

THE MADNESS OF THE AMERICAN SENTRY

[A FAMILY QUARREL]

by

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Characters

The Statue of Liberty / A lady of stature, a woman of spirit.

Chief of State

Amerigo Vespucci the 17th

Captain Ashcraft of the International Brotherhood of Fog Men

Master Private Triton & Poseidon / *a katzenjammer S.W.A.T. team*

Immigrants (mimes)

NEW YORK HARBOR - AFTERNOON

(Fog horn. Surf, sea gulls. The Statue of Liberty appears out of the fog, draped in black from head to toe.)

LIBERTY (V.O.)

October 18th, 1886. How well I remember the day of my unveiling. Straight out of a comic strip. Bartoldi, August Bartoldi, the sculptor, up in my crown. Waiting to pull the string on his creation: *Me...*

(A crowd heard in the distance, speaker droning on and on.)

That's the President, Grover Cleveland, speaking. All puffed up. Looking to cash in on the publicity. When he was Governor of New York, he vetoed a bill for fifty thousand dollars to stand me up. What was I supposed to do? Squat? The pennies of the poor raised me up on the pedestal. The rich never contributed a dime. And the ladies? They weren't invited to the ceremony. Rumors were spread that they would be crushed in the crowd. Well, that didn't stop them. A group of them circled Bedloe's island on a boat. Bellowed at Cleveland with a megaphone. Bartoldi got tired of waiting for Cleveland's speech to end, and yanked the rope. And there I was - *exposed*. For all the world to see.

(The drape collapses.)

And I hadn't even made up my face yet!

(Loud hammering, banging.)

I wasn't born, I was commissioned! Workmen crawled all over me, banging my plates, hammering me down. It took six hundred thousand rivets to hold *me* down. They needed every one of them. I wanted out from the beginning...

(Crowd heard laughing, joking.)

LIBERTY

When I was stood up in Paris, for the first time - and that wasn't the *only* time I was stood up - I looked out over the roof tops. Hundreds of fashionably dressed people gawking up at me. Making snooty remarks about the way I was dressed. Here I was - a gift. From the French people to the American people. And all they could do was talk about how I wasn't much of a work of art. Things haven't changed much since.

(Fog horn.)

And to top it all off, Bartoldi had the gall to ship me over here in two hundred and fourteen crates. I felt like I was falling apart at the seams! Then he stuck me up on the pedestal on Bedloes Island. A former gallows. Paupers graves everywhere...

(The loud, clanging, bell of the New York Stock Exchange. Again, the bell. LIBERTY, furious, tosses her book and torch away, grabs the crown off her head, and leaps off her pedestal into the harbor. A loud splash. BLACKOUT. Swimming, grunts, heavy breathing...)

OVAL OFFICE. WHITE HOUSE - LATER

(MUSIC: "Hail to the Chief")

CHIEF OF STATE

Our nation's beloved symbol, the Statue of Liberty - gone. Nothing of this magnitude has ever happened before. God forbid it should happen on my watch. But it did...

(Helicopter snarls overhead.)

Today I ordered a S.W.A.T. team. Uh.

(searches the prompter)

A S.W.A.T. team of America's leading Fog Men. To be dropped into New York harbor. Their mission? Uh. Search, everywhere. Every nook and cranny on the waterfront.

CHIEF OF STATE

This is a National Embarrassment. A National Disgrace. A National Disaster...

(wells up)

Miss Liberty, wherever you are, dear - come back. *Please*. Without you the world will never be the same. Is that it? Huh?

(fog horn)

AN ABANDONED WAREHOUSE -- LATER

(LIBERTY sits on a pile of fireworks boxes, toweling off her hair. Everything surrounding her diminished in size. Broken chains rattle on her feet. A boom, a jolt, a crash. An old elevator heard bumping and grinding its way up from floor to floor. Gate flies open, a burst of light. AMERIGO wheels in on roller blades, costumed like a Renaissance navigator.)

LIBERTY

(pointing a gun - an old Winchester)

One false move and I'll blow your head off from here to Brooklyn and back again! Your name? I said your name! You got wax in your ears?

AMERIGO

Miss Liberty...

LIBERTY

And don't call me *Miss*! I'm a grown woman.

AMERIGO

Amerigo. Amerigo Vespucci the 17th. The great, great, great, *etceteras* grandson of the famous Italian navigator. America was named after him.

LIBERTY

Vespucci? A liar from the word go. A slave trader. The stories he told to those Florentine nobles about coming over here were a pack of lies. Worse than Columbus.

AMERIGO

Ma'am, the gun? Please, put it down. It's not like you.

(She does, slowly. He flashes an old photograph.)

The lady smiling up at you? The one in the crowd, with the flowers in her hair? My great grandmother. And the man standing next to her? My great grandfather. They adored you. Worshipped the ground you stood on.

LIBERTY

That's what they all say. So many people, so many lands. One face fades into another. My memory escapes me.

AMERIGO

Watch over Liberty, they said. She needs all the help she can get. Ma'am.

LIBERTY

I don't need any more watching, Vespucci! Don't push your luck. I can spot a cock and bull story a mile away. Standing on that pedestal day after day, night after night - weeks, months, years, decades - for what?

AMERIGO

(persistent)

Every Sunday my grand parents visited you. Without fail. The torch, the crown, the poem, it was all sacred to them.

LIBERTY

I got my eyes on you, young man. All nine feet of them. Not counting the ones on the back of my head.

AMERIGO

Night after night they repeated the poem. Like a prayer. "Give me your tired, your poor, your hungry masses yearning..."

LIBERTY

Enough!

AMERIGO

Why did you do it? Why did you jump off your pedestal? Maam, you had everything going for you. You were cleaned, sand blasted, given a new lease on life. Why?

LIBERTY

I wanted a career change. Any thing wrong with that? Today I'm nothing more than a symbol for a Las Vegas casino. People fly over head, glance down at me, snap the Wall Street Journal into place, and dive right back into a column of figures. Well they just won't have Liberty to kick around any more...

(sneezes)

That swim - damn it! I'll catch the death of a cold, yet. At my age I should know better. Sometimes I go a little over board.

(Tea kettle whistles.)

Pour me a cup of tea. Now.

AMERIGO

(skates over to the tea.)

Sugar or honey?

LIBERTY

Both. I don't play favorites.

AMERIGO

(hands her the tea)

I brought you a gift...

LIBERTY

A gift?

AMERIGO

From my grandmother. From her to me to you. Look...

(He spreads out a glorious blanket of stars. Helicopter snarls overhead. LIBERTY grabs the blanket, wraps it around her - stands tall, majestic, defiant. Searchlight passes overhead.)

LIBERTY

If they think they are going to put me up on that pedestal again, they got another thought coming! I am the Statue of Liberty. And I still got some clout around here. Now, how do I get out of here? With my height there's not much room to maneuver.

AMERIGO

Let me get you something to eat, okay? I know a good pizza joint around the corner. They make a great Statue of Liberty pie. I can't vouch for the ingredients, but the pies are terrific.

LIBERTY

Nice set of skates you go on there, Vespucci.

AMERIGO

Designed them myself.

LIBERTY

Amerigo Vespucci the 17th, huh? Navigator *par excellence*. How did you find me?

AMERIGO

Big wet footprints all over the street. It was like following the yellow brick road. Why I know my way around the city like some people know the back of their hand. The ins, the outs, the ups, the downs, you name it, I've been there. I can cut around a corner like a boomerang. Watch!

(skates with vigor, sings)

I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy, A Yankee Doodle Do or Die! A real live nephew of my Uncle Sam, born on the Fourth of July! I've got a Yankee Doodle Sweetheart, she's my Yankee Doodle gal...

(pulls up abruptly)

Now how's that for openers?

LIBERTY

Go ahead. Polish my crown.

AMERIGO

(wheels over to the crown)

Just like Bartoldi said: Liberty enlightening the world. The planets, the moon, the sun, the stars, the universe.

(polishes)

My grandfather taught me how to polish. Polished every thing he could get his hands on. Gold watches, silverware, samovars, book ends, pawn shop signs. He loved to make things shine. Don't spare the elbow grease, Amerigo, he'd say. Corrosion gets into places where you least expect it. Ma'am, you can rise above anything. Even Tiananmen Square. No one can take that away from you.

(A rumble in the building. Liberty alarmed.)

AMERIGO

Please, ma'am - sit down. Its getting a little shaky around here.

(A boom, a jolt, a crash. Elevator rising.)

A S.W.A.T team! Are they crazy?

LIBERTY

Hand me the crown. I'll give them a dose of medicine they'll never forget.

(He lifts the crown with effort. Liberty crowned.)

Now, how do I look?

AMERIGO

Like you own the world.

LIBERTY

Well, I still do, don't I?

(A loud whistle, a burst of fog. POSEIDON and TRITON crash into the loft, wearing red, white and blue wet suits, flippers, and carrying jet propelled harpoons loaded down with the debris of the harbor. The latest weapon in America's arsenal of high tech wizardry.)

POSEIDON/TRITON

Fog Men! Don't move!

(CAPTAIN ASHCRAFT enters. A comic figure right out of Gilbert and Sullivan.)

CAPTAIN

Madam, allow me to introduce myself. Captain Ashcraft of the International Brotherhood of Fog Men. Home Security Division. On the order of authorities higher than myself, I'm afraid I must place you under house arrest. This domicile, if you can call it that, is no place for a lady of your stature. If you will come along peacefully, I will do my best to arrange for more suitable quarters.

LIBERTY

(tongue-in-cheek)

House? Arrest? I'm afraid I don't know his name, sir. And I certainly will not be placed *under* him. No women worth her salt would allow herself to be put in such a position. Especially in public.

CAPTAIN

Madam, you left your post without permission. We ask only that you fulfill your assigned responsibilities in life immediately. We all must pay our dues, whether we like it or not. You have become a national embarrassment, a national disgrace, and a national disaster. If I may say so myself.

LIBERTY

Captain, I have no intention of answering the beck and call of every Tom, Dick and Harry who thinks he can get away with it. Lay a hand on me, sir, and you will face serious harassment charges. Making a pass at the Statue of Liberty will not be tolerated by the American people. Although in this day and age every one and every thing is up for grabs.

CAPTAIN

At ease, men!

POSEIDON

Yes, sir!

TRITON

Yes, sir!

(Harpoons clatter to the floor. FOG MEN pick up their harpoons and snap back into place.)

CAPTAIN

Madam, I apologize for the clumsy responses of my men. They have been searching for you at the bottom of the river for hours. Lack of oxygen has a way of fumigating the mind.

(offers his hand)

This way, please. Boat loads of tourists are waiting to see you up on the pedestal where you belong.

AMERIGO

Captain Ashcraft, *sir!* The Statue of Liberty has powers as yet unheard of. I'd be careful, if I were you.

CAPTAIN

And just who do you think you are, young man?

AMERIGO

Amerigo Vespucci the Sevententh. The great, great, great, *etceteras* grandson of the famous Italian navigator. America was named after him.

CAPTAIN

America, I suggest you stay out of business that doesn't concern you,

LIBERTY

Captain, take a look around you. We are surrounded by boxes of fireworks ready to explode. Amerigo's *concern* for me is legendary.

(AMERIGO lights a match.)

LIBERTY

If he tosses that match into the fireworks, we will all be blown to Kingdom Come. Imagine what that will do to your reputation. Not to mention the reputation of the International Brotherhood of Fog Men. Home Security Division.

CAPTAIN

Put away your weapons, men! Everything's negotiable.

(Weapons clatter to the floor)

Poseidon!

POSEIDON

Sir!

CAPTAIN

Go fetch the torch and return it to Miss Liberty. The one she tossed into the river. Pronto!

POSEIDON

Yes sir!

(Exits.)

CAPTAIN

Madam, I have a responsibility to a law higher than myself. You have no other choice but to obey that law. I am doing my best to make things easier for you.

(POSEIDON carries in the torch - with great effort.)

LIBERTY

Thank you, Poseidon. You are a gentleman.

POSEIDON

Its an honor to be of service to you, ma'am.

(salutes)

LIBERTY

A family heirloom, Captain. I must admit that I threw the torch away with some misgivings.

CAPTAIN

Triton!

TRITON

Yes sir!

CAPTAIN

Bring Miss Liberty her book, pronto!

TRITON

(starts, stops)

I checked out the return date, sir. July 4th 1776. I think its over due at the library.

CAPTAIN

Its on permanent loan, stupid! Snap to it, Triton, or you'll never hear the end of it! And Triton!

TRITON

Yes sir!

CAPTAIN

Blow your horn, as instructed! Madam: the Anthem of the International Brotherhood of Fog Men.

(TRITON blows his horn. A crouch shell. A low mournful sound gone flat.)

LIBERTY

Thank you, Triton. The blast had biblical under tones. I am forever in your debt.

(Triton dashes into the elevator. He carries the book in with great effort.)

Master Private Fog Man Poseidon.

POSEIDON

Yes ma'am.

LIBERTY

Please open the book to the first page and read it.

POSEIDON

(with a glance at the Captain)

I'm sorry, ma'am, but I can't read. I'm from a poor family. I didn't have time to go to school. But I always dreamed about being a Fog Man. And here I am. Doing my job with the best and the brightest. Right, Captain?

CAPTAIN

Poseidon, The International Brotherhood of Fog Men is proud to have you on board. Let me read the words for you.

CAPTAIN

(opens the book with effort)

"When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary..."

(slams the book shut)

CAPTAIN

Poseidon, these words from the Declaration of Independence are indeliably written in the palm of my hand. I will read them to you later - at my leisure.

LIBERTY

Poseidon...

POSEIDON

Yes, ma'am.

LIBERTY

Check out the Declaration of Independence at the public library. In *my* name. I will read the words to you - at *your* leisure. If you don't mind, Captain?

CAPTAIN

(reddens)

Madam, allow me to make a confession. A personal one, if I may say so myself.

LIBERTY

Our Lady of the Harbor listens to confessions day and night. But I am sure they are nothing compared to yours. May I sit down, Captain? The swim exhausted me. And I know when I am in for the long haul.

CAPTAIN

Madam, your word is my command. Please.

LIBERTY

(sits)

I am all ears.

Amerigo

(barely containing himself)

All twelve feet of them.

CAPTAIN

(swallows his anger)

Madam, I am a dedicated public servant, going about the business of defending our national security - at all costs. But I must admit, that when I first saw you, years ago, a mere child, I knew *instantly* that it was love at first sight.

LIBERTY

I had no idea, Captain, that you felt this way. And at such an early age. Continue, sir, you have my undivided attention.

AMERIGO

And mine too. Sir!

CAPTAIN

I swore then, to you, to myself, to my country, that I would never let harm come your way. That I would protect you from all comers, all evil doers, all those with dire consequences on their minds - whoever they may be, wherever they may come from, or whatever the source. Whether they be strange and unusual creatures arriving on our shores, or insiders hell bent on doing you in - *I will be there*. Observing every detail, every shift of cargo on the docks, every nook and granny of our borders, every recessed cave in the purple majesty of our national park system, and every river, lake, pond and stream of this great and wonderful land of ours, *I will be there*. Every step of the way, to the full extent of the law - and beyond. Need I say more?

(No response.)

CAPTAIN

Forgive my impertinence, madam, but we all have a responsibility to preserve the American Way of Life. People from all over the world are flocking to see you up on the pedestal where you belong. I beg you, put away your private concerns, do what is best for our country. Do not break my heart. It has suffered enough already.

(No response.)

Madam: you may not leave America without permission. That is the bottom line. Accordingly I find it unbearably painful to ask you to place *yourself* under house arrest. You have left your assigned post and therefore must pay the consequences. Do what is best for our country, I beg you. Show the world what America stands for!

AMERIGO

Captain Ashcraft, Our Lady of the Harbor can spot a cock and bull story a mile away. I'd change my routine, if I were you. Sir!

CAPTAIN

Hold your tongue, young man! We have harpoons for the likes of you!

LIBERTY

Captain, let me remind you of something you apparently forgot. I *am* the Statue of Liberty. Admired all over the world for what I stand for and for the natural dignity and grace of my appearance. Seventy five craftsmen swung around me on platforms, hammering three hundred pieces of copper to my frame. It took six hundred thousand rivets to hold me down. So I know exactly where I stand. I know the meaning of liberty from the ground floor up, and I don't need a lecture on patriotism to remind me of who I am. Look at the outfit you're wearing. Wet suits? Flippers? Harpoons covered with garbage from the harbor? Your men look like they crawled out of a dumpster. That is no way to greet the Statue of Liberty. Have you no pride? Or is poking your way around the sewer your natural crawling space?

CAPTAIN

We have a job to do, madam. It is not an easy one. But we do it nonetheless. I am obligated to do my duty according to the canon and scripture of real estate law. This above all else:

(snaps open a writ of occupancy)

You are hereby declared to be squatting in a space that doesn't belong to you. I have no other choice but to place you under arrest for unauthorized occupancy. Real estate is at a premium in New York. Every foot of land is worth millions of dollars. Unless you can come up with a sizable amount of cash, I must ask that you leave these premises immediately. I'll see what I can do to make things easier. I do have some influence with the higher ups. Not much, but some.

LIBERTY

The rent, sir. From the Bank of America.

(pulls a wad of bills out of her bosom)

I assure you, I will not make this offer again.

CAPTAIN

Twenty four dollars? Is this some kind of joke? This is a matter of National Security and I would not make light of it. Madam, I have come to the end of my patience.

LIBERTY

Twenty four dollars is exactly the amount the Indians were paid for Manhattan. Apparently Captain Ashcraft, you can not tell the difference between liberty and a real estate deal. Amerigo, the match!

CAPTAIN

(snapping handcuffs on Liberty.)

Poseidon, Triton, arrest America! Pronto!

(FOG MEN surround AMERIGO with harpoons.)

LIBERTY

Take these handcuffs off me, sir! You are bruising my wrists!

POSEIDON

Captain, you just don't treat a lady that way.

LIBERTY

Now that's a patriotic reaction if I ever heard one.

CAPTAIN

Poseidon, lock him up! I said lock America up!

(FOG MEN stand their ground.)

LIBERTY

Your behavior, Captain, gives me no other choice but to snap off my handcuffs!

(She does. Helicopter snarls overhead. A shot rings out. Glass explodes, whistling fire works. BLACKOUT. A loud splash; swimming, heavy breathing. Cheers and applause from the crowd outside.)

CAPTAIN

(stepping out of the smoke)

Poseidon, Triton, come to your senses! She left her post without permission! Find her, or I'll wrap your balls around a flag pole!

(Fog Men drop their weapons.)

AMERIGO

(cradling her gown)

She's gone. But not forgotten.

CAPTAIN

Gone? Is there no respect for authority anymore? *I said, is there no respect for authority anymore!*

(MUSIC: "Yankee Doodle Dandy". AMERIGO wheels off.)

LIBERTY ISLAND - MORNING

(Surf, sea gulls. AMERIGO wheels in. Liberty's crown cockeyed on his head, torch in his hand.)

AMERIGO

(slightly tipsy)

My fellow Americans! Well, its been centuries since my late great, great, great, *etceteras* grandfather - Amerigo Vespucci the First - claimed he discovered America. A liar. From the world go. A slave trader. He never made it over here. Today I stand on the tip of Liberty Island. Where the Statue of Liberty once stood. She's gone. But her spirit remains...

(FOG HORN. IMMIGRANTS emerge out of the fog, carrying beat up luggage and meager belongings.)

People from all over the world gather here. On the pedestal where she once stood. Throwing flowers into her wake. Preying for her return. Hoping some day she will come back...

(CASINO SOUNDS. IMMIGRANTS slip out of their coats and slip on Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and Goofy masks. They become TOURISTS, waving, mugging, and snapping instant flash photographs of the audience.)

AMERIGO

Liberty Island has been sold. To the highest bidder. They plan to build an amusement park here. Disney Isle...

(IMMIGRANTS tear up the photographs one by one, and toss the scraps into the sea - like ballots.)

AMERIGO

Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and Goofy will all parade on the pedestal where Liberty once stood. Amerigo Vespucci the Seventeenth. Navigator *par excellence*. Keeper of the Torch!

AMERIGO

(holding the torch up high)

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary...

(The ocean gradually overwhelms the casino sounds until nothing remains but the ships at sea. And the light from the torch held high.)

THE END