threw his coat over his arm, and

did not even put his silk scarf round his throat. As he strolled home,

smoking his cigarette, two young men in evening dress passed him. He

heard one of them whisper to the other, "That is Dorian Gray." He

remembered how pleased he used to be when he was pointed out, or stared

at, or talked about. He was tired of hearing his own name now. Half the

charm of the little village where he had been so often lately was that

no one knew who he was. He had often told the girl whom he had lured to

love him that he was poor, and she had believed him. He had told her

once that he was wicked, and she had laughed at him, and answered that

wicked people were always very old and very ugly. What a laugh she

had!--just like a thrush singing. And how pretty she had been in her

cotton dresses and her large hats! She knew nothing, but she had

everything that he had lost.

When he reached home, he found his servant waiting up for him. He sent

him to bed, and threw himself down on the sofa in the library, and began

to think over some of the things that Lord Henry had said to him.

Was it really true that one could never change? He felt a wild longing

for the unstained purity of his boyhood--his rose-white boyhood, as Lord

Henry had once called it. He knew that he had tarnished himself, filled

his mind with corruption, and given horror to his fancy; that he had

been an evil influence to others, and had experienced a terrible joy in

being so; and that, of the lives that had crossed his own, it had been

the fairest and the most full of promise that he had brought to shame.

But was it all irretrievable? Was there no hope for him?

Ah! in what a monstrous moment of pride and passion he had prayed that

the portrait should bear the burden of his days, and he keep the

unsullied splendour of eternal youth! All his failure had been due to

that. Better for him that each sin of his life had brought its sure,

swift penalty along with it. There was purification in punishment. Not

"Forgive us our sins," but "Smite us for our iniquities" should be the

prayer of a man to a most just God.

The curiously carved mirror that Lord Henry had given to him, so many

years ago now, was standing on the table, and the white-limbed Cupids

laughed round it as of old. He took it up, as he had done on that night

of horror, when he had first noted the change in the fatal picture, and

with wild, tear-dimmed eyes looked into its polished shield. Once, some

one who had terribly loved him had written to him a mad letter, ending

with these idolatrous words: "The world is changed because you are made

of ivory and gold. The curves of your lips rewrite history." The phrases

came back to his memory, and he repeated them over and over to himself.

Then he loathed his own beauty, and, flinging the mirror on the floor,

crushed it into silver splinters beneath his heel. It was his beauty

that had ruined him, his beauty and the youth that he had prayed for.

But for those two things, his life might have been free from stain. His

beauty had been to him but a mask, his youth but a mockery. What was

youth at best? A green, an unripe time, a time of shallow moods and

sickly thoughts. Why had he worn its livery? Youth had spoiled him.

It was better not to think of the past. Nothing could alter that. It was

of himself, and of his own future, that he had to think. James Vane was

hidden in a nameless grave in Selby churchyard. Alan Campbell had shot

himself one night in his laboratory, but had not revealed the secret

that he had been forced to know. The excitement, such as it was, over

Basil Hallward's disappearance would soon pass away. It was already

waning. He was perfectly safe there. Nor, indeed, was it the death of

Basil Hallward that weighed most upon his mind. It was the living death

of his own soul that troubled him. Basil had painted the portrait that

had marred his life. He could not forgive him that. It was the portrait

that had done everything. Basil had said things to him that were

unbearable, and that he had yet borne with patience. The murder had been

simply the madness of a moment. As for Alan Campbell, his suicide had

been his own act. He had chosen to do it. It was nothing to him.

A new life! That was what he wanted. That was what he was waiting for.

Surely he had begun it already. He had spared one innocent thing, at any

rate. He would never again tempt innocence. He would be good.

As he thought of Hetty Merton, he began to wonder if the portrait in the

locked room had changed. Surely it was not still so horrible as it had

been? Perhaps if his life became pure, he would be able to expel every

sign of evil passion from the face. Perhaps the signs of evil had

already gone away. He would go and look.

He took the lamp from the table and crept upstairs. As he unbarred the

door a smile of joy flitted across his strangely young-looking face and

lingered for a moment about his lips. Yes, he would be good, and the

hideous thing that he had hidden away would no longer be a terror to

him. He felt as if the load had been lifted from him already.

He went in quietly, locking the door behind him, as was his custom, and

dragged the purple hanging from the portrait. A cry of pain and

indignation broke from him. He could see no change, save that in the

eyes there was a look of cunning, and in the mouth the curved wrinkle of

the hypocrite. The thing was still loathsome--more loathsome, if

possible, than before--and the scarlet dew that spotted the hand seemed

brighter, and more like blood newly spilt. Then he trembled. Had it been

merely vanity that had made him do his one good deed? Or the desire for

a new sensation, as Lord Henry had hinted, with his mocking laugh? Or

that passion to act a part that sometimes makes us do things finer than

we are ourselves? Or, perhaps, all these? And why was the red stain

larger than it had been? It seemed to have crept like a horrible disease

over the wrinkled fingers. There was blood on the painted feet, as

though the thing had dripped--blood even on the hand that had not held

the knife. Confess? Did it mean that he was to confess? To give himself

up, and be put to death? He laughed. He felt that the idea was

monstrous. Besides, even if he did confess, who would believe him? There

was no trace of the murdered man anywhere. Everything belonging to him

had been destroyed. He himself had burned what had been below-stairs.

The world would simply say that he was mad. They would shut him up if he

persisted in his story.... Yet it was his duty to confess, to suffer

public shame, and to make public atonement. There was a God who called

upon men to tell their sins to earth as well as to heaven. Nothing that

he could do would cleanse him till he had told his own sin. His sin? He

shrugged his shoulders. The death of Basil Hallward seemed very little

to him. He was thinking of Hetty Merton. For it was an unjust mirror,

this mirror of his soul that he was looking at. Vanity? Curiosity?

Hypocrisy? Had there been nothing more in his renunciation than that?

There had been something more. At least he thought so. But who could

tell?... No. There had been nothing more. Through vanity he had spared

her. In hypocrisy he had worn the mask of goodness. For curiosity's

sake he had tried the denial of self. He recognised that now.

But this murder--was it to dog him all his life? Was he always to be

burdened by his past? Was he really to confess? Never. There was only

one bit of evidence left against him. The picture itself--that was

evidence. He would destroy it. Why had he kept it so long? Once it had

given him pleasure to watch it changing and growing old. Of late he had

felt no such pleasure. It had kept him awake at night. When he had been

away, he had been filled with terror lest other eyes should look upon

it. It had brought melancholy across his passions. Its mere memory had

marred many moments of joy. It had been like conscience to him. Yes, it

had been conscience. He would destroy it.

He looked round, and saw the knife that had stabbed Basil Hallward. He

had cleaned it many times, till there was no stain left upon it. It was

bright, and glistened. As it had killed the painter, so it would kill

the painter's work, and all that that meant. It would kill the past, and

when that was dead he would be free. It would kill this monstrous

soul-life, and, without its hideous warnings, he would be at peace. He

seized the thing, and stabbed the picture with it.

There was a cry heard, and a crash. The cry was so horrible in its agony

that the frightened servants woke, and crept out of their rooms. Two

gentlemen, who were passing in the Square below, stopped, and looked up

at the great house. They walked on till they met a policeman, and

brought him back. The man rang the bell several times, but there was no

answer. Except for a light in one of the top windows, the house was all

dark. After a time, he went away and stood in an adjoining portico and

watched.

"Whose house is that, constable?" asked the elder of the two gentlemen.

"Mr. Dorian Gray's, sir," answered the policeman.

They looked at each other, as they walked away and sneered. One of them

was Sir Henry Ashton's uncle.

Inside, in the servants' part of the house, the half-clad domestics were

talking in low whispers to each other. Old Mrs. Leaf was crying and

wringing her hands. Francis was as pale as death.

After about a quarter of an hour, he got the coachman and one of the

footmen and crept upstairs. They knocked, but there was no reply. They

called out. Everything was still. Finally, after vainly trying to force

the door, they got on the roof, and dropped down on to the balcony. The

windows yielded easily; their bolts were old.

When they entered they found, hanging upon the wall, a splendid portrait

of their master as they had last seen him, in all the wonder of his

exquisite youth and beauty. Lying on the floor was a dead man, in

evening dress, with a knife in his heart. He was withered, wrinkled, and

loathsome of visage. It was not till they had examined the rings that

they recognised who it was.

THE END