

Oscar Wilde  
**THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY**

MAIN CHARACTERS

- DORIAN GRAY - a young, rich, extraordinary handsome, debauched dandy in the sinridden London of the 1890's
- Lord HENRY WOTTON - Dorian's witty, cynical mentor in sensuality
- BASIL HALLWARD - a serious artist whose haunting portrait of Dorian is his master-piece
- SIBYL VANE - a naive young actress who catches Dorian's fancy
- JAMES VANE - Sibyl's vengeful brother, a sailor
- ALAN CAMPBELL - a tormented young scientist being blackmailed by Dorian Gray

THE STORY

Lord HW, a cynical man about town, pays a visit to the luxurious studio of his painter friend, BH. There he sees the full-length portrait of a very handsome young man whose features are marked by purity and innocence. He wants to know who the young man is and the artist tells him the name: Dorian Gray. While they are talking, Dorian Gray arrives and Hallward introduces him to Lord Henry. Lord Henry engages the youth in charming, cynical banter. He tells Dorian to make the most of his youth and beauty while he has it. He impresses the young man with his sophistication and epigrammatic wit.

Before long the portrait is finished and the three men admire it. Dorian is disturbed because the picture will remain eternally young and handsome while he will grow old and ugly. He says he would give his soul if only the portrait would age and he would remain forever young.

In the next few months Lord Henry takes Dorian under his wing. Dorian comes from a wealthy family and is completely unspoiled. Lord Henry begins to change him. He takes him about London - to parties, plays and operas. He introduces him to society and to a life of pleasure and self-indulgence.

Lord Henry's influence is checked when Dorian falls in love with the innocent seventeen-year-old actress, Sybil Vane, whom he sees playing Juliet in a tenth-rate theatre. Dorian does not want to let know his name so she calls him "Prince Charming". Her mother approves of the affair but Sibyl's brother, James, becomes furious when he hears of it. James is a sailor, soon to leave England. He warns his sister against the mysterious admirer. He threatens to kill him if he betrays her innocence.

Lord Henry and Basil Hallward react coolly when Dorian tells them that he is engaged to Sibyl. They see it as the unfortunately but necessary first affair of an inexperienced youth. They are sure Dorian would soon leave Sibyl for someone more worthy of his wealth and social position.

Dorian insists that they come with him to the theatre where she is acting to see her. That night Sibyl gives a stiff performance and Lord Henry and Basil Hallward leave the theatre before

the final curtain. Suddenly Dorian realizes that his friends are right: Sibyl is "common". He brutally tells her he no longer loves her and leaves her weeping in the dressing room.

At home Dorian receives a terrible shock: he notices that the portrait of himself has changed slightly. A cruel grimace distorts his mouth. He hastily writes a letter to Sibyl begging her to forgive him and assuring her of his love for her. The next afternoon, however, Lord Henry arrives with the news that the Sibyl Vane had taken poison in her dressing room immediately after Dorian had left her. The girl is dead but Lord Henry assures Dorian that he is well rid of her; she was unworthy of him anyway. Furthermore, he will be spared any scandal because nobody connects his name with hers.

Basil Hallward calls to offer sympathy and asks to see the portrait. He wants to exhibit it but Dorian refuses to let him see the painting. Later he hides the portrait in an unused room. He is fascinated by the idea that the picture will be a mirror of his soul but terrified that anyone should see it and learn of its power.

During the next few years, Dorian falls deeply under the spell of Lord Henry Wotton. Lord Henry gives him a "poisonous" French book to read (J.K.Huysman's "A Rebours") which details the infinitive variety of sins and sensual pleasures in which a rich, selfish young man can indulge himself. Under its influence, Dorian collects rare gems and perfumes, flirts with Catholic ritual, and even frequent low haunts and opium dens. He takes pleasure in leading young men into a life of debauchery and soon finds himself barred from London society where evil rumours about him are circulating.

Dorian's greatest interest in life is to compare his still youthful, unravaged face in the mirror with the coarse, cruel face emerging in the portrait. Nobody in London can understand how Dorian manages to remain physically young.

Late one night, Dorian is visited by Basil Hallward. The artist tells him he is leaving for Paris, where he will spend at least six months painting, trying to recover the inspiration that left him when Dorian and he became estranged. Before he leaves he tries to talk to Dorian out of his evil ways but Dorian angrily reveals the picture to the artist who painted it. Basil is appalled by the loathsome visage of evil soul, but Dorian, in a sudden fury, grabs a knife and stabs Hallward to death.

Since Hallward was supposed to be going to Paris, Dorian is sure the murder will not be discovered if he can only dispose of the corpse. He enlists the aid of an old friend, Alan Campbell, a chemist. Dorian pleads him to destroy the body of Basil Hallward. When Campbell angrily refuses to do so, Dorian threatens to blackmail him for some secret sin of the past. Resigned to his fate, Campbell orders large quantities of nitric acid and in a few hours destroys the artist's body.

One night in an opium den, Dorian comes close to death. James Vane, returned from the voyages, he overheard a woman calling Dorian "Prince Charming", which he remembers as his sister's name for her lover. When Dorian comes out of the den, Vane is waiting for him with a pistol. Dorian's quick thinking, however, saves him from the brother's vengeance. He reminds Vane that Sibyl had died eighteen years ago, and then asks the sailor to look at his face under a street lamp. Since Dorian has not aged at all, he seems to be only twenty, and the would-be avenger goes away. Later Vane realizes his mistake. He stalks Dorian at a fashionable hunting party but is accidentally killed himself.

Dorian now thinks himself completely safe. The interest about the disappearance of Basil Hallward has subsided, Sibyl's brother is dead, Alan Campbell has committed suicide. No one can possibly accuse Dorian of murder. Sick of the past and grateful for his new lease on life, he tells Lord Henry that he is determined to lead a better, less selfish existence. Lord Henry laughs but Dorian insists that he has already begun to lead a better life by refraining from seducing a peasant girl. He wonders if his noble act will be recorded on the portrait. Perhaps it will not be so horrible now. He looks at the picture but the face is even worse. In addition to its grossness and cruelty, he can see a hypocritical smirk on the lips and blood dripping from the hand.

He sizes a knife and slashes passionately at the picture. The servants below hear an agonized cry. They break down the locked door. On the wall they can see the picture of Dorian Gray like it looked originally - godlike in its beauty and purity. But on the floor is the real Dorian Gray who, in stabbing portrait, has actually killed himself. He is old, debauched and withered, unrecognizable to his own servants. They can identify him by the rings on his gnarled, grasping fingers.