

SELLING LIBERTY

"Liberties for sale! Selling liberties here!" yelled the old man who stood on the street corner. Everything about him spoke "desperate," his raspy voice, his dirty clothes. There weren't many who paid more than a moment's worth of attention to him. People like him were common in those days.

"What have you got, grandpa?" asked a passer-by, a middle-aged middle-class man. "I'm looking for a deal on the freedom to own a cat. Do you have that?"

"No," the old man replied, "but I have others you might be interested in."

"Not today. I'm just looking for pet ownership liberties right now."

"But..." The old man paused. His only potential customer in the last half-hour was getting away. "I bet you could use the freedom to drink tea!" he yelled. "I'll sell it to you for cheap!"

"No thanks! Already have that one," replied the man. For a brief moment, the middle-aged man looked behind him as he walked away, waving bye with a newspaper held in his hand. When the middle-aged man looked back, he felt the strong grasp of someone's hand around his wrist. He came to a halt and peered at his own reflection in the mirror-like visor of a Liberty Officer's helmet.

"Let me see your liberty card, citizen," the officer said in an unreasonably authoritative voice. "You do realize you're carrying reading material in your hand?"

"I'm perfectly aware of that, officer," said the man as he pulled from his coat pocket a small, blue square, not much

bigger than an old playing card. "I have the freedom to read."

The officer grabbed the blue card from the man's hand. On the front was a picture of the man that was standing before him, complete with every vital detail: ID number, name, sex, birth date, hair color, eye color, marital status, the names of his two children, profession, salary, and most importantly—the man's liberties. "Mr. Connolly," the officer said to himself as he examined the card. The officer slid the card through a mechanism attached to his wrist.

Mr. Connolly patiently waited as the officer read through the information that appeared on the device. He tried to look through the officer's visor to see why the officer was taking such time, but the only expression he could see was his own, his reflection. Mr. Connolly decided to say something, "I understand that the freedom to read is uncommon in this area, but..."

The officer interrupted him, "You have an amazing list of liberties, Mr. Connolly."

"Thank you," replied Mr. Connolly, not knowing quite what else to say in response to such a statement.

"Ah, there it is," said the officer. "Wow, you even have the freedom to write... and... Wow!" exclaimed the officer again. "You have the freedom to ride a horse! What's that like?"

"Eh... I haven't actually used that freedom yet."

"What is a person like you doing in this neighborhood?" asked the officer as he handed back the liberty card to Mr.

Connolly. "With all those freedoms, I would be out enjoying them, not getting myself lost in this filthy ghetto."

"I'm looking for a good deal on the freedom to own a cat. My daughter asked for one for her birthday."

"Well, that's a common one, but I doubt you'll find anyone here with the freedom to sell their liberties. I'm assuming you have the freedom to buy other people's liberties?"

"Yes, of course." Mr. Connolly knew full well that most of the ruffians in this area of town weren't classy enough to have bought the freedom to sell their liberties, but he also knew that most didn't care whether they had that freedom or not. They would sell their liberties anyway, and that's precisely why Mr. Connolly frequented this area.

"I'd watch myself around here. If you step down a back alley when one of us isn't looking out for you," the officer said, motioning to himself, "you're likely to get mugged for your liberties. I would hate to have to shoot you because someone stole your liberty to breathe."

"That's why I purchased the freedom to carry a weapon a long time ago."

The officer nodded. "Good for you, sir. It was nice to meet you, Mr. Connolly."

"Liberties for sale here!" yelled the old man on the corner.

The officer was immediately distracted by the old man's cry. The officer hurried over to the old man and said in his unreasonably authoritative voice, "Let me see your liberty card, citizen." The old man's face sunk as he pulled from his pocket his small, blue liberty card. In those matter of seconds, his desperation sunk into

absolute hopelessness. The officer swiped the old man's card, and the old man waited for the officer to find that there was nothing left on the card but the basic freedoms (sleeping, eating, and breathing), the freedom to drink tea, the freedom to smoke cigarettes, and the freedom to own and operate a pocket knife. Missing was the freedom to sell his liberties, and that was grounds for immediate punishment. Mr. Connolly briskly walked away as the officer beat the old man with his nightstick again and again until the old man could no longer react with screams.

Later that day, Mr. Connolly found himself at a liberty bank well outside the ghetto he was roaming some hours earlier. It stood in stark contrast of the rundown neighborhood that that poor, anonymous old man called home. He thought for a moment, thought about that old man's situation, how easy it could have been for him to be exactly where that old man was, illegally selling his liberties just so he could feed himself, without the freedom to live in a dwelling, or the freedom to receive medical care, or the freedom to obtain a paying job. "If only I'd have been born to poorer parents," Mr. Connolly thought, "oh, how rough my life could have been..."

"Can I help you, sir?" asked the liberty teller.

"Why yes," said Mr. Connolly as he brushed all of his meaningful thoughts aside. "I'd like to trade in one of my liberties." Mr. Connolly set his liberty card on the counter. "The freedom to ride a horse for the freedom to own a cat."

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