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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor



WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH



"Like Lucifer cast out of Heaven, I fell with unbelievable velocity."

Return From Death

By BRUCE BRYAN

An unusual story about a scientific experiment that failed—the terrific experiences of a man whose body lay in the doctor's ice-box

“CAN’T we get on with it, Doc?” The irritation in my voice was an unconscious screen to the stark fear that was welling up in my soul.

Bixby turned around slowly, grotesque with his high-domed forehead and watery eyes behind thick-lensed glasses. In his hand was a paper.

“I know how you feel, old man,” he said quietly. “We’ll get started right away. There are just a few necessary preliminaries. You’ve got the five thousand deposited to your credit, but I’ve got to protect myself. Here is a typewritten form that releases me from responsibility in the—ah—in the event that the experiment is not a success.”

I grunted, rolling over on the white-enameled steel tray in which I was stretched at full length. The tray was mounted on rollers, and except that it was narrower, resembled an operating-table.

“In the event of my death is what you mean, isn’t it, Doc?” I asked, grinning rather bleakly.

Bixby shrugged. His weak eyes regarded me almost disinterestedly through those heavy lenses.

“You realize as well as I do, Pierce, that there is always that chance. My experiments heretofore have never extended beyond the use of dogs or smaller animals. But you’ve seen it proved to your own satisfaction that, after freezing them to death, I have in every case been able to

bring them back to life. Sign this, please.”

Taking the paper from him, I waited while he hunted up a pen. My gaze traveled about the interior of the room. It was fitted up as a laboratory, and its completeness no doubt would have delighted the heart of any scientist alive. Bixby had money and to spare, and had surrounded himself with an experimental surgeon’s paradise. But to me there was something cold and impersonal in those shelves of labeled bottles, those racks of gleaming metal instruments, and the complicated network of glass tubery that ran all over the place.

At one end of the laboratory was a large mechanical oven, flanked by standing cylinders of compressed gasses. Near the door at the opposite end squatted a huge electric refrigerating-plant. It stood about eight feet high, its flat-tiled top just brushing the ceiling, and was equipped with massive glass-paned doors that opened into vault-like compartments. Sliding roller trays, similar to the one on which I lay naked, fitted snugly into these apertures. As my eyes dwelt momentarily on this great ice box, reminiscent of an up-to-date morgue, an involuntary shudder ran through me.

And why not? Within the next few minutes I would be rolled into its cold embrace like a slab of beef in a butcher’s shop.

Bixby shoved a pen toward me. With the jerky speed of nervous hysteria, I

scrawled my name at the bottom of the release. The doctor glanced at it perfunctorily, folded the paper and put it in his pocket.

"And now," he said, looking at his watch, "we may as well begin."

I TRIED to smile indifferently, but I know the gesture was a mockery. Bixby had assured me there would be no real pain—just the temporary discomfort many a man has suffered when caught in a sub-zero blizzard. The temperature in the ice box, he said, would drop gradually to thirty below, and I would slip easily into slumber. Eternal sleep, from which he promised to recall me.

Perhaps he could—and perhaps he couldn't. In any case, I reflected bitterly, what difference would it make? We'd gone all over this before. I was here of my own free will, a living human subject for Bixby's experiment—the last link in an uncompleted chain. The circumstances that led up to my presence in the doctor's laboratory are unimportant. Like many another poor mortal I had made a mess of my life, from an economic point of view, and things had been at low tide for so long that I held no hope of their ever becoming better.

Only a few nights before I had been contemplating suicide—contemplating it with the deadly seriousness of one to whom all that matters is the way and means. And even as I contrasted in my mind the comparative efficacy of the rope or gun, my eyes chanced to fall on that item in the daily paper in which those lethal articles had been wrapped. It related the astonishing work of Doctor Theophilus Bixby, the eminent scientist who had devoted a lifetime of research toward solving the black riddle of death.

Through the press an astounded world read of his revivification from actual death of guinea-pigs, and even dogs, frozen stiff

for ten or twelve hours. On one hand the world of science was divided, some acclaiming, some doubting his results. Alined solidly against him on the other side were the church and the association for the prevention of cruelty to animals.

It appealed to me. Here was the ultimate gamble. And I was the one man on earth to offer up a life as the stake. I couldn't lose!

Fortunately, Bixby lived in the same city.

So I put away the gun and the rope, and walked through the snow of a late December afternoon to his address.

His secretary met me at the door of the big mansion in which he resided and maintained his laboratories. Taking in my seedy appearance, he told me coldly enough that the doctor was out. I said I'd wait. Attempts to dissuade me had no effect. Finally, Bixby himself came out.

"Now see here, my man," he began in a bluster, his weak eyes flashing annoyance through those ridiculous lenses.

I stood up, eye to eye with him.

"Doctor," I asked quietly, "do I look like a dog?"

A red flush mantled the scientist's pale cheeks.

"Do you—do you . . . see here," he stuttered angrily, "what do you want? Didn't my secretary tell you——"

"Forget that, Doc," I advised dryly. "I don't *want* anything. I'm not asking; I'm offering!"

That stopped him. For a moment he forgot his anger in his bewilderment.

"Offering? Offering what?"

I smiled, a little bitterly. Not much, perhaps. Only a human life. There was still time to back out. Then I cast the die.

"I'm offering myself, Doc—as your dog. And I don't think you'll have to buy a license tag for me, either."

Bixby wasn't dumb. Perhaps he had done most of his work with animals, but

he was no novice with human nature. His weak little eyes widened.

"Come into my office," he said abruptly, standing aside.

And so it was arranged. Bixby was no piker; there's nothing small about a man who probes the hidden laws of the cosmos. And he could well afford to pay as he went. For my part in the experiment, a part that was at once the easiest and the hardest, I was to receive five thousand dollars deposited to my account in any bank I chose. In case I didn't come back to claim it, the money would go to my only living relative—a sister back in Kansas whom I hadn't seen in years.

So there I was, supine on the enameled tray in Bixby's laboratory, waiting for him to start in. Already vague wisps of terror were coiling about my brain—strange in a man who had been on the point of taking his own life by a much more violent means.

THE doctor rolled a small table up close beside me. On its surface was a large amber-colored jar fitted with a double stopper from which sprouted a dialed gage and an intricate arrangement of thin glass tubes made flexible with rubber connections. Bixby tinkered with this for a moment, then approached me with an alcohol-soaked sponge in one hand and a scalpel in the other.

"First," he said, smiling with what in a physician might have been termed a suave bedside manner, "we must have a minor transfusion."

With expert fingers he sponged a small spot on my arm, made a deft incision with the knife, and unhurriedly inserted the nozzle of one of the tubes leading from the jar.

"A blood transfusion, Doc?" I queried nervously. "Am I anemic?"

"Quite the contrary," he assured me, his eyes on the dial. "Your blood is exceptionally healthy — and full-bodied.

What we want to do is guard against possible clotting while—while you are in a state of suspended animation. To thin your blood out to the necessary constituency I am injecting a small amount of a compound derived from one of my own formulæ. Its chief elements are composed of a solution of ordinary sugar, glycerin and citric acid. And now, you will please remain as quiet as possible."

When the transfusion was complete and the wound on my arm taped, he drew out his watch. "It is now exactly nine-seventeen," he said, with no apparent relevancy. "Just one thing more, and we are ready."

Dipping a cotton swab into a small vial, he applied some sort of vaseline-like substance to each of my nostrils. Then he started to roll the tray on which I lay toward the huge refrigerator. One of its doors gaped open, waiting, like the brazen vent in a glowering idol of Moloch, to welcome a sacrificial victim to its fiery maw. Only here the flame was cold and slow with promise of a lingering death. . . .

"Wait, Doc!" I gasped shakily. "How—how about an anesthetic first?"

Bixby shook his head.

"Can't risk it," he explained. "Ether fumes imprisoned in the lungs and brain might serve to break down the blood corpuscles, defeating our purpose. I'm afraid you'll have to take it on the chin."

He hesitated, as if waiting to see whether I'd change my mind at the last moment.

For a minute I digested his words. I had read in the same newspaper account of his experiments on dogs some of the comments other scientists had made regarding his work. One of them, after examining a resurrected canine, pointed out that its mind was affected. The animal was able to walk about, to eat and sleep, but commands it had previously understood now seemed to fall on deaf ears. Yet the dog was not deaf. It had, the savant implied, become what in a human being

would be termed a half-wit—an imbecile. It apparently lived in a daze, failing to recognize its own master. Something was gone from its intelligence—*something* had not come back from death!

To this Bixby had only one answer: no one knew much about the canine brain. The animal in question had, necessarily, undergone a terrific shock. It was, he claimed, already beginning to recover from its experience. He even predicted that in a few weeks it would become entirely normal. Nevertheless, his colleagues shook their heads. Bixby had done a wonderful thing, was their verdict. It was an accomplishment unique in the annals of medicine. But he had neither conquered death nor solved any of its age-old secrets. Let him, therefore, be sure to confine his researches to animals.

Perhaps I sensed a quiet scorn in the doctor's unruffled patience. At any rate, something stiffened my wavering will. I had made a bargain, and I'd stick to it.

"If I can't go out unconscious, Doc," I argued, "how about a little drink before putting me on ice? Some artificial courage can't do any harm. Preserve my innards, if anything."

Bixby smiled. He poured me a generous shot of Scotch. I downed it with a feeling of *ave atque vale* and handed back the glass.

I took a long breath. "Okay, Doc," I whispered. "Let's go!"

Bixby said nothing. He wheeled me head-first up to the open door of the refrigerator, elevated the tray to the proper level and fitted the rollers into the groove of the coffin-like compartment. He bent over me, ghoulish behind those crazy glasses, and held out his hand.

"Good luck!" he said.

"Cheerio, Doc!" I grinned back at him.

The tray slid easily into the great ice-box. There was a thud at my feet as the door was slammed shut, and through the

thick pane I could see Bixby's hand shove down the lever that locked it from the outside. I exhaled slowly. There was no drawing back now; I was committed to man's last and greatest adventure.

FOR several minutes I must have lain rigid and still in the semi-gloom of that narrow compartment, like one who is listening for the footsteps of a ghost. What are the thoughts of a man about to die? I ought to know, but somehow I have no clear recollection of the vagaries of my mind after that heavy door shut me off from everything that lived. Somewhere I have read that when death is imminent a man's past unreels before his eyes like a high-speed cinema. If such was the case with me, I don't remember it. I simply lay there, flat on my back, and all sense of panic had vanished. Yet neither did I feel that hopeless longing for death that had brought me to this place.

For what seemed an eternity, I lay absolutely quiescent, waiting for the first chill of death's icy fingers. My belly was warm with the flush of raw liquor and I was, to be truthful, almost lethargic in physical comfort. Then I heard a muffled click, followed almost instantly by a steady vibrating hum. Bixby must have thrown the switch.

It won't be long now, I thought. Soon I'd begin to shiver. I'd turn numb and blue, my teeth would chatter, and after an agonizing interval I would be sucked into swift oblivion. But when? When? Suddenly I was shaken by an intense desire to live—to breathe warm air, to eat warm food, to wear warm clothes! The drone of electricity rose to a crescendo, throbbing through my head, torturing my pulse into a compelling rhythm. It sang a dirge of dissolution in my ears, forced a scream to my lips. I tried to sit up. My head banged against the low shelf above, and I sank down, half stunned.

The horrible droning seemed to lessen with my consciousness. I felt stifled. I strangled for breath. Of course, this place was air-tight! And then—I *shivered*. At last, insidious tentacles of cold were reaching out for me. My limbs stiffened; I shuddered like a person afflicted with tropical fever. This, I thought frantically, is the beginning of the end. This is the Gethsemane that will win undying fame for Bixby—and for me an obscure paragraph in some ponderous medical brochure.

I pounded on the walls, on the shelf above me, until my knuckles were bloody. I kicked at the heavy door until my toes felt as if they were broken. Gasping for breath, I fell back, my strength gone. A great wave of light, intolerable, blazing, flashed before my eyes. I closed them, blinded. Long streamers of white-hot lightning flickered through the lids, like the aurora borealis casting lambent flame athwart a polar sea. Swiftly I slipped into blackness, complete, engulfing.

A curious sensation of lightness came with returning consciousness. I felt like a wraith of smoke, bending before an unseen draft. Slowly, I opened my eyes, fearful of whatever sights the dead must look upon. Amazement drove every other emotion from my mind. I was staring at the huge refrigerator—not from the gloomy constriction of that narrow compartment, but from the floor of the laboratory outside. My eyes were riveted on the closed and bolted door behind which was the tray on which I had lain.

For a moment I stood there in a trance of unbelief. A feeling of overwhelming relief welled up in my soul. I was alive! The experiment had failed. But what was I doing standing here in front of the ice-box? How did I get here? And where was Bixby?

These questions, to which there seemed no answer, made me nervous. And as a man does, when he feels fidgety, I reached

for a cigarette. I don't remember much about the absurdly inconsequential movements connected with getting the pack out of my pocket, abstracting a peg and lighting it. All I recall is the curious lack of effort and the seeming weightlessness of my hands. It was as if I had no sooner desired a smoke than I found myself puffing away.

A noise came from the other room, and I decided that Bixby must be in there. The door was closed, but it didn't occur to me to knock. Indeed, it seemed to me that one instant I heard that queer tinkering sound and the next instant I was there in the other room looking down at the doctor. He was crouching on the floor beside the generator that ran the refrigerator. There was a screw-driver in his hand and he was doing something to the brushes. Apparently he hadn't heard me come in, so I spoke to him.

Bixby didn't answer. He went right on working, as if he had not heard me. I spoke again, louder. Still he paid no attention. I began to get mad. The devil with him, I thought; I'll go back to the laboratory and pour myself another drink of that Scotch. And so suddenly it almost scared me, I found myself back in the laboratory with a glass of whisky in my hand.

As I tossed it off, that great ice-box caught my eye again. I stared at it with a sort of morbid fascination, waiting for the alcohol to send its permeating warmth through my veins. But strangely, there was no glow such as usually accompanied a stiff drink. An inexplicable sensation of uncertainty was coming over me. Either I had become subject to momentary fits of amnesia, or—something seemed decidedly wrong.

I found myself standing again in front of the ice-box, looking at the glass pane in that heavy door behind which Bixby had locked me. Something vague in the

shadow inside caught my eye and I bent over to peer closer. Then I got my first definite shock; then I began to realize how things really were. Because as I stood outside in the laboratory and gazed into the compartment through that glass window I saw—*myself lying inside, stretched out naked on the tray!*

THE cigarette in my hand dropped to the floor. Realization shook me from head to foot. Now I knew why I seemed so weightless, why doors seemed to mean nothing to me, why I moved about with such effortless ease and why distance was non-existent when I wanted to move from one place to another! I was dead! Dead! I could see my own body lying frozen inside that ice-box, and yet there I stood outside, fully clothed and shivering with a nameless dread.

Things began to whirl crazily before my eyes. The walls of the room leaned and tottered, converging into unimaginable angles, and I could look through them—through them and beyond into endless dimensions. I was dizzy, nauseated. My eyes were too heavy to keep open. I was caught up in a terrific maelstrom of forces, whirled to terrifying heights. With the breathless velocity of a comet I seemed to be hurled through empty space. Then gradually the vertiginous sensation abated. I forced my eyes open. Fiery, incandescent lights flashed past me, but aside from these I could see nothing that moved.

Still I seemed to be traveling with the speed of thought through a colorless immensity, traveling through space and through time, while the eons flitted past. I looked down from what felt an inconceivable height, and stared with uncomprehending awe at what might have been the earth itself, dropping out of sight like the rapidly diminishing tail-light of an express train at night.

Finally all sense of movement left me.

I might have been standing on a platform in the intergalactic reaches, only there was nothing under my feet. There was no sensation of gravity or balance left to me. Only—thought. Unhampered, unconfined thought—and the knowledge that I was dead. No heaven and no hell, such as I had been taught in Sunday school. Only a vast solitude and an intelligence filled with untranslatable wonder.

How long this continued I do not know. Eons, perhaps, dedicated to the tempering of a newly released soul. I was a bodiless entity adrift in endless nothingness, surrounded by unseen universes of wheeling planets and writhing, gaseous nebulae. But something was wrong—something was definitely out of tune with the cosmic laws in which I was as yet unabsorbed. I sensed that I was an alien mote here, because—because I wanted to live!

That was it! I was swept by an intense longing for the life I had voluntarily given up. I yearned for the impersonal coldness of that vault-like compartment in Bixby's ice-box. I craved the heartaches and disappointments, the physical discomforts of the drab existence I had renounced. There could be no peace even in death, in the face of such an unsatisfied craving.

Bixby and his experiment—how long ago that seemed! They were a shadowy tradition from a dim past. Vaguely I wondered about him. Was he carrying on his researches with other—subjects? For, of course, he had failed to recall me from death. I felt a sudden sensation of mirth. What an infinitesimal atom was Bixby, and what a mad dream he had cherished! Who and what was man, to think of solving the riddle of being? No doubt Bixby and all his generation had been in their graves a thousand years. Time was the merest flick of an eyelash here, where I sensed worlds being brought forth in fire and dying in frozen loneliness—all within the space of time it takes to utter these words.

Ages ago Bixby was forgotten, even to science — because his experiment had failed. I had gambled and lost. But what difference did it make? Even if I had lived out a full life, surrounded by all the luxuries of the rich — what difference would it make now?

But Bixby—had—failed! The thought droned in my mind. He could bring animals back to a semblance of life, but when he tried the same thing with a human being he was baiting God Himself!

I found myself wondering about my sister. Had she, in those ages long past, received the five thousand dollars I never returned to claim? And what had she done with it? What did she think of me, the wastrel brother who had bequeathed it to her? Even when I was alive it had been several years since I saw her. In a way it was a satisfaction to know that I had repaid her contempt and disdain with such a sum of money. It was a personal gratification, because my sister had always been small-natured and tight-fisted.

I could remember, as if it were only yesterday, when I came home from the war, broke and with no prospects.

"You can't hang around here for ever, Jim," she snapped at me on the second day. "You've got to get out and dig yourself up a job. Just because you're a war hero is no reason why you can loaf around my house."

Then it was I learned that the home I had lived in since boyhood had passed, with the death of my mother, to her—and her husband. Naturally, I got out. Got out and drifted, from one job to another. But now I wondered about my sister. I wondered what she had to say when she received the five thousand dollars. The wonder became an obsession. Her thin, sharp-featured face with its querulously suspicious expression rose before my eyes.

And even as I conjured up an image of her in my mind that feeling of vertigo as-

sailed me again. Once more I was caught up like a bit of chaff in a whirling tempest of unknown forces. The bottom seemed to drop out of my heart. Like Lucifer cast out of heaven, I fell with unbelievable velocity. Far below, millions of light-years away, the green star of earth came into view. It waxed and swelled as I hurtled toward it with the speed of thought, drawn irresistibly back to that clay from which I had sprung.

FASTER and faster I fell. Billowing seas and tumbling mountains rushed toward me. I plunged into the atmospheric blanket that shrouds earth from the bitter cold of interstellar space, and air whistled past me like the keening of lost souls in Erebus. Consciousness was reft from me in great welters of spiraling light.

I was standing on the porch of my sister's house in Kansas. No sense of wonder was left in me; just a subservient acceptance. How I came there or why did not occur to me. I put my hand on the bell and pushed. But no one answered. I tried again, but I could hear no muffled ring from within and no approaching footsteps. Well, I decided, there's no reason why I shouldn't walk on in. And before the thought was completed in my mind, there I was inside, standing in the library. I faced a desk, behind which my sister was sitting.

She didn't look up. Her husband was beside her, and I saw that they were reading a letter.

"Hello, Sis," I said. "I guess you're surprised to see me."

But she paid no attention, went right on reading. There was an odd expression in her narrow eyes. Her husband was beaming with delight.

"Hey, Sis!" I began again, louder.

She ignored me utterly and looked up at her husband.

"It's unbelievable, Henry," she exclaimed. "Five thousand dollars! Where in the world could he ever have gotten so much money? I know he could never have saved it—he wasn't the saving kind. Do you suppose he—stole it?"

My brother-in-law cleared his throat.

"Now, my dear," he said unctuously, "we mustn't look a gift horse in the mouth, you know. Just think! Now we can get that new car, and you can have your fur coat. I shouldn't wonder but what we could have the house painted in the spring, too. Even after the funeral expenses are deducted we should have a tidy sum left."

My sister's brow wrinkled aggressively.

"Funeral expenses!" she repeated. "This letter doesn't say anything about the funeral expenses coming out of this money."

Henry shifted uncomfortably.

"Yes, I know, dear. But you, being his only living relative, you know. . . . Don't you think we ought to write and offer——"

My sister whirled on him angrily.

"Henry, are you a fool?" she cried. "We'll do nothing of the sort. Let the authorities bury him, if they haven't done it already."

Her husband shrugged nervously and drew back a step.

"But, my dear," he protested mildly. "You know that means potter's field. And after all, he's your brother."

My sister laughed coldly.

"You just keep your mouth shut, Henry. It won't matter to him—now."

A cold rage had been growing in me as I listened to this conversation. I was disgusted with my sister, aghast that I had actually willed five thousand dollars—the price of my life—to such a warped creature. Why—oh, God!—why did Bixby's experiment have to fail?

Thought of the doctor brought me upright, trembling. If my sister was still alive—then Bixby must be alive, too. I

wanted to see him, to know what he was doing. What had he done with my body? Where was I buried? Surely, Bixby would not see me consigned to potter's field.

The desire to see him became an insatiable craving. He was half a continent away, and I began to think of how I should travel this distance. But no sooner was I considering ways and means than again I was seized in that vortex of cosmic forces, that whirlpool in which the senses reeled dizzily until blackness descended over everything. . . .

I WAS back in Bixby's laboratory, standing in front of that awful ice-box. The doctor was nowhere in sight, but from the other room came that subdued tinkering sound that I had heard—how many ages before! I began to shiver, overcome with a dreadful premonition. Bending over, I stared through the glass pane of the refrigerator compartment. Yes, by heaven! There was my body, still reclining naked on the enameled tray. It drew me like a magnet. An intolerable longing seized me. I wanted—I wanted to be with myself again. I wanted . . .

And even as I began to understand the longing, I felt myself being drawn forward like a moth to a flame. I felt myself going through that closed and bolted door, seeping into the air-tight vault through the invisible cracks as if I were no more solid than a tendril of gas. I was inside, hemmed in by narrow walls and the low shelf above. In the gloom I felt the coldness of my own body, looked into my own glazed, unseeing eyes. I threw my arms about the corpse. . . .

A great wave of light, intolerable, blazing, flashed before my eyes. I closed them, blinded. Long streamers of white-hot lightning flickered through the lids, like the aurora borealis casting lambent flame athwart a polar sea. Swiftly I slipped into blackness, complete, engulfing, with a roar

in my ears like angry surf thundering on a rocky coast.

Something choked me. I gagged, unable to catch my breath, conscious of a burning sensation in my throat. A cloying, powerful odor clung about my nostrils. I wanted to sleep, to rest, to lie still and forget everything in eternal slumber. But that pungent scent kept dragging at my senses. My eyes opened wide. Bixby was bending over me, peering through his heavy glasses with a queer mixture of anxiety and disgust. He was holding some sort of small vial to my nose—the source of that powerful aroma.

"Well, well!" he said jerkily. "How do you——"

I sat up suddenly, interrupting him with a wild shout.

"Doc!" I cried. "You did it! You did it!"

His small, watery eyes widened in surprise. He tried to push me back.

"Wait," he purred soothingly. "Wait a min——"

But I wouldn't be stopped.

"Bixby!" I grasped his arm, shook him. "The experiment was a success! You're the greatest man in the world! You've brought me back from the grave—oh, God! Back from death!"

I couldn't control my emotion. I broke down and wept, while Bixby stood off and regarded me with a perplexed frown. Finally he forced something on me. Scotch! I drained it, shaking in every nerve. The doctor waited. I steadied, grew quieter.

"Pierce!" Bixby placed his hand on my shoulder. "I've got something to tell you." He paused uncertainly.

I was scarcely listening to him, overcome with the wonder of my return from death. But his words bored insistently into my consciousness, compelling my attention.

". . . there's something mighty queer," he was saying in his dry little voice. "When I came in a few moments ago there was a

cigarette butt on the floor in front of the refrigerator. And I thought I smelled smoke. I thought I smelled it in the other room, too. But I never smoke. And you—you were locked in that ice-box."

"Yes, Doc, yes!" I broke in. "That's what I want to tell you about. You'll never believe——"

"Wait, Pierce!" The doctor was imperative. "That can wait. You've got to calm down. As I was saying, after I locked you in the compartment in the refrigerator I went into the other room and threw the switch that starts the generator. It started up, all right, but in a moment it began to sputter. Finally it stopped completely. I thought perhaps the brushes might be dirty, so I got a screw-driver. It's only the work of a few minutes to clean them. But I couldn't get it going again; so I called the electric repair company just a moment ago. They say they are tied up with business—can't send a man out to fix it before tomorrow. So I'm afraid——"

I stared at him.

"Doc," I whispered. "You mean——" Bixby nodded.

"We can't do anything more today. So I came right back in here and took you out. I thought at first you had fainted, and I was a little worried. I brought you to with whisky and ammonia. How do you feel now?"

My eyes continued to search his expressionless face.

"You mean—there was no experiment?" I stammered. "That I wasn't frozen to——"

Bixby laughed shortly.

"Of course not. The generator failed before there could have been any possible change in the temperature of that compartment." He drew out his watch. "Why, man, you haven't been in there fifteen minutes!"

Dazedly, I looked at the watch. It was exactly nine-thirty.