

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

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attack from within

by . . . *Burton Crane*

To be a secret agent in a future torn by strife takes a great deal of technical know-how — and a courage that outshines the stars.

WHEN A MAN has been places and done things, an alias fits him about as well as his first pair of diapers. The most unlikely places are swarming with people who remember him.

In a Congo village, in a Tashkent slum, in a raw little settlement on Churchill, the fourth planet of Alpha Centauri, somebody is sure to come crawling out of the woodwork to ask, "When did you get back from Project Atmosphere on Mars?" or "How about that poker game on the old *Albert Einstein* in twenty-two ninety-five?" It had happened to Corson a dozen times, and always in the most unlikely and inconvenient places.

Now the unlikely place was the lobby of the Space-Carlton Hotel in Kweiyang, China. Corson braced himself as he followed the bellboy in from the helicopter, keenly aware that if he were not letter-perfect in his role as a tourist from Terra's colony on Mars, or if some old acquaintance penetrated his trivial disguises his death

When one of America's leading financial writers—Burton Crane has been a prominent staff writer for the NEW YORK TIMES for a good many years—turns to the world of tomorrow in conflict with itself and analyzes its volcanic upheavals and revolts, its inventions and secret conspiracies, you can be sure that the entertainment meter will glow white hot. We're referring, of course, to the registering bulb at its summit which has been known to explode. But the electric bulb of this story is even more remarkable. It simply keeps on glowing, so dazzlingly you may well have to wear a radiation-insulated shield.

would be neither quick nor pleasant.

A week ago his hair had been dark and rather long. Now it was bleached and cut so short that it was little more than a peachdown fuzz against his spaceways tan. Small plastic inserts in his cheeks had changed the contour of his face. Padding stretched along his shoulders gave them a sharper slope.

"I rayed you from Lunar for one of your stinking rooms," said Corson abruptly. "Name of Mandeville." His offensive manner was deliberate. Martian colonists were notoriously boors, and had he been less abrupt he would have gotten off to a very bad start.

The desk clerk smiled and nodded. "Your papers, please."

The carefully-forged documents went into a shining metal device. There was a click. In seconds Kweichow Province gendarmerie headquarters would have facsimiles; in minutes they would be checked by world headquarters in Kokhara. The secret police were efficient in little things.

"If you will wait in the lounge," said the clerk, "I shall call you when the clearance comes through."

The lounge held the usual spaceways throng, mostly well-paid roughnecks, the truck and taxi drivers of the airless ways between the stars. Their women were like them, boldly handsome, brassy, tasteless. Every spaceport in the universe held their facsimiles, and

every spaceport was pretty much the same—a money-mad boom town on the edge of a wasteland that could not be further injured by the variegated flares of atomic exhausts.

Against that over-dressed and over-noisy background, the girl seemed out of place. A little above medium height she was—perhaps six feet four. She had a figure that sang in its close-fitting metallic sheath and she moved like a melody.

Corson watched her as she took a seat opposite him. She was dark—perhaps with a dash of Tonkinese blood—and her perfect features, although warm and vital, were enigmatically non-committal. They betrayed nothing, volunteered no information.

The girl picked up a magazine, and leafed through its pages idly. It was an old technique. Corson had used it himself. The girl was not reading; she was *watching*.

Corson turned to follow her line of sight. And that was how he happened to see Moore enter the lobby from the door marked "Barber."

Moore had been reported dead. Not for a month had The Committee had word of him, and Corson himself had been sent to Kweiyang to keep his eyes and ears open. Here was a mystery, perhaps, but a welcome one. Moore was a good man. It was unthinkable that he could be alive after three months on so difficult and danger-

ous an assignment without having learned a good deal.

Moore gave no sign by his manner or expression that he had seen Corson. His fingers fumbled in his pockets, extracted a short Venusian cigar, and lighted it without raising his eyes. But each movement could be performed in ten ways and each way was a number.

Corson read the signals easily. They said: *Seven—four—one*. Good! The code-conveyed numerals would be the number of Moore's room.

The bellboy had returned. "Your room, sir," he said.

As Corson went to the desk, he was conscious that Moore was cautiously following him at a distance.

"Room two twenty-two," said the desk clerk, "and now, sir, a few questions." There were more than a few. In addition to Name, Language, Planet, Address, Arrived From, Going Where and Probable Length of Stay, they covered such items as Address on January 1, 2311, Names of last Three Employers, Name and Nationality of Paternal Grandfather and Education. The last question had three divisions, Terrestrial, Martian or Extra-Terrestrial.

There were good reasons for the interrogation, Corson knew. Since man had never been able to attain a speed greater than that of light, his colonizing trips to the planets about Alpha Centauri still required more than four years. The leaders from the start had fought against

the inevitable boredom by making a university of each shipload of a thousand souls, all screened for intelligence.

Great educators had been enlisted, definitive libraries and research laboratories loaded. And since there was nothing much else to do for twelve hours each day—eight were set aside for sleep and four more for sex and other forms of entertainment—nobody arrived at his new home without at least the basic equipment of a Terra-side Ph. D. or Doctor of Science.

The trips back were pure enjoyment. On these the returning professors and a few laymen devoted themselves to basic research. It was on such a voyage back from Roosevelt, the third Alpha Centauri planet, that Krongold had developed the polymerization process that gave Mars and the moon adequate atmospheres in a single century of experimentation.

Although he had made two round trips to Alpha, Corson quickly and cheerfully indicated that his education had been Martian.

Men from the Alpha planets and not a few of those from Terra had enough subtlety to be dangerous. But the Martian colonists were generally neglected by the secret police. Their loud noises and occasional outbreaks of mob violence had no real significance and could be handled readily enough by the ordinary law enforcement agencies.

Room 222 was not locked. The bellboy threw open the door and

stood aside for Corson to enter first.

"This room hasn't been cleaned yet," said Corson, his lips white. "You'd better give me another."

The bellboy looked past him and grunted a curse. In the middle of the floor lay the dead body of Moore.

II

THIS IS THE first of a series of addresses on human history to which you will be subjected on your voyage to the Planet Eisenhower. I hope my narrative-lecture method does not seem too strange to you. If it does, you will have four years in which to get used to it.

Because of the abominable inadequacies of your education to date, I shall have to fill in a good deal of background, so that you can understand the implications of Frederick Corson's history-making adventure.

The Atomic Wars of the second half of the Twentieth Century all but wiped out the advanced peoples of North America, Europe and Eastern Asia. Not a city of importance was left. Peace brought a hollow victory, for the underdeveloped peoples of Asia, Africa and South America submerged what was left of Western civilization by simple weight of numbers.

Inner Asia, Africa and South America had money and goods, and their factories were still operat-

ing. The West had nothing left, and faced utter starvation. Within a few months the new conquerors had bought or stolen every secret of atomic power. Under the leadership of a small and corrupt clique of Chinese—shortly to be replaced by an equally corrupt clique of Indians and Southeastern Russians—they ran the world.

The whole world was a police state. There were uniformed soldiers in every village, secret operatives of the police in every office, every factory. The United States became a country of fear, where no man trusted his nextdoor neighbor.

But Richard Hobart trusted Corliss Grayson and David Fellows trusted them both. Hobart was a chemist who knew that certain experiments with aniline dyes could make a person temporarily sterile. Grayson was a physicist whose specialty was radiation. Together they tackled the job—this was in the year 1995—of doing with rays what could with more difficulty be done by chemical reaction. To put the matter bluntly, they wanted to invent an electrical illuminating device that would temporarily sterilize anyone exposed to its rays for a reasonable length of time.

In time they got it and—in this they were lucky—succeeded in improving manufacturing processes so that their bulbs were brighter, longer-lived and cheaper to make than any others. Their specifications included a strange alloy called fellocrene, after the man who had

backed them in their experiments.

Soon fellocrene light bulbs began to flood the markets of Asia, Africa and South America, competing in price even with the Chinese and Japanese bulbs. Before long demands—backed, it must be admitted, by ugly threats—began to arrive that Hobart, Grayson and Fellows license Argentine and Indian manufacturers to make the fellocrene bulbs.

The trio consented with apparent reluctance, stipulating only that they be allowed to exercise a monopoly in the American and European markets and retain control of the original source of supply.

This last provision was an important one, for the trio did not wish to cut birthrates too abruptly. To do so would have led to investigations, and the exposure and eventual defeat of their plan. That plan had nothing racial in it. Its sole aim was to deprive the totalitarian rulers in Bokhara of the mass of ill-educated robot-like manpower that was enabling them to suppress liberty throughout the world.

As Hobart and Grayson had anticipated, the birthrates of the backward areas fell away. Soon only Asiatics and Africans too poor to afford electricity were having children at a normal rate. By 2050—in fact, before the death of any one of the trio—they were privileged to see China's 400,000,000 population total drop to 180,000,-

000, and India's slip to 275,000,000. In another thirty years even those figures had been halved. The nations that had all but committed suicide in 1970 began to reassume positions of importance in world councils.

As might have been expected, manipulation of the fellocrene secret caused trouble. Only three men at a time were ever in control of the supply—first the sons and then the grandsons of the founders. But Chauncey Hobart, a grandson, seems to have been too unstable a character to have been trusted with such a world-stabilizing responsibility.

In 2103, in revenge for a bad evening at the hands of the secret police, he "conceded" to the East Russians the right to manufacture fellocrene bulbs within their own borders. As the East Russians ignored their agreement not to export, Greece, Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Egypt were virtually depopulated by 2200.

Another charge against Chauncey Hobart comes from the diary of Corliss Grayson IV. Australia lost its population, he wrote, because a girl named Daisy Miller jilted Hobart for a Brisbane lawyer named Hudson. Hobart maliciously sent them a hundred fellocrene bulbs as a wedding present and Hudson's uncle, a metallurgical engineer named Currie, pirated the fellocrene invention and marketed the bulbs throughout the Sixth Continent and New Zealand.

By 2250, the continents were peopled as follows:

<i>North America</i>	75,000,000
<i>South America</i>	10,000,000
<i>Asia and Oceania</i>	110,000,000
<i>Africa</i>	5,000,000
<i>Europe</i>	50,000,000
<i>Australia</i>	100,000*

At the same time, there were perhaps 25,000,000 descendants of North Americans and Europeans on other planets of the galaxy, principally the planet-necklace that whirls about Alpha Centauri.

It was in 2251 that The Committee was formed. Corliss Grayson IV, Henry Fellows and a man named Oscar Tarrant who had taken the Hobart place in the trio, decided that world depopulation should end. The odds had now become even enough, they believed, to enable men of good will to win back their liberties without resort to subterfuge or violence. Production of fellocrene was abruptly stopped.

By 2312—when this portion of our story opens—the over-all population figures had virtually doubled.

There had, of course, been other changes in the world. Hrdlicka's Twentieth Century finding that man grew taller when fed regularly and well was impressively confirmed, for the smaller populations had wiped out famines. In North America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the men in most

families gained an average of four inches in the first hundred years.

This proved to be a somewhat wavering rate of growth, declining about thirty-five percent in each succeeding century. But by 2312 the six-foot-eight man was as common as his six-foot-one ancestor of four centuries earlier.

Even in that day the average life-span was almost two hundred years. The epochal discoveries of Garson Merriwell, which doubled that figure, were not to come until 2340.

With plenty to eat, disease almost unknown and the assurance of a long life in which to enjoy himself, man had every reason in the world to be happy—or so the Bokhara World Government constantly declared. But mankind in general had grown tired of living in a miasma of suspicion and terror, and it was perhaps inevitable that The Committee should have been formed.

III

EVEN TODAY there must be gaps in my story of Corson's adventure, due to the secrecy that surrounded The Committee and its organization. Not until the definitive history by Grayson Fellows appears in 2400 will the missing details be available.

We do know, however, that the organization to which Corson belonged had been set up to make the loss of any one unit as unim-

*Mostly bushmen, with a few bushmen-kangaroo hybrids.

portant as possible. Workers in the field never knew their superiors. If one were captured and tortured he could never tell more than the location of the radiophone through which he talked to the men above him. Since nobody ever answered until the speaker's vibration-pattern had been matched with that of the office he happened to be calling at the time, each captured agent was a dead end.

There is even the story of the excitable agent who was so emotionally upset when he rushed to his radiophone that he had to talk for three hours before the vibrations of his voice dropped to a recognizable pattern.

The history of Corson's induction into the organization of The Committee is typical of a good many others.

He was twenty-six at the time, recently returned from a round trip to Churchill and Roosevelt and an assistant professor of politics and history at the University of Kansas. When agents of the World Government at Kokhara objected to a lecture on the old democratic systems of government, Corson had been caught in the middle of the controversy. Student riots followed. Three Kokhara agents had been killed and three hundred student and faculty rioters flattened with gas bombs. That, of course, ended Corson's career as a teacher. In the normal course of events he would have disappeared, and his grave would have gone unmarked.

As it was, he disappeared but not to a grave. He awoke to consciousness on a cot in a small windowless room. His head had been shaved and he was dressed as a common laborer.

He got up and tried the door. It was locked on the outside.

"You are Frederick Corson?" asked a voice. It seemed to come from a large tapestry picture above the cot.

"I am," said Corson. "Who are you?"

A light went on behind the tapestry and the head of a man was revealed. It was, however, a head disguised with false eyebrows, mustache and large cloth nose.

"I hope my beauty doesn't blind you," said the speaker. "Frankly, my boy, my friends and I are looking upon you as a possible recruit. You don't really like this World Government, do you?"

Corson shrugged. "If you represent it, I'm dead already, so I may as well tell you the truth. I am bitterly opposed to any system of government that survives by suppressing individual liberty."

"Do you have any friends who agree with you?"

"Dozens, I'm sure," Corson said. "But I've talked to only three or four."

"Would you like to talk to more—under such conditions as these?"

"Yes, but what would be the point?"

"Perhaps you could persuade

them to join you in doing the work of The Committee."

"What's that?"

"That's the only name our organization has. At the moment it is solely a recruiting organization. When the time seems ripe, it will become a revolutionary army. We need a good many men such as you."

Corson's answer came quickly. "I don't see what I have to lose," he said. "We have no liberty at all now. I'm with you."

"That's what I expected," said the man with the eyebrows. "Now I am going to take your picture for a new identity card. Before I come back you will fingerprint yourself a number of times on the blank forms you'll find on that table by the door. But I also have another job for you. This establishment, a vacant restaurant, bought and cleaned out a few days ago. Before the new occupant moves in, a non-directional radiophone must be installed in a secret compartment behind the men's washroom. The equipment is in the room next door. You'll find instructions and blueprints with it."

The tapestry picture was pushed aside. A flashbulb bloomed. Then Corson discovered that he was alone.

It had been exacting, dangerous, lonely work, but it had carried with it a sense of accomplishment. For a long time he had been a recruiter, moving cautiously from place to place, out of touch with The

Committee save for a single address filed in his memory—the address of the restaurant containing the secret radiophone.

Certain skills were lacking on Terra and Corson was ordered back to the Alpha planets to recruit the men The Committee needed. When he returned to Terra at the age of thirty-six, he was immediately sent for.

Since the destruction and contamination of the whole northeastern area of the United States more than three centuries earlier, the region had been allowed to grow back to forest. Hardly anybody lived there. Four hours out of Knoxville, the Eastern capital, he found himself flying over a wild and beautiful stretch of country that he judged to be in the Adirondacks. Then the helicopter-plane lost its forward momentum and settled down in a tiny landing field beside a rugged promontory.

The home of his host, he discovered, was solidly built into the cliff wall, and skilfully concealed.

Corson was met at the cave-entrance by a large heavysset man wearing the toystore eyebrows and mustache of The Committee's interviewers.

"To night," he said, "you will meet two other members of The Committee. Since I am the largest in stature, perhaps you had better call me Mr. Big—I assure you it has no other connotation—and the other two gentlemen Mr. Medium and Mr. Small.

Then it had come out. The Committee was gravely worried.

"We are almost ready to strike," said Mr. Medium, who seemed to be the real leader of the trio. "The World Government has grown careless. Bureaucracy has developed to such mushrooming dimensions that nobody dares to make an important decision on his own responsibility. Most of the inspectors of important military stores are now our men. I need hardly tell you that all uranium, hydrogen, lithium and omicron bombs have had to be 're-designed' and that the original lethal charges are now resting at the bottom of the Japan Deep."

"Wonderful!" said Corson.

"Yes, so far, so good," said Mr. Medium. "But now we're up against a new development. Let's have the figures, Mr. Big."

Mr. Big adjusted a jeweler's eyepiece and consulted notes written so fine they looked like dust. "One of our men in the statistical office," he said, "reported six months ago that no children at all were born in Winter Park, Florida, in the year twenty-three eleven."

"You know about fellocrene?" asked Mr. Small.

"I know what it did," said Corson.

"That's enough for anyone to know," said Mr. Small. He continued: "We checked on those figures and found that they were right. We also found Oklahoma City with a gross birthrate of one

point thirty-one per thousand. Alberta's rate was down to one point twenty-one and Alaska had only zero point seven. Do you see what that means?"

"Fellocrene or something like it seems to be in use again."

"Yes, and it is no new thing. Now that we have access to them, we have gone back over past figures for North America and Western Europe. As you probably know, the manufacture of fellocrene was halted sixty-one years ago. But for almost fifteen years somebody has been gradually increasing the supply to this continent."

"Not to Europe?"

"Not so far as we can tell," Mr. Small said.

"Who is doing it?" Corson asked.

"That is precisely what we do not know and that is why we are worried. Fellocrene can be pirated. We know that. But we also know that a bulb made of it loses its power to produce sterility in a single year. That means a big organization. It is our belief that the bulbs are being brought in from Mars or the Alpha planets."

"You've checked this suspicion?"

"Carefully. They don't come in at White Sands or the Berlin Waste or the Stalingrad Desert or at Marrakesh. We're not sure yet about Marrakesh. We're checking again. But a month ago we got a brief word from an agent named Moore at Kweiyang—"

"I think I know Moore," said

Corson. "I recruited a Waldemar Moore."

"That's the one," said Mr. Medium. "All Moore said was, 'I think I have something and I'm checking.' Since that message, we haven't heard from him. We believe he must be dead."

"The thing that bothers us," said Mr. Small, "is that we haven't the slightest idea where the menace comes from. This new force may be as big as we are—and have diametrically opposite objectives."

"A *coup d'etat* by a force that had brains as well as bureaucratic authority," said Mr. Medium, "could set us back a hundred years."

Corson studied the scrap of paper on which somebody had written the address of the Kweiyang restaurant where he could expect to find a hidden telephone connection with The Committee's agents.

"I think I know what my job is to be," he said. "But I should like to make one request in advance."

"I am sure it will be a reasonable one," said Mr. Medium.

"Moore was a friend of mine," said Corson. "We had four years together on the old *Albert Einstein* when we went out to Churchill in twenty-two ninety-one. Five years ago I went back, found him on Eisenhower and recruited him. He never knew it was I, of course. But we spent a good deal of time together. He was a grand guy."

"Go ahead," said Mr. Medium.

"It's a simple little request but I know it's unusual," said Corson. "I only want The Committee's permission to kill the man who murdered Moore."

Mr. Medium looked inquiringly at his colleagues. Mr. Big and Mr. Small nodded their heads silently.

"Request granted," said Mr. Medium. "Good hunting, Fred."

IV

MOORE hadn't been dead when Corson made that request. But now Moore was dead, half of his upper chest torn away with an explosive bullet.

The bellboy dropped the bags. He darted for the phone, reached out his hand for it and halted abruptly.

"I forgot!" he said. "Mustn't touch. I keep forgetting." He was at the door again. "You wait here. Don't let anybody in." He was gone like a streak of purposeful lightning down the hall.

Corson worked fast, hoping against hope that the killer hadn't given the body a real search . . .

Avoiding the blood from the wound in Moore's throat, he reached into the man's mouth, and unscrewed the upper left molar. If Moore had learned anything, his notes should have been concealed there. They were, on a tiny, tightly wadded bit of paper, written almost too small to be read with the naked eye.

Where could he hide the vitally important message? In his own hollow tooth? It no longer existed. Information had come back a month or so previously that the secret police knew that hollow teeth were often utilized in just such a manner by agents of The Committee. Perhaps an old-fashioned, more obvious place . . .

He unstrapped one of his own bags. They had been searched once, he knew, and quite possibly would not be examined again. He unscrewed the bottle of shaving lotion, pried the thin cork plug from inside the top, shoved in the sliver of paper and replaced both the cork and top. Then he re strapped the bag.

Seconds later he was climbing the service stairway to the seventh floor. If Moore had discovered anything more, some indication of the line to follow would very likely be found in his room.

The door of Room 741 was not locked. Corson entered warily. On the bureau was a large, almost nude photograph of the girl he had seen in the lobby.

She was facing the camera, dipping a tentative foot into a deep green mountain pool. Sunlight filtered in a golden crescent through bamboo branches, and flecked with shadow the smooth tan of her shining limbs. In her eyes and the curl of her lips was a slight challenge.

Never had Corson seen anyone quite so beautiful. Not even in the

Selecto caves of Churchill, where the pleasure dome proprietors use all the resources of science to enhance the loveliness of women for purposes of entertainment had he seen a figure of such flawless perfection.

He realized at once that he had to have that picture! Using his handkerchief to guard against fingerprints, he opened the heavy silver frame and removed the stiff pasteboard at its back. Lying against the reverse of the photograph was a bit of hotel stationery. On it Moore had written: "C-173."

It was then that somebody knocked on the door. We do not know his name, his nationality or even his purpose today. We do know, however, that if he had not knocked at that exact moment in the stream of time the history of the world would have been tragically different. Corson would have taken the picture, like a moonstruck young fool, and hidden it on his person. Then, when he returned to his room, he'd have been searched to the skin and the secret police would have had disturbing things to think about.

But that tragedy was almost miraculously averted. At the first knock, Corson slipped the paper into his mouth and chewed. By the second, he was in the bathroom, edging out the open window to the fire escape. Not much later, running along a third-floor corridor, he saw a tall figure ahead of him moving toward the stairs.

"Hey!" called Corson. "There's been a murder in my room. I need help."

Startled, the man swung about to stare. "Where's your room?"

"Second floor—right below here."

"Come along then."

When they entered Room 222 four men were standing grouped in a semi-circle about Moore's body. One was the bellboy.

"What's this, Wang?" said the most official looking of the four. "Who's your friend?"

The bellboy said: "That's Mr. Mandeville. He was assigned to this room."

"That's right," confirmed Corson.

"You were told to stay here. Where the hell did you go?"

"I don't take orders from bellboys," Corson said. "I went for help."

"What took you so long?"

"The first two guys I talked to didn't seem interested."

"What'd they say?"

"One said, 'Oh, yeah?' and the other, 'So what?'"

The detective's manner changed. "You know this guy?" he asked.

"I never saw him before in my life," Corson replied.

"Then why did he pick your room to die in?"

"Did he?" Corson's voice was tinged with irony.

"What do you mean by that? He died, all right."

"Sure, but he couldn't have

known it was my room. I didn't know myself until Young Hopeful here opened the door."

The detective turned to the bellboy. "Is that right?" he demanded.

The bellboy nodded.

"Speak up! I can't hear you."

"That's the way it was."

"Okay," said the detective. "I guess that about clears everything up. Just take off your clothes and toss 'em over here—one by one."

The search was thorough, but the searchers found nothing.

The detective was more friendly. "Tell the desk to give you another room," he said.

"How about my bags?"

"We'll send 'em around as soon as we've gone through 'em. Just a formality."

Corson tried to look amused. "If you guys aren't careful, you'll wear 'em out."

"Our fingers," said the chief detective, "will brush as lightly as thistledown."

The bellboy took him to his new room.

A trained operative such as Corson always finds it hard to believe that enemy operatives aren't fully as bright as he. Books of reminiscences from the twentieth century wars—the last wars—reveal that each nation thought of the agents of the enemy as fiendishly clever and privately considered its own agents dolts and bunglers.

So it was with Corson. If he had been searching his bags, he would have looked beneath the cork in

his shaving lotion bottle. He also would have opened the toothpaste tube from the bottom, unscrewed the mechanism of the electric razor and sprayed a breath of iodine vapor on an occasional letter or book-page, looking for secret writing. It did not occur to him that secret policemen going through the same suspicious routine every day, every week, every year, could grow bored and less meticulous.

From his point of view, there was less than an even chance that Moore's concealed report would go undiscovered. Discovery meant his death and the failure of his mission. It seemed prudent to guard against the first, patriotic to beware of the second.

Corson slipped out of the hotel by a side door as the day grew late. After a brisk walk, during which he checked repeatedly to make sure that he was not followed, he turned down Thieves' Street and entered an unobtrusive restaurant. The small eating establishment was the only address he knew in Kweiyang.

At the moment when he dropped into an unoccupied booth and ordered a meal, the secret police in his hotel room—who had decided from his manner that he was only a dumb Martian colonist and a pretty good Joe—had finished with their cursory search and were helping themselves to the excellent Martian *gussy*-whiskey they had found in his bag. In a little while they would fill the bottle back to

its former level with tapwater and go about their business.

When the crowd in the restaurant thinned out a little, Corson entered the men's washroom, closed the door of the lefthand booth behind him and pressed three studs on the rear wall. Instantly the wall swung inward, revealing a tiny sound-proof telephone booth. He lifted the receiver. Somewhere a tiny generator began to hum softly.

V

FRED CORSON dialed the frequency garbling attachment to its proper setting for month, day and hour and commenced to speak softly into the radiotelephone.

Voice-rhythm must match with body-rhythm. He began to recite the "epic" of The Bowlegged Barmaid of Boca Ratan, to which he had added more than a hundred stanzas of his own in the past dozen years. The lonesome men who waited at radio stations for The Committee knew everyone of them. A new one was an event:

The bowlegged barmaid of Boca
Ratan

Could seldom keep romance
alight.

She had six Norwegians
Who swore their allegiance

But wore them all out in a night.
Her standards were high.

She demanded a guy

That she'd rather love no one
else than.

But she came face to face
With the fact that our race
Of such utter perfection contained
not a trace,
So with King-right-through-Two-
Spot in place of the Ace
She managed at Boca Ratan.

"Okay, One-Two-One," said a voice. "You check. What do you know about Eight-Three-Four?"

Corson told the story.

"How did he know you were an agent?"

"I don't think he did, for sure, but I was a friend and didn't speak to him, so he knew I might be. He gave the finger signals, but he knew that I couldn't know them and that no harm would be done if I weren't an agent."

He continued: "First, flash that symbol C-one seventy-five back to headquarters. See if anybody can figure out a possible meaning. Second, I want a run-down for any possible information about this girl I've told you about. She's so beautiful that she must be in the entertainment field. Either she is or her daddy is so rich she doesn't have to work."

"Why do you say that?"

"Her clothes must have cost a mint. See if any dame fitting this picture is missing from her usual haunts anywhere." He gave a detailed description.

"That's going to take some time," said the man at the other end. "The boys will have to run through all the recent papers."

"I have an idea it may be worth it. Now listen carefully. I have one of my hunches. Something big may blow up here at any moment and I'm likely to want help. If we have any other agents in the area, give them a rendezvous in case I need them. They ought to be armed."

"You can count on at least a dozen," said the radio voice.

"That ought to be enough," said Corson. "Shall we sign off?"

The voice at the other end became cajoling: "You got any more stanzas of *The Barmaid*?"

"I'll have another for you tomorrow about noon," Corson promised. He hung up and returned to his restaurant table.

At the far side of the booth sat *The Girl*, a pistol aimed at his mid-section.

"Sit down," she said.

It took the waiter, it seemed to Corson, an inexcusably long time to unload his stack of dishes and depart. Meanwhile, *The Girl* kept her pistol trained on Corson below the level of the table top.

"Perhaps you'd care to join me," he said.

"I don't feel hungry."

She had spoken only six words but those few syllables, Corson felt, might hold the answer to the entire riddle.

Since the depopulation of Greece in the twenty-second century, the letter "d" or "delta" had been pronounced "dh"—like the "th" in "there"—in only one locality in the known universe. That was Ne'

Elladha—New Greece—the largest continent on the Planet Eisenhower. It had been peopled by the finest young men and women of old Greece.

For the past forty years the President and virtual father of Ne' Elladha had been Demetrios Christophorou, affectionately called Mitsos by everyone. On his last trip to Eisenhower, Corson had tried to get help from Mitsos for the liberation of Terra. In spite of the exalted position of the man, the anonymous interview had been amazingly easy to arrange. Mitsos knew that everybody loved him. His guards, as usual, were occupied elsewhere by their own pursuits.

Mitsos had been intensely interested but cagey. Corson had gained the impression that revolt on Terra was an idea on which the Ne' Elladhan President had thought long and productively. Quite obviously it could never be a project on which he would move as the lieutenant of someone else. He would have to be the leader in his own right.

It was only an impression, but as he heard The Girl say "drown" and "dhon't," Corson felt sure that Mitsos had already started work. He decided to attack at once.

"Did Mitsos come on this last trip?" he asked. "He said he might."

There was no change in The Girl's expression. "I dhon't know

what you are talking about," she said.

Corson shrugged. "Have it your own way," he said. "But Mitsos must have been psychotic to send you here as an agent. You're unbelievably beautiful. Wherever you go people keep looking at you, even when they don't suspect you. You could never get away with anything."

"So you really think I'm beautiful?"

"Most men, seeing you for the first time, would have difficulty in pretending otherwise."

She smiled. "Do the Terran men always flatter so outrageously?"

"Heavens, no. We're a tongue-tied lot compared with you people around Alpha. But you have an unusual effect on me. Yes," he continued chattily, "you must have started for Terra before I talked to Mitsos last. He had a couple of other cute babes he wanted to send, but I talked him out of it. How long you been here? I'd really like to know."

She seemed to weigh her words before replying. "May I ask, Mr. Mandeville, just what part you think you are playing in the organization?"

It looked like a slip. At least it seemed to admit the existence of an organization.

"Look, kid," he said. "Before I go on, how about giving me a name? It needn't be your own name, just something I can call you."

"If you must call me anything, call me Maria."

"Very good, Maria. Now I'll tell you. I have no real part in the organization. Mitsos wants his own people in the main jobs, or so I've been given to understand. I'm a kind of adviser. Although I've been out to Eisenhower twice, I've spent most of my life on Terra. I know the ropes here."

"And would that help?"

"Well, maybe it wouldn't. But I've persuaded Mitsos it would help a great deal. You wouldn't begrudge a poor spaceman his job, would you?"

"You are a pilot?"

"Why, sure!" He stopped with a show of shamefaced confusion. "Oh, what's the sense of kidding you? You could check up on me too easily. I was a kind of steward. I ran the hydroponics banks."

"And what could 'a-kind-of-steward' do to help Mitsos?"

"You want an example? Well—suppose you were determined to drop a sleep-bomb on secret police headquarters. I could tell you the exact hour when you'd catch most of the snoopers there."

"Yes, that could be useful." Maria agreed. "You've pretty well convinced me that you are what you say you are. May I ask for one more proof?"

"Of course. Anything."

Still holding the pistol, she groped for a hidden pocket and came up with a tightly-folded sheet of tissue paper. It looked, Corson

realized, exactly like the message from Moore's hollow tooth which he had hidden beneath the cork in the shaving lotion bottle. Maria tossed it across the table.

"What's this?" he asked.

"A message of some kind," she said promptly. "I thought Mitsos might have given you the key for it. I can't read it by anything he gave us."

Corson unfolded the paper. His heart jumped. Yes, it was definitely the message from Moore's hollow tooth!

"Where'd you pick this up?" he demanded.

"I'm afraid I can't tell you that," she said. "Does it make any sense?"

"You'll have to give me a little time." He spread the message out on the table and concentrated. It began:

hehd eulho qeasm alnny hysph
 qragh ckehm elar zhhxt souhq
 whfhh axohl hmmht nitri daljy
 imchd arrfa lthtg dioxm cnanl
 swdhw jhtup leetr eathe tuhj
 lwatn qhtox cbokm cswha
 mm . . .

Shaking his head as if in bewilderment, Corson made fairly rapid progress in decoding the message. It was actually a variation of an old newspaper cipher invented during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5, and could be read at sight by a man in the know.* The

*Readers who want to try will find the key on a later page.

Committee's agents quite naturally used it seldom. But it was handy to have in an emergency, when no safer method of communication had been arranged with another agent in advance. Most agents knew it by rote.

"Are you getting anywhere at all?" Maria asked.

With the first part of the message burning into his brain, Corson shook his head. "Not so far," he said. "But I've got something back in my bag at the hotel that may enable us to read it."

The girl twitched the paper from his hand. "Then suppose we go back there."

"Okay. But remember, I'm not promising anything." He rose and waved a bill at the waiter. "I'll be with you in a minute."

Corson turned toward the wash-room. His urgent job now was to report on what he had learned. Let The Committee get to work while he labored to patch up the wreck of the theories he had built about this case. He was reaching for the door when the girl spoke.

"I think that had better wait," she said. The hand that aimed the pistol at him was steady.

"Have it your own way," said Corson. He left the restaurant, the girl following.

"Walk ahead of me," she said.

Corson started for the hotel. It would be safe to return there now. Obviously, the secret police had not found anything in the suitcase to incriminate him. Unless—he

caught himself up short—unless the girl herself belonged to the secret police.

The girl was walking about twenty yards behind him now, holding her pistol ready in her handbag. Should he make a break for it? When he came to the next corner, he might turn quickly and sprint, opening up a lead of fifty yards. In spite of the misconceptions of fictioneers, a running, weaving man is almost impossible to hit with a hand-weapon at that distance.

He put off the decision. There would be other corners later. Meanwhile, his wisest course would be to get his thoughts in order. Precisely what did he know?

First, he had the contents of Moore's message—at least the first part. Western Europeans under somebody named Hans von Schwann were planning to take over the principal military installations on March 3. He realized that this made much more sense than the supposition that good old Mitsos was planning an attack. The benevolent President of Ne' Elladha would never have agreed to the use of fellocrene bulbs.

Second, he told himself, he knew that there were four elements in the situation: The Bokhara Government with its secret police; The Committee, The Hans von Schwann organization, and Mitsos, Maria and Ne' Elladha.

The European organization might have men in sufficient num-

bers to enable it to seize a few of the bases, load atomic weapons aboard planes and attempt to terrorize the Bokhara Government into submission. Von Schwann did not know that the bombs were useless.

But perhaps the bluff would work. In that event, The Committee's men should be ready to step in and take over. Were there enough of them? Could they be mobilized in time? Corson did not know. But perhaps Mitsos had enough of an organization. Perhaps he had enough really useful bombs to swing the balance of power. Perhaps an alliance between Mitsos and The Committee would be possible.

But did Mitsos have more than a handful of agents on Terra? Were his spaceships—assuming any or all of them were armed—on the Moon, Mars, or Venus, close enough to be summoned in time? After all, March 3 was only three weeks away!

These were questions for The Committee to answer. At any cost, he knew that he must get away, make his report and ask permission to approach Maria with a proposal for an alliance. At the next corner he would make his break.

But then the girl spoke. "We stop here," she said.

She knocked and an old-fashioned Chinese gate swung open. They crossed a paved courtyard, entered a one-story house, passed

through a long and almost dark corridor and came out into a large, well-lighted room. A dozen men sat around a table covered with maps.

VI

"HERE YOU ARE, Hans," said the girl. "I think I've got the answer to your questions about that other organization."

"Who's this man?" asked the apparent leader of the group.

"He's a kind of agent for Demetrios Christophorou. The old boy seems to have some kind of idea of freeing the world from Bokhara."

"From four light years away? He's crazy!"

The apparent leader rose to take a closer look at Corson. He was fully as tall as Maria's companion, with powerful shoulders and a lean, dark face.

"What do you know about this boy?" he demanded.

"Enough, I think." There was naked satisfaction in Maria's voice. "He's a space rat, a hydroponic farmer. Christophorou uses him to show other agents the ropes, but he doesn't trust him too much. I fooled him into thinking I was one of his people by talking in a Ne' Elladhan accent."

"Good work, Maria! So what do we do with him now?"

"I'll leave that up to you. You may be able to persuade him to tell you how to get in touch with

some of the high-powered men in his organization."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Hans. He chuckled. "Shove him down here into the light and let's get a good look at him."

Until he stepped forward into the circle about the table, Corson had been congratulating himself. By a near miracle he had landed in what seemed to be world headquarters of the von Schwann organization. By offering full cooperation, by making up plausible lies, he might soon find himself adopted as an assistant or accessory.

Then he heard the laugh. It came from a heavyset man with a stiff brush of red hair. The situation was suddenly reversed, for this man not only knew him by sight. He knew him well.

"Is this your hydroponics farmer, Maria?" he asked, and laughed again.

"What's the matter, Terence?" asked von Schwann.

"I'm afraid an expert has been pulling the leg of the beautiful Maria. I've known this fellow under two different names and in neither case was he an ignorant space rat. This, my dear Hans, is Frederick Corson, whose brilliant book on comparative civilizations caused such a stir a dozen years ago. He is also, I am certain, Rodney Brill, who was lecturing on the cosmic ray on the Planet Eisenhower only six short years ago. If I might make a guess, I should say that Corson-Brill is a top agent

for that other dangerous organization opposing the Bokhara Government—The Committee."

Terrence turned abruptly to Maria. "What does he call himself here and what is he supposed to be?"

Corson had been watching the girl intently. Judging by her expression, she was chagrined. No other emotion had come through. Now, however, she spoke with some strain.

"He says his name is Mandeville," she said. "And he has two personalities. For the secret police, he was a rough Martian colonist—a space jockey. For me, he was a Terran, but equally ignorant."

Von Schwann nodded. "If he isn't an agent, he has no need for a cover story." He turned to Corson. "What's it going to be, my boy? Are you going to tell us, or will we be compelled to kick it out of you?"

"I'll talk," said Corson. "I'll tell you everything I know. But you've apparently run into other agents of The Committee. You know that I can tell you nothing about the people above me and precious little about those below. Even though I may walk away from this little trap alive, my usefulness to The Committee would be ended. But The Committee will go right on."

In his mind was a plan. He would talk freely of everything he had known until he met Messrs. Big, Medium and Small, but he would exaggerate their knowledge

of the von Schwann organization. The Committee and von Schwann had the same objective—the overthrow of the Bokhara Government. Perhaps, if he played his part well . . .

"How much do you know about us?" asked von Schwann.

"Very little," said Corson. "I know that your name is Hans von Schwann. I know that you head an organization much like ours. You are now placing your men for a *coup d'état* on March 3."

Von Schwann swore. "There's obviously a traitor among us! We set that date scarcely three days ago!"

"And I left Knoxville yesterday. I knew it before I started and I also knew that you plan to take over the main military installations, and seize the big bomb supplies."

He drew a deep breath. Now for a long leap from what he knew into probabilities! "The main effort will be here in Kweiyang. Here you will load several ships with omicron bombs, fly to Bokhara and try to cow the World Government into submission."

At the edge of the circle he saw a man catch another's eye and smile.

"At least," he added, "that is one plan. The stronger group among you wants to obliterate Bokhara as a beginning move and it is my understanding that you will attempt to do so."

Terence Costigan was on his feet. "If they know this much,

Hans, they can stop us. They're bigger than we are!"

"Much bigger," said Corson. "The Committee has been building its organization for sixty years. You West Europeans are late-comers."

"How many men do you have?"

"Nobody ever told me."

"Where is your headquarters here?"

Corson grinned. "You've caught other agents of The Committee, haven't you? Then surely you must know that we don't work with groups. Agents in an area communicate by garbled radio with a secret station—so secret that even we don't know where it is or even how far away it is."

"But you can communicate with The Committee?"

"Easily. I'll make my proposition. You make yours. Then, if you'll let me go for an hour, I will bring back The Committee's answer."

"Do you feel you're in position to bargain?"

"Most definitely, and you know it. Look, von Schwann, you are planning an attack with a trifling force. You've got to have the advantage of surprise to succeed. If The Committee isn't ready to move, it can eliminate the element of surprise in any one of a dozen ways. You've got to deal with us."

"How?"

"Join us. Divide the work. Let The Committee take over part of it."

"This has been my show from the start," said von Schwann.

"I know," said Corson. "And there's one more thing. You've got to agree to stop sending fellocrene bulbs into North America. That is not considered a friendly gesture."

"I told you, Hans," said Costigan. "That was a long-range plan and all your others were short-range. I'll bet that's the way they got on to us."

"That's right," said Corson cheerfully.

"Shut up, both of you!" said von Schwann. "Kurt and Pierre, lock this fellow up. I'm not letting anyone take this play away from me. We've got to talk things over."

"You're going to be sorry about this," said Corson.

"Shut up! Double-handcuff him to something solid, Pierre—and bring me the keys."

"Right," said Pierre.

Corson found himself being propelled toward a door. "I've got just one more thing to say," he called back over his shoulder. "You'd better make up your minds to work with The Committee, because there isn't a single operative atom, hydrogen or omicron bomb left on Terra today."

The room was suddenly very silent.

"Say that again," said von Schwann.

Corson did so.

"Lock him up," said the leader

quietly. "That was the biggest of all his bluffs."

Pierre and Kurt handcuffed Corson—once to a water pipe, and once to a heavy, stainless steel bed.

"We shall handle you gently, my friend," said Pierre. "I have an idea that before long we shall be comrades at arms and friends. Hans is impulsive."

For a short time after they left Corson could hear an angry interchange of orders. Then hasty feet pounded through the corridor and motors purred into life. For perhaps two hours there was complete silence. Then the motors came back and feet raced through the corridor. In the big room indistinguishable voices engaged in a discussion. That was when he heard his name being called.

"Corson!"

He rolled over on the bed. The voice came from the window opening on the courtyard.

"Yes?"

"This is Maria. They have some agents in the bomb dumps. They were able to get in and examine some of the bombs. Now they are back and reporting to Hans. We can talk for a minute."

"Go ahead."

"I want to work for The Committee."

Corson chuckled. "Hans's girl—a Committee agent?"

"I'm *not* his girl. But he wants me to be. I thought at first that it would be a great adventure with history."

"It is. Don't question that for a moment."

"But now I see that he would only have the world exchange one kind of tyrant for another. When you left he raved that The Committee would destroy all of his plans for world conquest. He hates all Americans."

"So where does that leave us?"

"I did not show Hans the message which you took from Moore's hollow tooth. When you looked at it, I was sure you understood it. If it was that easy, I decided, Hans could read it too. He is very clever and he would have instantly realized that all of your information came from Moore and that The Committee really knew nothing about his plans."

"Again, where does that leave us?"

"I want you to tell me how to get a message through to The Committee. I will tell them exactly what happened to Moore. I will tell them where you are. I will read the Moore cipher. Then I will reveal everything I know about Hans."

"Let me think for a minute."

"Not too long. They will be coming soon."

What did he have to lose? His usefulness as an agent—on this assignment, at least—was ended. If the girl had been intent on tricking him, she would have given the message to Hans. It was only a simple substitution cipher which any reasonably intelligent cryptog-

rapher could break down in fifteen minutes.*

If she were deceiving him, only the one radiophone would be lost—for nobody would answer when she called.

"All right, my dear," he said. "I'll take a chance." He told her how to find the radiophone, and how to set the garbler.

"Say immediately that you are not an agent but that this is an emergency," he instructed her. "Tell them where I am and who holds me. Read the Moore message letter by letter. Then go on and tell them everything. You got that?"

Maria laughed. She had a beautiful, silvery laugh.

"You poor fool!" she whispered. "You deceived me before, but nobody does that twice!"

Feet came down the corridor and Maria vanished from the window. Pierre and Kurt unlocked the handcuffs.

But the girl was not present when they hustled Corson back into the big room.

"Damn it, you told the truth!" said von Schwann. He was no longer in complete control of him-

*Cryptography was virtually a dead science in the early twenty-fourth century and Corson may have over-estimated Hans and his friends. In the old cipher the vowels, including Y, were unchanged. The consonants stood for those most like them, as B for V and vice versa, C for S, D for T, F for Z, G for K, H for W, J for X, L for R, M for N, and P for Q. To confuse decipherers, the fourth letter in each five-letter group was a null, standing for nothing. Occasional five-letter groups were also nulls, first the fifth group, then the fourth group, and so on.

self. He looked mused and worried.

"Naturally," said Corson. Where had the girl gone? From the evidence at hand, she had told von Schwann nothing. "If The Committee is to work with you people," he continued, "there must be complete frankness on both sides."

"Can we work with you?"

"Why not? It looks easy to me. All we need is a battle plan, dividing the work and making sure that we do not fight each other."

"And the next step?"

"First I suggest that you tell me enough about your numbers and your dispositions to enable me to sound convincing when I report. Then set me at liberty."

"Will that be necessary?"

"Naturally. I can't reveal my methods of contact. I should have an answer for you in two hours at most. After that, perhaps you can go with me and talk to The Committee directly."

Von Schwann vacillated for a moment or so, then snatched a sheet of paper from the table. "These figures are the only ones I'm prepared to reveal now," he said.

The typed sheet indicated a world force of 60,000 men, 20,000 of them within a hundred-mile striking radius of Kweiyang. The main concentrations were in Kweilin, Liuchow and Paose.

"Very good," said Corson. "May I go now?"

He saluted. Von Schwann crack-

ed his heels together and returned the salute.

Corson ran in the wrong direction for three or four blocks, making certain that he was not being followed. Then he zigzagged carefully back to the restaurant. He was working on the door of the darkened building when he heard the girl speak from the little alley across the narrow street.

"Put them up, Corson-Brill," she said. "Hans may have let you go but I've no intention of doing so."

Corson heard the familiar whoosh of a hand sleep-bomb discharger and dived desperately for the road. As he lost consciousness, he heard the girl empty her pistol. Then she must have gone under, too.

VII

MR. MEDIUM was sitting in the chair across the room when Corson came to. He listened quietly as Corson told his story.

"There was nothing strange about your rescue," he said. "You had requested that agents in the area be put under your command. They had been told to hang around that radiophone and to identify themselves to each other by hand signals. They also knew what you looked like and the names you had used. When she called your name and started shooting, one of the men used the sleep-bomb."

"What happens now?" asked Corson. "Do we join with Hans?"

"I hardly think so," said Mr. Medium. "From Moore's message, which we found, and from what you tell me, Hans von Schwann sounds like an old-fashioned totalitarian, a tyrant hardly better than the World Government he wants to displace. Pardon me a moment."

He left the room. When he came back he was smiling beneath his comedy mustache.

"All the arrangements are working out quite simply," he said. He looked at his watch. "Do you have any questions?"

"Yes," Corson said. "Are we going to take advantage of this moment and strike now?"

"I hardly think so. Two or three of our men are now on the Praesidium of the World Government. They are working their way up. We can afford to wait for the right moment. Perhaps ten years more will do the trick."

"I want to know more about the girl. Did you ever identify her?"

"Yes. She is a famous Italian actress. We had no trouble at all."

"But how did she get Moore's message?"

"Very simply. She killed him and was hiding in the closet of your room when you entered with the bellboy. She saw you change the hiding place and retrieved the message when you left."

"But why didn't she give it to Hans?"

"Maria," said Mr. Medium, "has a very strange set of emotions. You had fooled her. Hans and

Terence had jeered at her. To get even, she had to spoil your plans all by herself."

"But she could have done it merely by showing the message."

"That would have been too simple," said Mr. Medium. His smile was fatherly. "And now, my boy, I think you had better join me in a gas mask." He walked to the window. Corson followed.

Far in the sky above, three tiny dots appeared, falling rapidly.

"Sleep bombs?" asked Corson.

Mr. Medium nodded. "One for secret police headquarters, one for Hans and his friends and one for the spaceport."

As Corson and Mr. Medium covered their mouths with the masks, the bombs exploded by magnetic impulse a thousand feet up. Frail streamers of almost white smoke spread out in umbrella-like patterns, filling a third of the sky. Sleep was on the way for the unprepared, and would not be long in coming.

Downstairs in the courtyard, motors roared into life and heavy covered trucks nudged their way out of the compound. Not a motion was wasted. Strong hands gathered up the members of Hans von Schwann's headquarters battalion, stowed them like cordwood in the trucks, and tossed their belongings in on top of them. The trucks rolled on, this time to the spaceport, where the still-unconscious plotters had been strapped into gravity seats on two great

spaceliners, already loaded with their female complements.

Before any member of the von Schwann group groped his way back to consciousness, the spaceliners *H. G. Wells* and *Jules Verne* were already a quarter of the way up the scale to the speed of light. Steady, hour-after-hour eight-gravity acceleration, I am told, prolongs the effects of sleep-bombs.

Some of the better-informed members of this little-informed class may recall that the first settlements on the planets of Sirius and Procyon, nine and ten light years away, were something in the nature of penal colonies. Despite that, they have proved enormously successful and Terence Costigan has been a conscientious and democratic president. Von Schwann, of course, did not reach the new world. He was killed in an attempted mutiny when the *Jules Verne* was two years out.

With the loss of its leadership, the European movement collapsed. The Committee found data which made the destruction of von Schwann's fellocrene-bulb plants the work of a mere week or so. It was then able to continue its work of undermining and eventually overthrowing the World Government at Bokhara.

Are there any questions? My dear young lady, you shock me. I had realized that this class had learned virtually nothing in the alleged schools of Terra but I must say that the full dimensions of

your truly monumental ignorance are only gradually becoming clear. My numbed mind resists the awful truth.

"C-173, my dear, was an emotional codeword for robots. Do you understand what an emotional codeword is? . . . Then I must explain. The early attempts to make emotionless robots failed. The human mind, it seems, rebels at strict logic. With our natures, we are uncomfortable with sheer mentality. We need the lubrication of emotion. So robots were given thalami as well as cortices. Don't bother to hold up your hand, my dear. I shall explain. The emotions are lodged in the thalamus, which is part of the brain.

Goelet, the inventor, next solved the problem of what kind of emotions to give the robots. He decided that the emotions of the robot should be as close as possible to those of the master. To do this, he used codewords. If you spoke the correct codeword, the inner nature of the robot became the same as yours.

Maria, you see, was not human. She was one of the first successful Goelet robots. When Moore and Corson met her, the last person to speak her codeword had been von Schwann. Since he was a slimy character, so was she.

In keeping his vow to dispose of Moore's murderer, Corson was not obliged to kill her; only to disassemble her.

Class dismissed.