

## **The Suit**

Eric Ward was never the same man when he put on the suit. It was a three-piece, black pinstripe with a notched lapel. A silk kerchief, deep crimson, sat Presidential in the jacket pocket with a tie to match. The Homberg on his head carried the proper tilt. He never checked the mirror. It just felt right. This was a suit for winners. A deal closer. That's what his father would have said: a suit you wear when you want to Get Things Done.

Today was that day.

At the door, Eric retrieved his briefcase: a standard, black attaché with a bit of heft to it. He liked the weight of it. Always had. It sat by the door every night, part of his vow to keep his work out of the house so he could spend more time on the things that mattered.

This was a family home, after all. Two kids, a happy wife, a loving dog. He rocked his feet on the hardwood floor inside the foyer. It creaked beneath his weight. A good, familiar sound. Tangible and reliable, just like his family.

Just before 8:00, Eric started his morning commute. He drove to the local car park, boarded the bus, and headed into town. He stepped off just west of 4th and Main, three blocks from the Financial District. The bus ran every fifteen minutes. Eric set the briefcase down, adjusted his shirt sleeves to the proper half-inch length, and set a mental timer.

Fifteen minutes was all he needed.

He checked left, right, left at the crosswalk before his polished, black oxfords graced the pavement. He crossed 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> without breaking stride, like Moses himself walking unhindered across a sea of honking horns and purring engines. At the corner of the Café Americano, he paused, watched the door. Errol Clark was stepping out with his morning coffee. The man took a sip, turned in his direction.

Right on schedule.

Eric tested the weight of his briefcase and began his approach. He gauged the distance and the angle, corrected himself to make the best possible impression. First impressions mattered, that's what his father would've said. That was the truth of it in this game, anyway: not how the business was handled but the impression that it made.

"Errol Clark?" Eric said, just loud enough to caress the ears. His voice was soft, generic, his face no different from a dozen other faces in the crowd. Clark looked up. Eric never broke his stride.

"The Institute sends its regards."

Eric tapped the button beneath the handle of the briefcase. He felt a small section of the attaché drop away, revealing the muzzle within. The gun coughed once, twice, and Errol Clark toppled onto the ground, blood trickling down his pristine, white shirt. Eric strode past the lifeless body, headed down to 8th. Screams and shouts erupted behind him as recognition swept through the crowd.

Eric smiled. If only the dead could talk.

At the corner, he turned right and started around the block, back toward the bus stop. He kept his head down, just another businessman, just another face. With a little luck, he would

make it before the sirens rang out. As he crossed 7th, he heard something else.

Something worse.

“Eric Ward?”

It was soft, that voice. Generic. Just loud enough to caress the ears.

He looked up.

“The Institute sends its regards.”

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