

“The Package”

by

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I crossed the busy street, ignoring honking horns, screeching tires, and some very imaginative swearing from drivers and riders alike. I stepped out of the street, finally, to their relief, and onto the sidewalk, jumping over some garden. Again, rebuke from some furious guy with gardening tools.

I had less than 5 seconds to make it through the closing doors. As they slid shut after I wrestled through them, I realized I was in!

It was 4 P.M. and the post office was now closed. In this day and age, with emails, drones, and 3-d printers, the post office didn't really need to stay open. However, people still needed some things delivered the old-fashioned way, so here I was.

I bent down, hands on my knees, gasping for air. Thank God for physical military training. And speaking of training, I had been recalled from my 96-hour leave. I had been visiting my folks in my little home town, in the backlands of Northeast Brazil. My father was fighting cancer, at age 56. On top of that, I had not seen my wife for 2 months, and we were newly-weds!

She said she understood. I was supposed to stay with dad for half my leave, and then head to Rio de Janeiro, to spend a day with her, before heading back abroad to Argentina, to finish my training. Joining the UNCE-DF, the *United Nations and Colonies of Earth-Defence Force*, was good financially, especially because it would help to put her through law school.

With all of these things running through my mind, I found myself as the last person in a queue of 2. Looking behind me, watching the security guy opening the door to let people out, I saw some people trying to get in, but to no avail.

“Roberto?”

There was a chubby, ebony-black, elderly woman with short red hair, piercing eyes, thick lips, looking all-question-marks from her side of the counter.

I knew her, Mrs. Silva, from church.

For a moment, I thought she wanted to hug me, and I would have welcomed it. I mean, my father was ill, I badly missed my wife, and the military had cancelled my leave. And there I was with *a standard cryogenic sperm preserve kit* on her counter. She looked at me sadly, as if to say, *you too?*

“Where are you stationed, Roberto?” She asked.

“I don’t know yet. I am still in training.” I told her. She nodded in comprehension. I knew her son was UNCE too and wondered where he was serving. As if reading my mind, she said, “Lucas is a junior communications officer with the UNCE Navy Ship *Fortaleza*.”

The *Fortaleza* was Brazil’s first space exploration ship, and it was a shame that it had been refitted to join the UNCE Space Navy as a ship of war.

“I haven’t seen him for a year now! He sends me emails once a week, doesn’t say much, but I know my boy! Something is happening, I can feel it.” She said, while examining my package.

She was right, only I couldn’t tell her. I hardly knew anything, anyway, except for scuttlebutt from fleet personnel. The rumor was that a message had reached Earth’s leaders via Mars Central. Apparently, a fleet was parked outside our solar system, asking for refuge. *An alien fleet!*

But what if they were really an invading force? And how would the rest of the population receive it? *Hello! We are aliens from outer space! Can we park our fleet there?*

“My son sent me one just like this some weeks ago.” She said.

“He sent it to you?” I asked, perplexed. “Why would he send it to you?!”

She studied me for a few seconds, as if I were stupid.

“So, you have decided to tell your wife you are not coming back?” She blasted me. I was taken by surprise, and quite frankly, annoyed at her outburst. But come to think of it...ok, she was right. What would my wife think, when she got it? And I wasn’t even sure if she would want to have my child after I was gone. Dumb move!

“Let me keep this safe for you. If it comes to it, I will send it to her.” She offered, putting on her best smile to try to get me to lighten up a little.

“You would do that for me?” I asked, defeated, but I resigned to her wisdom.

“God willing, I won’t have to send my son’s, or yours.” She replied confidently.

“Just promise me you will come back? No heroics? Promise?”

Strangely enough, her smile, and her words of wisdom rekindled my spirit.

“Thank you, Mrs. Silva! I promise!” I said, as she held my hands in hers. I said goodbye, promising to send her word, which made her really content.

And, as I stepped out of the building, smiling, some angry-looking gardeners headed my way...