

MACMILLAN GUIDED READERS

ELEMENTARY LEVEL

OSCAR WILDE

The Picture of Dorian Gray

Retold by F. H. Cornish



MACMILLAN

CLASSICS

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PART ONE

1

Two Friends

The curtains moved gently in the summer wind. The smell of flowers came in through the open window. And in the distance there was the faint noise of London traffic. It was very peaceful in the artist's studio.

Lord Henry Wotton was lying back in a large chair, smoking a cigarette. He was watching the blue smoke rise to the ceiling. And he was also watching his friend Basil Hallward, the artist. Basil was standing in front of a painting which was nearly finished. It was the portrait of a young man – a very beautiful young man.

Basil and Lord Henry were good friends. They had studied at Oxford University together. Now they were both about thirty years old. Basil worked very hard and he was a well-known artist. Lord Henry, who was called Harry by his friends, did not work at all. He was a rich man. He spent his money on expensive food and clothes, and on valuable books and paintings.

Lord Henry pointed towards the painting. That is the best portrait you have ever painted, Basil,' he said.

'You must show it in the best art gallery in London,' Lord Henry continued. 'Everybody must see it.'

'I am not going to show this picture in a gallery,' Basil replied.

'Not going to show it?' said Harry in surprise. 'You artists are silly people. You want to be famous. You become famous. Then you don't like being famous.'

‘Think, Basil. It’s bad when people talk about you, but it’s worse when they don’t talk about you! Why won’t you show the picture?’

‘I know you will laugh at me, Harry,’ answered Basil. ‘But I can’t show the picture because it shows too much of me. It is too much like me.’

‘Nonsense,’ said Harry. The picture does not look like you at all. You have black hair and a strong, intelligent face. But you are not beautiful, Basil. The young man in the portrait has blond hair and a pale face. And he is beautiful.’

‘You don’t understand me at all, Harry,’ said Basil. ‘I don’t mean that I look like Dorian Gray.’

‘Dorian Gray? Is that the young man’s name?’

‘Yes, that is his name. I didn’t want to tell you.’

Basil stopped talking and went out of the door into the garden.

Harry laughed and followed him.

The two young men sat on a long wooden seat under a laurel tree. The summer wind moved through the shiny leaves.

Harry looked at his watch.

‘I shall have to go soon, Basil,’ he said, ‘but first I want an answer to my question.’

‘What question?’ asked Basil.

‘Why won’t you show the picture of Dorian Gray in a gallery? What is the reason?’

‘I told you the reason,’ said Basil. ‘It is too much like me.’

‘But what do you mean?’ asked Harry.

‘I’m an artist,’ said Basil, ‘An artist paints pictures of other people. But I believe that an artist shows his own feelings in

every picture he paints. Each time I paint a picture, I show feelings that are inside me.

‘I don’t want people to look at the picture of Dorian Gray. I don’t want them to find out about my feelings.’

Basil stopped speaking. Harry bent down and picked a small white flower from the grass.

‘And what are your feelings, Basil? Tell me,’ he said. He looked closely at the tiny flower.

At last Basil spoke again. ‘I met Dorian at a party. It was Lady Brandon’s party and a lot of people were there. Dorian and I saw each other at the same time. I felt afraid, but I don’t know why. Then I felt that this person was very important to me. I felt that I had known him for a long time.

‘Somebody introduced Dorian to me. Somebody made a joke and we both laughed. Suddenly Dorian and I were friends.’

‘Well, laughter is the best beginning for a friendship,’ said Harry. ‘And it’s the best ending for a friendship too.’

‘Harry, you are never serious,’ said Basil. ‘Dorian is my closest friend. I see him every day. He is the most important thing in my life. He is more important to me than my work.’

‘But I thought your work was the most important thing in your life, Basil,’ said Harry.

‘It is important. But I need Dorian. I am a better artist now that I know Dorian. Do you remember that picture of the landscape – the woods and fields? Everybody thought it was my best painting. Do you know why it was good? It was good because Dorian was there. He saw me paint it.

‘Dorian has the power to make me a better artist. But I don’t

want him to know this. I don't want anybody to know. So I can't show the painting in a gallery. It shows too much of me. It is too much like me.'

'I think you are wrong, Basil,' said Harry. 'Poets put their feelings into their poems. And they make money. So artists must put their feelings into their pictures. Then they can make money too.'

Then Harry thought of something else. 'You will get tired of this beautiful young man,' he said. 'One day his beauty will disappear and Dorian Gray won't be interesting any more.'

'No, Harry, that is not true. Don't talk like that!' said Basil. 'Dorian's beauty is not important to me. Dorian himself is important to me.'

'Dorian Gray must be an interesting young man!' said Harry. 'I want to meet him.'

'I don't want you to meet him,' replied Basil quickly.

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

'No.'

Suddenly Basil's servant came out into the garden. 'Mr Dorian Gray is here, sir. He is in the studio,' he said.

'I will have to meet Dorian now,' said Harry, laughing.

'Please tell Mr Gray that I am coming,' said Basil to the servant.

Then Basil turned to Harry. He was upset and he spoke slowly to Harry.

'Please be careful, Harry,' he said. 'Dorian is beautiful and very young. You are never serious and you say strange things. Don't talk to him. Please don't try to influence him – to change him. Your influence would be bad. And I need him. I need him to help me with my work.'

‘You’re talking nonsense,’ said Harry, smiling. ‘Now, introduce me to Dorian Gray.’ He took hold of Basil’s arm and led him into the studio.

2

A Very Beautiful Young Man

The young man was sitting at the piano when Basil and Harry came into the studio. He was turned away from them, looking at a book of music. But he heard Basil’s footsteps. Dorian spoke immediately.

‘Oh, Basil,’ he said. ‘Do you have to work today? I don’t want you to paint me today. I don’t want a life-sized portrait of myself.’

Then he turned and saw Harry. He stopped speaking. His face became red. ‘Oh, I didn’t know you had a visitor.’

‘Dorian,’ said Basil, ‘this is Lord Henry Wotton, a good friend of mine. We went to university together. I have told him that you like my painting of you. And now he won’t believe me.’

‘Nonsense, Basil,’ said Harry. ‘I am very pleased to meet you, Mr Gray.’ Harry and Dorian shook hands.

Harry looked at Dorian Gray. Harry and Basil were both about thirty years old. Dorian was much younger. He was about twenty. And he was very beautiful. His hair was blond, his face was pale and his eyes were bright blue.

Basil did not want Harry to talk to Dorian. ‘Harry,’ he said. ‘I want to start painting now. Please will you go away?’

Harry did not want to go. ‘Do you want me to go, Mr Gray?’

he asked. 'I will go if you want me to go. Or I will stay if you want me to stay.'

'Yes, do stay, Lord Henry,' answered Dorian.

'Mr Gray wants me to stay, Basil,' said Harry. 'You don't mind if I stay, do you?'

Basil wanted to please Dorian. 'No, of course I don't mind. Please stay, Harry,' he said.

'But,' Basil went on, 'you must not listen to Harry, Dorian. He is never serious and he says strange things. He changes people. He has a bad influence on people.'

'Harry, sit down,' Basil continued. 'Dorian, come and stand over here. And please don't move around too much. I want to finish your portrait today.'

Basil started to paint. Harry sat in the comfortable chair and smoked a cigarette. There was silence for a few minutes.

Then Dorian spoke. 'Are you a bad influence on people, Lord Henry?' he asked. 'Do you make people change what they think and do?'

'I cannot be a bad influence or a good influence,' replied Harry. 'Because all influence is bad. It is bad to change a person. It is bad to give a person your thoughts and ideas.'

'Why?' asked Dorian.

'Everybody is different from everybody else,' answered Harry. 'You must not influence a person. You must not make a person the same as yourself.'

'You must live your own life. You must do everything that you want to do. You must enjoy life – the good things and the evil things. You must not worry about what other people think.'

Dorian was confused. Harry was wrong to say these things. But Harry was clever. He had a thin face and clever, dark eyes. He had a beautiful, slow voice. Dorian liked listening to Harry