

# EMBERS

## They Relighted a Flame of Love

By CLARISSA MACKIE

Paula Featherston was a creature of impulse. She had accepted her husband on impulse and married him on impulse. Before the honeymoon had waned she decided that she had made a mistake. Dick Featherston was a serious, matter of fact fellow with a strong will. He never allowed his heart to run away with his head. If his wife was in error and he was sure she was in error he refused to condone the error.

Then, too, Dick was a different man socially from those to whom Paula had been accustomed. He was not a dancing man; he was not a social leader; he was just plain Dick Featherston, with not a ray of glitter in his make-up. When Paula had introduced him to one of her society friends the young woman said to her, "Not at all the kind of person I supposed you would marry."

Within a few years after the marriage of Dick and Paula there came a definite result to Paula's dissatisfaction with her husband. Denis Brown was exactly the kind of man her friends supposed she would marry. He was a cotillion leader, a club man, a lady killer. Denis saw that all was not right between Paula and her husband. He began by feeling a pride in being favored by a married woman. But he did not stop here. He persuaded Paula to leave her husband and child and go away with him.

The elopers were to meet near Dick Featherston's summer cottage by the sea. Paula started with a wildly beating heart. The journey seemed too short. When the train drew into the little station she paused for an instant on the platform and then ran down the steps to the highway which curved sharply away toward the sea.

Down a vista of golden hued maples she saw the blue water and the curling white crested waves. It was October, and all of the summer cottages were closed. There was an air of desolation in the boarded windows and the bare verandas. The wind was keen and there was a pungent smell of bayberries from the sandy bluffs that ran down to the beach.

Mrs. Featherston passed beyond the last small cottage and rounded a jutting point of land to turn into a cobblestone gateway that led to a more pretentious house. There were grassy lawns dappled with brilliant autumn leaves, and back of the house was a garage, but there was evidence that the place had been long untenanted.

Paula Featherston inserted a key in the front door and rather hesitated at the gust of musty air that rushed out as the sea breeze swept in.

When she had closed the door and stood within the silent house she hesitated again.

The dear familiarity of the hall struck some answering cord in her heart. She winced as she turned away and passed through the various rooms where the furniture was swathed in ghostly linen. Before one closed door she paused and then passed on.

It was her husband's library.

It was useless to enter there. What

she had come after was upstairs in her own boudoir. If she was to meet Denis Brown at the end of the beach road she must hasten.

In her boudoir she sat down before the little satinwood writing desk and unlocked it. It was growing late, and the room was quite dark. She went to the window and unfastened a shutter. It banged in the wind, and her fair hair was tossed into disorder before she finally fixed the catch and closed the sash.

She went back to the desk and opened a secret drawer which was stuffed full of letters. These she carried to the hearth and heaped into a little pyre and touched a match to it. The blue smoke curled spirally upward; then the papers burst into sudden flame.

Words stood out clearly here and there, brief messages out of the past written in letters of fire.

"The moments have been hours and the hours days. My dearest sweetheart, be careful of yourself. If anything should happen—Tomorrow I shall call you wife—my darling wife!"

With a flurry the last letter shot up the chimney, a black, charred thing, dead, like their happiness. That was always the way when one expected too much of life, and Dick had been disappointing. He had curbed her in everything. No wonder she had rebelled.

She tried to laugh as she remembered her absurd happiness that evening when they arrived at Seaways to spend their honeymoon. They had made much ceremony about lighting the hearth fire in the library, and Dick had recited the "Hanging of the Crane" as they sat on the settle and watched the flames. Every year after that they had spent a few months at Seaways until last year, when the break came. Since then she had traveled the world over, the gayest of the gay in every fashionable resort, while Dick pegged away in the Street, and baby Polly was spoiled by a doting grandmother.

Suddenly her face grew tense, and she closed her eyes. Things would be better after this, for she had made up her mind to go away with Denis Brown. Then—then Dick would have no excuse for withholding her freedom. As for Polly, why, Grandmother Featherston had undoubtedly weaned the baby away from her mother.

Paula's heart hardened, and she laughed unpleasantly. The Featherstons were all that way—proud and stiff necked and conventional to a fault. She could safely say that there was no ache in her heart for any one—Dick, baby Polly or any one!

She walked defiantly to the mirror and, removing her hat, looked closely at her fair face. She was as lovely as ever. The two years of strain and worry had not marred her beauty. She must keep herself lovely for Denis' sake. Denis was an artist, a dreamer, a lover of beauty, and if she had disappointed Dick, who was not a beauty worshiper, she must not fail to hold Denis' love forever.

A little terror took possession of her for the moment, but she shrugged impatiently and turned away from the glass.

Denis was to meet her at the end of the road, and they were to go in his car to Boston. She had wanted this hour to herself before she left Seaways forever.

Gently she closed the door and went toward the stairs. Halfway down the flight she stopped short.

From somewhere in the house came the smell of burning wood—it was cedar, perhaps driftwood—but, no; it couldn't be that. She was quite alone in the house.

It was merely her fancy. Something in the hour had brought back the past too vividly. How many times she had come down the stairs at twilight sensing that same pungent odor from the

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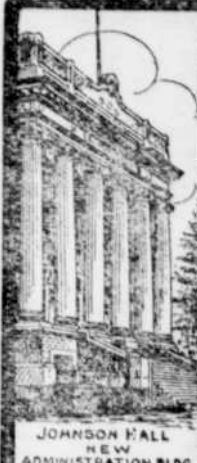
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hearth fire in the library!  
She must visit the library too. She wanted that dear picture of Polly from Dick's desk. He could have as many more taken as he chose, she thought bitterly, and he would have Polly too. Of course the Featherstons would teach Polly to despise her mother. But she must hasten; Denis would be waiting.

She turned the knob of the library door and entered.

Before the warm coziness of the room she stood in dazed wonderment. There was a great, roaring fire of driftwood on the hearth, and somewhere a gnarled bit of cedar was sending out fragrant blue smoke.

A red shaded lamp illuminated the room softly.

Dick was writing at his desk, something big and splashing, in his dashing way.

Curled among the cushions on the settee was Polly, fast asleep.

A low table was drawn close to the fire, and on it were a singing kettle and some clumsily arranged tiny cups and saucers. Paula recognized them as Polly's cherished toys. There were other things—a pot of jam and some stale looking sweet biscuits. They might have been hurriedly rummaged from the chimney cupboard.

Paula saw these things in one swift glance. She also saw Dick's broad back as he bent over the desk. He did not turn his head at her entrance.

"I must go!" she told herself in wild alarm, but still she stood there, afraid to move.

Dick did not turn his head, but presently he spoke, carelessly:

"We've been waiting ages for you, dear. The kettle's boiling over. I've promised Polly that she shall pour the tea."

Paula leaned against the door and closed her eyes.

"Coming, Paula?" asked Dick after awhile.

She came forward and, resting her hands for support on the desk, leaned toward him.

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"I—came here tonight—to—to—run away with Denis Brown!" she said.

"Yes?"

"Well, you cannot want me to pour tea for you now?" she laughed bitterly.

"Polly is to pour tea," he reminded her gently. "Besides, you will want to say goodby to her."

"Ah!" she cried sharply. "You are cruel."

He was silent. His pen ceased to write, and she knew that he was staring into the fire.

He must have suffered. His dark hair was almost white.

Polly stirred, opened her eyes, yawned like a white kitten and stared at her mother with unbelieving joy.

"Oh, muvver, muvver!" she shrieked at last, and, tumbling off the settee, she came to Paula's outstretched arms. For a long time Paula held her there, feeling her numbed heart slowly melting under the touch of the warm little body. Baby kisses smothered her face and throat, and little baby chuckles of endearment fell on her hungry ears.

At last Paula lifted wet eyes and looked straight at her husband. "I came after some letters of mine," she said honestly. "I must go now. This is the end."

Dick arose and went to the hearth fire. He stood there with an arm on the mantelpiece, his grave eyes searching her face.

"I'm sorry to spoil your plans, Paula," he said slowly, "but I can't allow any man to run away with my wife, you know. You've had a year or two of freedom, and when I heard—oh, well, he talked a little at the club about this, Polly, and I came down to stop it. I met Denis at the end of the road, I came around the other way by motor, and I thrashed him and sent him home."

A glad look came into Paula's face.

"Dick!" she said softly, and she knew then that the hearth fire had never been dead. Something had blown the embers into the warm flame of love again.

"Come and make the tea, muvver," pleaded Polly.