

money. I know what you'd say; a handsome settlement—a well-secured jointure, and all that. Yes, yes, I feel it all."

"Why, yes, sir, I believe I may add, that every thing in this respect will answer your expectations."

"Of course; to be sure. My poor dear Baby! how to do without her, that's the rub. You don't know, O'Malley, what that girl is to me—you can't know it; you'll feel it one day though—that you will."

"The devil I shall!" said I to myself.

"The point is, after all, to learn the lady's disposition in the matter——"

"Ah Charley! none of this with me, you sly dog! You think I don't know you. Why I've been watching—that is, I have seen—no, I mean I've heard—they—they: people will talk, you know."

"Very true, sir. But, as I was going to remark——"

Just at this moment the door opened, and Miss Baby herself, looking most annoyingly handsome, put in her head.

"Papa, we're waiting breakfast. Ah, Charley, how d'ye do?"

"Come in, Baby," said Mr. Blake; you haven't given me my kiss this morning."

The lovely girl threw her arms around his neck, while her bright and flowing locks fell richly upon his shoulder. I turned rather sulkily away: the thing always provokes me. There is as much cold selfish cruelty in such *coram publico* endearments, as in the luscious display of rich rounds and sirloins in a chop-house, to the eyes of the starved and penniless wretch without, who, with dripping rage and watering lip, eats imaginary slices, while the pains of hunger are torturing him.

"There's Tim!" said Mr. Blake, suddenly. "Tim Cronin! Tim!" shouted he to—as it seemed to me—an imaginary individual outside; while in the eagerness of pursuit, he rushed out of the study, banging the door as he went, and leaving Baby and myself to our mutual edification.

I should have preferred it being otherwise; but as the Fates willed it thus, I took Baby's hand, and led her to the window. Now there is one feature of my countrymen, which, having recognized strongly in myself, I would fain proclaim; and writing, as I do—however little people may suspect me—solely for the sake of a moral, would gladly warn the unsuspecting against. I mean the very decided tendency to become the consoler, the confidante of young ladies; seeking out opportunities of assuaging their sorrow, reconciling their afflictions, breaking eventful passages to their ears; not from any inherent pleasure in the tragic phases of such intercourse, but for the semi-tenderness of manner, that harmless hand-squeezing, that innocent waist-pressing, without which consolation is but like salmon without lobster—a thing maimed, wanting, and imperfect.

Now whether this with me was a natural gift, or merely a "way we have in the army," as the song says, I shall not pretend to say: but I venture to affirm that few men could excel me in the practice I speak of some five and twenty years ago. Fair reader, do pray, if I have the happiness of being known to you, deduct them from my age before you subtract from my merits.

"Well, Baby, dear, I have just been speaking about you to papa. Yes dear—don't look so incredulous—even of your own sweet self. Well, do you know I almost prefer your hair worn that way; those same silky masses look better falling thus heavily——"

"There now, Charley! ah, don't."

"Well, Baby, as I was saying, before you stopped me, I have been asking your papa a very important question, and he has referred me to you for an answer. And now will you tell me, in all frankness and honesty, your mind on the matter?"

She grew deadly pale as I spoke these words; then suddenly flushed up again, but said not a word. I could perceive, however, from her heaving chest and restless manner, that no common agitation was stirring her bosom. It was cruelly to be silent, so I continued—

"One who loves you well, Baby, has asked his own heart the question, and has been answered that without you he has no chance of happiness; that your bright eyes are to him bluer than the deep sky above him; that your soft voice, your winning smile—and what a smile it is! have taught him that loves, nay, adores you. Then dearest—what pretty fingers those are! Ah! what is this? whence came that emerald? I never saw that ring before, Baby."

"Oh, that——" said she, blushing deeply, "that is a ring the foolish creature Sparks gave me a couple of days ago; but I don't like it—I don't intend to keep it."

So saying, she endeavoured to draw it from her finger, but in vain.

"But why, Baby, why take it off? Is it to give him the pleasure of putting it on again? There don't get angry; we must not fall out surely."

"No, Charley, if you are not vexed with me—if you are not——"

"No, no, my dear Baby; nothing of the kind. Sparks was quite right in not trusting his entire fortune to my diplomacy; but, at least, he ought to have told me that he had opened the negotiation. Now the question simply is—Do you love him—or rather, because that shortens matters—Will you accept him?"

"Love who?"

"Love who? why Sparks; to be sure."

A flash of indignant surprise passed across her features, now pale as marble; her lips were slightly parted; her large full eyes were fixed upon me