

*"He who stands most remote from his age
is he who mirrors it best." – Oscar Wilde*



The Portrait

The Dorian Gray Case

Dramatization of the novel and life of Oscar Wilde

by Christian Lanciai (2014,
into English 2019)

The characters:

Victor, butler
Basil Hallward, painter
Lord Henry Wotton
Dorian Gray
Sybil Vane
her mother
her father
the Marquess
Lord Albert Savile, his son

Doctor Jekyll
Lady Windermere
Attorney Edward Carson
Grace Gray
Sir Edward Clarke
Robbie Ross
Sherlock Holmes

The action is in London and Paris towards the end of the 19th century.

Act I scene 1. A sumptuous workshop of an artist
The butler, somewhat troubled, enters before Henry, who has forced his way in without removing his hat.

Butler I couldn't stop him, Sir.

Basil (at his easel at work) Didn't I tell you not to come and bother me!

Henry But my dear Basil, if you so insist on secrecy about a portrait, then that portrait must raise my curiosity!

Basil I am just at the point of finishing it! Your presence imperils the final touch!

Henry Then you make me even more curious. Who is the object? *(inspects the portrait)* Never saw him before. Who is it? Should I know him?

Basil Well aware of the flower of his youth I was offered the confidential commission of trying to eternalize his youth before the appearance of the first withering signs.

Henry And you have succeeded. No wonder you wished to keep it for yourself, but who is he? Such a consummate male creation makes me grieve that I don't know who he is.

Basil He recently reached his twenties.

Henry But he looks like eighteen.

Basil Yes, there is something special about his looks, which made me the more anxious to work on it in peace. He has a certain feature which is unique and gives him an illusion of beauty that never can age or perish. There is something magic about him, and that's what I wanted to capture in the portrait by any means.

Henry If he looks like that in reality you have succeeded.

Basil That's the magic thing. That's how unreal he is in reality. *(A door opens and Dorian enters.)*

Dorian Pardon my late arrival.

Basil You are just in time to bring your portrait to fulfilment.

Dorian You are the painter of it, Basil.

Basil No, I am its medium. It's you who have given it to us. May I present Lord Henry Wotton, an old friend of mine. I was hoping that he for once would not come here and disturb, but he inevitable always does. He is like that.

Dorian A friend of Basil's is a friend of mine. *(politely greeting him)*

Henry I must congratulate you to your unusual portrait.

Dorian I am innocent. I did not ask for it.

Henry Didn't you order it?

Dorian I mean my looks. I didn't ask for that, and it has persecuted me all my life. It's not very pleasant to constantly be admired for one's superficial qualities.

Henry Usually one's looks are a mirror of one's real spiritual qualities.

Dorian Don't flatter me.

Henry I am not flattering. I am absolutely casual.

Basil Would you please take your position, Dorian. We have to finish your portrait.

Dorian Of course. *(takes his position, posing in a chair on the platform)*

Basil If Henry's presence disturbs you he surely will not mind leaving.

Dorian Not at all. Then I have someone else than you to talk with at the same time.

Henry I thank you for your grace, my friend. So you were always troubled by your exceptionally good looks?

Dorian Honestly speaking, it has been cumbersome. My mother spoilt me and protected me against life instead of opening the doors of it for me.

Henry So you know nothing about life?

Dorian I am beginning to learn.

Henry In what other ways have you been troubled by your handsomeness?

Dorian I never met with any resistance or adversity anywhere.

Henry But then you only have to please yourself.

Dorian There are scruples.

Henry Are there?

Dorian You have to take others into consideration.

Henry Do you? Why?

Dorian To avoid hurting or offending someone.

Henry You don't mean to say, that you with your good looks never happened to tread on the toes of a lady by the natural discrepancy of the sexes?

Dorian I never sought the company of women from my natural shyness.

Henry Then you have much to teach me.

Dorian Even Basil here has been eager about my never making a fool of myself. I would need an instructor to show me the way out to life.

Henry I immediately volunteer.

Basil I must warn you, Dorian. He is an incorrigible card who would gladly seduce any youth by his intellectual superiority.

Dorian That's exactly what I need, some spiritual mentor.

Henry I promise to be gentle in handling you.

Dorian If only I feel safe I would dare anything, but I think I would feel safe under your guidance.

Basil Take no chances, Dorian.

Dorian Does Lord Henry have any stain or anything on his conscience?

Henry No.

Basil But he is irresponsible and lives only for his pleasures.

Dorian Isn't that rather natural?

Henry Indeed, that's the only natural thing. Only if you are out of money you'll have any reason to work.

Basil That's the difference between us, Lord Henry. I work without money for the sake of my work, which is my life's highest pleasure and enjoyment. Without my work my life would be worthless. But the pleasures you are living for, Henry, are only casual and superficial.

Henry My highest pleasure is to study and associate with people. I admit it's contrary to any work, but still I enjoy myself.

Dorian It's something like that I have to learn, coming out and enjoying life, to meet with other people than myself and my very narrow circle of friends.

Henry You have a world to discover, my friend.

Dorian Bring me to it, so that I may see it!

Henry With pleasure.

Basil There. The portrait is finished.

Henry Just don't try to kid me that you struggled with this portrait in your solitude just for your own sake. Our friend Dorian in his favoured position would surely prove himself decent enough to pay you handsomely for it.

Basil Not one shilling. That was my condition.

Henry You can't be serious! But why then did you paint it at all? Surely you mean to present such an outstanding portrait in your exhibitions?

Basil Never in my life. I painted it only for Dorian in gratitude for his having lent me his looks and given me the opportunity to eternalize them. I am obliged to repay that loan to him by means of his portrait. What he will do with it is his own affair.

Henry I never heard anything like it. You must both realize the obvious thing that this is a most unusual portrait, like a kind of male Mona Lisa.

Basil Exactly. That's why I painted it. Neither did Leonardo da Vinci ever separate from his Mona Lisa but kept her only to himself.

Henry And you asked us not to flatter you, Dorian. Could anything beat Basil's flattery?

Dorian You amuse me both. I thank you for the portrait, Basil, but I refuse to accept it without a fair compensation, which you must accept.

Basil I will have to accept it, then.

Henry At last a human trait in you. Still it's unlike you to even consider painting for nothing. Can you afford it?

Basil No.

Henry Then this portrait must really be something quite exceptional in your production.

Basil It is.

Henry Why? Can you elaborate?

Basil I will try to offer you an explanation. When I started painting Dorian it was as if another force than my own took charge of my creative power leading it on new paths unknown to me. Call it magic if you want, but that's how I felt it, and

that's the word that comes closest to the truth. Dorian is a most uncommonly well-shaped physical being for being only physical, there is something spiritual and almost positively uncanny about his being, which he himself takes for granted as nothing noticeable to bother about, but which must make a deep impression on an observant creative artist, who can't leave it alone without making something of it taking it under special treatment, if not for other reasons then at least to find out the wonder of the matter.

Henry You seem to be unique, Dorian. How does it feel?

Dorian I had to get used to it from the beginning.

Henry Don't you feel privileged or chosen in a different way than ordinary people?

Dorian To some degree, perhaps, but at the same time I feel unaccountable for the problem, if there is a problem.

Henry Is it a problem?

Dorian Not yet.

Basil And I hope it won't be. When I am finished with you, Dorian, you will return to a normal life and not at all differ from the throng of ordinary dandies and loiterers in London but like all the others make the best of it, make a normal career with success and an exemplary family with a virtuous wife and sweet children, which you then will have the opportunity to spoil like you yourself were spoiled. My portrait will in no way become a bother to you or anything to feel special about.

Henry Hear, hear. Your future is settled, Dorian. You will be a nobody like all the others.

Dorian Honestly speaking, I don't mind.

Henry Like Basil states it so humdrumly, it's just to make the best of it and enjoy yourself as much as possible on the way down before it's too late.

Dorian You will both be me guides on the path of virtue as well as of vice.

Henry A ready and teachable boy, isn't he, Basil?

Basil So far he has done well.

Henry Now tell me the truth, Basil. You would never have fallen so deep in love with the portrait if you hadn't been in love with him.

Basil Platonic love in that case.

Henry That's enough. Is that enough for you as well, Dorian?

Dorian Absolutely. I never asked for anything more of anyone. Neither am I prepared to give anything more to anyone.

Basil He is clean, Henry. Never try to sully him.

Henry With what? My knowledge? My experience? My contacts? My pleasures? They are all as untarnished as he.

Basil The only thing you could sully him with would eventually be your influence.

Henry Is it that bad?

Basil It's not bad, but it invites licence.

Henry And is that so bad?

Dorian I trust you completely, Lord Henry, simply because you are a wise and experienced man who always knows what he is doing. That is at least my impression. Basil also knows that, but he is careful. In your company I would dare to be less careful.

Henry That gives me pleasure. I welcome you and invite you.

Basil You had my warning, Henry. Don't spoil him.

Dorian I am already spoiled enough and probably couldn't be more so.

Henry There you are, Basil. I am incapable of corrupting him.

Basil I hope so.

Henry But you have made such a portrait of him of such ideal beauty, yes, you have to admit that you have idealized him, that it could seduce anyone. That's where I see the greatest risk of his eventual approaching perdition.

Dorian I don't.

Basil I hope so indeed, because it is your portrait. You will live with it all your life, if you please.

Dorian You made it so oversensually alive in your idealizing me that I will almost fear to show it to people. The risk is that I will lock it up in a secret room in the attic.

Henry A splendid idea. Then no one can be seduced by it except yourself.

Basil Well, it isn't really as remarkable as all that. It's still the artist who creates and paints it, and whoever it depicts, he puts more of his soul into it than the object, simply since only his own soul is available.

Henry He has fooled you, Dorian. It isn't at all of you but of himself.

Dorian Still anyone can see that it is me.

Henry Thereby the deception is complete. He has masked himself in your looks.

Basil There could actually be some truth in it.

Dorian Anyway it is a successful portrait.

Henry That remains to be seen.

Dorian What do you mean?

Henry Your artist just admitted that he put some black magic into it.

Basil You are just pulling our legs, Henry, like you always do, but it's only pleasant, since you are never mean but only goodnatureedly ironic. Never take him too seriously, Dorian. He thrives on being as casual as possible in as sophisticated a way as possible to make it seem less casual than it is.

Dorian Thanks for your warnings, Basil. I promise to never be afraid of him.

Henry It's more likely the artist of black magic here that you should be wary of with his secret manipulations of your portrait. Who knows what demon could play what game behind the frame of this perfect beauty of superficiality?

Basil Some sherry, gentlemen?

Henry That's about time, Basil. Why did you wait so long?

Basil I apologise. I never drink when I am working, and I forgot that my guests are always thirstier than myself.

Henry The guest's privilege. The host saves to let the guest indulge.

Basil (*wants to pour a glass to Dorian*)

Henry How much can you take, Dorian?

Dorian Moderately.

Henry Take care then, Basil, not to make him drunk.

Dorian I am sorry, but I never got drunk.

Henry Then you missed an important part of life. You must let us compensate you for that. Pour him a full glass, Basil.

Basil I warn you again, Henry. Don't try to ruin him.

Henry I believe that would unfortunately be impossible. Shall we make a bet? I don't think he will be corruptible whatever I tempt him with.

Basil Don't try.

Dorian On the contrary, Basil. He may try his best. I don't think he will succeed either. Are you ready to bet against it?

Basil I am serious, gentlemen. Dorian must not be debased.

Henry But you already insured him against all possible corruption by eternalizing his youth and purity in the portrait.

Basil It's just a portrait.

Henry Don't make it a trifle. A work of art is always sacred, and by consummating a work of art of him you made him sacred. So he couldn't possibly be corrupted.

Dorian I accept the bet. Try to corrupt me by any means, and I bet that it will not succeed.

Henry I accept. Where shall we begin? Shall I lead you to a brothel?

Basil If there is anything that never will work on Dorian, it is commonness.

Dorian You know me, Basil. I am immune against all vulgarity.

Henry You must come from an exceptionally noble family, Dorian, if you succeeded in developing such an allergy.

Dorian Not at all. On the contrary. My mother eloped with a low and petty officer, for whom my cruel grandfather arranged a duel to have him killed by.

Basil His mother was Margaret Devereux.

Henry Margaret Devereux! The legendary beauty! Who died so young!

Dorian Yes, that was my mother. If I saw her at all I have no memory of it, except of an overwhelmingly beautiful and motherly soul.

Henry Poor boy! Born motherless!

Basil With a murdered father.

Henry No wonder that you yourself are endowed with such a rare beauty that a painter must find it ideal.

Basil The higher developed beauty, the more it is vulnerable and should not be used except by art.

Henry You are right. How is it, Dorian? Are you delicately brittle? Do you really dare to accept our bet?

Dorian I need to learn more about life. So far I only experienced an overly protected existence, since all my childhood and adolescence were wrapped up in cotton. I must accept such a bet as the chance of my life.

Henry But how sensitive are you? Is your beauty brittle or hardy? Are you easily shocked?

Dorian Not that I know. I was never shocked yet.

Henry Yes, I think you can manage and face just about anything, if only you are a bit hardened first. It's the hardening that is missing, and I would like to give it to you, if Basil doesn't mind.

Basil I can't provide any impediment.

Henry Then we are all agreed. Let's go to the theatre tonight.

Basil That sounds better than a brothel.

Dorian I trust you completely, Lord Henry, and subject myself entirely to your mercy or guidance.

Henry It could be both.

Basil Some more sherry?

Henry Fill up the glass of our disciple first. He needs to learn some relish.

(They continue their pleasant communion deliciously enjoying their sherry.)

Scene 2. Backstage.

Mother But are you sure of him, my darling?

Sybil How could I be otherwise? He is the only polite person I know.

Father The fault is ours who made you grow up among scum.

Sybil No, father, it is not your fault at all. You did as well as you could, and it was not your fault that your circumstances weren't any better. You taught me well indeed, that the service of art could never be just a pleasant dance only.

Mother But we wanted so much to offer you something better.

Sybil I know, mother, and that is your honour and glory, due to you indeed for always trying to do the best for me according to your means. No one can take that away from you. I couldn't have had better parents.

Father Who gave you this toilsome and miserable life in a poor theatre, when you could have become a great actress, if you had only had slightly better contacts and been born to a better theatre.

Sybil It's art that means something, father. Nothing else matters, for if art just keeps on a high level, it will become the highest thing of all.

Mother Very true. Only because of that we survived.

Father But is he really not just a fortune hunter, who is only looking for some fun with a simpler girl of lower class, whom he then just will drop after using her?

Sybil His presents and ways of courting couldn't be anything but honest.

Mother The risk is that you look too much up to him. No matter how much upper class and fine manners he displays, he is still just an ordinary human being.

Sybil No, he is not.

Father Aha! So that's what it's all about! He is finer than everyone else and is completely alien from the mob!

Sybil Yes, that's what he is.

Mother How, Sybil?

Sybil He is a gentleman.

Mother That's just what we wonder that you can be so sure about.
(*A prudent knock on the door.*)

Sybil Now he is here! Now you have to leave me alone with my knight in shining armour!

Mother We can't be so impolite as not to bid him welcome.

Sybil Of course, mother. And if you see a little more of him, you shall also be convinced about his honesty and purity. (*gets up and opens the door of her lodge to Dorian.*) Welcome, Sir.

Dorian (enters) How many times have I asked you not to call me Sir?

Mother (cringing) We hope our daughter gave you a worthy performance this evening.

Dorian Of course she did. That's why I never tire of coming. She surpasses herself every time.

Father Still I must apologise for our poor resources, that cannot make the direction and stage requirements any better.

Dorian You do as well as you can, and it's better than most more opulent theatres. You make at least a true theatre that doesn't just think of the box office.

Father You are right, Sir. We are quite happy if only it adds up.

Sybil You may go now, mother and father. I think Dorian wishes to be alone with me.

Dorian Not at all. I am happy to have them there. It's perfectly fitting that they happen to be here at this very moment, when I have a particularly sensitive message to bring.

Father Whatever could that be, Sir?

Dorian My good Sir, I have the great honour of requesting your daughter's hand in marriage.

Father Pardon me, Sir, but aren't you somewhat rash in this?

Dorian Do you have any objection?

Mother It's just a bit sudden, and I think Sibyl feels the same.

Dorian I am quite certain about it, and if there is no objection from my worshipped princess, I couldn't possibly understand any objection from her parents.

Father We are thinking of you, Sir. You are after all from the top society, while we belong to the bottom, and then it doesn't help much no matter how honest we are, for if you go ahead with an engagement to a wench like our daughter you will risk getting all your own society against you.

Dorian Don't you think I am aware of such possibilities? But I stand alone and am free and can do whatever I like, having the right to completely ignore whatever eventual snobs could think of my private love life.

Mother If you really are serious about marrying here, we could naturally have nothing against it.

Dorian That's what I mean. How about you, Sir? *(to the father)* Any objections?

Father It seems like we have to take the risk that you really know what you are doing. Come, Doris. Let's leave the young couple alone. I think Sybil now wants him for herself.

Mother Then it's only for us to be grateful and congratulate. Come, Gilbert. *(the parents leave.)*

Sybil (can't really believe it) Are you really serious?

Dorian Why shouldn't I be? I adore you. You are a very talented actress. I believe in you. You could go very far on stage. You can handle all Shakespeare's most difficult female parts with excellence.

Sybil That was before you entered my life. Now I will have something else to think about.

Dorian I will bring my friends here for them to see you act. They will then be able to brag about you to all society just as I do. They will be impressed and give us the verdict, that I made the best possible choice.

Sybil My fairy tale knight, ever since you entered my life it has changed into a dream, which I have some difficulty getting accustomed to, but still it must be true. I have found it difficult to believe in you, and it hasn't been very easy to convince my parents either, but now I am convinced.

Dorian That's all we wanted. Come into my arms, my love. I will give you a better life than you ever dared to dream of.

Sybil What kind of friends is it you wish to invite to my acting?

Dorian My two best friends, an artist and a lord. The artist has made a portrait of me, which isn't quite of this world.

Sybil You are not quite of this world.

Dorian Yes, I am actually, but I seem to find it constantly harder to convince my associates about it. But from now on it's enough if only you are convinced.

Sybil I am almost convinced.

Dorian Come then and give me a kiss, so that I could believe your conviction.

Sybil (kissing him in his lap with her arms about him)

Dorian There you are. Now even I am convinced. What are you acting tomorrow?

Sybil Juliet.

Dorian That's perfect. My friends will love you like myself.

Sybil I hope so, Dorian. I don't wish to disappoint anyone.

Dorian I believe that's impossible. *(They kiss again.)*

Sybil If only this moment could last forever!

Dorian A dangerous wish in dramatic circumstances.

Sybil Why? Couldn't it be possible?
Dorian That was the wish of Faust from the devil.
Sybil It's not an evil wish. Was it granted?
Dorian He thought so but deceived himself.
Sybil How so? What happened?
Dorian Even he loved but too much and lost her but still dared to insist on his wish and almost ended up in hell for his persistence but was saved in the last moment.
Sybil There you are. It could be real.
Dorian Yes, it could actually become real. And I have no deal with the devil, as far as I know, so you have nothing to fear.
Sybil I will always believe in you.
Dorian And I will always love you. *(They kiss again.)*

Scene 3. A theatre box.

Enter the three friends making themselves comfortable with high expectations of the evening's performance.

Henry I never thought anything could surprise me, but you certainly have taken me by surprise, my dear boy. She must then be something very special.
Dorian So she is.
Basil You extolled her so emphatically that the risk is we must get disappointed.
Dorian I don't think you will be. That risk is practically eliminated.
Henry You seem quite sure of your conviction.
Dorian I *am* sure of it. Or else I would not love her. Or else I would not be able to propose to her.
Basil Attention. The play begins. Our nerves are brought to supreme tension.
Henry I can only really hope that you know what you are doing, *Dorian*.
Dorian Or else I would not do it.
(The curtain rises, and spontaneous applause is heard.)
You hear how popular she is already.
Henry (impressed) You are right. She really is a beauty.
Basil I was worried, *Dorian*, that you had been blinded by some youth infatuation or something like that, but fortunately I now see that my worries were unfounded.
Henry But can she act?
Dorian Or else she would not be given parts like Juliet and Imogen.
Henry The other actors are pathetic in her presence. What kind of a lot are they? Discharged cabaret stars that lost their voices?
Dorian I agree they are somewhat past their best season.
Henry Past their season? They have survived their own age. They should all be pensioned.
Dorian They are not quite that old.

Henry But well above middle age. Romeo and Juliet are supposed to be around sixteen-seventeen years.

Dorian At least Juliet then is of the right age.

Henry Yes, but she sticks out like a swan among wing-broken crows.

Basil I am sorry, Dorian, but she has really got herself into bad company. Romeo's pot belly is out of rhyme with his character, and his credibility is lost.

Basil It's not the poor old withered Romeo you should watch but Sybil.

Henry (*feeling more and more awkward about the situation*) I am sorry, Dorian, but even she has seen better days. She has a beautiful presence on stage, but she doesn't believe a word of what she says.

Dorian I agree that she is better as Rosalinda.

Basil She speaks as if she didn't bothered the least about what she is saying, as if Shakespeare's unsurpassed verses were only empty formulas. This is bad art, Dorian.

Henry And it's getting worse. Mercutio is no good as a drivelling clown. And Juliet's parents! They seem to come directly from East End. Romeo is grotesque. No wonder Juliet doesn't believe a word of what she says. No one could ever love such a preposterous old Romeo. He would fit Falstaff's costume better.

Dorian That's enough, my friends. This is only getting more painful. Shall we leave?

Basil For your sake we would gladly suffer to the bitter end.

Henry We know anyway already that they are all fortunately going to die.

Dorian I really must apologise. She has been so much better than this, yes, I admit it, as excellent as she now is miserable.

Basil I believe you, Dorian. Such a beauty must have been able to act so much better than this.

Henry I think I understand her. She is potty about you, Dorian, and no wonder, that's the only explanation, and her intoxication by you has gone to her head, so that she forgets to act and instead just flows out in affected emptiness.

Basil She is really much affected. Shakespeare's Juliet is natural, but this one is completely unnatural and gives the impression of being exactly the opposite of what she is supposed to be.

Dorian Unfortunately I have to agree with you. Instead of acting her part she acts her self.

Henry We are really sorry about this fiasco, Dorian.

Dorian You don't have to suffer to the end. We know unfortunately that they will all rise again after their decease.

Henry You mean, that you won't get rid of her.

Dorian I would never back up bad theatre. So far she only acted brilliantly well. This I will not be able to support.

Henry Do you intend to turn her down now only for having flopped on stage?

Basil Even the audience is dissatisfied. More and more are leaving.

Henry And she doesn't seem to care.

Dorian An actor shouldn't.

Henry You are right. An actor has no choice. She must be consistent in her part until the end no matter how much it goes against her. The problem here is that it's not the part that is bad but the actress.

Dorian You had better leave. I don't wish to torture you any more.

Basil And we have no wish to torture you by our presence under the scourge of our constantly more pungent criticism.

Henry We don't wish to feel urged to throw lettuce, tomatoes and eggs at your beloved.

Basil Come, Henry. Let's leave him alone with the unlucky turn of his love business.

Henry Whatever you do, Dorian, don't do anything more stupid than you have done already.

Dorian You are most amiable. Well, the situation is not your fault. You are excused. But I have to stay. Duty compels me to go backstage afterwards.

Henry Good luck, Dorian. Our condolences.

Basil Don't go too far, Henry. We may all but hurt him.

Henry That's why we had better leave before it gets worse. Pardon us, Dorian.
(*They break up.*)

Dorian You are excused. (*Henry and Basil leave, leaving Dorian alone to suffer.*)

Scene 4. Backstage (like scene 2)

Sybil in front of the mirror normalizing herself when Dorian enters.

Sybil (cheerfully, gets up to embrace him) My fairy tale prince!

Dorian (tersely) Not any more.

Sybil What has happened?

Dorian You made my friends disappointed.

Sybil But I haven't even met them!

Dorian You knew they would be with me in my box tonight. You knew they would come here with me afterwards, for me to introduce you to them as my becoming bride. And still you ruined the show.

Sybil Ruined? In what way?

Dorian Sybil, what has happened? Yesterday you were brilliant and irresistible as Rosalinda, and the full house was jubilantly with you. Today you made a miserable Juliet who rambled her verses like an insensitive wound up automat, and not only my friends were disturbed, but almost the entire audience left before the play was finished.

Sybil Did they? I didn't notice. One or other, perhaps, but many remained.

Dorian Yes, the drunkards and the snorers and some who stayed to keep warm. That's not theatre, Sybil. You can't act any longer. What has happened?

Sybil It must be love.

Dorian What do you mean?

Sybil You are the great happy fortune in my life, and I have been completely absorbed by it. Nothing else matters any more. Suddenly I see reality as it is, my

parents as the worn out mummies they are, our terribly pathetic artists, our whole troupe is a team of dilettantes, they are all grotesque caricatures of actors who didn't quit in time, while I alone am young and have a future, but no longer with them in this mothly theatre but with you in a better world than these slums.

Dorian But your art, Sibyl! You must not forget your art for all that!

Sibyl What art? What does it matter any more, now that I have become a woman? No, it's real life that now has become my reality. Art and make-believe, the lies and cursed false poetry can drop as dead as they are.

Dorian No, Sibyl, art is sacred and demands devoted service!

Sibyl Are you trying to make it a religion?

Dorian No, but it must be beautiful! It must be aesthetically accomplished and consist of beauty, or else it is no art! But you have dragged it down and vulgarized it into cheap dilettantism!

Sybil A theatre company consists of co-operation. I can't co-operate with these people any more. They have sunk below my level, I see through their common cheapness and don't know them any more. Therefore I cannot act with them any more. Can't you forget me as an actress and take me for what I am?

Dorian But without your art you are nothing. Your magic is lost, your inspiration is gone, your power is no longer convincing, and you are completely indifferent to the wonderful poetry you are supposed to speak with your heart and soul, as if you didn't mean a word of the most beautiful poetry in the world.

Sybil Can't you still take me for what I am, as your love and as the one who loves you?

Dorian But without your artistic magic you are nothing, Sybil. You become a zero, and who wants a zero? Least of all an accomplished aesthetic like myself, who has demands on life and who can't live without beauty. Without your acting magic, Sybil, I will starve in your presence and can't bear with you, like also my friends couldn't stand your poor inability on stage tonight. Bad art is no art, Sybil, and we aesthetes have nothing else to live for than art.

Sybil Do you mean to say that it is over?

Dorian I can't go on under the new conditions, Sybil. I proposed to a flowering beauty in the service of art, but if you abandon the ideal world of art to prefer trivial reality, my proposal can't be valid any more.

Sybil So you ditch me.

Dorian I can't force myself to a love that has died.

Sybil Was it then as fleeting and unreliable as a passing Mayfly?

Dorian It's you who have lost your wings. I am sorry and apologise if it was my proposal that made you so drunk that you forgot your art.

Sybil You became everything for me just so that I could lose you.

Dorian I could say the same about you.

Sybil And your friends were not just jealous that you fell for someone like me?

Dorian What do you mean with "someone like me"?

Sybil You know what I mean. No pedigree, no background, no income, no position, nothing except this poor environment.

Dorian I loved you for your art, Sybil. Your poverty and position meant nothing.

Sybil (looks away) Then stick to your snob world from now on and leave us poor church rats alone.

Dorian Sybil!

Sybil You had better leave, if you don't wish to hurt me even more.

Dorian Sybil! *(at a loss, but realizes there is nothing more for him to do and leaves. When he is gone, Sybil leans over her make-up table with her face in her hands, crying bitterly.)* The prince of my dreams!

Act II scene 1. At Dorian's.

Dorian (enters, not in his best morning spirits) Any mail?

Victor Only the usual, Sir, and a letter.

Dorian From whom?

Victor It seems to be from Lord Henry Wotton.

Dorian Then it's just more indelicate jibes, as if yesterday's disappointment hadn't left me depressed enough. He has only one medicine to provide, which is acid.

Victor I leave it with you, Sir.

Dorian Do so. And leave me in peace, I have to think. *(Victor bows and leaves. Dorian advances to a mirror hanging beside the portrait.)*

I put you there to be able to compare myself and my changes with Basil's remarkable portrait. But I see no changes, in spite of yesterday's trauma. The battle has left you with no scars. You seem only somewhat tired and cast down, but I see no wrinkles or furrows or marks in your soul. But did I right? That's what haunts me. I could have hurt her more deeply than intended. In that case I have to make up for it. Yes, since I led her so far, I morally owe her a marriage. Or else the entire theatre will consider me a man of dishonour, and such a reputation would easily spread. I must apologise and retract everything. But what's the matter with the portrait? *(examines the portrait, never seen by the audience, more closely)* Could it be possible? Was that mean trait around the mouth there before? In that case I never observed it. The portrait couldn't possibly change by itself. It was painted specifically to save me in my original shape. And still I think the portrait gives a more accurate reflection of my soul than the mirror. Could it be true? Could the mirror really only show my outward looks, while Basil in his portrait reached my soul, which now displays the changes therein hidden by the superficiality? Could an artist be that skilful? Or am I just imagining things and let myself be affected by some remorse?

(The bell. Enter Victor.)

Victor Lord Henry Wotton is here, Sir.

Dorian Show him in, by all means. *(hides the portrait and the mirror behind a screen. Enter Lord Henry.)* Welcome, Lord Henry.

Henry It comforts me to see you so fresh and fit.

Dorian Why shouldn't I be?

Henry I was afraid the events of yesterday might have affected you somewhat negatively and only came here in an effort to calm my worries. They seem to have been unfounded.

Dorian You never need to worry about me. I can always manage.

Henry (observes the unopened letter) Haven't you read my letter?

Dorian Should I have?

Henry Then you know nothing? And haven't seen the papers?

Dorian What is it I don't know? Is there a war on somewhere again?

Henry My dear boy, in the letter I expressly beg you not to read today's paper before I have had a word with you.

Dorian What then is the matter?

Henry I am very sorry, my boy, but Sybil Vane has committed suicide.

Dorian (shocked, takes a seat) Oh no!

Henry That was the reaction I was afraid of. But you have nothing to blame yourself for. When a person commits suicide it is entirely on her own responsibility. It's the ultimate way of taking charge of your own destiny.

Dorian But how did it happen?

Henry When she was to leave the theatre with her parents, she said she had forgotten something and returned. Then she never came home. They found her in her dressing-room probably poisoned by prussic acid or some other chemical available there.

Dorian I cannot deny my responsibility in this disaster. If I hadn't broken up our engagement, she would never have done it.

Henry We can't know that for sure. So you really broke the engagement?

Dorian Yes, and this morning I regretted it thoroughly and decided to immediately go back and apologise to her and marry her anyway, when you turned up.

Henry Then you can even less be held responsible for her death. A broken engagement is quite enough to make an immature and unstable girl lose her control and go to extreme measures, which she can't even be held responsible for herself. Remember, that there hardly ever was a suicide that the perpetrator did not regret. In all cases where the suicidal candidate returned from death, that was a fact.

Dorian You can't relieve me of her fate.

Henry You will get over it. It will naturally take some weeks, you will soon find even lovelier ladies of your own class, that will be more difficult to dupe and disgrace, and then you will marry and get settled with a stable family life like me and become like all the others. Nothing can recall Sybil Vane from death. Leave her alone where she is. That is all you can do.

Dorian I will never be able to forget her.

Henry That's another thing. Keep her by all means as a beautiful memory. She was after all an actual beauty. Pity that she would fall out of her part as a promising

actress. I regret that we didn't have the opportunity to see her before she lost her grip.

Dorian Henry, I am devastated. You must respect it. Therefore I must ask you to leave me.

Henry Of course, my friend. Nothing is more respectable than genuine sorrow, and it commends you that you feel it so deeply. I will leave at once.

Dorian What does Basil say?

Henry I don't know. I haven't met him. He will certainly be in touch, if you don't visit him.

Dorian Thank you, Henry, for your consideration. It was definitely better that I learnt it from you than from the paper.

Henry That's why I came with that hopeful premonition. Take it easy, my friend, and take care. (*leaves. Dorian, shattered, sits down.*)

Dorian That was the last thing that should have happened! That's the worst accusation she could have left me with. This will stick to my heart like a cruel wound from which I will never be able to recover. (*returns to the portrait and mirror and removes the screen, carefully comparing them.*) Yes, there is a trait in the portrait which is not seen in the mirror, no matter what faces I make. There is no shadow of her in my reflection, while I never could deny its palpability in the portrait. It's remarkably impossible but true. Well, it will remain my secret. No one else shall ever see the frightening weirdness of this portrait. (*puts up the screen again, and sits down with his head in his hands in deep brooding despair.*)

Scene 2. Lord Henry Wotton's beautiful home of excellent taste.

He is sitting lazily smoking when Basil suddenly breaks in.

Henry Basil! Impulsively without notice! What has happened?

Basil What have you done to him?

Henry To whom?

Basil You know very well. Our friend.

Henry Nothing. What has happened?

Basil Nothing, except that I don't recognize him any more. He has become like a stranger to me and almost seems no longer human, and I can only trace it to your influence.

Henry My dear Basil, will you not grant him his right to mature and develop? I assure you that I did nothing to influence him in any way. I allowed his wounds to heal by themselves without applying any kind of psychic or moral therapy, and as far as I can see he has completely recovered. He has forgotten her.

Basil And you call that healing? He has repressed her! He will never be able to forget her, and by repressing her, he only causes even greater harm to himself!

Henry He must have wounded you in some way to make you so upset. Tell me what has happened.

Basil Nothing has happened. I am just disturbed and upset by his callousness, and he associates with new ladies as if Sybil Vane never had existed.

Henry When a wound transforms into a scar you don't touch it but keep it protected against any friction. That's only natural.

Basil I looked him up recently after not having seen him for too long and asked him to come to sit for another portrait. He refused. I asked him to borrow the earlier portrait to use it for an exhibition in Paris, and then he was quite put off beside himself and refused to even let me see it. I have never seen him so upset. "But you told me that you never wanted to see it again and never wished to exhibit it!" he almost yelled at me, as if I had given him a mortal wound. That was never my intention, but he went even further. He threatened, that if I ever reminded him of his portrait again, he would regard our friendship as finished and cancelled.

Henry That's remarkable. And he gave no explanation?

Basil No explanation at all.

Henry Do you think he could have destroyed the portrait, ruining its beauty from the time before Sybil Vane?

Basil No, the portrait was there but concealed behind a screen, and when I wanted to see it, it seemed that he would rather murder me than let me come behind the screen to see it.

Henry Was then your portrait of him so special?

Basil Not at all. It was just an extremely true portrait of his finest beauty of youth.

Henry Have his looks changed after the Sybil Vane affair? Has he started to differ from the looks of the portrait?

Basil That's another odd thing, which you probably noticed yourself. Outwardly he seems completely untouched by the terrible personal tragedy, which nevertheless affected him crushingly deeply. He is as young and handsome and untarnished now as when I painted the portrait. You couldn't find a trace of sorrow or bitterness in his features by some wrinkle or furrow, and his smile is as light and candid as ever.

Henry I advise you to leave him alone. He is getting over it, and you won't let him. Instead of allowing his wounds to heal, you persist in reminding him. I know that he now courts a lovely young lady of his own class, and I hope he will marry her and get children and thoroughly settled. You must have heard about his literary success?

Basil I heard a rumour that he had published some poems.

Henry He is getting a reputation as a poet. Even Algernon Swinburne has taken him under his wings. Just let him carry on, and he will make a promising career in our literature. He has already started writing plays.

Basil I didn't know that.

Henry Now you know. I will keep you notified of his progress. We both grant him that, don't we?

Basil Of course. With all our hearts.

Henry How about some sherry? I am glad I could put you in higher spirits. When you get upset like that, you could do more harm than any good.

Basil I apologise. I was just worried about him.
Henry And you didn't recognise him, as he is becoming a new and better man. Be patient, and let him come to you. Don't disturb him, and sooner or later he will look you up again. He needs us both.
Basil Yes, he does.
Henry Here, my friend. All we need is a slight portion of patience and sherry. *(toasts him, and they drink. Basil is somewhat relieved, and they have a good time together.)*

Act III Scene 1. A salon.

Marquess Don't have anything to do with him. He is an unbearable snob who only imports corruption.
Albert How do you know?
Marquess After you having made his acquaintance and becoming too intimate with him, I made some enquiries with terrible results.
Albert You are probably the only one in London who can't appreciate him, and not to appreciate his deserts with his good wits and tastes is no good warrant of your own.
Marquess It's obvious that you have been influenced by him. I warn you. If you persist in associating with him, I must take measures.
Albert I am of age, father. You can't stop me.
Marquess If I can't stop you, I can stop him with what I know about him.
Albert Are you threatening me?
Marquess No, I am threatening him, if you don't let go of him.
Albert I refuse to let him go. He is the leading genius of London.
Marquess And its leading corruption. He is morally a plague.
Albert What is your evidence?
Marquess I can collect them when needed.
Albert You can only produce idle threats.
Marquess No, I am serious.
Albert I suggest that you are blinded by moral darkness. Ask doctor Jekyll here what he thinks about moral prejudice.
Jekyll What is it about?
Albert Dorian Grey, the brightest star and idol of London.
Jekyll Personally I rate other authors higher, like for instance Robert Louis Stevenson, but I must admit he is an interesting case from a moral point of view.
Marquess In what way?
Jekyll He has no morals, and in accordance with that, he allows himself any moral or immoral indulgence. He has no scruples morally, since he in the capacity of poet and aesthete considers himself above all moral standards and rules, and I must think he is right.

Marquess And what if he seduced your son and pulled him down into the bog of perdition, initiating him in criminal circles of prostitutes and homosexuals, would you then not object?

Jekyll I have no son and have no intention of getting any, since family life leads to partiality, which tends to colour and blow up prejudice like yours, my dear Marquess, to exaggerated and unreasonable proportions. Your moral blindness deprives you of all sense of proportion and perspective.

Marquess Without moral rules we have no society and no order, since moral looseness must lead to the dissolution of the nuclear family and society by anarchist irresponsibility. It will not do. Surely you must realize that as a responsible doctor?

Jekyll I maintain that you are exaggerating and allow your exaggerated concern for your son's welfare to make your common sense derail and get lost, drowning in the moral fanaticism that blinds you.

Albert Hear! Hear!

Marquess Then you are as corrupted to the core as Dorian Gray.

Albert But here he is at last! (*rises spontaneously to applaud Dorian as he enters.*) Congratulations to your great success, Mr Gray!

Dorian It was just a shallow comedy aimed at pleasing the ladies and the superficial flair of youth. It was so far from seriously minded as you could possibly reach. But it pleases me to see you again, Albert.

Albert The pleasure is all mine. A cocktail for Mr Gray! (*served immediately*) I can't understand how anyone could have anything against your art, Dorian. No one can deny your genius, and only a sourpuss could envy your progress and success with the muses. And to this comes your handsomeness as a human being. That's almost what I most admire in you. You are thirty-eight years old and have enjoyed life fully as long as you lived and made a family with two children, and still you look like a totally fresh and intact twenty-year-old. How do you do it?

Dorian It must be in the genes.

Albert Is it in the family?

Dorian My mother died intact as a perfect beauty, no matter what hardships she had gone through.

Marquess But she died young, and that was perhaps her only happiness.

Dorian You seem to be well informed, Sir.

Marquess As long as you have the slightest influence on my son, you can be sure that I will keep myself more carefully informed about you than about anyone else. Feel watched from morning till night.

Dorian I thank you for the least liberty you grant me at night.

Marquess Then least of all.

Dorian Why do you hate me so?

Marquess I don't hate you. I only detest everything you stand for, your snobbery, your unbearable conceit, your moral decadence, your presumptuous hubris, your affectation, your falsity and grand airs...

Dorian (interrupting) You flatter me, Sir, by allowing the catalogue of my vices never to reach an end.

Marquess You put the question but interrupt me from answering it fully. I hope I will one day have the pleasure of fighting a duel with you, so that we may settle our differences once and for all, but you are too much of a coward to even consider a challenge.

Dorian Your methods, Sir, are well known to confine themselves to brute violence. I am sorry I must disappoint you, but on principle I never deal with vulgarity. Or else I would accept any challenge that excludes force or violence, preferably verbal ones.

Albert Don't mind him, Dorian. He is only a grumpy old man.

Dorian Unfortunately he is also your father.

Albert You are more like a father to me than he.

Dorian That's the cause of his relentless fatherly jealousy.

Albert I had better keep you out of range from him. *(brings him over to other parts of the salon to meet some ladies, that he greets with charming ease of manners.)*

Jekyll (to Basil) You were with him from the beginning, Mr Hallward, and reputedly painted a legendary portrait of him before he even came out to society. How do you think he has developed?

Basil Unfortunately I am in very little touch with him nowadays, since he evades me, after he once and for all forbade me to even mention his portrait, which he appears to keep locked up somewhere for no obvious reason, as if he jealously didn't want anyone else to see it, but on the whole he has managed well. I am well aware of his reputation but will not comment on it, since I really don't know if there is any ground for it. He enjoys the fact that there are myths spreading about him. It flatters his vanity, and you must agree that it fits a poet of the same status as Byron and Shelley.

Jekyll They died young. Is there a risk for Dorian Gray to meet the same fate?

Basil Not if he stays on his stable course of impeccability.

Jekyll So you don't know if there is any ground for the scandal rumours about him?

Basil The only story of that kind that I know of, I was myself involved in from the beginning. It was his first great love, a cheap actress on the cheaper side, which he was honestly in love with, which turned her so potty that she forgot her art and made him disappointed, whereupon he broke the engagement and she committed suicide.

Jekyll I heard that story. He can't be blamed for it. A suicide is always entirely on the perpetrator's own responsibility, and most candidates even insist on that in a farewell letter. So after that, there has been nothing compromising about him?

Basil Not that I know. He has been discreet and settled down and proved himself an orderly and responsible father with two children and a charming wife who adores him, so he has everything and will probably continue getting more. Some want him into Parliament.

Jekyll But what's the matter with the portrait?

Basil I wonder that as well. I haven't seen it since it was painted, and when I once expressed a wish to look at it again he almost terminated our friendship. Since then I have missed the relationship we had before.

Jekyll Instead there are others. (*indicates Albert*)

Basil Which brings me misgivings. His father is not to be trifled with. And what does Albert see in Dorian? Albert has no literary talent and is only fascinated by the fact that Dorian outwardly remains unchangeably handsome, as if he couldn't be corrupted no matter what. I suspect Albert desires and aspires to become like him. At least he covets the secret of Dorian's eternal youth.

Jekyll Dorian blames his genes.

Basil You always blame the genes nowadays, while I would suggest that everything actually depends on the character of the soul.

Jekyll The body as the mirror and face of the soul?

Basil Yes, that's my firm conviction as an artist.

Jekyll So you mean that a beautiful human being impossibly could harbour a corrupted soul?

Basil Yes. That would be utterly impossible. You can fool yourself but not nature.

Jekyll I hope you are right.

Basil But look who's coming! The greatest seducer of youth in our time in person!

Lord Henry (enters) Basil! Am I still damned according to you?

Basil I don't condemn anyone, but I observe everything.

Dorian My two best friends! At last I may see you together again!

Henry And I hope without any tensions.

Dorian I sincerely hope that as well.

Henry Basil, how could you suggest that I seduced and corrupted our friend Dorian? If I did, I must have failed utterly, for I can't see that he has taken any harm at all. Can you see that he in any way has been marked by his years or by that life of licence which you suggest I introduced him into?

Basil I must acknowledge you're right, Henry. He looks exactly the same today as when I painted him eighteen years ago.

Henry What happened to that portrait? It became legendary from the start, but then it disappeared.

Dorian Don't talk about it.

Basil For some reason it turned into a sensitive issue to Dorian from the start.

Jekyll We just talked about how your way of life must leave traces in your appearance, and I must agree with both of you, that whatever indulgences Dorian might have given himself up to, they must have been negligible, as there is no trace of any age or hardship in his face. Dorian, your bad reputation must be both exaggerated and unfair. Basil as an acknowledged expert on human nature must agree with me, that your notoriety in certain circles must be unfair, since your appearance indicates the contrary.

Henry We all have darker sides, though, that we don't readily exhibit to anyone, but on the contrary have every interest to conceal, to the better be able to freely cultivate them, and no disguise would be more opportune than a capacity not to age.

Jekyll Do you mean, Lord Henry, that an impeccable exterior still could conceal an interior corruption?

Henry Can you refute that possibility, Doctor Jekyll?

Jekyll I can go as far as to admit, that the one possibility doesn't have to exclude the other.

Dorian Henry, I don't think you've met my protégé. The way you brought me up in the arts of aesthetics and enjoyment, I tried to teach this young man to pursue the same positive spiritual career. May I present Lord Albert Savile.

Henry I have heard about you, young man. It pleases me that you make progress in the same school in which I placed Dorian.

Albert I envy him his consistent youth and am very curious about the secret of his incorruptibility in spite of his indulgencies. Do you know anything about it?

Henry Absolutely nothing. I can only consider it somewhat unfair, since I as his teacher did not meet with the same destiny. I am confined to a constantly steeper downhill on a hopeless course towards the black blind alley of withering old age and have during these eighteen years only increasingly distanced our young Dorian, who still remains on the same spot in the most adorable beauty costume of youth.

Basil A phenomenon observed by all which no one can explain.

Dorian I usually blame the genes as there is nothing else to blame.

Basil Still there lingers some mystery about it, as if you would be specially chosen or blessed by some good fairy.

Dorian In that case I have never been made aware of any such influence.

Henry Your wife perhaps?

Dorian She is just a paragon of goodness, all perfect correctness, the ideal mother of our two sons and the most prudent and orderly housewife you can think of. No, there is nothing special there at all. I can't go home without getting bored.

Henry I warned you against marrying. You should have been discouraged by my destiny. Still you got stuck and that most willingly. Still you haven't been ruined and spoiled like me.

Dorian You are not depraved, Lord Henry. You carry your ageing maturity with dignity.

Henry Like a torture, that I pretend not to mind. That's the first ageing syndrome, until we get worse troubles by pains. They are still ahead of me, but I hope to be able to put them off as far as possible.

Marquess You will not escape it, Lord Henry, as little as that debaucher will. Your nemesis will catch up with you, Dorian, and with a vengeance, I promise you.

Henry Who is that old sourpuss?

Albert My father. I apologise for him. He shouldn't have come here but forced his way in only because he learned that I would meet Dorian here.

Henry Has he any objection against your connection?

Marquess If I have! And I will do anything in my power to break it!

Henry (aside to Dorian) That old man is no sport. Watch out for him.

Dorian He doesn't frighten me.

Henry He would have been a clown if he had been in the least way funny, but he isn't.

Dorian I know. He is the burden and cross of poor young Albert's life, and he cannot escape it.

Henry An over-protective father could turn dangerous.

Dorian Not such a pathetic fanatic.

Henry I would still beware if I were you. Could your friendship with Albert be worth acquiring enemies?

Dorian A true friendship is worth any risks.

Henry He worries me, since it's obvious that he could go at any length without any scruples. He could walk over corpses without noticing them.

Dorian If he ever tries to walk over me, I will make him notice it.

Henry The risk is that he will.

Albert Now tell me at last the secret about your portrait, Dorian, since you have your artist here. Why was he never allowed to see it after its completion?

Dorian Don't ask me about that, Albert.

Albert According to hearsay, Basil succeeded in preserving and making you the consummate ideal of male beauty, which was its very intention, to preserve you while you would decay like everyone else, but that's what you never did. Basil said himself right here just now, that you are exactly the same today as when he painted you.

Dorian It was Lord Henry who said it.

Albert Does it matter who said it? The riddle is why you hid it to the world although it is the truest picture of yourself.

Basil Maybe that's the reason why.

Marquess There could be only one reason for his hiding it to the world. The portrait shows all the corruption and depravation that is so well concealed by his lying surface.

Basil Have you seen the portrait?

Marquess No, and I never want to see it. That man's presence in life is more than enough intolerable to also make you wish to see his portrait.

Albert Father, Dorian Gray has never done you any harm.

Marquess But he seduced you, and you seem only to be grateful for that.

Dorian It's your son speaking to you, Sir. Not even a father has the right to outrage his son.

Marquess But obviously you have.

Dorian I never said so.

Marquess But you did it.

Dorian Is that an accusation?

Marquess It is indeed!

Albert Father! You are going too far!

Marquess On the contrary! At last I put a stop to it!

Dorian To what, if may ask?

Marquess To your continuous violation of my son!

Dorian What is your aim and purpose with this?

Marquess Most of all I would like to fight a duel with you and remove you from the world once and for all, but you are too much of a coward to accept it.

Dorian Your accusation is too absurd for any reasonable man to regard it as anything else than a deranged fancy.

Marquess Are you calling me a liar?

Dorian If you accuse me, you must be able to prove your accusation.

Marquess Don't you think I collected enough evidence during all these years of your sullyng my son with your obtrusion? Don't you think I have the names of all the male prostitutes that you frequent for the cultivation of your vices? Don't you think that I know everything about Sybil Vane, that you haunted to death?

Basil Sir, you don't know what you are talking about.

Marquess On the contrary, I know what I am talking about, but you don't know what worm you nourished by your bosom!

Henry Dorian, you can't accept this. This is public slander and nothing else.

Dorian Exactly my opinion.

Marquess Then sue me, and prove me wrong!

Henry You are the one who needs to prove you are right.

Marquess And I will do so!

Basil Take it easy, my dear Marquess. No one has any desire to drag your family or Dorian Gray into court in a process that could only mean disgrace to all of you.

Marquess On the contrary! I challenge him to do so, for the restoration of our honour!

Henry You are a fool, Sir, and of the worst kind, as your only motivation is your baseness.

Marquess No father can accept that a bugger seduces and violates his son!

Dorian So you accuse me of sexually abusing your son?

Marquess To the highest degree!

Albert Father, I must deny it.

Marquess You can't deny it, as it is a fact!

Albert I deny it with all my heart!

Henry (aside) A coitus is no violation or even any sexual abuse if both parties enjoyed it. That's what the Marquess never will be able to accept.

Dorian I must repudiate your accusation.

Marquess Do so then! I accept the challenge, since I know that I am not lying!

Hostess Gentlemen, it is not proper of you to have such discussions in my salon! I must ask you to leave at once.

Dorian I apologise on behalf of all my friends and enemies, but it was the only member of the later category that opened this Pandora's box.

Hostess Still you all took part in such an unheard of outrageous debate in public!

Dorian I apologise, Lady Windermere. Come, Albert. Let's immediately remove ourselves from the poisonous presence of your father.

Albert You are mad, father.

Marquess No, Albert, it's you who are lost.

Albert So let me be lost! It's my life and not yours!

Marquess That's what I must oppose by all conceivable means, since you allowed yourself to be ruined by such a one.

Henry Do you mean that it would have been acceptable if Lord Albert had been ruined by someone else?

Marquess Dorian Gray is a social parasite who lives on seducing and ruining such as it pleases him to abuse to death. He has done so before.

Hostess This is outrageous!

Dorian It's all right, Lady Windermere. We will all withdraw with appropriate excuses for the brutal eruptions of the Marquess' uncontrolled emotions, which we must all feel ashamed of.

Marquess It's you, damned bugger, who is a shame to the entire society as long as your parasitic plague may continue undisturbed in contaminating society with your lewd corruption!

Henry (*shaking his head*) A hopeless case.

Jekyll The Marquess or Dorian Gray?

Henry Both.

(All retire, and the salon almost gets empty. The hostess sighs.)

Scene 2. At home at Gray's.

Grace You can't prosecute him, Dorian.

Dorian I have no choice, Grace. If I don't it will be the same as admitting that all his accusations are true.

Grace Can't you just ignore it? He is a pathetic old man obsessed by a possessive mania which no one can take seriously. He is laughed at all over London.

Dorian But I can't allow his reckless slander to contaminate and spread all over London.

Grace You mean that the rumours he is spreading might harm your career?

Dorian They could have a negative effect on the success of my plays.

Grace The risk is that a process could worsen the damage.

Dorian Not if I win.

Grace The mere occasion of such a process must imperil your position and could lead to your ruin.

Dorian Do you believe in his rumours?

Grace It's bad enough that he thinks it's justified to spread such rumours.

Dorian So you don't believe in me.

Grace No, I just love you, but that carries heavier weight.

Dorian I am naturally grateful for that, but you must understand, that I can't let such a vicious old man's personal attacks and humiliation of me pass without consequences.

Grace I am afraid of the consequences, for the sake of your family and your children.

Dorian I am not afraid of him.

Grace But I am.

Dorian (embracing her) Grace, you don't need to worry. I can always defend myself and verbally extricate myself out of any pinch. I always could. This poor devil is a megalomaniac ant who thinks he could attack an elephant and get him down. Such an ant I must crush.

Grace You can only do it if his accusations are without grounds.

Dorian They are.

Grace Can Albert confirm it?

Dorian Are you jealous of him?

Grace No, I am not, but I always considered him a risk to your safety.

Dorian He could never harm me.

Grace Can you swear on that his father's accusations are false?

Dorian I could never have him exposed to cross examination as a witness.

Grace Don't you see where you are heading? He will be your downfall! If you exclude the only witness that could save you to protect him against the prosecutor for an excuse, the jury must draw their conclusions.

Dorian Not as long as I can defend myself.

Grace And for how long do you think you could do it under the strain of a ruthless prosecutor's cross examination? You don't know what you are up against!

Dorian I am prepared to answer for what I am, and I have not committed any crime. I am ready to stand for that for eternity.

Grace (sighs) You are too good and too naïve for this world.

Dorian I know. I am just a poet endowed with the liability that I am too talented and too beautiful. The petty human world cannot bear with such a superior excellence, so they must pull me down to their level by any means. I can't allow them that debasement.

Grace So it's no use asking you not to sue the Marquess?

Dorian It's already done. He gives me no choice.

Grace (sighs) I have to solace myself with the fact that your only enemy today at least will never be able to deprive you of any of your friends.

Dorian The more reason to get rid of the only enemy.

Grace An ant can bite hard without ever being detected, and an elephant could find it difficult to shake him off.

Dorian I am sure it will come out all right. It's just a petty case of calumny caused by a fixed idea with in a grumpy old man of idle debility.

Grace If it only were that simple.

Scene 3.

Carson I am sorry, Sir, but I can't take the case.

Marquess You must! You can't let such a nuclear corruption abscond justice!

Carson He is the most celebrated poet of our country, an indispensable flower in our poetry, loved if not adored by the ladies, admired by everyone except you. He was also my fellow student in Dublin. Whatever he did, no matter what kind of life he leads, no matter how immoral he is, it would be a shame for me to accept the case. I don't wish to contribute to his ruin.

Marquess In that case you commit a judicial error and betray justice by allowing seditiousness to win and to continue corrupting and destroying our society!

Carson We also have small chances of winning. Any jury will be partial to him from the beginning, since he is a famous man and a universally acknowledged ornament to our literature. No jury will want to judge and even less condemn him.

Marquess They must if there is clear evidence that he is guilty! They can't turn a blind eye to the obviousness of justice!

Carson And what is then your evidence? He will refuse to let your main witness your son testify. Your accusation of him concerns your son, and that's the only evidence you consider yourself almost certain of.

Marquess I have spared no means to trace down every male prostitute he has availed himself of. They are dozens, and I will go to any pains to track down new ones!

Carson And what kind of miserable creatures will then be your witnesses? You mention male prostitutes. Who can take such a person seriously in a court? Is a single one of those witnesses you dug out of dung hills more than a pathetic remnant of a human being? They will be half men all of them, wrecks on the bum, alcoholics and drug addicts, dealers and smugglers and pimps and what else? Your intention is to dig out the most stinking garbage dump in London just to harm one poor poet, who really didn't do anything else than amused himself.

Marquess At the cost of me and my son!

Carson He hasn't touched you, not even approached you, and your son has had nothing against his friendship. You want to stain the proud literature of England at any cost by dragging down its leading star as far down in as stinking dirt as possible, and all you will accomplish is to get yourself the worst possible reputation that will stick to you forever. And what is worse: your whole class with marquesses and baronets, counts and dukes will be stained as well by your fanatic urge to pull down an ingenious man to your level.

Marquess I will pay you anything! We have evidence of all his vices! His practices are consistently against the law! As an attorney you can't refuse a client his right of justice. If you refuse I will get you excluded from the association of barristers with your career stranded from the start and for life!

Carson You really then stop at nothing. Your fanaticism is monstrous and the meanest thing I ever experienced in reality. The worst thing about it is that you are right. As an attorney I can't refuse your right of justice. Well, I will defend you, but

when I have accomplished your acquittal, I will take no further step to assist you in your desperate effort to bring about his fall.

Marquess I have a family to defend!

Carson My dear Marquess, your defence of your family will bring your family a lasting dishonour, and I regret to say that you have actually forced me to help you to achieve this fatality. (*rises and leaves.*)

Marquess He accepts the case. That's all that matters. That's enough to have that unbearable monster parasite ruined for life, and that's all I want, whatever the devil himself may charge for it.

Scene 4. A club room after the first trial.

All are rather dejected.

Clarke My dear Dorian, how could you be so inconceivably unintelligent as to believe that you could get away with fooling justice?

Dorian I am not sentenced yet, Sir Edward.

Clarke But you will be. The dreadful Marquess is obsessed about having you ruined by any means, and he is prepared to pay his whole family fortune for his destructive quest. He will never give up.

Dorian Are you deserting me now, Sir Edward?

Clarke I can't do that. As little as Edward Carson had the right to refuse the Marquess' request for his defence, I have the right to let you down, if you want me for your defence in your next trial.

Dorian I am afraid I can't pay, as I am obliged to pay for all the Marquess' costs of trial.

Clarke I know.

Ross I will gladly put up with whatever means I can muster. But what actually went wrong?

Clarke It's very simple. I accepted the case as prosecutor on Dorian's assurance that there was nothing behind the Marquess' allegations. Dorian thought he could bluff his way through such a trial and talk himself out of any cross examinations, as he was used to talk himself out of any pinch, but his superior intelligence did not make it the whole way. Attorney Carson brought him to make a slip of the tongue. On the question why he never had kissed a certain doubtful character, Dorian answered quite spontaneously that he was far too ugly. That's where he lost the jury, attorney Carson noted the slip and used it ruthlessly in his cross examination, which ended by his threatening to bring forth a whole catalogue of equally doubtful witnesses to chart the whole width of Dorian Gray's nightly indulgences in pornographic clubs and homosexual societies. Dorian's credibility was entirely lost. There was only one thing to do, to drop the case against the cruel Marquess.

Albert It's all my fault. It's I who should pay for your treat, Dorian, but unfortunately I get no money from my father.

Clarke If you dare to stand trial a second time in a prosecution for sedition, Dorian, and you think you can win, then we must allow Albert to testify. He can tell all about the Marquess, so that we could annihilate him and put a stop to his personal infernal crusade against you.

Dorian It is out of the question. Albert shall never be exposed to a cross examination by this character assassin. I will answer to what I am accused of and convince the world that I am innocent and only a victim to personal maniacal revenge for nothing.

Ross You should leave the country at once, Dorian. Society has already sacrificed you, all your books have been blacklisted and disappeared from all bookshops, you are ruined and have nothing to gain by making the agony worse. The risk is that you will ultimately be sentenced, and then you will face a social execution and destruction of your person by a public disgrace without pardon.

Dorian In that case society will destroy itself. By condemning me it condemns itself.

Ross It will never be able to forgive you that you got caught and handled your private life so carelessly and bad that you couldn't avoid it being made public.

Dorian I know, Robbie. It's all my own fault.

Albert No, it's my fault.

Dorian If it only were that simple, Albert. The depravity of life is much more complicated than that only one person could be blamed for it. Still this is what always happens, like a security regulator in sacrificing one particular person as a scapegoat, so that all the others may get away.

Clarke I accept your defence, Dorian, without charges for you.

Dorian That's noble of you, Sir Edward.

Clarke I do it from principle. As a humanist I can't tolerate that our literature is put to shame for a society that developed a speciality in consistently practising double standards.

Ross Hear! Hear!

Dorian I thank you, Sir Edward.

Clarke But please, no more lies. Never try bluffing again in legal circumstances. That's the most dangerous thing you could do.

Dorian I abandoned myself to my double life by an irresistible urge to live dangerously.

Clarke You were too well off. You were too established. All society adored you for your beauty and talent. You had the most promising future of this country ahead of you as its leading poet and politician to be in both the houses of Parliament. You had a perfect life served for you on a golden plate. And you risked everything and lost. I am sorry, Dorian, but you can never have your wife and children back.

Dorian Are they giving up ahead of my fall?

Clarke Your reputation is already fallen, and an acquittal could never restore that perfect reputation you have lost. A burnt child smells. Your wife must think of your children and their future. I am sorry.

Dorian Will they change their name?

Clarke Most probably.

Dorian I feel like Lucifer falling from heaven. I dared to trust the lucky star that guided me. Was it my hubris that brought me down, or did I just have some bad luck? I wasn't exactly unique or alone in my vices, you know. Higher servants of society than me wallow in dirtier iniquity than me. I could report quite a number of them, but I am not like the Marquess. And I must confess, Sir Edward, that no matter how hard I try to strain my conscience, I can't feel the slightest hint of any remorse.

Clarke It's a fact that you didn't harm anyone, while the Marquess is pulling the whole nation down in the greatest social damage that could occur by causing the judicial murder of you.

Dorian Thanks for those words. Sir Edward. Then I dare to stand trial for the rest of my life.

Ross It will pass, Dorian. Sooner or later you will be a free man again and can take a gruesome revenge for your injustice by writing more brilliant works than ever.

Dorian Then it will be no revenge, Robbie. It will only be my personal exoneration. Still I hope I will not have to live until I get old. I kept rather intact and well up to my thirty-eighth year and could maybe manage a few years more, but then I will have to start withering. This trial crisis is like a warning that a memento mori is also lying waiting for me. May I rather die young and untarnished by age like a Byron, Shelley and Keats than be forced to grow old and grumpy and incomprehensible like an isolated Browning.

Basil Dorian, your portrait is still there. Still you haven't parted from it neither personally nor visually. I can warrant that, who have studied your appearance more carefully than anyone else.

Dorian That you should mention the portrait in this moment! That's what started my career, which convinced me that I was indestructible, that I could succeed in whatever enterprise I engaged in, that I had to be superior in everything and could indulge in whatever pleasures without having to bother about being discovered or punished or repressed. A mad puritan Marquess could not stand the presence of a free man who used his individual right to take liberties at some length.

Ross With your philosophy, Dorian, you could endure any crises and adversities without being affected by them, to instead like a Dostoevsky be able to use their experience to some advantage in your art of writing.

Dorian You always only thought the best of me, Robbie.

Ross A creative talent couldn't be anything else than only good, whatever he creates. The act of creation itself excludes any possibility of evil or destruction.

Albert That is instead represented by society and my father.

Dorian He is just jealous, Albert, and is getting old. You have to forbear with the weaknesses of old age.

Albert Not if he in unforgivable ignorance and self-assumed blindness causes harm to my best friend.

Dorian The stupid are like the dead. They have no idea of their own condition.

Clarke (rises) Then it's settled. We start working on your defence already tomorrow. I hope you will cooperate better this time, Dorian, for now it's serious, as your life is at stake.

Dorian My life was never a matter of seriousness.

Clarke Unfortunately, my friend, not even you could now avoid its getting serious.

Act IV scene 1. At home with the Wildes.

Grace What actually happened?

Ross The less said about the sad business, the better.

Grace But he wasn't convicted? Why was he then not acquitted?

Ross The jury could not agree. They tried as hard and long as they possibly could but could finally only agree on the single point that they could not agree.

Grace What will happen then? Will the case be dismissed?

Ross No, there must be a new trial, the worst possible scenario!

Grace We can't afford it! We are ruined already!

Ross I know, Grace. And it's too much to ask of Sir Edward that he would once more accept the case for nothing.

Grace What do you mean?

Ross If there is a new trial, the chances are minimal that he will not be sentenced.

Grace That damned Marquess! Dorian never did him any harm, but he has persecuted Dorian like in a witch-hunt without ever stopping, as if ruining and harming Dorian as thoroughly as possible was his life's only meaning! And his worthless son! I can't understand why Dorian didn't drop him like hot potato at once!

Ross No one can understand that.

Grace It was as if Dorian was pursued by an inner latent self-destructiveness, a kind of sickly urge to challenge his destiny and abandon himself to the temptation of wagering his life like in Russian roulette, and if you do it eagerly and consistently enough you are bound to end up with the desired loss at last, in a kind of morbid self-destruction. And Albert was perfectly cut out to bring about his fall, totally irresponsible, irresistibly handsome like a god, utterly reckless and careless and insensitive to the feelings, situations and vulnerability of others, and when he has brought someone like Dorian to utter personal devastation, he will not understand what he has done and renounce all responsibility.

Ross A monster of a father and a freak of a son.

Grace And still they are human beings.

Ross Are they human? That's the question.

Grace Yes, they are human, but utterly corrupt by their privileged position in the upper class. It's this upper class mentality that I hold responsible for Dorian's fall. He belonged himself to that top social level and was so much impeded by it, that much of his humanity never could develop and come to its right. It's the same with

all higher aristocrats. They get so spoiled from the beginning that they never get a realistic perspective on life and never really reach their own human nature. That's how monsters and freaks appear like the Marquess and his son. They have everything, fortune, position, beauty and established security, but all this hides and buries their humanity.

Ross You mean that Dorian by his fall could save his humanity and maybe be salvaged from his class depravity?

Grace At best. At worst he will perish for real and never be able to recover from the fall. But he has definite prospects. He wrote so many wonderful things, especially his tales for children. His "The Rose and the Nightingale" is one of the most endearing masterpieces of English literature. If only he could rise to continue writing such things!

Ross We'll see at the next trial. At least he has civil courage enough to face and endure it.

Grace What is the worst that could happen? What could be his gravest sentence?

Ross Prison with hard labour for maybe two years.

Grace Could he with his fine and sensitive intellect take such an ordeal?

Ross It remains to be seen. The most important thing is that we don't fail him.

Grace You are his best friend. You have been as beneficial a support to him as Albert has damaged him.

Ross Try not to be bitter.

Grace I am not bitter. I just fail to understand his obvious self-destructiveness, which seems as mere stupidity and blindness but which indicates an inner morbid urge to do away with himself, as if he meant that his whole life was a lie which he unconsciously tries to liberate himself from.

Ross The more important that we never let go of him.

Grace He has already let go of us. His actions have bereft him of his own children and me. All he has left is himself, and the risk is that he will let that go as well.

Ross I will never let him go.

Grace Thank you, Robbie. You are the one who most of all tried to save him, spiting this entire world of perdition with its inhuman upper class establishment, which only consists of lies, hypocrisy and affectation!

Scene 2. The club.

Henry What shall we do with him? We can't just let him go under.

Basil What else can we do? We did all we could in our power. We agreed to let him have his trial. He took the consequences. We accepted that it went to hell. Sir Edward was noble enough to accept defending him for nothing in a second trial, which he admirably led to almost an acquittal, but unfortunately the terrible Marquess' evidence proved valid. We did what we could to make him endure his two years in the penitentiary. To his honour it must be added that he took it as a

man. Any other snob would have perished directly. And now he is under protected identity in Paris. What more can we do?

Jekyll I heard that he lives under miserable circumstances almost like a tramp. His wife sends him a meagre pension, which is almost like a rationing. He ignores that she made the condition that he would no longer associate with Albert, who adds to his daily declination. He is helplessly decaying and seems by all appearance to have given up. He writes nothing any more. He just eats and drinks and sleeps.

Basil What a shame to such a talent and to our literature!

Jekyll Indeed.

Henry The question remains: what can we do? Shall we just let him go to the dogs?

Basil Never. We must make him pull himself together. He must come back to literature, and I think I know a way.

Ross Tell us!

Basil Robbie, you are familiar with our famous detective Sherlock Holmes. He has shown a personal interest in the case, as a serious symptom of the decadence of our time and age. His view is, that by taking Dorian to court, humiliating him and driving him out, our society has condemned itself.

Ross What can he do?

Basil I suggest that we solicit him to try to rescue Dorian Gray. We know him far too well, and he would only sneer at if we tried to talk seriously with him and refuse to come back home, with us he would only make a bitter ironic joke of the whole thing, but if he meets an unknown stranger for the first time who has some psychological skill in both deeper understanding and persuasion, perhaps he would get some second thoughts.

Henry The matter is to save his life from his decay.

Jekyll His honour cannot be saved. His life is downhill. The question is if we can save his talent for the literature of which he once was the king.

Basil It should definitely be worth a try.

Henry Why not?

Ross Have you discussed it with him? Is he willing to try?

Basil He is completely engaged in the situation and should present himself here at any moment. He has already accepted my request to find out what eventually happened to my portrait.

Henry Does it still exist?

Basil Unless Dorian destroyed it.

Ross Here he is. (*enter Sherlock Holmes*)

Holmes Pardon me for not being exactly punctual, but I can assure you that I would never have turned down such a mission as the one you invited me to.

Basil It's a mission of honour.

Holmes I am aware of it. I regard it almost as a sacred mission.

Henry Do you think it could be successful?

Holmes All my missions and tasks are generally successful. At least none has failed as yet. Surely you must be aware of it? I suppose you carefully study my faithful chronicler's intrepid efforts to do me justice in his awkward accounts?

Henry Doctor Watson is a naïve dilettante.

Holmes But impeccably meticulous as a doctor. He never misses a detail.

Ross And without him you would never have been what you are, Mr Holmes.

Holmes That's why I keep him.

Basil Back to our task. All my friends and Dorian's are in on it. We don't think any of us could save him back to the Parnassus, and you are perhaps the only one who could succeed.

Holmes I thank you for your confidence. I am not literate, but I love to delve into people's stories and their strange fates. This is a special case.

Henry What do you think about the picture? Do you think Dorian could have destroyed it for some reason?

Holmes Never. He was an aesthete who loved art. Besides, he always loved and adored himself. The picture is art and even a portrait of him. If there is anything he lacks, it's a motive to destroy the picture. On the contrary, he most probably keeps it in a safe place where he can have it for himself.

Basil We really wish you good luck, Mr Holmes. Our nation, our literature and our future would be most grateful to you if you succeeded in returning him to his only real home, our theatres and literary salons.

Holmes Exactly. Of course, I can't vouch for any success. I can only make a sincere effort to talk some sense into him and try to make him realize that it's worth saving him from his own destruction, which saving mission you, his close and honest friends, all have a keen interest in.

Basil Exactly.

Holmes The only thing I think I can promise you with some certitude as a result is what happened to your painting.

Basil That's the official task.

Henry Good luck then, my friend. Most of all we would like to see you return with him, but at least we look forward to some detailed report.

Holmes It will be a pleasure to dedicate myself to the opposite of criminality for a change.

Henry What is the opposite?

Holmes To save an invaluable human life from his crucifixion by society.

Jekyll Does anyone know what happened to Albert?

Henry He is the one who is pulling Dorian down to his destruction. He is the one we are to save Dorian from. All he needs is to drop Albert to come back to his wife.

Jekyll If once you acquired a taste for a double life, you will never relinquish it with less than death.

Holmes It almost sounds as if you spoke out of personal experience, Doctor Jekyll.

Jekyll I am familiar with the problems of that mentality.

Ross I think you might succeed, Mr Holmes.

Holmes Gentlemen, if I fail it will be because I am not taking my worthy friend Doctor Watson with me this time, since he would only be in the way.

Henry Is he than a warrant for your success?

Holmes In all his simplicity he always was so far, mainly because he never actually understood what I was doing. But together with Dorian Gray, Doctor Watson would only make me look ridiculous, and the poet would never take me seriously. No, this is a face-to-face case. He must find his confidence for me alone.

Jekyll I was acquainted with Doctor Watson as a perfect man of honour but as a poor doctor.

Holmes You have seen him through. As long as I have known him he never had a patient.

Jekyll And now you have the world's most sensitive case and patient to take charge of. Honestly speaking, I don't think you could succeed, I view Dorian's case as hopeless, but by all means, do everything you can.

Holmes It will be interesting to solve the mystery of the secret portrait. Gentlemen, I am delighted to be at your service. (*bows and leaves*)

Henry What do you think? What are the odds?

Ross I think we view them very differently.

Basil In any case, there is hope, and that is the main thing.

Act V scene 1. Paris, a less respectable bistro.

Enter Sherlock Holmes, looking around, checking the time, finds a table, takes a paper and lights a pipe in expectation of the other.

Dorian (enters, well aware that he is late, worn and torn but unchanged.) Sorry that I have kept you waiting.

Holmes The pleasure was all mine.

Dorian You must be used to the strangest clients and their bad habits.

Holmes Let's say, that you are not the first one.

Dorian I understand that you have come to try to talk some sense to me.

Holmes I have no illusions that it might work.

Dorian Then you seem as free of illusions as myself.

Holmes Your friends have given up about you. They think you can never come back. They persuaded me to make a last effort to save your talent for literature. Even if our Victorian society has discarded you, I hope you will not be as stupid as they to do the same.

Dorian I am sorry, but you are too late. You come here to save the life of a patient who is already dead. The problem is that no one can accept that he is dead, except the patient himself, who would rather not be revived, even if it were possible.

Holmes So you already discarded yourself. That's to admit defeat and to make your loathsome society right. Still you are entirely maintained as yourself

Dorian It's just that I lost my character in the process, which you must admit, if you are in the least privy to the theatre world. That is an unsurmountable dilemma for a playwright and born actor, for that was what I was born and lived to remain. No audience wants me any more and therefore least of all myself.

Holmes Still they are perfectly aware that you as a poser were supreme and absolutely unique. Neither before nor later will Britain ever see the like of it.

Dorian Still all I ask for nowadays is to be left in peace. I have definitely given up, write nothing any more and am more than just resigned. All I have to look forward to is my exit, like an actor in a bad performance which I am compelled to carry through against my will, and am obliged to continue acting on stage under constantly exacerbated awkwardness, especially since the play is constantly prolonged.

Not even you could possibly find any solution to the problem. I have fallen out of character and lost it and still must go on playing it, although it's dead and I have nothing left to give. I would have preferred not seeing you at all, but Robbie spoke so mysteriously about you, that I could not resist making your acquaintance.

So my friends, the few that still are left and who dare to know me, want me back to reality, the reality that violated me unto irrecognizability. Of course it's impossible. They have taken everything away from me that I was, and I have nothing left except my lasting dishonour, established by the Victorian judicial system, which makes no allowance for compromises or concessions to the human factor. I was only human. That was my only crime. Was that so outrageous?

Holmes Dear Dorian, you are not the first one. Exactly 300 years ago another British dramatist was on exactly the same spot, accused of homosexuality, atheism and what not and threatened by the severest measures of the law, which in his case could only mean death.

Dorian Are you talking about Marlowe?

Holmes Who else. I recall his case because it has suddenly become actual by the fact that an American has arrived at the conclusion by thorough research, that Marlowe must have continued working as a dramatist under the cover of Shakespeare.

Dorian An interesting theory. Swinburne also cultivated heretical thoughts in that direction. So he would have absconded justice by faking his death and then continued his business as usual with only the loss of his good name, which was forfeited forever, just like in my case. The problem in my case is that I did not abscond the so called justice. Another problem is that it did not execute me.

Holmes Among the allegations against Marlowe was also one of coining. You were at least no coiner or forger.

Dorian Jokes aside, what do you think of the whole process?

Holmes Absurd. The future will condemn it.

Dorian Of course. I pity the Victorian society. By this judicial murder, for that's what it is, it has condemned itself. It will go under and disappear, and in about 200 years it will be laughed at, when it becomes accepted all over the world that

bisexuality is something natural. I was never homosexual, but I gave way to temptations from the left. Instead of female mistresses, I deceived my wife with male ones. Was it so bad? No one was harmed by it. On the contrary. I was as discreet as a Frenchman. My wife had no idea of it until it was made public at court.

Holmes Still you could have avoided the whole embarrassment. The only one to bring up the case was Albert's father, a thorough scoundrel.

Dorian He was only jealous. Many fathers are like that about their sons and even more about their daughters. It's a parent's madness. It knows no limits.

Holmes But Albert was a good for nothing. He was not worthy of your love. Still you clung to it like in a sick and irrational let alone self-destructive fixation.

Dorian He was beautiful. I always loved beauty above all. That's my only crime and the only thing for which I was taken to court.

Holmes Still you were the one to start the trial.

Dorian I had myself to defend. The old mad Marquess was impertinent to the extreme. He made a fuss about it and started the scandal by openly calumniating me in public to an outrage. Should I then just keep my mouth shut and listen and swallow his offensive coarseness? I loved Albert, but all his father ever showed was boundless meaningless aggressive hatred.

Holmes It would have been safer not to respond.

Dorian We didn't know that until now. If I hadn't sued him he would have continued his public calumnies and done everything to separate Albert and me, and it might perhaps have ended worse than by a trial. By embarking on the judicial process, I at least proved myself a man enough to speak for himself in a public defence, and I don't think I failed in that.

Holmes So you still have something to live for. You still have your integrity. According to the American, Marlowe went on working as a dramatist and even more freely than before, ending up as the supreme master of his language and king of his theatre for all times by just a few security measures for his personal protection. You could do the same.

Dorian The question is if I would like to. Two years in a penitentiary is no amusing, edifying or relaxing vacation. In my case it was devastating, since it was intentionally cruel and directly aimed at humiliating me. There was an evil intent to punish me for my superiority and talent, it was carried through with a vengeance, and no one tried to stop it. Perhaps I should have absconded before the arrest, but I had already started defending myself in public. A true actor does not leave his part until he has carried it through. No actor can leave stage before the stage throws him out or he drops down from it or dies on it. My part was not yet finished, and to leave the stage before it was done with would actually have been cowardly.

Holmes All this just adds to your honour and to my arguments, that you have something left to live for. Don't give up, Dorian. Go on writing. You master the language. You are still superior by your imagination and intelligence.

Dorian You don't understand. I still have a family in England. For my sake they have they changed their name. They can't show themselves in public. My children

are harassed for my sake. I have made a fool of myself. That's the heart of the problem. This character has consumed itself and must get off the stage. My good name is forfeited, and I can't replace it with anything else. I have no Shakespeare to resort to, who could lend me and protect me by an impeccable name. I am lost. All that actually is left for me is suicide, but that would be the ultimate cowardice. You don't solve the problems of life by escaping them. Or do you know something that I don't know? In the east they believe in reincarnation. Do you think I could have another chance? If I am reborn, would I then have a better or worse life? Have I wasted my spiritual capital? Robbie Ross told me that you if anyone could know something about such things.

Holmes My friend, I cannot expound on the matter, simply because I lack all experience of death or of what comes afterwards. I am no better than you in that respect, and I guess we are all at a loss there. I can't warrant any reincarnation on your part, or that your purge in this life in any way would secure a happier life to come. That remains to be seen. As another roué once said, an atheist who did not expect anything better after death than to be left completely dead in peace, "but if there would be a continuation and I were allowed to go on in any form, what a pleasant surprise it would be!" It's the present life that counts. You still have it. The world can change. You can come back. Here you just bog yourself down with pathetic buggers in a life of debilitating inactivity, which only could be harmful to the soul you still have left.

Dorian Even you judge me for my indulgence. Is then indulgence something so wicked, that it must be condemned? Are you a puritan? There are no people more boring. If I have anything to be proud of, it's that I always gave way to my sexual drive, no matter where it brought me. I call that healthy for both body and soul. You always feel better afterwards, no matter how much you spilt. It doesn't matter what expressions sexuality finds, as long as it finds expressions. To keep it in is as harmful as to enforce a constipation. You must die of it. You could even die by just forcing yourself to withhold your wind. Puritanism was the most devastating constipation in English history.

Holmes So that's how you wish to carry on, in poverty, without other friends than doubtful ones including Albert and without writing any further plays, in inactivity and apathetic resignation under the slow process of ageing decay, until death will liberate you. Is that what you want?

Dorian Exactly. I still enjoy my lust, but it is gradually ebbing out. My muse was taken away from me by force by the Victorian judicial system. Dorian Gray was raped to death as a poet, since the fact that he was only a lover of beauty, poet and Irishman was not taken into any consideration at court. They took the poet away from me and put him away at a penitentiary for two years' ravagement. My only protest against it is the only natural and logical one, not to be able to write any more. Let me just die and see if it might offer me a rise of another curtain to another play and theatre than this ruined and failed one, which victorianism transformed from a happy and successful comedy to a bad and sordid farce. The society is seriously ill.

Let it ail in peace. I have nothing more to do with it, and it doesn't deserve a single line more from me.

By the way, you said an American had discovered that Marlowe went on under the cover of Shakespeare. You can't do that in England. In America there still seems to be some freedom of thought. What do you think? Must the beautiful old aristocratic refined England perish by its Victorianism to be substituted by the vulgar and ugly, coarse and corrupt America?

Holmes It doesn't look any better, does it?

Dorian Poor England. I don't know who deserves more pity, England or me.

Holmes The world is at a loss, Dorian, throwing away jewels like you and claiming that geniuses like me don't exist, while it puts the real geniuses away at mental institutions. But pull yourself together, my dear friend. You still have much left, if you only would allow it. You still have your powers, all your beauty is still intact both outwardly and inwardly, and all you need is a will of your own.

Dorian My destruction was the destruction of my society, which I loved. That's where I belonged, it made me, I am helplessly a part of it, and if it now has destroyed itself be destroying me, none of us will be able rise any more.

Holmes Your friend the painter Basil Hallward mentioned something about a portrait. Does it still exist?

Dorian Yes, it is still there. It's a matchless portrait. I can't believe that it is of me, but it is. It is kept safely, and only I have access to it. That's how it will be as long as I live.

Holmes That's all he wanted to know: that it is safe.

Dorian Not even society can take that away from me, but when once I am gone, it will disappear with me. That's how I ordered it. No one will see it after my death. It's a portrait of the beauty of art itself, the imperishability of eternal youth, the total openness of the natural freshness and the limitless possibilities in the maturity of a young man's blossoming consummation. I can still be recognized in the portrait, but since my society cast me out, that portrait will never again grace that society. Art is immortal, they tried to destroy my art when it reached its fullest maturity, and therefore I will deny that society the immortality of my art. I will take it with me to perhaps, if destiny gives me permission, come back with it in the next life. And honestly speaking, dear colleague, I wouldn't gladly survive myself the passing of my youth. I said that already long ago, that I would rather die than see the withering of my capacity, beauty, and spirituality. May I rather die at once than see that I lost an ounce of the beauty and freshness that shines in the portrait of me, which I will take with me in my own immortality.

Holmes Your vanity transcends all limits.

Dorian Isn't that life's meaning, that you should at least be able to be as vain as you wish as long as it doesn't harm others? That was the meaning of life that was denied me, and I avenge myself by letting the portrait of the perfected beauty and freshness of our time which should have gone on forever be as forfeited as the age that destroyed me.

Holmes That's the cruellest possible sentence by a creative artist on his age.

Dorian It hasn't given me any choice. Farewell, professor Holmes. It was interesting to make your acquaintance. Perhaps we'll meet again under happier circumstances another time in another life, in a world which doesn't abandon itself to self-destruction by voluntarily going to hell.

Holmes (rising) There is nothing more I can do for you. Unfortunately I must inform your friends that you are staying here. But what shall I tell your friend the artist about the portrait?

Dorian He knows what portrait he painted. He knows, that even if the portrait is lost, the beauty of that art will never get lost.

(Holmes breaks it up, while Dorian Gray thoughtfully remains, smoking and having coffee.)

The End.

Comments.

The foremost effort to do Oscar Wilde justice was the eminent film of 1960, "The Trials of Oscar Wilde", with Peter Finch in the lead, based on Montgomery Hyde's book of the same title. He was subject to three trials, the first was the prosecution of the Marquess of Queensberry for libel, (in the film perfectly acted by Lionel Jeffries), when he was acquitted he prosecuted Wilde for sedition, which ended in the deadlock of the jury, so there had to be a third trial. Wilde survived the execution of the sentence with difficulty, while two years' hard labour in a penitentiary would have broken anyone else. He struggled on in poverty in Paris on a lean allowance by his wife Constance for three years before he suddenly passed away in meningitis. He never dropped his friendship with Alfred Douglas, called 'Bosie', to whom Wilde's last great work "De Profundis" is dedicated, a confession by letters motivated by perhaps the most sincere urge and pathos of honesty in the history of literature.

This play was written during an arduous toothache crisis in February 2014. That the dramatization of Wilde's only novel "The Picture of Dorian Gray" gradually transformed into a dramatization of Wilde's own life was most intentional.

Gothenburg 27.2.2014,
translated in May 2019.