



JEFF SOMERS

**THE
BOUNCER**
a novel

The Bouncer

27.

I felt rather than heard Patsy finally roar through the window, but it was too late. Gravity wasn't the big man's friend. I pulled myself onto the first landing of the fire escape as two shots exploded below me. I kept moving, running up the old, rusted stairs to the second floor, where Lisa was ushering Ivan through her bedroom window.

"Unlocked windows. Very dangerous," Jill said in-between breaths. She was pressed against the wall on one side of the window, still holding what I was certain was an empty gun. "How long you lived here, girl?"

"Right behind me," I said.

"Is it too late to time travel back a few days and tell you to go fuck yourself?" Jill said, scrambling through the window.

"Come on, *mijo*," Lisa urged. Another shot cracked the cold night air. I hustled through the window into a soft, pink light. Lisa's bedroom was the same size as my own, a small space barely big enough for a twin bed and a stick or two of furniture. But she'd made it into a cozy, warm space with a piece of red fabric over a lamp and some serious investment in linens. I instantly felt surreally relaxed.

She climbed in after me and pushed me out of the way. Kneeling down, she reached under her bed and pulled out a roll of gray blanket. She dropped it on the bed and unrolled it, revealing three pump-action shotguns, two automatic handguns, and a shoebox filled with ammunition.

“Jesus, lady,” Jill said.

Lisa began loading one of the shotguns. “Come on,” she said. “No time for receipts.”

Ivan hefted his bat and stood by the window. “No thanks, mamasita,” he said. “I ain’t touched a gun in my life and I’m not starting now.”

I grabbed one of the handguns. Shotguns would be a liability in close-up fights and tight spaces.

“You got 45s in there?” Jill asked. I picked up a box and tossed it to her. For a moment, there was nothing but the sound of clicks and snaps as we loaded and reloaded. Outside, yelling and whistling.

As I turned away from everyone to check the chamber, A figure filled the bedroom window and leaned inside. I froze, staring at a broad-shouldered Black guy with a thick, square King Tut beard.

A moment later, Ivan swung the bat, smacking the guy in the chest with an audible *thump*. He rocketed backward, and there was a screeching cry as he tumbled over the railing and fell.

Behind me, I heard three shotguns rack. “C’mon!” Lisa shouted.

I tapped Ivan on the shoulder and jerked my head. He nodded and followed everyone else out of the room. I took up the rear, walking backwards, gun warming in my hand, eyes on the

window. As I stepped through the doorway, I saw a flicker of movement, so I squeezed the trigger and sent a bullet after it.

Lisa's kitchen was immaculate, and smelled like ammonia. I stumbled into her table, my eyes on the back window. Flashes of movement made my heart skip beats, but no one stepped into the window's frame. They were trying to draw my fire.

A hand on my shoulder. "Come on, Mads," Jill whispered. "Here we go."

I let her guide me to the door, and then through. I pulled it shut behind me and spun. Luis stepped forward, the shotgun held low by his hip where it would cause him some serious pain when he fired it. He walked past the stairs heading up to the landing.

Three shots. Luis spun, the shotgun going off. We crashed to the floor, and I felt the sting of a few stray bits of birdshot. When I looked up a second later, Luis was staring back at me from the floor, the top of his head a bloody ruin.