

### **The Package**

Tom lived a mile from the King's University campus on a quiet street in a small ninety-year old stone and wood two-story house he had recently purchased as an investment, and only then because he thought he was in a secure, long-term position at the university and could make the payments. Comfort zone. Ha, that's funny, he thought, smiling to no-one in particular as he meandered home at the end of the day. But most of his thoughts kept returning to Eloise and how to break the news to her.

Life, remembered Tom, begins at the end of your comfort zone. At least that's what the t-shirt said. He didn't think he was at the end of his comfort zone just yet, but he could see it quickly closing in. The really annoying thing was that he felt fairly content with the life he was currently living. This was a gut-wrenching jolt from the President.

Four months left for the Group, then they all lose their jobs, himself included, and more importantly, Eloise. And what then of their relationship? The University, as illustrated by the President just an hour earlier, would extol the group's virtues when it was successful, but in the group's moment of need, it would happily let it go under the bus and avoid tarnishing the university's lofty ivory tower image. Someone would be the Fall Guy. It wouldn't be Wainright, the bastard, as the university would also face the heat, as would the President. Yes, the Fall Guy would be Tom, and it would only make matters worse if he made a big stink about it.

Shit.

This ivory tower was a fair-weather friend at best. At worst, it was a collection of multiple egos claiming success over others in a world that was increasingly more about impressions and image, and less about substance. From previous experiences Tom knew all too well that image-conscious successful people want to be seen with other successful people; none of these people want to be associated with so-called losers. A university was no different in these times, despite the altruistic, idealistic assumption that universities should produce servants to the people and make the world a better place.

Tom was oblivious to the heavy rain. This downpour had not been in the forecast, and all he had was a windbreaker. He didn't feel the water soaking his hair and

running beneath his collar. The weight of the world pressed down on Tom's sodden shoulders as he plodded along, his mind cluttered and whirling. His thoughts of an impending darkness in his life were such that he didn't even notice the sprays of muddy rainwater hitting him as cars drove through the deepening puddles. He'd had better days.

Tom almost walked into the UPS Delivery Guy who was striding back from Tom's front door.

'Are you Tom ... Carrott?' he asked, looking down at his manifest.

'Yes, that's me,' said Tom.

'Seriously? Carrott?'

'Seriously,' Tom deadpanned, having painfully gone through this moment hundreds of times before.

'Oh, well, nothing wrong with a Carrott is there, eh?' said the UPS guy, 'Good for your eyes they say,' he chuckled. 'I've got a package for you and I need your signature.'

'Sure,' said Tom quietly as the UPS guy leaned into his van and pulled out a surprisingly heavy cardboard box roughly the size of a large suitcase. Tom signed the form, picked the package up and awkwardly stumbled up the path to his front porch. He put the box down on the damp steps, and fished his keys from his pocket, only just now realizing that rainwater was running through and off him like a broken faucet. Tom opened the door and slid the box into the house, not in the mood to even wonder what it was he had been sent.

He dripped, squished and sloshed his way down the hall to the kitchen and placed the soggy carbon copy of the form he signed on the counter. He noticed the senders name written in the corner. It took a moment for him to register that the package had been sent by one Professor Wainright.

*Really?*

Just then Tom was jumped on by Fred, his five-year old yellow lab who had been waiting, in hiding, in the kitchen. He'd been doing his usual daytime activity of sleeping, chewing his teddy bear, staring at the wall and more sleeping while Tom was at the university, and now he was ready to play. He followed Tom as if tied to

him with elastic, his teddy in his mouth, hoping that Tom would take it and throw it down the hall. Fun times.

Tom absently patted Fred's head, staring at the paper in his hand. His eyes opened wider and his forehead furrowed when he looked again to see the package was indeed from Wainright.

'What!!! Are you friggin' kidding me?!' He walked quickly back down the hall, Fred following. He stared briefly at the package, then kicked it. This wasn't a good idea for his foot, and not a terribly good idea for the package. But he kicked it again because it felt good, even though it had hurt him the first time. This time he used his other foot. That hurt too. But it also felt good. He was lividly angry at Wainright.

Tom stared at the package. Wainright was screwing up his life quite royally despite being dead. Tom decided not to open the package. His growing sense of despair coupled with his anger that he should be put in this position was overwhelming. All he wanted to do right now was dry off, warm up, get changed, make a hot drink and recalibrate in light of the new knowledge passed to him by the university's President.

Besides, he had to meet Eloise in an hour to tell her about his meeting with the President. It was going to be a tricky conversation. Most of all, he needed to think.

Tom sighed as he opened the front hall closet, pushed the package inside with one of his throbbing feet, shut the door, and stumbled upstairs to have a quick bath.

The package sat there quietly, as packages often do. Inside the package was a suitcase. Inside the suitcase there was a chest. The chest had travelled several thousand miles, a long distance for something three thousand years old. It had just been kicked several times. It had seen life. It had seen death. It had made and lost fortunes for many people over the centuries. It had been the bringer of war, and the symbol of peace. It had been the source of knowledge and the keeper of secrets. It had known darkness and had provided light. It was all these things. But no-one had ever used the full extent of its potential. And no one had ever kicked it.

## Secrets

In fairness to the Professor, he wasn't planning on dying at such an inconvenient moment. And he certainly didn't want to burden his favourite student with the responsibility of saving the Life Research Group. But this was a very small burden compared to the larger one that was about to change Tom's life. This was Wainright's Plan B: In the event that the professor died, his lawyer was instructed to send a particular heavy suitcase to Tom.

Heavy because it contained an ancient Egyptian chest. In that chest were clues to secrets: weighty signposts to hidden revelations. These were heavy clues. They were signposts to secrets that were hidden. You could find the secrets if you knew what you were looking for, but if you didn't know about them, then it was simply a very old and kickable chest filled with objects and words with meanings that connected the past with the future.

For those who would seek to see past the surface of the chest's contents, an old knowledge would be discovered, which would reveal a powerful new understanding that could change the world.

Wainright knew this. After decades of investigating and deciphering clues he had finally found the connections that would reveal the secrets. With the help of two old friends, he had finally put it all together: his life's work.

Tom was smart – book smart and street smart – and had a willingness to learn. Wainright knew this. So he entrusted Tom with the responsibility of nothing less than changing the world in the event that the professor would die before he could finish the job. Wainright was leaving his legacy, his least desirable attempt at immortality, in the hands of someone who knew nothing about the secrets, let alone changing the world. In retrospect, of course, it might have been useful to let Tom know about this.

The package sat inside the closet. To the left of the package was a pair of smelly old running shoes longing to be used again, and to the right were old winter boots, an umbrella, Fred's leash and a stick. Several hoodies and three jackets hung above the package. It was dark in there, a strange and odorous place from which the world was to be changed.

The chest was still sitting quietly as footsteps and unflattering mutterings about Wainright the Bastard passed by. The front door creaked open and closed quickly with a loud slamming bang. Tom walked off the porch, still trying to work out how to give the news to Eloise.

It was raining heavily.

Tom didn't realize it, but it was truly the first day of his new life. Nothing would ever be the same again. This was no ordinary package in his closet; it was an opening to a new world.