

The Brass Briefcase

By : **HonestyAndCapacity**

Imagine if you were given the chance to earn \$200,000 at the risk of your life. Would you leave your fate in such a dangerous situation? How would everything unravel? Who would you trust? This story is an example that answers all of these questions and more.

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I headed outside at the peak of dawn to go on one of my routine walks. The violet hue the day brought used to gather inspiration for novels that were called "masterpieces" by highly acclaimed critics. However, I've been getting a severe case of writer's block recently. Anyone who is an author or poet will agree with me when I say that it's the worst problem we can possibly have. This goes especially for me, since it's the only thing I have to pay for the bills, which are becoming more of a problem for me.

Several minutes into my walk, a limousine rolled right next to me. I shrugged it off, assuming it's some rich guy passing through town. But my hypothesis was quickly disproven when it rolled up and honked twice. There was no denying that whoever was in there wanted me for something. He most likely wanted directions to a meeting that he was running late to. I gradually approached the vehicle as it sunk its tinted back window. As the glass descended, an Oriental woman in a business suit came into view.

"You need directions?" I asked.

"No thanks," she replied. "What I need is more of a favor."

"A favor? Well, what do you have in mind?"

"I need a briefcase to be delivered to somebody across town."

I was stunned by her request. Why would she trust me, a total stranger, to help her complete a business venture? "Uh...don't you have assistants to do that type of thing for ya? I mean, I don't even know who you are."

The lady gave out a deep, aggravated sigh. "Listen, I don't have time to hear you talk. When you hold up your end of the deal, I'll pay you two hundred thousand dollars. Of course I won't pay you directly, but I'll call the person meeting you to write out the check. How does that sound?"

I lost concentration after the words "two hundred thousand dollars" left her mouth. Was this for real? Was this a gift from God? More importantly, would I be safe? Something that valuable doesn't come without a few other greedy customers trying to put their hands on the product. I wanted to ask her about anything I should be worried about, but I was too dumbfounded by her offer to say anything.

"It's not safe," she said, breaking the awkward silence.

"What?"

"I know what you're thinking, and I can't lie to you. When you have the suitcase, you will be in a lot of danger. That's why you need to have it hidden somewhere. Like the trunk of your car. You have a car, right?"

"No I-I take the bus."

"Jesus Christ. Fine, I guess you'll have to take the bus. Just don't lose it. Or else you'll have to talk to some of my assistants."

"Don't worry, I won't."

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“Good.” She pulled out a small piece of paper from her blazer pocket and handed it to me. “Here’s the time and place to meet the guy you’re looking for. He’ll spot you once he sees you.” Prior to her departure, she passed me a ridiculously bright suitcase. Brass coated all of the case’s sides. The ruby lock looked like it belonged on a deadbolt door handle. I wasn’t given the key to it though. *They probably didn’t want me to snoop around in their business. Maybe the person I’m meeting does.* That was fine by me. I didn’t want to know anymore than she gave me. I stared in astonishment as I wrapped my hand around the fine leather handle. At that moment, her chauffeur drove off. I glanced at what I was holding a second time. It was actually lighter than I imagined, yet it was still fairly heavy. How come she trusted *me* to handle her business, especially if it’s as important as she says? A million questions floated my mind, but I forced myself into focusing on the money.

My eyes studied her cursive handwriting.

Kube Caf 

129 West Nobel Lane

Meet NO LATER than 9:40 AM

My watch was reading 6:12 AM. “This is going to be as easy as a prostitute,” I said to myself. The Kube was only an hour away, thirty if the bus arrived early enough. I sauntered a couple blocks until I was next to the bus sign. Leaning on the pole, I further inspected the case. My pupils eventually started to sting from staring at it so long.

I didn’t have to wait long for the semi-crowded bus to come. I swiped my bus pass and took an empty seat in the back. Something felt wrong. Everyone was staring at me. At first, I didn’t know what was so interesting. Then the realization of the briefcase sticking out like a sore thumb popped into my head. I clutched onto my road to fortune a little tighter, becoming more paranoid of their possible intentions. My focus was mainly on a teenager who was greedily eyeing the suitcase.

Approximately ten to fifteen stops later, I pulled the yellow cord, signaling my stop. I picked myself up and went out the back door. I forced myself to ignore the twenty or so commuters, who kept their minds on what I held in my left hand. Without looking back, I arrived on the block where Kube Caf  was. I sauntered down the block, when the same adolescent I was suspicious of stole the briefcase from behind me. He darted in the opposite with me on his tail. In spite of him being a thieving scumbag, I had to respect him on how fast he was. Even a former track star like me could barely keep him in my sight, let alone catch him. My chest felt like it was going to detonate like a box of explosives. We both shoved civilians out of our way for the duration of the pursuit. At one point the kid drove his shoulder into a policeman’s stomach, who tried to join in on our pursuit. This resulted in the cop staggering off of the sidewalk and onto the path of an oncoming car. A strident *screech*, along with the chilling sound of the cop’s body getting hit by the speeding vehicle resonated from the road.

The chase continued in an alley that he turned off into. The opening was extremely narrow, however, my body managed to fit through with no resistance from the dilapidated brick walls that surrounded the passageway. Once through, I found myself in a small courtyard that possessed flipped over trash bins and a deceased cat missing an arm. Revolting as the area may be, my attention was still concerned apropos the objective at hand. When I spotted my target, he was on a fire escape pulling up the ladder. I rushed to him, in the back of mind hoping I’ll be able to grab the ladder.

As I jumped, my hand extended for my target. A fingertip grazed the ladder’s bottom rung before gravity dragged me down back to earth.

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“Get back here you damn coward! I’ll rip your face in two!” The robber, unaltered by my threat, continued up the stairs without so much as replying back to me. The money, all of it, was gone. I didn’t know how to cope with such a loss. Yet that wasn’t the worst part. What if she discovered I lost the bag and her employees killed me? Even though there was a small chance that she’d find me, there, nonetheless, was *still* a chance. Self-induced panic quickly became a problem solving process. I grabbed one of the trash bins and placed it under the fire escape. I cautiously stood on the lid, preparing myself for a personal record-breaking hop. There was no margin for error. I jolted upwards, barely catching the rung. I pulled myself onto the platform, silently enjoying my achievement. My feet heaved my body up the staircase, ascending at a rapid pace. Little by little, I came closer to the rooftop.

Exhausted, I finally reached the top of the staircase. I hopped onto the guardrail, being careful not to hit the pavement seven stories below me. I threw myself in the air and grabbed the ledge. The feeling of concrete bumps piercing themselves through my hands gave me a great deal of comfort. I yanked my body up and onto the roof. The adolescent was nowhere to be seen. I don’t know where else he could’ve gone. All of the other walls around me were too high to scale. The door to the roof access was locked. In reality, the only way he could have escape was to jump off of the roof. He wasn’t *that* desperate to stay out of trouble though. Was he?

I walked over to the facade of the building, not expecting what I saw next. It was the adolescent, lying in a pool of his own blood. Bystanders slowly started to circle around the corpse. Some videotaped the carcass, others just stared in shock. A nun said a prayer or two and moved her hand in a crucifix motion. I felt awful for the kid, I really did, but that money had to be mine. I didn’t know how I was going to get past an angry mob of people, but I’ll manage somehow.

Once I descended back onto the ground, I went around the building and found myself mixed in the commotion. I moved past the individuals in the crowd until my shoes stepped in the sluggishly flowing red liquid. I flipped his stiff on its back. The details of his mangled body was as clear as day. Bones stuck out from his limbs. His jaw was contorted to one side, his nose on the other side. Blood profusely ran from his mouth and wounds. I cringed at everything I saw and felt. Observing all of this made me want to leave him undefiled. Taking the briefcase was easier said than done when I wasn’t this close to the gory mess. I was angry at the boy, but he was still young. Nevertheless, the two hundred grand dollars. I didn’t know what to do.

I didn’t know what came over my decision, but I decided to go for what was good for my wallet. The moment I reached his body, people were wondering about what I was doing. A few of them asked me about my intentions. Instead of answering their inquiries, I abruptly seized the suitcase and ran off. It goes without saying that most of them were appalled by my actions. As fast as I took what I needed, I jolted away. A couple people tried to stop me, but breaking through the circle of bystanders wasn’t a big issue. I sprinted as far and as quickly as I could.

Out of range from anyone who could be seen as a threat, I slowed down my pace. I gave a second glance at my watch.

7:45. I guess I’m still making good time. Nonetheless, I was concerned that people might recognize my face. It’s probably for the best to stick to the alleys. I maneuvered through the crevices of the area, making my way from block to block. Before moving to another block, I would dip my head in a pitiful attempt to hide my identity. Doing this surprisingly helped me blend in among the crowd without any trouble. On one occasion, I ended up at the accident that killed the cop. A news van just pulled up on the street, ready to interview the officers that were holding a horde of people at bay. My mind was set at ease by the disturbance. It may have been unnecessary to hide my face prior to coming here, but it was better to be safe than sorry. Now that I was here, I felt safe. As anticipated, I made it past the commotion and into

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the next alleyway. Even though crossing the street wasn't a problem, I became wary of my surroundings.

I wasn't alone. My intuition confirmed that.

Heavy footsteps echoed mine as I entered the alleyway. I turned around, predicting another robber to be behind me. The narrow walls that led to the street were the only things I saw. Paranoia struck me for a second time. I *knew* someone was following me. Continuing the walk, I kept an eye out for whoever it was. No matter where I looked, no one came into view. Yet, the footsteps sounded like they were coming closer to me. And closer. And closer. Suddenly, I bumped into a body.

"AH!" I yelped. I jerked back and fell flat on the concrete. This only accomplished me feeling ridiculously foolish for letting an old man taking out the trash scare me. He showed more fear on his face than I did. He glared at me bug-eyed before coming back down to earth.

"Oh, uh, sorry about that," I said, feeling embarrassed. I got back up, brushing off any dirt that got on me.

"No worries mate," He replied. "You need any help?"

"No thanks. I'm good."

"That's great to hear. What about your case?"

"What?"

"Your case. It looks very important. People might go around stealing it and what not."

"People have. Trust me you don't know half of the story."

Then out of nowhere, something whizzed past my left ear. I clasped onto my ear, dazed from the deafening ring that was trapped inside it. Next thing I know, the elder was lying on the ground with a tiny red circle on his forehead. Was he shot?

I spun around and spotted a man in a black suit and tie at the end of the alley. The barrel of his gun was smoking from the blast. His shades obscured the emotions in his eyes. He progressed towards me, possibly having the same intent as the formerly alive teenager. My mind told my body to get the hell out of here, but my feet refused its orders. Instead, they glued themselves to the concrete. I was too frightened to move. Everything was just happening so fast. The leather handle clutched in my hands was coated with sweat. It took several seconds till my legs were able to get into gear. The minute they did, I sprinted in the opposite direction.

An earsplitting noise unexpectedly shot out from behind me. Then, sharp, fiery pain stabbed my left thigh. My knees buckled, but I quickly recovered and limped forward. A warm stream of blood tickled the hairs on my leg. The same substance also left a noticeably growing blotch of crimson on my pants. Hot pavement met the palms of my hands. No good can come from being on all fours while a deranged lunatic was in hot pursuit. That being said, it was the only way I could support my injured body. Lying in an alleyway was only going to accomplish more suffering. As I struggled for freedom, he grabbed me and flung me at the wall, both hands holding me up.

"Where's the key?" he sternly asked.

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“I don’t have it,” I replied.

He gave me a powerful blow to the stomach. “WHERE’S THE KEY?!”

I answered his question in coughs.

“WHERE.” He punched me again.

“IS.” And again.

“IT!?” And again.

At this point, I was more than convinced to take him to the man who had it. \$200,000 wasn’t worth my life. I also have the woman in the limousine and her briefcase to thank for these agonizing wounds, which scarred me both mentally and physically. I don’t know why she gave it to me; it’s given me nothing but trouble.

“Just don’t lose it. Or else you’ll have to talk to some of my assistants.” Her voice struck my brain like a bat cracking against someone’s skull. *“Great, I’m dead either way,”* I thought to myself.

“Not exactly. I mean she didn’t say you were going to die.”

“Do you hear yourself? Why are you so naïve about all of this?”

The other side of my conscious fell silent. It didn’t want to accept the fact that death was the only passage out of this situation. During the fast-paced argument going on inside my head, the well-dressed man let go of my flaccid body. When I sat up, his face met mine. I tried to scurry away; however, his grip overpowered my strength. So I was left with no choice but to face him. He reached for his shades, taking them off with one swift motion. Horror wept over my face.

“Now, I’m not going to hurt you,” he said in a calm, mundane tone. An endless wave of worms slithered out of his eye sockets. *“Yeah, like I believe you,”* I thought. I was baffled at how controlled he became after he took his sunglasses off. Making me see the wretched ugliness in his eyes was probably more than enough to express his anger. Filthy earthworms dripped from his pale flesh. A rancid odor of what smelled like a combination of dog feces and fried chicken emitted from his scorching breath. The stench crawled down my throat, making me almost suffocate. “I-I just want the key to the briefcase. Then no one will get hurt.”

“I’m telling you. I don’t have possession of the key. If you just listen,”

“No, *you* listen. I can do much worse things to you than just shoot you. I was merciful on the boy who stole that from you.”

I stared at him in shock. He killed that poor kid, over a briefcase of all things. Just pushed him off the roof like it was nothing. I may not have been there, but the scene was as clear in my mind as daylight.

The murderer hid behind the roof access shed, waiting for his moment to strike. The thief didn’t know where to go after he reached the roof. He goes to the edge, checking out the empty street. All of the commotion is focused on the dead cop a couple blocks down from his location. He felt guilty for doing something so heinous. His instincts just took over. Out of nowhere, the predator comes out of his hiding spot and swings the adolescent by the collar of his shirt over the edge. The kid loses his balance, heels no

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longer on the ground. He flails both arms, trying to regain his stability. He's too frightened to scream. His psyche was lost in the moment, never coming across putting such logic into action. Instead, he whispered for mercy.

Yup, begged for his life when I dangled him over the ledge. I took great pleasure in ending his sad, pathetic excuse of a life. So don't think I won't kill you. I'll search your intestines just to find what I know you have. If you give me what I need, you'll never have to see me again.

I'll don't have it.

LIAR! He raised his fist over his head and started to bring it down.

Wait! Honestly, I didn't think I could take another beating from this man. He has the punching power of a professional boxer. I don't have the key. But I can take you to the man who does.

He clinched my shirt. Where is he?

A-At the Kube Caf . I'll take you to him if you want.

Yeah, let's do that. He lifted me back up. As he was regaining his standing posture, a handful of earthworms poured out of his eyes. He put his sunglasses on and proceeded ahead, expecting me to trail behind him. He probably knew where the restaurant was, so I didn't need to give him a tour. The instant I walked, my left leg buckled. An aching roar escaped my lips. I fell to the ground, unable to get up. The gentleman in the suit angrily walked to me, fist balled so tightly they turned pink.

What's the problem? He knelt down to take a good look at my wound.

My knee. It hurts like hell.

He rolled up his sleeves and waved his hands inches from the bloody hole in my leg. A burning sensation soon followed. I gritted my teeth, unaware of what he was doing. He brought his hands away from my leg. I didn't believe it.

It was gone. The gash the pain that came with it. Vanished.

Better?

I guess. How did you,

Good. Now let's go. I'm tired of screwing around here.

He advanced to the end of the narrow path. I grabbed the briefcase and reluctantly tracked behind him. On the way to our destination, I passed the two cadavers without so much as getting a glimpse of interest at them. Today was a day he concept of death was all too known for me. Now when I look at them, they simply look dull. No meaning. No remorseful feelings. Only the insipid vibe from seeing murder filled my heart.

Once we were across the street from the Kube Caf , we gave one last glare at each other.

Alright, give me the brass. I obeyed his command, devoid of any resistance or second thought whatsoever. He returned a quick nod, and then headed over to the caf . A guy sitting at a table at the far end outside the restaurant whistled at the monstrous example of a human being, and gave a gesture to come to

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where he was seated. They shook hands and began their session. During their meeting, a compelling case of curiosity hit me. I couldn't help but to listen in on their conversation. I knew it was a terrible idea; I should've run when I had the chance, however, I felt like I needed to find out what was inside that briefcase. The client opened the lid of the brass suitcase. I wasn't sure if it was just me, but it seemed like the luggage produced a dark glow that washed over the customer's body. He developed a crooked grin, a grin displaying one missing lateral incisor on his upper jaw. I squinted both of my eyes once I was near the velvet rope that was used as the entrance to the restaurant. I barely made out the words "It looks like it's all here," flee from his mouth.

Two seconds after, the devilish human being fired his gun from under the table, killing the person at the opposite end. Panic and confusion immediately presented themselves in the civilians at the restaurant. Some fled the scene. Some concealed under tables. Before I could react, the suited gentleman stood up, tossed the gun in my hands, and said to me, "I owe you one." The briefcase was now in his possession, the gun no longer was. *But why did he give his gun to me? I didn't need it nor did I want it.* As soon as this thought entered my mind, he was no longer in my field of vision.

"Freeze!"

Startled by the sudden burst, I turned around, hands in the air. Two police officers had their guns on me. "Drop your weapon and leave your hands in the air."

I strained attempting to open the fingers that were clasped around the handle of the pistol. *What the hell is going on, I thought. What did he do to me? Why was it so difficult to drop the piece of metal?*

"I said drop it!"

"Sir, I can't. You see, this guy,"

"Drop it!"

"Please, I'm begging you,"

"NOW!"

"I'm trying!"

"Do it or we will shoot!"

"If you just listen to me," Foolishly, I pointed my arm, and the gun, at them. In quick response, they riddled me with bullets. My body danced as each piece of lead jerked me around. Once I hit the ground, I experienced a torturous rush comparable to being burned alive. My blurred vision caught a peek of gallons of blood exiting my body. Then, darkness soundlessly overcame me.

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