

The Stolen
Dormouse

By L. Sprague de Camp

THE riot started during the Los Angeles Radio Exposition, in the third week of February, 2236. The foresighted managers of the Exposition had put the Crosley and Stromberg exhibits as far apart as possible. But they could not prevent the members of these companies from meeting occasionally.

Thus, on the day in question, His Integrity, Billiam Bickham-Smith, chairman of Stromberg, had passed into the recesses of the Stromberg booth, leaving a froth of lesser nobility and whitecollars in his wake, when a couple of Crosley whitecollars dropped an injudicious remark within hearing.

A Stromberg whitecollar said to one of these stiffly: "Did I hear you say our prefab houses leaked, sir?"

"You did, sir," replied one of the Crosleys evenly.

"Are you picking a fight with me, sir?" The Stromberg fingered his duelling stick.

"I am not. I am merely stating a fact, sir."

"Slandering our product is the same as picking a fight, sir."

"When I state a fact I state a fact, sir. Good day." The Crosley turned his back.

The Stromberg's stick hissed through the air and whacked the Crosley's skull. The Crosley's skull gave forth a muffled clang, whereupon the Stromberg knew that his enemy wore a steel cap disguised by a wig.

Now, no member of the nobility would have hit an enemy from behind. But the Stromberg was a mere low-born whitecollar, which somewhat excused his action in the eyes of his contemporaries.

The Crosley who had been hit, shrieked "Foul!" and broke his assailant's nose with a neat backhand. Strombergs boiled out of the exhibit, pulling on padded gloves and duelling goggles.

At that instant, Horace Crosley Juniper-Hallett passed on his way to the Crosley booth to take up his outanding for the day. His job was to pass out catalogues, printed in bright colors on slick paper, describing the Crosley exhibits, and also the many commodities other than radios, such as automobiles and microscopes, manufactured by this "radio" company. Exhibit-goers, unable to resist the lure of something for nothing, would collect up to twenty pounds of these brochures in the course of their visit, and like as not, drop them in a heap beside the gate on their way out. Horace Juniper-Hallett himself was of medium height and slim—skinny, if you want the brutal truth. His complexion was fair and his hair pale blond. He had twice given up trying to grow a mustache; after a month of trying, nobody could see the results of his cultivation except himself. Take a good look at him, for this ineffectual-looking youth is our hero.

As he was barely twenty-two, and not too mature for his age, his behavior patterns had not yet hardened in the mold of experience. Just now, of the several conflicting impulses that seized him, that of playing peacemaker was uppermost. He ran up and pulled the nearest of the embattled partisans back. His eye caught that of Justin Lane-Walsh, heir to the Stromberg vice-presidential chair. He shouted: "Here, you, help me separate 'em!"

"Bah!" roared the heir to the vice presidency. "I hate all Crosleys, 'specially you. Defend yourself!" And he advanced, whirling his duelling stick around his head. He and JuniperHallett were whacking away merrily, as were all the other members of the feuding companies in sight, when the police arrived.

A DUELLING stick, whose weight is regulated by the conventions, is no match for a three-foot nightstick. When the clatter had died down, and the physicians were doing emergency repairs on assorted skulls, collar bones, and so forth, the chief of police summoned the chairmen of the rival houses.

Billiam Bickham-Smith of Stromberg and Archwin Taylor-Thing of Crosley appeared, glaring.

“Aw right,” said the chief. “I warned you ‘bout this here feudin’. I said, the next time they’s a scrap in a public place, I’d close up your show. I wouldn’t say a word if you’d fight your duels out in the hills somewhere. But I got to protect the innocent bystanders.”

The chief of police was a small, sallow man. He wore the blue tunic of officialdom, with a shield bearing the motto of the Corporate State: *Alle was nicht Pflicht ist, ist verboten*—“A11 that is not compulsory is forbidden.” His trouser legs were gayly colored, in different patterns: one that of the American Empire, the other that of Los Angeles, the capital.

Archwin of Crosley looked through the head of the rival house as though Billiam of Stromberg were not there. He said to the chief: “You can’t expect my men to submit to unprovoked assault. Unprovoked assault.”

“Unprovoked!” snorted Billiam of Stromberg. “My lord chief, I’ve got all the witnesses you want that egghead’s men struck first.”

“What?” yelled Archwin of Crosley. “Where’s my stick?”

Whereas, Billiam of Stromberg had a beautiful head of silky white hair, Archwin of Crosley had no hair at all. He was sensitive to references to this fact.

“Won’t do you no good to start a fight here,” said the chief. “I’m going to close you up. I represent the plain citizens of Los Angeles, and we don’t want no feudin’ in the city limits. The Imperial Board of Control will back me up, too.”

“Vulgar rabble,” muttered Billiam of Stromberg.

“Have to travel all day to get out of the limits of this city,” growled Archwin of Crosley.

The chairmen subsided, looking unhappy. They did not want the Exposition closed; neither, really, did the chief of police. Aside from the dangers of antagonizing two of the noblest clans of the American Empire, there was the loss of business.

He let them think for half a minute, then said: “Course, if you’d agree to discipline your men hard enough next time there’s a fight, maybe we could let the show go on.”

“I’ll go as far as that old goat will,” said Archwin of Crosley. “What’s your plan?” asked Billiam of Stromberg, controlling himself with visible effort.

“This,” said the chief. “Any man who gets in a scrap gets degraded, if he belongs to one of the orders, and read out of his company.”

The chairmen looked startled. This was drastic. Billiam Bickham-Smith asked: “Even if he’s of the rank of executive?”

“Even if he’s of the rank of entrepreneur.”

“Whew!” That was little short of sacrilege.

Archwin of Crosley asked: “Even if he’s the innocent party?”

“Even if he’s the innocent party. ‘Count of both of ‘em would claim they was innocent, and the only thing we could do would be give ‘em a trial by liedetector, and everybody knows how to beat the liedetector nowadays. Do you agree on your honor as an entrepreneur, Lord Archwin?”

“I agree.”

“You, Your Integrity of Stromberg?”

“Uh-huh.”

BACK at the Crosley exhibit, Archwin Taylor-Thing searched out Horace Juniper-Hallett. His Integrity’s eye had the sparkle of one who bears devastatingly good news.

He said: “Horace, that was a fine piece of work you did this morning. A fine piece of

work. That was just the right course to follow; just the right course. Try to prevent trouble, but if your honor's attacked, give back better than you get. I've had my eye on you for some time. But, until today, you minded your own affairs and didn't do anything to businessman you for." The chairman raised his voice: "Come gather round, all you loyal Crosleys. Gimme a stick, somebody. Thanks. Kneel, Whitecollar Juniper-Hallett." He tapped Juniper-Hallett on the shoulder and said: "Rise, Horace Juniper-Hallett, Esquire. You are now of the rank of businessman, with all the privileges and responsibilities of that honorable rank. I hereby present to you the gold-inlaid fountain pen and the briefcase that are the insignia of your new status. Guard them with your life."

It was over. The Crosleys crowded around, slapping Juniper-Hallett's back and wringing his hand. Dimly, he heard Lord Archwin's voice telling him he could have the rest of the day off.

Then he was instructing a still younger whitecollar, Wilmot Dunn-Terry, in the duties of the outhander. "You encourage 'em to take one of each of the catalogues," he said, "but not more than one. Some of these birds'll try to walk off with half a dozen of each, just because they're free." He lowered his voice. "Along around fifteen o'clock, your feet will begin to hurt. If there's a lull in the business, look around carefully to see that none of the nobles is in sight, and sit down. But don't stay sat long, and don't get to reading or talking. Keep your eyes open for visitors and nobles, especially nobles. Got it?"

Dunn-Terry grinned at him. "Thanks, Horace. Can I still call you Horace, now that you're a businessman and all? Say, what's this about the theft of a dormouse from Sleepers' Crypt?"

"Huh? I haven't heard. Haven't seen a paper this morning."

"One of 'em's disappeared," said Dunn-Terry. "I overheard some of the nobility talking about it. They sounded all worked up. There was some talk about the Hawaiians, too."

Juniper-Hallett shrugged. His head was too full of his recent good fortune to pay much attention. The clock hands reached ten; the gates opened; the visitors started to trickle in. A still slightly dazed Horace Juniper-Hallett wandered off.

His hand still tingled from the squeezing it had received. He wondered what on earth he had done to deserve his elevation to businessmanhood. He was young for the rank, he knew. True, he was of noble blood on his mother's side, but Archwin of Crosley had the reputation of leaning over backward to avoid favoring members of the ruling class in dealing out businessmanhoods; he had even been known to elevate proletarians.

What Juniper-Hallett did not know was that the chairman was trying to build him up as a possible heir to the presidency. His Acumen, the president of Crosley, was getting on; he had two sons, one a moron and the other a young hellion. Next in line, by relationship, was Juniper-Hallett himself. Though, as the relationship was remote, and Juniper-Hallett was of noble blood on his mother's side only, he had not given the prospect any thought. His Acumen, the president, father of the precious pair of misfits, did not know the chairman's plans, either.

JUNIPER-HALLETT, in his happy daze, noted casually the scowls of the Stromberg whitecollars. But the brief case and the fancy fountain pen in his breast pocket gave him the feeling that the hostility of such rabble could no longer affect him.

Then he saw a girl. The daze cleared instantly, to be replaced by one of pinkish hue. She was a stunning brunette, and she wore the Stromberg colors of green, brown, and yellow. She was leaning against part of one of the Stromberg booths. Juniper-Hallett had seen her picture, and knew she was the daughter of His Integrity William Bickham-Smith, chairman of Stromberg. Her name was Janet Bickham-Coates, "Coates" being her mother's father's family name.

Juniper-Hallett stood very still, listening to the blood pounding in his ears, and

looking, not at the girl, but at a point three meters to the left of her. He ran over what he knew of her

—she was just about his age; went in for sports— He was determined to do something about her. At the moment, he could not think what. If the Strombergs had been friendly, it would have been simple; some of them undoubtedly knew her to speak to. But as things were, she'd probably be no more ingratiated by the sight of the Crosley colors—a blueand-yellow-striped coat and red pants—than the rest of them.

Nor would it be simple to get a suit of Stromberg colors. First, the obligations of businessmanhood forbade it. Second, the salesman in the clothing department of the drugstore would make you identify yourself. He'd want no trouble with the genuine Strombergs for having sold a suit of their colors to an outsider.

And the Strombergs were throwing a big dinner that night. Justin Lane-Walsh appeared. He put his hat on his head of copper-wire curls and walked past Juniper-Hallett. He slowed down as he passed, growling: "If it weren't for the old man's orders, you dirty Crosley, I'd finish what we started, sir."

Juniper-Hallett fell into step beside him. "I'm sorry I can't oblige you, you dirty Stromberg. I'd like nothing better, sir."

"I'm sorry, too. Don't know what we can do about it."

Juniper-Hallett felt an idea coming. He said: "Let's grab some lunch, and then go somewhere and drink to our mutual sorrow."

"By the great god Service, that's an idea!" Lane-Walsh looked down at his enemy with an almost friendly expression. "Come along, sister."

"Coming, you big louse." They went.

"IR," said Lane-Walsh over his third drink, "I can just imagine my stick crunching through that baby face of yours. Swell thought, huh?"

"I don't know," said Juniper-Hallett. He winced every time Lane-Walsh made a crack like that about his looks. But he was learning, somewhat late in life, not to let such taunts drive him into a fury. "I find the idea of knocking those big ears loose a lot nicer. Why do all Strombergs have ears that stick out?"

Lane-Walsh shrugged. "Why are all Crosleys baby-faced shrimps?"

"I wouldn't call Lord Archwin baby-faced," said JuniperHallett judiciously. "Any baby with a face like his would probably scare its parents to death."

"That's so. Maybe I judge the rest of 'em by you. Well," he held up his glass, "here's to an early and bloody settlement of our differences."

"Right," said Juniper-Hallett. "May the worst man get all his teeth knocked out. Look, Justin old scum, what have you heard about the stealing of a dormouse from the Crypt?"

Lane-Walsh's face went elaborately blank. "Not a thing, sister, not a thing."

"I heard the Hawaiians might be mixed up in it."

"Might be," said Lane-Walsh. "The dormouse that was stolen, a guy named Arnold Ryan, was half Hawaiian, they say."

"He must date back to the days of single surnames. Wasn't he the original inventor of hibernine?"

"He—" Lane-Walsh's face went through a perfect doubletake, as he realized that he had fallen over his own mental feet. He covered his confusion with a big gulp of rye-and-soda. Then he said: "You never know what those devilish Hawaiians are up to. Loafers, pirates, blasphemers against the good god Service. They've stopped another shipment of tungsten from New Caledonia."

"Sure," said Juniper-Hallett. "But about this dormouse Ryan, whom you just said you didn't know anything about—"

"I said I didn't know," said Lane-Walsh angrily. "I may have heard a few things. Now, I say these Hawaiians ought to be wiped out. What's the matter with our admirals? Scared of

a few flying torpedoes? I—”

“Pipe down,” said Juniper-Hallett.

Lane-Walsh saw that he was attracting attention, and lowered his brassy voice.

“Right. Say, I’ll be getting drunk at this rate. And I’ve got to be at the speakers’ table tonight.”

Juniper-Hallett smiled. “I’m an A. C. member. How about dropping in there for a steam bath and a rubdown?”

“Swell. You really take exercise and everything? You’ll be a man before your mother, sir.”

“Yep. One of these days I’ll pull your neck out by the roots and tie it in knots, Your Loyalty.”

“O. K., if you can do it. Makes me almost wish you were a human being instead of a stinking Crosley. Let’s go.”

J UNIPER-HALLETT took a steam bath with his enemy, wishing that he, too, had a set of muscles like the tires of a transcontinental bus. Years of conscientious weight-lifting and other, equally dull, exercise had hardened Juniper-Hallett’s stringy muscles until he was much stronger than he looked. But still he was not satisfied. Every bathing suit advertisement roused his inferiority complex.

He said to Justin Lane-Walsh: “About that dormouse—”

“Oh, forget the dormouse,” said Lane-Walsh. “You know as much about him as I do. As I understand it, he’s not due to wake up for another fifty years, so whoever’s stolen him is welcome to him.”

“But suppose somebody’s found a way of rousing a man from a hibernine trance—”

“Bunk. They’ve tried over and over again, and all they accomplished was killing a few dormice. Shut up, sister, and let me enjoy the steam.”

Juniper-Hallett was too angry to say anything. But the heat soon sweated his sulks out of him, and he put his mind on the problem of the stunning brunette. When he spoke to Lane-Walsh again, it was to extol the abilities of a masseur named Gustav. Lane-Walsh bit.

While Gustav was sinking his thumbs up to the second joint in Lane-Walsh’s tortured muscles, Horace Juniper-Hallett calmly dressed, put Lane-Walsh’s coat and pants in his new brief case, and walked out.

Three hours later, he showed up at the ballroom of the American Empire Hotel. He was wearing Lane-Walsh’s suit, with the Stromberg colors of green for the coat and brown, with yellow stars, for the pants. His landlady, Service bless her, had tak~n a few reefs in it, so that it did not fit quite as badly as when he had first tried it on. He had further disguised himself by screwing Lane-Walsh’s monocle, which had been attached by a thread to the coat lapel, into his right eye. It made him see double, but that was a detail.

Horace Juniper-Hallett was young; he was thin-skinned; he was afraid of doormen, headwaiters, and policemen; he had an inferiority complex a yard wide. But such is the magic of sex— well, love, if you want a nicer word for it—that he now marched up to the doorman of this ballroom as if he had had the courage of six lions poured into him. He had always considered himself a poor actor. But now he beamed confidence as he put his hand in his pocket. When the hand of course found no admission card, his expression of shocked dismay would have melted an even harder heart than that of this doorman—who had been specially picked for hardness of heart.

“Must have left it in my other suit!” he bleated.

“That’s all right, sir,” said the doorman, eyeing the green coat, the star-spangled pants, and the businessman’s fountain pen. “Just give me your name.”

Juniper-Hallett gave an alias, and described himself as a Stromberg salesologist from Miami. He checked his hat and duelling stick, and went in.

THE ballroom was full of Strombergs and their women. Juniper-Hallett thought that the Stromberg colors en masse were pretty depressing. Now, at a Crosley ball— A couple of Strombergs near him were talking; executives by their heavy watch chains, nobles by their self-assured bearing. One said: "When the uranium gave out, we went back to petroleum, and when that gave out, we went back to coal. If the antarctic coal gives out—"

"How about alcohol?" asked the other.

"All you'd have to do would be to cut the earth's population by three quarters. You can't grow alcohol grains in little tin trays, you know."

"The Hawaiians—" The speaker realized that his voice was carrying to Juniper-Hallett; he lowered it and pulled his companion farther away.

Juniper-Hallett was not listening. He had located Janet Bickham-Coates. She was standing on the edge of a crowd of portly Stromberg lesser nobility surrounding His Integrity, the chairman.

Juniper-Hallett strolled up and tapped his forehead in greeting. "Care to dance, my lady?" he asked casually. "Oh, I'm sorry, I'm afraid you don't remember me. Horace Stromberg Esker-Vanguard, Esquire. I met you at the last convention. You don't mind?"

She touched her forehead too, then, and melted into his arms. She murmured: "I'm glad you had the nerve to ask me. The young whitecollars are all afraid to go near father. So I've been dancing with fat His Acumen this and His Efficiency that for an hour."

"How was the dinner?" he asked.

"Frightful. The speeches, I mean; the food was all right."

"Was His Loyalty, Justin Lane-Walsh, there?"

"No, now that I think, he wasn't." Then she asked: "What's your real name?"

"Didn't I tell you?"

"No, you didn't." She laughed up at him. It buoyed his ego to find that this girl laughed up at him, even if he was a shrimp compared to Lane-Walsh. She said: "You see, I never attended the last convention."

"The music's good, isn't it?"

"Now, my young friend, you can't get away with—"

"Janet!" said a hearty female voice. Juniper-Hallett saw a tall, beaky, gray-haired woman. "I don't think I know this one."

"Mother," said Janet, "this is . . . uh . . . Businessman—"

"Horace Esker-Vanguard," put in Juniper-Hallett pleasantly.

"Not a bad-looking young fellow," said the grand dame critically, "in spite of the silly eyeglass. I don't know why they wear them. What did you catch him with, Janet? Salt?"

"Mother!"

"Ha-ha, now she's embarrassed, Businessman Horace. Does the young good to be embarrassed occasionally. Keeps 'em from taking themselves too seriously. She's quite a pretty girl when she blushes, don't you think? Well, run along, children, and try not to be bored. These conventions are stupid, don't you think? Poor Janet's been dancing all evening with dodos of my generation." She and Juniper-Hallett touched their foreheads.

"And now," said the girl, "how about telling me who you really are?"

"Must we come back to that subject? They're starting a trepak."

"I'm afraid we must."

"You wouldn't want to see me scattered all over the ballroom, would you? A head here, a leg there?"

"I'd hate to see you scattered all over anything. But there'll be some investigating unless you talk."

So Juniper-Hallett, his heart pounding with apprehension, told her who he was. Instead of being angry, she took it as a

joke. Then she insisted on being told how he had come by the suit of Stromberg colors. She took this for an even better joke.

"It served Justin right," she said. "I don't like his type— loud-mouthed ruffian, always bragging of his success with women. I suppose I shouldn't talk that way about my own cousin, especially in the presence of the enemy. But now, why did you go to all that trouble to crash our gate?"

"To meet you."

"Do I come up to your expectations?"

"I could judge that better," he said thoughtfully, "on neutral ground. You remember what your mother said about conventions."

"My mother," she replied, "has remarkably good sense at times."

ON the way out, Juniper-Hallett's ear caught a phrase ending with "—do with the dormouse."

Hell's bones, he thought, why did that subject have to come up to distract him from his present business? The Strombergs were up to something; he was sure he hadn't been taken in by Lane-Walsh's elaborate protestations of ignorance. And then there was the Stromberg who had spoken of exhaustion of antarctic coal. It never rained but it poured. You droned along with an uneventful existence. Then all at once you met the most wonderful girl in the world; you were elevated to businessmanhood, with the prospect of eventually becoming an executive or even an entrepreneur and being allowed to carry a personal two-way radiophone; a couple of first-class mysteries were thrust under your nose. You couldn't do all these subjects justice at the same time. The good god Service ought to arrange his timing better.

He was sure Janet was the most wonderful girl in the world, on the quite inadequate grounds that her presence made him feel tall, brave, debonair, resourceful, cool-headed, and all the other things he'd wanted to be. He felt, in fact, as though he wouldn't mind taking on a dozen Justin Lane-Waishes with duelling sticks at the same time.

He was lucky enough to get a couple of good seats to a show. He and Janet whispered for the first twenty minutes, until people shushed them.

But Juniper-Hallett still had too much to think about to pay attention to the mesh—the three-dimensional woven structure on which the images were projected. He did remember later that the show was a violent melodrama laid in the Century of Revolutions, and that at one point the heroine said: "I am going to die, Boris! Do you hear me? I am going to die!" Whereat, Boris had ungallantly replied, "Well, stop talking about it and do it!"

The Hawaiians—Justin Lane-Walsh had mentioned them; so had the Stromberg executive at the ball. Horace Juniper-Hallett had been brought up to scorn and suspect them. They did not acknowledge the sovereignty of any of the big, orderly empires that divided the globe between them. They did not worship the great god Service. Instead of trying with all their might to increase production and consumption, as civilized people did, the wicked, immoral Hawaiians made their goods as durable as possible, worked no more than they had to, and sat around in the sun, loafing the rest of the time.

To add injury to insult, they raided the shipping lanes now and then with their privateering submarines, robbing the ships of raw materials. And nothing, it seemed, could be done about it. An attempt by the combined American and Mongolian navies to do something about it, some years before, had ended in disaster for the attackers— "The show's over," said Janet in his ear.

"Oh, is it?" he replied blankly. "Let's go somewhere where we can talk."

NEXT morning, Horace Juniper-Hallett showed up at the Exposition, walking warily and frowning. He was wondering what he ought to do, being a young man much given to wondering what he ought to do. If he showed his face around there too much, Justin Lane-Walsh would appear thirsting for his blood. He was not afraid of Lane-Walsh, having exchanged a few stick slashes with him the day before and found him nothing extraordinary.

But if he got in a fight, it would lead to all sorts of complications; perhaps his own degradation. And with his private affairs in such a delicate stage, he did not want complications. On the other hand he didn't want people to think he was afraid—On the other hand—

He ascertained that Lord Archwin of Crosley was in his semi-office in back of the Crosley exhibit. A conference with His Integrity would solve the problem for the present.

"Well, my boy," said the bald, billikenlike chairman, "how does it feel to be a businessman?"

"Fine. But, Your Integrity, I thought you'd be interested in a couple of clues to the whereabouts of the stolen dormouse."

Archwin's eyebrows, what little there was of them, went up. "Yes, Horace, I would be. Yes, I would be. What do you know about it?"

Juniper-Hallett told him of Lane-Walsh's reaction, and of the mention of the dormouse at the Stromberg ball.

"That's interesting, if hardly conclusive," said Archwin. "What interests me more is how you got into that ball."

Juniper-Hallett gulped. He thought he'd been keeping out of trouble! But a businessman could not tell a lie, except in advertising his product. At least, so Juniper-Hallett had been taught to believe. He was in for disgrace and disaster, no doubt, but—He blurted out the story of his embezzlement of Lane-Walsh's clothes, without mentioning his evening with Janet. Then he waited for the lightning to strike.

The chairman's forehead wrinkled; his nose twitched; his lips jerked; he burst into a roar of laughter. "That's the best thing since Billiam lost his pants in a duel with me back in '12! Congratulations, Horace."

"Then . . . then I'm not going to be degraded for wearing false colors?"

"Service bless you, no. If they'd caught you and made a protest, I might have had to go through some motion or other. But if they'd caught you, you probably wouldn't have survived to tell the story."

"Whew!" Juniper-Hallett gave a long sigh of relief. Mixed with the relief was a slight feeling of disillusionment. He'd always been taught that the rules of businessmanhood were adamantine. Now they seemed to have a few soft spots, after all. And His Integrity's integrity had acquired the faintest tarnish. Juniper-Hallett had taken his code so seriously, and worried so about its violation—"Let me think it over," said Archwin. "I didn't know you were such a Sherlock. The last regular agent we sent around to the Stromberg building was beaten nearly to death with sticks. Maybe I'll have some more use for yo~,1. Maybe I shall." The chairman agreed that it would be prudent to transfer Juniper-Hallett from the Exposition back to the main office in the Crosley building. Thither Juniper-Hallett went, almost getting run over twice. His mind was on his date with Janet the coming evening. Not until he reached the office, which was over the main showroom, which stretched along Wilshire Boulevard for six blocks, did he remember that he had meant to ask Lord Archwin about the state of the antarctic coal fields.

THEY met in the Los Angeles Nominatorium, one place they were unlikely to be disturbed. The long lines of columns stretched for blocks in all directions. Each line was sacred to one company or clan, and each pillar bore the names and dates of the members of one family of that company.

"Now up here," said the guide, "is somethin' interesting. You see that blank space on the Froman column? That's where they'd put John Generalmotors Froman-Epstein, only they didn't put him nowheres. And on the Packard colonnade, they's a blank space where they didn't put Theodora Packard Hughes-Halloran, who married him. A Generalmotors marryin' a Packard—hm-m-m." He saw that his visitors were clearly not listening, and gave up.

"Personally," said Janet, "I don't care whether they put me on a column or not."

"Neither do I," said Juniper-Hallett.

"Do we have to agree on everything, Horace?"

"It sure looks that way. Maybe you agree with me that this Crosley-Stromberg feud's gone on long enough."

"I certainly do. I asked father once what started it, and he said nobody in the company remembered any more, but I could probably find out if I wanted to dig back far enough into the records."

"It's a lot of bunk," said Juniper-Hallett. Taking his courage in both hands, he added: "I don't see why a person can't marry whom he pleases, companies or no companies."

She nodded gravely. "It's their affair, isn't it? Of course they ought to stay within their own class."

"Right. It doesn't do to mix classes. But there's no logical reason why you and I shouldn't marry if we felt like it, for instance."

"No reason at all, if we felt like it. Why, you're much better suited to me than anyone in the Stromberg Co."

"Make it both ways. As a matter of fact, I think it would be about a perfect match."

"Just about, wouldn't it?"

"If we felt like it."

"Oh, of course."

Juniper-Hallett looked at his shoe buckles. "Matter of fact, I know an old geneticist who'd do it if I asked him to."

She turned to face him. "Horace, you mean you do feel like it?"

"Sure. Do you?"

"Of course! I was afraid you were just citing an imaginary case—"

"And I was afraid you were just being nice—"

"Ever since I met you last—"

"Ever since I saw you—"

The guide looked back over his shoulder. He said "Hm-m-m!" and shuffled off into the night.

"I'm afraid," said Juniper-Hallett.

"You afraid? You weren't afraid of Justin yesterday. And you weren't afraid to invade the ball last night."

"It's not that. I feel somehow that something's going to happen. Something to separate us."

"How frightful, Horace!"

"Yep, that's the word for it. For instance, do you know anything about the antarctic coal situation?"

"No, I don't suppose I do. Though I've heard father—"

"Go on."

"Nothing definite; just a few words now and then. I suppose I ought to be more interested in coal and such things. But if that's the case, I don't suppose we ought to wait—"

"Any longer than we have to—" said Juniper-Hallett.

"We could start right now—" said Janet.

"And see that geneticist of mine. I'll have to go back to my house, though, and get my pedigree. I suppose you will, too."

"No," she said brightly, "I brought mine along with me!"

THE geneticist was a benevolent old gent named Miles Carey-West.

He said hello to Juniper-Hallett, and implied with a look that he knew what his young friend had come for.

"Got your pedigrees?" he asked. He glanced over Juniper-Hallett's. Then he looked at Janet's. He whistled when he saw the name at the top.

"I thought I'd seen your face somewhere," he said, peering through thick glasses.

"Won't this cause all kinds of trouble?"

The young pair shrugged. Juniper-Hallett said: "Yep. We're ready for it."

"Ah, well," said Carey-West. "No reasoning with the young and headstrong. Maybe it'll be a good thing; heal up this silly feud. Just like Romeo and Juliet."

"Who?" asked Juniper-Hallett.

"Romeo and Juliet. Couple of characters in a play by a preindustrial English dramatist. Hope you make out better than they did, though."

"What happened to them? I'd like to read it."

"They died. And you'd have to read it in translation, unless you're a student of Old English. Raise your right hands, both of you."

OF course, thought Horace Juniper-Hallett, it was another dazzling piece of luck, getting the girl of one's dreams right off the bat. But he couldn't help a slight feeling of dissatisfaction; a feeling that by rushing things so impetuously he'd missed something. Maybe it meant nothing to have a big wedding and walk out of the Gyratory Club under an arch of duelling sticks held by his fellow businessmen. But it would have been nice to have had the experience.

It would not do to voice these fugitive thoughts.

"Well—" he said uncertainly. They were standing outside the geneticist's house, which was on a back street near Wilshire and Vermont. Now that Juniper-Hallett was no longer dazzled by the approaching headlights of matrimony, he could see the swarm of problems ahead of him clearly enough.

Janet was waxing her nose. She said: "I'll have to go back to the Stromberg building for a few days, anyway."

"What? But I always thought—I was led to believe—gulp—"

"That a bride went to live with her husband? Don't be silly, darling. I'll have to break the news gently to my parents. Or they'll make a frightful row. I can't go to live with a member of a rival company without my own company's consent, you know."

"Oh, very well." Juniper-Hallett had an uneasy feeling that his wife would always be about three jumps ahead of him in making decisions. "Every hour we're separated will be hell for me, sweetheart."

"Every minute will be for me, precious. But it can't be helped."

IT was too early to go to bed; besides which Horace Juniper-Hallett's mind was too full of a number of things. Instead of heading for his rooming house, he walked along Wilshire Boulevard toward Western Avenue. The Crosley building reared into the low clouds ahead of him. The sight always aroused Juniper-Hallett's pride in his company. Time had been when such tall buildings were forbidden because of earthquakes. Then they had excavated the San Andreas rift and filled it full of graphite. This, acting as a lubricant, allowed relative motion of the earth on the two sides to be smooth instead of jerks.

A light, cold drizzle began; one of those Los Angeles winter rains that may last for an hour or a week.

If he made good as a businessman, he'd soon be able to move into the Crosley building with the executives and full-blooded nobility. If— "Hey!" Juniper-Hallett saw Justin-Walsh running toward him, making aggressive motions with his duelling stick. The Stromberg must have been hanging around the Crosley building just in case. He yelled: "You're the punk who stole my clothes!"

"Now, Your Loyalty," said Juniper-Hallett, "I'll explain—"

"To hell with your explanations! Defend yourself!"

"But the chief's order—"

Whack! Juniper-Hallett got his stick up just in time to parry a downright cut at his head. After that, his reflexes took hold. The sticks swished and clattered. Pedestrians formed a dense

ring around them; a ring that would suddenly bulge outward when one of the fighters came close to its boundary.

Lane-Walsh was stronger, but Juniper-Hallett was faster. That, with sticks of the standard Convention weight, gave him an advantage. He feinted a flank-cut; followed it by a leftcheek-cut. He was a little high; the stick hit Lane-Walsh in the temple. The heir to the Stromberg vice presidency dropped his stick, and followed it to the pavement.

Juniper-Hallett saw a policeman coming up, drawn by the crowd and the clatter of sticks. Juniper-Hallett pushed out through the opposite side of the ring. The crowd knew what to do: they opened a lane for him, meanwhile getting as much as possible in the way of his pursuer. Juniper-Hallett ducked down the stairs of the Western Avenue station of the Wilshire Boulevard subway before the cop broke through the crowd. After all, the young man had furnished them with free entertainment.

But, though Juniper-Hallett got away, the police soon learned who had sent Justin Lane-Walsh to the hospital with a fractured skull. Everybody knew the colors of the Crosley Co., which appeared on the raincoat Juniper-Hallett had been wearing as well as on his suit. His brief case identified him as of the rank of businessman. And, of the members of that order, there was only one Crosley of Juniper-Hallett's physical properties in Los Angeles at that time.

They picked him up late that night, still riding the subway back and forth and wondering whether to give himself up to them, go home as if nothing had happened, or take an airplane for Mongolia.

III.

THEY led him into the Crosley Co.'s private courtroom, wherein cases between one member of the company and another were normally decided. The Old Man was there, and the chief of police, and all the Crosley higher-ups. JuniperHallett looked around the semicircle of stony faces. Whether they felt sorrow, or indignation, or hostility, they gave no sign.

Archwin Taylor-Thing, chairman of Crosley, cleared his throat. "Might as well get this over with. Get it over with," he muttered to nobody in particular. He stepped forward and raised his voice. "Horace Crosley Juniper-Hallett, Esquire, you have been found unworthy of the honors of businessmanhood. Hand over your brief case."

Juniper-Hallett handed it over. Archwin of Crosley took it and gave it to His Economy, the treasurer.

"Your fountain pen, sir."

Juniper-Hallett gulped at giving up the last emblem of his status. Archwin of Crosley broke the pen over his knee. He got ink down his trouser leg, but paid it no attention. He threw the pieces into the wastebasket.

He said: "Horace Crosley Juniper-Hallett, Esquire, no longer, you are hereby degraded to the rank of whitecollar. You shall never again aspire to the honorable status of businessmanhood, which you have so lightly abused.

"Furthermore, in accordance with the agreement of this honorable company with the city of Los Angeles, we are compelled to expel you from our membership. From this time forth, you are no longer a Crosley. You shall, therefore, cease using that honorable name. You are forever excluded from the Crosley section of the Imperial Nominatorium. Neither we nor any of our affiliated companies will have any further commerce, correspondence, or communication with you. We renounce you, cast you out, utterly dissociate ourselves from you.

"Go, Horace Juniper-Hallett, never to return."

Juniper-Hallett stumbled out.

He was halfway home, shuffling along with bowed head, when he put a hand in his coat pocket for a cigarette. He snatched out the note he found, which had gotten there he knew not how. It read:

Meet me twenty-three o'clock basement Kergulen's Restaurant tomorrow night. Don't tell anybody. Anybody. A. T.-T.

Juniper-Hallett decided he could defer thoughts of suicide, at least until he saw what the Old Man had up his sleeve.

J UNIPER-HALLETT'S old friend, the geneticist, was surprised, a week later, to get a visit from Janet JuniperHallett, née Bickham-Coates. The girl looked a good deal thinner than when Carey-West had seen her last. She poured out a rush of explanation: "Father was wild—simply wild. This is the first time they've let me out of the Stromberg building—and they sent my maid along to make sure I wouldn't sneak off to Horace. Where is he? What's he doing?"

"He was in once after his expulsion," said the geneticist. "He looked like a wreck—unshaven, and he'd been drinking pretty hard. Told me he'd moved to a cheaper place."

"What'll we do? Isn't there any way to rehabilitate him?"

"I think so," said the old gentleman. "If he can get along for a year, and moves to some city other than the capital, I could arrange to have another radio company take him in. The Arsiays are looking for new blood, I hear."

Janet's eyes were round. "Do companies actually take in outcasts like that?"

The geneticist chuckled. "Of course they do! It's highly irregular, but it does happen, if you know how to finagle it. Our man won't have to stay proletarianized forever. These watertight compartments that our fine Corporate State is divided into, have a way of developing leaks. You're shocked, my dear?"

"N-no. But you sound almost as if you approved of the way they did things back in the Age of Promiscuity, when everyone married and worked for whomever he pleased."

"They got along. But let's decide about you and Horace."

She sighed. "I can't live with him, and I can't live without him. I'd almost rather become a dormouse than go on like this."

"Now don't look at me, my dear. I wouldn't sell you any hibernine if I thought you should take it. Don't want to spend my declining years in jail."

Janet looked puzzled. "You mean you might approve of it in some cases?"

"Might, though you needn't repeat that. In general, the laws against the use of hibernine are sound, but there are cases—"

The doorbell rang. Carey-West admitted Horace JuniperHallett, dressed as a proletarian, and whistling.

"Janet!" he yelled, and reached for her.

"Why, Horace!" she said a few minutes later. "I thought you were a wreck. Didn't you mind being expelled and degraded—and even being separated from me?"

He grinned a little bashfully. If he'd thought, he'd have put on a better act. "That was all a phony, darling. The general performance, that is. I really got drunk. But that was at the Old Man's orders, to make it more convincing."

"Horace! What on earth do you mean?"

"Oh, I'm technically an outcast, working as an ashman for the city of Los Angeles. But actually, I'm doing a secret investigation for the Crosleys. Lord Archwin saw me after the ceremony and told me that if I was successful, he'd have me reinstated and—oh, gee!" Juniper-Hallett's boyish face registered dismay. "I forgot I wasn't supposed to tell anybody, even you!"

"Huh," said Carey-West. "A fine Sherlock your chairman picked."

"But now that you've gone that far," said Janet thoughtfully, "you might as well tell us the rest."

"I really oughtn't—"

"Horace! You don't mistrust your wife, do you?"

"Oh, very well. I'm supposed to find out about this stolen dormouse. And I'm starting with the Strombergs."

"My company!"

"Yep. Remember, we're trying to stop the feud and bring about a merger between your company and mine. So it's mine as well as yours, really."

"But my own company—"

Juniper-Hallett did his best to look masterful. "That's enough, Janet old girl! You want me reinstated and everything, don't you? Well, then, you'll have to help me."

THE precise form of that help Janet learned the following evening.

She was sitting at her window in the Stromberg building, which towered up out of the clump of low and often fog-bound hills in the Inglewood district. She was watching the lights of Los Angeles and reading "How to Hold a Husband," by the thrice-divorced Vivienne Banks-Carmody. She was also scratching Dolores behind the ear. Dolores was purring.

Came a knock, and Dolores, who was shy about strangers, slunk under the bed.

Janet opened the door. She squeaked:

"Hor—"

"Sh!" said Juniper-Hallett, slipping in and closing the door behind him. A fine rain of powdered ash sifted from his work clothes to the carpet.

"How on earth did you get in here?" she whispered.

"Simple." He grinned, a little nervously. "I stuck a wrench into the works of the ash hopper and jammed it. While the boys were clustering about it and wondering what to do, I slipped in through the kitchen door. I rode up the service elevator; nobody stopped me." He sat down, rustling and clanking a bit. His clothes bulged.

"How did you know how to get here? The place is like a maze."

"Oh, that." He took a huge fistful of papers from under his coat, leafed through them, and selected one. "They gave me a complete set of plans before I started out. I've got enough tools and things hung around me to burgle the National Treasury. I'm supposed to climb through your air conditioning system to the laboratory, to see if they've got the stolen dormouse there."

"But—"

He stopped her with a wave. "I can't start until early in the morning, when things'll be quiet."

"About when?"

"Between three and four, they told me. You've had your dinner, haven't you, darling?" He took out a sandwich and munched.

"But Horace, you can't stay here!"

"Why not?" He rose and entered the bathroom to get a glass of water.

"I have to get to bed some time, and I can't have a man—"

"You're my wife, aren't you?"

"Good Service, so I am! This is frightful!"

"What do you mean, frightful?" he said indignantly. "Matter of fact, I was considering—"

A knock interrupted him. Janet asked: "Who's there?"

"Me," said the voice of Janet's mother.

"Quick, Horace! Just a minute, mother! Hide under the bed! Dolores won't hurt you."

"Who's Dolores?"

"My cat. I'll be right there, mother. Quick, please, please!"

Juniper-Hallett, thinking that his bride might have shown a little more enthusiasm for his company, stuffed the rest of his sandwich into his mouth, put away the transparent sheet it had been wrapped in, and rolled under the bed. Janet opened the door.

"I thought I'd spend the night with you," said Janet's mother. "I've been having those

nightmares again.”

Janet gave a vaguely affirmative reply. But Horace JuniperHallett did not hear it. His hand was clutching his mouth, which was open in a silent yell. Every muscle in his body was at maximum tension.

Two feet from his head, a pair of green eyes, seemingly the size of dinner plates, were staring at him.

When the first horrif~ing shock wore off, Juniper-Hallett was able to reason that if Janet wanted to call a full-grown puma a “cat,” she had every right to do so. But she might have warned him.

Dolores opened her fanged mouth and gave a faint snarl. When Juniper-Hallett simply lay where he was, Dolores relaxed.

Lady Bickham-Smith was talking: “—and even if your father is a bit rigid in his ideas, Janet, it was a crazy thing to do, don’t you think? You don’t really know anything about this man—”

“Mother! I thought we weren’t going to argue about that—” Dolores kept her green eyes open with a faint, lingering suspicion, but did not move as Juniper-Hallett touched her head. He stroked it. Dolores’ eyelids drooped; Dolores purred. The sound was like an eggbeater churning up a bowlful of marbles, but still it was a purr.

Then Juniper-Hallett’s mucous membrane went into action. He just stopped a sneeze by pressing a finger under his nose. His nasal passages filled with colorless liquid. His eyes itched and watered.

He was allergic to cats, and he’d been neglecting his injections lately. And cats evidently included lions, tigers, leopards, pumas, jaguars, ounces, servals, ocelots, jaguarundis, and all the other members of the tribe.

In an hour, when he was treated to the sight of the bare ankles of the two women, moving about preparatory to going to bed, he had the finest case of hay fever in the city of Los Angeles, which stretched from San Diego to Santa Barbara. And there was nothing he could do about t.

But, he assured himself, no situation would ever seem grotesque to him again.

w.

J UNIPER-HALLETT awoke after five or six hours’ fitful slumber.

He tried to raise his head, bumped it on the bottom of the mattress, and realized where he was. It seemed incredible to him that he should have slept at all under those bizarre circumstances.

But there he was, with a gray wet dawn coming in through the windows, and Dolores’ head resting peacefully on his stomach.

After several years, it seemed, of his lying and silently sniffing, the women got up and dressed. Janet said: “I didn’t . . . sleep very well.”

“Neither did I. It’s that beast of yours. I wish you wouldn’t keep her in here, Janet. She gives me the wiuliejitters. She kept purring all night long, and it sounded just like a man snoring.”

When Lady Bickham-Smith had departed, Juniper-Hallett rolled out from under the bed. When he got to his feet, he threw back his head, closed his eyes, opened his mouth, and gave vent to a sneeze that fluttered the pages of a magazine on the table. He looked vastly relieved, though his eyes were red and watery and his hair was mussed. “There,” he said, “I’ve been wadtig to do that all dight!”

‘Was that all you thought about last night?’

“Just ab—Do, of course dot!”

“Darling!”

“Sweetheart!”

She stepped back and looked at him. "Horace, did you snore last night?" Her tone suggested that she wished she'd known about this sooner.

"How should I do? Have you got some ephedrine in your bathroom?"

"No, but Pamela Starr-Gilligan down the hall, may have some. Why?"

Juniper-Hallett gestured toward the puma, who was standing with her forepaws on the window sill, looking at the rain. "I'm afraid that when we have our own home, dear, it'll have to be without her."

"Oh, but Horace, how frightful! I love Dolores—"

"Well, let's not argue now. Will you get some ephedrine, old girl, before I drop in by our own home?"

When she returned with the medicine, she found a thinner-looking Juniper-Hallett eating another sandwich and examining the air conditioning registers. On the floor lay a lot of engineering drawings, a coil of rope with a hook at one end, a flashlight, and a couple of burglarious-looking tools.

"Horace! What on earth—"

He blew his nose violently and explained: "I'm trying to figure out which system would get me to the lab quicker, the risers or the returns." He looked at the plans. "Let's see. The Stromberg building has a low-velocity air conditioning system designed to furnish six air changes an hour with a maximum temperature differential of thirty degrees centigrade and a trunk line velocity of three hundred meters per minute. Ducts are of the all asbestos Carey type. There are 1,406 outlet registers and 1,323 return registers, mumble-mumble-mumble— Looks like the distance is the same in either case; but if I take the warm air side I'll get toasted when I get down near the furnace. So it'll be the returns."

He took his ephedrine and addressed himself to the return register. The grate was locked in place, but the frame to which it was hinged was held to the wall by four ordinary screws. These he took out in a hurry. He stowed his elaborate apparatus about his person, kissed his bride, and pushed himself into the duct head first.

THE duct dropped straight for two feet, then turned horizontally.

The corner was square, and was full of little curved vanes to guide the air around. Juniper-Hallett fetched up against these while his legs were still in Janet's room.

He backed out, muttering, got out his wrecking bar, kissed Janet again, stuck his upper half into the duct, and attacked the vanes. They came loose and plunked to the bottom wall of

the duct one by one. Then Juniper-Hallett wormed himself completely into the duct and around the bend. "Wormed" is no exaggeration. The duct was a mere twenty by forty centimeters, and, thin as Juniper-Hallett was, it took all his patience and persistence to get himself around that hellish corner. Too late he remembered that he had a third sandwich in an inside pocket; he probably had jam all over the inside of his clothes by now.

The duct soon enlarged where others joined it, so that Juniper-Hallett could proceed on hands and knees. Faint gleams of light came down the ducts from the registers. The breeze purred softly past his neck. The inside of the ducts was waxy to his touch. He came to another bend, and had to pry loose another set of vanes that blocked his path. He hoped he wasn't making too much noise. But the asbestos muffled even the sound of the wrecking bar.

Then he arrived at deeper blackness in the darkness around him; his right hand met nothing when he put it down. He jerked back in horror; in his hurry he'd almost tumbled down one of the main return stacks. It would have a straight drop of about a hundred meters.

His viscera crawling, he turned on his flashlight. He found he'd have to pry a couple of baffle plates out of the way to get into the stack.

That took a bit of straining, cramped as he was. When it was done, he stuck his head into the stack and flashed the light down against the stack wall below him. There ought to be a ladder of hand holds all the way from top to bottom.

But there were no hand holds below him; nor above him, either. With great difficulty, he got out the plans and read them by the flashlight. His underwear was now clammy with sweat. The plan showed the hand holds. The plan was wrong, or the hand holds had been removed since it was made. He could not think why the latter should be.

He took another look, and there were the hand holds—on the side of the stack opposite him.

The idea of jumping across the two-meter gap over the black hole below him, and catching the hand holds on the fly monkeywise, made his scalp crawl. He sat for a minute, listening to the faint, deep, organlike note of the air rushing down the stack. Then he knew what he must do. He unwound the rope from around his middle, and tossed the hook on its end across the gap until it caught on one of the hand holds. Then he took the rope in both hands and slid off the baffle plates. He fetched up sharply against the other side of the stack.

AN hour later, Juniper-Hallett arrived at the return-register, opening into the biology room of the Stromberg laboratories, well below ground. He was shaking from his hundred-meter climb down the stack. Without the plans, it would have taken him all day to find the right duct.

He stifled a grunt of disappointment. The register was high up on one wall, giving him a good view of the room. The duct, serving a room much larger than Janet's, was thrice the size of the one leading to hers, so Juniper-Hallett could move around easily.

But there was no sign of the body of a dormouse anywhere. His watch told him it was eight-thirty. That was dangerously close to the hour when the scientists went to work. But if there was no dormouse, there would be no reason for invading— A lock clicked and a man entered the room. He stared at a long, bare table, and bolted out, slamming the door. Soon he was back with several more. They all shouted at once. "Ryan's gone!" "Who was here last—" "I saw him on the table—" "—must have stolen—" "—the Crosleys—" "—shall we call the police—" "—the department'll catch hell from—" "Shut up, sir! Let me think!"

The last was from a man Juniper-Hallett recognized as Hosea Beverly-Heil, Stromberg's chief engineer. He was a tall, masterful-looking man. He pressed his fingertips against his temples and squeezed his eyes shut.

After a while he said: "It's either the Crosleys, or the Ayesmies, or the Hawaiians. The Crosleys, on general principles; if we steal something, that is to say, it obviously has value for us; wherefore it behooves them to steal it from us. The Ayesmies, because Arnold Ryan was a prominent member of the A. S. M. E. back in the days when it was a legal organization; that is to say, now that they are an illegal, secret group, I mean, clique or . . . uh . . . group, and have been driven almost out of existence by our good dictator's vigilant agents—" Here somebody snickered. Beverly-Heil frowned at him, as though everybody didn't know that the dictator was a mere powerless puppet in the hands of the turbulent aristocracy of the great companies. "—our . . . his vigilant agents, as I was saying, they may wish the help of one of their former leaders in saving them from extinction. The Hawaiians, because they may suspect that Ryan, who, as is well known, is part Hawaiian, may give us their power secret; that is to say—Well, of the three possibilities, I think the second and last are too farfetched and melodramatic to be worth serious consideration; I mean to say, to merit further pursuit along that line. Therefore, by a simple process of elimination, we have to conclude that the Crosleys are the men—that is to say, the most likely suspects."

Juniper-Hallett, huddled behind the grill of the register, began to understand why Janet had called the Stromberg dinner "frightful." Undoubtedly, Hosea Beverly-Heil had made a speech.

THE chief engineer now turned on a squarely built, blond man with monocle stuck in a red face. "As for your suggestion, Duke-Holmquist, by which I mean your proposal that we call

the police, I may say that I consider it about the silliest thing I ever heard, sir; that is, it's utterly absurd. I mean by that, that to do so, would involve the admission that we had stolen, I mean expropriated, the body of Arnold Ryan in the first place."

Horace Juniper-Hallett was leaning against the grill, straining his ears. He was sure that his company hadn't stolen the dormouse. Why should the Old Man send him out to hunt for the body at a time when he must have known of its whereabouts and of plans for its seizure?

And then the grill, which was not locked in place at all but was merely held upright by friction, came loose and fell out and down on its hinges with a loud clang. Juniper-Hallett caught the register frame just in time to keep himself from tumbling into the laboratory.

For a few seconds, Juniper-Hallett looked at the engineers, and the engineers looked at him. His face started to take on a friendly smile, until he noticed that the couple nearest him started moving toward him with grim looks. Men had been beaten to death with duelling sticks when caught in the enemy's— Juniper-Hallett tumbled backward and raced down the duct on hands and knees. Behind him the technicians broke into angry shouts. The light was dimmed as the head and shoulders of one of them was thrust into the opening. Juniper-Hallett thought of trying to lose his pursuer in the maze of ducts. But he'd undoubtedly lose himself much sooner; and then they'd post somebody at each of the fourteen hundred registers and wait for him to come out— The man was gaining on him, from the sound. The laboratory was connected to the main air conditioning system; there were smaller special temperature rooms, with a little circulating system of their own. The duct that Juniper-Hallett was in turned up a little way on, to reach the basement level where it joined the main trunks from the air conditioner. He had come down the one-story drop by his rope. It was still there; he went up it hand over hand. Just as he reached the top, it went taut below him; the other man was coming up, too.

J UNIPER-HALLETT tried to pry the hook out, but it had worked itself firmly into the asbestos, and the weight of his pursuer kept it there.

He took out his flashlight and wrecking bar. A businessman could hit another businessman, or a whitecollar, with a duelling stick. A whitecollar could hit another whitecollar or a businessman with a duelling stick. A whitecollar could use his fists on another whitecollar, but for a businessman to either strike with or be struck by a fist was a violation of the convention. An engineer ranked above a white collar and below a businessman; he could not be promoted to a businessman, executive, or entrepreneur, however. He could be struck with

—Juniper-Hallett had forgotten. But it was utterly certain that hitting a man with a wrecking bar was a horrible violation of the code. Maybe an entrepreneur could hit a proletarian with such an implement, but even that— The man's head appeared over the edge of the bend.

As

Juniper-Hallett turned the flashlight on, the man's monocle gleamed balefully back at him. It was the thick-set fellow addressed as Duke-Holmquist.

Juniper-Hallett hit him over the head with the wrecking bar; gently, not wishing to do him serious damage.

"Ouch!" said Duke-Holmquist. He slipped back a little; then pulled himself up again.

Juniper-Hallett hit him again, a little harder.

"Uh," grunted the man. "Damn it, sir, stop that!" He reached a large red hand out for Juniper-Hallett.

Juniper-Hallett hit him again, quite a bit harder. The monocle popped out of the large red face, and the face itself disappeared. Juniper-Hallett heard him strike the bottom of the duct. He worked his hook loose and pulled the rope up.

He could walk almost erect along the main duct. He hiked along, referring to his plan now and then, until he found the stack down which he had come. He stumbled over the

vanes he had knocked loose before.

He started to climb. By the time he had ascended ten meters, he had discarded the wrecking bar and the other implement, a thing like a large can opener. By the time he had gone twenty, he had stuffed his papers into his pants pocket and dropped his coat. He would have discarded the flashlight and the rope, except that he might need them yet.

At thirty meters, he was sure he had climbed a hundred, and was playing the flashlight up and down the shaft to make sure he hadn't already passed the takeoff with the bent baffle plate. The ephedrine made his heart pound even more than it would have, anyway.

By and by, he worked out a system of looping his rope into a kind of sling, slipping the hook over one of the hand holds, and resting between climbs. The climbs grew shorter and shorter. He'd never make it. Anyone but a thin, wiry young man in first-rate condition would have collapsed long before.

But he kept on; ten rungs; rest; ten rungs; rest.

The ten rungs became nine, eight, seven—Pretty soon he'd give up and crawl out the first duct he passed. It might land him almost anywhere—but how could he get into and through it, without his burglary tools?

He'd stop the next time he rested; just hang there in black space, until the Strombergs lowered a rope for him from above.

THERE was the bent baffle! Feeling ashamed of his own weakness, Juniper-Hallett hurried up to it. How to get across the two meters of empty space? He climbed ten extra rungs, hooked the hook over a hand hold, climbed back down, took the rope in his hands, and kicked out, swinging himself pendulumwise across the stack. He caught the baffle all right and wormed his way into the duct. He found he would have to leave his rope behind. He said to hell with it, and squirmed out through the duct leading to Janet's room.

She was there alone. She squeaked with concern as JuniperHallett poured himself out of the register and collapsed on the rug. He had sweated off five of his meager sixty kilos, and looked it. She said, "Oh, darling!" and gathered him up. Dolores, not yet altogether used to Juniper-Hallett, slid under the bed again.

With his little remaining strength, he tottered back to the register and began putting the frame of the grill back in place. A knock sounded. Juniper-Hallett looked up and mumbled:

"S'pose I could go back and get my rope—don't know how—and hang out the window—"

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" Janet bowled him over and rolled him under the bed.

The visitor was a strapping young Stromberg guardsman. He explained: "Those fool engineers—begging my lady's pardon—took half an hour getting Duke-Holmquist out of the flues before they thought to tell us. But we'll catch the marauder; isolate the main stacks and clean them and their branches out one at a time—what's that?" He bent over and examined the register. "Somebody's been taking the screws out of this, and he didn't put them all the way back in. The man hasn't come out through your room, has he, my lady?"

"No," said Janet. "But, then, I was out until a few minutes ago."

"Hm-m-m." The guardsman removed the register frame and stuck his flashlight inside the duct. "The vanes have all been knocked out of this bend. Somebody's been through here all right. Mind if I search your room, my lady?"

"No. But please don't muss up my things any more than you have to."

The guardsman went through the closets and the bureau drawers. Then he approached the bed. Janet's heart was in her mouth. Being a sensible girl, she knew that tier husband in his present condition, had not the ghost of a chance of throttling or stunning the man before he could give the alarm. And there was nothing in sight to use as a club— The guardsman bent over and pulled up the bedspread. Something hissed at him; he jumped back, dropping his flashlight. "Wow!" he said. "I'd forgotten about your lioness, my lady. I guess the fellow sneaked out through your room while you were out of it." He touched his forehead and departed.

Janet looked under the bed in her turn. "Horace," she said. A snore answered her.

V.

J UNIPER-HALLETT awoke after dark. He felt almost human again, and very hungry. The cause of his awakening was the click of the door as Janet returned to her room after dinner.

"Here, sweetheart," she said, producing a couple of hard rolls.

"Wonderful woman!" he replied, sinking his teeth.

She said: "Mother's going to spend the night here again. It's her nightmares."

"Then I'll have to get out somehow. Right away."

"Oh, must you, Horace?"

"Yep. I don't fancy another night with Dolores."

The puma, hearing her name, came over to Juniper-Hallett and rubbed her head against his knee.

"She likes you," said Janet.

"That may be. But she gives me hay fever, and she has too much claws and teeth for my idea of a pet. How'll I get out, old girl?"

Janet got a raincoat, a hat, and a pair of shoes out of a closet. "If you put these on—"

"What? Good Service, no! If it ever got out that I'd been doing a female impersonation, I'd never live it down. The mere idea gives me the horrors."

"But that's the only thing I can think of—"

"Me run around in a girl's clothes? Yeeow!" He closed his eyes and shuddered. "If they caught me in what I'm wearing, the worst they could do would be to beat me to death. But that—br-r-r-r! No, a thousand times no!"

Half an hour later he had his pants legs rolled up under the raincoat, and was putting on the hat. His expression was that of a man about to have a boil lanced by a drunken friend with a rusty jackknife.

He stood up. Dolores rubbed against his legs; then suddenly reared up, embraced him with her muscular forelegs, and threw him. She sat down on him and licked his chin. She had a tongue like sandpaper of the coarsest grade.

"Hey!" said Juniper-Hallett.

"She wants you to stay and play with her," said Janet. "She loves to wrestle."

"But I don't," said Juniper-Hallett.

Dolores was persuaded to let Juniper-Hallett up, and was sent out for a walk with Janet's maid while Juniper-Hallett hid.

When Horace Juniper-Hallett got home late that night, he took off the hat and the shoes and flung them on the floor with a violence all out of proportion to the crime, if any, of these inoffensive garments.

J UNIPER-HALLETT'S next obvious step was to report to Lord Archwin of Crosley that he had arrived at the Stromberg laboratories just as the Strombergs learned that somebody else had made off with the precious dormouse.

He didn't relish the prospect. Lord Archwin might have regretted already sending an untrained young sprig out to gumshoe and be glad of an excuse to call the deal off and put a professional Sherlock on the job. So Juniper-Hallett was relieved next morning when he learned at the Crosley building that Archwin Taylor-Thing was down at the Exposition, which was closing that day.

Juniper-Hallett was starting out of the receptionist's vestibule when he noticed a man sitting with a brief case—not a businessman's fancy leather one, but a plain rubberoid bag—in his lap. The man had a large quantity of curly black hair, tinted spectacles, and beard. Juniper-Hallett did not know any men with beards, but still this one did not look unfamiliar to him.

"Waiting to see the Old Man, sir?" he asked pleasantly.

"Da. Yes."

"He won't be back until late this afternoon, sir."

"Saw? That is too bad. But I shall wait for him anyway."

"I'm going down to see him now. Can I take a message?"

"Da. Tell him that Professor Ivan Ivanovitch Chelyushkin waits to see him. He has very important invention to show him."

"How long have you worn those whiskers?" asked Juniper-Hallett.

"Years and years. Gaw, young man, and geev your master my message!" The professor rose and pointed imperiously to the door.

"I think," said Juniper-Hallett in a low voice, "that you're the lousiest actor I ever saw, Justin old slug."

The eyes behind the tinted glasses took on an alarmed, hunted look. "You damn dirty Crosley," whispered the bearded man fiercely. "If you say a word, I'll break your neck before ~hey can—"

Juniper-Hallett laughed at him. "Now, now, I don't want Your Loyalty beaten to a jelly. That's what they'd do; beat you to a jelly." He repeated the word '~jelly' with relish. "I'm not technically a Crosley any more, you know."

"That's right, so you aren't. And I'm nobody's Loyalty. But—"

"Let us gaw outside, my frand, where we can talk wizzout vulgar interruptions," said Juniper-Hallett.

JUSTIN LANE-WALSH explained, crestfallen: "After I got out of the hospital, they degraded and expelled me, just as they said they would. But our Old Man told me not to go off the deep end, because he might have some confidential work for me.

"So last night I get a call from him, and he tells me somebody's got our dormouse, the one we expropriated from the Crypt. You know all about that, don't you? So the Old Man says, you find where the dormouse has gone, and we'll see about giving you your rank back."

"Same thing happened to me, exactly," said Juniper-Hallett. He explained why he was sure the Crosleys had not stolen the dormouse. Lane-Walsh scratched his head, getting black hair dye on his fingertips, but he could not see a hole in Juniper-Hallett's reasoning.

Juniper-Hallett went on: "Matter of fact I had an idea, when I saw you, that we'd do better together than working against one another. Why not? We're both outcasts."

"Well," said Lane-Walsh hesitantly, "suppose we find the dormouse; which of us—or which of our two companies—gets him?"

"We could fight it out," said Juniper-Hallett. He was sure he could handle Lane-Walsh, despite the latter's size.

"Can't. The doc told me I couldn't fight any more duels for a year, on account of what you did to my skull last time. Are there any other honorable methods?"

"We'll have to flip a coin or something." Juniper-Hallett dismissed the disposal of the dormouse with an airy wave. Lane-Walsh, still doubtful, gave in.

Juniper-Hallett said: "I don't guess there's much point in prowling around our own companies' buildings any more. What we want is a lead to the Hawaiians or the Ayesmies."

"Do you know any Hawaiians?"

"No. Do you?" asked Juniper-Hallett.

"I've never even seen one. I understand they have brown skins and flat faces, sort of like Mongolians."

"Well, if we don't know any Hawaiians, how are we going to find their secret headquarters? If they've got a secret headquarters."

Lane-Walsh shrugged. "I suppose we'll have to go after the Ayesmies then. But I don't know any Ayesmies, either."

"We both know some engineers, though. And any engineer might be an Ayesmy."

Lane-Walsh opened his eyes as if this was a great revelation.

"That's so! There's one engineer around our building I don't like. He ought to be an Ayesmy."

SO evening found the amateur Sherlocks lurking in the shrubbery—literally—in front of the Stromberg building.

"That's him," said Justin Lane-Walsh. A portly man had just come out of the front entrance. "He walks home every night at this time."

They rose and followed the engineer Lane-Walsh didn't like. They followed him to the restaurant where he ate his dinner. Lane-Walsh whispered to Juniper-Hallett: "That's one of the things that made me suspect him. What's his idea of sneaking off to eat by himself? They serve good grub in the Engineers' Mess in our building."

Juniper-Hallett replied: "Let's order something; but not too much. We don't want to be in the middle of our meal when he finishes."

Juniper-Hallett had a tuna-fish sandwich and a glass of wine. Lane-Walsh had a glass of milk. The milk got in his beard, which was held on with a water-soluble adhesive. He had to hold the object in place with one hand. He muttered:

"What's this about your getting married to the Old Man's daughter?"

Juniper-Hallett told him.

"I'll be damned," said Lane-Walsh. "That's another reason for knocking your head off, when we have our duel after I get well. Janet's a good kid, though. If I were sap enough to marry anybody, she'd do very nicely. Reminds me of a Spanish girl I met at a party last week. She was shaped like this and like this." He gestured. "And when I woke up—"

Just then the stout engineer whom Lane-Walsh didn't like got up. His pursuers got up, too, and followed him out.

As they mounted the stairs to the sidewalk, the engineer was there waiting for them. He came right to the point. "What the devil are you two following me for?"

"We aren't," said Juniper-Hallett.

"We were just waiting for an airplane, sir," said Lane-Walsh. "Bunk!" roared the engineer Lane-Walsh didn't like. "Get out of here. Right now, or I'll call a cop!"

They went.

VI.

SLEEPER'S Crypt, colloquially known as Dormous Crypt, occupied the southern corner of Griffith Park, at Western

and Los Feliz. From this elevation the Crypt commanded a fine view of the capital city, which its permanent residents were in no condition to appreciate. The Crypt itself was a big mausoleumlike building, streamlined. "Streamlined," in the

language of the time, meant, not shaped so as to pass through a fluid with the least resistance, but covered with useless ornamentation. The word got this meaning as a result of its misuse by twentieth-century manufacturers, who took to calling boilers, refrigerators, and other normally stationary objects "streamlined" when they merely meant that they had dressed their products up in sheetmetal housings and bright paint. Hence "streamlined" came to mean dressed up or ornamented, with no reference to aerodynamics.

At the entrance to the Crypt was a cluster of watchmen. At sixteen o'clock, the line of sightseers entering the Crypt contained Justin Lane-Walsh and Horace Juniper-Hallett, conspicuous in their sober proletarian off-hour costume among the gaudy colors of the great companies.

As they entered, Lane-Walsh remarked: "They've got about twice as many watchmen as usual here today."

"I guess they're not taking any more chances of having another dormouse stolen," said Juniper-Hallett. Just then they passed through a turnstile; one of a pair, one for

incornerers and the other for outgoers.

Like all visitors to the Crypt, they lowered their voices. It was that kind of place. There was hall after hall, each with its rows of glasstopped caskets. In each casket was a sleeper. There was a little light above the head of the sleeper, which a visitor could flash on by a button if he wished to examine the sleeper's face. At the foot of the casket was a plate with the sleeper's name and other pertinent information, including the estimated date of his awakening.

Lane-Walsh switched on one of these lights. The sleeper was a girl.

"Some babe," said Lane-Walsh. "If she was ready to wake up, now—"

"Wouldn't do you much good," said Juniper-Hallett, reading the plate. "She isn't due to wake for fifty years. And you won't be up to much then."

"Sall right, I'll be up to more at seventy-five than you are right now, shrimp. Say, I always wondered if they called 'em dormice because the top of the coffin comes up like a door when they wake up and pull the switch."

"Nope. Matter of fact they're named after some kind of mouse they have in Europe. It goes into a very deep sleep when it hibernates. Oh-oh, here's a new ope. I didn't know they were still taking them in."

"Sure," said Lane-Walsh with much worldly wisdom. "You can get hibernine easy if you got the right connections."

Another of Juniper-Hallett's youthful illusions popped. He concealed his feeling of shock, and led the way to the hall that had contained the torpid body of Arnold Ryan. There was quite a crowd around the empty Ryan casket. When Juniper-Hallett and Lane-Walsh wormed their way in close, they bent over and examined the object eagerly. This was what they had come for:

having run out of all other ideas, they thought there might possibly be a clue in or around the Ryan casket.

But the casket was exactly the same as all the others in the Crypt, except that the padding and the electrical connections had been removed from the interior. There remained nothing but a big plastic box, without even a scratch to hint at the destination of the victim.

DISAPPOINTED, they strolled off, snapping casket lights on at random. Juniper-Hallett said: "All these folks, I understand, took a hibernine pill because they hoped they'd wake up in a better world than the one they were in. I wonder how many of 'em will really like it better."

Lane-Walsh laughed harshly. "Whaddya mean, better? We've got a properly organized set-up, haven't we, with a place for everybody and everybody in his place? What more could they want?"

"I was just wondering—"

"That's the trouble with you, shrimp. You'd almost be a man if you weren't always wondering and thinking. Hell, what does anybody want to think for? We hire the engineers to do that. Hey, what—"

Juniper-Hallett was bending over behind one of the caskets. He said softly: "They ought to polish this floor up better." He waved Lane-Walsh to silence as the latter opened his mouth to speak. Lane-Walsh, for all his bluster, took orders docilely enough in the presence of anything he did not understand.

"See," said Juniper-Hallett. There were a lot of parallel scratches running from the casket to the wall. "Somebody's been shoving this box back and forth. Now if we could stick around here after the guards chase the rest out at seventeen— Oh-oh!"

"What's up, sister?" asked Lane-Walsh.

"You wouldn't understand, lame brain. It occurs to me that there's a comptometer hitched to each of those turnstiles, so the guards can tell after they close the place whether as many people came out as went in. Got it?"

"Oh. I get it. What'll we do then?"

"If you'll shut up and let a man with a brain think, maybe I can figure a way."

Juniper-Hallett fell silent. Then he gave his friendly enemy instructions.

They started out the front door, Lane-Walsh leading. LaneWalsh passed through the outgoing turnstile and halted a couple of steps beyond it to light a cigarette. He remarked to the nearest guard: "So this is your wonderful Los Angeles climate, huh? I've been here just a week, and it's rained the whole time."

The guard grinned. "You oughta be here in summer, mister. Say, would you move out of the way a little? People want to get by you."

"People" in this case meant Horace Juniper-Hallett. He had gone through the turnstile behind Lane-Walsh. When LaneWalsh had stopped, he had stopped, too. While concealed from the doormen by Lane-Walsh's broad shoulders, he reached back and gave the turnstile a couple of quick yanks.

They strolled off into the drizzle while Lane-Walsh finished his cigarette.

Juniper-Hallett explained: "I turned the out turnstile a couple of extra quadrants, so it reads two visitors too many."

"So what? If the out stile reads two more than the in, they'll know something's wrong—"

"Dimwit! When we go back in we'll raise the reading on the in stile by two, so they'll balance after everybody but us has been cleared out."

"Oh," said Lane-Walsh. "I get it. We better hurry back, or they'll wonder why we're coming in just before closing time."

"Almost human intelligence," said Juniper-Hallett. "It'll be too bad to spoil what little wits you have by cracking your skull again, when we have our duel."

AT seventeen the guards blew their whistles and herded everybody out. Juniper-Hallett and Lane-Walsh, by a bit of adroit dodging, hid from the guards, and were left in the empty Crypt. Most of the lights went out. There was no sound but the occasional, very faint, honk of an automobile horn wafted in from outside.

Juniper-Hallett took out a sandwich and divided it with Lane-Walsh, who had not thought to bring one. Between bites Juniper-Hallett pointed to a bit of incomplete electrical wiring along the wall. He whispered: "I guess they're putting in a fancy burglar-alarm system. Good thing we got here before they finished it."

"Say," said Lane-Walsh, "wouldn't it be something if all the dormice woke up at once and came out of their coffins?"

"It would scare me silly," said Juniper-Hallett.

"Me, too," said Lane-Walsh.

They fell silent for a long time, huddling behind a pair of caskets and listening to their own breathing. Even the breathing stopped when a night watchman passed through the hall on his rounds, his keys jingling faintly.

An hour later, when the watchman was due to pass again, Juniper-Hallett took off his shoes. When the watchman passed, Juniper-Hallett followed him, flitting from casket to casket like an apprehensive ghost.

He came back in a few minutes. He explained: "I wanted to find what route he takes. The last station he keys into is in the next hall; after he works the dingus there he goes down to the basement and smokes his pipe."

"So what?" whispered Lane-Walsh. "If you make me sit on this floor all night just to watch the watchman make his rounds, I'll—"

"You suggested looking into this place!"

"Sure I did, but staying here all night was your—"

TWO more hours passed, marked by the watchman's plod past.

Then the watchers heard another step; a quicker one. They did not have to see the man to know that he was not the watchman. He walked straight down the passage between

the

rows of caskets, and stopped at the casket that Juniper-Hallett thought had been moved.

The two outcasts peeked around the corners of their respective caskets. The stranger was pressing the button that lit up the inside of the casket, making a series of short and long flashes. When he had finished, the casket rumbled back toward the wall, exposing a hole in the floor. Light illuminated the stranger's face from below, giving him a satanic look. He climbed down into the hole, and the casket slid back into place.

Juniper-Hallett whispered: "That was Hogarth-Weems, one of the Arsiay engineers!"

"Does that mean the Arsiays are back of all this?"

"Don't know yet."

They started to crawl toward the movable casket; then snapped back into their original positions as more footsteps approached. Another man walked in, flashed the light as the first one had done, and descended out of sight. Then came another, and another. Lane-Walsh recognized this one as a Stromberg engineer; so was the next one. Then followed a couple that neither knew; then a Crosley engineer.

Juniper-Hallett speculated: "It must be an Ayesmy meeting."

"Because they have engineers from all the different companies?"

"Right."

"Boy!" breathed Lane-Walsh. "What wouldn't BickhamSmith give to know where their hide-out is! He hates 'em like poison, and so do I. Even worse than the Crosleys."

"What's so terrible about them?" asked Juniper-Hallett, more to be contrary than because he wished to defend the secret brotherhood.

"They don't know their place, that's what. They've got a lot of wild revolutionary ideas about abolishing compulsory technician's contracts, and letting engineers decide for themselves which company they'd like to work for. If their ideas were put through, it would gum up the whole machinery of our Corporate State. They—"

They waited a while longer, but no more men came in. Eleven had entered the hole in the floor. Juniper-Hallett and

Lane-Walsh crawled over to the movable casket. They put their heads down next to the floor and next to various parts of the casket. From one place it was possible to hear a faint murmur of voices, but no words could be distinguished.

Juniper-Hallett said: "The watchmen must be in on it."

Lane-Walsh nodded. They went back to their hiding places and waited for something to happen.

It did, in the form of another visit by the night watchman. Juniper-Hallett rose and followed him in stocking feet, beckoning to Lane-Walsh.

The watchman had just turned the key in the last signal station on his route, when Lane-Walsh's big hands shut off his windpipe. He struggled and tried to yell, but nothing came out but a faint gurgle. Presently he was unconscious. Lane-Walsh relieved him of his pistol.

Juniper-Hallett looked doubtful at this. "You know what the law and the Convention say about carrying a firearm," he said.

Lane-Walsh sneered silently. "Bunk! A lot of the upper execs and entrepreneurs carry 'em. I know."

Juniper-Hallett subsided, and helped to tie up and gag the watchman. For anybody other than an authorized person, such as a watchman or soldier, to have a firearm in his possession was a serious violation of the statutes, and was an even worse violation of the Convention than hitting an engineer over the head with a wrecking bar. Young company members were allowed to settle their differences with duelling sticks instead, whose use seldom resulted in fatal injuries.

Juniper-Hallett admitted that Lane-Walsh probably knew what he was talking about. On the other hand it irritated him that the man should be so violently in favor of the legal and

social scheme under which he lived, and at the same time be so cynically tolerant of violations of its laws and mores, at least by members of his own group. Juniper-Hallett was one of those serious-minded persons who can never understand wide discrepancies between theory and practice in human affairs.

THEY went back to the hall containing the movable casket. Lane-Walsh wanted to flash the light in the movable casket and, when the casket moved, to jump down and hold up the whole meeting. Juniper-Hallett refused.

They waited three hours more. Then the casket rumbled back. The eleven men climbed out one by one, five minutes apart, and disappeared.

"Now," said Juniper-Hallett.

"But, you damn fool, they're all gone! There won't be anybody in the hole!"

"Somebody let the first bird in," said Juniper-Hallett. "And unless he's gone out another exit he's there yet." He put his shoes on, went over to the movable casket, and pressed the light switch in the sequence of flashes used by the engineers.

The casket rumbled back. Light flooded up out of the hole.

Lane-Walsh, pistol ready, tumbled down the steep steps. Juniper-Hallett followed.

They were in a room, four or five meters square, with a door leading into another room. Two men were in the room. One was emptying ashtrays into a wastebasket. The other was gathering up empty coffee cups.

They stared at the intruders and at the intruders' gun. They slowly raised their hands.

One of them was the square man with the monocle, DukeHolmquist. A patch of his scalp was shaven and covered with adhesive tape, where the wrecking bar had landed. The other man Juniper-Hallett did not know; he was a dark-skinned man with stiff gray hair and a smooth-contoured, slightly Mongoloid face.

"That's him. The dormouse," said Lane-Walsh, referring evidently to the dark man.

"Arnold Ryan to you, mister," said the dark man. "I'm tired of having people talk as if I were a rodent."

"All right, Arnold Ryan," said Lane-Walsh, "what's this all about? What are you doing here?"

"Looking for four-leafed clovers, sir," said Arnold Ryan.

"Come on, come on, no funny stuff. You see this gun?"

"I say, is that a gun? I thought it was a grand piano."

Lane-Walsh got red in the face. "When I ask you something I want an answer!" he roared.

"You got one. Two, to be exact."

Lane-Walsh showed signs of imminent apoplexy. "I want to know what this meeting was! Ayesmies or what?"

"The meeting," said Ryan imperturbably, "was of the Los Angeles Three-dimensional Chess Club."

Lane-Walsh tore at his coppery hair with his free hand. "Liar! If it were a chess club, you'd have boards and pieces!"

"That's simple. We play it in our heads."

Juniper-Hallett touched Lane-Walsh's arm. "Better let me talk to him," he said. He asked a few questions of the two men, but got no more satisfaction than had Lane-Walsh.

They held a whispered consultation. "What'll we do with 'em?" said Lane-Walsh. "If we start a public row, we'll expose the Ayesmy, but they'll take the dormouse away from us."

Juniper-Hallett thought. "I think I know a place where we can hide 'em for a few days." He addressed Duke-Holmquist:

"Mr. Duke-Holmquist, I don't know why you went to so much trouble to steal Mr. Ryan. But it's obvious that you wanted him pretty badly. So I won't threaten you; I'll just say that unless you come along peacefully, we'll shoot Mr. Ryan. We'll try not to shoot him fatally. All right, Justin old fathead, make 'em follow me."

He led the way out of the secret room. Behind him he could hear a whispered argument between the two engineers: "I told you we ought to have changed the meeting place." "But we couldn't on such short notice; you know why." "Bunk! Once a dormouse was involved, somebody was bound to stumble on us sooner or later—"

VII.

MILES CAREY-WEST, Juniper-Hallett's elderly geneticist friend, was astonished to find four men ringing his doorbell at half-past one.

When the prisoners had filed in, Juniper-Hallett took Carey-West aside and explained the situation.

"Horace!" protested Carey-West. "I can't—That's a terrible thing to do to me! Where would I keep them? What if it were found out—"

"You could blame it all on us," said Juniper-Hallett. "And we'll keep them in your basement. Please! Maybe I can use them to stop the Stromberg-Crosley feud. And Janet—"

"Oh, very well," grumbled the geneticist. "No arguing with you, I see."

Duke-Holmquist and the ex-dormouse were taken down to the basement and made more or less comfortable.

"What'll we do now?" asked Lane-Walsh. "Flip a coin to see who gets 'em?"

"I've got a better idea than that," said Juniper-Hallett. He explained his plan for using the dormouse as bait to persuade the heads of the Stromberg and Crosley companies to bury their feud and merge.

"What!" cried Lane-Walsh. "Us join up with a lot of lousy Crosleys? The worst manufacturing company in the business?"

"Yep. You'll find we're not so bad."

"Oh, I see why you want it—so they'll let you and Janet live together peacefully. Though why some people are so hot about married life I never could see."

"That does enter in."

"Huh! As if it weren't bad enough that a good Stromberg gal goes and marries a weak sister like you, you want to ruin the proudest and noblest house of 'em all by—"

"Wait a minute, wait a minute, Justin old louse. Think of all the credit we'll get for stopping the feud and bringing about the merger! Everybody's forgotten what started it in the first place, and I'm sure the execs would be glad to call it off if they could do so without losing face."

"Hm-m-m. Well. Now that you put it that way—but I'd have to think about it."

"That's easy enough. We'll have to get some sleep before we can start our campaign."

They agreed that Lane-Walsh should take the first watch. Juniper-Hallett, as he curled up, gave his partner a fleeting glance. In his mind were the first seeds of suspicion. If he were asleep, and Lane-Walsh had the gun, and Lane-Walsh decided to double-cross him and turn Ryan over to his company forthwith— But so far Lane-Walsh had played the game fairly enough,

even though he and Juniper-Hallett liked each other no better than when they started. A double cross like that, so easy, would be a violation of the code. And Horace Juniper-Hallett still had a good deal of faith in his code. What would be would be. He went to sleep.

LANE-WALSH awakened him at three, gave him the gun, and went to sleep in his turn.

Across the dimly lit basement the prisoners sprawled on their mattress.

Duke-Holmquist was asleep, but Arnold Ryan was looking at him silently with bright black eyes.

"I wish you birds would tell me something about your activities," said Juniper-Hallett.

"I," said Ryan, "am a biological engineer, as you ought to know. I'm working on the development of a variety of pepper tree that doesn't shed little sticky red berries all over the sidewalk, to stick to the soles of your shoes. Those little berries are one of the major drawbacks to life in your charming capital, as I see it."

"No, seriously," said Juniper-Hallett, feeling very young and inadequate in the presence of this smooth jokester. "If I knew what you were up to, I'd have a better idea of whether I was doing the right thing. For instance, you're part Hawaiian, aren't you?"

"Everybody knows that," said Ryan. "My mother's name was Victoria Liliuokalani Hashimoto, which is as good an old Hawaiian name as you'll find. Each of the names carries the flavor of one of the three main ethnic strains we're descended from."

"Are you working for the Hawaiians?"

Ryan laughed. "You wouldn't expect me to admit it if I were?" he asked.

"All right. Can you tell me something about Hawaii? As far as I know, no American has been there for many years."

Ryan shrugged. "I can tell you what I knew from first-hand experience before I went into the hibernine sleep; or I can tell you what I've heard in the few days since my awakening. Not, you understand, that I've been in personal touch with Hawaiians."

"Mainly I'd like to know why they don't let themselves be civilized like other people, and won't let anybody on their islands."

"Oh, that," said Ryan. "You think they should organize themselves into a tightly compartmented Corporate State like the American Empire, with an arrogant and disorderly aristocracy at the head of it, and worship Service at the Gyrotory and Tigers' Clubs every Sunday, and spend half their time running their legs off to produce as much as possible, and the other half running their legs off trying to consume what they have produced?"

"Well—I didn't say they should; I asked why they didn't."

"They don't like the idea, that's all. They'd rather just lie on the beach. They've got a stationary population, all the food they can eat, and all the houses they can live in. And in that climate nobody wears much of anything anyway. They do a good deal of scientific research, partly for fun and partly to devise new ways of keeping out people they don't want. But production—phooey!"

"They sound like a lazy lot."

"They are. And they value the right to be lazy so much that they've wiped out three fleets sent out from the American and Mongolian empires to change their way of living."

J UNIPER-HALLETT'S conscience bothered him a little for getting all this information while his partner was asleep.

But, he thought, he could tell him the important parts later.

He asked: "Are they hooked up with the Ayesmy somehow?"

Ryan grinned. "Sorry, my boy, but you ought to know that topic is kapu."

"Well, what do they want? They're up to something, I'm sure."

"I am told," said Ryan carefully, "that they're tired of living in a perpetual state of siege. They'd like to travel and see the world now and then. So, I suppose, they'd be glad to back any change in conditions in the empires that would enable them to do so."

"How did they manage to defeat those fleets?"

"As I understand it, by three means: one, a new source of power—neither coal, nor petroleum, nor atomic power. Don't ask me what it is, because I wouldn't tell you even if I knew. You'll hear more about it when the Antarctic coal fields run out. Two: a system of multiplying terrestrial magnetism over a given area, so that any fast-moving metal object, like an airplane engine, gets red-hot from eddy currents when it passes through the field. And finally their aerial torpedoes, which are nothing very remarkable except for their system of remote control. Now you know almost as much about their defenses as the defense chief of the Empire."

"What's the Ayesmy?"

"The American Society of Mechanical Engineers."

"I know that," said Juniper-Hallett. "But who are they and what are they trying to do?"

"You're the most persistent young fellow. But I'm not telling you anything that the heads of your companies don't know already. When the professional societies were suppressed as a disrupting influence by the first dictator, who came to power following the short-lived Communist regime that ruled after we lost the War of 1968—as I was saying, the A. S. M. E. was the only one that survived; underground, of course. And when the dictatorship began to decay under the fourth and fifth dictators, with the actual power being taken by a Board of Control representing the companies, they revived, though the companies fought them almost as hard as the dictators had done.

"Nowadays, as I understand it, the Ayesrny consists of a lot of engineers who don't like the Corporate State generally and the compulsory contract system in particular. They claim it makes them just high-priced slaves."

Juniper-Hallett was silent for a few seconds while he tried to figure out how the term "high-priced slave" applied to the engineers, and, if it did, what was so objectionable about that status. He asked: "What do you think about the compulsory contract system?"

"I don't. I never have opinions on political questions." Ryan gave a slight, malicious grin that told Juniper-Hallett he wasn't to take these statements too seriously.

"Look here, what would you like us to do with you?"

"Let us go, and forget you'd ever seen us or the room under the Crypt."

"Why?"

"We'd just prefer it, that's all."

"We can't very well do that," said Juniper-Hallett. "Our reinstatement depends on giving you up."

"I was afraid that was the case. But you asked me what we'd like."

"Is there any particular reason why we should let you go?"

Ryan shrugged. "Just say we're allergic to having the affairs of the Los Angeles Three-dimensional Chess Club poked into."

"Oh, now, you don't expect me to believe—"

"I don't care what you believe, young man."

Juniper-Hallett, feeling a bit hurt, shut up. This man fascinated him; Juniper-Hallett was sure he had the solution of all the little mysteries and discrepancies that had been puzzling him. But the man was not, he thought, inclined to meet him halfway.

"OU understand," Juniper-Hallett told Lane-Walsh when they had breakfasted, "you're to telephone first to Lord

Archwin, and then to Lord Billiam. You tell each one you'll hand the dormouse over to the other unless they'll listen to our proposals. When you've softened 'em up, arrange a three-way connection so you can talk terms. And—if you get a chance to send Janet here without letting the other Strombergs know where our hide-out is, I wish you would. This being just married and not even being able to see your wife is driving me nuts. Got it?"

"I get it, shrimp."

Juniper-Hallett hesitated. "I . . . I don't want you to think I'm suspicious, Justin old scum, but will you give me your word as a businessman?"

"Sure. You've got it."

Juniper-Hallett gave a sigh of relief. The word of a businessman was a pretty serious thing. He took the pistol from LaneWalsh, and watched his partner tramp up the basement steps and out.

Duke-Holmquist turned his monocle on Juniper-Hallett. "You're a pretty trusting young man," he said.

Juniper-Hallett shrugged. "He gave me his word. And if he ever wants to be reinstated, he won't dare break it."

Arnold Ryan grinned sardonically. "You have a lot to learn," he said.

They were all silent. Juniper-Hallett paced the floor nervously, keeping an eye on his captives. These did not seem much disturbed. Ryan was chewing gum and Duke-Holmquist

smoking a malodorous pipe.

"Tell me," said Juniper-Hallett to Ryan, "how did they wake you up?"

Ryan shrugged. "Strontium bromide; an otherwise more or less useless salt. Some bright Stromberg engineer discovered that it counteracted hibernine. They kidnapped me from the Crypt so they could wake me up and ask foolish questions about the Hawaiians' power, without having to release the formula to the Board of Control and bid against the other companies for my custody. If any one company got the secret of the Hawaiians' power, it could practically extort control of the Board when the coal shortage arrives."

Juniper-Hallett continued pacing. For the first hour he was not much concerned. But as the second wore on, he felt more and more queasy. Lane-Walsh, in accordance with his instructions, should have finished his telephoning and reported back by now. Of course, the fact that he was to make his different calls from different drugstores, in case one of the chairmen should try to locate him, would complicate matters. Juniper-Hallett couldn't leave his prisoners to do some telephoning of his own.

Time passed, and suspicion and alarm grew in Juniper-Hallett's young brain. Lane-Walsh might have met with foul play, or he might be indulging in a little of the same himself— And he was tied to his prisoners. He didn't dare use his host's phone for fear of being located. He could not walk the captives around the streets in broad daylight at the point of a gun. He regarded the weapon with distaste; he had never fired one, and had been brought up to consider the possession of one by a white-collar or businessman a disgraceful thing.

He heard old Carey-West's doorbell ring. He listened, tensely, for Lane-Walsh's return.

But it was Janet.

"Darling!" they both cried at once. In the midst of the embrace that followed, Juniper-Hallett had the presence of mind to swing his beloved around so that her back was to the captives, whom he still menaced with the gun.

"Here," said Juniper-Hallett, pressing the gun into her hand. "Cover these men; don't let them get away until I get back."

"But, Horace—"

"Can't explain now. Going out to phone. I'll be back shortly." And he bounded up the steps. Good old Justin—the louse had stuck to his word after all.

OUTSIDE the drizzle had ceased. Pools of water lay on the sidewalk, reflecting the cold blue of the sky. Juniper-Hallett shivered and stuck his hands deep in his pockets. He wished he had his overcoat along.

The nearest drugstore was The Sun at the corner of Wilshire. Juniper-Hallett found his way through the hardware and furniture departments to the phone booths, tucked in one corner of the sporting goods department.

He called Archwin of Crosley. As Lord Archwin was ex officio of the rank of entrepreneur, he could be located at any time through his private portable radiotelephone set.

"Horace!" cried Lord Archwin. "Where are you, my boy? I've been worried about you. Very much worried."

"I'm all right, Your Integrity," said Juniper-Hallett. "And I've got the dormouse."

"You have? You have? Where? We'll come collect him, at once!"

"Just a minute, Your Integrity. You see, I didn't catch him all by myself." He gave a thumbnail account of his co-operation with Justin Lane-Walsh, and of his offer to give up the dormouse in return for the chairman's promise to initiate a merger.

Archwin of Crosley heard him through, then asked suspiciously: "Where's that Lane-Walsh? Is he with you?"

"No, sir, he went out to phone you and his own chairman, leaving me with the prisoners. But I haven't heard from him, and I'm afraid something happened to—"

"You idiot!" yelled Archwin into his transmitter. "Idiot! Idiot! Imbecile! Fool! Don't you know he's gone to get the Strombergs to take your men away from you? Don't you know that?"

"But he gave me his word as a businessman—"

"Idiot! What's a businessman's word worth? Nothing, when his company's interests are involved! Nothing! What's any Stromberg's word worth? Nothing, again! You tell us where to

find the dormouse, quick, before the Strombergs get there, or—"

"Hey!" said Juniper-Hallett. "I won't do anything of the kind. And Justin Lane-Walsh did keep his word, at least as far as sending my wife to me. I've kept my word and he's—"

"You utter nitwit!" shrieked the chairman. "You young jackass! You can kiss your reinstatement good-by! We don't want traitors and sentimental pantywaists in the organization! You—"

Juniper-Hallett had heard Lord Archwin in a tantrum before, and knew that arguments were useless. He hung up and started sadly back to the geneticist's house. If the chairman said he wouldn't readmit him to the company, he wouldn't readmit him to the company. He wondered whether LaneWalsh had gotten in touch with his own chairman— And then an ominous thought struck him. He walked faster.

Janet was still there in the basement, covering the two engineers, who were being gallant.

Juniper-Hallett bounded down the steps; "Janet! Didn't Justin Lane-Walsh send you here?"

"Why no, Horace. I haven't heard from Justin since he was degraded. I came here because I thought Mr. Carey-West could tell me where you—"

"Oh my Service! Then Justin did double-cross me! Lord Archwin was right; I am an idiot. Now I'm in bad with the Crosleys, and Justin'll be here any minute with a gang of Strombergs!" He took the pistol from Janet and laid it on the table. He turned to Ryan and Duke-Holmquist. "I guess you birds can go; I don't see how I can do any good keeping you here."

The engineers grinned as if they had expected something of the sort all along. Duke-Holmquist said: "Why don't you throw in with us, young man? You can't expect anything from the companies, you know."

"I don't know . . . I don't know what you stand for—"

Duke-Holmquist opened his mouth to say something. Just then the door flew open, and four Strombergs with duelling sticks tumbled down the steps. In their lead was Justin LaneWalsh.

LANE-WALSH pounced on the pistol. He turned to Juniper-Hallett, grinning nastily. "Hah, sister, so you're still here, huh? Very nice, ve-ery nice indeed. We'll take these smart engineers along. But first we'll teach you to marry a decent Stromberg girl."

Janet exploded. "You let him alone! He's my husband!"

"Exactly; that's just the point. But when we get through with him he won't be anybody's husband. Then maybe you can marry some decent Stromberg. Not me, of course," he added hastily.

Janet punched Justin Lane-Walsh in the nose.

Horace Juniper-Hallett kicked one of the Strombergs in the shin, violating Paragraph 9a, Section D, Rule 5 of the Convention. Then he wrenched the stick out of the man's hands, and hit him over the head with it.

The two engineers went into action likewise. Juniper-Hallett never could remember just what happened next. He did remember boosting Janet up the steps by main force, the engineers behind him, and slamming and locking the basement door just as the pistol roared and a bullet tore through the plastic.

"Mmglyph," said a bundle of ropes on the floor. It was Miles Carey-West. They cut him loose. Another bullet crashed through the door; they all ducked.

"What do we do now?" asked Juniper-Hallett.

The two engineers had been whispering. Duke-Holmquist said: "Follow me."

They sprinted out of the house. Carey-West panted after them, crying: "Can I come, too? I'm sunk anyway once it comes out that you used my house."

Duke-Holmquist nodded curtly and walked swiftly to Wilshire Boulevard. There he hailed a cab and piled his whole party into it. "The Dormouse Crypt," he told the driver.

"Where are we going?" asked Juniper-Hallett.

"Hawaii," said Duke-Holmquist.

"What?" Juniper-Hallett turned his puzzled frown to Ryan. Ryan, instead of explaining how one got to Hawaii via the Crypt, said: "He's convinced finally that his strike plan's fallen through. We'll have to skip. You'd better come along."

Duke-Holmquist nodded gloomily. "If I'd had a couple more years to prepare—"

They zipped up the steep hill at the north end of Western Avenue.

Janet said: "But I'm not sure I want to go to Hawaii—"

"Sh, sweetheart," said Juniper-Hallett. "We're in this up to our necks, and we might as well stick with them." He turned to Ryan. "I can't understand why Lane-Walsh, if he was going to double-cross me, didn't do it last night while I was asleep and he had the gun."

Ryan shrugged. "He probably didn't make up his mind to do so until after he left Carey-West's house. He's not terribly bright, from what I hear."

They stopped and got out. Duke-Holmquist told the driver to wait, and strode up to the front entrance of the Crypt. He whispered to the doorman.

The doorman stepped inside and shouted: "All visitors out, please! There's a time bomb in the Crypt, and it may go off any minute. All out, please! There's a time bomb, and these experts have come to take it away. All—"

He jumped aside as the first of the visitors to realize what he was saying went through the turnstile with his overcoat fluttering behind him. The others followed in record time. It did not take long, for it was still morning, and the Crypt was not yet full of visitors.

The engineers went straight to the movable casket, put their shoulders to it, and rolled it back. Juniper-Hallett and his bride followed them down into the underground room.

They did not take the time to pull the rope that slid the casket back over the hole. They went straight to a wall cupboard, opened it, and took out a simple electrical apparatus which Juniper-Hallett did not recognize.

A couple of wires led from the apparatus back into the cabinet. The apparatus had a brass arm with a circular pad on the end of it. Duke-Holmquist began depressing and releasing this arm, so that it went tick-tick-tick, tick, tick-tick, and so on. Juniper-Hallett was mystified. Then he remembered that one of the pioneers in electrical communication, centuries before, had invented a system of sending words over wires by having intermittent impulses represent the letters. The man's name had been—Morris? Marcy? No matter. Duke-Holmquist was sending a message of some kind. And now and then he paused while the machine ticked back at him.

One of the Crypt guards put his head down the hole. "Mr. Duke-Holmquist, sir!" he said. "They've come!"

"The Strombergs?"

"Yes, sir. Automobiles full of them."

VIII.

DUKE-HOLMQUIST finished his ticking and stood up. He asked: "Have any of you boys guns?"

"No, sir. Toomey-Johnson, the night watchman, is the only one of us allowed to have one, and his was taken off him the other night."

The burly engineer cursed softly. Then he bounded up the steep steps. The others followed.

About fifteen Strombergs stood around the entrance, hefting their sticks. Their way was barred by three guards with billies. Justin Lane-Walsh, among them, yelled in: "You might as well send 'em out, or we'll come in and get 'em!"

Juniper-Hallett asked Duke-Holmquist: "What are the cops doing?"

"We don't want to call in the police, and neither do they." The engineer turned to the guard who had called them: "How about the rear entrance?"

"They got some men there, too, sir; all around."

"Looks as though we were stuck," said Duke-Holmquist somberly.

Juniper-Hallett fingered the stick he had taken from the Stromberg. "Our cab's still out there."

"Yes, but we haven't got a chance of getting to it."

"I don't know," said Juniper-Hallett. "I can run pretty fast."

"You've got an idea, Juniper-Hallett?"

"Yep. I'll draw 'em off, and you make a run for the cab."

"Horace!" said Janet. "You must not take such a risk—"

"That's all right, darling." He kissed her and trotted off to the rear entrance.

Two guards inside it faced three Strombergs outside. Juniper-Hallett pushed between the guards and leaped at the nearest Stromberg. Whack! Whack! The Stromberg dropped

his stick with a howl. The others closed in on Juniper-Hallett; one of them landed a blow on his shoulder. Then Juniper-Hallett wasn't there any more. He dodged past them and raced around the big building over the smooth lawn. He hit one of the front-door Strombergs and kept on running, pausing just long enough to thumb his nose at the rest as they turned startled faces toward him.

Yapping like a pack of hounds, they streamed away after him. He ran down the long hill, breathing easily. This was fun. He could outrun the whole lot— He took another glance back, and ran into a fire hydrant. He went sprawling, fiery pain shooting through his right leg. The yells rose as they pounded down to seize him.

The cab squealed to a stop just beside him. He had barely the strength and presence of mind to reach a hand up; a hand from the cab caught it and pulled him in. That is, it pulled him part way in; a Stromberg got a hand on his ankle.

"Ow!" yelled Juniper-Hallett.

The tug-of-war was decided by the cab driver, who spun his rheostat. Off they went. The would-be captor was dragged a few steps, and then let go.

"I think my leg's broken," said Juniper-Hallett. Ryan felt the leg and decided it was just bruised.

Janet, looking out the rear window, said: "They're coming in their cars."

"Can't you go any faster?" Duke-Holmquist asked the driver.

"Governor's on," was the reply. "Can't do over sixty k's."

"Damn," said Duke-Holmquist.

"What's that?" asked Ryan. "Cars have governors nowadays?"

"Yes. They go on automatically when you enter a built-up area. But if we can't do over sixty, neither can they."

THEY purred sedately down Western Avenue at sixty kilometers per hour, and the Stromberg force purred after them. Now and then one party would gain when the other was held up by traffic. But on the whole they maintained the same interval.

Duke-Holmquist asked the driver: "When does it go off?"

"Slauson Avenue."

"When it does go off," said Juniper-Hallett, "they'll be able to catch us. They've got big, fast cars. Where are we headed for, anyway?"

"San Pedro," said Duke-Holmquist.

"Are we taking a seaplane?"

"No. The navy could catch us easily."

"Submarine?"

"No. There hasn't been time for the Hawaiians to send us one."

"What, then?"

"You'll see."

"But—" Just then they reached the southern limit of the governor zone, and Juniper-Hallett's question was choked off by the cab's spurt. The driver kept his hand on the horn button. They gained several blocks on the pursuers before the latter reached the edge of the zone and accelerated.

"They're gaining," said Janet.

"Oh, dear," said Carey-West. The little oldster was trembling.

They squealed around a corner and raced over to Main Street, then took another corner.

"They're still coming," said Janet.

A little while later she said: "They're gaining again."

Duke-Holmquist and Ryan looked at each other. "Maybe we could figure the point where they'll catch us by differentials," said the former.

"Maybe," said Ryan, "we could tell 'em we're not us, but a family on its way to a polo game."

Juniper-Hallett looked to the right of the car into the open cut in which the Pacific Electric's inter-urban line ran. "Hey!" he said, "look down there!"

Half a mile ahead of them they could see the tapering stern of a car pulling into the North Compton station.

"Change to a streetcar?" said Duke-Holmquist.

"Right. Hey, driver!"

They skidded into the station. They were scrambling aboard a few seconds later when the Stromberg cars pulled up.

The streetcar was a thirty-meter torpedo that ran on two rails, one below it and the other overhead. The motorman's compartment was a closed-off section in the nose. The four men and the girl marched up to the front of the car, threw open the door, and crowded into the compartment. The legitimate passengers looked at one another. They had never seen that happen before. But then these people had seemed to know what they were doing, so they didn't feel called upon to interfere. The car started, a bit jerkily. It accelerated up to its normal two hundred kilometers per hour. It kept on accelerating. The passengers began to mutter and look to their safety belts.

Inside the compartment, the motorman, who was being firmly sat upon by Duke-Holmquist and Ryan, protested:

"You'll pass Gardena station! This is a local! You gotta stop at Gardena!"

"Hell with Gardena," said Juniper-Hallett over his shoulder. He was at the controls.

"How fast is she going?" asked Ryan.

"Three hundred and thirty-six k's."

"You'll burn out the fuel batteries!" wailed the motorman.

Juniper-Hallett said soothingly: "The P.E. can sue us, then. Say, maybe you'd better tell me how to stop this thing, motorman old sock!"

"What?" shrieked the motorman. "You don't even know?"

Somebody knocked on the door. The committee ignored the knock. Somebody tried the door, but they had locked it in advance.

The motorman told Juniper-Hallett how to stop the car. He also asked where they were.

"I'm not sure," said Juniper-Hallett, "everything goes by in such a blur. Matter of fact, I think we're near Anaheim Road."

"Then stop it! Stop it!" yelled the motorman. "Or we'll go right off the end of the track

into the drink!"

"Oh, my!" said Carey-West.

J UNIPER-HALLETT applied the brake. The landscape continued to flash past; they had come out of the cut onto an embankment. Juniper-Hallett applied more brake. Wilmington rushed at them. The deceleration squashed them all against the front of the car. They were through Wilmington and screeching down the end of the line. The bumpers grew at them as the landscape finally slowed down. They hit the bumpers with a bang, and tumbled backward.

They raced out through a car full of jade-faced passengers. Duke-Holmquist led them a couple of blocks to the waterfront.

"Damaso!" yelled Duke-Holmquist.

A swarthy man stuck his face up over the edge of the nearest pier. "Hiya, boss!" he said.

"Everything ready?"

"Sure is, sir."

They tumbled breathlessly down steps and into an outboard boat. Before they had recovered their breath, Damaso had cast off and purred out to a dirty-white yawl anchored among a flock of motorboats, sailboats, and tuna clippers.

"Are we going in that?" gasped Juniper-Hallett.

"Uh-huh. Climb aboard."

"But you're crazy! They'll catch us in a police launch or something in ten minutes!"

"Do as you're told," snapped Duke-Holmquist. Juniper-Hallett, half convinced that he was accompanying a party of lunatics, hopped aboard the yawl and helped Janet up. Damaso was already casting off from the buoy. The yawl had a little coke-gas auxiliary that sputtered into feeble life. Juniper-Hallett was sure the engineers were crazy; starting for Hawaii—with half the Stromberg Co., and the Los Angeles Harbor Police, not to mention the Imperial American Navy, likely to be after them any time—in a little cockleshell designed for taking people out for a day's fishing. The boat did stink of fish, at that, and the low afternoon sun glinted on a silvery scale here and there.

They vibrated out of the long channel with maddening slowness. Juniper-Hallett squeezed Janet's hand until she complained he was hurting her.

"Take it easy," said Ryan. "Duke-Holmquist knows what he's doing."

"I hope he does," said Carey-West. "Oh, dear, why did I get mixed up in this?"

"Don't worry about the police," said Duke-Holmquist, his monocle reflecting the sun as he stood at the wheel. "Lieutenant More-Love is one of our sympathizers. The P.E. will try to set them after us, but he'll see that they look every place except the right one."

"How about the Strombergs?" asked Juniper-Hallett.

"I think one of those young nobles owns a seaplane. If they come after us, there may be trouble. We'll worry about that when the time comes."

THEY were out of the channel. In the outer harbor sat part of the navy: a seaplane mother ship, three hundred meters long, with five of her birds around her; flying boats with a one-hundred and fifty-meter wing-spread, each of which carried launches and dinghies larger than the fishing yawl.

Juniper-Hallett looked at Duke-Holmquist, jerked his thumb toward the flying boats, and raised his eyebrows.

Duke-Holmquist said: "I think the Strombergs will do everything they can to catch us themselves first, before they call in the Board of Control. If they take us, it probably won't be alive."

"You're the head of the Ayesmy, aren't you, sir?"

Duke-Holmquist permitted himself a wry smile. "You're right, youngster. Or I was until I

had to run away.”

They were rising and falling in the Pacific swells now. Juniper-Hallett said: “I wish they’d come if they’re going to. I don’t like this waiting.”

“The longer the wait, the better our chances,” said Ryan imperturbably.

Juniper-Hallett asked: “What was the Ayesmy up to?”

Duke-Holmquist replied: “We were going to pull a strike of all engineers, to have the compulsory contract system abolished. We were going to force a lot of other reforms, too, to break down the compartmentation of the Corporate State and give everybody a hand in the government. But it was terribly slow work operating by means of an illegal organization. If we tried to take in all the technicians, there’d bound to be a leak. And if we didn’t, we couldn’t count on the nonmembers when the time came.”

“The truth is,” said Ryan, “that they’d never have gotten sufficient co-operation from the profession anyway. Your average engineer is too much enamored of respectability and dignity to go in for revolutionary conspiracy. For the privilege of rating salutes from the whitecollars, they’ll put up with their state of gilded peonage indefinitely.”

“That’s not fair, Arnold,” protested Duke-Holmquist. “You know those—”

“We’ve argued this before,” said Ryan, “and we’ve never gotten anywhere. I say, isn’t that our friends?” He pointed north at a silvery speck in the sky.

Janet said: “Justin kept his plane at Redondo Beach.”

“That’s what took them so long,” said Duke-Holmquist. “Damaso! Get the things out.” He grinned at the company, once again self-confident at the prospect of violent action. “Stand by to repel boarders!”

The seaplane grew, soared overhead, turned, and came down with a smack on the waves. It taxied up astern of the yawl.

As it approached, they could see Justin Lane-Walsh climbing out on the left wing. His mouth opened and moved, but they could not hear him against the wind and the whir of the propeller. The seaplane swung to one side and came up abreast of them to windward. The other Strombergs climbed out, too. Lane-Walsh yelled, this time audibly: “Heave to, you!”

Duke-Holmquist said: “Do you see that pistol anywhere?”

“No,” said everybody after looking.

Ryan added: “Maybe they lost it, or emptied it breaking the lock of that door.”

“Fine,” said Duke-Holmquist. He put his hands to his mouth and bellowed: “Keep off or we’ll sink you!”

“Haw haw,” roared the Strombergs.

The yawl pounded ahead through the swells, and the breeze blew the seaplane astern of them again. The pilot gave the motor more juice, and the machine crept up alongside once more.

Duke-Holmquist called: “Let ‘em have it, Damaso!”

D AMASO, standing on the forward deck with his feet spread, was doing a curious thing. He was whirling around his head a length of rope to the end of which was tied a block of wood. He gave a fast whirl and let fly. The block flew toward the plane, the rope snaking after it.

The Strombergs saw it coming, and evidently thought those in the yawl were throwing them a rope to make fast. A couple braced themselves and spread their hands as if to catch it. But such was not Damaso’s intention. The block hit the propeller with a terrific clank; splinters flew; the propeller stopped turning with a jar that shook the seaplane. The propeller was seen to have one blade sharply bent, and to have meters of rope tangled around its hub.

The Strombergs set up a howl of rage. Some of them climbed out on the left wing as if ready to jump down into the yawl, toward which the wind was swiftly blowing them. The seaplane tipped alarmingly. The pilot yelled. A couple of Strombergs crawled out on the other wing to balance the craft.

Damaso hurried aft with a boathook.

Duke-Holmquist said: "Get ready to jab a hole in their float at the water line."

Damaso poised himself. The Strombergs, yelling threats, clustered at the end of the wing. At the tip was Justin LaneWalsh.

For a breathless thirty seconds the parties glared at each other, as the two craft bobbed closer and closer. Duke-Holmquist spun the wheel a little, the yawl nosed downwind a few points.

"They're going to drift astern of us," said Juniper-Hallett.

Duke-Holmquist laughed shortly. "Don't you think I ever ran a boat before?"

The wind pressure on the seaplane's rudder had swung the craft into the wind like a weather vane, so that, though it was drifting astern of them, its left wing was still toward them. Justin Lane-Walsh gathered himself to jump; but they were not quite close enough.

"Hey," said Juniper-Hallett, "we need that bird!"

He snatched the boathook from Damaso and shot the business end up to the seaplane wing. He caught the hook in LaneWalsh's starspangled pants and yanked. Lane-Walsh's legs went out from under him; he sat down on the wing tip, bounced, and smacked the water. A cloud of spray rose, and was instantly blown down against the receding seaplane.

Juniper-Hallett caught a glimpse of a head of copper-wire hair, but it was already out of reach of his hook. Duke-Holmquist nodded and brought the boat around in a big circle.

They

came upon Lane-Walsh, swimming heavily in his clothes toward the seaplane, which was drifting swiftly in the general direction of Ensenada. They hauled him aboard. The chatter of his teeth came clearly over the pattering of the engine. The Pacific off sunny southern California is icy in February.

Juniper-Hallett explained: "I just remembered that he was with me in the Crypt the night we made our raid, and recognized several of the Ayesmy members. He'd have made trouble for them if we'd left him here."

"Good work, boy," said Duke-Holmquist.

J UNIPER-HALLETT winced at the "boy." If being married didn't make one a full-grown man, entitled to the respect accorded to such, what did?

He asked: "Are we safe now, sir?"

"No," said Duke-Holmquist. "They'll radio their company, and the company will appeal to the Board of Control to order the navy out to stop us."

"Then it's useless to try to get away?"

"We'll see."

Ryan climbed out of th~cabin, whither he and Damaso had taken Lane-Walsh to change his clothes. Juniper-Hallett asked him: "How do you fit into this, sir?"

Ryan's smooth brown face smiled, and the wind ruffled his stiff gray hair. He said: "I was to be a go-between for the Ayesmy and the Hawaiians. The Hawaiians wanted to back the Ayesmy in upsetting the Corporate system, because it would end the siege of the Islands. But they wanted somebody they could trust, not having any agents on the mainland. I was the only one, and I was in a hibernine sleep.

"Then that Stromberg engineer discovered the effect of strontium bromide, and the Strombergs stole me from the Crypt to try to get the secret of the Hawaiians' power from me. It was developed back before I went to sleep, you know. Of course, the Stromberg engineers who were also Ayesmies knew about the theft, and arranged to have the Ayesmy rescue me."

"How did the Ayesmy communicate with the Hawaiians? I'd think their messages would be intercepted."

"They would have been, if they had been sent the normal way. But people used to communicate with the Islands, centuries ago, by undersea cables,

and those calories are still there. The mainland end of one of them is in a museum in Frisco. The Ayesmy spliced a lead into it and used the ancient dot-dash method.”

“What is the Hawaiian power?”

“Maxwell demons, sir,” said Arnold Ryan.

“What?”

“Special bacteria. Bacteria are the only things that can break the second law of thermodynamics, you know. They can, for instance, separate levulose from fructose, though the molecules of these sugars are identical except that one is a mirror image of the other. Starting with these bacteria, the Hawaiians have developed strains that will build up hydrocarbons out of water and carbon dioxide, taking their energy directly from the heat of the solution. So the solution gets cold, and has to be brought back to outside temperatures to keep the reaction going. But they have the whole Pacific Ocean to warm it up with. It’s like putting a lump of ice in a highball, and instead of the ice’s melting, having the ice get colder and the highball hotter.”

Juniper-Hallett did not understand much of this. He asked:

“Then are all these plans for breaking the Corporate system finished?”

“Not quite. The Antarctic coal fields will run out in a couple of years, and we’ll be able to dictate our own terms to the Empires. Meanwhile we’ll sit in the sun in the Islands and take life easy. You’ll like it, I think. We Hawaiians haven’t such an elaborate code as the mainlanders, but we stick better to the one we have.” He shaded his eyes. “That is, you’ll like it if we get there alive. Here comes the navy now.”

THEY all looked back toward the mainland. The air was full of a deep throbbing sound which grew to the roar of one of the giant flying boats.

The monster thundered past them, seeming to skim the waves, though it actually was a good thirty meters up. A gun cracked, and a 10.5-centimeter shell crashed in front of them.

“That means heave to,” said Duke-Holmquist. His red face got redder and he shook a fist. He made no move to stop the boat.

The machine came back on the opposite side, between them and Santa Catalina Island. Another shell crashed, this time closer. It sent up a tall finger of water, which hung for an unreasonable time before collapsing.

Juniper-Hallett asked: “Will they try to board us?”

“Not if I know the navy,” said Duke-Holmquist. “They’d like a little target practice on a live target.”

The machine banked ponderously astern of them. This time, as it passed, it let loose a full broadside.

“Duck!” yelled Duke-Holmquist, doing so.

The air was suddenly full of noises like a train wreck and six shells hit all around them. Splinters whined overhead; a couple crashed through the yawl’s planking; one of the columns of water toppled onto their deck, drenching them.

The yawl staggered, but kept on. The next time, JuniperHallett thought, they’ll blow us to pieces. He hugged Janet, and heard Ryan’s voice in his ear: “Sorry we got you kids into this—didn’t have time to warn you—”

The navy ship thundered past again. Juniper-Hallett held his breath. It was coming—Their engine stopped with a wheeze. Duke-Holmquist bounded to his feet with an inhuman scream. “They did it!” he yelled, dancing and waving his big fists.

“Did what?” asked Juniper-Hallett. Then he realized that the rumble of the flying boat’s propellers had ceased. The only sounds were those of wind and water. He looked over the lee gunwale to see the flying boat glide silently down to the surface and settle like a big duck a kilometer or two away. He repeated: “Did what?”

“The Hawaiians got their thing that multiplies the terrestrial magnetic field turned on, so that there’s a strip all along the coast that nothing can get through but a sailboat or rowboat. That’s what I was wiring about from the Crypt. Now do you see why we started out

in this little thing? Damaso! Damn it, come out of that cabin; the war's over. Fix those holes in the woodwork. Arnold, do you know how to get the sails up? Here, boy, take the wheel while I'm helping Ryan."

THE deck was now sharply canted to the brisk northeast breeze.

The sun was half below the horizon ahead of them. When they crested a swell, a broad highway of golden reflection glared in their faces.

Horace Juniper-Hallett and his wife sat bundled in sweaters and things, their feet braced, watching for flying fish and ducking the cold spray. The navy flying boat was out of sight, even from the tops of the swells.

Janet gave up trying to wax her nose to the proper degree of shininess, and turned to Juniper-Hallett. She said. "Horace! I just remembered my cat! My little Dolores!"

"Dolores'll have a nice home—in the zoo."

She sighed. "I suppose so. Anyway we're alone at last, dearest."

Juniper-Hallett looked around the little yawl, which was very much occupied by its seven passengers. The cabin seemed to be half full of canned goods, and the other half full of a morose, blanket-wrapped Justin Lane-Walsh. Obviously everyone would be very much in everyone else's hair for many days.

"Not quite, sweetheart," Juniper-Hallett replied. "But we shall be. We shall be."