

fect upon her, however. His self-contained placidity seemed to give her courage as she explained her presence to him. "Mr. Southwick will see you in the morning room, Miss," he told her as he led the way through the wide, soft-carpeted hall, and on through other numerous passages of the big house.

Finally, stopping at the door of a sun-drenched room, one entire side of which was composed of French doors opening out onto a grassy terrace, he addressed a light-haired, bronzed young man who was seated at a huge, flat-topped desk. "Miss Allen, in answer to the advertisement, Mr. Southwick," he said, and closed the door softly behind him, leaving them alone.

A low whistle brought Emily's eyes up from the letter of reference that she was taking from her handbag; then a voice, expressing utter astonishment, queried: "Am I still Dan's Southwick, or did I go to sleep and wake up some one else? Dana, my boy, the old brain has gone back on you; or is it the eyesight? Advance, Miss Allen, and be recognized. Prove that you are of this earthy earthy and not a vision that will straightway evaporate into the ether."

Emily's clear, almost childish laugh rang out so spontaneously that it surprised even her. "Read this, please," putting the letter into his hands, "and you will realize that I am in no sense a vision, but a flesh-and-blood person who likes at least three meals a day."

Perched on the edge of the desk, one long, tweed-clad leg thrown over the other, he read the letter that Judge Bond, Emily's Sunday school teacher for so many years, had given her. In old-fashioned script, stating: "To whom it may concern," it related the entire history of Emily's life.

As the little French clock on the desk ticked away the minutes, Emily, small hands gripping each other in her lap, waited tensely. The soberness of her small, heart-shaped face, with its enormous dark eyes, gave her the look of a child hoping for praise but fearing punishment.

Finally, when it seemed her heart would stop beating altogether, she chanced a timid glance at his face, only to be met with a regard almost as serious as his own, and in that moment she realized that Dana Southwick, notwithstanding the flippancy of his manner, was a very earnest and mature person.

"Know what I'm thinking? That you need us about as much as we need you. 'Young girl on her own in big city'—not so good, my child. In fact, very bad. That's your side of the problem. As for us: Sal, who is Mrs. Sarah Jane Southwick to every one but me, needs youth and beauty instead of the horse-face catarrh sufferers we've had in the past."

It would really have been impossible for Emily to mask the expression of relief and happiness that lighted her face. "Thank you, oh, thank you," she said. "Please believe that I'll do my

gratitude should her hand on his arm. He looked down at her with such warmth and understanding that she quickly snatched her hand away; not, however, before he had squeezed the small fingers reassuringly.

"Now why spoil a lovely, natural gesture," he asked. "I neither bite nor scratch. But come along and I'll show you around the place. You can practice your companioning on me, even if I'm not exactly an elderly invalid," and, drawing her arm through his, he led her out into the bright sunlight.

"First, we'll start with the kennels—that is, if you like dogs, and somehow I believe you do."

"Indeed, I do. I never had but one—a Scottie—and I simply adored her. Jeanie was her name, and she would run as fast as her short little legs could carry her to meet me when I came home from school."

"Then you'll like our Laurie, who, by the way, has just presented us with a new family of four of the squirmiest, wriggliest puppies you ever saw."

Then, as they stopped before the wired inclosure: "Did you ever see so much uncontrolled energy in your life?"

"Oh, you darlings, you perfect little darlings!" she exclaimed. "That one over there is so black he should be named Smudge, or have you already given them names?"

He snapped his fingers with a sharp click. "There—you see—I told you we needed you."

Then to the little mother dog who was eying him watchfully: "Sorry I failed in my responsibility to you, old girl, but you've some one now who'll make up for my oversight."

To Emily: "But remember there are two boys and two girls, and no sissy names, mind you."

**A**FTER the kennels there were other fascinating places to explore. The rose garden, the orchard, fragrant with ripening, sun-kissed fruit, and finally the house itself.

Of the latter, the most interesting feature to Emily was the big, sunny, chintz-draped room with its private bath that would be hers after tomorrow. Mentally, she compared it with the small, overcrowded one that she had shared for so many years with two of her cousins, and it was not surprising she was afraid she would awaken and find all of this a beautiful dream.

It was in Dana's study, however, that Emily came to a realization so startling and acute in its penetration that it fairly stifled her. Without warning or preparation of any kind, she became aware that Dana Southwick was the one man in all the world whom she could ever love.

It was not his wealth that attracted her; she would have felt just the same if he had been as penniless as she. Rather it was an inherent kindness, a quality of understanding that she had not encountered in any other man since her father's death.

As she looked at him standing before

"No interruptions without a kiss," he told her, and proceeded to demonstrate his meaning.

her holding a silver-framed photograph that he had picked up from the table, she knew for an absolute certainty that there would never be another man who would be the same to her.

So engrossed was she with this revelation that she had not been listening to what he was saying. Now, however, she became aware he was holding the photograph for her inspection. "Beautiful isn't she?" he asked.

Emily inspected the blonde loveliness of the girl in the picture and felt a little shiver run over her entire body. "The most beautiful girl I ever saw," she answered at length.

"Lucilla Copphorne," he explained. "Used to live on the next place before her father crashed in the stock market. Now lives on a farm in Connecticut. We virtually cut our teeth on the same rattle and, except for college, have never been apart for very long at a time."

**A**T THAT time there flashed through Emily's mind another picture—one that would no doubt be in the rotogravure section of the Sunday papers soon. Lucilla Copphorne, her perfect features framed by a filmy wedding veil, and by her side, Dana, her husband.

But, of course, that was as it should be. They were entirely suitable for each other. Same background; same—But he was speaking again.

"She'll be here any day, now. Wrote me she was fed up with the sticks and wanted to come down for a visit." He set the picture back on the table and turned again to Emily. "My reason for showing you around the place is that I want you to feel at home here, my dear—completely and comfortably at home."

"Why, I believe I do already"—Emily was surprised to find that she really meant it—"that is, as much as I feel at home anywhere."

"You poor child! Has life really been so unkind? You seem so young and small to be away from your family."

At the mention of her beloved mother and father, bringing remembrance of her happy, carefree childhood with them, Emily's soft mouth trembled and tears welled to her dark eyes. Tears that glistened on her long lashes and spilled over on her soft cheeks.

Tenderly he drew her to him and wiped them away with his handkerchief. Soothingly he stroked the small shoulders, kissed the edge of her hair that came just to his mouth. "Little sweetheart," he said; and again, "Little sweetheart."

Minutes passed, in which Emily's world reeled, righted itself and tottered again; for upon opening her eyes the first thing that they encountered was Lucilla Copphorne's photograph.

Immediately she released herself, turning her flushed face from him to hide her shame and confusion.

It was Dana, however, who restored her composure. As though what had happened were the most natural thing in the world, he ignored it completely.

Casually he replaced his handkerchief in his breast pocket and then consulted his wrist watch.

"Too late to see Sal this afternoon. Doctor's orders are for her to be tucked in by 6 o'clock. So what? So . . . want to 'companion' me to the club for dinner, or just what is your little heart's desire?"

Emily, dimples showing again, was quite herself as she answered him. "That would be exactly in accordance with my heart's desire, but my head's instructions are something else again. I've letter-writing, packing and what-not to do before I start my arduous duties tomorrow."

"Then I'll drive you straight home so that you may not be all night about it and either come for you or send the chauffeur at 9 in the morning."

The top was down on the big roadster, inviting the soft dusk to saturate them with its velvet magic, and Emily was torn between the desire to prolong this leisurely drive and the opposing desire to be alone so as to hug this day to her, squeezing from it all its joy and sweetness.

There seemed no need of words between them, so none were spoken; but to her there was ecstasy in sitting beside him with closed eyes, feeling the rough tweed of his sleeve on her bare arm.

Stopping the car in the shadow of an overhanging tree, he took both her small hands in one of his and with the other tilted her face so that he could look deep into her eyes. "Dreaming?" he asked. "Yes, but not asleep," she laughed a little shakily.

"Well, just to make sure those lovely eyes don't stay open too late, I'm going to put a seal on them," and he brushed each eyelid softly with his lips. That was his good-night.

**E**MILY was awakened the next morning by a sharp knock on her door. Glancing at the clock on the dresser, she saw that it was 8 o'clock. For the first time since she had been here, she had had a night of dreamless, unworried rest and had overslept her usual rising time. Hastily stepping into her slippers and at the same time throwing on her dressing gown, she opened the door.

"There's a lady downstairs to see you," Mrs. Pope whispered in an awed voice. "Looks like an actress." Mrs. Pope had had stage ambitions when she was young, and this was the highest praise she could render any one.

"Didn't she give her name?" Emily asked in the same undertone.

But it was not Mrs. Pope who answered that question, for at that moment Lucilla Copphorne herself appeared in

Pope, she leaned indolently against it. Embarrassed as Emily was at her disheveled appearance, she nevertheless was struck by the difference in Lucilla Copphorne in the flesh and the photograph of her in Dana's study. True, the patrician features were the same, but what had passed for justifiable pride in the set of her head was in reality a cold haughtiness.

For a moment her eyes traveled around the plain little room, taking in all the details of its meager furnishings. That finished, she surveyed Emily with the same deliberate casualness. When she finally spoke, her voice, though low-pitched, was heavy with insolence.

"Mr. Southwick sent me to tell you that after thinking the matter over he had decided that you were unsuitable for the position he offered you, Miss Allen."

**F**OR a full minute Emily was too stunned to answer her; in fact, had no voice with which to speak. Then, as the truth penetrated her numbed brain, she dropped down on the side of the rumpled bed, still unable to tear her eyes away from those of the other girl.

It was only when Lucilla started to open the door that Emily recovered her speech. "But why? Why did he . . . ?"

"Why did he what, Miss Allen?"

"Why did he change so?" Emily was all but sobbing now.

"He doesn't feel that it is necessary to go into the details with you," was the quick answer. Then from the doorway she turned back again. "Oh, yes," she said in that same cool voice, "Mr. Southwick also asked me to tell you please not to bother him about it."

After she had gone, Emily continued to sit very still on the side of the bed, staring straight ahead of her in the quiet room.

Once she brushed back a lock of copper-colored hair that had fallen over her eyes; again she examined the nail of one of her fingers that she had broken on the lock of her bag the night before. But she was not conscious of either gesture. Over and over she was hearing the last thing Lucilla had said: "Please not to bother him."

She knew she should be angry and disgusted, but the hurt was too deep to feel anything but the pain of it.

It was only after dry sobs had started to convulse her body, opening a well of tears that seemed to have been dammed, that she was able to relax her tenseness. Then, throwing herself across the bed, she let grief have its unchecked way with her.

Three hours later Emily rose, washed her tear-stained face and dressed herself carefully in the blue tailored suit she had worn here. Her board was paid only through today, so she must leave on the afternoon train for Banton. She put the last few things in her suitcase and went downstairs to find Mrs. Pope.

That kindly soul was genuinely distressed and sympathetic as Emily related the facts to her; but she was having a hard enough time getting along as it

"Sweetheart, I had to know," he said. Then she was in his arms, being crushed to him, surrendering her lips to his in a rapture that was so intolerably sweet it was the essence of pain. All the eternity of suffering that she had endured was wiped out in that kiss, leaving her shaken but exalted.

Finally, his lips released hers, and she drew away from him. But as though she could not bear to have him beyond the boundary of her reach, she took his hand in hers and drew him back to the swing.

"How did you happen . . . ?" she began, but he stopped her with another kiss—this time on her soft little palm.

"Now let's begin at the beginning," he suggested. "I was just starting after you this morning when your very cordial telegram was delivered. Perhaps 'cordial' is hardly a strong enough word; 'affectionate' would more aptly describe it."

"But, Dana, I didn't send you a telegram of any kind—affectionate or otherwise." Her voice plainly indicated her dismay.

"Of course you didn't, darling, but I didn't know it at the time. Anyway, the one I received said: 'Cannot accept position. Have better offer. Leaving immediately. Emily Allen.'"

"At first I was mad clear through, but the more I thought of it the more convinced I became that there was more to it than was meeting the old eye. About that time Lucilla came in—she arrived last night just after I got back from taking you home, and I was so goggle-eyed about you I spilled it all to her."

"But she . . ." Emily began.

"No interruptions without a kiss," he told her, and proceeded to demonstrate his meaning.

"By that time," he went on, "I had decided to see you again if possible, and it was really Lucilla's attitude in trying to persuade me to drop the matter that made me suspect that she had been up to her old tricks again."

"Do you mean to say she has done this sort of thing before?" Emily asked in amazement.

Dana laughed his deep, hearty laugh. "More than once, my child. I let her get away with it the other times because I really didn't care, and it seemed sort of funny to me. But this time was different, and when your erstwhile landlady confirmed my suspicions, I put friend Lucilla in her place pronto."

"Oh, Dana, if I had only known!" Emily was thinking of those wretched hours she had spent. She shivered a little in his arms and he drew her closer.

"Never mind, sweetheart," he told her; "let's not waste time thinking of that when we could be on our way. Sal wants us to hurry home and be married by the side of her wheel chair. But before we start there's just one thing I want to tell you."

Emily waited, expecting almost anything after the revelation she had just heard.

"I love you," he finished.