

"FROM DEATH TO LIFE"

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Written expressly
for this Magazine

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Edward Tyler, a young teller in the Cooper's National Bank, is told by the cashier, Robinson, to go to the race track and bet one thousand dollars on a horse named Selim Bay, giving him the money with which to bet. Selim Bay loses. Tyler, going to his lodgings after banking hours, learns that his accounts have been found one thousand dollars short. Robinson has reported to the president, Mr. Ellis, that Tyler had gone away under plea of sickness, and later had been known to have lost the missing sum at the race track. Tyler, feeling that circumstances are overwhelmingly against him, determines to take his own life. He goes to a hotel in a suburban village, writes some letters, then starts for the river. On the way a stranger joins him and forces his acquaintance. He has seen and recognized the young teller at the track and divined his intention, supposing, of course, that he is foolish and guilty. The stranger confesses himself Charles Brewster, a man of wealth, who has become engaged to a lady of his own social set and, later, under an assumed name, to a poor salesgirl, who has won his heart. Rather than face the odium of exposure, he chooses death and makes the fantastic proposal that they die together. Tyler agrees, and together, in the moonlight, they walk to the river. In return for Brewster's confidence, Tyler narrates the circumstances of which he is the victim. At the very brink of death Brewster, after making Tyler swear to the truth of his tale, forbids the act of death, and they return to the hotel. Here Brewster writes a letter to the president of the bank, enclosing a check for a thousand dollars, which he intimates was overpaid him by mistake. This will relieve Tyler from the charge of embezzlement and bring him back from death to life. Brewster, however, persists in his own determination to die. Tyler strives desperately with him, seeking to save the life of the man who has saved his own. He persuades Brewster to take brandy to steady his nerves and succeeds in rendering him intoxicated. In this condition Brewster is forced to go to bed, while retaining full control of his mental faculties and persisting in his determination to act as soon as the effects of the intoxicant have gone.

THE gray light of morning had come, the newsdealer had arrived with his bulky Sunday papers, the village was astir with the life, drowsy and slow, which betokens the morning of the day of rest. Tyler moved to and fro upon the sidewalk in ceaseless vigil. At last he went up to Brewster's room and knocked at the door. Brewster, half feverish, half stupid from the effects of his recent intoxication, opened the door. He had not undressed when going to the room.

"What do you want?" he asked, irritably.

"I want," Tyler firmly replied, "my breakfast and you in my company. You are ill, and for a few hours you are in my charge. Whatever you do, you must restore your strength of mind. A quick, cold bath while I wait outside, then coffee and food and you will be yourself and know what to do."

Brewster hesitated, then closed the door with an abrupt promise to appear soon.

He came out a few minutes later, haggard, with bloodshot eyes, but calm and rational, though his features were set and stern.

"I think," he said, in quiet tones, "that you are very impertinent in your interference with my affairs."

"Quite as much as you were when you interfered with mine," Tyler answered quite as calmly. "Let us go to the dining-room. My interference will not go far. I have done what I believed was right. The coffee will clear our minds and we will know what to do."

The two men went to the table, and for a while they ate little, gulping down quantities of coffee and nibbling at the buttered toast.

Then first Brewster and then Tyler began in real earnest to eat.

"I have heard that criminals, on the morning of execution, usually eat well," Brewster grimly remarked, cutting at his steak.

"So I believe. And usually, I have heard, they take ham and eggs," Tyler responded.

"I think you are right. Waiter, bring me an order of ham and eggs."

"And me, also," Tyler said.

"Don't trouble to accommodate yourself to my taste," Brewster said. "I am only trying to carry the fashion."

"And I also," Tyler replied. "If the comparison applies to you, it does to me as well. We can speak plainly. You still

feel that you are a criminal, deserving and doomed to death?"

"I certainly do."

"Very well. Last night I was to all intents a dead man. A benefactor appeared and brought me back to life. Now, if I permit him to die I am a criminal, deserving death. If I deserve that death I will receive my desert. You proposed going in my company. I will go in yours if you persist in going. I have said it."

Brewster looked at his companion in silence for a brief period. Then he spoke quietly.

"You are a fool," he said.

"Even so."

"Do you really mean to persist in such folly?"

"If such you term it."

"And render valueless the sacrifice I made in consenting literally to die a second time in order to save, not only your life, but your honor?"

"My honor is saved. You will not undo what you have done. My life has been spared thus far that I may make one supreme effort to save you. When I have made that effort, whether successful or not, the worth of your sacrifice has been proved. Last night you insisted on bearing me company through the white moonlight to the river. When all was ready you proposed half an hour's wait. I assented. Then you proposed still further delay. Now I propose that next Saturday night we again walk to the river at midnight. The moon will be shining then."

"But it might be raining! Ugh!"

"Then we will go far away and await another night such as last. But if in that time I can lay before you proofs—you to be the judge—that you can happily and honorably live, you will not refuse to do so?"

"Of course I would not. But what you mention is absurdly impossible."

"Nevertheless, it is my only chance for life. I ask you, in view of that fact, to agree to next Saturday night."

"What do you intend to do?"

"I hardly know. But I will do nothing which is not honorable, place you in no false light, tell no lies. With these conditions I ask liberty."

"Well," said Brewster, "you have won again. You are a fool, but a game and chivalrous fool. Saturday night let it be."

The meal was finished almost with cheerfulness. Then, Brewster agreeing to remain at the hotel, Tyler returned to his lodgings where he was promptly placed under arrest on a warrant sworn by Robinson, charging him with the theft of a thousand dollars. But, as he knew, bail was already provided. Brewster having telegraphed a friend for that purpose.

Next morning he unflinchingly presented himself at the bank. There was much staring and whispering, and then Mr. Robinson, red-faced and awful, appeared.

"I am astonished, young man," he said, "that you dare to show yourself after what has happened!"

"You mean after losing the thousand dollars you gave me to bet on Selim Bay?" Tyler responded, coldly, but in tones which could be heard by all near.

"What do you mean by such insolence?" Robinson blustered. "Do you think in that way to account for the thousand dollars you were short?"

"I think that is a very good way."

"Do you mean—"

"I mean that it is your word against mine. You know as well as I who is the liar and thief."

Robinson stammered in his anger, and while he was hunting for words to express his wrath a clerk came to ask both of them to appear before Mr. Ellis.

"So you were at the racetrack Saturday?" the president asked.

"For Mr. Robinson."

"And bet a thousand dollars on Selim Bay?"

"For Mr. Robinson."

"You know that my invariable rule is

the discharge of any employee who bets at the tracks?"

"I do. It is a good rule."

"And yet you broke it?"

"For Mr. Robinson."

"And you now expect to be discharged?"

"I certainly do."

"And you acknowledge the discharge just?"

"I do."

"And what have you to say of the thousand dollars in which your cash was short?"

"By advice of my lawyer I say nothing. I believe a criminal charge lies against me."

"Mr. Robinson," said the president, turning sharply upon the cashier, "did you give this young man a thousand dollars to bet at the track?"

"I did not. I hope you don't believe—"

"Do you think he had a thousand of his own to bet?"

"I am sure he had not. You know that he came here just from college penniless, and that he has had only his salary since."

"Yes I know. But where did he get the money he took to the track?"

"Well, of course, you know that the cash was a thousand short."

"Yes, Mr. Robinson, but that was by your act," said the president, sharply. "Look at that letter."

He handed over Brewster's letter, which had come in the morning's mail.

"Well, I—I—" stammered the cashier in bewilderment.

"And here is a letter for you in the mail," Mr. Ellis continued, handing over Brewster's letter addressed to Mr. Robinson, and watching the latter closely as he read it.

"Well, I—of course, I'm sorry," he said, very pale and trembling, "but under the circumstances I will acknowledge my mistake and will offer my resignation."

"Which is accepted," said the president, curtly. "And you will go to court at once and withdraw your charge against this young man. Mr. Tyler, I believe that you have told the truth. Whether you have or not, you have broken a rule, for which the penalty is loss of your position. I will give you recommendation as far as possible, and if I can assist you in any way I will do it. But I positively never will have in this bank any employee who ever places a bet on horseracing."

"I appreciate your justice and thank you for your kindness," said the young man, and, bowing, made his departure.

Outside the bank he stood for a moment with a kind of mistiness before his eyes as he realized that he was breaking irrevocably with the associations of his past business career. Then he went unhesitatingly to the railroad station and after an hour alighted at the village to which Brewster's letter to Miss Catherine Ball had been addressed.

An inquiry of the first passer-by and ten minutes' walk and he stood before an old mansion in the midst of beautiful grounds.

"I must see Miss Ball," he insisted, in reply to all the servant's inquiries, and at last a handsome woman of about thirty years, with a refined, intellectual face and somewhat sad expression, came to the door.

"I desire a conference with you," he said. "It is a matter, pardon me, of life and death. On your decision rests the matter of two lives."

"Come into the library," she said, leading the way. "Now what have you to say?"

"I have a letter for you," Tyler began. "A letter from a friend who contemplated suicide, but has been prevented for a time from carrying his plans into execution. He believes that his letter has gone by mail. I come to you in the desperate hope of assistance in overcoming his disposition for another attempt."

"Give me the letter."

He handed it to her. She read, then laid the letter in her lap and rested her cheek in her hand.

"It is what I expected," she said. "Pardon me, Miss Ball. I do not know what the letter contains, but I know the history upon which it is based. The case seems nearly hopeless, but I must do what I can. I would spare you, but I would save my friend."

"Tell me frankly what you know."

"I know that he has long been engaged to you."

"Yes, and what else?"

"That he has—has—"

"Has engaged himself to another woman?"

"Yes."

"I knew that he did not love me," she said, still dreamily looking out of the window, "but I did not think this of him."

"It is an infatuation, a blindness," said Tyler, with all the sage wisdom of his twenty-five years, "to which men have been subject from the beginning of the world."

"Why do you speak so? What do you know of the young lady?"

"I know nothing, save that she is a salesgirl in a department store."

"And does that prove to you that she is unworthy?"

"God forbid!" said Tyler, flushing hotly. "My own mother, now among the saints of heaven, was once thus employed. I said that was all I knew. I believe her worthy. I used the word infatuation, partly because I could not understand—pardon me, I speak sincerely—this is no time for mere compliment—because I could not understand, after seeing you, why he should care for another. Partly, I believe, because I wished to use soothing words, knowing how you were hurt."

"I am not hurt," she said, in her soft, quiet way. "I am I, she is she. Charles Brewster loved her for some qualities I do not possess. All women cannot be alike. He is entitled to his preference. But he should have told me long ago."

"That is true. But it was his desire not to hurt you which held him back."

"Well, there is no reason why he should not marry the girl he loves. You can tell him so. I have never loved him any more than he loved me. But I liked him and I believed him an honorable man. I had, perhaps, a natural human desire to marry. But I see now that I was wrong to engage myself without love, and I am glad it is all over."

The man was by this time so fascinated by the noble and beautiful woman that he could not resist the desire still to preserve the engagement between her and Brewster.

"But, Miss Ball," he said, "suppose that I prove that Miss Laughlin is not really in love with Mr. Brewster, as he supposes?"

"That would have no interest for me."

"Would you not marry him if he should return penitent and ask your love?"

"Never!"

He was silent, for he felt that her word was irrevocable.

"Now tell me," she said, "how he was prevented from suicide after writing this letter."

Tyler sat in embarrassed silence.

"In this letter," she said, "he says that he is going down to the river in company with a bank thief."

Tyler flushed so painfully that Miss Ball instantly divined a part of the story.

"And you exchanged confidences," she said, sarcastically. "For noble fratrum."

Tyler's flush departed, leaving his face deadly pale.

"I beg of you, Miss Ball," he said, "to hear my story to the end. I am not a thief, though I contemplated and still contemplate suicide."

Something in his manner checked her rising scorn. She felt that she was indeed in the presence of tragedy.

Then in a few words he told her of his misfortune at the bank, of his rash determination, of Brewster's action in saving him.

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