**The Lady Higher Up**

O. Henry

New York City, they said, was deserted; and that accounted, doubtless, for the sounds carrying so far in the tranquil summer air. The breeze was south-by-southwest; the hour was midnight; the theme was a bit of feminine gossip by wireless mythology. Three hundred and sixty-five feet above the heated asphalt the tiptoeing symbolic deity on Manhattan pointed her vacillating arrow straight, for the time, in the direction of her exalted sister on Liberty Island. The lights of the great Garden were out; the benches in the Square were filled with sleepers in postures so strange that beside them the writhing figures in Dore’s illustrations of the Inferno would have straightened into tailor’s dummies. The statue of Diana on the tower of the Garden—its constancy shown by its weathercock ways, its innocence by the coating of gold that it has acquired, its devotion to style by its single, graceful flying scarf, its candour and artlessness by its habit of ever drawing the long bow, its metropolitanism by its posture of swift flight to catch a Harlem train—remained poised with its arrow pointed across the upper bay. Had that arrow sped truly and horizontally it would have passed fifty feet above the head of the heroic matron whose duty it is to offer a cast-ironical welcome to the oppressed of other lands.

Seaward this lady gazed, and the furrows between steamship lines began to cut steerage rates. The translators, too, have put an extra burden upon her. “Liberty Lighting the World” (as her creator christened her) would have had a no more responsible duty, except for the size of it, than that of an electrician or a Standard Oil magnate. But to “enlighten” the world (as our learned civic guardians “Englished” it) requires abler qualities. And so poor Liberty, instead of having a sinecure as a mere illuminator, must be converted into a Chautauqua schoolma’am, with the oceans for her field instead of the placid, classic lake. With a fireless torch and an empty head must she dispel the shadows of the world and teach it its A, B, C’s.

“Ah, there, Mrs. Liberty!” called a clear, rollicking soprano voice through the still, midnight air.

“Is that you, Miss Diana? Excuse my not turning my head. I’m not as flighty and whirly-whirly as some. And ‘tis so hoarse I am I can hardly talk on account of the peanut-hulls left on the stairs in me throat by that last boatload of tourists from Marietta, Ohio. ‘Tis after being a fine evening, miss.”

“If you don’t mind my asking,” came the bell-like tones of the golden statue, “I’d like to know where you got that City Hall brogue. I didn’t know that Liberty was necessarily Irish.”

“If ye’d studied the history of art in its foreign complications ye’d not need to ask,” replied the offshore statue. “If ye wasn’t so light-headed and giddy ye’d know that I was made by a Dago and presented to the American people on behalf of the French Government for the purpose of welcomin’ Irish immigrants into the Dutch city of New York. ‘Tis that I’ve been doing night and day since I was erected. Ye must know, Miss Diana, that ‘tis with statues the same as with people—‘tis not their makers nor the purposes for which they were created that influence the operations of their tongues at all—it’s the associations with which they become associated, I’m telling ye.”

“You’re dead right,” agreed Diana. “I notice it on myself. If any of the old guys from Olympus were to come along and hand me any hot air in the ancient Greek I couldn’t tell it from a conversation between a Coney Island car conductor and a five-cent fare.”

“I’m right glad ye’ve made up your mind to be sociable, Miss Diana,” said Mrs. Liberty. “‘Tis a lonesome life I have down here. Is there anything doin’ up in the city, Miss Diana, dear?”

“Oh, la, la, la!—no,” said Diana. “Notice that ‘la, la, la,’ Aunt Liberty? Got that from ‘Paris by Night’ on the roof garden under me. You’ll hear that ‘la, la, la’ at the Café McCann now, along with ‘garsong.’ The bohemian crowd there have become tired of ‘garsong’ since O’Rafferty, the head waiter, punched three of them for calling him it. Oh, no; the town’s strickly on the bum these nights. Everybody’s away. Saw a downtown merchant on a roof garden this evening with his stenographer. Show was so dull he went to sleep. A waiter biting on a dime tip to see if it was good half woke him up. He looks around and sees his little pothooks perpetrator. ‘H’m!’ says he, ‘will you take a letter, Miss De St. Montmorency?’ ‘Sure, in a minute,’ says she, ‘if you’ll make it an X.’

“That was the best thing happened on the roof. So you see how dull it is. La, la, la!”

“‘Tis fine ye have it up there in society, Miss Diana. Ye have the cat show and the horse show and the military tournaments where the privates look grand as generals and the generals try to look grand as floor-walkers. And ye have the Sportsmen’s Show, where the girl that measures 36, 19, 45 cooks breakfast food in a birch-bark wigwam on the banks of the Grand Canal of Venice conducted by one of the Vanderbilts, Bernard McFadden, and the Reverends Dowie and Duss. And ye have the French ball, where the original Cohens and the Robert Emmet—Sangerbund Society dance the Highland fling one with another. And ye have the grand O’Ryan ball, which is the most beautiful pageant in the world, where the French students vie with the Tyrolean warblers in doin’ the cake walk. Ye have the best job for a statue in the whole town, Miss Diana.

“‘Tis weary work,” sighed the island statue, “disseminatin’ the science of liberty in New York Bay. Sometimes when I take a peep down at Ellis Island and see the gang of immigrants I’m supposed to light up, ‘tis tempted I am to blow out the gas and let the coroner write out their naturalization papers.”

“Say, it’s a shame, ain’t it, to give you the worst end of it?” came the sympathetic antiphony of the steeplechase goddess. “It must be awfully lonesome down there with so much water around you. I don’t see how you ever keep your hair in curl. And that Mother Hubbard you are wearing went out ten years ago. I think those sculptor guys ought to be held for damages for putting iron or marble clothes on a lady. That’s where Mr. St. Gaudens was wise. I’m always a little ahead of the styles; but they’re coming my way pretty fast. Excuse my back a moment—I caught a puff of wind from the north—shouldn’t wonder if things had loosened up in Esopus. There, now! it’s in the West—I should think that gold plank would have calmed the air out in that direction. What were you saying, Mrs. Liberty?”

“A fine chat I’ve had with ye, Miss Diana, ma’am, but I see one of them European steamers a-sailin’ up the Narrows, and I must be attendin’ to me duties. ‘Tis me job to extend aloft the torch of Liberty to welcome all them that survive the kicks that the steerage stewards give ’em while landin.’ Sure ‘tis a great country ye can come to for $8.50, and the doctor waitin’ to send ye back home free if he sees yer eyes red from cryin’ for it.”

The golden statue veered in the changing breeze, menacing many points on the horizon with its aureate arrow.

“So long, Aunt Liberty,” sweetly called Diana of the Tower. “Some night, when the wind’s right. I’ll call you up again. But—say! you haven’t got such a fierce kick coming about your job. I’ve kept a pretty good watch on the island of Manhattan since I’ve been up here. That’s a pretty sick-looking bunch of liberty chasers they dump down at your end of it; but they don’t all stay that way. Every little while up here I see guys signing checks and voting the right ticket, and encouraging the arts and taking a bath every morning, that was shoved ashore by a dock labourer born in the United States who never earned over forty dollars a month. Don’t run down your job, Aunt Liberty; you’re all right, all right.”