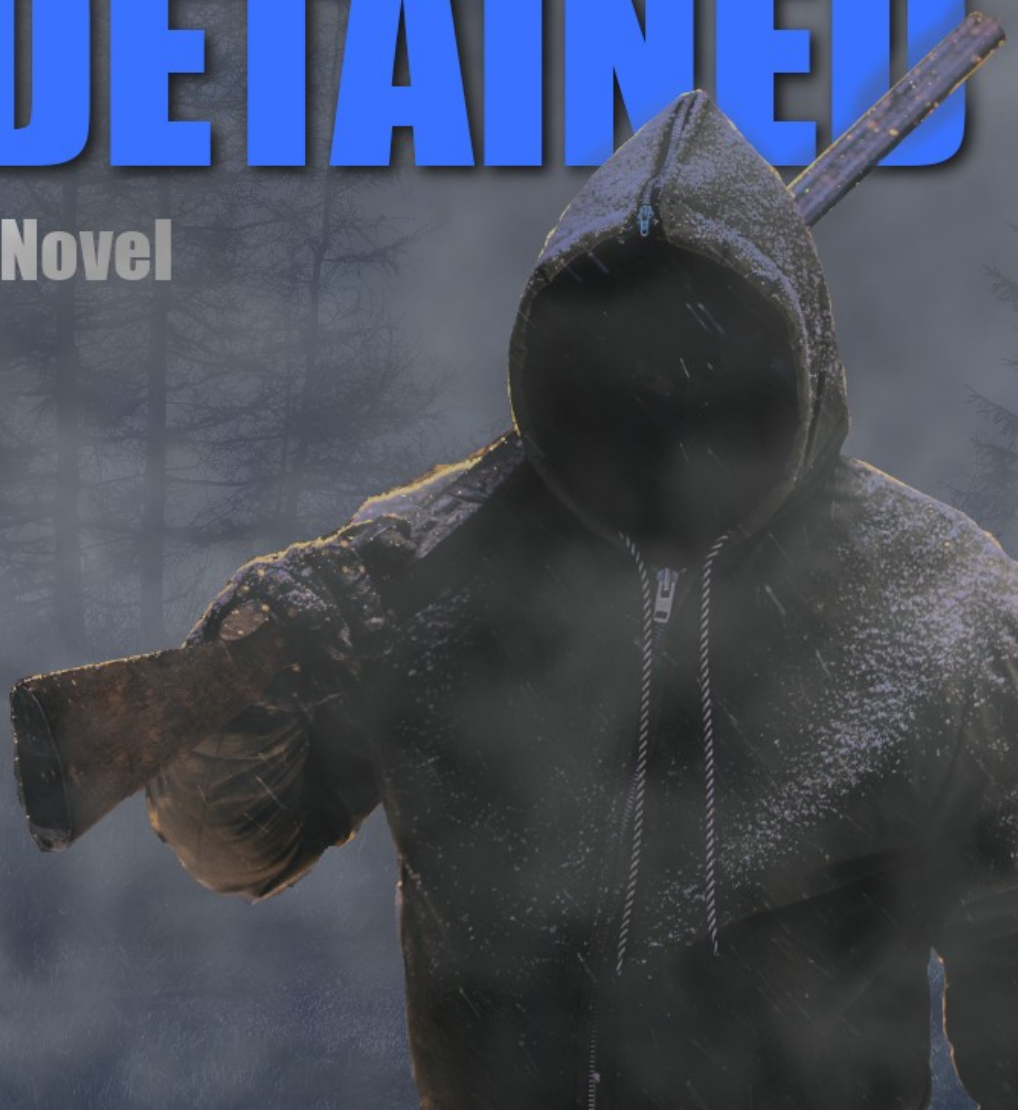


JEFF SOMERS

DETAINED

A Novel



DETAINED

Chapter 6

by Jeff Somers

6. Mike

He was moving before he realized it, diving forward at a run and throwing himself down next to Simms, his knees soaking in the man's warm blood. He could see Simms' eye moving behind his thick glasses, looking around, wide and amazed. His lips, pale and wet, were moving as if he was asking a question.

Mike remembered a summer spent riding along with a volunteer ambulance corp in Ohio; it was amazing what a generous donation could do. No one had any objections as long as he agreed to stay out of the way, and during the down time he got an education in emergency first aid. He learned about the Golden Hour when it came to gunshot wounds: People who made it to emergency medical services within an hour of being shot had a much better chance of survival.

He looked up. The soldier at the door was still holding the gun in his hand. He looked at the man with the glasses. His face was cold and almost sneering.

"A doctor! A medic!" Mike shouted. "You must have one in your unit!"

No one moved. Behind him, he heard the other civilians yelling, but the soldiers and the cold, still man sitting at the table just stared

at him.

“A first aid kit!” he shouted desperately, heart pounding.

“Anything! Please!”

The man with the glasses turned back to his screens. “It doesn’t matter,” he said.

Anger flooded into him. These bastards could have shoved Simms, pushed him around, even hit him, and he would have been cowed. Shooting him had been savage, unnecessary—cruel.

He tore off his jacket and then the flannel shirt he was wearing, fingers numb and clumsy, buttons popping off. He leaned over Simms; blood had welled up and stained his shirt just above his waist, and continued to pulse onto the floor with every heartbeat. Mike balled up the shirt and pushed it down onto the wound, applying pressure. Simms gasped and his whole body jerked, but Mike could recall his lessons from the EMTs: Direct pressure, slow down the bleeding. It was literally the only thing he could do without any sort of supplies—or a doctor.

“Come on Kevin,” he said, looking into Simms’ eyes. “We’re gonna help you. Just hang on, okay?”

Simms’ eyes were locked on his, watery and terrified. His lips kept moving, but Mike couldn’t hear what they said.

He remembered the only time he’d seen someone die while shadowing the EMTs. A heart attack. They’d wheeled him into the ambulance, and he’d been alive, and conscious, red-faced and weak, but *there*. And then he’d flatlined, his eyes rolling up, and they’d worked on him the whole drive to the hospital. And Mike had felt so useless, so stupid, just sitting there. And he’d thought that if he could just *do* something, anything, it would be better. Nothing, he’d thought, could be worse than sitting by idly and helpless while

another human being died. It was even somehow worse than waking up and finding Julia dead, on her belly in her panties, her beautiful hair stringy and dirty, her skin marked by purple bruises, junkie marks.

Now he felt Simms' life leaking away literally under his hands and he knew better. *This* was worse. An hour ago he didn't know Kevin Simms existed. Now the man was dying right in front of him.

He tore his gaze from Simms' glassy stare and looked around. "Jesus fucking *Christ* a man is dying! *A man is fucking dying here!*"

The man in the black-framed glasses didn't look up from his keyboards, but he sighed in what Mike thought was irritation. "Doesn't matter," he said. "He's not in my calculations."

Mike looked back at Simms, whose face had gone slack, his eyes staring fixedly up at the ceiling. His *calculations*? Something about the word drilled down into him, and molten rage boiled up. Without thinking Mike turned and launched himself, bloody hands and all, at the little man.

"Doesn't—"

Someone punched him in the stomach as his legs were swept out from under him. He landed on his back, hard, head bouncing on the floor, and there was a gun in his face, the barrel an inch away. He froze and closed his eyes, waiting for the shot.

"Soldier, *step back!*"

The whole place went still. Mike opened his eyes and for a moment his field of vision was the gun barrel, nothing else, just the perfect symmetry of the weapon.

"That was a command, son."

The gun disappeared, and the soldier—the same one who had shot Simms, he saw, a tall, lanky man with a crooked nose and a

monobrow that made him seem perpetually angry—stepped smartly back, holding the gun by his thigh.

Mike twisted himself up on one elbow, his abdomen still aching from the punch. Colonel Hammond stood in the doorway that led to the office and bathrooms. She looked angry. Mike revised, his brain jerking and kicking back into motion. She looked *apoplectic*. Her face had flushed, and she stood ramrod straight, her body almost vibrating with tension and anger.

“Holster that weapon, Musgraves,” she snapped. “Then remove your holster and hand it to King. Don’t speak a fucking word, soldier, or you will *regret* it. King, you are detailed with Musgraves’ weapon. Do not let it out of your sight.”

Mike watched the monobrowed soldier wordlessly holster the gun, then unsnap the holster and hand it to the other soldier who’d been guarding the front door, a woman with densely curly black hair. She took it wordlessly, not looking at him, and buckled it over her own.

Hammond remained where she was, looking over the whole place, nostrils flaring. Mike thought the only sound in the place was the Colonel’s breath whistling in her nose. His own heart was beating wildly, all over the place, without rhythm. Sweat had soaked through his shirt, and his pants and arms were covered in Simms’ blood.

“Next member of this unit who discharges their weapon,” Hammond said in a steady, acidic tone of voice, “without *my* direct order will also *regret* that decision.”

She let that hang in the air.

“King: Detail someone to deal with the body. Show some respect.”

Mike blinked and turned his head. Simms stared blankly at the ceiling. He was dead.

Then she looked at the skinny little man in the glasses, who'd continued to work at his keyboards as if nothing had happened.

"Dr. Raslowski," she snapped. "My office."

She turned and walked back down the hall. Raslowski kept tapping at his keyboards for a moment, as if he hadn't heard or didn't intend to obey. Then he suddenly shoved the table violently, making all his equipment jump, and leaped up, striding quickly through the room. Mike thought he looked like a little boy who'd been reprimanded in school.

He stared around. The soldiers had their eyes on distant points, their faces expressionless. The bar patrons and employees were pale and shaken, staring back at him. He closed his eyes and thought, *Raslowski. Hammond. King. Musgraves*. Four names was a paltry list of new data for Simms to have died for, but he was determined to make it count.