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SF PERUSALS

The Picture of Dorian Gray

by Oscar Wilde

Adapted for the stage by
Merlin Holland
and John O'Connor



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AUTHORS' NOTE

Oscar Wilde wrote *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in the winter of 1889/90. By that time he was married with two children; he was the author of a volume of somewhat derivative poems, a failed Russian political drama and a collection of stories for children; and he was making a precarious living from book reviewing and writing the odd short story and essay for magazines. He had also been the editor of a woman's journal, but had recently given it up, regularity of habit not being one of his strong points. In short he was teetering dangerously on the edge of respectability. Earlier in the year he had published a controversial dialogue called 'The Decay of Lying' in which he made a plea for more imagination in literature and less of the currently fashionable realism. In essence it was a broadside fired against what Lady Bracknell would later refer to as the 'three-volume novel of more than usually revolting sentimentality', and a chance commission that autumn from an American magazine allowed him to put into practice what he had been preaching.

Dorian Gray was published on 20 June 1890 simultaneously in London and Philadelphia in the July number of *Lippincott's Magazine*. It immediately unleashed a storm of protest from British critics, and even for Oscar, who had been conducting his own public relations campaign off and on since leaving Oxford, the effect must have been surprising. It was described variously as 'a poisonous book, the atmosphere of which is heavy with the mephitic odours of moral and spiritual putrefaction' and written 'for outlawed noblemen and perverted telegraph boys', which is as close as the critics could allow themselves to an outright accusation of the story's homosexual overtones. The oblique reference was to a police raid the year before on a notorious male brothel in Cleveland Street involving young employees of the General Post Office with members of the aristocracy, and the subsequent Establishment cover-up. As a consequence of the reviews, WH Smith (ever the self-appointed guardian of British morals) refused to stock *Lippincott's* for July. 'To get into the best society, nowadays, one has either to feed people, amuse people, or shock people,' Lord Illingworth remarks in *A Woman of No Importance*. Unfortunately, in taking his own advice, Oscar cannot have foreseen the degree to which that society would turn against him five years later.

Once the *succès de scandale* had died down, Wilde set about expanding the story to have it published in book-form, which it was the following year. As well as adding new material, rather uncharacteristically, he toned down some of the more overtly homoerotic passages but always denied publicly that any adverse criticism affected his decision. In adapting Wilde's only novel for the stage, we have reintroduced a few of those suppressions from the magazine as well as others from the original manuscript, in order to reflect Oscar's original intentions. These passages, significant as they are, will be largely unknown to the general

public, who read the novel today as published in its book-length version. One of the most significant, for example, occurs in Scene 11 when Basil Hallward confesses his love for Dorian Gray in the following terms: 'It is quite true that I have worshipped you with far more romance of feeling than a man should ever give to a friend. Somehow, I have never loved a woman. I suppose I never had time. From the moment I met you, your personality had the most extraordinary influence over me. I quite admit that I adored you madly, extravagantly, absurdly.'

Unfortunately the fall-out from *Dorian Gray* was to haunt its author. In 1895, when Oscar Wilde sued the Marquess of Queensberry for calling him a sodomite, the Marquess's lawyers filed a plea of justification in which they portrayed the story as an 'immoral and obscene work' describing 'sodomitical and unnatural habits tastes and practices…and calculated to subvert morality and to encourage unnatural vice.' With that they hoped to convince the jury of Wilde's guilt by association with his work. Although, in the event, he was able to defend himself and his art skilfully enough, the damage was done and the matter was raised again by the Crown Prosecutor when Wilde was tried subsequently for homosexual offences. One cannot help wondering what the Crown would have made of a private letter written the year before, in which he makes the revealing statement: 'Basil Hallward is what I think I am: Lord Henry is what the world thinks me: Dorian is what I would like to be – in other ages, perhaps.'

Despite assuring Oscar Wilde's posthumous reputation throughout the world, it is a sobering thought that *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* once described by Arthur Ransome as 'the first French novel to be written in English', and which now figures on the A-level English curriculum, should have contributed, even marginally, to putting Oscar Wilde behind bars 120 years ago.

Merlin Holland and John O'Connor
January 2016

Notes on staging

Picture Effect

The big challenge in presenting *The Picture of Dorian Gray* on stage is how to create the magical portrait as it grows older and more corrupted. In the original production, we had an empty, free-standing, life-sized picture frame that represented the portrait. At the top of the play, we see Dorian standing in the frame, looking young and beautiful and this image is repeated at the end. When Basil is painting, his brushes are, in fact, caressing the empty space within the frame. It means the audience can see him paint and their view is not compromised by having a large, obstructive canvas on stage. After the death of Sibyl Vane, the picture appears at Dorian's house covered with a cloth. We used a thin, dark material that shimmered slightly on stage and added a sinister quality to the picture. When Dorian first looks at it again, we had the actor lifting up the cloth from the side so that he could see the picture but the audience couldn't. This was accompanied by sharp lighting and a menacing sound effect that conveyed to the audience a sense of the picture's evil power. What the audience doesn't see is often more horrific than anything you can show them as their collective imagination runs riot.

At the end of scene 14 ('Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril') we see Dorian in the picture again. This vision of him should be shocking after all the years of corruption. This can be achieved by gothic lighting from below which casts grotesque shadows on the face, lurid colour and malevolent sound effects. The actor can also adjust his body shape and facial expression to add a greater sense of decay. When Dorian stabs the picture at the end of the play, all of the lighting, sound and physical elements should come together climactically before the picture is restored to its original beauty.

Of course, this is only one way of achieving the horror of the original story and you may want to experiment with other methods such as video projection which may be equally effective.

The play was first presented at the Queen's Hall Arts Centre, Hexham on 8 April 2015 before touring to 45 venues all over the UK and ending at St James Theatre, London on Saturday 20 June – 125 years to the day that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was first published in *Lippincott's Magazine*. The cast was Guy Warren-Thomas, Rupert Mason, Gwynfor Jones and Helen Keeley.

The production then transferred to Trafalgar Studios in London, opening on Monday 18 January 2016. The cast and characters were as follows:

DORIAN GRAY . . . . . Guy Warren-Thomas
BASIL HALLWARD . . . . . Rupert Mason
DUCHESS OF HARLEY
MR ISAACS
JAMES VANE
MR HUBBARD
SERVANT 1
GAMEKEEPER

LORD HENRY WOTTON . . . . . John Gorick
MRS VANE
VICTOR
ALAN CAMPBELL
ADRIAN SINGLETON

LADY AGATHA . . . . . Helen Keeley
SYBIL VANE
LADY HENRY
MRS LEAF
SERVANT 2
OPIUM SELLER
DUCHESS OF MONMOUTH
HETTY MERTON

PRODUCER . . . . . John O'Connor
DIRECTOR . . . . . Peter Craze
DESIGNER . . . . . Dora Schweitzer
LIGHTING DESIGNER . . . . . Duncan Hands
SOUND DESIGNER . . . . . Matthew Eaton

This play can be performed by any number of actors between 4 and 21. Given the logistical complications of co-ordinating exits, entrances and costume changes for the smallest cast, the above distribution of parts was found to be the best workable solution.

CHARACTERS
(IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

BASIL HALLWARD

LORD HENRY WOTTON

DORIAN GRAY

LADY AGATHA

DUCHESS OF HARLEY

MR ISAACS

SYBIL VANE

LADY HENRY

MRS VANE

JAMES VANE

VICTOR

MRS LEAF

MR HUBBARD

SERVANT 1

SERVANT 2

ALAN CAMPBELL

OPIUM SELLER

ADRIAN SINGLETON

DUCHESS OF MONMOUTH

HETTY MERTON

GAMEKEEPER

THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

Scene 1
The Studio Of The Artist Basil Hallward

As the lights come up, we briefly see a framed picture of a beautiful young man. This snaps out suddenly with an ominous sound before we hear music, and lights fade up fully on Basil Hallward's studio. Sunlight streams in through a door opening onto the garden. There is a vague sound of birdsong. **BASIL HALLWARD** *is putting the final touches to a painting on an easel.* **LORD HENRY WOTTON** *is reclining on a sofa.*

LORD HENRY WOTTON It is your best work, Basil, the best thing you have ever done. You must certainly send it next year to the Grosvenor Gallery. The Academy is too large and too vulgar.

BASIL HALLWARD I don't think I shall send it anywhere, Harry.

LORD HENRY My dear fellow, why? What odd chaps you painters are! You do anything in the world to gain a reputation. As soon as you have one, you 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.

BASIL I know you will laugh at me, but I really can't exhibit it. I have put too much of myself into it.

LORD HENRY 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 and this young Adonis, who looks as if he was made out of ivory and rose leaves.

BASIL You don't understand me, Harry. Of course I am not like him. Indeed, I should be sorry to look like him. There is a fatality about all physical and intellectual distinction. Your rank and wealth, Harry; 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.

LORD HENRY Dorian Gray? Is that his name?

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

LORD HENRY Why not?

BASIL 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. I suppose you think me awfully foolish.

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 she never knows what I am doing.

BASIL I hate the way you talk about your married life, Harry. I believe that you are really a very good husband, but that you are thoroughly ashamed of your own virtues. Your cynicism is simply a pose.

LORD HENRY Being natural is simply a pose, and the most irritating pose I know. And now, Basil, I really must be off, but before I go, I insist on your telling me why you won't exhibit Dorian Gray's picture. I want the real reason.

BASIL Harry, every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter: the painter reveals himself on the coloured canvas and I am afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my own soul.

LORD HENRY And what is that?

BASIL I am afraid you will hardly understand it. Perhaps you will hardly believe it.

LORD HENRY I can believe anything, provided that it is quite incredible.

There is a pause. **BASIL** *looks slightly uncomfortable, reluctant even to unburden himself.*

BASIL Two months ago I went to 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.

LORD HENRY Of course, my dear fellow; with an evening coat and a white tie, even a stockbroker can gain a reputation for being civilised.

BASIL Well, after I had been in the room about ten minutes, I suddenly became conscious that someone was looking at me. I turned half-way round, and saw Dorian Gray for the first time. 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 knew that if I spoke to Dorian I would become absolutely devoted to him, and that I ought not to speak to him. I turned to quit the room but there I stumbled into Lady Brandon. You know her curiously shrill voice. "You are not going to run away so soon, Mr Hallward?"

LORD HENRY Yes, she is a peacock in everything but beauty.

BASIL I could not get rid of her. So, in a moment of recklessness, I asked her to introduce me to the young man who had so strangely stirred me. "Charming boy – poor dear mother and I absolutely inseparable. Quite forget what he does – 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.

LORD HENRY Laughter is not at all a bad beginning for a friendship, and it is far the best ending for one.

BASIL You don't understand what friendship is, Harry. You like every one – indifferently.

LORD HENRY 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. But tell me more about Dorian Gray. How often do you see him?'

BASIL Every day. I couldn't be happy if I didn't see him every day. Of course sometimes it is only for a few minutes but a few minutes with someone one worships mean a great deal. He is all my art to me now. I know that the work I have done since I met Dorian Gray, is the best work of my life. I see things differently.

LORD HENRY But it still doesn't explain why you won't exhibit his portrait.

BASIL Because I have put into it some expression of this extraordinary romance. 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.

LORD HENRY 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.

BASIL And I hate them for it. We live in an age when men treat art as if it were meant to be a form of autobiography and for that reason the world shall never see my portrait.

LORD HENRY Tell me, is Dorian Gray very fond of you?

BASIL He likes me, 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 walk

home together from the club arm in arm or we sit in the studio and talk of a thousand things. But now and then he is horribly thoughtless, and seems to take a real delight in giving me pain.

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. 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.

BASIL 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.

LORD HENRY 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.

BASIL There you are again with your world-weary cynicism. You said you were going and I think it's time you went. Dorian is due here any time and I don't want you to meet him.

LORD HENRY You don't want me to meet him?

BASIL No. Dorian Gray is my dearest friend. He has a simple and beautiful nature and your influence would be ruinous. Don't take away from me the one person that makes life absolutely lovely to me and who gives to my art whatever charm it possesses.

LORD HENRY What nonsense you talk! Anyway, I have just remembered where I heard the name of Dorian Gray. 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. I am bound to state that she never told me he was good looking. I wish I had known it was your friend.

BASIL Well, I am very glad you didn't.

Enter **DORIAN GRAY**.

DORIAN GRAY It's such a wonderful afternoon, Basil. Do we have to spend it shut up with the smell of turpentine. Besides, I am tired of sitting…

He sees **LORD HENRY** *for the first time.*

Oh! I'm so sorry, Basil, but I didn't know you had any one with you.

BASIL This is Lord Henry Wotton, Dorian, an old Oxford friend of mine. I have just been telling him what a perfect sitter you were, and now you have spoiled everything.

LORD HENRY *(rising)* At least you have not spoiled my pleasure in meeting you, Mr. Gray.

He steps forward and holds out his hand.

My aunt Agatha has often spoken to me about you. You are one of her favourites.

DORIAN I'm afraid I am in Lady Agatha's black books at present. 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.

LORD HENRY Oh, I don't think it really matters about your not being there. The audience probably thought it was a duet anyway. When Aunt Agatha sits down to the piano she makes quite enough noise for two. Anyway you are too charming to go in for philanthropy, Mr. Gray – far too charming.

BASIL 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 Am I to go, Mr. Gray?

DORIAN 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.

LORD HENRY Well, I certainly shall not run away now that you have asked me to stay. You don't mind, Basil, do you? You have often told me that you liked your sitters to have someone to chat to.

BASIL *(concentrating on the painting and rather peevishly)* If Dorian wishes it, of course you must stay. Dorian's whims are laws to everybody, except himself.

LORD HENRY *(taking up his hat and gloves)* Actually Basil, I am afraid I really must go as I have an engagement. Good-bye, Mr. Gray. Come and see me some afternoon in Curzon Street.

DORIAN Basil, if Lord Henry Wotton goes I shall go too. You never open your lips while you are painting.

BASIL Stay, Harry, to oblige Dorian, and to oblige me. 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 *steps up on the dais and assumes the pose in the picture. There is a longish pause.*

DORIAN Have you really a very bad influence, Lord Henry? As bad as Basil says?

LORD HENRY There is no such thing as a good influence, Mr. Gray. All influence is immoral.

DORIAN Why?

LORD HENRY Because to influence a person is to give him one's own soul. He does not think natural thoughts or burn with 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 some one else's music. To realise one's nature perfectly – that is what each of us is here for, but people are afraid of themselves nowadays. 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.

BASIL Just turn your head a little more to the right, Dorian, like a good boy.

LORD HENRY And yet, every impulse that we strive to strangle, broods in the mind and poisons us. The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing. You, Mr. Gray, with your rose-red youth and your rose-white boyhood, have had passions that have made you afraid, thoughts that have filled you with terror, dreams whose mere memory might stain your cheek with shame—

DORIAN Stop! Stop! You bewilder me. I don't know what to say. There is some answer to you, but I cannot find it. Let me think. Or, rather, let me try not to think. Basil, I am tired of standing. The air is stifling here. I must go out and sit in the garden.

He steps down off the platform.

BASIL I don't know what Harry has been saying to you, but he has certainly made you have the most wonderful expression.

LORD HENRY He is right, Basil. It really is horribly hot. I shall go into the garden with you, Mr Gray.

BASIL Very well, but don't keep Dorian too long.

They go out into the garden and **DORIAN** *buries his face in lilac blossom.*

LORD HENRY You are quite right to do that. Nothing can cure the soul but the senses, just as nothing can cure the senses but the soul. *(***DORIAN** *suddenly looks taken aback)* Yes, that is one of the great secrets of life. But come: let us sit in the shade. You really must not allow yourself to become sunburnt. It would be unbecoming.

DORIAN *(laughing)* What can it matter?

LORD HENRY It should matter everything to you, Mr. Gray because you have the most marvellous youth, and youth is the one thing worth having.

DORIAN I don't feel that, Lord Henry.

LORD HENRY No, you don't feel it now. Some day, when you are old and wrinkled and ugly you will feel it, feel it terribly. You have a wonderfully beautiful face, Mr. Gray. And Beauty is a form of Genius – is higher, indeed, than Genius, as it needs no explanation. You smile? Ah! When you have lost it you won't smile. People say that beauty is superficial but it's 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. Live! Live the wonderful life that is in you! Realise your youth while you have it and don't squander the gold of your days. 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 moment I met you I thought how tragic it would be if you were wasted. For we never get back our youth. We degenerate into hideous puppets, haunted by the memory of passions of which we were too much afraid, and exquisite temptations that we had not the courage to yield to. Youth! Youth! There is absolutely nothing in the world but youth!

BASIL I am waiting. Do come back in. The light is quite perfect.

LORD HENRY *(almost as a question)* You are glad to have met me, Mr. Gray.

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

LORD HENRY Always! That is a dreadful word. Women are so fond of using it. They spoil every romance by trying to make it last forever. The only difference between a

caprice and a life-long passion is that the caprice lasts a little longer.

DORIAN In that case, let our friendship be a caprice.

BASIL There! It is quite finished.

LORD HENRY My dear fellow, I congratulate you. It is the finest portrait of modern times. Mr. Gray, come over and look at yourself.

DORIAN Is it really finished?

BASIL Quite finished. Don't you like it?

LORD HENRY Of course he likes it. Who wouldn't? It is one of the greatest things in modern art. I will give you anything you like to ask for it.

BASIL It's not my property, Harry.

LORD HENRY Not your property? Whose is it?

BASIL It's Dorian's, of course.

LORD HENRY Well, he's a very lucky fellow.

DORIAN *(thoughtfully after a short pause)* How sad it is! 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. I would give my soul for that!

LORD HENRY It would be rather hard on your work, Basil.

BASIL I should object very strongly, Harry.

DORIAN *(peevishly)* I do believe you would, Basil. You like your art better than your friends. How long will you like me? Till I have my first wrinkle, I suppose. When one loses one's good looks one loses everything. Your picture has taught me that. Lord Henry is perfectly

right. Youth is the only thing worth having. When I find that I am growing old, I shall kill myself.

BASIL Dorian! Don't talk like that.

DORIAN Why did you paint it? It will mock me some day – mock me horribly!

BASIL This is your doing, Harry.

LORD HENRY It is the real Dorian Gray – that is all.

BASIL You should have gone away when I asked you.

LORD HENRY I stayed when you asked me.

BASIL Between you both you have made me hate the finest piece of work I have ever done, and I shall destroy it. What is it but canvas and colour?

BASIL *walks over to a table on which is a litter of tubes, brushes, and pots. He picks up a long palette-knife and goes purposefully towards the painting.*

DORIAN *(jumping up)* Don't, Basil, don't! It would be murder!

DORIAN *tears the knife out of* **BASIL***'s hand.*

BASIL I am glad you appreciate my work at last, Dorian.

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

BASIL Well, as soon as you are dry, you shall be varnished and sent home. Then you can do what you like with yourself. *(A slight pause)* Now, you will have tea, won't you Dorian? And you, Harry? Or do you object to such simple pleasures?

LORD HENRY I adore simple pleasures, they are the last refuge of the complex. But I don't like scenes, except on the stage. So now that the ownership of the portrait is no longer in question, let us all go and dine at Willis's.

BASIL It is such a bore putting on one's dress-clothes, and, when one has them on, they are so horrid.

LORD HENRY Yes, 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.

BASIL You really mustn't say things like that in front of Dorian, Harry.

LORD HENRY Before which Dorian?

BASIL Before either.

DORIAN I should like to dine with you, Lord Henry.

LORD HENRY Then you shall; and you'll come too, Basil won't you?

BASIL I would sooner not. I have a lot of work to do.

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

DORIAN I should like that awfully.

BASIL And I shall stay with the real Dorian.

DORIAN *(going over to the painting)* Is this the real Dorian? Am I really like that?

BASIL Yes; you are just like that.

DORIAN How wonderful, Basil.

BASIL But it will never alter. *(He sighs)* That is something. *(He pauses)* Don't go to Willis's tonight, Dorian. Stop here and dine with me.

DORIAN I can't, Basil.

BASIL Why not?

DORIAN Because I have promised Lord Henry to go with him.

BASIL He won't like you any the better for keeping your promises. He always breaks his own. I beg you not to go.

DORIAN *laughs, shakes his head and looks at* **LORD HENRY**, *who in turn has been watching them with an amused smile.*

DORIAN I must go, Basil.

BASIL Very well. Good-bye, Dorian. Come and see me tomorrow. You won't forget?

DORIAN No, of course not.

BASIL And… Harry…

LORD HENRY Yes, Basil?

BASIL Remember what I told you, earlier.

LORD HENRY I have forgotten it already.

BASIL I trust you.

LORD HENRY I wish I could trust myself. 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.

Scene 2
Interior Of Lady Agatha's House

Afternoon tea is laid out. Enter **LORD HENRY**.

LORD HENRY Good afternoon, Aunt Agatha. Dear Duchess.

LADY AGATHA This is an unexpected pleasure, Harry. I thought you dandies never got up till two, and were not visible till five. What brings you out so early?

LORD HENRY Pure family affection, I assure you. And I want to get something out of you.

LADY AGATHA Money, I suppose.

DUCHESS OF HARLEY Young people, nowadays, imagine that money is everything.

LORD HENRY Yes, 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. What I want is information about a mutual friend – Mr Dorian Gray.

LADY HARLEY Oh, Mr Gray, how delightful! We are quite devoted to him.

LADY AGATHA And we are expecting him for tea, at any moment.

LORD HENRY Well, before he arrives, perhaps you could tell me something about him. We met only yesterday. So I know nothing but his most intimate secrets. Who is he? I heard he is the last Lord Kelso's grandson.

LADY AGATHA Yes, I knew his mother well. Margaret Devereux… She was an extraordinarily beautiful girl…

LADY HARLEY She made all the men frantic by running away with a penniless young subaltern from a foot regiment!

LADY AGATHA I remember the whole thing as if it happened yesterday. The poor chap was killed in a duel at Spa… Just a few months after the marriage…

LADY HARLEY They said Kelso got some rascally adventurer, some Belgian brute—to insult his son-in-law in public…

LADY AGATHA Paid him, Sir!

LADY HARLEY Yes, paid him to do it.

LADY AGATHA The fellow spitted this man as if he had been a pigeon! It was an ugly story.

LADY HARLEY Kelso brought her home after that but she never spoke to him again.

LADY AGATHA And died within a year, leaving a little orphaned child…

LADY HARLEY Mr Dorian Gray.

LORD HENRY Then he should have a pot of money waiting for him.

LADY AGATHA He already has all the Selby property through his mother.

LORD HENRY And, like his mother, he is very good looking.

LADY AGATHA AND LADY HARLEY *(together)* Very good-looking!

Enter **DORIAN**.

DORIAN Good afternoon, Lady Agatha, Duchess. And Lord Henry, what a pleasant surprise!

LADY AGATHA *(quite flustered)* Oh, Mr Gray, we were just talking about Harry's poor brother.

LADY HARLEY Were we? Oh yes, we were! Is it really true that he is going to marry an American?

LORD HENRY I believe she has made up her mind to propose to him, Duchess. It is rather fashionable to marry Americans just now.

LADY HARLEY How dreadful! Really, someone should interfere. Who are her people?

LORD HENRY American girls are as clever at concealing their parents as English women are at concealing their past.

LADY AGATHA I am told, on excellent authority, that her father keeps an American dry-goods store.

DORIAN What are American dry-goods?

LORD HENRY American novels.

The **DUCHESS** *looks puzzled.*

LADY AGATHA Don't mind him, my dear. He never means anything that he says.

LADY HARLEY Really, our girls have no chance nowadays. Why can't these American women stay in their own country? They are always telling us that it is the Paradise for women.

LORD HENRY It is. That's why, like Eve, they are so excessively anxious to get out of it.

LADY HARLEY Oh! But I have seen specimens of the inhabitants and must confess that most of them are extremely pretty. They get all their dresses in Paris.

DORIAN They say that when good Americans die they go to Paris.

LADY AGATHA Really! And where do bad Americans go when they die?

LORD HENRY They go to America.

LADY AGATHA Now, Harry, I hope you are not trying to persuade our nice Mr. Gray to give up playing piano in the East End. They are so unhappy in Whitechapel.

LORD HENRY I can sympathise with everything except suffering. One should sympathise with the colour, the beauty, the joy of life.

DORIAN Still, the East End is a very important problem.

LORD HENRY Quite so. It is the problem of slavery, and we try to solve it by amusing the slaves.

LADY AGATHA Well how do you propose to change it, then?

LORD HENRY I don't wish to change anything in England except the weather. Humanity takes itself too seriously. It is the world's original sin. If the caveman had known how to laugh, history would have been quite different.

LADY HARLEY You are really very comforting. I always feel rather guilty when I come to see your dear aunt, for I take no interest at all in the East End. In future I shall be able to look her in the face without a blush.

LORD HENRY A blush is very becoming, Duchess.

LADY HARLEY Only when one is young. When an old woman like myself blushes, it is a very bad sign. Ah! I wish you would tell me how to become young again.

LORD HENRY Can you remember any great error that you committed in your early days, Duchess?

LADY HARLEY A great many, I fear.

LORD HENRY Then commit them over again. To get back one's youth, one has merely to repeat one's follies.

LADY HARLEY A delightful theory! I must put it into practice at once.

LORD HENRY Yes, 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.

LADY HARLEY *(laughing)* Goodness, is that really the time? How annoying! I must go. I have to call for my husband at the club. 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.

Exits with **LADY AGATHA**.

LORD HENRY And now I think I shall take a stroll in the park.

DORIAN Let me come with you.

LORD HENRY But I thought you had promised to go and see Basil.

DORIAN I would far sooner 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.

LORD HENRY Ah! I have talked quite enough for to-day. All I want now is to look at life and you may come and look at it with me, if you like.

Scene 3
Exterior Of Royal Theatre Holborn

LORD HENRY *walks across the stage and is accosted by* **MR ISAACS** *outside the Royal Theatre, Holborn.*

MR ISAACS Would your Lordship care for a…

LORD HENRY *ignores him and walks on.* **DORIAN** *has been lagging behind and follows dreamily.*

Have a box my Lord!

DORIAN Oh, no thank you, I…

MR ISAACS Only twenty-five shillings…

DORIAN No really, I…

MR ISAACS The last box is yours for the lamentable tragedy of Romeo and Juliet by that immortal bard… William…err…

DORIAN Shakespeare?

MR ISAACS The very man! You are a literary gentleman, Sir?

DORIAN Oh no, I…

MR ISAACS Yes, I can tell! When I saw you I thought to myself there's a young man who appreciates the bard, who is a lover of poetry, who will pay up!

DORIAN Oh, thank you…

MR ISAACS Step this way, my Lord.

DORIAN But I have to catch up with my friend…

MR ISAACS The gentleman you were following has gone my Lord! And you have not seen Juliet until you have seen Sibyl Vane.

DORIAN Sibyl who?

MR ISAACS Sibyl who he says!! Sibyl who! She is a genius! Her birth certificate says Mile End but you will swear she is from fair Verona.

DORIAN Good, is she?

MR ISAACS Good?! You've heard of Ellen Terry? Rubbish! Sarah Bernhardt? *Quelle patate*! Imagine a girl, hardly seventeen years of age, with a little flower-like face, eyes that are violet wells of passion, lips that are like the petals of a rose. She is the loveliest thing you will ever see in your life! She is Juliet!

DORIAN Well, she sounds wonderful. Let's say a sovereign.

MR ISAACS You are a most munificent patron of the art! You won't regret this. I will show you to your box immediately! The warm up act is about to start.

DORIAN Warm up act?

MR ISAACS Yes, a strongman and a dog that whistles. No extra charge. This way my Lord!

They enter the theatre hurriedly.

Scene 4
Interior Of Royal Theatre Holborn

DORIAN *is in his 'box' looking transfixedly at the stage. The lights come up to reveal* **SIBYL VANE** *on stage as Juliet.*

SIBYL VANE O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

MR ISAACS *is revealed to be playing Romeo:*

MR ISAACS *(aside)* Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?

SIBYL 'Tis but thy name that is my enemy.
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
What's Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot,
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
Belonging to a man. O, be some other name.
What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet;
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,
And for that name, which is no part of thee,
Take all myself.

Wild clapping and cheering from the audience. **DORIAN** *stands and claps while* **SIBYL** *bows and curtsies.*

DORIAN Bravo! Bravo!

MR ISAACS Worth every penny of the pound, I think, my Lord? Would you care to come backstage and meet the fair Juliet?

DORIAN I should be honoured.

MR ISAACS Then this way Sir.

DORIAN *follows* **MR ISAACS** *'backstage' as* **SIBYL** *disappears into the wings.*

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