Dear Cousin Philip,

Happy 100th Birthday! Of course, I know you’re only eight like me. But Papa says that now your country, the United States, has had its freedom for a whole century.

Did you know that French children like me, and grownups, too, are giving money to make a birthday gift for your country! It’s being made right here in Paris by Papa’s friend Mr. Bartholdi. He is making a gigantic sculpture to remind people of liberty.

Papa says it will be the tallest statue in the world. But it will take a long time to finish.

Your cousin,

Colette Gaget
June 14, 1878

Paris

Dear Cousin Philip,
You asked so many questions in your last letter! I guess now that Mr. Bartholdi is building his statue in Papa’s workshop, you think I know everything. Well, I’ll tell you what I can.

First, Mr. Bartholdi took clay and made a four-foot-high model of a lady. He made a torch of freedom for her to carry. He made her walking away from broken chains. She carries a tablet with the date of American independence on it: July 4, 1776. And her crown will have seven rays to represent the seven seas and the seven continents of the world.

When Mr. Bartholdi was happy with his small statue, he made bigger and bigger copies out of plaster until he had one 38 feet tall. It was so large—Papa built a special shed in the workyard to hold it. But it was only one-quarter of the size Mr. Bartholdi wants the statue to be when it is finally done.
You will not believe what they did next. They cut the plaster model into big slices! That's because they can't build a full-size model of the statue in one piece—it would be too big. So they have to make one section at a time, instead. They take each slice and measure very carefully, over and over, in order to make a full-size copy.

There's so much to do. Papa has 50 men working on it every day!

Your cousin,

Colette Gaget
January 5, 1880  Paris

Dear Cousin Philip,

These days there’s hardly room for the cat to walk through Papa’s shop! There are layers of the Statue of Liberty everywhere! Each layer is about 30 feet wide and 12 feet high—as big as a house! You asked me if the finished statue will be made of plaster. Oh, no! It’s going to be made of thin copper. To get the copper the right shape, wooden molds made of lots and lots of boards are built using the plaster model. Then, when sheets of copper are hammered into the wooden molds, they will be exactly the same shape as the model! It’s so clever. Papa’s workmen will then bolt and rivet the sheets of copper together to make the statue.
But there was a big problem. Mr. Bartholdi didn't know how he was going to make the thin copper strong enough so that the statue wouldn't bend or blow over in the wind. He thought of filling the statue with sand or stones, but it is much too big.

Luckily he talked to Mr. Eiffel, the man who builds bridges. Some people call him the Magician of Iron. Mr. Eiffel had the great idea of making a wrought-iron skeleton inside the statue to hold it up.

Your cousin,

Colette Gaget
August 20, 1884

Dear Cousin Philip,

The statue is finished! She towers over the buildings of Paris.

On July 4th Mr. Bartholdi proudly led American officials up the spiral staircase inside the statue to her crown. The view of the city from there is wonderful!

I often stand by the workyard gate to take money from people who want to see her before she goes to America. Her reddish copper color will become a dull green in time, but I think she will always be beautiful.

I’m glad the Americans don’t have the money yet to finish building the pedestal where she will stand. I will miss her when she goes to her island in New York. I can’t remember Papa’s shop without the statue.

Your cousin,

Colette Gaget
March 30, 1885

Dear Cousin Philip,

Mr. Bartholdi has lost his patience. He is taking the statue apart and packing it up. He wants to see it standing in New York Harbor. Coming, ready or not!

Each piece is carefully marked before it is packed. I hope it won't be too hard for the Americans to figure out how to put the puzzle together! There are more than 200 huge crates.

I'm glad that the American schoolchildren are sending their pennies to help pay for the huge pedestal the Statue of Liberty needs to stand on. It's so nice that they like the gift the French are giving them.

And here's another gift just for you. When the ship arrives in New York in June, with all the pieces of the Statue of Liberty, I will be waving from the deck. Look for me; I'm all grown up!

Till then,

Colette Gaget
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