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I've heard or seen—but we're so close, I feel things."

"Is it anybody in Nettleton?" Vivia asked, her face tremulous. "I was there once—we were out motoring, nearly all night, and stopped to walk a hundred yards—for a lark, you know."

"If I'd a-seen you, I'd a-kept you." Mrs. Kane said; then, sighing: "If only it was one body in Nettleton—Ellen Lee, my stepiece. The very nicest girl. Pretty, good-humored, bright enough—not like you, but nobody's fool. With money in hand, too; and a better housekeeper than I am."

"Don't tell stories, Plum Pudding!" Vivia admonished. "Nobody can be a better housekeeper than you are. Does Ellen like John? And did he ever make up to her?"

"In a way, yes. Until two years back, I was sure they'd make a match. But since John's been egging on Doctor Will to court her, and teasing her to say 'Yes,' I judge she tries to put him out of her mind. Sometimes I think it was on account of not wanting to stand between them, John would bring me here."

"I see! John is a wise, wise guy," Vivia laughed. "But don't worry, Plum Pudding. I think the senior partner's daughter has fallen in love with him, and he's going to marry into the firm. Let that console you for Ellen."

Mrs. Kane shook her head. There was a sob in her throat, as she said: "City girls don't want children, and you don't know how I ache to have grandchildren—a whole lot of 'em."

A passion of scanted motherhood rang in every word, awing Vivia into sober tenderness. She caught the pudgy fingers and lifted them to her lips, laid her cheek upon them, and ran silently away. Five minutes later she was saying to her mother: "No! Even a good heart is not armor against the arrows of Fate."

"Which means, I suppose," Mrs. Dauben said coldly, "that you have been finding out that that foolish kind person who feeds us, has troubles of her own."

"I must study how to save her from worse troubles," Vivia said, enigmatically.

Her mother stared. "I don't catch your meaning, quite."

"That was to be expected. You know a good thing when you see it, and don't want to let it go. But we are going to move next month—depend on that."

"Then, you have made up with Lannering? I don't see how else—"

"Nothing is settled—yet. I am considering him as a business offer."

"I hope you are going to be sensible. God knows I am tired enough of this hole. I have n't complained; but if I have to live on alimony for another year, I shall lose my mind."

"I have promised to go some day to the alms house, to make music for the wrecks and waifs and castaways," Vivia broke in. "Wouldn't it be dramatic if my father were among them? Alimony takes the whole income of his trust fund—and the lawyer says he had nothing else."

"When is Lannering to know?" Mrs. Dauben inquired icily.

Vivia laughed, a soft unpleasant laugh. "He has a dinner party in a few days; I am going to it. If I wear his orchids, instead of roses from the Greek at the street corner, he will understand."

Throughout the week following, Mrs. Kane saw little of Vivia, who spent her time playing simple old melodies, with a heart-throb in them; or going for solitary walks. "I am thinking—hard," was all the explanation she gave her mother.

Mrs. Dauben sewed more steadily than ever; but so hopefully that she did not feel the strain. Peace with Lannering

meant so much—luxury, ease, the sense of surceance. Vivia had been wickedly foolish to break with him—even yet, her mother did not know how the break had come about. Lannering had been such a friend! It was ridiculous in people to look askance, and remember that he had an insane wife, luxuriously bestowed out of his way. Certainly he had been fond of Vivia; but in a fashion wholly paternal. He had not lavished money on her outright; but had provided it under the guise of advances, to be repaid when she was world-famous.

Mrs. Dauben, selfish to the core, even in her maternity, had been bitter against Vivia for the shipwreck of their fortunes. The girl, her talent, her beauty, were still the main assets for a future. Once Vivia had said, her mouth hard, her eyes darkling: "Never mind! there is always—the river." After that, her mother had tried to be tender with her; but the sense of frustration had crept into her voice.

Vivia dressed early for Lannering's dinner. Her mother was to dine with Mrs. Kane, whose birthday was to be celebrated that night. John had been delayed—he would be home around midnight, said the telegram. But to Vivia it seemed likely that such a son might rush in upon his mother, her dearest birthday surprise. She stood fondling her long white gloves as she spoke, and glancing down at the orchids waving in velvet-purple pride upon her breast: "I shall run and tell Plum Pudding goodbye. I shall not dare to see her—after tonight."

"Don't be idiotic," Mrs. Dauben answered sharply; then, in a softer tone: "But go, by all means. I am so proud of you in that frock. I want her to see it."

"Bye-bye!" Vivia flung over her shoulder, running lightly down the long hall. The Kane apartment was four flights higher; but she chose to climb them, rather than to ring for the car. So she stood panting, with a faint red suffusing her lightly rouged cheeks, after she had rung Plum Pudding's bell. A firm step came down the hall; at the sound of it, her heart beat faster. John had come—just as she had foreseen. She would stand face to face with him before—There she checked herself; she knew she had come hoping to see him. She meant to beg him to marry Ellen—at once—so that Plum Pudding might have a happy old age. Plum Pudding was so dear, so innocently kind! Light streamed through the opening door full upon her. John Kane began to say: "I am sorry, but my mother is away—" then, he caught both her hands, crying huskily: "You! At last!"

"A long last!" Vivia said, stepping inside. "Listen! And promise me to do whatever I say."

"What is it?" he asked, his voice vibrant.

Vivia looked him up and down—six-foot-two of clean muscular virile humanity, with nothing of Plum Pudding about him, save her soft voice and her smile.

"You are never to tell my Plum Pudding—that is your mother—anything," Vivia half-whispered. "Actually she believes I'm fit for heaven. Let her keep on thinking so—really we haven't preyed on her half we might—and we've saved her from, maybe, worse company."

"I know you have been angels to her," John said huskily. "But there is nothing I'd mind, nor she, if she knew—"

"Yet, you took me by strength from a drunken beast who was trying to force me into his car at three o'clock in the morning, and he flung it in your face that I was: 'Lannering's girl!'" Vivia said, her breath like a sob.

John looked down at her with infinite

tenderness. "I did n't believe that. But, even if I had—"

"You would have fought for me just the same? I know it—I knew it then. Yet—you harmed me—can you guess how?"

John shook his head, his eyes searching hers the while. They drooped the least bit, as she went on: "By making me break with Lannering—my guardian demon. It seemed worth while to keep straight, after I had found there was one man in the world who was not also a beast."

"And you've had it pretty rough ever since," John hazarded, letting fall her hands; but setting his own palms upon her shoulders. She had on a long shimmering cloak, over something pale pink, and clinging, save where it swirled and billowed about her feet. The orchids, in their richness, seemed to mock the delicate hue. Vivia touched them meaningly.

"I have not worn them since that night. Promise me Ellen shall never wear them—"

"Ellen is going to wear orange flowers in January. I see you know us through and through—mother does love a good gossip. But, don't you be feeling you broke up her plan for me. I could n't have tried to get Ellen, even if I had never seen you."

"Oh!" Vivia gasped, "I only guessed, before tonight, that you were the John I knew. I must run away now, as soon as you promise. Of course, I shan't ever come to see Plum Pudding any more; but you'll let her remember me—"



"An engagement for life,"
John whispered

"I think you are coming to stay with her always," John said, catching the slim shimmery figure tight in his arms. She struggled a little; then lay happily passive against his breast, while kisses rained upon her eyelids. Suddenly she stiffened. "Wait!" she panted, tearing off her flowers and trampling them out of shape. As John snatched them up and tossed them into the fire, she said, a shake in the words: "Please send a message to Mr. Lannering—say Miss Lane can not come to dinner, on account of another engagement."

"An engagement for life," John whispered, again taking her in his arms.

"Or good behavior," Vivia supplemented, smiling at him through tears.

"However shall we manage to tell Plum Pudding? Mama will understand at once."

"We'll wait until my next trip—this is rather sudden." John answered, patting her cheek. "By that time, she'll be prepared for anything."