

This was the best of all possible worlds—was it not? All men were free, for Big Sister was in charge, and she was—

ABOVE THIS RACE OF MEN ROBERT F. YOUNG

Illustrated by RICHARD OLSEN

Signs of the Times

ALL ALONG the Avenue of Procesions, Big Sister slogans were in evidence. Some were embroidered on bright-colored banners suspended from the copings of the tall and stately buildings for which the Avenue was famous; some were written in neon tubing above marquees; others were part of the decor of the buildings themselves.

BIG SISTER LOVES YOU.

BIC SISTER THINKS OF YOU NIGHT AND DAY.

BIG SISTER WATCHES OVER YOU WHEN YOU ARE YOUNG AND TAKES CARE OF YOU WHEN YOU GROW OLD.

Walter Cranston, who had quit work early so he could visit the Avenue before catching the 5:59 tube train, loved Big Sister signs.

So did everybody.

Sometimes on the Party TV programs they showed you tapes of the old days when she was still in her childhood and hadn't as yet acquired her present authority. It must have been terrible living in those days. Nobody had given a damn about you and Big Sister had been too young and too little to do anything about it.

As soon as she began to grow up, though, she plunged right in and started helping people and seeing to it that they got everything that was coming to them.

Everybody owed everything to Big Sister.

Cranston worshipped the ground she walked on.

The Avenue was all in readiness for the procession that was scheduled to take place the next morning in her honor—the Big Sister Day Parade. Vehicular traffic had been rerouted and the two invisible electronic fences that would confine the crowd to the sidewalks were already activated. The Avenue proper had been scrubbed so vigorously it fairly shone in the slanted rays of the afternoon sun. Big Sister Day came on the 6th of August, and next to Xmas it was the most beloved holiday of the year. This year, it had excited even more interest than usual because there was a rumor being bruited that the Parade was going to include an innovation so startling it would knock your eyes out.

Directly across the street from where Cranston was standing there was an electronic Big Sister poster.

Like all such posters, it depicted her from the waist up, stood four stories high and, when you looked at it for any length of time, caused her to ask you a question. What struck you about her first were her eyes. They were as blue and benign as a summer sky and merely to gaze into them was to feel reassured. Her yellow hair reminded you of fields of golden grain and her round full face managed to convey both a feeling of affection and an impression of authority. There were some people who thought her breasts were too big. Cranston wasn't one of them. In his opinion, it was good for a goddess to have big breasts;

and anyway, in Big Sister's case, they were discreetly hidden by the bodice of her gay gingham dress.

"Have you taken your anti-hate pill today?" she asked Cranston in a gentle, if booming voice.

"Yes, of course, Big Sister," he answered. "I took it the minute I got out of bed this morning."

It wasn't necessary to answer her out loud, but he had done so instinctively. Big Sister Eve always affected him emotionally, just as Xmas Eve did. He looked around to see if anybody had heard him. Apparently nobody had, or, if they had, had paid no attention.

He discovered that he was far from being the only one to quit early in order to visit the Avenue. The sidewalks were fairly choked with people. There weren't nearly as many of them as there would be tomorrow, of course, but there were enough, nevertheless, to make you wonder where they all came from. Their eyes were aglow with the holiday spirit, and in some cases the glow was abetted by spirits of another nature. Cranston himself, having visited two baromats on his way to the Avenue, was feeling no pain either.

But that was as it should be. Going home cold sober on Big Sister Eve was tantamount to going home cold sober on the night before Xmas. Both occasions came only once a year, and it was only fitting that they be celebrated to the maximum extent an individual's physical and financial resources permitted.

Partly to underscore his conviction but mainly because he was still thirsty, he visited another baromat on his way to the Hub tube-station. Unfortunately, he got into a conversation with a Megalopolis 16 sanitation-department worker who felt as strongly about such matters as he did, and by the time they got through buying each other handijugs of beer the 5:59 had long since departed. Cranston groaned when he saw the long line of commuters waiting for the 6:25. He'd have to stand all the way home.

To make matters worse, the train pulled out ten minutes late. He groaned again. Madelyn would be furious when he showed up after seven. Well let her! he thought, as the beer he had drunk began to take fuller effect. What good was it to *be* free if you couldn't *act* free? In his mind he asked the question directly. "What the hell, Madelyn," he "said", "what good is it to be free if you can't act free?"

He warmed to his subject. Forty million of us, Madelyn, living here in Megalopolis 16 alone, and all of us free—as free as the breeze that blows across the green reclaimed deserts that give us the food we put into our mouths, free and equal, so you see, Madelyn, you haven't got any right to be mad . . . Tonight we'll cook out, soysteam and tossed salad—good for Friday night, especially good for Big Sister Eve, a tradition, you might say, I'll have beer instead of coffee, to hell with coffee on Big Sister Eve, I know you say I drink too much on weekends, especially holiday weekends, but you do too, Madelyn, and besides, you've got to overlook it on Big Sister Eve, hell, niggerblood flows in my veins and that makes her all the more dear to me because I owe All to Her, She freed my ancestors and She's my Savior and I'll carry the torch for Her every time, because of Her the niggerblood in my veins is as Free as the white blood is, you know yourself how it used to be before She put Her foot down and said Let them be Free! and they were Free, Free to come and go as they pleased and to ride where they pleased and to sleep where they pleased and to work where they pleased, hell, Madelyn, She pays our mortgage payments and our electric and our gas and our videophone bills and the installments on the TV and the washer-drier and the car and the cookout-set and all She takes out of my pay is sixty-percent and part of that sixty percent, Madelyn, She puts in Her Purse and keeps for us in case we get sick and need it and so we'll be secure in our Old Age and happy and contented and well-fed, Big Sister's Purse is our Piggy Bank, Madelyn . . . I think I'll stop off at the Freedom Baromat for one more before I go home, you won't mind, will you Madelyn?—after all, it *is* Big Sister Eve and tomorrow we're going to take in the Parade, I can hardly wait, I wish our generation hadn't been proclaimed a babyless one, it would be nice to have kids and take them to the Parade to hear the drums and see the soldiers go marching by, I was a soldier once and helped keep this Great Land Free or would have if there'd been a war like they thought there would but there wasn't because what was there to fight about? . . .and here I am and this is Big Sister Eve and I'm going to live it up, everybody's going to live it up and it's going to be a Big Sister Eve like there never was before.

Dissension in a Twenty-first Century Conference Room

HIGH IN THE Mega 16 Vespers Building Theodore Barr, District Director of Iconology, placed the model he had secured from Special Effects on the conference table and brought its mini-batteries to life. He raised his eyes to the faces of his three advisors—to broad-browed Breslau's, to sensitive Parks', to finely chiseled Miss Penharlow's. He said, "I called this late Friday-afternoon meeting to afford each of you the opportunity to see this miniature of the float in operation. I'd like to hear both your reactions and whatever suggestions for improvements you may have. Naturally, no major changes can be made in the life-size version at this late date, but there may be one or two small items that can be improved upon.

"I realize," he continued, "that I'm interfering with what should have been an early quit, so without further preamble I'll hear from each of you in the order of his or her seniority, after which we'll take a vote on the suggestions and adjourn. Breslau, you've been with me longest—we'll start with you."

Breslau's pouty eyes were following the little float intently as it moved this way and that over the tabletop. It consisted of a square steel platform mounted on two sets of wide wheels, the set in the rear affording the necessary maneuverability. Standing on the platform was a little Big Sister animannikin, and as the wheels rotated, a complex gear setup caused her to turn her head first to the right and then to the left, and to raise her arms at periodic intervals and hold them straight out before her.

Despite its synchronized movements, the animannikin was startlingly realistic. Its yellow hair was arranged in a plain but becoming coiffure; its diminutive round face had a life-like rosy tinge; and its gay gingham dress followed the body's movements flawlessly, crinkling in this place and stretching in that as the tiny doll raised and lowered its arms. At its feet, just beneath the hem of the dress, were miniatures of the seats that Barr, Breslau, Parks and Miss Penharlow would occupy during the Parade, and centered in front of them was a miniature of the tiller-like steering mechanism by means of which the tech from Special Effects would guide the life-size model down the Avenue of Processions.

At length Breslau raised his eyes to Barr's middle-aged but somehow youthful face. He said, "The realism's remarkable when you consider the weight the model represents. If the life-size version even comes close, everybody should be suitably impressed—to a point, possibly, where they won't even object to the new tax bite. I do have one suggestion, however. I think that she should hold her arms a little higher when she raises them. Holding them parallel to the ground the way she does now is a bit too reminiscent of the Third Reich, don't you think?"

"Suggestion duly noted, Al," Barr said. He turned toward Miss Penharlow. "What's your reaction, Pat?"

Patricia Penharlow had been watching the float with an intensity that matched Breslau's. Her hair was dark brown in the last rays of the afternoon sun and fell in lustrous flocculent waves to her shoulders. Midway, it was caught back from her face, revealing the midnight tone of her cheeks and the cool, almost classic line of her chin and neck. He knew her hair well, for often it spilled onto his pillow during the night. He knew her neck and her chin intimately. But he knew her lips best of all. Their slight thickness, their sudden softness in the middle of a kiss . . . When the daylight faded and the fluorescents came on, her hair would be black.

Now he knew the clearness of her intelligent brown eyes as she raised her gaze to his face. Enthusiasm shone in them, disrupting their usual quietude. "It's exactly what we've needed all along. They'll love it. Is she going to announce the new tax bite during the Parade?"

"Yes. When the emotion of the crowd reaches maximum intensity. The life-size model is equipped with a Shapiro decibel-reactor that couldn't, naturally, be included in the miniature. As you probably know, a Shapiro reactor responds not only to sound but to mass-emotion wave-patterns. The patterns register on a highly sensitive receiver, which correlates them with the sound level and determines which of the tape sequences should be played at any given moment. Big Sister, incidentally, is also going to announce the new postal workers' raise—as a sort of counterbalance. And then, of course, there'll be the usual slogans and admonitions."

"Among them, no doubt, the catch phrase, 'Big Sister Sees All, Hears All and Knows All?'"

Barr nodded. "I believe that one's included."

"Then I strongly urge that it be deleted. Such a warning is fine for posters, subliminal perception casts and other media in use for ordinary Party propaganda; but for the sort of medium we're using tomorrow it would be out of place: The spirit of Big Sister Day is one of emotion-charged thanksgiving and arises from the people's need to think of her primarily as a benign and understanding protectress. The very proportions of the life-size animannikin already suggest her omniscience and her omnipotence. To further emphasize either might very well be detrimental to both."

"Suggestion duly noted, Pat," said Theodore Barr. He next faced the youngest member of his advisory team—Benjamin Parks. "How does the Department of Iconology's brain child strike you, Ben?"

Parks was staring at the mini-float as though it were a monster bent on devouring him. He did not answer for a whole minute; then he said, "It makes me think of an idol."

Barr smiled. "Come on, Ben—let's not be naive. It *is* an idol. Among ourselves we've never pretended Big Sister was anything else."

"I've always thought of her as an icon rather than an idol."

"Then you've been splitting hairs. She's the Fedgov as the people visualized it long before the Party iconologists gave her substance. Granted, up till now she's appeared only on posters and in an occasional animated cartoon—but that doesn't make her any less of an idol. All we've done in the present instance is to make her into an *animated* idol. An animannikin."

"But the people will see her as an entity."

"They already see her as an entity. They *want* to see her as an entity. Why do you think they created her in the first place?"

Parks did not answer. He had returned his gaze to the float, which, almost as though it sensed his morbid fascination, had rolled in his direction. Nearing the edge of the table, it backed off and turned around.

At length he asked, "How much does the life-size job—float and all—weigh?"

With difficulty, Barr suppressed a surge of annoyance. "I'm unfamiliar with the exact tonnage, but I'd estimate the over-all weight at about nine or ten. Special Effects used light materials wherever and whenever possible, but batteries, gears, cables, axles, platform—not to mention the size of the animannikin itself—worked against them." He paused as Parks shuddered. "What's bugging you, Ben?"

"I—I don't really know. It's just that I keep getting a feeling that we're doing the wrong thing in exposing the public to such a machine without adequately preparing them for it first. There's something evil about it—to me, anyway. Something atavistic. Associations are probably at work somewhere, but for the life of me I can't put my finger on any of them."

Barr had less luck with a second surge of annoyance. "Damn it, you were recommended to me as one of the brightest young men ever selected by the Party for Iconology training and one of the most promising ever to qualify! And here you show up at my conference table with ideas befitting an old woman out of Grimm's Fairy Tales! You say you *feel* that the float's evil. Give me one solid reason why. Just one!"

Parks face had paled slightly, but he didn't give ground. "It's possible to know something's evil without being able to pinpoint why. I think we'll be making a terrible mistake if we use the float tomorrow."

"That float and that animannikin," Barr said icily, "cost the Fedgov three million dollars, and the Department of Iconology gave our Mega 16 district the honor of building it and initiating it. If you think I'm going to keep it out of the Parade just because you have an old-womanish notion that it's some sort of evil throwback, you'd better think again! Suggestion not duly noted."

Barr faced the table at large. "I'm in complete concordance with Breslau's and Miss Penharlow's suggestions, and believe they should be put into effect. Does anyone dissent?"

"I dissent," Parks said. "I dissent with the whole business."

Barr ignored him. "I'll relay the suggestions to Special Effects, and it is to be hoped they'll have time

to incorporate the necessary changes. I hereby declare this meeting adjourned."

BRESLAU and Parks said good night—the latter a little distantly—and left the room. Patricia Penharlow stayed behind. "That white dress becomes you exceedingly, Pat," Barr said, getting up and walking around the table to where she was sitting.

"Observation duly noted." There was a swift and indecipherable downward sweep of her dark lashes. Then, "I suppose you'll be seeing me home?"

"I can't—it's my turn to take the megapulse."

"That's right—I'd forgotten."

"But I'll be by later. The minute I finish the intraurban crosscheck." He got her wrap for her and arranged it around her shoulders. Instantly it took on an added luster. "And there's no reason why we can't have dinner together after I visit Special Effects."

She stood up, tall and Junoesque. "I think you should get rid of Parks," she said with sudden vehemence. "He's a non-progressive."

Barr was mildly surprised. "No he's not, Pat—he's still so inundated with idealistic Party doctrine that he hasn't been able to make peace with reality yet—that's all. When he does make peace, he'll automatically acquire the necessary hard-core attitude and begin functioning as effectively as the rest of us."

"By which you mean to imply, I suppose, that all Progressives are cynics."

"Not all of them—just some of them. Most of them are like you. Pure as the driven snow."

"Which kind are you?"

Barr laughed. "We'll discuss that on a more propitious occasion. Meanwhile, let's go to dinner."

They left the conference room together.

The Coldpac Culture

AFTER DOWNING three self-disintegrating handijugs of beer in the Freedom Baromat, Cranston left the establishment and began walking down the street on which he lived. Dusk was at hand and the oppressive heat that had infested the day was beginning to dissipate. Before he had gone two steps, the aroma of charred soysteak reached his nostrils. It intensified with every step he took. Apparently everybody on the block was either cookouting already or had already done so.

He felt guilty. His own cookouter should have been activated long ago, its electric briquettes red and waiting.

Like all intra-urban developments (Mega 16's numbered in the thousands), the one in which Cranston lived compensated in altitude for what it lacked in depth. The houses it comprised couldn't exceed the 25' X 30' standard dwelling size established by the Fedgov Intraurban Building Bureau, but they could and did rise to seven, eight and sometimes even nine stories in height.

However, while you could compensate in height for what you lacked in width and length insofar as indoor-living space was concerned, there was nothing you could do to make your standard 30' X 60' lot any larger. Your only means of acquiring more outdoor-living space—or at least the illusion thereof—was by building your house flush with the sidewalk and "adding" your front yard to your back. In Cranston's neighborhood this practice had been universally followed and as a result a pedestrian passing down the street saw nothing but two series of tall facades with narrow crevices in between. Passing automobilists were similarly rewarded, but the latter were rarely in evidence, as the average citizen preferred to hoard the driving hours the Fedgov allowed him till he had enough to make a round trip to one of the extra-megalopolitan parks the Fedgov maintained for recreational purposes.

Cranston's house was eight stories high. The first story, of course, was given over to the garage. The successive ones constituted the utility room, the kitchen, the dining room, the living room, the TV room, his and Madelyn's room, and the guestroom respectively, and were made accessible by a small, centrally located self-service elevator. The bathroom was just off the main bedroom, an arrangement frowned

upon but not forbidden by the Fedgov, which encouraged homeowners to locate their bathrooms as close to the sewer line as possible so as to curtail expenses.

He found Madelyn in the TV room watching a dramatized newscast. She was a tall blonde with a round full face and cool blue eyes that weren't quite as far apart as he would have liked. When he stepped off the lift, she yawned; then she finished the handijug of beer she was drinking, dropped it into the exhausted coldpac beside her chair and got up and kissed him lackadaisically on the cheek. He was disappointed: he'd thought for sure she'd be angry with him for being late.

They took the elevator down to the kitchen, and collected what they needed for the cookout, then descended to the garage and passed through the back door into the back yard. It contained two catalpa trees, an imitation-brick cookouter, a small picnic table and two benches. Cranston activated the cookouter and when the briquettes turned red, placed two soysteaks on the grill. Madelyn made a tossed salad and opened a container of DeLiteFul Dills. She unwrapped a fresh loaf of self-baking bread. They ate at the picnic table, a handijug of beer at each of their elbows and a coldpac within easy reach. In the back yards to the left of them and in the back yards to the right of them and in the back yards behind them, other people were seated at similar picnic tables, either in the midst of similar repasts or their coldpac aftermaths, and an aura of camaraderie had begun to pervade the whole block.

After he and Madelyn finished eating, Cranston broke open a second coldpac, thinking tipsily of the jingle the Coldpac people had composed to go with their popular self-disposing handijug cartons:

*There're never enough coldpacs
in your fridgie, friend,
So on your way home, why not
pick up six or ten?*

It could never be said there weren't enough coldpacs in his and Madelyn's fridgie. They kept an extra fridgie in the garage and used it exclusively to store the handy containers in, and the minute their supply became half depleted they replenished it. The mere thought of the extra fridgie made Cranston feel proud. It was a symbol of his and Madelyn's good consumer-ship, and being a good consumer meant you were doing your Part for the Economy and for Big Sister. Granted, in order to plug the extra fridgie in, they had to unplug the one in the kitchen or they'd exceed their voltage quota; but it was nice having one just the same, especially on holidays and weekends.

In the back yards to the left of Cranston and in the back yards to the right of him and in the back yards behind him his neighbors were also breaking open coldpacs, and the aura of camaraderie was becoming almost as tangible as the bluish haze sent up by the countless charred-soy steak drippings. Presently someone began singing "Big Sister Loves Me" in a cracked soprano voice. Enthusiastically Cranston joined in and so did just about everybody else on the block, and the words rose up thrillingly into the summer air and inspired the stars to greater grandeur. A full moon was climbing into the sky and she beamed benignly down on all of Big Sister's kid brothers and sisters and it was like Xmas Eve, almost, with carols filling the avenues and streets and the Christ-child animannikin lying in his chromium manger in Freedom Park and all the people filing past the automated creche and leaving gifts of frankincense and money. Cranston felt tears running down his cheeks. Big Sister, he thought. Dear, wonderful Big Sister.

There were no fences separating the back yards—intra-urban fences were forbidden by law—and soon everybody was everywhere, shaking hands with his neighbor and holding hands with his neighbor's wife, and from all around came the sounds of coldpacs being broken open and handijugs being chug-a-lugged in the night. Cranston still sat at his own table, his cheeks wet with tears of joy and gratitude, but Madelyn was no longer with him. The last he'd seen of her she'd been holding hands with a neighbor whose own wife had been holding hands with someone else. If it had been an ordinary coldpac Friday night, Cranston would have found someone else's wife himself and held hands with her, but it wasn't an ordinary coldpac Friday night, it was a coldpac Big Sister Eve, and Big Sister was everywhere, he could see her walking beneath the stars, tall and strong and beautiful; he could hear the soft swish of

her gingham skirt and her warm voice calling his name, "I'll take care of you, Wally Cranston," she crooned, "haven't I always?"

The tears came faster and he opened another coldpac and pulled out one of the moisture-beaded handijugs. "Of course, Big Sister," he murmured, "of course you have!" The stars seemed to come closer, all sounds seemed far away; the night was velvet soft against his face . . . When I finish this coldpac I'll go down to the Freedom Baromat and have a few; yes, that's what I'll do—it's no good to drink alone . . . He chug-a-lugged the handijug and opened another. He chug-a-lugged that one too. Then, eager to be on his way, he tucked the coldpac under his arm, got to his feet, staggered through the garage past his automobilette and out into the street and down the street underneath the stars, opening another handijug and gulping its contents as he walked . . . Tomorrow after the parade we'll have another coldpac cookout and everybody will sing again and it'll be just the way it was tonight, all full of warmth and happiness and equality and everybody loving everybody else and everybody loving Big Sister the way She should be loved, the postmaster said to me this morning, Gee, you do your job swell, Wally, I wish everybody did his job as good as you do; well of course I do it good and I'll do it better yet, you wait and see, and when it's time for me to retire and ask Big Sister for some of my money back I'll be able to do so without feeling guilty, I've got a long ways to go though before I'm fifty—ten whole years . . . I wish we could've had kids, maybe they could've had kids of their own, you never know what the quota will be from one Gen to the next, and Madelyn and I'd've been grandparents and could've gone to see them and bought them ice cream cones and pretzels . . . the grill is bright tonight, the bar is full . . . there's room here beside this Fedgov man, gee what swell uniforms they have, blue slacks and green coat, and would you look at that red kepi—wow!—Big Sister sure treats her guardians right . . . "Hi, have a drink with me? My name's Wally Cranston."

The tall Fedgov man turned. "Barr," he said. "Theodore Barr. Sure, I'll be glad to have a drink with you."

The De Tocqueville Tapes

AFTER PARTING from Patricia Penharlow, Barr had begun his intra-urban crosscheck at once. He had chosen the developments at random and this was the sixth he had visited. It was also the last he intended to visit, not only because he was tired but because he had already determined Mega 16's pulse rate. He had talked with automat owners and baromat keepers and automation men and electronics men and housewives and constructo-workers and transporto-workers and farm-equipment operators and monitor men—with just about every type of citizen, in fact, whose work did not come directly under Party jurisdiction—and he had found the pulse rate to be smooth and even, and in not so much as a single instance had he encountered the slightest objection to the new Big Sister edict that had been issued several weeks ago and which he had chosen as the subject for his Key Question.

He should have felt elated. Instead, he felt let down.

Why? he wondered. Why should he, one of the shepherds, feel let down because the sheep refused to go astray? But he knew the answer. Alcohol robbed him of his objectivity and painted the world in unreal colors, and although he had limited himself to one drink in each of the developments he'd visited, true reason was no longer with him.

He became aware that the sheep who had bought him the drink had asked him a question. The man was even drunker than Barr had at first thought. Drunk, and rapidly reaching the maudlin stage—if he hadn't reached it already. His eyes were red and his cheeks were streaked with tear tracks. He was wearing civil-service clothes that reeked of burnt soysteak drippings and stale beer. Cradled in his left arm was a half-empty coldpac. There was nothing about him that distinguished him particularly from the rest of the patrons—not even the slight swarthinness of his complexion or the broadness of his nose. Following the *fin de siecle* failure of the last black insurrectionists to find a foothold, miscegenation had accelerated at an exponential rate, and fully a third of the patrons in the big bustling baromat had Afro—or nigger- (the term, after falling into disgrace, had acquired aristocratic overtones)—blood in

their veins.

Pure-blooded blacks like Patricia Penharlow were a rarity.

The question Cranston had asked was, "You work for the Fedgov, don't you?"

"Yes," Barr said.

Cranston drew himself up proudly. "So do I. Though not on the Party level of course. How do you like that for a coincidence? The two of us walking in here and standing right next to each other and both of us Fedgov men!"

In view of the fact that thirty-five percent of the populace worked for the same organization directly and that the other sixty-five percent did so indirectly, Barr didn't regard the meeting as being particularly unusual. But he found himself mildly interested in the faceless man standing beside him. "What branch of the Fedgov are you with, Mr. Cranston?"

"The Postal Service," Cranston said.

A stamp-licker, Barr thought, employing the term Party-level workers used to designate not only the holders of post-office sinecures but all other sinecures as well. There were millions of such jobs—there had to be to provide sufficient employment in an automated society. To have placed all the Cranstons on direct dole would have been unthinkable. "I'm with the Department of Iconology."

Cranston shook his head. "That's a new one on me."

Barr didn't elaborate. "Here, let me buy *you* a drink," he said, noticing that Cranston's handijug was empty.

He ordered two more from the robbottlebringer. "Are you married?" he asked Cranston.

Cranston dispatched the contents of the fresh handijug in three Herculean swallows. "To the sweetest little girl in the world! You?"

"No."

"Too bad—you don't know what you're missing."

Just what am I missing? Barr thought. The privilege of sharing my wife with any man who covets her because he is my equal according to law? The privilege of not being able to beget children because the generation I am a part of was declared a babyless one and all its members were sterilized at birth? The privilege of getting drunk on Big Sister Eve without my wife?

No, he had been right all along in not asking Pat to marry him and she had been right in not encouraging him to. As her lover, he didn't need to think about the children he couldn't beget; as his mistress, she retained her legal status as a virgin and lacked a wife's legal obligation to consort with any man in whom she aroused passion and whom she did not find objectionable. In the morning, Barr knew, his doubts would return, for the effects of the alcohol would have worn off by then, leaving his mind clear and cold; but there were no doubts now, and perhaps he was the better for it.

Nevertheless, he decided he'd had enough to drink for one night, and when Cranston offered to buy him another handijug, his first thought was to turn it down. Then he saw the desperation deep in the man's eyes and changed his mind.

It was the same desperation you saw deep in everyone's eyes: the desperation that resulted from belonging to a society that gave you independence and simultaneously denied you the right to be free.

Years ago, Patricia Penharlow had called Barr's attention to a book she thought should be banned. He had followed her suggestion, but he had made the mistake of reading the book first, and in the process, two passages had taped themselves indelibly on his memory. Sometimes when he was drinking and off guard, his mind played the tapes through. It did so now:

"As in the ages of equality no man is compelled to lend his assistance to his fellow-men, and none has any right to expect such support from them, everyone is at once independent and powerless. (A citizen's) independence fills him with self-reliance and pride, his debility makes him feel from time to time the want of some outward assistance, which he cannot expect from any of them, because they are all impotent and unsympathizing. In this predicament he naturally turns his eyes to that imposing power which alone rises above the level of universal depression (and) ultimately views it as the sole and necessary support of his own weakness (and thus) the very men who are so impatient of superiors patiently submit to a master, exhibiting at once their pride and their servility."

"Above this race of men stands an immense and tutelary power, which takes upon itself alone to secure their gratifications, and to watch over their fate. That power is absolute, minute, regular, provident, and mild. It would be like the authority of a parent, if, like that authority, its object was to prepare men for manhood; but it seeks on the contrary to keep them in perpetual childhood; it provides for their security, foresees and supplies their necessities, facilitates their pleasures, manages their principal concerns, directs their industry, regulates the descent of property, and subdivides their inheritances—what remains, but to spare them all the care of thinking and all the trouble of living?"

WHEN THE ROBOTTLBRINGER brought Barr the beer Cranston had bought him Barr raised the handjug to his lips and took a polite swallow. Setting the jug back down on the bar, he remembered the purpose of his visit and realized he hadn't asked Cranston this year's key question yet. He did so without further delay: "How do you feel, Mr. Cranston, about Big Sister's decision to make it a capital offense for anyone publicly to impugn any of her actions?"

Cranston stood up straighter, swaying a little as he did so. He gripped the edge of the bar to steady himself. "How do I feel about it? I feel that it's just and fair like all Big Shister's decishions. And if I ever catch anybody talking about Her behind Her back I'll turn him in quicker'n you can say 'Jackie Robinshun!'"

An inward shudder racked Barr. He would have given his right arm if just one of the citizens he had put the question to had had the guts to ask, "Damn it, isn't she big enough already? How much more of our human dignity must she strip away before she's through aggrandizing herself?" It was an index of the alcohol-content of Barr's blood that he would have given both his arms if he himself had had the guts.

Cranston was staring at him. "Don't *you* approve of Her decishion? You, a *Fedgov* man!"

Barr was both disconcerted and annoyed. Did his thoughts show so clearly on his face that this petty stamp-licking lush could see them through the mists of drunkenness? Barr re-donned the cold mask he habitually wore in public places and re-cloaked himself in his impenetrable mantle of indifference. "Of course I approve of Her decisions," he said. He laid down enough change to cover another drink for Cranston, and, despite the man's tearful protests, walked out of the baromat.

OUTSIDE beneath the stars it should have been better, but it wasn't. Barr hadn't looked at the stars for many years. They invariably reminded him of man's failure to conquer space to an extent that would have made colonization of other planets practicable and thereby have enabled him to experiment with new and possibly better ways of living with himself. Barr did not look at the stars tonight either, but walked down the street, eyes fixed on the blacktop, and presently he came to the intra-urban station and descended the stairs. After a short wait in line he boarded the train for the Hub. Patricia Penharlow was still up when he let himself into her air-conditioned ultra-modern apartment twenty stories above Abraham Lincoln Boulevard. A white negligee brought out her midnight skin tone and matched the whiteness of her teeth. It was always white with Patricia—she knew how black and beautiful she was and knew that contrast could not fail to make her more so. After nightcaps, they retired and made love quickly, like rabbits almost, and then lay silently side by side in the cool darkness. And Barr felt alone—as alone as he always felt after making love, even when he loved the woman he made love to.

The mood brought on by the alcohol he'd consumed still lingered and he could not sleep. He thought of Cranston, and the man's helplessness, and realized that he himself was no less helpless . . . Even though I can pull strings here and there and slightly affect the over-all picture I'm still helpless. And with me, the helplessness is worse. Undrugged, immune to slogans, incapable of self-complacency, I am acutely aware of my helplessness, while the Cranstons are blithely ignorant of theirs. The shepherd has something to say about the sheep, but when the time comes he must always shear them because he is only one of many shepherds and all of us are slaves of the shepherdess we comprise and can do nothing she doesn't want us to do. Nor does the fact that the shepherdess is a benevolent shepherdess make matters any better, for as many crimes can be committed in the name of benevolence as in the name of malevolence, and despotism admits of no distinctions . . . I am only one of the little gears that turn in Big Sister's Brobdingnagian brain and around and around I go and where I stop nobody knows; tomorrow I

will ride in a Fedgov-sponsored circus caravan called a Big Sister Day Parade and all up and down the Avenue of Processions sheep will stand on their hind legs waving flags and cheering the shepherdess on and all throughout the land other sheep will sit before their TV screens with rapt and tearful eyes, Big Bo Peep in your gingham gown, your sheep will never run away, they haven't got the guts, their tails will always wag behind them—O that man should have coveted equality so much that he voluntarily became a sheep in order to obtain it, licking stamps by day in Fedgov meadows and hiding behind Big Bo Peep's apron strings by night ... O if he had only bent all his energies toward conquering the stars, but he sold his birthrate down the drain for gadgets and domestic security and now the stars he might have had are setting one by one.

Jagannatha

Dawn the rosy-fingered found Cranston in the bathroom, fumbling in the medicine cabinet for an anti-crapulence pill. He washed the pill down with two glasses of cold water and by the time he reached the kitchen he felt, if not quite his normal self, at least a reasonable approximation thereof.

He made coffee. It wasn't until he was drinking his second cupful that he remembered what day it was. Instantly the face of all the world was changed and he dumped the rest of the coffee down the sink and opened a coldpac and dispatched the contents of a handijug. Carrying the coldpac, he took the lift back up to the seventh floor and, setting the jug aside, removed his pajamas and shaved and showered. Afterward, dressing in the bedroom with the coldpac within easy reach, he nudged Madelyn awake (she had come in sometime during the early-morning hours) and told her to get up. She glared at him out of sleep-dulled eyes, but when he reminded her what day it was she rolled quickly out of bed. The memory of the last time he had seen her came back to him and he experienced a bad moment; then he took an anti-hate pill and everything was all right again.

He donned his best suit, Madelyn her best dress. By eight o'clock they were ready to leave, and did so. The Parade wasn't scheduled to begin till ten and probably wouldn't get underway much before eleven; but counting the time they would have to wait in line for their train, it would take them a good hour and a half to reach the Hub and it would require at least another half hour for them to reach the Avenue of Processions and squirm their way to a place of vantage behind the electronic fence.

Actually the ordeal consumed two hours and twenty minutes. The Avenue was lined with two thirty-foot-thick rows of people, most of whom had brought coldpacs. Cranston was one of the latter. He and Madelyn broke theirs open without delay and took out a handijug apiece. Already the day was oppressively humid and a blast-furnace like wind was ruffling the Big Sister banners and making the lettering on them crawl. The heat generated by the crowd tried to rise but was forced back down by the far greater heat of the sun.

"*Big Sister!*" someone shouted. Someone else repeated the name and soon it was on everyone's lips, rolling thunderously up and down the Avenue.

A Fedgov chopper passed overhead, dropping leaflets. The leaflets drifted down from the sky like big flat snowflakes. Cranston got hold of one of them. Big Sister solicits your patience. This morning she discovered a run in her stocking and time out has been called so it can be repaired. He laughed. Around him, other people were laughing. All up and down the Avenue, they were laughing. Apparently Big Sister had her troubles too. It was nice to know she could make light of them and poke fun at herself while doing so.

That was when the momentous thought occurred to him—and, judging from the great gasp that went up, to all the other people lining the Avenue. If the Parade was being held up till Big Sister's stocking was repaired, *then Big Sister was going to be in the Parade!*

So *that* was the innovation!

Cranston could hardly breathe. The excitement of the crowd was almost tangible and broke over him in huge hot waves. Usually Big Sister Day Parades obtained their special flavor from the holiday itself and from contingents of her Special Girl Troops carrying signs. Otherwise, there was little to distinguish them from ordinary parades, save for the overwhelming enthusiasm with which they were received. Never

before had she *personally* appeared in one of her processions.

Of course she wasn't *really* going to appear in the one today—Cranston knew that. No one had ever seen her and no one ever would. Not that she wasn't real; but she was real in the way God was real, and who had ever seen God? *Really* seen him. No, she wasn't going to appear physically in the Parade: she was going to be represented somehow—probably in a way she'd never been represented before.

Cranston calmed down a little, but not very much. He still had difficulty breathing and his hands were slightly trembling. In an effort to calm himself further. He finished the handijug he'd opened and opened another. Martial music sounded in the distance and far down the street the vanguard of the Parade came into view.

NOW MARCHED the men who guarded land and sea and air from nonexistent foes, and bugles blared and glockenspiels chimed and drums went BRUM-BRUM-BRUM! Gossamer signs carried by contingents of stunning girls wearing majorette-bikinis proclaimed Big Sister's greatness; scarlet smoke rising from portable sky-rite kits repeatedly spelled her name. And her name was on everybody's lips

"Big Sister. BIC SISTERRRRRR!"

Cranston felt tears running down his cheeks and intenningling with the sweat brought out by the hotness of the August day. He made no attempt to wipe them away. All around him, other people were crying too. One of the passing bands struck up the Big-Sister-Loves-Me song in march tempo and the crowd began singing the words. Cranston heard his own voice. It was hoarse, and it cracked whenever he hit the high notes. Beside him, Madelyn was singing too:

"—yes I know, 'cause the Fedgov tells me so..."

In the distance, a huge shape showed.

Was she coming? Cranston fought his way to the fence. Yes, he could see her clearly now. She towered thirty feet above the huge float on which she stood. Her gay gingham dress was a windblown tent. At its base, pygmies sat, one of them holding a tiller. Goddess-tall, she grew out of the morning; her face was the sun, her hair its golden light. Her handsome head turned left, then right; her huge, rounded arms rose and fell in rhythmic majesty. He heard her gentle booming voice, and it was like the surf breaking along a sunlit summer shore: "HELLO ALL YOU WONDERFUL PEOPLE."

BRUM, went the drums. BRUMBRUM-BRUM!

Cranston flattened himself against the fence, trying to see her better. People were pressed tightly against him, but he was barely aware of them. He'd forgotten Madelyn completely. "Big Sister," he murmured. "Big Sister."

"HELLO ALL YOU WONDERFUL PEOPLE, she boomed again. "AREN'T YOU GLAD TO SEE ME?"

The crowd answered in a ragged chorus. "We are, we are, we are!"

"BIG SISTER LOVES YOU. BIG SISTER CARES."

(Cheers.)

"SHE HAS GOOD NEWS FOR SOME OF YOU TODAY—SHE'S DECIDED TO GIVE HER POSTAL WORKERS A RAISE. THAT'S RIGHT—HONEST SHE HAS. BUT TO MAKE THIS POSSIBLE SHE MAY HAVE TO TAKE A LITTLE MORE OUT OF EVERYBODY'S PAYCHECK. YOU WON'T MIND, THOUGH, WILL YOU? YOU KNOW THAT IN THE LONG RUN EVERYBODY WILL BENEFIT, AND YOU KNOW HOW IMPORTANT EVERYBODY IS TO BIG SISTER."

"No, Big Sister—we won't mind. *We won't mind. We won't mind.*"

"BIG SISTER KNEW YOU WOULDN'T. BIG SISTER LOVES YOU. BIG SISTER CARES."

Cranston was crying uncontrollably by this time. Why, she was going to give *him* a raise! He pressed harder against the fence. "Big Sister," he sobbed. "Big Sister."

The pressure of his own weight and that of the people directly behind him proved to be more than the fence could withstand. Overtaxed already, it developed a flaw, and he fell through it into the street. His

handijug slipped from his fingers and disintegrated on the pavement. Dazed, he got to his feet. But the fence had already mended itself, isolating him from the sidewalk and stranding him in the street.

He did not care. He was glad. Now he could get closer to Big Sister. He moved farther away from the curb. A contingent of Special Girl Troops had just passed and the Big Sister float was less than fifty feet distant. He began walking toward it, drums sounding in his mind as well as in his ears. Behind him a vaguely familiar voice cried, "No, Wally—no! Come back!" He paid no attention. BRUM, went the drums in his ears and his mind. BRUM-BRUM-BRUM! The occupants of the float were waving frantically to him and the float was slowing. Big Sister loomed building tall above him now; he could hear her gingham dress flapping in the morning wind. "I'm coming, Big Sister!" he cried. "I'm coming!" BRUM, BRUM, BRUM-BRUM—BRUM! One of the float's occupants was a black girl. She was shouting to him. "Go back, go back!" she shouted. "We can't stop it in time!" But Cranston was not to be denied. The float's left front wheel loomed darkly before him; huge, relentless, beautiful. It was what he wanted, what he had always wanted. He threw himself beneath the darkness, rejoicing as his bones were crushed and his flesh was ground to pulp. BRUM, BRUM, BRUM-BRUM. BRUM!

Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for Freedom

WHEN IT WAS ALL OVER—the confusion and the shouting, and the long afternoon conference at Party Headquarters—Patricia Penharlow returned wearily to her apartment accompanied by Theodore Barr. When he declined her offer to mix him a drink, she mixed one for herself and they sat down at the little bar in her cool and spacious living room. Slanted sunlight was fading from the parqueted floor and the little isles of throwrugs, and the terrible day was drawing swiftly to a close.

There was an emptiness in her that the whiskey could not even begin to fill. "Parks was right, wasn't he," she said.

"No," said Barr, "he was wrong. He sensed the right analogy but he drew the wrong conclusions because he associated the Orissa ritual with evil. It was not evil, and it was discontinued only because a new ideology took over. And far from being detrimental to its own cause when it inspired self-immolation, it strengthened its own cause—just as the incident today strengthened Big Sister's cause. People admire an entity that inspires self-sacrifice and the Party leaders were right this afternoon when they decided to make the float a part of all future Big Sister Day Parades."

"How can you be so callous!"

"I'm not being callous," Barr said. "Ideologies need an occasional fanatic like Cranston. Incidentally, he was one of the Citizens I talked to last night during my intra-urban crosscheck, and on a personal level I'm as sorry as you are that he threw himself beneath that wheel. But no one made him—he did it of his own free will. He was part black, you know. He didn't tell me, but I guessed, and his dossier bears me out."

Patricia Penharlow shuddered. "That makes it twice as bad. Perhaps three times. The irony, I mean."

"Nonsense!" Barr said.

"I could feel the wheel go over him—could you?"

"It was your imagination. With all that weight beneath you, you couldn't conceivably have felt anything."

"I did, though. I could feel his bones being ground into the pavement. My bones."

"You're upset right now," Barr said. "You'll be all right when the memory loses its sharp edges."

She made no further comment and it grew quiet in the room. Darkness was nearly at hand, but neither she nor Barr made a move to turn on the lights. In the near darkness, she swirled her highball. I should get drunk, she thought. Get drunk and go down into the megalopolis and join the coldpackers in their pursuit of love, happiness and equality for all. There should be a goodly crowd at Cranston's wake—I daresay they have him laid out by now. A coldpac at his head and a bag of peanuts at his feet. So he had niggerblood in his veins. I'll bet he was proud of it. They always are. As though nigger- or any

other kind of blood could make a man any more or less human; any more or less of a fool.

Barr had gone over and was standing in front of the wide picture window. Beyond him stretched the vast megascape, its multi-lights winking on like glowworms in the dusk. He seemed tenuous standing there, a thin pencil line of a man she felt certain she could erase if she had a large enough eraser. How much substance do any of us really have, she thought, apart from the substance we give ourselves?

I really must go down into the city. I really must attend Cranston's wake. But she knew she would do neither.

LATER, in the chaste coolness of her windowless bedroom, they made love. Rabbits, she thought afterward. We make love like rabbits. And never have litters to show for it. She lay there silently in the darkness, the cleansed cool air washing over her. Presently Barr's breathing informed her that he slept. It was well that the shepherd should sleep. He had had a hard day. A bad day. A rent had appeared in the roseate cloud cloaking America and for an instant the sun had glinted on one of the links of the Great Chain.

The Chain I helped to forge, she thought. The Chain I helped hoist into place. All of us were shouting "Hallelujah!" white and black alike, our backs gleaming with noble, self-righteous sweat. And all the while we labored, the ghost of that opinionated little Frenchman stood on the sidelines laughing.

The night was still. The only sounds were the susurrus of Barr's breathing and the fainter whisper of her own. While the room was windowless, there was a way to look out. Just beneath the ceiling on the street-side there was a small louvered vent, put there for a forgotten reason long ago. She had looked through it hundreds of times. At the peopled pinnacles and the cold, terrible chasms in between; at distant patterns of blue or starry skies. One spring, doves had nested on a ledge just beneath the eaves, and for many nights she had lain in the cool cruel darkness listening to them coo. And then one day they had gone away, never to return. One seldom saw birds in the megalopolis. Perhaps there was an updraft of some kind that made it difficult for them to fly.

If she had wings, she probably wouldn't be able to fly either.

When she heard the drums she thought at first they were the Big Sister Parade drums that had gone BRUM, BRUM, BRUM-BRUMBRUM! but she realized presently that these were different drums. Hollow-log drums, reverberating through the forest and the night, a steady rhythmic throb reaching out across the decades and the centuries and the sea. Yes, yes! the drums. She removed her dress again, slipped out of her filmy underclothes. She kicked free from her white-girl shoes. The jungle mud oozed tip between her naked toes; she knew the coolness of the earth. She pirouetted in the clearing, in the raining light of the stars. The drums grew louder, matched their tempo to the quickened beating of her heart. She left the clearing and began running through the forest, through the night, running running toward the distant drums. Swiftly, swiftly now; my feet kissing the earth, the earth kissing them back, flowing up and through me into my veins, free, the night trees rising round me, the leaves brushing my blackness as I pass, free, free, the chains slipping from me, the old chains we used to help forge the new, Free O Free, the night and the stars and the throb of the drums, the great dark earth of my birth, running I go Freeeeeeeeeeeee.

-ROBERT F. YOUNG