

**JEFF SOMERS**

**DETAINED**

**A Novel**



# DETAINED

## Chapter 3

by Jeff Somers

### 3. Candace

She looked around and tried to process. One moment she'd been asking herself if she was really planning on her first-ever one night stand, the next moment there were soldiers everywhere, shouting. She'd noticed how Mike had stepped in front of her, protectively, and while it had annoyed her she also thought it was kind of cute, the sort of dopey chauvinistic thing guys did with good intentions.

And it *was* all kind of alarming. After the initial shock of the noise and the lights and the soldiers coming through the front door, though, her heart rate had lowered a little bit. The soldiers in their gray-and-green uniforms and black arm bands had taken up positions, the tall blonde officer had walked in, and then things had gone still for a bit, the jukebox still playing Journey like it was the most appropriate song in the world, the stupid old Dipping Bird still going up and down like it had been for as long as she could remember. Jimmy found the old thing in Jack's office one night years ago, and ever since he'd been moving it around, putting it in unlikely places just to annoy Jack McCoy.

She paid attention. The soldiers were all shouting *clear* and *secure* as they moved through the place. A group of soldiers invaded the rear of the bar, and emerged a few moments later pushing a young guy

ahead of them.

“In the bathroom,” one of the soldiers said, giving him a shove. “Wouldn’t come out.”

The young guy was wearing a pair of crisp new jeans and a sweater over a T-shirt, and looked to her to be college-aged, young. He was clean-shaven and super skinny. He shrugged, looking around.

“Can’t just cancel the operation,” he said. “I don’t know how *your* colon works, asshole, but once I commit, the mission’s gonna be completed, no matter who’s shouting at me through the door.”

Candace counted: Twelve soldiers, plus the officer. They each had rifles on their shoulders, and sidearms on their hips.

“Someone turn that off,” the officer said. Her voice was crisp and certain. Two soldiers moved over to the juke and yanked the plug out of the wall, silence clamping down, making Candace jump. The officer nodded and looked from face to face, lingering a moment on each one. When it was her turn, Candace straightened up in an automatic reaction she’d learned from the Nuns at school. Then the officer stepped aside, and a short man wearing a camouflage jacket over more casual civilian clothes entered behind her. He carried a briefcase in one hand that seemed heavy, pulling him down, and a tablet computer in the other. He came up to the officer’s chest, and when he set the briefcase down and straightened up he stood with a slouching posture, almost ape-like, looking out at them over the rims of his thick, black-framed glasses. She thought he might be thirty or sixty, his hair thin and slicked back.

The officer leaned down and whispered in his ear. He nodded, looking around, glanced at his tablet screen, then looked up at her, nodding firmly.

“All right,” the officer said. “With my apologies for the disturbance, let’s make two things clear: You are all in my custody, and nobody leaves.”

“Custody?” Glen asked, hands flat on his table. “By who’s authority?”

The officer directed her gaze at him. Candace had the sense that there was a certain amount of time allotted for questions, and that it went against her grain to indulge civilians. “Mine.”

In front of her, Mike stepped forward. “And you are?”

The flat, steady gaze fell on him. Candace thought it seemed like the officer was seeing right through him. “Colonel Willa Hammond.”

Mike waited a beat. “Of?”

Hammond’s eyes stayed on him, and Candace felt her heart rate ticking up. She could feel the tension in the air, and was acutely aware that half of that tension landed on people who were carrying automatic weapons.

She edged herself behind Mike and eased her phone out of her back pocket, cursing how tight her jeans were. She thumbed the volume way down and chanced a look at the screen. No signal. And she’d never once seen a WiFi signal show up out here. There was nothing.

“All right,” Hammond said, stepping forward and clasping her hands behind her. “I know this is alarming. Please, stay calm. There are a few rules we’re all going to have to live with for a little while.”

“How long?” Glen asked. Candace thought, *Go Glen. Don’t take any shit.*

Hammond ignored him. “One: Any commands my team give you, obey. We will not ask twice.” She held up her hand and extended two fingers. “Two, do not make any attempt to leave this building. We do

not intend to harm anybody, but we will use force to prevent this if necessary, and my team has permission to use *deadly* force. If necessary.”

Candace froze, gawking. *Deadly force?* Had she heard that right?

“Listen here,” Glen said, standing up. He didn’t notice, but Candace did, as the soldiers all stiffened and seemed to twitch ever so slightly. “We’re American Citizens. There is due process. We have rights.”

Hammond nodded, lowering her arm and looking around. “The process has already occurred, Mr. —” She paused for the short man with the glasses to lean up on his tip toes and whisper in her ear, his eyes on his tablet. “—Eastman. Please sit down.”

Candace blinked. *Shit, they know who we all are already. How long have they been planning this?*

“Rule three,” Hammond said, putting her hands behind her back again. “Bathroom breaks by permission only, with an escort. Just ask any of my people to accompany you. Rule Four, I won’t deal with a committee. Choose one person among you and designate them your liaison. They can bring any questions or issues directly to me. Any questions?”

She looked around, then nodded. “Good.”

Candace looked around at everyone. Jack McCoy and Jimmy Haggan were still at the end of the bar; Jimmy’s mouth hung open slightly; Jack looked pissed off. Glen had resumed his seat and sat slumped over slightly, arms stretched out in front of him, palms down. It looked like surrender. The balding man with the glasses looked terrified, eyes flicking from soldier to soldier. The guy from the bathroom just stood in the middle of the room, self-conscious and stiff.

Mike turned and faced her. "You okay?"

She nodded. "You?"

"Fine. You get a signal?" he asked, pulling his own phone from his pocket.

"Nope."

He shook his head. "Me either."

"So what do we do?"

They both turned to find the guy from the bathroom standing near them. Mike stared at him. "We do what she says. Because they have the guns."

Bathroom Guy put up his hands. "Hey, look, I'm freaked out too, okay?"

Candace stepped forward and put her hand on his arm. "Sure, we all are. It's okay."

He smiled at her, and turned and sat down at one of the tables, hunched over and tense. Mike looked at her, and she stepped down the bar a few chairs, and he followed. They looked around; none of the soldiers were close enough to hear them.

"Any idea what's happening?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Hell no. My shift was supposed to be over in an hour!" She didn't add that she'd planned on asking him if she should stick around to have a drink with him. Somehow, she thought the timing on that wasn't quite right.

"What's that installation down the road, about half a mile? Looks all industrial, barbed wire on the fence, no sign?"

She nodded. "I know what you mean. Been abandoned for years—decades. Used to be a chemical plant, employed half the town." She paused. That had been before her time. "Town was bigger, then," she finished lamely. "I have no idea what it is now—thought it was still

empty. Maybe Jack or Glen knows more.”

He turned and leaned back against the bar next to her. “You trust them?”

“Jack and Glen?” she asked, surprised. But then she thought about it: He didn’t know them. Which made her think, *she* didn’t know *him*. And yet she felt like she did. “Jack: Of course. He’s as decent as they come. Glen ... yes. I’ve known Mr. Eastman my whole life. He has some crazy ideas about being a Sovereign Citizen, about the government—but I trust him to do right.”

He nodded. “All right. Let’s have a town council. See if you can get their attention, catch their eye, without making a scene. Get them to join us here. Everyone calm and civil.”

She nodded. This was sensible. She could hear her father saying *pretending you ain’t confused is just stupid*. He’d taught her to never be ashamed of not understanding something, to always ask questions, that dummies pretended they understood when they didn’t.

She looked over at where Jack and Jimmy were conferring, Jimmy still drinking his shot and beer. She tried to catch Jack’s eye, but Jimmy noticed. Before she could play it off, he’d nudged Jack and they both nodded as Jimmy stood up. It couldn’t be helped, and she figured Jimmy Haggan would have inserted himself when he noticed them all meeting up anyway.

When she looked over at Glen, he was already looking at them, so all it took was a tick of her head and he nodded, standing up.

There was a round of hurried introduction when they were all gathered at the bar. Then Mike asked “Anyone have a cell signal?”

Everyone shook their heads. Candace scanned the room. The soldiers were all standing around, seemingly at ease. Hammond and the unidentified man remained at the front, three soldiers stood at

the entrance to the back hall where the office and bathrooms were. The fat tourist with the glasses was still sitting at his table, seemingly frozen. The kid from the bathroom was sitting more at ease, glancing through the little bar menu booklet that sat on every table.

*Yeah, good luck getting served in here* tonight, she thought.

The silence was brittle and unnatural. She thought she could hear all the ticks and hisses of the place, the pipes, the heat, everything that was normally hidden by conversation and the business of business.

Mike nodded as if he hadn't expected anything else. "Anyone have any *facts* about this? Not theories—we all have theories—but anything they might have actually seen or heard that suddenly seems relevant?"

There was a pause. Jimmy Haggren suddenly smiled. "And what, you electin' yourself our little *liaison*, buddy?"

Candace wanted to hit him. Leave it to Jimmy to be an ass when it was the last thing anyone needed. Then Mike just rolled with it.

"Sure, unless someone wants to suggest someone else."

Glen, Jack, and Jimmy looked at each other. "We don't *know* this asshole," Jimmy said.

Jack nodded. "He's in our same boat though."

Glen added. "I vote yes." He looked at Mike and Candace got a flash of him in gym class when she'd been a kid, kindly and smart. "You sure you want the job, Mister Malloy?"

"Call me Mike. And no, I don't want the job. But I'm willing to do it."

Jack nodded again. "You're it."

Mike nodded back. "All right. So, anything? Anyone remember anything at all?"



Everyone shook their heads. Mike sighed.

“So, we know exactly one interesting thing.”

Glen smiled. “The uniforms.”

Mike nodded. “No insignia. No patches. No name tags, no ranks.”

“Just the black band. Like mourning.” McCoy added.

“Right. Which means someone doesn’t want us to know who they are.”

They all chewed on that for a moment. Candace suddenly sucked in a breath.

“Actually, we know two things.”

They all looked at her.

“That kid they pulled out of the bathroom?” she said, looking from face to face. “Wasn’t in there before they arrived. He’s one of them.”