

The Picture of Dorian Gray



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF OSCAR WILDE

Wilde grew up and studied in Dublin, before moving to Oxford to further his studies. He became a fashionable and intellectual writer, involved in the London scene, where the philosophy of Aestheticism was becoming popular. The wit of his language and the tightly wrought themes and plots of his stories gained him a literary reputation whilst his personal life also attracted attention. His homosexuality and controversial views were targeted by his detractors and in 1895, he was imprisoned for many years and wrote his most tragic poems. After his release, he moved to France, and died there.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The novel's depiction of Victorian London seems to draw a lot from the historical events and fashions of the era. Dorian's excursion into the seedy world of opium dens especially relates to an underground city obsession.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Other works of the 19th century that deal with Gothic settings and spooky, supernatural events, like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and *The Tell-Tale Heart* by Edgar Allan Poe, remind us of *Dorian Gray*. For its dark portrayal of opium and temptation-filled London, Charles Dickens' *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* also creates a similar atmosphere. We also know that Wilde was inspired by the themes of *Faust* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and there are allusions to these texts in *The Picture of Dorian Gray's* plot.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Picture of Dorian Gray*
- **When Written:** Some time between 1889, when the story was commissioned, and 1890
- **Where Written:** London
- **When Published:** It was initially published in a magazine called *Lippincott's Monthly* in July of 1890.
- **Literary Period:** Aestheticism
- **Genre:** Aestheticism, Philosophical Fiction, Gothic Fiction
- **Setting:** London
- **Climax:** Dorian becomes so tormented by the portrait that he stabs it with a knife, but when the scene is discovered, it is Dorian himself who lies dead on the floor.
- **Antagonist:** Dorian and the other characters are surrounded

by antagonistic influences, which seem to be a part of day to day life in the high society of London. These influences, fashion, classism, obsessions with aesthetics and reputation are embodied by Lord Henry Wotton, making the man and his ideas seem like the main antagonist of the book.

- **Point of View:** An omniscient narrator; this narrator guides us in the past tense between one place and another, able to show us the interior workings of the main characters

EXTRA CREDIT

Dorian Gray Syndrome. Dorian Gray's name still haunts popular culture but it also has a more serious legacy. *Dorian Gray Syndrome* is now a common term to describe a cluster of narcissistic qualities. It often refers to severe mental illness and can be diagnosed from symptoms reminiscent of Dorian's in the novel.

The real Dorian? It has been suggested that the inspiration for Dorian Gray was a man called John Gray, who, though very handsome and a good poet, was dropped by Wilde in favor of his new love Lord Alfred Douglas. He apparently signed his love letters "Dorian", after an ancient tribe called "The Dorians".



PLOT SUMMARY

The story begins in the studio of painter Basil Hallward, who is entertaining his old friend, the relentlessly philosophical Lord Henry Wotton. Basil confides to Henry that he is working on a **portrait**, the finest he has ever done, depicting a beautiful youth, Dorian Gray, who has had an extraordinary influence on him. The influence is so great, in fact, that he refuses to exhibit the picture, for fear of the secret passion it reveals.

Surprised by this passion in Basil, Henry wants to meet this Dorian Gray, and as luck would have it, Dorian arrives at the studio before Basil can remove Lord Henry. Basil warns Henry that he is not to damage Dorian. He is very serious and protective over the young man. As it turns out, he has a right to worry. Lord Henry brings out his finest display of philosophical chatter for Dorian and the boy is in awe of the new ideas he's introduced to, of hedonism and aesthetics.

Basil excitedly finishes his **portrait**, and it is agreed that it is the best thing he's ever done. After hearing Lord Henry's warning that his beauty and youth will fade, Dorian has an extreme response to the portrait. The passing of time and the certainty of his own aging terrify him and he wishes that he could trade places with the portrait, maintaining his youth while the paint alters with time. Basil offers to destroy the portrait, and Henry offers to keep it for himself, but Dorian has a fascination for it

and decides he must have it.

Inspired by Lord Henry, Dorian begins to seek every experience of life. He goes to parts of London that some people of his social stature never see, and finds a shabby theater, performing Shakespeare. Here, he falls in love with Sybil Vane, a beautiful young actress who embodies Shakespeare's heroines. Her brother, Jim Vane, does not approve of the match, and tells their mother to do a better job of protecting Sybil while he is away at sea, but Sybil is in love with her 'Prince Charming' and is determined to marry him.

Tragedy strikes when Sybil's new love for Dorian causes her acting to become completely lifeless. Now that she has found real love, she explains, the idea of Romeo is nothing to her. Dorian is heartbroken. He finds he cannot love Sybil without her art, and calls off the engagement. When he returns home, Dorian notices that his portrait has changed somehow. It has grown a cruel expression. Could it be that his wish has come true? Dorian is terrified and pledges to make it up to Sybil, but before he can, he receives word that she has killed herself.

Dorian becomes haunted by the portrait and hides it, locked in the top room of his house. But he continues to be affected by Lord Henry's theories, living for the art of experience and pleasure. He loses his remorse. Influenced especially by a particular book about a beautiful boy just like him, he fills his life with decadence and dangerous explorations. His reputation sours, but he is so charming and wealthy that he is still welcome in the highest circles. However, when confronted by Basil about the rumors surrounding him, Dorian reveals the portrait to him and is so filled with rage by Basil's horrified reaction that he stabs and kills him.

Dorian blackmails a man called Alan Campbell to cleanly dispose of Basil's body. Dorian then escapes to opium dens, seeking to forget what he has done and the portrait, but while there, he is attacked by Jim Vane, who is looking to avenge his sister's death. Dorian's impossible youthfulness saves him, but the image of Jim haunts him even when he goes to stay in the country with his friends. On a hunting trip, a man is killed accidentally and it turns out to be Jim Vane, ensuring that Dorian's crimes will never be discovered.

Dorian vows that he will become good but he will not turn himself in. When the portrait reveals this hypocrisy, Dorian's hope is lost. In a fit of rage, he grabs a knife and goes to destroy the painting. A terrible cry is heard and when found by the servants, Dorian is lying dead on the floor, old and hideous, while the painting hangs in its original, beautiful state.

the subject of the wonder and affection of Basil, and is immortalized in Basil's **painting** as a living Adonis. His luck changes though, when he starts to become aware of the transience of his good looks. He becomes obsessed with staying young, but when his wish for the portrait to do his aging for him comes true, a horrible supernatural chain of events ensues. Dorian is heavily influenced by Lord Henry, who teaches him about hedonism, and Dorian seeks a life of pleasure and ruins his reputation. In the end, his vanity and selfishness ruin him, and the portrait provides a visual representation of the degradation of his soul, meaning that his life really does become art.

Lord Henry Wotton – Cultured and intellectual, he inhabits the most fashionable circles, spreading his own brand of highly intelligent, paradoxical philosophies about art and life. He is a powerful, often poisonous influence on young Dorian. As the story goes on, Dorian's speech seems to mimic Lord Henry's tricky style and his heartless sentiments seem to take Lord Henry's tempting philosophies too seriously, that artful, pleasure-filled experiments in living is more important than morality.

Basil Hallward – The painter who becomes enamored with Dorian Gray's beauty and innocence, seeing him as the ideal to which his work has always aspired. He makes Dorian sit for hundreds of portraits. When one day he paints a **portrait** of true likeness to Dorian, his feelings overwhelm him. It is the best work he has ever done but he is afraid that there is too much of himself in it. After the painting, his artistry becomes average, he can never elevate his work to the perfection that Dorian inspired at his youthful peak. He tries to guide Dorian towards decency, so in love is he with the memory of that innocent boy, but the knowledge of how Basil has dictated his now tortured existence with his painting and his passion, enrages Dorian, who kills Basil. Basil becomes a sad example of a good artist disappearing in sacrifice for Art.

Sybil Vane – A young actress, from a poor family, who performs Shakespeare's heroines every evening at a low class theater. Dorian falls in love with her performances, but she finds performance paltry in comparison to true love and her acting suffers after her engagement to Dorian. Dorian, in turn, is uninterested in her after she no longer has her art. He leaves her heartbroken and Sybil, a Juliet-like martyr for love, commits suicide. She is a symbolic character, pure in her love and embodying an artistic ideal.

James 'Jim' Vane – The burly sailor brother of Sybil Vane and very different from his sister in experience and appearance. He is rough looking but very decent and seeks above all else to protect his sister. He threatens to kill whoever hurts her, and, avenging her suicide, follows and haunts Dorian. His face becomes a symbol of the goodness that Dorian has destroyed.

Alan Campbell – is called on by Dorian to dispose of Basil



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Dorian Gray – Represents the ideal of youth, beauty and innocence to his new acquaintances Basil and Lord Henry. He is

Hallward's body. He is a scientist whom Dorian knew intimately once, but grows like many others to despise Dorian and doesn't want anything to do with the crime. Dorian blackmails him and he unhappily completes the task, and commits suicide not long after.

The Duchess of Monmouth – A clever and pretty member of Lord Henry's social set. She is unusual amongst the women of the novel as one of the only ones able to impress Lord Henry and keep up equal banter with him. She is also enamored with Dorian and shows that marriage in this society is often just a show, revealing secret affections, something that Lord Henry seems to highly approve of.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mrs. Vane – The theatrical mother of Sybil Vane. Her obsession for 'scenes' and drama leads her to some quite unmaternal behavior. She feels awkward around her less attractive son, but when she confesses how similar her own romantic history is to Sybil's predicament, we see her in a new light.

Victor – Dorian's valet at the time when he discovers the nature of the portrait and hides it. Dorian suspects him of being a spy, which only highlights the paranoid tricks that Dorian's mind is playing on him. There is nothing to suggest that Victor is not a completely loyal servant.

Adrian Singleton – Another former friend of Dorian's, who has been ruined and now sits in opium dens all day. Adrian gives a glimpse into the real human consequences of Dorian's influence.

realization, when his beauty seemed to him simply a part of him, he was only vaguely aware of it. But once he realizes that it is not something he can hold on to, that it will be taken from him by time, he wants desperately to keep it. In this way, mortality doesn't just destroy beauty and youth, it makes them things to treasure and obsess over because eventually they will be destroyed.

Throughout the novel, beauty and death are linked. Dorian loves Sybil because he gets to watch her die onstage in all her passion and then, miraculously, be alive backstage. Her art makes her immortal each and every night. Sybil's actual death by suicide is tragic, but it also gives her a kind of eternal beauty because she was never allowed to age. Dorian, meanwhile, is similarly saved from aging by the supernatural transformation of his portrait, but while his appearance is now beyond mortality this freedom seems to drive Dorian to try to experience every kind of excess, to not care about consequences, to destroy lovers and friends through his influence and callousness. In this way that novel suggests that while mortality will always destroy beauty and youth, that beauty and youth in fact *need* to be destroyed—that immortal youth beauty, such as is preserved in art, is in fact monstrous in the real world. And, in fact, as Dorian's soul shrivels and he begins to seek and admire ugliness, his own beautiful face comes to seem to him just a hateful reminder of the innocence he has lost.



SURFACES, OBJECTS AND APPEARANCES

Beauty is skin-deep in Dorian's circle of friends. He is welcomed and adored because of his beautiful appearance and even when his sins ruin lives, he always has a certain power because of his attractiveness. Dorian is at his peak when he is unaware of his own beauty, but when conscious of it, his life becomes about surface and appearance. His taste for fashion grows; he loves tapestries and jewels, very flat, decorative objects.

The novel of course revolves around the **portrait** of Dorian but this is just one of the damaging surfaces that Wilde depicts. Characters' identities and fates are entirely decided by their outward appearance. The owner of Sybil Vane's theater is reduced to a collection of Jewish features and hideous mannerisms, as is his theater reduced to its shabby decor, and in turn it is all redeemed by the beautiful face of Sybil, who herself is putting on a costume. Veils of societal roles and costumes are worn by everybody in the novel and are made more fatal by the way the characters describe and stereotype each other, never letting each other escape from their narrow identities and appearances. To Lord Henry, even knowing Dorian's sinful behavior, he remains the beautiful boy that he met in Basil's studio because appearance always wins out.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



THE MORTALITY OF BEAUTY AND YOUTH

The trouble starts when Henry warns Dorian that his extraordinary beauty and youth will fade, and tells him to make the most of it. Dorian's beauty is such that people are astonished by it and all of his advantages seem to come from it, even if he has got an interesting personality and wealth. With Henry's words ringing in his ears, Dorian immediately views Basil's **portrait** of him in a new light. Rather than immortalize him, the picture suddenly seems to mock him for *not* being immortal—the picture won't change, but Dorian himself will. Dorian then becomes aware of time, and aware of his own beauty as a thing that will fade. Before Dorian's



ART AND THE IMITATION OF LIFE

The novel opens with a theory of the purpose of art, which Wilde reasons out until he reaches that “all art is quite useless”. Whether or not this is some kind of warning from the narrator, we as readers don’t know, but what follows certainly seems to illustrate his point. It presents art in many forms and the danger of it when it is taken too literally or believed too deeply. It starts with a painting, which alters the perspectives that look on it and seems to alter itself. Once Basil has attributed to the **painting** the power of capturing the spirit of Dorian Gray, and once Dorian has attributed to it the power to host and represent his own soul, the painting has a dangerous life of its own. Dorian’s romance with the actress Sybil Vane is composed of the romantic characters she played and the drama of each nightly performance. To see the girl die on stage and then find her backstage alive and beautiful is a supernatural kind of existence that cannot last. The danger of seeing life only through the lens of art is that one must stay at a distance or risk ruining the illusion, just like a mirage. This is Dorian’s trouble, and Basil’s trouble, and through these examples we learn that the closer one comes to art, the closer one comes to some kind of death or destruction.

The set up of Dorian’s world in society and in his own home is full of pictures, stills and images through which we see life frozen or removed. Whether portraits, tapestries, or scenes, these images build up and up in the novel until Dorian’s climactic act of stabbing his own **painting**. It is the ever-present pressure of art—of being a piece of living art himself, and of seeing real life mirrored in the portrait—that destroys Dorian. In addition, as we read the novel, we are aware of the power of the narrator to embody the characters omnisciently, and to implant repetitions of their particular vocabulary, imitating the influence that Lord Henry’s memorable phrases have on Dorian’s mind. As a piece of art itself, the novel invites us to question its form and purpose, as the argument of the preface suggests.



INFLUENCE

The power of one to affect another is a theme that pervades the novel. At first, Basil is influenced by his model Dorian. On a personal level, he is confused and changed by his romantic feelings, but Dorian’s influence is also more far-reaching, actually seeming to change Basil’s ability for painting, and to change the **painting** itself in an almost supernatural way. Influence here describes an almost chemical change that one can assign to feelings and the perception of a painting. The same curse befalls Sybil Vane, when she is so influenced by Dorian, and by love, that she is transformed and can no longer act. In fact the whole course of events can be viewed as a series of domino-like influences. When the narrator recounts the series of bad relationships,

where Dorian has led an innocent friend astray, the influences spread through the country, knowing no bounds.

Influence is also shown in the novel as a persuasive power. It is a less magical effect, of attractive ideas and styles worming their way into others’ vocabulary. Lord Henry’s philosophies and paradoxes have a hypnotic power on some people, and cause Dorian to seek knowledge and believe in these theories enough that he lives by them. Henry’s suggestion that the soul and the senses can mutually cure each other, for example, arises in Dorian’s mind and, out of context, misguides him into thinking that opium could soothe his soul.



WOMEN AND MEN

Lord Henry’s philosophies frequently criticize women and marriage, and the era of Dorian Gray’s London society, and indeed Oscar Wilde’s, becomes vivid to us in his dialogue. He says that women are a “decorative sex”, and that there are always only a few worth talking to. We see his marriage with Lady Victoria Wotton as a very separate affair, both parties leading distinct lives and meeting the other occasionally. When Victoria leaves him, Henry expresses sadness and misses her company. Though his description of sadness is far from a romantic declaration, it does seem that many of the women provide the male characters with essential and distracting company, and actually, it is the hostesses that at times enable the lifestyles of connection and fashion that men like Henry and Dorian boast of. Ladies like Lady Narborough and the Duchess are the connectors. Henry says of the Duchess Gladys that her clever tongue gets on his nerves, which is comically hypocritical. And she has the same disregard of her husband as the men have for women when she falls in love with Dorian. In this way, she is used to illuminate the actions and paradoxes of the men’s world.

With women taking somewhat of a back seat in Dorian’s tale, the romantic energy between the men takes center stage. Though there are no explicitly homosexual relationships, there are definitely homoerotic ones, and words like “admiration” and “fascination” begin to acquire a double meaning in the text. In a world where beauty is the ideal and knowledge is attractive, the older gentlemen’s longing for Dorian and his admiration of them adds another layer of taboo to the secrecy of the characters’ private lives.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



WHITE AND RED

Colors symbolic of purity and innocence and sin

and gore populate the story at crucial moments. One of the first noticeable examples is when Sybil's Vane's body is described as "little" and "white", emphasizing her ruined purity. Dorian's devolvement into a monstrous, unnatural figure is stained with bloody colors. Increasingly, as we move towards the climax of the novel, redness seems to gather until Dorian starts to see blood-like marks on his portrait. These color symbols create a visual surface in the text, showing us clearly the difference between right and wrong and giving the action a kind of painted effect.






THE PICTURE

The **painting** itself is an overarching, ever-present symbol in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, not just in the text but to nearly all of its characters. Though physically it is nothing more than a two-dimensional object, it becomes the main antagonist of their lives and has such far-reaching and powerful influences that it seems almost to be more alive than Dorian himself. It represents beauty, mortality, time, and art, all the major themes of the book, and its degradation literally presents to us the dangers inherent in these ideas.

themselves become too deeply implicated in their artistic creations, as Basil does when he creates the perfect portrait of Dorian because of his own emotions and attachments.

☞ All art is quite useless

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

The notion that art is "useless" is another major proposition of the Aesthetic movement. Uselessness does not mean that art shouldn't exist or have a role in society, but rather that it should not have a *function* beyond being seen and enjoyed. Its value is merely aesthetic. Of course, the painting of Dorian in the novel does come to have a use--Dorian uses it to avoid his own mortality. Therefore, when read in the broader context of the novel, this quote can be seen as a warning about what happens when we demand that art take on a function beyond its aesthetic role.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ "He is all my art to me now."

Related Characters: Basil Hallward (speaker), Dorian Gray

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Basil has been telling Lord Henry about Dorian, describing Dorian's extraordinary beauty and explaining the transformative impact of his presence on Basil's work. He likens Dorian's arrival to the dawn of a new artistic movement or era, and says that Dorian *is* all Basil's art now. This highly dramatic, romantic language is typical of the novel, and it helps create the impression of Dorian as a larger-than-life figure, building suspense in the lead up to his entrance in the next chapter. Basil's exaggerated reverence for his muse also hints at Dorian's sexual power, and is an example of the many homoerotic dynamics within the narrative.






QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* published in 2003.

The Preface Quotes

☞ To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim.

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 



Page Number: 3


Explanation and Analysis

The preface takes the form of a short introduction in which the omniscient narrator reveals the main themes of the novel. The nature and purpose of art is one of the novel's main themes, and here the narrator argues that art should "conceal the artist." This is a key principle of the Aesthetic movement, and suggests that the role of art is not to play a social role in a historical moment, but to simply be appreciated for its own sake. Such a view leads to the glorification of art as something beyond and superior to human society. It also suggests that it is wrong for people

“An artist should create beautiful things but should put nothing of his own life into them”

Related Characters: Basil Hallward (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

Basil has explained to Lord Henry that he does not want to exhibit his painting of Dorian because there is too much of himself in it. Lord Henry responds that poets often put themselves into their work, for example when they suffer heartbreak and use the experience as inspiration for their poetry. Basil rejects this, adamantly maintaining the view that an artist should not put "his own life" into his work. This directly echoes the statement in the preface that "to reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim." Again, this principle is a central tenet of Aestheticism, a movement to which both Basil and Oscar Wilde himself subscribed.

Chapter 2 Quotes

“Nothing can cure the soul but the senses, just as nothing can cure the senses but the soul”

Related Characters: Lord Henry Wotton (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

Basil has now introduced Lord Henry to Dorian, who finds him extraordinary. They converse for a while, and later Lord Henry catches Dorian in the garden with his head buried in lilac blossoms, drinking in the scent as if it were wine. Lord Henry murmurs approvingly that sensual experience is the only cure for the soul. This moment can be seen as an example of Dorian's innocence before he becomes fixated with his own beauty and mortality; his soul is vibrant and healthy and he is sensually connected with the natural world around him. It is also a clear example of Lord Henry's almost teacherly relationship to Dorian, a relationship infused with flirtation.


At the same time, Lord Henry's statement ominously prefigures the coming events in the novel. In contrast to

Dorian's present innocent delight in the flowers, he will soon become insatiably hungry for carnal, sinful pleasures. In connecting the "cure" of the soul with the senses, Lord Henry foreshadows the fact that Dorian's soul will eventually be destroyed by submergence in vice.

“If it were only the other way! If it were I who was always young, and the picture that was to grow old!”

Related Characters: Dorian Gray (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis


Having been warned by Lord Henry that his youthful looks will fade, and having seen the supernaturally beautiful portrait that Basil has now finished, Dorian becomes overwhelmed by the wish to stay young forever. This is a climactic moment in the narrative in which Dorian drastically alters his own fate. His sudden desperation and subsequent harsh words to Basil do not fit the innocent, charming image of Dorian we have seen so far; Wilde uses this dramatic transformation to show that the threat of mortality can have an extreme effect on people.

This passage also highlights the exaggerated role of art in the world of the novel. Dorian is so astonished by the portrait of himself that he becomes jealous of it and the fact that it will remain the same while he himself ages and grows less attractive. While this might seem like a strange reaction, it demonstrates the importance of art, surfaces, and appearance to Dorian and the other characters. As the novel will show, this is a dangerous view, as investing too much in appearances leads to the corruption of one's personality.

Chapter 4 Quotes

“I have seen her in every age and every costume. Ordinary women never appeal to one's imagination. They are limited to their century.”

Related Characters: Dorian Gray (speaker), Sybil Vane



Related Themes:  

Page Number: 51**Explanation and Analysis**

Dorian describes seeing Sybil Vane play Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* to Lord Henry, confessing that he has fallen in love with her. Dorian uses the dramatically romantic rhetoric typical of the novel, explaining that in contrast to "ordinary" women, Sybil is appealing because her profession as an actress makes her transcend time and reality. This emphasizes Dorian's obsession with escaping time, and reinforces the sexist dismissal of women in the novel. Leading up to this passage, Lord Henry has claimed that there is no such thing as a female genius, and that there are only five women in London worth talking to; Dorian's words here confirm the impression that the world of the novel is homoerotic male one, and that—even in light of Dorian's newfound love for Sybil—the (male) characters see relationships between men as superior to relationships with women.

Chapter 5 Quotes



“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.”

Related Characters: Mrs. Vane (speaker), James 'Jim' Vane**Related Themes:**  **Page Number:** 61**Explanation and Analysis**

Sybil Vane has been excitedly telling her mother about Dorian, emphasizing his extraordinary beauty and wealth, when her brother arrives. Jim Vane is the opposite of Dorian, and a huge contrast to his talented, ethereal sister. When he enters the room, Mrs. Vane envisions the moment as a "tableau" and positions Jim as the audience. This passage once again highlights the centrality of art in the play, showing that artistic performance is so important to the Vane family that Mrs. Vane imagines real life as a piece of theatre. Of course, this also lends a sense of inauthenticity to the behavior of Mrs. Vane and the other characters; by seeing all her actions as a performance, Mrs. Vane reveals her preoccupation with being watched by others, adding to the theme of obsession with appearance.

Chapter 6 Quotes

“I never approve or disapprove of anything now. It is an absurd attitude to take towards life.”

Related Characters: Lord Henry Wotton (speaker)**Related Themes:**  **Page Number:** 72**Explanation and Analysis**

Lord Henry has been telling Basil about Dorian's engagement to Sybil Vane. In response, Basil embodies the pragmatic elitism of the time, worrying that Dorian is marrying beneath him and asking Lord Henry if he approves. Lord Henry tells Basil that he no longer approves or disapproves of anything, and that to do so is "absurd." This answer is a typical example of Lord Henry's flamboyant, contrarian attitude to life. His resistance to making judgments suggests a sense of underlying carelessness and immorality. In contrast to Basil, who is worried about Dorian's future, Lord Henry seems only to want to be entertained by Dorian (and life in general). This statement also emphasizes Lord Henry's commitment against reason, as it is logically incoherent—he calls disapproving of things "absurd," thereby expressing disapproval at the idea of disapproval.

“I am changed, and the mere touch of Sybil Vane's hand makes me forget you and all your wrong, fascinating, poisonous, delightful theories.”

Related Characters: Dorian Gray (speaker), Sybil Vane, Lord Henry Wotton**Related Themes:** **Page Number:** 75**Explanation and Analysis**

Lord Henry has been teasing Dorian for his lovesick state and for agreeing to marry Sybil so quickly; however, Dorian doesn't mind, telling Lord Henry that his love for Sybil has made him forget Lord Henry's "fascinating, poisonous" theories. One could interpret this quote as revealing the lingering innocence and purity of Dorian's personality, qualities that are brought out by his love for Sybil. At the same time, Dorian is obviously not as free from Lord Henry's corrupting influence as he claims. Although he seems aware of the dangerous nature of Lord Henry's ideas,

he nonetheless still calls them "fascinating" and "delightful." Furthermore, it is clear that Dorian's love for Sybil has been influenced by Lord Henry; unlike other women, Sybil represents the ideals of art, illusion, and even "foolishness" that Lord Henry embraces.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☞ "What a place to find one's divinity in!"

Related Characters: Lord Henry Wotton (speaker)

Related Themes: 



Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

Lord Henry and Basil have accompanied Dorian to the theatre where Sybil performs for the first time. Observing the rough and unrefined nature of the scene, Lord Henry remarks on the irony that Dorian has found his "divinity" (Sybil) there. This quote exemplifies Lord Henry's arrogant, irreverent attitude, and highlights the enduring importance of appearances in the narrative. Although Dorian claims that Sybil transcends her vulgar environment, this turns out to be an illusion born out of the superficial appeal of her performances; once Sybil's love for Dorian makes her no longer able to act, he immediately loses interest in her and finds her just as unappealing as her surroundings.

☞ "The painted scenes were my world. I knew nothing but shadows and thought them real."

Related Characters: Sybil Vane (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

The play has finished and Dorian has gone to see Sybil backstage, bewildered and disappointed by her terrible performance. Although Sybil is also aware that she performed badly, she is not upset by this fact but is actually overjoyed, as she sees it as a sign that she no longer needs to escape her sad reality through acting. She explains to Dorian that prior to meeting him, the theatre was her "world." This statement once again collapses the distinction between art and reality, confirming the impression that the

best artists locate their life's meaning in their work. Dorian idealizes this, but Sybil's words suggest that creating great art requires the artist to suffer, a bargain that emphasizes the thematic connection between beauty and torment.

Sybil's statement "I knew nothing but shadows and thought them real" is directly reminiscent of the philosopher Plato's famous Allegory of the Cave. In the allegory, a group of people spend their entire lives chained inside a cave, watching shadows projected on the cave wall and believing that these shadows are "real." When one prisoner escapes into the wider world, he is suspicious of what he sees, though eventually comes to understand that this is true reality.

Plato was distrustful of appearances, arguing that reason was the only way to gain true knowledge. He believed that music and painting could have a corrupting effect on people. Sybil's mention of shadows here thus refers to the idea that, although it is tempting to be seduced by the world of appearances and representation, this can have dangerous consequences.

☞ "So I have murdered Sybil 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 that."

Related Characters: Dorian Gray (speaker), Sybil Vane

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

Dorian has written a long letter to Sybil in an attempt to atone for his cruelty; however, Lord Henry then arrives and tells him that Sybil has committed suicide. Dorian is shocked and feels responsible, yet at the same time notices that the roses look just as lovely as they always do. This passage shows Dorian's growing corruption, especially in contrast to the portrayal of Sybil's childlike innocence ("cut her little throat"). Although Dorian is highly disturbed by what has happened, he can't help but observe that on the surface, things still seem as "lovely" as if nothing has happened. This directly corresponds to the fact that Dorian himself looks as pure and charming as ever; it is only the painting that is beginning to show his increasing moral corruption.

☞ "The girl never really lived and so she never really died."

Related Characters: Lord Henry Wotton (speaker), Sybil Vane

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 100



Explanation and Analysis


Dorian is horrified by Sybil's death, and Lord Henry attempts to soothe him by arguing that—because Sybil lived through her acting—she did not live as normal people do and thus hasn't "really" died. On one level, this reveals Lord Henry's reverence for art and artists, confirming his belief that art transcends life. However, it could also be interpreted as rather callous. Lord Henry does not seem particularly moved by Sybil's death, thereby increasing the impression that he is careless and immoral. Furthermore, his disdain for the theatre and for women in general means that the statement "she never really lived" could also be interpreted as an elitist, sexist judgment that Sybil's life was unimportant and meaningless.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☝☝ “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 on time.”

Related Characters: Basil Hallward (speaker), Dorian Gray

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 110

Explanation and Analysis

Dorian has confused Basil by vehemently refusing to let him see the portrait; to distract Basil from this suspicious behavior, Dorian has asked why he plans to show the painting now after always refusing to do so before, offering that they "share" their secrets. Basil admits that at first he tried painting Dorian in various historical settings (for example, as a character from Greek mythology), but that on a "fatal" day he decided to simply paint Dorian as he was in his present-day context. This dramatic language is typical of the novel, especially when the characters discuss art—yet in this instance Basil is right to use the word "fatal," as the portrait has indirectly already caused one death (Sybil's) and will come to cause others.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☝☝ It was a poisonous book. The heavy odour of incense seemed to cling about its pages and trouble the brain.

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 121

Explanation and Analysis

Dorian, increasingly disturbed by the painting and suspicious that his valet, Victor, is plotting against him, has tried to distract himself by looking at some reading materials Lord Henry sent him. After growing angry that Lord Henry included newspaper articles about Sybil's death, he turns his attention to a novel Lord Henry also sent about a young Parisian man who indulges in both virtue and sin (the novel is perhaps a reference to *Against Nature* by Joris-Karl Huysmans). This is one of the clearest examples of Lord Henry's deliberate corrupting influence over Dorian. The word "poisonous" appears frequently in the novel, signifying the themes of corruption and vice. This passage also emphasizes the supernatural power of art in the narrative, conveyed by the way in which the book's smell mystically "trouble(s) the brain."

Chapter 11 Quotes

☝☝ 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.

Related Characters: Dorian Gray

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 125

Explanation and Analysis


The narrative has jumped forward in time, describing years of Dorian Gray's life spent imitating the adventures of the Parisian man depicted in the novel Lord Henry gave him. Although he hosts concerts and indulges his "exquisite" taste in decorative arts, Dorian considers life itself the principal form of art. This is another reference to the novel's preface, in which it's basically argued that art should be separate from and beyond life itself. It is when Dorian starts to view life as something purely aesthetic, a surface to be entertained or stimulated by, that things become truly dangerous for both himself and those around him.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☞ What was that loathsome red dew that gleamed, wet and glistening, on one of the hands, as though the canvas had sweated blood?

Related Characters: Dorian Gray

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 165

Explanation and Analysis

Having stabbed Basil to death in the room where the portrait sits, Dorian begs his former friend Alan Campbell to assist him with disposing of Basil's body. As Dorian opens the door, he is less horrified by the sight of Basil's corpse than by the change the portrait has undergone as a result of the murder: the image of Dorian now has lifelike blood on its hands. Once again, blood is closely linked to the symbol of redness, a visual manifestation of Dorian's sins. The description of the blood in this passage is significant for its grotesque vividness. The narrator's statement that the canvas "sweated blood" implies that the painting has literally become alive; if this is true, it suggests that Dorian might not be fully alive himself.

Chapter 15 Quotes

☞ "She is very clever, too clever for a woman. She lacks the indefinable charm of weakness. It is the feet of clay that make the gold of the image precious."

Related Characters: Lord Henry Wotton (speaker), The Duchess of Monmouth

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

Dorian and Lord Henry have spent an evening with the Duchess of Monmouth, a smart, beautiful woman who adores Dorian. The next day, Lord Henry tells Dorian that her husband is incredibly boring, and remarks that the Duchess herself is "too clever for a woman." This passage highlights the disdainful view Lord Henry has of women (even the few women he likes). None of the various female characters play a significant role in the novel, and the narrative itself thus reflects Lord Henry's view that most


women are unappealing and uninteresting. Furthermore, Lord Henry's comment that the Duchess is "too clever" and that she does not have the "charm of weakness" shows that he believes it is desirable for women to seem vulnerable and inferior.

At the same time, it is possible to interpret his comment as applying not just to women but to people in general; if so, this has negative implications for Dorian. After all, Henry argues that it is charming for women to have "feet of clay," before saying that the Duchess's feet are more like porcelain, hardened by her experiences. Clay is often symbolically connected to human flesh, a solid foundation even for an attractive surface like gold, whereas the image of hardened, white porcelain brings to mind Dorian's pure exterior, beneath which lies the sinful experiences that have hardened his soul.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☞ 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.

Related Characters: Dorian Gray

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 178

Explanation and Analysis

Overwhelmed by an intense craving for opium, Dorian has taken a cab to a seedy, violent part of London to visit an opium den. On the journey over he reflects on his desire for this rough and vulgar underside of the city, musing that this yearning has replaced his interest in beauty and art. Indeed, he considers the "disordered life" found in this part of London to be more "vivid" and intense than any art form. Dorian's loss of interest in art shows how different he is from the character introduced at the beginning of the novel; at the same time, his current state seems to be the logical conclusion of following Lord Henry's advice to indulge in aesthetic and sensual experiences, paying no mind to morality.

Chapter 18 Quotes

☞ 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.

Related Characters: Dorian Gray

Related Themes:   



Page Number: 191

Explanation and Analysis

Although Dorian managed to escape being killed by James Vane, it's clear that he is becoming increasingly paranoid and tormented, to the point that he can no longer enjoy life or his lingering youth and beauty. He interprets everything around him as conspiring against him, imagining that the dead leaves blowing against the wind are like his "wasted resolutions and wild regrets." In a reversal of the thematic obsession with surfaces and appearances, the entire world now seems to reflect the tortured landscape of Dorian's soul. Significantly, two spheres that Dorian used to treasure--art, symbolized by the tapestry, and nature, symbolized by the leaves--seem to have turned against him, taunting him for the corrupt choices he has made.

☞ "You would sacrifice anybody, Harry, for the sake of an epigram."

Related Characters: Dorian Gray (speaker), Lord Henry Wotton

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 195

Explanation and Analysis

Dorian is growing more panic-stricken by the minute, and has been especially shaken by Sir Geoffrey's accidentally killing of a man while shooting hares. Lord Henry has tried to reassure Dorian, advising him that they should avoid a scandal, but for the first time Dorian seems resistant to and critical of Lord Henry, saying Henry would "sacrifice anybody" for an epigram (a witty saying). Throughout this part of the novel, Dorian seems to be developing a moral conscience, acting less and less like a careless hedonist with no regard for other people. Here for the first time he seems to become aware of Lord Henry's corrupting influence, and the fact that--given that Lord Henry prefers wit and art to ethics--he might not actually be a particularly good man or friend.

Chapter 19 Quotes

☞ "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."

Related Characters: Lord Henry Wotton (speaker), Dorian Gray

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 203

Explanation and Analysis

Dorian and Lord Henry have been discussing Basil's disappearance, which is now being investigated by the police, as well as other matters such as Alan Campbell's suicide and the fact that Lord Henry's wife left him for a pianist. Dorian, increasingly frantic, asks Lord Henry if it's occurred to him that Basil was murdered, and then he even asks what Henry would say if Dorian confessed to having murdered Basil. Lord Henry's response is typically blasé--he accuses Dorian of playing a part that doesn't suit him, adding that Dorian is not capable of murdering anyone, and that crime is something only the lower classes do.

This moment provides one of the most extreme examples of Lord Henry's arrogance. He does not seem remotely upset about Basil's death, and similarly is not able to pick up on Dorian's desperate state, despite the fact that Dorian seems to be unraveling right in front of him. Indeed, this passage shows that Lord Henry's careless elitism actually makes him rather foolish. He makes a series of completely false claims, including that Dorian is not capable of murdering anyone and that crime "belongs exclusively to the lower orders," when in fact the narrative has revealed a string of crimes that have taken place among the upper class, including Dorian himself.

Lord Henry's words also highlight the fact that he treats life as a performance or game, and is unable to take anything seriously. He assumes it would "hurt Dorian's vanity" to be told he was not capable of murder, and believes that crime is merely a "method of procuring extraordinary sensations." Clearly, Henry's luxurious, shallow lifestyle has so cut him off from reality that he completely misunderstands the way the world really works.

Chapter 20 Quotes

☛☛ His beauty had been to him but a mask, his youth but a mockery. What was youth at best? A green, unripe time, a time of shallow moods and sickly thoughts.

Related Characters: Dorian Gray

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 210

Explanation and Analysis

Dorian has returned home, thinking morosely about his lost innocence and wishing that he had received punishment for his sins. For the first time, he begins to resent his youthful beauty itself, associating youth with "shallow moods and sickly thoughts." It is clear that Dorian now understands the danger that comes with an unchecked desire for

immortality, beauty, and pleasure. He characterizes youth as a repulsive state, indicating through the mention of "green" and "sickly thoughts" that it is even a kind of illness. Indeed, the passage suggests that the problem lies in the obsession with appearances, which are inherently hollow and misleading. Dorian's beauty was a "mask," revealing nothing about his true self, and only terrible consequences have come from living according to "shallow moods."

This passage confirms that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a didactic (teaching) novel with a clear moral message for its readers. Of course, this message stands in contrast to the views of the main didactic *character* in the novel, Lord Henry. In the final scene, Dorian is able to see through Lord Henry's corrupting influence and understand the mistakes he has made, but he cannot survive this realization; the novel ends with the final ironic flourish that Dorian's desire for immortality results in his death.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

THE PREFACE

The novel begins with a short preface, a line of reasoning that suggests that Art has no purpose and all beauty is useless. It is an argument introducing the themes of the story to follow.

The preface makes us aware of the novel to follow as a work of art, so we enter the story unsure of whether to believe in it or see it as “useless.”



CHAPTER 1

The novel opens in the gorgeous flower-filled rooms of Basil Hallward’s house. Lord Henry Wotton and Basil are together in the studio, considering the **portrait** that Basil has been working on, of a slim, handsome youth. Henry praises it very highly, but Basil says he will not send it anywhere. Lord Henry is shocked, and scolds that artists always wish for reputation and then never want it when it arrives.

Amid a magnificent display of spring’s natural beauty, the focus of the room is Basil’s portrait., bringing the eye of the story immediately to art as the central subject.



Basil says he has put too much of himself into the **painting** to exhibit it. Lord Henry, not understanding, thinks that Basil is ridiculous for being vain, he is the plain artist, and it is the boy’s figure that provides the beauty, all vanity should be placed in him. Basil knows all this. They all have different gifts, his artistry, Henry’s wealth, Dorian Gray’s beauty, and all are curses in their own way.

The characters are separated and categorized by appearance and talent, each representing only his own category and unable to move between them. This creates a kind of inhuman tone to these descriptions. As if trying to simplify and beautify the messiness of people’s personalities and inner contradictions, Basil turns his friends into two-dimensional portraits.



Realizing he has given away Dorian’s name, Basil confesses that he hadn’t wanted to reveal him to Henry, but had wanted to keep him a secret. He thinks secrecy provides a kind of romance in his life. Henry comically likens it to marriage. Deception is necessary, he says. Basil tells him off. He doesn’t believe that Henry really means the cynical things he says. The pair walks out into the garden, and Henry brings up the sensitive subject of Basil’s reluctance to exhibit. He demands a proper answer. But Basil defends that his reason was true. The painting is one of the artist, not of the sitter. He is afraid that Henry will not understand his meaning. But he begins the story.

Basil and Henry’s discussion of secrecy should be a chance for confession and depth, but the opportunity is missed. Lord Henry’s view of secrecy is shallow and comical, while Basil too concentrates on Dorian’s name, which doesn’t seem to be much of a confession at all. We start to suspect that Dorian is at the moment just a collection of exterior qualities and already we are getting to know Basil and Henry’s qualities through Dorian. He has the reflective properties that Basil attributes to art.



Basil met Dorian Gray at a party. He says that an artist must go into society occasionally to show he is not a savage. It is here that he meets the eye of Dorian Gray. The moment their eyes meet, Basil is filled with a strange sensation. He is immediately fascinated by the boy. He inexplicably felt that he was heading for some terrible fate and tried to escape the scene, but is called back by the host Lady Brandon. Basil suggests that it was cowardice rather than conscience that made him want to escape, but Henry quips that the two are one and the same.

Lady Brandon, a shrill, social butterfly, brings Basil around to meet some of the guests. Spotting Dorian again, Basil asks to be introduced, though seems to think that he and Dorian were always fated to know each other. They admitted this together later. Henry, knowing that it is a habit of Lady Brandon's to give a colorful preface to each introduction, wants to know how she described Dorian Gray. The introduction is a mess. Lady Brandon mentions Dorian's "poor dear mother" and then realizes she knows almost nothing about the boy. Basil and Dorian share a laugh.

Henry mentions that laughter is a good basis for friendship, but Basil teases that Henry knows nothing about friendship. Henry disagrees, he chooses his friends carefully for their good looks. He insists though that Basil is like a brother to him, although he seems to hate his relatives. He mocks his relatives for having all the typical vices of the upper class. Basil accuses him of always saying things he doesn't even believe himself.

The subject turns back to Dorian Gray. Basil confesses that he has been spending more and more time with the boy and that Dorian has become "absolutely necessary" to him. He compares the arrival of Dorian in his life to the important era in the world of art, the appearance of a new muse or a new medium. Dorian seems to have taken Basil's artistry to a new level. He tries to explain to Henry what the visual presence of the boy does to him but finds no expression superlative enough. Dorian has simply become the reason for Basil's work.

Henry desperately wants to meet Dorian now. Basil explains that Dorian will probably not have the same effect for Henry, that it is a curiously personal thing. This is the reason why Basil won't exhibit. He cannot bear the audience to know his secret passions. He believes that art should be beautiful and autobiography should be left out.

Show and appearance and façade are the defining features of the circle that Basil inhabits. It is important for Basil to make an appearance in society, as if he would not exist without others seeing him. His vision of Dorian Gray is at once superficial, based on one glance but also deep beyond reason. Fate and supernatural sensations elevate this meeting to something of existential importance.



The speed of Basil's attachment to Dorian show how much it is based on appearance. No sooner has Basil laid eyes on Dorian than he is filled with an almost divine sense that the boy will be very important to him. The importance and precedence of appearance is a trait of the entire privileged society to which Basil and Henry belong, comprising gentlemen, ladies and artists, all of whom seem to base their judgments almost entirely on appearances and reputations.



Things like relatives and love and friendship are dumbed down by Henry and mocked. Though he is the chosen conspirator for Basil's confession, he himself portrays people without sympathy as if they were merely types and characters. There is something paradoxical about him that is ominously exposed by his fancy speeches.



Dorian Gray is enlarged and elevated to the status of a historical figure, even an era, a measure of time itself. The boy's influence cannot even be described – it all lies in his appearance, he appears as a vision before Basil. The raising of Dorian over and above human status to myth, to art itself, sounds like a warning—such great heights usually lead to a fall.



Dorian's charisma and attractiveness have been removed now from Basil's protective clutches, and in the hands of Henry become a kind of myth, making the boy seem less real. The strangeness of Basil's confession about the painting's exposure of his secret passion creates a sense of danger around the painting and, to an extent, around Dorian.



When asked if Dorian Gray has any fondness for him in return, Basil says he sees a certain affection in Dorian, but he may just be enjoying the flattery. Lord Henry comforts that it might be surprising how Dorian's affection outlasts Basil's. Dorian's beauty is likely to change, and with those altered tones and shapes, Basil's feelings might in turn alter. Basil denies that this is possible. Henry is too changeable to understand. But Henry thinks that it is this changeability that has made him susceptible to love.

Henry muses with great pleasure on the debate of the human heart. Life's romances and tragedies are to him the greatest amusement, and he is very glad to have passed up a tedious lunch for an afternoon at Basil's instead. He remembers then that he has heard about Dorian's charms from his Aunt. Basil is glad he had not known at the time of Dorian's importance; he does not want Henry to meet him. But just at that second, Basil's butler announces the arrival of Mr. Dorian Gray. Henry is gleeful at the turn of events, but Basil becomes very grave. He wants Henry to swear not to take Dorian away or expose him to bad influences.

CHAPTER 2

Henry and Basil go into the house and find Dorian Gray playing a song at Basil's piano. Lord Henry is introduced to him, and mentions that he has heard wonderful things from his Aunt Agatha. Dorian confesses that he has offended Lady Agatha by avoiding dueting with her. Henry jokes that Agatha doesn't need a partner to sound like a duet. As Dorian teases his Henry for his insults, Lord Henry notices his unusual attractiveness. He tells him that he is too charming to want to be kind to Agatha by dueting with her.

Basil is getting nervous at Henry's affect on the afternoon he had planned. He tells Henry to leave so that he can paint. But Dorian tells Basil off for being sulky. Basil gives in of course at Dorian's request but Henry makes an excuse of a prior engagement and now must be coaxed to stay by Basil.

Dorian takes his place on the platform. As he poses, he asks Lord Henry about his reputation as a bad influence. Henry explains that all influence is immoral, because it takes over the soul of the other person. He goes on, poetically, almost musically, describing how the ideal way to live is to strive to be the purest natural version of oneself. He believes that, though society has wandered from this ideal to religion and other codes, one day soon a hedonistic revolution will take place. The only thing stopping it is how afraid man is of his own desires.

The picture we have of Dorian Gray is blown up out of all proportion by these two characters. To Henry, Dorian is a symbol of beauty, a collection of colors and lines, just like Basil's painting. To Basil, Dorian represents something bigger than art, something inexplicable. The collision of these two exaggerations puts Dorian into a difficult position, having to live up to an impossible ideal.



Henry's friendship, though exciting, starts to take on a changeable, insensitive tone. To him, it is not loyalty that draws him to spend time with someone, or love, but a sense of seeking the most interesting experience. It is a little like he is shopping for a book to read. Lord Henry gives the impression that he would have left a while ago without the excitement of Dorian Gray's story and the promise of a new object of curiosity to contemplate.



Henry's interests in Basil and Dorian are being exposed. Henry has barely met Dorian but is complimenting him on his charm. His quick familiarity with the boy shows that it is exterior qualities, like reputation and appearance, which he forms his attachments with.



The web of influences between Basil and Dorian and Lord Henry conspires so that the only way every character's desire can be the least satisfied is by them forming a trio. The unavoidable, tricky nature of influence starts to become clear.



Henry's desire for a new hedonism is an attractive but potentially chaotic idea. The dazzling moves of Henry's wit takes over the room and he manages to logically go from the concept of influence as inherently immoral to a suggestion that society's traditions and morals be scrapped for a more instinctive way of life.



Dorian is amazed by Henry's philosophy. He is overcome with admiration for the intellect he is hearing. It is a very new and welcome feeling. It is like music, but more dangerous. Somehow Lord Henry senses that his words have just struck a chord and he marvels over the potential transformations that might be occurring in the young man's mind. With eyes bright and lips parted in curiosity for these new ideas, Dorian is in perfect form for Basil's **painting**. Basil lets them go into the garden for air and excitedly carries on painting, sure that the work will be a masterpiece.

In the garden, Henry notices Dorian smelling one of the fragrant lilac-blossoms. He praises him for it. He tells Dorian that a great secret of life is to learn to cure the soul with the senses. He praises him again for knowing these philosophies instinctively, without awareness of them. Dorian is again struck with wonder. He is shocked, even afraid, of how quickly this man has entered into his life.

Lord Henry takes Dorian inside. He warns that sunburn would ruin him. He must preserve his youth. He may not realize it now, but youth is the most powerful thing he owns. But it will fade. He tells Dorian that he has been fortunate in his beauty but that he will suffer all the more, when time will jealously steal away its power. Going back to his idea about the new era of hedonism, Henry suggests that Dorian could be the face of the movement. He becomes more and more emphatic, and to Dorian, the commonplace creatures of the garden appear to him with new significance.

Henry asks Dorian if he is glad they met. Dorian is certainly glad but suspicious that it might not last. Henry responds that he is not interested in faithfulness and lasting, so they agree to have a capricious friendship. Basil is painting with a great passion. When he is finished, Henry congratulates him. It is certainly the **masterpiece** Basil promised. Then Dorian comes over to look. As if seeing his beauty for the first time, he takes in the portrait with absolute awe. Suddenly he understands the compliments he has received but also Lord Henry's terrible warning, that it would all fade.

A meeting of minds has occurred. Dorian falls in love with the ideas of desire and hedonism, impressed by Henry's elaborate prose. This language serves as an art form in itself – it certainly has all the illusion, trickery and potential danger that the novel suggests are inherent in art. At the same time, Henry is in love with the idea of influencing the young mind. His careless hypocrisy, having just admitted that all influence is immoral and replaces the soul of the influenced, is a dangerous step.



Dorian's natural behavior, to appreciate the nature around him, to be happy, to play the piano and banter playfully, paint Dorian has the perfect youth, innocent and natural. But as Henry begins to introduce him to theories, an awareness of his most instinctive actions starts to grow. Dorian becomes aware of himself, aware of his own beauty.



While on the surface Dorian and Henry's stroll through the garden seems like a celebration of the youth and beauty they are discussing, the fragility of every beautiful thing around them and especially Dorian himself becomes clear. The once light and airy scene becomes heavy with dark concepts, of mortality and aging. And though Henry paints Time as Dorian's enemy, it is Henry himself that is forcing the idea of mortality upon him. It is almost as if Henry himself is the jealous one.



The doubt with which Dorian considers the benefit of a friendship with Henry, and the acknowledgement that it may be brief give a sense of foreboding to their encounters to follow. Dorian's easy, innocent ways have been transformed in one afternoon by Henry. Now when Dorian looks at the painting, he realizes his beauty for the first time. This glorious pleasure, similar to the pleasure he received from hearing Henry's ideas, has an awful side, though, when he realizes in the same instant that what he has, he must also lose.



Dorian can't bear the thought of all those horrible changes coming true. He exclaims his desperate wish that he should trade fortunes with the portrait, for it to age and he to remain young and beautiful forever. He says he will give his soul to trade places. He accuses Basil of only caring about him as much as a statue. The outburst is so unlike Dorian. He goes on, mourning his lost youth already, pledging to kill himself before he grows old.

Basil tries to comfort Dorian, but he is distraught. He blames Lord Henry, and they quarrel about his influential ways, Basil getting increasingly upset until he grabs a knife and takes it to the **painting**. Dorian cries out. He now feels so much a part of the painting that he thinks to destroy it would be murder to the most perfect version of himself. Basil says he will give it to him then, and he can look after it. Henry wants it for himself, but Basil has always seen it as Dorian's.

As they have tea, Basil reprimands Henry for saying wild things to Dorian. But Dorian is not put off. When a trip to the theatre is proposed, he leaps at the chance. Basil opts to stay with the portrait, which he calls "the real Dorian", much to the boy's delight. Basil tries to make Dorian stay longer, but he is excited about spending more time with Lord Henry. He promises to come tomorrow as planned, but Basil's spirits are dejected. He reminds Henry of the warning he gave him earlier.

CHAPTER 3

The next day Lord Henry goes to visit his Uncle, an old nobleman with all the traits and hypocrisies typical of the English. His Uncle imagines that Henry has come to him wanting money, but Henry is interested in gaining some information instead, about Dorian Gray. He knows that the boy has come from the Devereux family and that his Uncle will surely know them.

The idea of mortality, and of the degradation of his youth and beauty makes the cool, calm, innocent Dorian turn into a frantic mess. The vision of the painting occurs like an existential revelation for Dorian and marks the beginning of a move from innocence to experience, from joy to tragedy.



We get a glimpse of the painting as a human-like influence on Basil and Dorian, persuading and taunting them. Basil's move with the knife has overtones of murder, and we realize what extreme value both characters place in the image and its ability to freeze time and be possessed.



Basil's affections are transferred to the painting, as Dorian's interests are swayed by Lord Henry's exciting, sociable lifestyle and grand ideas. Dorian is young and impressionable, and Basil's repeated mention of Henry's bad influence paints an ominous picture. What is even more worrying though is Basil's description of the painting as the "real" Dorian, distorting both his own and Dorian's impressions of real beauty, locating Dorian's real-ness in how he looks rather than what he is.



The deviousness of Henry exceeds the playful, carefree interest he showed in Dorian at first. The way he is snooping into Dorian's past, as if to discover the origin of his beauty, makes it seem like the boy is something of an obsession to him as well as to Basil.



It turns out Uncle George knew Dorian's mother very well. He describes her as unusually good-looking. However, her marriage to Dorian's father was fraught with disaster, he was beneath her in social status and her disapproving father arranged for him to be killed. The whole scandal was hushed up. Uncle George imagines that Dorian has inherited quite a lot of money and property. He hopes that Dorian will fall into good hands, remembering what an awful presence his grandfather Kelso had. From what Uncle George says, it seems that Lady Devereux was the most beautiful girl in the country, and had every nobleman wanting to marry her. They discuss unsuitable marriages for a while, George having heard that one of their friends is to marry an American.

Henry leaves to visit Aunt Agatha, who George berates for her incessant philanthropy. Leaving the old man to his grumbling, Lord Henry thinks about Dorian's story as he walks to his Aunt's house. He is now fascinated by the romance of Dorian's origins. He remembers how impressionable Dorian had been listening to Henry's ideas, how he was visibly moved by his curiosity. The possibilities of influence upon him seemed limitless. Lord Henry also thinks about Basil, and finds the whole story of secret influences and affections very exciting. He vows to make himself a part of it and become a kind of muse to Dorian.

Lord Henry realizes he has missed his Aunt's house in his distracted state. When he eventually arrives, the guests, including Dorian, are seated. Henry observes the crowd, summing each one up for his or her class and quirks. The Duchess of Harley brings up the marriage of their friend to the American girl. The Duchess mourns the increase in competition for eligible bachelors. One of the gentlemen compliments Americans for being a reasonable people. This sets Henry off. He detests reason as a virtue. Aunt Agatha scolds Henry for always being puzzling with his paradoxical arguments. She tells him off for trying to make Dorian leave the East End – she thinks Dorian should play the piano for the unhappy people there. The table begins a discussion of how to solve the East End's poverty. Henry does not sympathize, claiming to prefer philosophy to philanthropy and doesn't want to see the world changed in any way.

The Duchess is on Henry's side; he makes her feel a lot better about her mistakes and guilty pleasures. Henry tells her that the way to stay youthful is to always relive and repeat one's mistakes. They are the only unregrettable things. Gathering momentum, Henry masterfully plays with his argument, running linguistic circles around his audience. Dorian observes him at work and is fascinated.

The struggle of beauty against evil influence has been going a long time. The connection of Dorian to a familial lineage creates a story behind Dorian's attractiveness and romantic, innocent nature that brings him somewhat down to earth. He appeared earlier as a kind of mythic figure, like a work of art, but now with parentage and genes explaining his beauty, he has become more real. The link between extreme beauty and misfortune reminds us of Henry's warning to Dorian, and its evidence in history makes the threat all the more pressing.



The story of Dorian Gray, just like Basil's picture, has elevated the boy to heroic, fictional status. To influence such a character would be an even bigger deal now, connecting Henry to the glamorous history of the Devereux ancestors. The uncaring outlook of Henry's need to influence is illuminated here, as is the attractiveness of art and art's ability to smooth and beautify life's tragedies.



People in this society exist in categories of class, wealth, nationality, and these categories in turn are predetermined stereotypes, like the preconceived national identity of "American" tarnishing all Americans. We see beneath the surface of Lord Henry's strongly-held beliefs: when the topic turns to something serious, he refuses to acknowledge it or pretends that it is not important. It seems that everybody is somewhat caught in this spell, Aunt Agatha believing that music will solve everything. Art and artfulness trumps politics.



Henry's art is his conversation. His artfulness seems to describe the nature of life, but in reality it merely covers up the ugliness of it by transforming ugliness into a desirable thing. The way Henry becomes wilder and more frantic and full of words, suggests to us that language is to him what the painting becomes to Dorian—it is his addiction.



Eventually, the party dissolves, agreeing to meet again soon. One of the lot, Mr. Erskine, tells Henry that he should write a book, but Henry does not have literary ambitions, he enjoys reading too much. Once he has ensured Lord Henry's company for another occasion in order to continue the explanation of his strange opinions, Mr. Erskine departs. Lord Henry decides to head to the park. Dorian wishes to follow, even though he has made a prior engagement to visit Basil. Henry can't promise him any more talking but says he may accompany him, and "look at life" for a while.

Henry acts and observes and comments as if preparing for a major work of literature or philosophy but since he believes that Life is the best form of art, he is stuck in an inactive life. The only way his views survive is by passing them on to his friends and prodigies—through influence.



CHAPTER 4

Now a month later, Dorian is in Henry's library, waiting for Henry to arrive. It is another of Henry's philosophical principles not to be on time and Dorian begins to get irritated by the ticking of the library clock. When at last Dorian hears his host returning, he goes to greet him at the door but finds his wife Victoria instead. Victoria recognizes Dorian from the many photographs Lord Henry has of him, and also from the opera, *Lohengrin*, they both attended.

Henry and Dorian both have a distrust of time. Dorian is always conscious of it wasting away and Henry, paradoxically as always, tries to cheat its influence by denying it. We discover that Henry must be quite interested in Dorian's appearance, and the photographs serve as mini portraits of Dorian and connect Henry's interest with Basil's adoration. It seems that Dorian cannot escape being copied everywhere he goes.



They share views on talking during musical performances, Dorian saying that he would only talk during *bad* music. This amuses Victoria as an echo of one of her husband's views. The narrator describes Victoria as a woman who tried to look picturesque but only managed to look untidy, and as being always in love, which she admits herself when she tells Dorian that she always falls in love with pianists. She attributes it to their foreignness. She thinks that foreigners make a room look very picturesque.

Dorian's phrases have begun to mimic Lord Henry's, a sign that Henry's hedonistic ideas have already wormed their way into Dorian's thoughts. Though the women in the novel seem to fall in love easily and deeply, we realize that they too are all about image. As we see here, Lady Henry imagines herself and others according to their beauty. Note Wilde's clever use of 'picturesque', repeatedly reminding us of the picture as the ideal of beauty.



Lord Henry arrives and Lady Henry, after praising Dorian's charm, departs. Henry complains about his wife's sentimentality and orders Dorian never to marry. Dorian tells him that he is actually too in love to marry. The girl is Sybil Vane, an actress, a genius on the stage, Dorian thinks. Lord Henry explains that women can't be geniuses, and that there are only five women in London worth talking to.

Marriage is not seen as a deep bond but rather an inconvenience or a meaningless vow. It's sort of like a ticket one needs to punch or purchase to stay at a certain level of society, but nothing more. Real love is said to be outside the realm of a vow like marriage, but this makes it seem unattainable and almost unreal. Lord Henry's brash statements about Genius and women cut down Dorian's joy and show a very simplified view of the world.



Dorian asks Lord Henry to sympathize, because after all, it is his influence that can be blamed for Dorian's new, passionate view of life, and now he is curious to try everything. This is why he went to the run-down theatre in the first place. He found it, as he was wandering the East End slums looking for adventure, with a "hideous" Jewish man standing outside, who offered him a box for a guinea. Dorian can't think why he took it, but now thanks his stars because if he hadn't, he would have missed out on the romance of his life. Henry laughs and insists that Dorian will have many loves, that's what makes him interesting. Only shallow people have one love.

Dorian goes on to describe the cheapness of the theatre's interior. He tells Henry that the play was [Romeo and Juliet](#), cast with old, ill-fitting actors for the most part, but that the girl playing Juliet, Sybil Vane, shone. She was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen, classically beautiful, and with a melodious voice. Only Lord Henry and Sybil Vane have impressed Dorian so strongly with their voices, he says. He describes the Shakespearean roles she has played masterfully, and claims that an actress is the only kind of woman worth loving.

When Henry asks what kind of relationship Dorian has with Sybil, Dorian defends that it has been entirely innocent and calls Sybil "sacred". He describes how the Jewish theater manager invited him backstage, and after refusing several times, he couldn't resist meeting her. He describes her as childlike and shy, and very complimentary to him, nicknaming him 'Prince Charming'. Dorian describes Sybil as unconnected from real life, and when the theatre manager offers to tell him her history, he refuses, only caring about the girl he sees on stage.

Henry now knows why he hasn't seen Dorian for ages. He urges that they finally dine together that evening, but Dorian wants to see Sybil play Imogen at the theatre - every night is another unmissable heroine. But Dorian does want Henry and Basil to come with him one evening, and help him to free Sybil from her contract with the Jewish manager. Henry agrees to come and to write to Basil about it.

Dorian hasn't been keeping in touch with Basil. The last contact he had was when Basil sent the portrait to him in a new frame. Dorian admits being jealous of its youth but fascinated by it. He tries to explain his annoyance with Basil, calling him a philistine. Henry philosophizes that a good artist will live through his art and be completely dull as a person, and that inferior artists are much better company.

The extent of Henry's influence can be seen in how quickly Dorian has moved from his sphere of beautiful objects to the opposite surroundings in the East End slums. The signs of decay, age and poverty should signal that Dorian does not belong here and some misfortune might befall him. But even though he has begun to expose himself to the ugliness of the world, he seeks out the one beautiful thing in the place and, despite Henry's influence, retains his pursuit of beauty.



The mention of Romeo and Juliet, the most fateful, tragic story of young love, echoing the loss of innocence that Henry forecast in the garden, is ominous. That it is Sybil's voice and acting that entrance Dorian further suggests that his love for her is based on surface and art. He loves her for how she sounds, not what she sees. And he loves her for being able to portray great heroines, not for who she is.



Dorian's description of his relationship with Sybil is strangely reminiscent of Basil's earlier description of his fascination for Dorian. It is based on innocence, passion, and surfaces. He, in fact, doesn't want to know about her. He only wants to see the girl onstage, or perhaps the heroines she's playing. For her part, Sybil is similarly focused on surface things. She doesn't even know Dorian's name.



Dinners, parties and outings to the theatre seem to be almost constant for the characters in this social circle. Being seen out is an important part of their obsession for appearances and the drama of Sybil's stage spills over into the audience. We get the sense that Dorian sees his life as a story and creates scenes to increase the romance.



The power of art overtakes Basil. His work has begun to have a life of its own, and he is no longer credited with its success. In fact, the beauty of the portrait has taken the beauty out of Basil, turning him into a shadow of his own creation, which shows a life so much more vivid than the artist.



Dorian leaves for the theatre and Henry contemplates his feelings for the young man. He takes great pleasure in watching Dorian's romance unfold. He thinks about how amazing all human life is, and decides that it is the only subject worth investigating. He seeks to know the science of the soul's relationship to the body, considering Dorian to be the perfect psychology experiment. He wonders at the extreme influence he has had upon Dorian's behavior. When he returns from dinner, there is a telegram waiting for him. It is from Dorian, telling him that he is engaged to be married.

Henry's desire to observe the gamut of human experiences leads him to make a specimen of Dorian. This implies that, rather than try to help Dorian, to ensure that Dorian ends up happy or fulfilled, he will instead happily provoke and test Dorian to try to witness a reaction. There are very sinister overtones to Henry's influence, and the gap between science and art, reality and illusion narrows.



CHAPTER 5

Chapter Five begins in the home of Sybil Vane and her family. Sybil is raving about her 'Prince Charming' to her mother. Mrs. Vane is nervous that Sybil shouldn't forget her acting and her earnings, but Sybil insists that love conquers money. She praises Dorian above all things, boasting of his social status as well as his affection and how *he* can support them now instead of Mr. Isaacs, the theater manager. Mrs. Vane scolds her daughter for being foolish.

Sybil's love is a battle between appearances and practical concerns—between love of Dorian's beauty and affection and excitement about his money. The reality is that her low income means she must be careful, that giving up her independence could ruin her if things don't work out. But she is willing to throw it all away for love.



Mrs. Vane is a tired, anxious woman but Sybil is full of color and beauty as her mind revels in thoughts of Dorian. She remembers that Dorian is wealthy and that she must also consider the conventions of marriage, and thinks herself unworthy. She wonders why Dorian loves her. She asks her mother what it was like to love her father, but there is obviously some tragedy in the story and Sybil apologizes for bringing him up. Mrs. Vane seems to have many reasons for disapproving of Sybil's mood, that she is too young, that she doesn't even know Prince Charming's real name, but also that her brother James Vane is leaving for Australia, and it is inconsiderate to overwhelm the occasion.

The difference between youth and age is made clear and vivid in this passage. Youth is innocent and happy, while age is difficult and unyielding. The sense that life is repeating itself and especially its tragedies—as hammered home by the vague tragedy involved in Sybil's parent's attachment—taints the whole scene with a tone of coming tragedy.



Jim arrives on cue. He is a thick-set young man, very unlike his fine-featured sister. As he enters, Mrs. Vane is conscious of the 'tableau' of the room, but Jim has no taste for drama. He asks Sybil to come for a walk with him. They are obviously very loving siblings, and they hug and tease affectionately. Even though Jim thinks the park is too posh for him, they decide to go and Sybil disappears to dress.

Appearances create the dynamic of the family. Sybil is protected because of her pale, innocent beauty and Jim is made to feel self-conscious. As visual descriptions rule, so does the need for art, and Mrs. Vane curates her home like a stage, removing the reality and the maternal atmosphere.



Now alone with her son, Mrs. Vane contemplates the feeling of unease she has with him. She talks to cover it up, reminding him of the difficulty of his choice to go to sea instead of working as a solicitor. Jim dismisses the issue. His real concern is Sybil. Mrs. Vane assures him that she will look after Sybil and that her suitor is a perfect gentleman, very good looking and it might lead to a good marriage. Jim is not convinced and again asks her to promise to watch over Sybil. As Sybil returns and the pair go out for their walk, Mrs. Vane's unease comes back, and she is fearful of her son's mood.

As Jim and Sybil take their walk, Jim is conscious of the difference in their appearance. Sybil is completely oblivious. She chats about Jim's future plans absent-mindedly, so that she can secretly think about her Prince Charming as they go along. She makes plans for Jim, feeling superior to him in experience of life, but Jim himself is nervous to leave and even more so because he distrusts Sybil's attachment and their mother's shallow opinion of it. There's something else on his mind too, some rumor that he meant to ask his mother about.

Jim asks Sybil about her 'new friend' and Sybil tells him everything, saying that now she has found real love, her acting will astonish the audience like never before. Jim is suspicious but Sybil answers each concern with resolute passion, and condescends to Jim that he will understand when he finds love himself. She assures him that she's the happiest she's ever been and that just as Jim is starting an adventure in a new world, so is she.

They sit and watch the passers-by and Jim begins to talk of his own plans, but Sybil suddenly thinks she sees 'Prince Charming' in the distance and Jim's fear returns. He threatens to kill the man if he mistreats her. Sybil scolds Jim for his aggression. She tells him he's jealous and inexperienced. Jim protests but reluctantly agrees that he wouldn't harm someone who loved and was loved by Sybil. When the pair arrives home, Sybil is due to rest before her performance, so they say goodbye upstairs to avoid making a scene. Despite their quarrel, they part lovingly and Jim comes down to eat his final supper with tears in his eyes.

Mrs. Vane's unease around her son Jim is strangely unexplained, leaving their relationship and the scenes where they are alone together quite ominous. Jim's sense of the danger Sybil could be in and strong desire to protect her establishes him as someone to be reckoned with, and also sets up the expectation that somehow Dorian will end up on Jim's bad side. It's interesting to note that the Vane's are the only family portrayed in the novel, and they are somewhat of a disconnected and dysfunctional bunch.



Sybil is the picture of innocence as she walks along, blindly devoted to Dorian whom she barely knows. A link is made between beauty and innocence. Sybil, young and beautiful, is contrasted vividly with her plain, more grounded brother, who seems to have more experience of life's trials.



Sybil is open, not hiding anything, she has become the symbol of purity that Dorian used to be. In a way represents everything that Dorian covets, youth and eternal life, which she achieves through in her roles on stage. Art gives a kind of immortality.



The near sighting of Dorian only serves to increase the anticipation surrounding him and the importance of his visual appearance. Jim's threats of violence continue to raise the stakes should anything go wrong between Dorian and Sybil. Sybil sees love as making her experienced, but Jim shows his experience in his cynicism about it working out.



The atmosphere is tense between Jim and his mother at dinner until Jim asks his mother outright whether she and his father had ever been married, and, relieved that it is out in the open, Mrs. Vane says no. She explains a situation similar to Sybil's – their father was a gentleman and not free to marry her. With sudden sympathy for his mother's tears, Jim comforts her. But the worry about his sister's protection colors Jim's final moments with his mother. He swears to kill anyone who mistreats her. Mrs. Vane loves the melodrama of the moment and wishes it could continue, but the practicalities of her son's departure take over. She expresses her sadness later to Sybil, to be left with only one child.

The women in the novel are caught between two extremes. They are, like Sybil's mother, stuck in their social class, or like Henry's friends, unhappily married and scorned for being too clever. The repetition of life's hardships recalls Henry's view that one should relive mistakes. It also forebodes further tragedy to follow as the cycle continues. Just when we see some sympathy and human connection between Mrs. Vane and her son, the preference for art and the drama of the moment transforms Mrs. Vane back into her stereotype.



CHAPTER 6

As they dine together, Henry informs Basil that Dorian is to be married. Basil doesn't believe it, and Henry reminds him that being engaged is not the same as being married. Concerned, Basil questions Henry about the girl; he doesn't want Dorian to marry beneath him. Henry assures Basil that the girl's beauty is not in doubt, that Dorian's eye for appearance has been very much quickened since he saw his portrait.

When the idea of an equal marriage is brought up, Henry assumes that Basil means physical attractiveness as the measure of this equality. This shows how one-sided and flat his view of Dorian is and the importance placed on appearance. Even vanity is described as being a good thing by Henry.



When asked if he approves of the match, Henry says the experience of marriage will be interesting to observe in Dorian but that he disapproves of marriage as a whole, saying it makes people unselfish. Basil is sure that Henry doesn't mean a word he says, but Henry goes on regardless, saying that connecting oneself with others is protection from one's own fears.

Isolation, selfishness and the refusal of a traditional lifestyle are the messages of Henry's speech. Henry's care is for the spectacle of Dorian's marriage, whether happy or not. He is making a show of Dorian's life.



Dorian interrupts them, in jubilant spirits and tells his friends about his engagement. He describes how Sybil, dressed as Rosalind, beautiful in boy clothes as if she was made for the role, returned his love. After the show, Dorian went backstage and the pair had their first kiss. It was a moment of elation and occurred to Dorian as if he were kissing all of Shakespeare's heroines at once.

The layers of costume covering the real Sybil and Dorian's affections is almost confusing. Dorian is attracted to the romance of Shakespeare. There is an unreality to the scene between him and Sybil. Again, art provides an ideal and not a reality. And through Sybil, Dorian feels himself kissing art.



Henry pushes Dorian to explain about his engagement. He says that it was actually Sybil who first mentioned marriage. Henry comments that this is typical of a woman. Basil scolds him for his rudeness but Dorian's spirits will not be dampened. He declares himself changed, and spouts romantic traditional values of how unbreakable vows and the like have made him see past Lord Henry's tempting theories. Lord Henry claims that pleasure is the only theory to have, and that they, as rich men, can live a life of beautiful sin. Dorian dismisses the argument, sure that when Lord Henry sees Sybil act, he will know a new standard.

Dorian's happiness is mocked and undermined by Henry, but it is impossible to tell Henry off, because he doesn't believe in morality in the same way as the other characters. Life and riches and trips to the theatre have given Henry a well-developed sense of good taste..



CHAPTER 7

When they arrive at the theater, Henry and Basil see firsthand its crude set up and rough-looking crowd. Dorian promises Henry that Sybil will make it all seem quite different, as she stirs the audience in sympathy with her characters. Basil encourages Dorian, saying that such a powerful actress must have given something vital to Dorian's life and deserves his love.

After the orchestra's awful introduction, Sybil appears as Juliet. The three men are fascinated by her. Henry realizes that she is as beautiful as Dorian had promised. But though her appearance is divine amongst a cast of plain players, Dorian is shocked that her performance is lack-luster and unfeeling. The change terrifies Dorian. During the famous balcony scene, Juliet's words are flat and lifeless. Henry and Basil decide to leave. Henry reassures him that she is very beautiful nonetheless. Love is better than art, Basil says. But Dorian is distraught and asks them to leave immediately. He stays through the second act and then visits Sybil backstage. She is aware of the dreadfulness of her performance, but that does not affect her joy at seeing Dorian.

Sybil explains to him that now that she has found real love, she will never be able to act again, that the world of sets and costumes, which had seemed so real, now seems shallow. She seems overjoyed at this revelation but Dorian can no longer bear to look at her. He erupts in an angry tirade, saying that she is now nothing to him without her art. Sybil collapses at his feet, begging him to reconsider but Dorian is annoyed by her pain and leaves her weeping on the floor.

Dorian, in a kind of trance, wanders the night away through the streets of London, finding himself at a market place as the morning trade begins. He takes a cab back to his house, where the lamps are still burning. Among the luxurious treasure of his home sits Basil's portrait. Today, something about it causes him to double-take. The expression on the portrait's face has altered, it looks somehow crueler.

Dorian's excitement that Sybil's art can solve the crudeness of the audience and make everything beautiful shows his belief in the transformative nature of art and love, but the fact that she must transform her surroundings means that it is the illusion that interests Dorian.



Dorian's praise of Sybil has been entirely based on her artistic talent and her ability to transform an audience. But now her artistry is gone. Did Dorian imagine it all along, because of his own lack of experience or because of her beauty? That Sybil is aware of how awful her performance was suggests otherwise. That she is happy to see Dorian despite its awfulness suggests that love is now her priority, not theater.



Sybil has given up on art because, to her, life is so much more real, so much more wonderful. She loves Dorian more than her art. But to Dorian, art is the only valuable thing in life. He loved Sybil solely for her art. Sybil wants to drop the curtain. Dorian wants to cover everything in the curtain. Such a conflict can't end well, and of course it is the poor woman who bears the brunt of it.



The strange passing of time in these early hours and Dorian's dazed wandering signals to us that the traditional order of things has been upturned. With the mood of Dorian's recent cruelty hanging in the air, the alteration of the portrait is unclear. Is the art work supernaturally connected to Dorian's sins, or is the shameful change in the eye of the of the beholder?



Dorian, disturbed, remembers the sentiment the portrait initially stirred in him and his prayer for the portrait to age in his stead. But he can't believe the prayer has come so horribly true. And why should the face now wear the expression of cruelty? Dorian considers Sybil but struggles to find remorse, and sees the tragedy as *her* doing. But the painting will not let up. Dorian stares at it, in a panic. What if the thing that has taught him his own beauty could teach him to despise himself?

Earlier the characters spoke about art and its ability to capture the soul. Now the painting really has captured his soul! And in doing so it makes Dorian even more aware of himself. It preserves the surface that Henry made him believe was his most valuable asset, but forces him to see the impact on his soul of his total dedication to such surface things. Dorian worries that the thing that taught him of his beauty might teach him to despise himself—but it's actually more connected than that. By teaching him to value his and other beauty above all else it has set him on the path toward despising himself. Those two lessons are the same lesson.



Dorian imagines the horrible transformation the portrait would go through. He tries to imagine a sinful life. Some remorse begins to come to him and he resolves to win Sybil back and live happily with her. The morning suddenly seems fresh and romantic again.

The horror shown to Dorian by the portrait inspires him to change, inspires him to act in such a way that the cruelty in his soul is shaped back into joy and happiness. The question is whether Dorian's resolve here is true. Would he really have tried to win Sybil back if he had the chance?



CHAPTER 8

Dorian is woken by his valet well into the afternoon. He rises and catches up on his regular routine, opening invitations to parties and having a leisurely breakfast in his beautiful library. The night before hangs in the back of his mind like a dream, but then he sees the **portrait** covered by a decorative screen and remembers what he saw. He thinks he must have been mistaken the night before.

Dorian's behavior reveals the dream-like nature of the vision he had the previous night. Nightmarish and unclear, we wonder even if it was Dorian's mind playing tricks on him. The true meaning behind the painting's change is yet to be revealed.



But the clearness of the memory haunts Dorian. He tells the valet, Victor, not to accept any visitors. Now alone, he debates removing the screen. He feels that perhaps ignorance is bliss, not wanting to see his fears realized, but the temptation is too strong and he whips off the cover and the terrifying cruelty is just as he remembers.

Though the painting has caused horror in Dorian and similar fear in Basil, they each also feel a kind of obsessive love for it that is unavoidable. The bad kind of fascination that Dorian previously admitted to Henry draws them all to their most dangerous desires. Is this the new hedonism that Henry predicted?



Dorian marvels at the science of the transformation he sees, how the brush strokes have not changed but the new attitude is so obvious. Dorian is sickened, but he is compelled to act. He has been made aware of how he has injured Sybil Vane. He has for a moment what no man could hope to have, a living symbol of his moral soul. Impassioned, Dorian crafts a long letter to Sybil, and when he is finished, feels the relief of atonement already.

Once again, the revelation that the painting provides of what is happening to Dorian's soul compels him to act. And he does act, writing the letter to Sybil.



Lord Henry appears at the door, wishing to see him. He wants to comfort Dorian about Sybil. Dorian suggests that the tragedy has taught him the value of his own conscience. Henry seems pleased to find Dorian in healthy spirits but when Dorian announces his plan to preserve his soul by marrying Sybil, Henry's tone changes. He informs Dorian that Sybil Vane has died. It is in all the papers. There is to be an inquest. Dorian realizes that Sybil's death was suicide and that it is his fault.

Henry notes that such a scandal is wisely avoided by Dorian. Dorian is too good to be mixed up in such things. Gradually he persuades Dorian not to worry so much about his mistakes. He depicts the whole event as an opportunity to think artistically about life. Sybil's death is the perfect artistic sacrifice. Anyway, he wants Dorian to come to the opera.

Dorian is still full of grief, but what he seems to be mourning is his own lack of pity for Sybil and his cruel behavior. Henry convinces him that he should not feel too badly, that they never could have married and, taking his theory further, that Sybil lived through her characters and so never really died as normal people die. Dorian agrees to come to the opera. As he regards the portrait again alone, he comes to the conclusion that there could be a great pleasure to watching the portrait change, it could be a real experiment, and he vows to enjoy his beauty.

CHAPTER 9

Basil arrives at Dorian's house, and expresses his sympathy for him, and for Sybil Vane and her family. He had come to visit Dorian as soon as he heard but had found him absent. When advised that Dorian had gone out to the opera, he didn't believe it, but now as he asks Dorian his whereabouts, the boy says he has been at the opera, and ignoring the subject of Sybil, describes the glorious singing he heard. Basil is appalled. How can Dorian talk of opera singers when Sybil's body is lying dead in the slums?

At the mention of what is in store for Sybil's "little white body", Dorian orders Basil to stop. He says that the incident is over, he has mastered the emotion of it, and they must no longer think about it. Basil can't believe the change he sees in Dorian, from the innocent, lovely boy who once sat for him. He thinks Henry's influence is to blame, but Dorian praises Henry's influence. At least it hasn't made him vain, as Basil's influence has done.

Sybil is a symbol of purity and beauty, and her death is the death of those things, as well as the death of Dorian's chance to reclaim them for himself. Sybil's death makes it impossible for him to go back. So he can only go forward. Meanwhile, the reader knows about Jim Vane's threats against anyone hurting Dorian.



When Lord Henry tells Dorian that he's too good to be mixed up in such a scandal, he is saying Dorian is too good to be mixed up visibly in such a scandal. He's focusing, as he always does, on appearances. Because of course Dorian is mixed up in the scandal! But Henry refuses to acknowledge reality. He wants only to look at the surface, the art of things, and he convinces Dorian to do the same. Of course, that sort of thinking is what caused Dorian's portrait to start looking cruel, but with Sybil dead (like one of the great heroines of old), there's no turning back for him.



Both Henry and Dorian use artfulness to paint over the gruesome nature of Sybil's death. She becomes as unreal in death as she was, onstage, in life. She might as well be Juliet again. And artistic death, of course, is no real death at all. Under Henry's influence about looking at life as art, as a kind of experiment, living through the portrait becomes desirable again. Dorian can now paint his own portrait through his actions. His life will literally become art.



Like a drug, music and art and life represented on stage keeps drawing Dorian in and he can't get enough. He mourns Sybil not as a woman but as a piece of art, and the fact that he has gone out looking for more inspiration from the theatre, shows that his addiction cannot be satisfied.



Dorian continues to think of Sybil in artistic terms, dampening the sense of tragedy, but Basil's description of the pale, pure color of her body brings Sybil out of the two-dimensional world of art for a moment. Though Henry's influence taught Dorian to embrace all of life, it has actually had the opposite effect and made him shy away from the reality of life and death into a world of illusions and ideas.



Basil is sickened at the idea of Sybil killing herself but Dorian explains the beauty of it, saying that Sybil is now a piece of art herself, elevated to a heroine by her extreme action. He describes, with a Henry-like philosophy, how his mourning was brief. He then scolds Basil for wishing to comfort him and then being annoyed to find him already comforted. He admits that he has changed, he now lives for an artistic point of view, but says he still wants Basil's goodness and friendship. Basil gives in and remembers his fondness for the boy. His concern now is whether the police will be after him, but Dorian assures him that he was only known to Sybil's family as Prince Charming.

It's interesting to note that Basil's initial attraction to Dorian, his initial reason for wanting to capture Dorian in a painting was due to Dorian's artless, unselfconscious beauty. Basil wanted to turn Dorian into art because Dorian was natural—was not art. But by being transformed into art Dorian was made aware of himself, and in so doing began down a path of coming to see himself and all the world as art. Now Dorian sees everything as art and shows no human decency, and it horrifies Basil. But Basil can't tear himself away because he still remembers that young, natural boy who inspired him in the first place.



Dorian requests that Basil do a portrait of Sybil. Basil agrees but really wants Dorian to sit for him again himself. Dorian vehemently refuses. Basil sees the screen hiding the **portrait** and demands to know what the problem is. Dorian makes an excuse about the sun, but Basil goes towards the portrait anyway, forcing Dorian to rush before the object, defending it. He tells Basil that he will never speak to him again if he looks at it. A confused Basil agrees, but says that he will want to exhibit the painting in Paris soon, so he will have to see it then. Dorian tries to hide his terror and exclaims that Basil had said that he never wanted to exhibit it.

The image of Sybil to Dorian is now the artistic ideal that Basil once saw in the boy, which introduces a morbid similarity between the two relationships. The levels of image and representation that now fill their conversation blur the line between copy and original. Basil's love of his painting is barely separable from his love for Dorian himself. As if there weren't enough veils and masks, Dorian must pretend to be unmoved by everything Basil is asking.



Dorian asks Basil to trade secrets with him. He asks why Basil refused to exhibit the picture at first. Basil is afraid to expose the real reason, but Dorian does not let up. Basil begins by asking Dorian if he has noticed anything strange in the picture. Dorian's reaction tells Basil that his question has struck a nerve. He goes on.

Truly imitative of his portrait, Dorian reflects the viewer's secrets, exposing Basil and saving himself.



Basil explains that when he met Dorian, he was struck by a strange fascination. Dorian became the ideal to which Basil had always strived in his art and because of this, he had worshipped him. He had created portrait after portrait, comparing him to heroes of history, until the fateful day when he vowed to create the real likeness. But as he worked, his mistake became clear, his secret was being revealed on the canvas stroke by stroke, and when it was finished he realized there was so much of himself in the **painting** that he couldn't allow others to see it.

The overlapping nature of art and life is persistent. Basil's description of the painting, and its effect on him, confuses the romance he feels for Dorian. It is almost as if he is in love with the painting rather than the original. Remember, after all, when Basil had first finished the painting and called it "the real Dorian". Though it is Dorian's personal beauty that has fascinated Basil, it is the presence of the art work that haunts him.



As soon as Basil had removed the painting from his studio, the curse lifted, and he saw clearly the beauty of the painting and resolved to show it off in a Paris exhibition. Dorian is relieved and feels sorry for Basil. With the secret revealed, Basil expects to see behind the screen, but Dorian still refuses. Basil, having told his great confession, seems to feel eased and deflated. Dorian admits feeling disappointed at the confession, but denies that there is anything else to see in the portrait.

The power of the painting is a physical thing, almost brainwashing both artist and subject. The difference is that Basil is able to confess his passion, and feels its power over him diminish, whereas Dorian hides and hides and locks away the truth, which festers.



Basil, set to go home, reaffirms the importance of Dorian and the painting to him, and Dorian reassures him that he sees the confession merely as a compliment. He sees nothing shameful in it. He tells Basil that he has been a better friend than Henry, and his affection is unchanged, but again he refuses to sit for another portrait. He promises to visit for tea, but never for another portrait. As Basil leaves, Dorian reflects, with sympathy, on how Basil's confession has illuminated their past encounters and how romance makes everything so tragic, but most of all, Dorian is filled with relief that his own secret remains hidden. He decides to hide the **painting**.

Basil's insistence that Dorian come and sit for another portrait and Dorian's absolute refusal shows that they are both under the same influence in different ways. Basil still wants to "capture" Dorian in art. Dorian knows that in one sense he has been as fully captured as possible by art, and that in another he has become art.



CHAPTER 10

With Basil gone, Dorian begins to get suspicious of his servant Victor, imagining him sneaking a glance at the covered **portrait**. He organizes for his housekeeper to bring him the key to the schoolroom at the top of the house. The housekeeper is confused - the room hasn't been used for generations - but is not suspicious and obediently hands over the key and leaves.

A portrait is made to capture and imitate life. And when it captured Dorian's natural beauty, it was something he liked to see and liked others to see as well. But once it begins to reflect his soul—not what he looks like but what he is—Dorian seeks to hide it, from others and from himself.



Dorian finds a morbid Venetian embroidery to wrap the **painting** in. He considers that it may once have shrouded a corpse and now its task is much the same, yet unlike a corpse, his painting would go on living and showing him his rotten soul. He regrets for a moment not sharing the burden with Basil. He feels a sudden appreciation for the love that Basil showed him, a kind of pure, adoring love, like the best artists for their muses. But he mourns that it is too late for that love to save him.

The novel is full of surfaces and veils, masking corruption with a show of beauty. Here the embroidery, typical of Dorian's rich collection of objects, shows us vividly how far the portrait has fallen from beauty to death. Though Dorian has been saved from aging, the sense of his own doom and mortality has grown.



As he covers the **painting**, Dorian's pain at seeing the changed face is more intense than ever. It seems that the figure's cruelty has again increased. He covers it quickly, just as the servant enters to tell him that the frame makers have arrived. Dorian gets rid of the servant by sending him away with a message for Lord Henry, and accepts his visitors, who are very glad to be doing business with the famously charming Dorian Gray.

The difference between Dorian's public and private life has grown. His reputation is untouched, his charm and status ensuring princely treatment wherever he goes, but reputation is shown to be hollow - the surface of Basil's painting, the surface of art itself, has become the true measure.



The master frame-maker tells Dorian that he couldn't help coming over in person to show him the frame he has found, perfect for a religious subject. But Dorian instead only wants help moving the picture. Mr. Hubbard is glad to do the job, and with his helpers carries the covered **painting** to the top of the house. While they are occupied with the back-breaking task, Dorian inspects the schoolroom. It is unchanged from his childhood memories. It all comes back to him, the lonely, innocent hours he had spent in the room, how his grandfather had wanted to keep him at a distance because he looked so much like his mother.

It is interesting that Dorian takes the frame makers to the top of the house. Yes, he's locking it away in an unused room, the furthest away from the eyes of visitors. But he's also moving it to the scene of his sad childhood, the origin of both his looks and his discovery of cruelty. Just as the painting is being hidden, deeper and deeper within the house, Dorian seems to be getting closer to his original self.



These memories make Dorian long for his youthful soul and detest the relentless aging of the portrait. As he imagines further and further into the grim future of his image, he firmly resolves to conceal the picture, to lock the room and keep the key close to him. Mr. Hubbard brings the painting in and props it against the wall. Curious, he asks to take a look but Dorian feigns that it would not interest him and ushers him away.

Dorian enjoys a moment of relief, knowing that the **painting** is shut away. But soon, he worries that the servant Victor has returned from his errand and has noticed the missing picture. He has begun to think of Victor as a spy. He distracts himself with the reading materials that Lord Henry has sent over. In the newspaper is an article about Sybil Vane's inquest. The reminder of the horrible details angers Dorian. He is annoyed that Henry marked the article for him to see, and his suspicion of Victor flares up again.

Dorian inspects the other package from Lord Henry, a book with a yellow cover. As soon as he starts reading the novel within, he is absorbed. It was strangely, richly written, without a plot, but following a young Parisien, who seems to embrace sin and virtue at once. The novel's philosophy and imagery entrances Dorian's senses and he finds himself reading for the rest of the day until he is late to meet Lord Henry at the club. He tells Henry that he was fascinated by the book, but perhaps not in a good way. Henry seems pleased at this reaction.

CHAPTER 11

Over the next years of Dorian's life, he becomes obsessed with the book about the Parisien. He gets it bound in different colors to suit his various moods. As he reads and rereads it, it seems to tell the story of his own life, yet while the protagonist suffers the loss of his own beauty, Dorian's is as noticeable as ever. Dorian finds pleasure in this. Even when his friends and acquaintances begin talking badly about his "sensual" lifestyle, they are still charmed by his looks and his relentless youthfulness.

Dorian would sometimes disappear from society on mysterious jaunts. Each time he returned to his house, he checked on the portrait, which was becoming uglier and uglier. But instead of fearing it, Dorian became fascinated, almost in love with the feeling of superiority he had over the image. His hunger for knowledge and experience of life was always growing, thanks to Lord Henry's influence.

Again, time is the enemy. Neither the past nor the future can give Dorian what he wants, so he takes absolute control over the painting, protecting it like a child. The key to the locked room allows him to feel ownership over his image, but we know that this can only be temporary and time cannot be stopped.



The influence of the painting is so all-consuming that even its absence is a powerful object. Dorian's narcissism turns everything into an attack against him. He sees Victor as a spy, and Henry's interest in Sybil's case as a cruel taunt. The painting has shown Dorian his own beauty and has singled him out as the hero. Just like viewers' eyes on a painting, Dorian feels he is always being watched. Life is imitating Art now.



It is not just the picture that represents Dorian Gray – he finds his life represented in this story too, almost as if it was written for him. Again, even though the art of fiction promises a less superficial subject than a portrait, Dorian is taken in by the language and imagery of the story, and its lack of plot, signaling chaos, is an ominous sign of obsession with appearance.



Not only is Dorian represented by the book's protagonist, but Lord Henry is also very present in the book's pages. His philosophies about living a sensual life are those of the book. Lord Henry's influence, immortalized in art, seems limitless now. The text becomes alive, just like the painting, and Dorian feels competitive towards it as if it is a living thing.



Dorian has fully given himself over to a life of pleasure and experience. Just as he earlier felt insignificant next to the timelessness of his portrait, now he revels in his own timelessness as compared to the portrait. He has fully prized surface over soul—he enjoys watching the harm he does to his soul.



And Dorian was managing to keep up his place in society. When back from his jaunts, he would throw parties, hosting artists, beautiful music, and the finest decorations and pieces of art filled his rooms. The way he embodied ideals of beauty and fashion was admired by the men in his circle. But to Dorian, the best form of art, as he had so often been advised by Henry, was life itself.

In his place in society, Dorian was coming of age into a position of very high status and influence, but he desired now not to follow the traditional path but to be an icon of fashion, modern in his ideas and living by the values of sensuality and pleasure rather than traditional virtue. He mourned, looking back at history, how valor and sacrifice had won over pleasure. But guided by Lord Henry, he saw a new way of life opening up, replacing puritan values with passion and the senses - the dreams, shadows and hallucinations that happen at night seemed most real to Dorian.

The narrator describes at length a series of hobbies and fascinations that Dorian takes up to fill his life of leisure. First, is Catholicism. Its idols and luxurious rituals attract him, but he finds he cannot adapt his life to a strict code. He then goes to the more physical laws of Darwinism but again, he cannot submit himself to one limiting theory of life.

Dorian's pursuits move away from religion and philosophy. He becomes obsessed with perfumes, then music, jewels and tapestries. With each fascination, Dorian collects not only the objects but the romantic stories behind them, the stories of Kings and Queens who wore elaborate crowns and scepters, and the origins of embroideries of exotic cultures. This list of treasures accumulates into a rich world surrounding Dorian, but beneath it all, the old fear still haunts him. He finds he must regularly check on the state of his soul in the portrait, and becomes frantic when he is away from the house.

As his anxiety grows, and his behavior gets stranger, Dorian's circle of friends becomes more seriously distrustful of him. Rumors abound. He is barred from establishments and avoided by people who once loved him. But all this only increases the strange charm of his reputation. Lord Henry's theory that entertainment, manners, and material opulence are more important to one's social standing than morals seems to be true.

But despite the obvious degradation of Dorian's activities, the facades of society and art that fill the characters' reception rooms cover up the immorality of the streets outside and Dorian is able to keep up a double life. The dual existence of the painting and the original expands into the whole of Dorian's world.



Dorian not only ceases to care about his soul, he ceases to care about traditional society or morality. He has fully embraced Lord Henry's philosophies and placed art and experience and pleasure at the pinnacle of life. It is interesting that as he himself has ceased to age—has become timeless—that he has focused more and more on things that are ephemeral and always changing.



Though Henry's theories fill the novel with structure and reason and attract Dorian with their intelligence, theories that do not allow freedom, spontaneity, or an excess of pleasure have too much of reality for him to handle.



Such is the portrait's influence on Dorian that he now sees only aesthetic pursuits as valuable. His whole life seems to be mapped out as a series of collections of objects, connected to real romance and tragedy by their histories but in themselves detached from human life. In a life of surfaces and decorations, Dorian replaces his concern about the portrait with other imitations of life and these mirages become his new reality. And yet these mirages are just that, and can't hold back reality altogether.



The picture of Dorian Gray retains its perfection but its cheating of nature's course plagues and rots Dorian from the inside. The society they live in is exposed for the sham that it is, when we see that it is only appearances that count and though reputation is also considered, it is also a shallow measure, hiding the real sin



Dorian enjoys walking through his rooms and studying the portraits of his ancestors. He enjoys seeing the rich fashions and handsome forms and how each set of passions has somehow formed his nature. But he also believes his lineage lies in literature, and it seems to him that the characters of the stage and novels are all telling parts of his own adventure story. He comes back to the yellow-bound book and reads over and over again his favorite passages, those about violent acts, poisons and seductions. Dorian's life has become fuelled by dangerous ideas.

The novel is full of pictures, tableaux, and works of art, each pushing and pulling Dorian in various directions, asserting influence. Dorian becomes so concerned with the artistic portrayal of things that these portraits and fictional heroes become more real to him than the lives he is ruining in real life.



CHAPTER 12

Years have passed and Dorian is approaching his thirty-eighth birthday. Walking home from an evening at Henry's, he sees Basil Hallward in the street. Dorian pretends he hasn't seen Basil, but Basil soon catches up with him and tells him that he has been awaiting his return all evening. He wants to say goodbye. He's due to go to Paris that evening, where he intends to spend six months in the creation of a new masterpiece.

The large time leap and Dorian's avoidance of Basil in the dark make clear the extreme changes that have come to Dorian Gray. His avoidance of Basil suggests guilt and shame. Meanwhile, Basil is still working, and moving on—his old masterpiece was the portrait of Dorian.



Dorian reluctantly invites Basil in, if he promises not to talk about serious things. Despite Dorian's request, Basil insists that they talk of a serious matter. Dorian sulks. He doesn't want to hear about the scandals connected with him. Basil assures him that he should be very interested in his own reputation, because it has become so horribly stained. Basil at first refuses to believe that what he has heard is true, but the evidence is overwhelming against Dorian. He goes on to list the charges against him, friends and admirers that have been left heartbroken and ruined by Dorian's influence.

Dorian's avoidance of serious things shows his habitual avoidance of reality and substance. Just as he himself is all surface, he wants to keep conversation at the level of the surface. The fact that Basil, who was so passionate towards Dorian is acting like a concerned father figure now, illuminates how his influence has changed from innocence and charm to something destructive.



Dorian scolds Basil. It is quite the reverse, he claims. It is their own scandalous ways that makes his old friends avoid him. Basil goes on. He accuses Dorian of damaging even his close alliance, Lord Henry's sister. He implores Dorian to use his wonderful charms for good instead. The list of his foul deeds is unending, and Basil says in order to really know Dorian now, he would have to have a glimpse at his soul. At this, Dorian pales. He suddenly decides to reveal his secret to Basil.

Dorian's appearance, though physically unchanged, has finally given way. It does not seem to match the hideous reputation that has spread around the city. Though shallow measurements like reputation and the appearance of innocence have meant everything until now, the reality of the soul beneath leaks through. Dorian's sudden decision seems to indicate a need for release, or maybe a hope that what he sees in the portrait every day is worse than the reality. He wants, suddenly, for someone to truly see him, not just the unchanging beautiful surface he must always wear.



CHAPTER 13

Dorian leads Basil to the top of the house. He is smiling with a strange pride at what he is about to reveal. He tells Basil that he is the one man who will know everything about him. Basil is confused. Dorian is acting very strangely, and the room they have entered is cobwebbed and creepy. Dorian tells Basil that he is about to see his soul just as he wished. As he flings off the cover of the **portrait**, Basil lets out a cry of horror at the state of his once most beautiful work. He can't believe the monstrosity he sees, yet he knows that it is the very same portrait. Dorian stands observing his own image. He is chillingly calm.

Dorian reminds Basil of the wish he had made on seeing the portrait for the first time. Basil can't believe what Dorian is insinuating. Surely, some scientific cause could be detected. Dorian asks Basil if he can see the ideal boy that he once worshipped. Basil is horrified. There is nothing of the same beauty – the face on the canvas is like a devil, or a corpse. Basil sinks into a chair and starts weeping, crying out to Dorian to pray for his soul to be saved. He says he also needs forgiveness, he was wrong to worship Dorian so. He begs them to pray together.

Dorian tells Basil it is too late for prayer, he doesn't believe in the words. Basil scolds him. Feelings of hatred start to overwhelm Dorian. He hates Basil with a passion. He is possessed, as if the portrait itself is turning him against its maker. He spots a knife in the room and goes slowly to fetch it. Turning suddenly around, wielding the knife, Dorian rushes at Basil and stabs him in the neck, again and again, until Basil stops moving.

The sound of Basil's blood is a horrible drip, drip, drip on the floor of the schoolroom. Dorian goes out, and listens. The house is quiet and dark. He goes back to the room and locks himself in. He marvels at how easily he has killed Basil, how calm the man looks seated in the chair slumped over as if in sleep. Dorian goes to the window and watches the street, feeling strangely calm. There is a policeman outside dealing with a vagabond woman.

The journey to the top of the house is the journey towards Dorian's real image. As the sitter leads the artist into the room, the tables have turned – now the artist has no power at all. Dorian has "painted" this portrait. Art has reflected life and has shown the object of desire and inspiration to be the real creator, imposing on the artist a vision beyond their control.



Dorian truly does want to know if Basil can see the innocent boy in the portrait. But Basil cannot, and faced with a portrait that truly mirrors life, which shows the changes in a soul as opposed to a surface at a brief moment in time, Basil is horrified. And he turns not to art but to religion for safety



But Dorian has only surface things, and so religion means nothing to him. In Basil's horror Dorian can see the total loss of his innocence—he hates Basil because Basil knew him when he was innocent, and because in painting the portrait Basil started Dorian on the road away from innocence. Dorian is possessed by the portrait because he is a product of the portrait—and so the portrait attacks its creator.



Dorian's control over life and death, with such a mask of calm, stands in extreme contrast to his initial terror at the idea of his own mortality. Even the physical signs of Basil's destroyed body, the dripping on the floor, do not produce remorse or realization. Dorian has truly become a shell of a man.



Without looking back, Dorian leaves the room. He thinks the best way to succeed now is not to think about what has just happened. But, he has forgotten the lamp inside the room. Returning, he cannot help but look at the body, and is suddenly filled with new terror at its appearance, at its stillness and **long white hands**. He locks up the room and goes down to the library. He says to himself that since Basil was supposed to go to Paris that evening for six months, nobody would suspect anything for months.

It occurs to Dorian that he has plenty of time to dispose of Basil's body. He fetches his servant Francis and asks to be woken early the next morning and if there had been any visitors. When Francis tells him about Basil's visit, Dorian feigns innocence and says he'll await news from Paris. With the servant gone, Dorian paces hurriedly, and swinging into action, fetches an address book and finds the address of a man named Alan Campbell.

CHAPTER 14

In the morning, Dorian is sleeping like a baby when the servant comes in to wake him. He wakes pleasantly, smiling as if from a lovely dream. But soon, the night's bloody events come back to him. Dorian sickens and feels again the loathing for Basil that had caused him to strike. How strange it is, he considers, to have a corpse laying up there in the daytime. He feels that the memory must be driven out to stop him from going totally mad.

Dorian dresses carefully, and breakfasts, taking time over everything. He reads his mail, one letter seemingly from one of his wronged women. He writes a letter to Alan Campbell and sends it away with his servant. He spends some time sketching, but soon the drawings start to resemble Basil Hallward. Determined to distract himself, Dorian goes to the bookshelf and picks an ornately bound volume of poetry. He reads one about Venice, and it transports him to the canals perfectly. He remembers with pleasure the romance of the city, but then it occurs to him that Basil had been his travelling partner.

Denial and confrontation jostle for Dorian's attention. It seems not to be the idea of murder that scares him but the appearance of Basil and his symbolic white hands, standing for the purity and goodness with which the horrible portrait was crafted.



You would think that the murder of the artist that has created so much of Dorian's personality would sap some of the life out of him. But the opposite is true. The evil deed seems to fuel Dorian's activities, and he never seems more alive than when he is creating a clever disguise and hiding calmly behind it.



It is interesting that in the forgetfulness and innocence of sleep, Dorian's face takes on a childlike appearance – we realize how old and tortured his internal life has become. A symbol of clarity and freshness, the daytime, has become sour and dark with the morbid secret, showing how all appearances are deceiving now.



Dorian has a routine of practical affairs to take care of, but he turns to art to soothe his tormented thoughts. Nothing else will distract him. He even starts drawing, taking but just as Basil once feared that he was too visible in his portrait of Dorian, now Basil is too visible in Dorian's sketches. The soothing words of poetry surround Dorian with a brief reverie but reality interrupts. This art can't compete when Dorian's own life is the ultimate piece of work.



Eventually, after much nervous waiting by Dorian, Alan Campbell arrives. Alan was a science scholar and a musician, and he and Dorian had spent over a year in close company, but now Alan, like many others, avoids Dorian. Alan has a pale, dejected appearance. He tells Dorian that he never wanted to come to this address again, but that he'd been told it was an emergency. Dorian tells Alan about the body, claiming it was a suicide, and asks him to take it away, to treat it as just another of his experiments. Alan refuses, calling it "devil's work". Dorian then tells him the truth. He begs Alan to pity him and remember the intimacy they used to share. But Alan is unmoved, even when Dorian says he will be hanged for the crime.

Dorian then writes something on a piece of paper and shows it to Alan. Alan falls back on his chair. His whole demeanor changes. Dorian shows him a letter he has already written which would realize the threatened action. Alan can't refuse now. Dorian reminds Alan that he has used him badly in the past and now it is time for Dorian to be in control. Pained and sickened, Alan begins to think of the practicalities of getting rid of the body. He sends Dorian's servant away for the necessary equipment from his lab.

Dorian has tears in his eyes and tells Alan that he has saved his life, but Alan feels no pity, only anger. The servant soon arrives with the materials and Dorian and Alan the two climb the stairs to the schoolroom. At the door, Dorian loses courage. Alan tells him he can manage alone. But as the door is opened, Dorian catches a glimpse of the portrait, and its gory colors seem even worse to him than those of Basil's body. Dorian goes in and covers the painting, and leaves Alan Campbell to his work. Over five hours later Alan emerges, his task completed. As he leaves, he says he hopes to never see Dorian again.

CHAPTER 15

The same evening, Dorian, charmingly dressed with violets in his buttonhole, goes calmly to a party held by Lady Narborough, a clever, wily woman with a special fondness for Dorian. She complains good humoredly about her former husband and regrets she could not have married Dorian instead. She is also fed up with her guests, and finds her own daughter and son-in-law dull company. She requests that Dorian sit by her.

The lack of pity that Alan has for Dorian, and indeed the actual fear that Dorian's presence causes him, is evidence of Dorian's mysterious lost years that in chapter 11 were spoken of as years of decadence and sin. The sickness that has plagued Dorian's mind is now literally visible in Alan, showing that Dorian's devilish influence has spread and taken hold of others. Just as Lord Henry influenced Dorian, Dorian has influenced others. But Alan refuses to be influenced any longer.



So Dorian forces Alan to help him. He uses Alan completely. He sees in his old friend only a set of skills that can help him escape his guilt. It is as if Dorian has usurped the spirits of those around him in order to stay strong and young himself. There is a sense that as the painting warps and ages, so too do Dorian's friends become visibly destroyed under his influence.



Dorian is less affected by what he has done to others—the gore, Basil's still body, the suffering of Alan—than the evidence of what he has done to himself that is visible in the painting. It is not something he can bear anyone else to see, even if Alan would be unsurprised given his experiences with Dorian.



How quickly Dorian transforms from a desperate murderer to a vision of loveliness! The society of Henry's friends is preoccupied again with appearances, and Dorian's, still unchanged, always secure him the most attention of the group.



Dorian looks around the room and agrees that the guests are an ugly set. He feels a little cheered when he realizes Lord Henry will be there, but at dinner, he has no appetite and drinks to excess. Henry notices, and inquires after his mood. Lady Narborough interrupts and announces that Dorian is in love. The three of them tease and banter about Dorian's latest love, Madame de Ferrol, who is on her fourth husband. Lord Henry comments cuttingly that the husbands of beautiful women are mostly criminals. Lady Narborough scolds him. His reputation for wickedness is well deserved.

She jokes that she ought to marry again to be in fashion, but according to Henry's theory, women only remarry because they hated their husbands. When Lady Narborough complains that her husband was flawed enough, Lord Henry shares another theory, that women only love flawed men. The three of them agree that the state of the world is faulty. Dorian calls it a disappointment. Narborough insists that Dorian should not be at all tired of life yet, and tells him she will try to marry him off to an eligible girl. She wants him to have a happy marriage. Lord Henry quips that a happy marriage is impossible if you are in love with the girl.

Lady Narborough asks Henry to come and entertain her more often, promising to have better guests in the future. The women get up from the table and withdraw, leaving Henry still spouting his theories. While the other male guests begin a pompous, political discussion, Dorian moves to sit by Lord Henry. Henry talks about the evening they spent together with the Duchess of Monmouth, who is smitten with Dorian. She is an unusual woman, clever and pretty, but unhappily married. Dorian tells Henry that they will see her again at a party he is hosting. He lists the other distinguished guests and Henry is pleased.

Lord Henry changes the subject and asks Dorian why he left so early the previous evening. Dorian treats the question with nervous suspicion. He apologizes that he is out of sorts, and decides to go straight home. As he leaves, his own loss of control at the mention of the previous evening worries him. When he gets home, he burns Basil's clothes and bag.

The guests are rewarded either for attractiveness or for quick wit and cutting humor. And Dorian's shallow affections for Madame de Ferrol, who is lusted after by most of the men in the set, fulfill the superficiality that creates this dangerous social dynamic. The whole conversation suggests that one cannot both be good and beautiful. Dorian's experience that one cannot be good while being aware of and focused on one's own beauty. But beauty is all these people are focused on.



True to form, Henry banter in a way that mocks happiness and goodness. Traditional forms of love, like marriage, are degraded by Henry. Dorian represents youth to them, and a chance for Lady Narborough to enjoy the idea of courtship, and for Lord Henry to enjoy imparting influence. These elders have used and coveted Dorian's youth for themselves.



There is an obvious divide between the place of women in this society and the place of men, who are catered to and whose discussions take center stage and whose ideas are thrown around and listened to by the women. But the Duchess of Monmouth seems more like one of the men. She stays around during the male post-dinner hour. Perhaps it is her blend of prettiness and wit that allows her to be seen by Dorian and Henry.



Dorian is struggling to keep his façade – the evidence of his sins seems to be both material and abstract, but though he can destroy the material signs, Basil's clothes, his own guilt and his failing nerve start to become visible.



Afterwards, Dorian is overcome with a craving. He goes to a special cabinet, to a particular drawer within, which holds a jeweled Chinese box, and opens it to find a pungent green paste. Dorian dresses in common clothes and rushes outside and finds a cab. The driver refuses to go to the destination Dorian requests, but after Dorian offers more money he agrees.

Veils, coverings and containers symbolize the layers of secrecy and denial that threaten Dorian's mind. Here, Dorian hides opium within his beautiful objects. On the one hand, opium puts those who use it into a forgetful daze, at once making the world seem like art and allowing someone to forget their past. At the same time, the opium dens of the city are in the worst, seediest parts of town. Clearly Dorian has done all this before—traveled through squalor for the lure of opium.



CHAPTER 16

The cab arrives at the river side, where dark public houses and mist from the water create a secretive scene. Dorian remembers Henry's advice to cure the soul with the senses, and has come to the home of London's opium dens to try and force away his memories. Reflecting on his sins, he realizes that forgiveness is impossible, but he can still forget.

Here for the first time—in this awful part of town, with its poverty and fog—Dorian explicitly wishes he could undo his past, that the experiences and pleasures were not worth the damage to his soul or to others. But having no means for forgiveness (and if he could still believe in religion he might feel there was some means for forgiveness) all he can try to do is forget.



Through the foggy, riverside slums, the cab seems to be crawling. Dorian can't wait to satisfy his craving, and his mind is mad with paranoia and imaginings. He contemplates the changes in him: his taste is now for the ugliest of pastimes. He sees filth and desire as beautiful temptations. He doesn't long to be good, only to forget and feed his sins.

Dorian's addicted, obsessive mind now transforms everything of life into a strange, slow-motion show. Just like the book about the Parisian gentleman, the story of his life revolves around him and his sins. Henry's advice that beauty is not innocence but experience, has overtaken his perception of the world around him.



The opium den is full of old, poor objects and sick looking people. Dorian goes straight towards a figure in the shadows and follows it up some stairs and along a dark corridor. The air becomes thick with the smell of opium.

The vision of the opium den, ugly and unclear, is the opposite of Dorian's luxurious home and youthful face. Here we see his life represented as it really is – the hideous portrait would be quite at home here.



When inside the room at the end, Dorian sees an old friend, Adrian. Adrian says that he has been shunned by his old acquaintances. Opium is the only friend he needs now. Dorian observes fearfully the deformed figures sitting around them, each in a state of the forgetfulness that Adrian describes. The memory of Basil haunts Dorian. And so does the presence of his changed old friend. Dorian wants to be somewhere where he can be anonymous. As he leaves the broken Adrian, he is cursed by some rough old women in the shadows. They use his old nickname Prince Charming.

The degradation and darkness of the bar shows us how Dorian has banished the consequences of his selfish, sensuous life to the outskirts of society. Though Basil's is the only murder he has committed, the implication is that Adrian was brought to his sad state by Dorian's influence, and that there are many others whose lives have been essentially corrupted by him. Dorian still looks just as he did when he was Prince Charming to Sybil, but the words have turned from a statement of love to a curse.



Little does Dorian know he is being followed by a sailor. He hurries along the quay towards another den, annoyed by his meeting with Adrian and fuelled by his mad desire for sin. As Dorian turns in to another establishment, he is seized by the sailor, who with one strong hand holds him by the throat and with the other threatens him with a revolver.

The image of Dorian Gray, its elevation above the shadowy figures in the opium den, is brought crashing down to earth. The focus is suddenly on Dorian's vulnerable flesh, and we remember that he is not a myth but a real human body.



The sailor announces himself as the brother of Sybil Vane and accuses Dorian of being the man who ruined her. He tells Dorian to pray to his God. Dorian rushes to deny the accusation, trying to think on his feet as James Vane orders him to kneel down. Suddenly it comes to him. He asks Jim how long ago his sister died. Jim sees that the face before him cannot possibly be eighteen years older than Sybil's former fiancé. Dorian's youth is obvious and Jim apologetically releases him.

In trying to forget his past, Dorian has brought it's repercussions on himself. As he comes close to realizing his own mortality, in the hands of rough, unattractive Jim Vane, the triumph of art and beauty over life seems a shallow motto. Yet, Dorian's youth wins out again. Fortune and appearance is again on his side, for now.



Dorian condescends to him to be careful of his temper. As Jim walks off, a woman from the bar wonders why he hasn't taken the opportunity to kill the man. Jim explains, but the woman responds that Dorian really is ridiculously young looking. The rumor goes that he has sold his soul for his looks. Jim runs after him but it is too late.

Reputation and myth follow Dorian around these dark places. It is now not his beauty that distinguishes him but the unlikeliness of his beauty. Rumor has created another surface of Dorian Gray. His face both saves and dooms him.



CHAPTER 17

A week later, Dorian is entertaining the Duchess, her husband, and other elegant guests at his country house. Dorian, the Duchess, and Lord Henry discuss Henry's plan to "rechristen" everything - he thinks that no one gives beautiful names to things anymore. Henry and the Duchess trade quips, their wits on equal footing. The Duchess accuses him of valuing beauty too highly. Henry disagrees. He also values ugliness, he claims.

Lord Henry's preoccupation with names instead of the substance of things shows off his superficial outlook. As always, he uses his language and logic exquisitely, impressing everybody, but the Duchess's equal linguistic acrobatics threatens his status in the group, and everything he preaches about women and genius.



They banter back and forth, on the virtues of the English, on the meaning of love, the importance of reputation. The Duchess makes the point that women love with their ears, while men love with their eyes, and accuses Dorian of never really loving. Henry responds that he believes that there are very few good experiences, and that one must live a life of repetition in order to be happy. He insinuates that Dorian's many romances should not put her off. Dorian tells the Duchess that he agrees with Henry, but that he does not desire happiness, only pleasure.

The pair seem to go through many topics in their discussion ranging from race to romance, but if we look carefully, all these subjects are but appearances and rumors. Though Henry's words are hypnotic, his arguments beautifully structured, beneath them lies a troubling promotion of addictive, superficial and unsustainable behavior. Dorian's acceptance of the beautiful surface of Henry's arguments shows the brain-washed state Henry has him in.



Dorian goes to fetch some orchids for the Duchess to take home. When he is gone, Henry inquires about the Duchess's flirting. She likes the challenge of Dorian. Henry warns that Lady Narborough is also after him. They discuss tactics, using similes from the myths of romance and war, Henry mocking the female cause but the Duchess defending it as the source of all romance. But they are interrupted – Dorian has collapsed in the other room.

Dorian is put on a sofa and comes round, realizing where he is. Henry assures him he only fainted, and Dorian insists on dressing and eating with his guests. As he dresses he remembers that it was the sight of James Vane's face at the window that had caused him to faint, and terror fills his heart.

CHAPTER 18

The sight of James Vane tortures Dorian the next day. Every sound and sight seems to suggest his coming doom. He convinces himself that the sighting was just an illusion; there would have been some evidence of the trespass if it was real. But this begins to scare Dorian even more. The thought that his own mind could produce such a vision makes him feel mad and out of control.

Three days after the sighting, Dorian manages to go outside. He has survived his doubts and fears and is surprisingly refreshed by the winter day and meets up with the Duchess and the Duchess's brother, Sir Geoffrey, who has been hunting. Being outside amongst nature and company thrills Dorian. But as Geoffrey goes to shoot a hare, Dorian stops him, suddenly feeling unusual pity for the animal. Geoffrey shoots anyway, laughing at Dorian's behavior, but then it is revealed that he did not shoot a hare but rather a man, who has been killed.

Lord Henry suggests they all go home and avoid more of a scene. Dorian is obsessed that the incident is a bad omen. Henry assures him that there is nothing to be afraid of. Even if there were such things as omens, Dorian is too lucky to be affected by them. Dorian tries to explain that he is not lucky at all. His paranoia is at its height. He thinks he sees something waiting for him behind a tree, but it is only the gardener with a note from the Duchess.

Marriage, companionship and meaningful love are degraded by the characters' infidelity and lack of care. While it is someone like Henry who is on an intellectual level with the Duchess, the attention of all the women goes towards the object, Dorian. War imagery turns Dorian into a figurehead, a prize, and reminds us of when he was a muse for Basil. War and Art actually seem to be similarly destructive.



Dorian has faced the horrors of his actions and past. But in James Vane he suddenly faces the prospect of his death, and he can't handle it. He responds to his fear by keeping up appearances.



As the novel reaches its climax, the terror of the portrait is reproduced in other images and surfaces. Dorian used to see himself everywhere. Now he sees Vane. Now he sees Vane. This brings a nightmarish quality to Henry's earlier theory, that life is a series of repetitions, and art as an imitation of life is destined to repeat too perhaps.



Dorian's concern about the hare's life shows a change in him. He's never cared about the life of anyone else until now. Perhaps his fear of his own death—which had been eliminated by his lack of aging—has reconnected him to the world. The lack of care shown by the other members of his society shows that his uncaring is not limited to him. The death of the man is strange... why would someone be hiding in the bushes?



Once again Henry advises everyone to avoid the appearance of a scandal. Henry, who is so focused on surfaces, cannot fathom that Dorian, who still has the perfect surface, could possibly have anything wrong or unlucky in his life. Henry's witty philosophy looks wholly inadequate now.



Henry praises the woman for her flirtatiousness, suggesting that her and Dorian's shared love of danger makes them a good match. Dorian regrets that he cannot even feel passion for a woman anymore. He would rather escape on his own and forget everything. The Duchess comes out to greet them, asking about the strange incident and why Dorian had asked Geoffrey not to shoot. Lord Henry thinks a murder would have been much more interesting. At the mention of murder, Dorian feels suddenly faint and excuses himself.

With Dorian gone, Henry asks the Duchess about her feelings for Dorian. She isn't sure how she feels. They banter about it, both flirting with equal wit. Meanwhile, Dorian is battling with his demonic thoughts. He orders his servant to pack his things, and he sends a letter to Lord Henry telling him that he is going to visit his doctor in town.

Just then, the head keeper of Dorian's grounds comes to see him, to ask Dorian about the man who has been killed. It seems that the man was a stranger to the house, a sailor, and his body, rough-looking, is resting in one of the stables. At the description, Dorian starts. He orders the keeper to meet him at the stable and rushes to the farm to see the body. When the face of the body is revealed, Dorian sees for certain that the body is Jim Vane's. Tears of relief come to his eyes.

Henry's ad Dutchess's insensitive monstrosity really come to the surface here, joking about murder. Of course, Dorian has actually committed murder, and the awfulness of having done so makes it hard for him to even hear the word. Dorian is not just a face – we are reminded that his body functions and weakens as any other and he is not the portrait he looks on the surface.



Henry and the Duchess are of the same breed, they cover real feelings with artfulness of expression, leaving us unsure of who they are influenced by. But though Dorian is described in superficial terms like a picture or an object, it is he who hides deeper turmoil.



Jim Vane's death frees Dorian. There is no longer any threat hanging over him. He is free to live as he pleases, to enjoy life with the abandon he always has. Jim was one of the last examples of a natural person to be found in the novel, and his death is therefore . Jim's roughness and decency are signs of his depth where all other characters are motivated by shows and appearances, and his being mistaken for a hare and killed in a hunt also indicates his animal, natural character and how that kind of reality is shot down by Dorian's superficial society.



CHAPTER 19

After a stay in the country, Dorian comes back to London and tells Henry he has resolved to be a good person. Henry says it is easy to be good in the country; there is none of the corruption and interest of the city. Dorian is certain of his resolution though. Henry asks how the turn came about and Dorian tells him that he performed a good deed. A girl had fallen in love with him; a simple girl of a lower class, and Dorian cut off the romance before it went too far, saving her from Sybil's fate. Henry responds that the girl is certainly heartbroken and will probably never be satisfied again. Dorian has not saved her at all. Dorian is hurt at Henry's constant jesting at the most serious tragedies.

Just as Sybil symbolized for Dorian the characters of Shakespeare's plays, the poor country girl that falls in love with him now is a symbol of his mistake with Sybil. The qualities he finds in her, the low class, the devotion, all echo Sybil's character, but without the acting. The girl represents a chance to erase the curse of art imitating life. But, ironically, in this attempt to make up for Sybil's death—to be good—Dorian repeats his mistake. Neither Dorian nor Henry understand that the way to have responded was not to cut things off before they began, but to return her love. They can't understand such a thing, and so Dorian can't see any way to be good.



The topic turns to Basil's disappearance, which has now been noted by the police and talked about for some time, though no answers have surfaced. As well as the rumors about Basil, the city has had many other scandals, like the suicide of Alan Campbell. Dorian asks Henry what he thinks has happened to Basil, but even for his once dear friend, Henry is quite heartless, seeming more concerned about death itself than Basil's in particular.

Henry asks Dorian to play the piano for him. His wife recently left him for a pianist, he notes. Dorian asks about the rumors of murder that are following Basil's case but Henry finds the whole topic quite dull. He says that the only time he found Basil interesting was when he confessed his love for Dorian all those years ago.

Dorian asks Henry how he would react if he told him that he had murdered Basil. Henry says that Dorian could never do such a thing. Murderers are low down people. He understands the mind of the murderer – for the low class seeker of sensations; murder must be a lot like art. He can't see Basil meeting such a romantic end. At least, he thinks, he'd passed his artistic peak. Henry goes over to Dorian's exotic parrot and starts to stroke it. Reminded of Basil's career, he wonders what has become of the portrait, which Dorian told him once had gone missing. Dorian says that he never really liked it anyway.

Dorian likens the **painting** to a quote about "a face without a heart". This reminds Henry of another quote he heard in the street, and he asks Dorian what happens to man who gains the world in exchange for his soul. Dorian tells him not to joke about the soul, it is the most serious organ, quite real, he believes. Henry responds that it must be an illusion, if Dorian believes in it so certainly.

Lord Henry tells Dorian to lighten up and play him a song on the piano. Henry is full of the joy that he always finds in human experience. The unending charm and youth of Dorian's looks astonishes him anew tonight. He seems genuinely happy when he thinks about what a blessed life Dorian is having. Life, he says, is dictated by uncontrollable sensations, the passing scent of a once-smelt flower can give one the deepest nostalgia or terror, but the world is in Dorian's favor. His life has occurred like a work of art.

Dorian's influence and the consequences of his actions have spread through the city and beyond. To Henry, who cares only about the surface of things, Basil's death isn't much different from Basil having just gone away. Henry doesn't much care about Basil the person; just Basil the experience. And you don't mourn an experience.



Lord Henry treats his entire life as if he is an audience member at a play. He cares only about what interests him and does not get involved. He does not even seem to care that his wife left him, though one can infer from her choice of an artist, a piano player, that she was looking for someone with a little more passion.



Henry remains fooled by Dorian's beautiful surface, taking it to indicate a high-class inside as well. For Henry, art, even when discussing murder and the loss of a friend, is the mark by which all events and personalities and values are judged. But Henry sees the enjoyment of art as passive—not a quest to experience low-class senses but an amused willingness to watch others in their passionate struggles through the world. Dorian never had that reserve.



Here the twists and turns of logic regarding the illusion or reality of art come to a head. At times like these, Lord Henry's comments are so fitting to Dorian's paranoia that he seems to have some kind of fated or supernatural awareness of Dorian's secrets, but this just shows how precisely and wholly Dorian has been influenced by him.



There is a huge gap between Lord Henry and Dorian. The Dorian he thinks he knows is still full of glee, still incredibly lucky and probably in Henry's mind, still fascinated by his fancy ideas and philosophies. But the illusion of art is upon him. Dorian exists for him in a two-dimensional plane, unable to escape from his initial, superficial pose as a beautiful object.



Dorian maintains that he will alter his ways, but Henry does not listen and suggests they go to the club. Dorian responds that he wants instead to go to bed early. He blames Henry for poisoning him with the book he had lent him in boyhood, but Henry claims that art cannot act in such a way, it disables action and merely reflects things back to the viewer. Uncaring, Henry tells Dorian to meet him tomorrow and they will visit one of their friends.

Once again Lord Henry attests to the passive nature of experiencing art. It is this passivity that saves Henry from his own philosophies. Henry would never murder anyone, because Henry never does anything. He just watches and enjoys. But Dorian, transformed into art, tried to live like art, and it has destroyed him.



CHAPTER 20

Dorian walks home. Through the streets of London, he remembers the places he has been and the awful things he has done in them. Every pleasure seems lost to him. He wonders, as he returns home, whether Henry's words are to be believed. He wants desperately to be able to retrieve the innocent feelings of his boyhood. He deeply regrets the fateful wish he made to the portrait. How wonderful it would be now to receive each punishment for each sin in a natural form of justice.

Dorian's thoughts have come full circle. He realizes that a life devoid of consequences, a life lived outside of time and cause and affect, leads only to monstrosity. There is no natural restraint, and in taking each small step, each one leading to the next, you lose who you originally were. He wants to live not as something eternal, but as something natural.



Dorian picks up a mirror that Henry gave him once, and remembers the words of an old lover, that the beauty of his features has rewritten history. Dorian loathes his looks now. Youth, which had once seemed so perfect, seems like his enemy. He cannot allow himself to think of the past. The threat of his crimes being discovered is over and he resolves again to start a new kind of life and perhaps if he lives well enough, the portrait will gradually return to its natural state.

The mirror shows the exact copy of the portrait when it was first painted, Dorian frozen in the peak of his beauty. Art is supposed to reflect life, but only at a moment in time. It cannot be life. With his realizations Dorian hopes he can change his ways...



Full of hope for this new possibility, Dorian rushes upstairs to the picture. As he removes the cloth, the old terror returns, full force. The figure is even uglier than before. Dorian now doubts his new resolve to do good, thinking that perhaps even these things come from vanity. As he becomes more and more distressed, he notices that **red** stains have grown on the **painting**, like blood. He considers making a confession. His own motives now seem completely unclear to him.

...but the picture is now so ugly, indicating such a rotten state of his soul that Dorian despairs. He cannot imagine how he can get back to what he was. Just as a normal man cannot regain his youth, Dorian cannot regain his innocence.



In a frenzy, Dorian grabs the murder-weapon. He wants to kill the **painting** that has destroyed his life. As he strikes, a terrible cry is heard by his servants. The terrified servants manage to get into the room through a balcony and find their master dead on the floor, hideous and old, barely identifiable and a portrait hanging on the wall, of a beautiful young man.

Ultimately, Dorian sees the only way to eliminate the sins marring his portrait, his soul, is to destroy it. This is, once again, a selfish action, and the easy way out. The hard way would have been to fight off his despair and try do good, over and over, for decades. But Dorian instead wants to destroy his sins, and blames the portrait for his own weakness. And so he stabs his own soul, essentially, and kills himself.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Parfitt, Georgina. "The Picture of Dorian Gray." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 17 Sep 2013. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Parfitt, Georgina. "The Picture of Dorian Gray." LitCharts LLC, September 17, 2013. Retrieved April 21, 2020.
<https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-picture-of-dorian-gray>.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Penguin Classics. 2003.

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Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. New York: Penguin Classics. 2003.