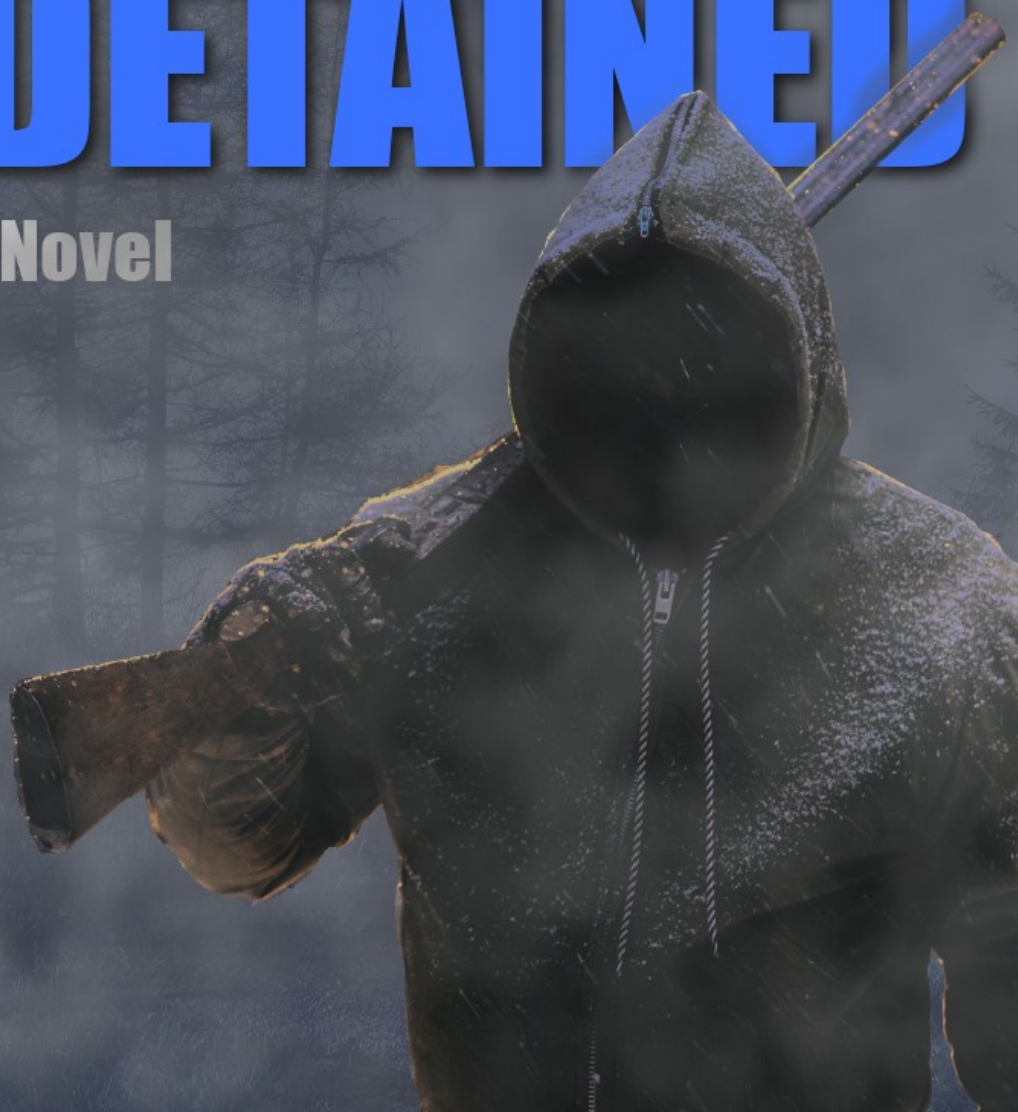


JEFF SOMERS

DETAINED

A Novel



DETAINED

Chapter 8

by Jeff Somers

8. Mike

Haggen was their best chance. The moment she suggested it, Mike knew Candace was right. The shifty-looking ex-boyfriend was half in the bag and seemed kind of erratic, but they didn't have any other choice. The retired teacher, Eastman, didn't look like he had the balls to act as a distraction. Jack McCoy, the bar's owner, Candace didn't seem to think he had the brains, and Mike was inclined to agree after the man took his suggestion to go make sandwiches to heart like it was the most important mission ever handed down in a crisis.

Mike would have done it himself; the role of distraction was dangerous. They'd just seen someone shot to death because he caused trouble, spoke up, refused to follow orders. Making some noise and drawing all those twitchy trigger fingers to you wasn't going to end well, and if someone was going to be put in danger, Mike thought it might be best if it was him. Not because he was a hero, but because he was alone: No one knew where he was. He had no ties to his family, no friends left. He'd been drifting for so long he'd come unmoored from everything except his bank accounts. If someone was going to die, why not the guy who had nothing but money?

But Candace said that Haggen was the ideal disruptor. He'd been one his whole life, first as the kid who drove all the teachers crazy,

then as the employee who expertly toed the line between being difficult to his bosses and getting fired, and finally as a libertarian-type who lived in the woods and hunted for his food, who had the sort of natural ability with a computer and electrical wiring to achieve a more or less off-the-grid life because he didn't want to pay taxes and have his life documented. She said he'd spent his whole life causing trouble, and Mike took one look at him and believed her. And if he really did know how to code and wire things up he was smarter than he'd been pretending to be, and Mike kind of liked anyone who feigned stupidity for a tactical advantage.

Mike steeled himself. He could sense that Haggen didn't like him very much. And he already had an instinctive sense that Haggen was the sort who enjoyed being difficult, just to throw his weight around.

He settled himself against the bar at the far end, where Haggen had returned, sitting slumped over, one hand on a bottle of Jim Beam.

"Shit," Haggen said immediately without moving or looking at him. "I thought I was ready for this, you know?"

Mike was nonplussed. He'd anticipated a difficult time getting the man to talk to him. "For what?"

Haggen glanced at him. There was, Mike thought, a surprising spark in his eyes, a glimmer of intelligence he'd missed before. "This. This—the end. Government crackdown. Martial law. Economic collapse, chaos." He shook his head. "If I was in my house, I'd be fine. I'm prepared. *In my house*. But I had the bad luck to be here getting shitfaced when it came down."

"Martial law?"

Haggen snorted. "What else do you call being imprisoned in Jack McCoy's shithole bar with soldiers shooting people who try to leave?"

Mike leaned in. “We don’t know what’s going on. We don’t have any information. As far as we know, this might be the only place in the world this is happening.”

Haggen picked up the bottle and poured whiskey into his glass. He proffered the bottle. “Drink?”

Mike shook his head. “We need information, Mr. Haggen—”

“Jim.” He set the bottle down. “We’re all gonna die in this shithole, I’m not going sober, and I’m not being called *Mr. Haggen* like I’m some fucking lawyer.” He picked up the glass and held it between them. “I have water. Solar. Food. A propane generator and two hundred-pound tanks. Gasoline. Guns. Books. I could have lived out there for *years* while all this played out.” He toasted Mike. “Best laid plans and all that.”

Mike reached out and put his hand on Haggen’s arm as he raised the glass. “We need your help, Jim.”

Haggen smiled. “*We?* Man, you got here like two hours ago.”

“And if I’d kept driving I might not know anything about this. I might be in a hotel room right now, ordering room service. Or sleeping in my car on the side of the road. Or maybe arrested somewhere else, detained somewhere else—I don’t know. That’s the *point*, Jim. We don’t know. We need your help to get some information.”

Haggen oriented on him, and Mike had the sense he was listening to him for the first time that evening. “Information?” he said, frowning. “About *these* guys? How?”

Not as drunk as he seemed, Mike thought, noting how he seemed suddenly sharper, less blurry. Either a man who held his liquor well, or an old con artist who knew appearing drunk gave him an advantage.

“The old computer in the office. Candace thinks the hardline the old modem uses might have been overlooked.”

Haggen’s focus shifted slightly away from Mike, as if thinking, then he snapped back, leaning forward.

“Holy *shit*,” he hissed. “That crappy old box with the 56k dialup. Yes—listen, man, a year, two ago Jack had a flood in here, had an electrician in. They found this one line they couldn’t shut off. The main was tripped, everything disconnected, this one outlet in that office was hot. Finally discovered the previous owner—named Catfish Lowell, and if you want a fucking *story*, ask about *him*—had done a lot of work around this place himself, ignoring code, permit requirements, and property laws. He’d run power and phone lines out to the road, if you can fucking believe it, stealing service.” He nodded. “I will *bet* you these assholes missed a phone line. I would *bet*.”

Mike glanced around. Candace had Eastman and McCoy at the middle of the bar, occupied. The soldiers stood around the perimeter, Raslowski sat at his computers. Did the soldiers all look tense? Worried? Were they sweating? It was hard to tell, but in a flash Mike had a sense that maybe they had less time than he thought, because the body language in the place seemed to imply a looming, invisible deadline.

“We need a distraction. Candace will go in—she knows the system and won’t waste time figuring it all out. You up for getting Hammond out of that office and keeping her out of there for as long as possible?”

Haggen stared at him. Mike prepared himself for an insult, for pushback.

“I can do that,” Haggen said. “How long you need?”

Mike blinked. He recovered himself and said “It’s dangerous, Jim. You saw what happened to Simms.”

Haggen shrugged. “Man, I got little doubt we’ll all be dead in this goddamn bar soon enough.” He sighed, glancing over Mike’s shoulder for a moment. “She’s a gem, man. A fucking gem. I screwed that up. A long time ago—this isn’t a confession of a torch or anything. There ain’t no romance there, anymore. But you know, sometimes you look at someone from your past and it just reminds you of everything you’ve ever done wrong, and you realize it was *most of it*.” He looked back at Mike. “You understand?”

Mike saw her again, stretched out on the floor in her underwear, purple bruises on her legs. “Yes,” he said. “I get that.”

Haggen shrugged. “I like my life. I like myself. Maybe always a little too much. I know a lot of people thought it was silly, me worrying about the government coming in and taking what was mine. Not so silly now, I guess. I worked hard my whole life to get out from under, and here I am being crushed again. Screw that.” He smiled. “Get our girl in position and let’s make some noise.”

Mike studied him, then nodded. “Good. Thank you. Anything you need?”

Haggen smiled. “I’ve been fucking with authority figures my whole life,” he said. “I got this.”

“He’s in.”

Candace looked up at him and seemed to freeze, then her eyes leaped over his shoulder. Mike was surprised at his reaction: He didn’t like it. At all.

“Oh, Jim,” she said softly. “You have always been an idiot.”

The place was quiet, and they were all murmuring softly but it

seemed like everyone ought to be able to hear every single word they said. He gestured at the hallway that led to the office. “Let’s go; he’s waiting for you to be in position.”

“Mr. Malloy,” Glen Eastman said, adjusting his glasses with one finger. Mike glanced at the old man: Standard issue retiree, he thought. Paunchy, no fashion sense, whitening hair and thickening glasses, dressed like it was Halloween and his costume was Fisherman. “I know you saw no need to consult me—or Jack, here—but I want my objection noted. This is a dangerous plan. Actually, *plan* is a grandiose word for what this is.”

He talked like a schoolteacher too, Mike thought. He knew the type, from his own school days, and from some of his travels. He’d spent some time volunteering at high schools for a while, trying it on for size. A way to spend his time and money. An experience to have—it all sounded so ridiculous in his head now. A better way to put it, he thought, was that he’d spent all this time wandering the world so he didn’t have to think about what he’d done, or not done.

“Mr. Eastman, where do you imagine your objection could possibly be *noted*?” he asked, irritated.

“Mr. Eastman,” Candace said, touching his arm. “I appreciate your concern. But we need to do this.” She looked at Mike and nodded.

He walked with her towards the hallway. Two soldiers were posted on either side; they would escort people to the restroom as per Hammond’s orders. They watched as they drew close, but didn’t react, and when they stopped just beyond the hallway their eyes went elsewhere.

She turned to look at him. “Listen,” he said.

“Mike!”

A hand on his shoulder, and he was being spun around forcefully.

Jim Hagen grinned at him.

“I’m causin’ a *disturbance!*” he said conversationally, and hit Mike hard in the face.