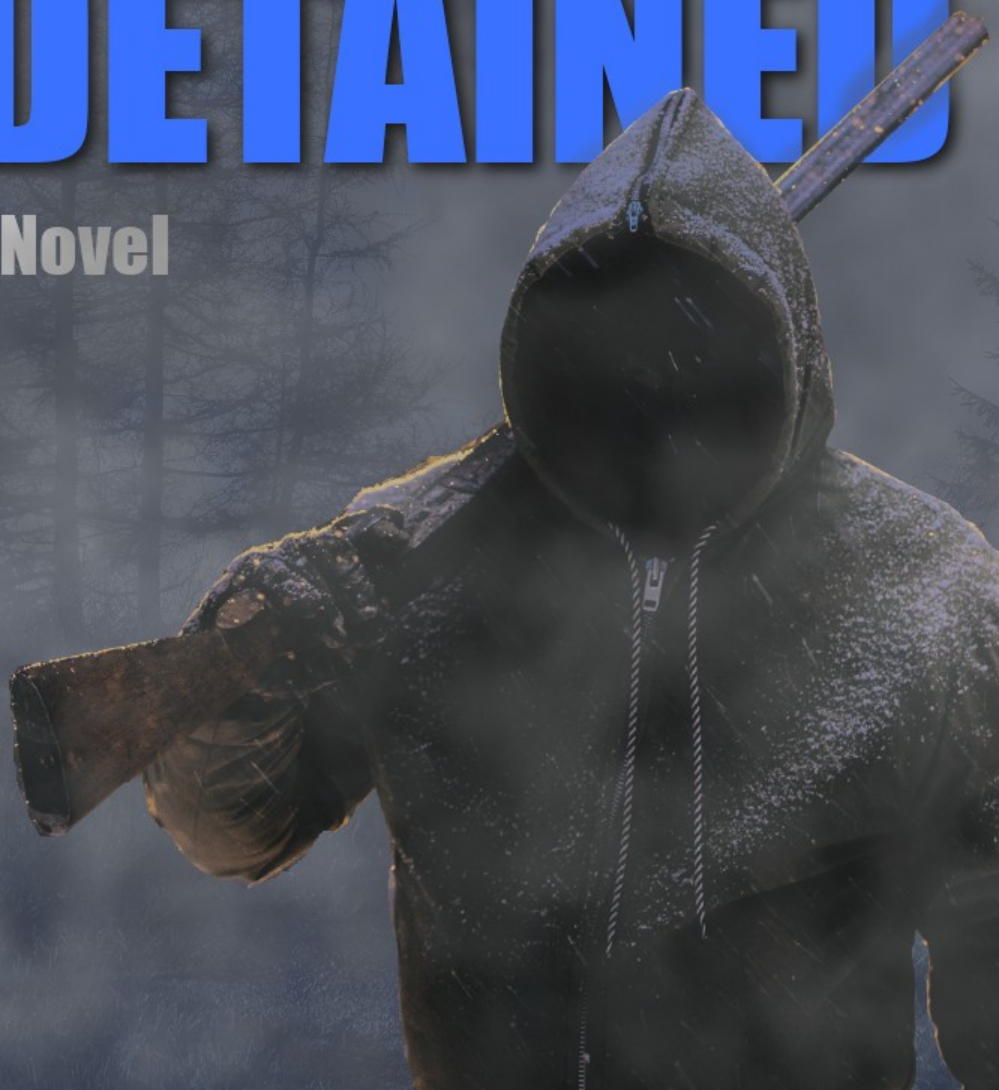


JEFF SOMERS

DETAINED

A Novel



DETAINED

Chapter 4

by Jeff Somers

4. Mike

Colonel Hammond glanced up, studied him for a moment, then waved him into the office. It was a tiny, cramped space; a small metal desk and filing cabinet filled it almost completely, so that anyone seeking to sit behind the desk had to maneuver their way there very carefully, bending into ridiculous poses. He tried to imagine the Colonel making herself look ridiculous in order to sit there and couldn't; she didn't look like someone who took being made ridiculous lightly.

"Yes?" she said, glancing down at the file she'd been reading.

Mike took his own moment to study her. She didn't look well, he thought. Stress, maybe. Or a guilty conscience. She was flushed, and had dark bags under her eyes. He thought she looked exhausted, and tense. He tried to keep his eyes and ears open, seeking every possible detail—they were at a severe disadvantage regarding information, and if they were going to survive, or escape, they would need to know a lot more than they already did.

"You asked for a liaison," he said. "I'm it."

She looked up again. "Congratulations, Mr.—?"

He smiled. "Don't pretend you don't know all our names."

She nodded, leaning back. "All right, Mr. Malloy. What can I do for

you?”

“Let us walk out of here? Tell us what’s going on? Explain your legal authority for detaining us?”

She stared back at him, expressionless. He sighed. “Didn’t think so. The owner wants permission to go in the kitchen and make up something to eat for anyone who wants it. He’d be happy to rustle up something for your people, too, if you can let us know which government agency or Joint Chief to send the invoice.”

She didn’t smile. After a moment, she nodded. “I’ll detail two guards to supervise. Only McCoy in the kitchen, no one else.”

He nodded. “What about our families, jobs, et cetera? We all have people who will miss us.”

Hammond shook her head. “Actually, you don’t.”

Mike had known this was a bluff in regards to himself. He’d been drifting for a year now, no permanent address, his most frequent contact being his attorney and his broker, neither of whom he counted as a friend, and neither of whom would expect a call from him at any specific time. He was surprised at how certain she was of the others—surely one of them had someone who would check on them—but she *did* have dossiers on all of them. He shifted his weight but didn’t pursue it further.

“Anything else, Mr. Malloy?”

He hesitated, but shook his head. “No. Thank you.”

He turned and one of the soldiers escorted him out. In the hall he glanced into the bathroom, another soldier standing outside it on guard.

At the bar, the skinny guy named Jimmy was pouring shots and handing them off. Everyone was gathered there, even the fat bald guy with glasses. The soldiers stood around the perimeter, watchful. Mike

noted the presence of Bathroom Guy, but said nothing.

“Bad idea,” he said, joining the group.

Jimmy smiled. “My specialty.”

“We should stay clear and sober. We don’t know what’s going on.”

Jimmy lifted the shot glass and toasted him. “Fuck you.”

Mike took a deep breath. He had a pretty good idea he could take on Jimmy, if he had to, but the last thing they needed was a brawl. He glanced at the bald tourist and held out his hand. “Mike Malloy.”

The bald man jumped a little, surprised to be brought into the conversation. He reached out and shook; his hand was clammy, his grip soft. “Kevin Simms,” he said, smiling nervously. “Jesus, I picked the wrong place to get dinner.”

Mike nodded, let go, and dismissed him: A tourist hunter, probably more interested in getting away from his wife (the wedding band on his finger was plain and lodged permanently on the sausage-like digit) than any actual sport. He turned to Bathroom Guy.

“Mike Malloy.”

Bathroom Guy startled a little, then smiled sheepishly and shook hands. “Andy Powell,” he said. “Jesus, huh?”

Mike smiled, nodding, and putting everything he had into putting on a friendly demeanor. “You said it.” He turned as naturally as he could and touched Candace on the shoulder, enjoying the contact with her, no matter how brief.

“Got a sec?” He said, smiling and staying relaxed.

She stared at him a moment, then suddenly loosened and smiled. “Of course!” she said, and followed him to the back end of the bar, away from everyone and as far from the groups of soldiers as possible.

“I need to ask a kind of ridiculous favor,” he said, watching her

carefully. He didn't know her, though he felt instinctively like he *did* know her, somehow. He wasn't sure how his next suggestion was going to go over. "I need you to, um, distract him."

She raised an eyebrow and leaned in. But she seemed amused instead of angry, which he took to be a good sign. "*Distract?* The guy from the bathroom?"

He nodded. "Andy. Look, I know that's ... weird, but we need to be able to talk without a spy standing right there, and we also need to keep the fact that we know he's a plant secret. I know I'm making ... a couple of big assumptions here, but there's no time for a long think on the subject, you know?"

He was embarrassed. For a moment she just stared at him and he wondered if he was going to get slapped in the face, or dressed down for assuming she was the only one who could "distract" Andy, and was already scrambling for the words to explain that he'd come to her because she was the only one he trusted at the moment, for reasons beyond his ability to explain. Then she smiled and nodded.

"Absolutely." Then she winked. "Watch the master work."

She turned and walked around him. He realized his pulse was pounding, and he felt an odd wave of affection for her. He'd met Candace Cuddyer an hour ago and she'd become his favorite person in the whole world already.

He watched as she rejoined the group at the middle of the bar, jostling Andy as she did so. She turned and touched his arm, apologizing, and then they were talking.

Mike smirked to himself. It was just that easy. As he watched, she expertly kept pushing him further and further away as she talked, all simply by moving in subtle ways, invading his personal space. Silently tipping his hat to the Master, Mike walked back to the rest of

them, and leaned in close so he could speak low.

“We got a few things to discuss, quickly,” he said, but was immediately interrupted by the older man in the fishing vest—Candace had introduced him as Glen Eastman, he recalled.

“What about him?”

They followed his gaze to the short man in the glasses and the slicked-back hair. He was seated at one of the tables and had two laptops open, the tablet held in one hand as he tapped at the keyboards with the other.

“That’s it,” Simms said. “He set himself up, and hasn’t moved.”

“What she say about food?” McCoy asked.

“Go ahead,” Mike said. He thought: Okay, McCoy’s super practical, Eastman’s already pissy about everything, and Simms just wants to please. He pushed people into quick little boxes, fully prepared to move them if proved wrong. “She said she’d have two grunts stand guard over you.”

McCoy nodded. “I’ll make up some sandwiches. Whatever else is going on, we gotta eat.”

Mike thought that was sensible enough, and nodded. McCoy moved off. Mike looked at Jimmy Hagen, then dismissed him and caught McCoy by the sleeve. “What about weapons? Aside from that accident waiting to happen you had earlier. Anything else in this place?”

McCoy nodded slowly. “There’s a pump-action in the office,” he said, hesitated, then nodded decisively. “That’d be all of them. Aside from my hunting gear.”

“Weapons?” Simms said nervously, smiling around as McCoy walked away. “Are we crazy? The place is crawling with soldiers! You want to pull out a goddamn *shotgun*?”

Mike didn't look at him. "Mr. Simms, I'm just taking stock of our resources."

Jimmy raised another shot glass. "Thank goodness you're here to be in charge," he said, and downed the shot.

"He's got a signal," Eastman said suddenly. He was looking at the man who'd come with Hammond.

"Satellite," Mike said. "They're blocking normal data networks. His must be ..." he trailed off.

"Military?" Simms asked.

"Corporate?" Glen offered.

Mike shrugged. "Not blocked," he said after a moment.

"Could we find out the password? Use it?"

Mike shook his head. "I doubt it. It's probably not a normal cell phone connection or WiFi connection, and it's likely encrypted with a baked-in hardware key." They all stared at him. "I invested in a lot of hardware companies," he said by way of explanation.

"Oooh la la," Jimmy said, grinning.

"Listen," he said, ignoring Haggan and watching Candace chatting up the Bathroom Guy. "What we need right now is information. We don't *know* anything. Why they're really here. Who they really are. We have no connections to the outside world. We need info. So what I'd suggest is simple—be nosy. Wander, pretend you don't understand where you're not supposed to be. Eavesdrop, keep your eyes open." He pulled out his own phone and glanced at the time. "Let's meet back at the bar in half an hour, report anything we can figure out."

Eastman and Simms nodded crisply; he thought Simms looked pleased, but Eastman looked irritated. He took a chance and looked at Haggan, who had the blurry look of the drunk.

“You want to help out?” Miked asked.

Jimmy shook his head and didn't look at him. “You take point on that shit, boss,” he said. “I don't do as I'm told.”

Mike wanted to hit him. This was not the time for childish bullshit. But he would be just as bad as him if he fell for it, so he looked at Simms and Eastman. “All right, let's go see what we can find out.”