

apart though, I certainly am far from being the same enthusiastic slave to woman that I was at the period to which you refer. If I have changed, I think it is for the better.—”

“Impossible.”

“You flatter me. But praise is sweet, very sweet, and in spite of Descartes, I will allow myself to enjoy this. So I have changed—I think we may safely grant that—and have accomplished the ‘gilding refined gold.’ Results: diminished devotion to what some fellows call ‘angels,’ and some fellows call—the opposite, the converse, you know—greater regard for my own comfort, fewer colds—being out less frequently in the evenings below darkened windows—and a general rationality of conduct, much appreciated by my mother.”

“Mother! you have a mother?”

“Incredible though it may seem, I had. Eighteenth century style, aged, but sound. Useful at Christmas, when bills were more numerous than pleasant. In the way occasionally, when I want to do something very bad, and can’t on account of her image—impressive and striking—stepping in betwixt self and evil deed, and imploring. Forgiven, however; amiability of temper in self greatly surpassing tendency to dogs.”

“Pardon me; but did I hear right? You said ‘had’ or ‘have’?”

“Had. She departed this world in the year of her age the seventy-third, consequently three years ago. Since then my family has consisted of a collection of portraits with remembrances attached.”

“I am inquisitive, and therefore rude.”

“Therefore restrain yourself. You already know more about the ancient history of my family than any other man in London.”

“I know nothing.”

“Precisely the right amount. But we are wandering from our discussion on study, as required in love-letter writing. To return. Little as you may pretend to know about such matters,—and little as I believe you,—you are not without having had experience of.