

## **It's Our Wonderful Rights**

*How the Constitution's Articles I-VII Protect Our Rights*

I gasped for breath and fought to keep my head above the icy waters of the Potomac. As I dragged the jumper onto the riverbank, police sirens wailed in the distance, helicopters circled the city, and through the driving snow I could see a barricade surrounding the National Archives building. The Constitution was missing and Washington, D.C. was panicking.

"Mr. Constitution, don't you know the whole city is searching for you?" I panted, helping him wring out his parchment. "Why did you jump off the bridge?"

"Why wouldn't I?" he moaned. "I have no reason to exist. I'm in everyone's way. They're only looking for me because I'm a moneymaking tourist-attraction."

"What makes you say that?"

"I hear what people say. That glass I'm under isn't as thick as you'd think. They complain that my checks and balances cause gridlock and nothing gets done. They call my Electoral College antiquated and insult me with talk of abolishing it. On top of that, they dismiss me as irrelevant. They think my authors couldn't have imagined life in the 21st century." He sighed. "I'm a washed-up fuddy-duddy."

"That's not true," I said soothingly. "You're just going through a rough patch."

"You don't understand," he said miserably. "My Framers put me in charge of protecting your rights and I've failed. America would've been better off without me. I wish I'd died in committee!"

"Ohhh, you mustn't say things like that. You're—" I paused. "Wait a minute. That's an idea. Alright, let's imagine what America would be like if you'd never been written."

Suddenly, we were caught up in a gust of swirling snow and found ourselves in the Capitol building.

"Where are we?" he asked, surprised.

"Well, Mr. Constitution, this would've been the Senate chamber, but since you don't exist, there's no Congress, so it's just a filing room."

"Call me Clarence," he responded absently. "What's that big stack of papers?"

"Those are this week's new laws—all 293 of them."

"For *one week*?" Clarence was horrified.

"Yep. Running a country is *a lot* easier when there's only one branch of government. What a nuisance checks and balances would be! This way, there's no need for debate or compromise. Leaders make new laws whenever they want."

"But that's exactly what my Framers *didn't* want!" Clarence cried. "They knew more laws meant less liberty. That's why Articles 1-3 separate our government into the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. They purposely create tension to help weed out bad bills and refine good ones."

"You're right. Gridlock is crucial to protecting our rights. But remember, you can't shield us from a tsunami of regulations. You don't exist."

As we walked, we heard a television blaring. "Welcome back to *The Sean Hannity Show*. Breaking news—New York City and Los Angeles voters have elected the next leader of the American Democracy."

"Democracy?" Clarence sputtered. "America is a republic!"

"Nope. Without you, whoever gets the most votes wins. That means candidates only campaign in the biggest cities. They don't have to bother with the less-populated areas. It's only fair that the majority rules."

"That's not fair at all!" Clarence exclaimed in disgust. "In a republic, every voter has an equal voice no matter where they live. That's why my Framers included the Electoral College in Article 2. Every state possesses electoral votes. This entices candidates to campaign in each of them to try to win them. Whoever wins more than half the nation's electoral votes becomes president."

"If only you were here to protect our rights from the tyranny of a majority," I lamented.

Just then, people began shouting and arguing. We peered curiously around a marble column.

"Ah-ha!" I observed. "Another constitutional convention. The government's always doing rewrites to try to stay relevant, but they base them on philosophical fads and the issues of the moment. Every time something new comes along, it throws society into chaos. Their living, breathing constitution goes out-of-date faster than florescent skinny-jeans!"

Clarence scoffed. "To remain relevant, a constitution must be built on the timeless wisdom of history and the universal patterns of human nature. America may look different than it did in 1787, but the nature of its challenges hasn't changed."

"Exactly. We still need your strong foundations to ensure a stable government that protects our rights. But alas, you don't exist."

"Stop saying I don't exist!" shouted Clarence, his ink brightening. "This is only what America *would* be like. I've got a job to do. Get me back! I want to live again!"

"Attaboy, Clarence!"

The snow swirled and we were back on the riverbank.

"Americans do still need me," said Clarence. "I'm the only protection they have. But they don't seem to realize it."

"Many don't know what life would be like without you and they take you for granted," I acknowledged. "I promise that we citizens will band together to change that."

"Thank you for saving me tonight. You're my guardian angel."

I watched him head toward the National Archives with a new spring in his step.

*No, Clarence, I thought. You're our guardian angel.*