

17. The Package

(At a dock warehouse. It is the customs service warehouse. #1, a customs agent, is behind a counter. #2 walks up to the counter. #1 barely looks up.)

- #1: May I help you?
#2: I hope so. I've been wandering around this place for an hour. Am I at the right station?
#1: That depends. Are you supposed to be here?
#2: That's what I'm trying to find out.
#1: Have you a bill of lading?
#2: A what?
#1: A bill of lading.
#2: I have no idea. This is what I was sent. *(Hands #1 an invoice. #1 takes a look at it.)* Is that a bill of lading?
#1: No.
#2: *(Pause)* Well, what is it?
#1: It's a request for clarification. *(Hands the paper back to #2.)*
#2: OK. What needs to be clarified and am I in the right place for that? *(#1 takes the paper again, looks at it, reaches under the counter, pulls out a storage box, and places it on the counter.)*
#1: This and yes.
#2: What is that?
#1: It's the contents of a package addressed to you from one, *(Reads)* Vladimir Borzov, of what was the former Soviet Union.
#2: Wait, are you saying you opened my package?
#1: We're the government. We can do that.
#2: But it's a federal offense to tamper with the U.S. mail.
#1: First, it started out as Russian mail, before it became U.S. mail. U.S. mail and U.S. Government both start with U.S. which stands for "us."

- #2: No...it stands for United States.
#1: Which is who we are. We're the government. We do what we want.
#2: I see. So...why did you open my package from my Uncle Vlad?
#1: So you do acknowledge kinship with this Valdimir Borzov.
#2: "Acknowledge kinship"? Who talks like that?
#1: We're the government. We do.
#2: OK. Yes, Vladimir Borzov is my relative. My grandfather's uncle.
#1: So, he's actually your great-uncle.
#2: I don't know how great he is, but he's always been pretty good. *(Chuckles a bit. #1 has no reaction.)* Don't tell me, you have no sense of humor. You're the government.
#1: Exactly right.
#2: It's going to be a long day.
#1: It very well could be if you don't explain yourself sufficiently.
#2: What's to explain? I got a package from a relative in Russia.
#1: Correction, you received a Communist package from a Communist relative.
#2: A Communist package? Unless you've had your head buried in the sand...or somewhere else, the Cold War is over. There are no more Communists.
#1: That's what they'd like you to think.
#2: Really, it's the truth. It was in all the papers.
#1: We know. You read what we want you to read. It's our job to look out for you.
#2: Then how come there's no national health care plan?
#1: Because that would take free enterprise away from the insurance companies. If free enterprise goes, so does the democratic way of life. If that happens, know what we get?

#2: Communism?

#1: Didn't take two guesses, did it...Comrade?

#2: Never mind. Can I just have my package, please?

#1: I told you, not until you explain some of the items this Communist sent you.

#2: My uncle Vlad is not a Communist, he's a baker. Besides, he's sent me things before.

#1: But never things like these! *(Reaches into the box and pulls out a Russian flag.)* Care to explain this?

#2: It's an old Russian flag.

#1: And what do you plan to do with it?

#2: *(Pause)* Make a jacket out of it. I plan on holding on to it. It's a collector's item.

#1: And what kind of sicko would collect this?

#2: Historians, colleges, museums. You know, real subversives.

#1: Then what about this? *(Pulls out a small doll.)*

#2: It's an ordinary doll. It was probably intended for my daughter.

#1: It looks ordinary. So did a particular box of Jello until they found some microfilm hidden in it.

#2: If you're referring to the atom bomb spies, the microfilm was in a fake hollow coin. Two halves of a Jello box were used as a signal.

#1: Know your spy history pretty well, don't you!?

#2: OK, that's it! I've received things from my uncle before and I have never gone through this. I'd like to see an order authorizing you to do this to me.

#1: No, we're the...

#2: Don't even think of saying that. If you're truly the government you thrive on paper. It's probably there in triplicate. Show it to me! *(#1 reluctantly hands #2 a piece of paper. #2 starts to get very angry.)* I wasn't sent a clarification notice. This says I have to pay twenty-five dollars duty on these items and that it will be collected here by a trainee customs agent.

#1: I...I wouldn't believe everything you read.

#2: On every piece of garbage I'm told. What are you trying to do to me?

#1: You're a Communist sympathizer and I seem to be the only one around here who realizes that. I may just be a trainee right now, but I can spot a Communist a mile away. Soon they'll all find out I'm right, and when they do...I'll be a hero!

#2: You know, I'd like to stay here and debate this with you, but I'm due back on the planet Earth very soon. So, here's what we're going to do.

#1: No, wait...

#2: No, you wait! Don't talk, just listen! I am going to take my box of harmless presents from my foreign uncle and leave. You – are going to pay the duty on this package yourself.

#1: And why would I do that?

#2: Because if you don't, I am going to sue your red, white, and blue behind, the U.S. Customs Service, and anyone else who might have had a hand in hiring a deranged Joe McCarthy throwback who doesn't realize that it's not 1951!

#1: You can't do that.

#2: Correction, I'm a U.S. citizen. I can sue anyone I want. *(Picks up his/her box and walks away.)*

#1: *(Pulls out a pad and pen.)* I have to remember that one. "I'm a U.S. citizen..."