



**JEFF SOMERS**

**THE  
BOUNCER**  
a novel

# The Bouncer

36.

It felt like something heavy had smacked into my side, half-spinning me and knocking me off balance. I felt flushed, then cold, and my legs got weak. A moment later a searing pain bloomed in my ribs and the air got jellied and impossible to breath, the floor looked comfortable. I laid down, faster than I'd intended. I closed my eyes, just for a moment.

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The ceiling of Lisa's apartment was cracked and yellowed from old water stains. You could put together a history of the 293 just by walking through it, noting all the damage. A storm here. A fight here. Furniture moved here.

Ivan's sweating face, my legs under each arm. "Stay with me, kid," he said between breaths.

I twisted my head around. I was leaving a slime trail of blood behind on Lisa's nice clean floors. She was going to kill me.

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The cold liquid made me surge up from nothing and splutter, eyes stinging, nose burning with a minty smell. I tried to raise my right hand to my face and winced from a sudden lance of pain down my side. I scrubbed with my left hand and paused, head pounding.

“Mouthwash?”

Ivan nodded. “Had to wake you up. They’re in the apartment. I think you nailed that asshole, but he’s got backup.”

I tried to orient myself. I looked down. My shirt hung off me in tatters; Ivan had bandaged me up with a wad of sterile pads and some tape he’d raided from Lisa’s medicine cabinet, already soaked red. I was sitting on the toilet. I looked up in time to see the bathroom door across from me shake from impact.

I glanced down. The Beretta was on the floor next to me. I felt like I’d been injected with lead.

“There’s an exit wound,” Ivan said, climbing into Lisa’s spotless clawfoot tub. “I think you got a through-and-through. If it missed your organs, you’re golden. If it nicked an artery ... we’ll know in about thirty more seconds.”

I grimaced. “Thanks.” Getting shot was the worst physical pain I’d ever experienced in my life. The whole right side of my body throbbed in agony, I felt like I was going to pass out and throw up more or less simultaneously, and my vision kept fading to black, my head filling with fuzz and then smoothing out.

I reached down and picked up the Beretta. My hand shook under its weight.

The door shook again as someone threw themselves at it. I turned my head with infinite slowness and looked at Ivan. “What are you doing?”

He kept his eyes on the door. “Getting out of your way.”

I followed his gaze back to the door. It shuddered again, the frame splintering. I held the Beretta on my knee. I sat and concentrated on staying conscious. It was harder than I would have thought, with everything coming to me in woozy waves that echoed every stabbing pain in my side. I realized with a weird sense of alarm that everything had gone silent outside.

With a resounding crack of broken wood, the door crashed inward. For a second The Broker was framed there, the front of his shirt soaked in blood. I squeezed the trigger and the gun leaped in my hand, and Merlin Spillaine spun away and crashed to the ground.

Behind him, the kid with the cloud of curls floating over his head stood with his arms locked straight out, a crappy little revolver pointed right at me. I could have moved the gun in my hand a little and squeezed the trigger again, but it suddenly seemed like way too much effort. I blinked at him languidly, feeling stupid.

A second later, the gunshot. Cloudy crumpled to the floor, slumping on top of The Broker. A moment later Mick Carroll stepped into view. He was sweating heavily, his bowling shirt stained dark under his arms, around his neck. He studied the two bodies on the floor and methodically fired two more shells into them. Then he turned and looked at me, his heavy eyes watery.

“This,” he said heavily, “is gonna be fucking expensive.”

Everything went sideways and I slid into the darkness. Echoing, distant but clear, I could hear Mats singing.

*Oh, the sun is on the harbour, love*

*And I wish I could remain*

*For I know it will be some long time*

*Before I see you again*