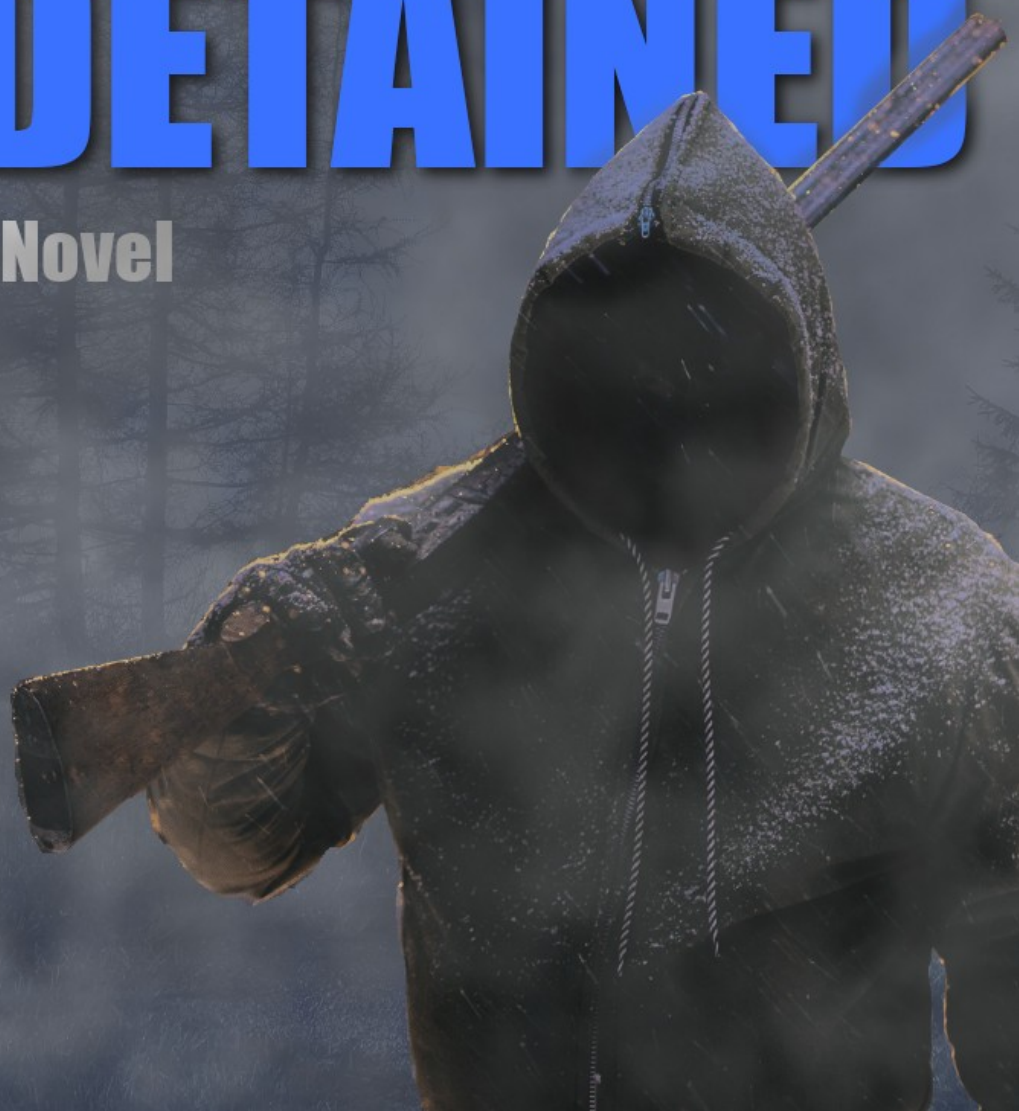


JEFF SOMERS

DETAINED

A Novel



DETAINED

Chapter 13

by Jeff Somers

13. Candace

She added to her virtual resume the little-known skill *pretending to enjoy your own imprisonment*. Her list of skills was getting pretty long and esoteric. She wasn't sure what kind of job they would help her get assuming she wasn't executed in the next eight and a half hours.

None of the soldiers seemed to be paying any particular attention to them, but they were careful anyway, keeping up a stream of chatter and basically pretending to get drunk. It made sense, she thought; they'd tried a few gambits and seen one of their own killed and the other two threatened. It made sense that they would simply drown their sorrows. It served two purposes: It made everyone think they'd given up, and it gave them a reason to hang around the bar area and shift position a lot.

Mike made his way around the bar in stages, always engaged in conversation.

That was the hardest part, she thought. The chatter. Behaving like you were talking to people and hanging out was exhausting when it was all for show, when all you wanted to do was watch the guards and scream out of frustration and fear.

Mike just dropped behind the bar. One moment he was there, the next he was on the floor and hidden from the rest of the room. None

of them reacted in any way. None of the soldiers took any notice. And she kept pretending to have a conversation with Jack and Glen, or she *was* having a conversation but it made no sense, it was just the three of them saying things to each other and nodding. She couldn't pull her thoughts into line long enough to make any sense as Mike crawled to the trap, pulled it up, and slipped down, pulling the trap shut behind him.

They'd allowed about three minutes for Mike to make his way to the other trap in the back room, based on the darkness, the difficulty of moving in such a confined space, and an effort to not make any unnecessary noise. Longer, if he got turned around. But from what she'd seen of him, she doubted that was likely. After that, she had no idea what would happen.

"Excuse me?"

Candace felt herself tighten up, her throat closing up as a surge of panic went through her.

"Young lady?"

You'll be okay. She could picture her father nodding encouragingly, telling her to make it work, she was smart, like her mother. She forced herself to turn. Dr. Raslowski scowled at her from his table, his glasses turned into opaque discs of white light by the collection of monitors facing him. He waved impatiently.

"Yes *you*, dear God save me from the hicks of the world. Come *here*."

Her mind raced. Up to this point, Raslowski had acted as if the entire population of the bar didn't exist, and she realized she preferred to be a figment of someone's imagination. That terrible eyeless face pointed in her direction was much, much worse. She kept hearing him spit *doesn't matter* after Simms had been shot.

Doesn't matter.

She tried to mirror his scowl and did the only thing she could think to try: She stalled. "What do you want?"

He cocked his head as if examining an interesting-looking bug. "I want you to *come here*."

She looked at Eastman and McCoy, but they both had no suggestions for her. So she took a deep breath and turned and walked over to where the Physicist sat, staring at her. As she approached he leaned back and crossed his arms.

"Please do take your time. As you might imagine we came here and are holding you all under guard for no reason of any importance whatsoever, so there is no urgency to *any* of this."

She stopped a few inches away from him. His eyes roamed over her and she felt the familiar, creepy vibe of a man studying her body and making a record of it *for later use*. "What?"

She was conscious of Mike, worming his way under the bar, in the dark, about to creep up from below and try to take out an armed guard, free Jim Haggan, and deliver weapons to Jack McCoy.

"Sit down," Raslowski said, turning and placing a small metal box on the table. "I'm going to need some blood."

"What?"

Raslowski sighed as he pulled a pair of plastic gloves from the box and began tugging them on. "Solely to check identities. Jesus, *you people*," he muttered. "King!"

King stepped out of a knot of four soldiers who'd congregated around the front door. "Sir?"

Candace eyed her. She was cute, sort of, short with dark, curly hair. She moved with a fighter's posture, Candace thought, shoulders out and head lowered, like she was always prepared to scrap. Her face

was round and blandly pretty, set in a mask of near-total disinterest.

“Round them up,” Raslowski said. “I need to take some blood samples.”

Candace stood frozen, mind racing. Mike! He was under the floorboards, or in the back about to jump Warner. If they discovered him missing, it would go badly for all of them.

King snapped off a salute, then hesitated, a scowl flashing across her face. *She doesn't like him, or taking orders from him*, Candace thought. He wasn't military. He was a scientist, and they'd probably been ordered to take his commands. But how long does that discipline last? Candace ran her eyes over King and noted the black armbands they all wore. If they were right and something bad had happened and might happen again, and these soldiers were assigned to guard them—

Candace gasped a little as it hit her. The black armbands—these soldiers had been chosen, or volunteered, *to die*. Or at least to take that risk—this was a suicide mission, in some sense. *They were dead anyway*.

King's face smoothed out and she snapped off another impressive salute. “Sir!” Raslowski didn't even notice; he was busy pulling syringes and tubing from the box, along with a small beige device that had a tiny screen on one end. It looked like an advanced pencil sharpener.

Candace thought furiously, holding herself still. If she tried to signal Jack and Glen, she might be observed, it might give everything away. If she did nothing, in a few moments they were going to discover something was up.

I could cause a disruption—I could jump King and knock her down, start a fight, she thought.

She saw Mr. Simms in her mind, dead, staring sightlessly up at the ceiling. That seemed like a dangerous choice, to say the least.

I could try to signal Mike. Make a noise.

But I don't know what would make it through the floorboards, and I don't know what would make sense to him but wouldn't give everything away.

King had turned away. Candace knew she had a second to make a decision, to do something, *anything*.

She thought,

Jesus Christ, just do it!

She closed her eyes and let herself drop to the floor.