

# Ordinary Heroes

## Chapter 1

President Walter Beckman sighed, and sat back heavily in the seat of the presidential limousine as it drove through the slushy, dreary streets of Geneva Switzerland. His chief of staff was silent for a time as they drove.

"It's not your fault Walt," he said. Kanuparanabam just isn't moving with this."

"I know that," President Beckman gestured impatiently. "You know that. All of Pakistan knows that, but do you think that our own press is going to acknowledge that?"

"No."

"Damned right they won't," Beckman shook his head. "Did you see Kristine Robertson last night on 'Today's America'? She practically came right out, and said that it was my fault they were starving to death in India."

"So what do we do next? We've already tried all of the economic sanctions we got, and still \_"

Suddenly from outside came a series of rapid pops, like popcorn, or a loud zipper coming apart. President Beckman sat forward in his seat and peered out of the windshield, but all he could see was the blinding snow and sleet. The secret service car ahead of them erupted in flames with a shattering roar.

"Down! Down!" The secret service agent in the front seat shouted through the small window in the limousine as he pulled out his automatic pistol. Behind them, the other secret service car exploded in a ball of flames. The President's limousine skidded sideways as the driver swerved, trying to avoid the flaming wreckage in front of him.

"What ... What's happening?" The chief of staff stuttered terrified. The secret service agent next to him drew his revolver and pushed both him and the President down. He thrust the revolver through the window and shot the other agent in the head. Then with a single motion, he turned around and shot the chief of staff in the head.

The color drained from Beckman's face, and he swallowed hard as he looked up at the revolver pointing straight at him.

"Just sit very still, Mr. President, and you might just live through this day." The agent pressed the revolver's muzzle to the president's head. "Just sit very, very still."

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Brian Handly sat in the seedy living room of his run-down apartment and stared out at the brick wall through his only window. He swirled his glass of Jim Beam and watched the ice cubes tinkle back and forth on the sides of the glass, sourly reflecting on the events that led to his fall from grace. The computer screen in front of him flickered.

He downed the rest of the whiskey and set his glass beside the monitor. Sighing heavily, he rubbed his unshaven face. Time to get back to work.

He typed erratically for a time, entering data from a sheet of marketing demographics for a breakfast food company. The phone rang, startling him. He swore softly and stared malevolently at the empty bottle of Jim Beam on the table. His supervisor usually called every night at this time to check on how he was doing. He let it ring for a moment while he shuffled through the

pile of papers on his desk to find the one that his supervisor always needed him to refer to. Finally, he found it and held it up in front of him, staring at it boozily.

"Hi Jack," he said into the phone, trying to maintain an even voice.

"Brian?" the caller asked.

"Pete?" Handly gasped. "Is that you?"

"Yeah. It's me. Been a long time."

"Yeah, a long time all right." Handly sat stunned. Suddenly, all of the oaths, speeches and fine, clever obscenities he vowed he'd say to this man if he ever had the chance were gone, and all he could say was, "How you been?"

"Oh fine, just fine. How have you been?"

"Fine." Handly leaned back self-consciously, and glanced at the brick wall out the window. "Real good as a matter-of-fact. I've got this consulting firm nowadays, and I'm making some real money now. I just got a line on a couple of potential famous clients just yesterday –"

"Like Tony the Tiger?"

Handly hung his head and briefly considered throwing the phone out the window. He swallowed hard and consoled himself by kicking the empty bottle of Jim Beam off the small, rickety table. "So what do you want, Pete?" he snarled.

"I want you to come back to work for me."

"What? Why? Why should I ever want to do that Pete, when the last time, you –"

"I know how you must be feeling, Brian. I'd be bitter too if I were in your position, but you got to understand –"

"Understand what? That you ruined my life? That you literally threw me to the wolves when it suited you?"

"It's not that easy, Brian. In my position, you wind up doing some pretty unsavory things for your country." Handly stood up, seething with rage. He took a deep breath in preparation for hurling all of his rehearsed speeches into the phone and then hanging up vehemently with a righteous wrath. "Your country? I did some pretty ugly things too you know! For your country! It's my country too, and how did you, Pete, the head of the CIA, a representative of my country, treat me?"

"They've kidnapped the President, Brian."

"They *what*?" Handly gasped.

"Hamid Al-Basra is holding the President somewhere in the desert. He's going to have him beheaded on national television."

"They're going to do *what*? My God. When?"

"Don't know yet. Your country needs you, Brian. He needs you."

"I didn't vote for the guy."

"I need to know if you're going to do this thing, Brian. It's your chance to get everything back again."

"Same job as before?"

"Same thing."

"I want \$250,000 sent to my parents so they can replace the house and business they lost trying to defend me during my trial."

"Done."

"My back pay for the last three years."

"No problem."

Handly paused for a long moment, considering. "I'll see you at Langley in the morning," he said finally.

"There's a car waiting outside right now to take you to the airport for my personal jet."

Handly felt a flash of anger. "You knew I'd do it, you son-of-a –"

"You're a good man, Brian. I always knew that. I know it doesn't mean a whole lot anymore, but I tried the best I could to protect you during the trial."

"I don't believe you."

"You aren't in prison are you?"

"But that was because the judge –"

"No, it was because of me. I arranged that."

Handly hung up angrily and flopped back down again on the sofa with his mouth open, stunned for a long moment. Finally, he picked up the phone again and quickly dialed a number.

"Jack?" He picked up his jacket, and put it on. "Yeah. Listen, about this job here? Yeah. I *quit!*"