

The Draft

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2045

“Moisés!”

The 5-year-old looked up from the pile of pebbles and mulch he had been collecting next to the fence. Jamie continued, “Didn’t I tell you not to drop things off the roof? You could hurt someone if you drop a rock on them.” She could almost see the wheels turning in her son’s head as he tried to think of a way to get beyond this frustration of his plans.

“What if it’s just grass and leaves?”

Jamie considered this for a moment, and said, “Ok. But don’t rip up too much. We don’t want to have management kick us out of the park.” Less than a minute later, she watched as the leaves fluttered the twenty long meters to the ground below their roof-top park.

They had a nice tenement here, with plenty of space and a tree-filled park just an elevator ride away. There were several other children in the building, which made it a little easier to find friends for Moisés and to trade day-care service with the other parents.

Before returning to her book, Jamie took a moment to think about the past few years, and how different her life had become.

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Jamie nervously tidied up her front room as she glanced at the clock. *Any minute now*, she thought. She had just gotten an alert that a visitor was on his way. There had been rumors for a few days, but now it was for real. *General Thomas Wiley, United States Army. ETA, 1400. Purpose of visit: unspecified.* Right. The purpose of this trip was in about as much question as was the purpose of a call from an IRS auditor. Unpleasant business.

Jamie answered the knock at her door and welcomed the General into her tenement in a formally polite manner, trying desperately to send a message with her attitude: *I know why you are here, and I will not be intimidated. You are wasting your time.*

“Miss Jamie Alvarez, I have come to inform you that you are being drafted into the United States Military, effective six months from now.”

Duh.

Jamie took a deep breath and steeled herself. “So, General Wiley, you mean to tell me that of all the millions of people you could draft, you just happened to choose a leading anti-draft activist as the first choice?”

The general smiled self-deprecatingly. “That *would* be a little unethical to single you out, wouldn’t it? But it isn’t my choice, as you well know, Miss Alvarez. The computers

make a selection at random, and you were in the first group. Actually, we decided to come to you first and give you an early notice specifically *because* of your, ah, involvement in this matter. And it isn't all that unlikely to have an activist in the first draft group, when you consider that there are several thousand of you."

"You should know that I will fight this. I claim conscientious objector status."

General Wiley's conciliatory attitude began to lessen. "Objecting to what? Mother Nature?"

Jamie cut in quickly, "Objecting to an unfair attack on my personal freedom. Objecting to a government policy that singles out women for a military draft. It is unconstitutional."

"The Supreme Court disagrees with that assessment. And Congress declared in the bill authorizing the draft that there is no such thing as conscientious objection this time around, given the nature of your responsibilities. And clearly, national security trumps personal freedom for now."

"National security? What a joke," Jamie ground out bitterly, feeling her calm slipping away against her will. "Demographics is not national security. You will actually force thousands of women to have children against their wishes because you are afraid there won't be enough otherwise? There are half a billion of us in this country! We aren't going extinct!"

The general replied softly, "We *know* there won't be enough children otherwise. The demographic trends are very clear. We have made it for a long time at a sustainable birthrate, but in the past ten years it has dropped like a rock. And no, we would not go extinct, but the economic and social costs would certainly threaten national security. Do you want our country to go through what Japan did? Or Russia?"

Jamie countered desperately, hopelessly, "I don't want to do this. I just got my own place, a job, my own life. I want to live my own life!"

"I know. So does every one else. That's the problem. But we are trying to make it as easy as possible for you. Your enlistment will only last a year or so, after which you can resume life as normal. Even during your enlistment, you will have a lot of latitude. We aren't sending you to boot camp or anything. Afterward, you will be free to raise the child yourself, select an adoptive family, or let us make all arrangements. In this program, we will do anything necessary for you, including providing *in vitro* fertilization at no cost if you wish. All that matters is that you help the nation achieve a higher birthrate."

Jamie felt the futility of her position. *This is really going to happen. After all this time, none of the work will make a difference.* In a way, she felt a little better now that she knew she should stop fighting and get it over with.

2045

On second thought, Jamie closed her book to watch her son play and to take in the scenery. Moisés was about to start school, and this afternoon at the park was in some ways the last page in a chapter of his life. She didn't want to miss any of it.

She had surprised the military, the media, her friends, and even herself when she had decided to raise Moisés herself. Now, she couldn't imagine what her life would be like without him. She wouldn't miss this opportunity for the world. And yet...

And yet she had tried desperately to keep this from happening. Moisés would eventually know about her anti-draft work—a simple semantic computer search on his name would bring up the news accounts and records from the past. In fact, reporters would certainly try to talk to him about it at some point in the coming years, perhaps as part of the stories marking ten years since the re-institution of the draft. What will he think of himself when he discovers that she—his own mother—did not initially want him to be born?

Of course, he might understand that she really had a change of heart if she decided to have another child, this time of her own choice. *Maybe a girl this time?* Jamie thought, intrigued at the idea.