

T136 THE PORTRAIT

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

The studio was filled with the rich odour of roses, and when the light summer wind stirred amidst the trees¹ of the garden, there came through the open door the heavy scent of the lilac, or the more delicate perfume of the pink-flowering thorn.

5 From the corner of the divan of Persian saddle-bags² on which he was lying, smoking, as was his custom, innumerable cigarettes, Lord Henry Wotton could just catch the gleam³ of the honey-sweet and honey-coloured blossoms of a laburnum⁴, whose tremulous branches seemed hardly able to bear the burden of a beauty so flame-like as theirs; and now and then the
10 fantastic shadows of birds in flight flitted⁵ across the long tussore-silk⁶ curtains that were stretched in front of the huge window, producing a kind of momentary Japanese effect, and making him think of those pallid jade-faced painters of Tokio who, through the medium of an art that is necessarily im-
mobile, seek to convey the sense of swiftness⁷ and motion. The sullen⁸ mur-
15 mur of the bees shouldering their way through the long unmown⁹ grass, or

O. Wilde

The Picture of
Dorian Gray

Chapter I

Genre: Fiction

► Map 4

1. stirred amidst the trees. Mosse leggermente gli alberi.
2. saddle-bags. Tasche o bisacce per la sella.
3. gleam. Bagliore.
4. laburnum. Laburno.
5. flitted. Svolazzavano.
6. tussore-silk. Seta ruvida.
7. swiftness. Velocità.
8. sullen. Cupo.
9. unmown. Non tagliata.

10. gilt. Dorati.
 11. straggling woodbine. Vite del Canada rigogliosa.
 12. bourdon. Bassa.
 13. clamped. Fissato.
 14. easel. Cavalletto.
 15. full-length. A figura intera.
 16. comely. Attraente.
 17. to linger. Attardarsi.
 18. lids. Palpebre.
 19. Grosvenor. Una galleria d'arte.
 20. tossing. Scuotendo.
 21. wreaths. Anelli (di fumo).
 22. whirls. Spirali.
 23. chaps. Individui.
 24. rugged. Dura, segnata.
 25. Adonis. Adone (nella mitologia greca, Adone era un giovane amato da Afrodite per la sua bellezza).
 26. Narcissus. Narciso (personaggio mitologico greco, che dopo essersi innamorato della sua immagine riflessa in una sorgente, si gettò in essa e annegò).
 27. hideous. Orribili.

circling with monotonous insistence round the dusty gilt¹⁰ horns of the straggling woodbine¹¹, seemed to make the stillness more oppressive. The dim roar of London was like the bourdon¹² note of a distant organ.

In the centre of the room, clamped¹³ to an upright easel¹⁴, stood the full-length¹⁵ 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 comely¹⁶ form he had so skillfully mirrored in his art, a smile of pleasure passed across his face, and seemed about to linger¹⁷ there. But he suddenly started up, and, closing his eyes, placed his fingers upon the lids¹⁸, 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 Grosvenor¹⁹. 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, tossing²⁰ 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 wreaths²¹ of smoke that curled up in such fanciful whirls²² from his heavy opium-tainted cigarette. "Not send it anywhere? My dear fellow, why? Have you any reason? What odd chaps²³ 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 rugged²⁴ strong face and your coal-black hair, and this young Adonis²⁵, who looks as if he was made out of ivory and rose-leaves. Why, my dear Basil, he is a Narcissus²⁶, 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 hideous²⁷ 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,

65 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 chill²⁸ our intelligence. Don't flatter²⁹ yourself, Basil: you are not in the least like him."

70 "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 shoulders³⁰! I am telling you the truth. There is a fatality about all physical and intellectual distinction, the sort of fatality that seems to dog³¹ through history the faltering³² steps of kings. It is better not
75 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 gape³³ 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
80 rank³⁴ 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.

85 "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 any one. It is like surrendering a part of them. I have grown to love
90 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 dare say, but somehow it seems to bring a great deal of romance into one's life. I suppose you think me awfully foolish about it?"

95 "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
100 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 row³⁵ 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
105 Hallward, strolling³⁶ 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
110 Lord Henry, laughing; and the two young men went out into the garden together, and ensconced themselves³⁷ 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.

28. chill. Rinfrescare.
29. flatter. Lusingare.
30. shrug your shoulders. Alzi le spalle, cioè non mi credi.
31. to dog. Perseguitare.
32. faltering. Incerti.
33. gape. Guardare a bocca aperta (con stupore).
34. rank. Posizione sociale, rango.
35. row. Scenata.
36. strolling. Andando, avanzando.
37. ensconced themselves. Si sedettero comodamente, sprofondarono.