



**JEFF SOMERS**

**THE  
BOUNCER**  
a novel

# The Bouncer

## 31.

I may have screamed out her name. I wasn't sure.

You get used to people. They're in your life, they live six blocks away, they're always in your phone, your DMs, your old photos. They become fixtures. Furniture. Always there, never thought about.

I had a photo of Jill on my phone. I'd moved it from phone to phone over the years, making a point of it. For a while it had been my screen background, but Carrie hadn't approved, so I'd moved it. But it was always there, in my gallery, no matter what. It was Jill at a party, smoking a cigarette with an exaggerated pose of haughty elegance, smoke in the air all around her. It flashed through my mind.

I ran for the edge, ignoring the gunshots, the grunts, the sounds of combat around me. Just as I reached Patsy, hands found me, pulling me back. A voice hissed in my ear.

"Where ya goin' Renik?"

Another set of hands on me. I struggled, trying to pull away. They pushed me down, letting their weight do the work. With my arms controlled I couldn't get sufficient leverage to do anything.

I stared over Patsy's body at the spot where Jill had vanished.

There was a dull, solid sound, and the hands on me disappeared. I spun in time to see Lisa smack my old friend Milky in the head with her baton, a solid, cracking hit that spun him around, a tooth flying free. She stood there, sweat dripping off of her, baton pointed up at the sky, a fucking Valkyrie.

Bodies slumped on the roof, but our chokepoint strategy had worked. Ivan and Tony crouched on opposite sides of the door, hands on their knees as they sucked in air. Ivan's bat was bloody. Seven bodies slumped on the roof's silver surface.

I lumbered to my feet and staggered for the edge. I crashed into the low wall next to Patsy and leaned over, staring down into the mass of branches and leaves. The backyard had always been a jungle, and it had swallowed her whole.