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THE FIRST DEBT.

A TALE OF EVERY DAY.

BY SUSANNA MOODIE.

*Continued from our last Number.*

CHAPTER XVI.

"I WISH we had stayed at home, dear cousin," said Alice to Arthur Fleming. "I cannot settle my mind to any useful employment this morning, and Sophia is so tired and sleepy that she is not up. After all, there is little real enjoyment in these scenes. It is the last public ball I will ever attend."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said Fleming. "Yet, upon the whole, the evening passed off better than I expected, and even you, Alice, seemed to enjoy it."

"And so I did at the time. The scene was new to me, and I was pleased to see Sophia so happy. Did she not look lovely?"

"I saw one who I thought looked far lovelier; but, if I were to name her, Alice would not agree with me." He looked earnestly into the deep blue eyes that were raised with an expression of surprise and inquiry to his face.

"There is no one in B—— to compare with her," said Alice, till, struck by the expression of her cousin's face, she dropped her eyes, and coloured rosy red.

"You have found out who I mean?"

"I should be sorry to suspect you, cousin Arthur, of such gross flattery."

"Do not think me insincere, Alice? I speak what I feel."

Alice made no reply. There was a sudden swelling of the heart, and a moisture on her eyelids which would have told Fleming, had he noticed the agitation of her manner, that praise from his lips was only too seductive. Then remembering her promise to Mrs. Marsham, she suppressed a regretful sigh, and turned away. At this moment, Sophia entered the room, and Alice withdrew to a distant window, to still the violent throbbing of her heart.

"Why, Sophy, you have lost your roses, and look as if you had been tipsy last night," said Mrs. Linhope, laughing. "Dissipation would never agree with you."

"Then I must look a perfect fright, mamma," said Sophy, skipping to the glass. "Humph! not quite so bad as I expected. Well, cousin Arthur, are you not a sad hypocrite,—after all the fuss you made about waltzing, to waltz with the rich heiress as you did half the night? Amelia Ogilvie was quite condescending."

"In what respect, my little cousin?"

"In so far forgetting her pride as to honour you with her hand. When Mrs. Watson introduced me to her, she drew up with a curtsy, so cold, so awfully dignified, that it froze me into a statue.—What a proud, disagreeable woman, she is. What a contrast to Lucy and her brother."

"She's a woman of the world, Sophy. I found her agreeable enough. But as to the captain——"

"Oh, say nothing against him: he is a delightful creature, and so kind and gentle. I wonder Alice did not like him. For my part, I think the woman who is so fortunate as to get him for a husband will only be too happy."

"You are not in earnest, Sophia?"

"Perfectly so."

"Nonsense! mere *bagatelle*! I'll not believe you, Sophy!"

"Nay, cousin Arthur, I am not in the habit of telling stories."

"Then I pity your want of taste. Why, my dear girl, the man is all outside show: he cannot boast of two original ideas."

"I don't care if he had not one, he is so handsome and so gentlemanly. I hope he will call this morning, if the odious rain does not prevent him."

"And who was the young man in dark blue who danced with Miss Lucy Ogilvie?" asked Fleming; "I did not like his expression, but he was far more intelligent looking than the captain."

"You must ask Alice," said Sophy, with a sly glance towards the window. "He is a great admirer of hers; but I think he was jealous last night"