

THE PACKAGE

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Kane Kirkland was no mental giant by anyone's definition. He was an idiot, but a very determined idiot. What little he had accomplished in his meager 22 years on planet Earth had been won by simple, sheer willpower. He was absolutely terrible at baseball but held his school's record for stolen bases and runs scored in a single season. Kane reasoned that since he had no hitting skills to speak of, he would perfect the fine art of bunting. When that didn't pan out, he simply let the ball hit him and he would get on base that way. He was lightning-fast and had no problem stealing bases. He had even stolen home several times. He would point to third base and even tell the catcher when he was going to run and they still couldn't throw him out. If he could have just learned how to hit, he could have had a serious career in professional baseball.

"Jesus, Kane, do you have any idea what kind of damage you're doing to your body by letting those balls hit you? You going to pay for it later on." said his Coach.

"Nonsense. Nothing I can't handle, besides, I wear padding under the uniform. I barely even feel it."

"It's your health." said his coach and just walked away.

Always misunderstood, never appreciated. Kane was like the last slice of birthday cake on the table. He had ideas and schemes that he put into action. None of them ever panned out. He had his own internet video channel where people would dare him to eat things. After his third trip to the ER and the medical bills associated with it, he decided the juice simply wasn't worth the squeeze.

He tried college and pledged a fraternity, only to flunk out in less than a year. He even joined the Army for a few years, but was kicked out for smoking pot. A habit he just couldn't seem to kick.

"Well, I don't want to be in your damn Army anyway. How the hell can you tell a man he can't smoke any weed, but can almost kill himself drinking every night in the barracks? Makes absolutely no sense."

"I don't come up with these rules soldier, I only enforce them. The battalion commander thinks it best if you were simply not here." said his Captain.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means he wants you out of the Army."

"Out of the Army? I'm the best you got."

"You're not much of a soldier Mr. Kirkland. You barely passed your PT test and you've been AWOL twice this year." said the Captain.

"You're not going to hold that against me."

"Of course we are. You also lost a grenade while out on patrol."

"I'm sure the Army isn't going to miss one little grenade," said Kane

"It was found by a bunch of kindergartners. It's a miracle it didn't go off."

"You can't kick me out, I've got nowhere else to go." he pleaded.

"That's really not the Army's problem. The discharge shouldn't take any longer than a week." said the Captain as he dismissed Kane.

Just like that, Kane suddenly found himself jobless and out on the street. He lived in his cousin's RV for four months until he landed his first real job, as a shipping and receiving clerk for a major agricultural parts warehouse. It was only supposed to last three months. Just a temporary job to put a little cash in his pocket. The boss was so impressed he offered him a full-time position on his last day of work for the temp agency. For the first time in his life, Kane felt like he was headed in the right direction. Life was beginning to look up.

Kane liked to think of himself as a lady's man. He had only been with three girls and a Thai prostitute he met while on R&R from the Army in Thailand. They were a serious couple for the whole four days he was there. She ended up stealing his wallet and he decided to call the whole thing off. It simply was not meant to be. She came in one day, like a cool breeze on a hot summer day. Her name was Wanda Gibbons. She was the new delivery driver for a company in town. She was brazen and magnificent. Like a Greek statue that suddenly came to life.

"My God, she's amazing," he said to Danny, one of his co-workers.

"Wanda? Yeah, I'm pretty sure she's a lesbo, Kane, but go ahead, shoot your shot. Worse she can say is no."

"A lesbian is perfect. She's not used to having men hit on her. I've got the element of surprise on my side."

"I think you're going to need a lot more than that."

Kane played it cool for the next several days, barely making eye contact with her, when she came to his desk to get her papers signed.

One day, he decided to try and hit her up with a little caffeine. She looked exhausted the day before.

"Here you are Wanda, the best cup of Jo in town."

"Oh, thanks, Kane. That was very sweet of you."

"I got plenty more where that came from."

"I'll bet you do. Well, thanks for the coffee."

And just like that, a romance was born. Well, not really. Wanda was in the process of breaking up with her girlfriend and Kane was just a friendly shoulder to cry on. Pretty soon, they were texting back and forth. For a lesbian, she certainly seemed to like the attention Kane was showing her. He was never pushy. Never forced anything on her. He just played it cool and figured when she was ready, it would happen naturally.

After six months, his position hadn't really changed much. They got drunk one night together at her parent's beach house and had sex twice. She told him she had never been with a man before. Kane was on cloud nine. He had even thought of proposing but wanted her to think it was *her idea*, not his. They even took a shower together the next morning. Kane was ecstatic. This relationship was finally going to get off the ground. His patience had finally paid off. The king had gotten his queen. A week later, Wanda told him the news. She was going to give her ex-girlfriend another chance and allow her to move back in. Kane was devastated. Crushed, shattered, and bewildered. This is not how this fairy tale romance was supposed to end.

"Wanda, my dear. We had sex three times if you include the shower! Surely, you can't deny our attraction to one another. Our chemistry is almost electric."

"Kane, I like girls. I mean you're cool and all, but I'm just not the girl for you."

"What are you going to do when she screws up again this time?" he asked

"I don't know, probably cry for a few days and then take her back, just like I always do."

"You can't be serious! You know this won't end well at all."

"I know, I wish I could quit her, but I just can't. *The heart wants what the heart wants*"

Kane was back to square one. Danny saw him sitting on the benches in the break area and sat down next to him.

"What's the matter?"

"Wanda is going back to her ex. The same one who slashed her tires and stole from her."

"Wanda is just one of those girls that loves chaos. You throw a nice guy in front of her, I don't think she would know what to do with him."

"She knew what to do with me, alright," said Kane taking a drag from his vape.

"Kane, you just go to get over her. I don't think she was the right one for you or anyone else," said Danny

"What do you mean?"

"Kane, some people are just too screwed up and dysfunctional to be with anyone. They're probably better off being alone, so they don't wreck the other person's life."

"That's ridiculous, we belong together. It's fate."

"Kane, she likes girls. A lot of guys here have tried to get with her and gotten nowhere. You should be proud of yourself. You did a lot better than most."

"That's still not good enough. I've accepted the challenge. She wants to play hard to get, we can play that game."

"What do you have in mind?"

"The idea came to me last night, like a lightning bolt. Like a signal right from the almighty himself."

"I'm almost afraid to ask."

"I read this book about this Javelin thrower from Australia who competed in the Olympics in England. He didn't have enough money for a plane ticket back home, so he decided to mail himself in a crate back to his country. He actually made it."

"What does that have to do with you?"

"I'm going to mail myself to her house. She's going to open up the box and I'm going to jump out and be like: *You could have had all this, Wanda and you threw it all away!* Then I'm just going to leave. Let it percolate for a few days before I call her."

"You're serious? Are you actually going to mail yourself to her house? That's nuts."

"No, Danny. That's love. See, you've never been in love. You simply wouldn't understand." said Kane.

"I've never mailed myself either, Kane."

"Love can make all of us do crazy things."

"You're in love with Wanda? Kane, she's a lesbian, you can't be in love with somebody who will never love you back."

"She's not a lesbian, just confused is all. Her first boyfriend was terrible to her. Her own father abandoned her and her mother. She's never had a positive experience with a man in her life."

"I don't know, Kane. She looks like a lesbian and acts like one. I think this might be more than just a passing phase here."

"Nonsense. When I look into her eyes, all I see is my future. A future with us together. That future might include her girlfriend as well, but I am definitely in the picture."

"Well, good luck. I'll be pulling for you," said Danny as he left and went back to work.

Kane went back to work, but his mind was elsewhere and everywhere. His plan required a lot of precision timing and planning. He would somehow have to ship himself from the loading dock. The shipping companies his company used were accustomed to delivering packages weighing several hundred pounds to customers. Agricultural equipment can be very heavy. As long as the paperwork was in order, no one would suspect a thing. Why would they?

Cause who the hell would be dumb enough to mail themselves to someone's house?

It took him several days, but he managed to get a hold of an empty shipping crate. He took it home and began to go to work. He put handles on it and even a few air holes in different locations in case he landed in a strange position. He knew there was zero chance of the plan working unless he could get someone to load his crate on the truck. That was the tricky part. He needed someone dependable, intelligent, and willing to offer their help at no additional charge, cause Kane was broke. He knew just the person. The biggest stoner in his high school was *Clark Osbourne*. He hadn't spoken to Clark in a few years and owed him some money for weed, but he had to hope Clark would simply put their differences aside and be willing to help out. Clark was famous for pulling fire alarms in high school when he didn't feel like taking a test. The man was just not built to follow anyone's rules but his own. He knew Clark hung out at a pub downtown and decided to stop by after work.

"Kane Kirkland, well I'll be damned. How are you? Got that five hundred bucks you owe me?"

"Come on Clark, you're not still mad about that are you?"

"I run a business Kane, not a charity. If you don't have my money, then fuck off."

"I'll get you your money. Besides, I'm your best customer."

"You were my best customer until you stopped paying me."

"Just hear me out. I need your help with something. You're the only guy I know who's crazy enough to pull it off."

"This ought to be good," said Clark as he motioned Kane to sit down at his booth.

Clark wasn't sure if Kane was serious or not. It occurred to him that he may seriously want to consider helping him for the simple reason that if he gets arrested or fired, his chances of getting any money out of Kane were back to zero.

"You want to mail yourself to Wanda's house? Are you serious?"

"Of course?"

"That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard. I always thought Wanda was a lesbian?"

"Just confused is all. We were hot and heavy for a while. I think she's the one."

"Kane, isn't mailing yourself kind of dangerous? I mean what happens if you get put in a cargo hold on a plane or something? There's no oxygen in there. You could die."

"She lives ten miles from the warehouse. This is an easy delivery. I'll make sure the driver takes it right from the warehouse to her front porch. The whole thing should take less than half an hour."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Simple. The driver for the delivery service is always in a hurry. As long as the paperwork is correct and the crate loaded, he's not going to suspect anything. Why would he? You just pretend you're me. You hand him the paperwork and make sure you sign it and have the crate loaded and you're done. It should only take like five minutes."

"Who's going to load the crate?" asked Clark

"Well, you are."

"How am I going to do that?"

"With a forklift."

"A forklift? What the hell do I know about running a forklift?"

"It's not that hard, just don't drive off the loading dock."

"So, I do all this for you and I get my money?"

"That's all I ask. You are participating in one of the greatest love stories ever told."

"Are you sure Wanda's not a lesbian? Didn't she get caught in the shower with another girl in high school?"

"So? Are you in or not?"

"What if someone from your company sees me?"

"Just say you're from the temp agency. That's all you got to say."

"Right.....okay Kane, I'll do it, but you better have my money the following afternoon. Meet me right here. Don't make me come looking for you."

"Thanks, Clark, I knew I could count on you."

"I just hope I can count on you," said Clark as he finished his beer. He wasn't really doing this for the money. He knew Kane would never pay him. He just wanted to see how far he could take this. This was an entirely new level of stupidity for Kane.....and that's saying something.

The plan was finally coming together. The pieces were beginning to fall into place. The stars were aligned. It was meant to be and Kane was meant to be with Wanda. Romeo had his Juliet and Kane will have his Wanda. She was glorious and trashy all at the same time. If Cinderella was covered in hundred-dollar tattoos and had pink hair, well that would be his Wanda. She was a diamond in the rough. Kind of like finding gold at the flea market or Goodwill Store. This was going to be a story for the ages. He thought about filming the whole thing, so he could show it to their grandkids, but that would take away some of the magic of it. He wanted the whole thing to be organic.....like a weed growing between the cracks in the pavement.

Thursday afternoon rolled around and Clark was right on cue. Kane could have kissed him he was happy.

"I knew you wouldn't let me down," he said slapping Clark on his back.

"You sure you want to go through with this? It kind of has disaster written all over it," said Clark.

"Clark, remember what President Reagan said after the Challenger disaster?"

"We weren't even born then."

"Yes, but he said the future doesn't belong to the faint of heart, it belongs to the brave."

"Right.....so what do I have to do?"

"There's the forklift. You can ask Ahmed if he can load it for you. Just tell him you're backed up and it's going to be awhile. He keeps a very tight schedule."

"What if that doesn't work?"

"Well, then you have to load me yourself."

"Kane, I don't know how to run a forklift," said Clark

"Clark, it's a forklift, not the space shuttle, I'm sure you'll be fine. Just make sure the bars are under the pallet and don't go too high. You'll be fine."

"Ok, here comes my Oscar!" said Clark

Kane scurried away, back to his makeshift homemade delivery box. He made certain no one was looking, then climbed inside. He secured the hatch bolts and made certain it would not open. He was really doing it. He was going to ship himself to Wanda's house. This is what real love looked like.

Clark only had to interact with two people before it was quitting time. He made certain he was dressed for the part. He had his hard hat and vest on and carried Kane's all-important clipboard. Sure enough at exactly two-thirty, Ahmed showed up. Kane had him sign the paperwork and told him which crate was his.

"It's a local delivery on the other side of town. The customer is a VIP, so make sure it gets there on time."

"Yeah, no problem. Where's Kane?"

"He called in sick, I'm just filling in."

"Gotcha. You mind if I load?" asked Ahmed

"Go for it."

Ahmed had Kane's box loaded onto his truck in less than a minute. He waved goodbye to Clark and took off.

"Mission accomplished. Good luck, dipshit.....you're going to need it." he said and took off his hard hat and vest.

Kane planned for every contingency. He could easily get out of the box if he wanted to, but he didn't want to. Not until he was at Wanda's house. She lived with her mom. Hopefully, mom wouldn't be home. He figured within minutes of him unveiling himself, they would be making passionate love on the nearest piece of furniture. Unfortunately for Kane, his brilliant plan fell a little short. Kane had planned this all out for weeks, only he somehow got Wanda's address backward. Her real address was 7221 West Willow St. Kane had typed 1227 on the shipping papers. That's what Ahmed would use for the delivery address. Wanda's house was in a pretty nice part of the city. 1227 West Willow St. was in the worst part of the city possible. Much of the neighborhood was abandoned to the gangs. Fifty years ago, it was the nicest part of the city, now it was the worst. Most nights, the police didn't even bother patrolling it. They would only be called when someone found a dead body or corpse in one of the alleys. This tiny mistake would have huge implications for Kane and his plan. He wasn't going to Wanda's house.....he was going to someone else's house. They were not going to be glad to see him, not by any stretch of the imagination.

Ahmed looked at the house and at first thought there had to be a mistake, but the address was listed on separate shipping labels and the delivery ticket. This place looked like a crack house. What the hell were they doing buying farm equipment? Undeterred, he walked up to the steps and rang the bell. A moment later, a man with a ponytail answered the front door.

"The fuck you want?"

"I've got a delivery for you."

"Huh? I wasn't expecting one." said the man

"This is 1227 West Willow St.....right?"

"Yeah. Okay, bring it in, maybe it's something we can actually use."

Ahmed's job ended at the front door. He had a sneaky feeling that if the man didn't get the package in his house, he would refuse delivery. That made for a rather complicated day. He would have to drive to the return center which was a few hours away. That meant overtime. That meant him having to deal with his obnoxious supervisor. That meant trouble. His best option was to use the electric dolly to bring it into the house. As long as the stairs could handle it. He moved the package onto his tailgate and lowered it to the ground. He used the electric dolly to move it up the stairs, through the front door, and into the living room. The man in the house never even bothered to help. It was tough, but he made it in the house.

"Good work. No idea what it is?"

"Nope. I just deliver it."

The man said nothing and continued to stare at the box

"Right....so will you sign now?"

"The man took the clipboard and signed it without even looking. Ahmed said nothing and walked out the front door. The vibe in that place was creepy AF. He scanned it as delivered and the addresses matched with his delivery log. He knew that guy didn't order it, but that was not his problem.

That was someone else's problem for a different day.

Kane was ready to make his grand appearance. He made some peepholes to see out of, but he was literally upside down in the box. He waited until he heard what he thought to be Wanda's voice. He was inside the house. The hard part had been done. Now it was time for the grand finale. He thought he might have to wait a while for Wanda to come home. He saw a woman move past his little peephole. It had to be Wanda.

He would recognize those tan legs anywhere. It was go time. This was the final act of their fairy tale romance.

"SURPRISE!" he shouted as he unbolted the top and shot out.

He turned around and saw a young lady smoking a joint on the couch, watching TV. She took a deep hit and just stared at him.

"Is Wanda here?"

"I don't know. Who the hell is Wanda?" she asked

"Wanda Gibbons. Redhead. Big boobs. Killer smile. The love of my life." said Kane

"Does she like to get high?"

"I don't think so. Wait.....did you mail yourself to her?"

"Yes."

The girl started laughing. Pretty soon she was laughing so hard, she nearly fell off the couch. Kane climbed out of the box and looked at the shipping papers. It took him a moment to realize his mistake.

"This is 1227.....not 7221?"

The girl just looked at him and continued to laugh harder. The ponytail man came back into the room eating mac and cheese out of a pot.

"Who the hell is this?"

The girl tried her best to compose herself.

"Wait till you hear this. This is the funniest shit ever. This dumb ass actually mailed himself to his chick's house, only he got the address wrong."

The ponytail man just started to laugh as well. Kane felt pretty foolish at that moment. His grandiose scheme had come apart at the seams.

"I think I'd better be going," he said

"What's the rush? Stick around for a while. You like to get high?" asked the man

"Um no.....last time I got high, I got kicked out of the army."

"No shit.....me too. I sold my CO some bad acid. Guess that was a big whoopsie."

"Right.....well, I'll just be on my way then. I've got a fairy tale romance that needs to get itself going."

"You should stick around. Have you ever shot up heroin? It's like being held in God's arms. No other feeling like it."

"Yeah, thanks but no thanks. I'll be on my way."

Just as Kane was about to leave, he saw a young girl wearing nothing but a bra and panties in the kitchen. The look on her face said it all. Kane had seen the same look while out on patrol in Africa with the 82ns Airborne. He could see the looks on the faces of the natives. The look was unmistakable.

Please, God, help me.

Kane quickly looked away. He knew then at that moment what he had to do. He may not be the sharpest tool in the shed.....*but even he could clearly see there was something not right about this place.*

He walked quickly down the steps. As he turned the corner, he dialed 911. That poor girl's face was now seared into his mind, like an image on the TV screen. He waited until he was back out on the street. He stepped into a bodega and asked to use the phone. The old man behind the

counter seemed reluctant at first, but the look on Kane's face was enough to convince him. He handed Kane a small cordless phone.

"Hi, my name is.....well, I'd like to make an anonymous report. You guys really need to investigate the house at 1227 West Willow St. There's a lot of drugs and weird stuff going on in there. You might want to hurry." he said and hung up quickly.

"Thanks, Man."

Kane called Clark and asked him if he could come pick him up.

"You got my money?"

"We'll go to the bank. I can give you half."

"You better not be jerking me around."

"I'm not."

"How'd it go?"

"I'm not really sure. I got the address wrong. I got delivered to the wrong house."

"Only you Kane.....only you."

"Can you come and get me? I don't think white people are supposed to be in this part of the city."

"I'll be there, then we go straight to the bank."

"Sure. Corner of Fifth and Primm. Right next to Zasky Park."

"I got it. You really shipped yourself to the wrong house huh? Classic Kane."

"Just get here as fast as you can..... Oh and whatever you do, don't tell Wanda."

Kane could see the old man was about out of patience. He hung up and gave him the phone back. He waited in the store for nearly half an hour for Clark to show up. Kane got in the front seat.

"I didn't recognize the number, I almost didn't pick up. I can't believe you went through all this, only to get dropped off at the wrong house. That's hilarious. You got delivered to the wrong house." said Clark

Kane looked out the window as they drove past the dilapidated house on West Willow. He saw several police cars outside the house. The pony-tailed man was being handcuffed against a police car.

"No bud, you know, I'm starting to think maybe I got delivered to the right house after all."