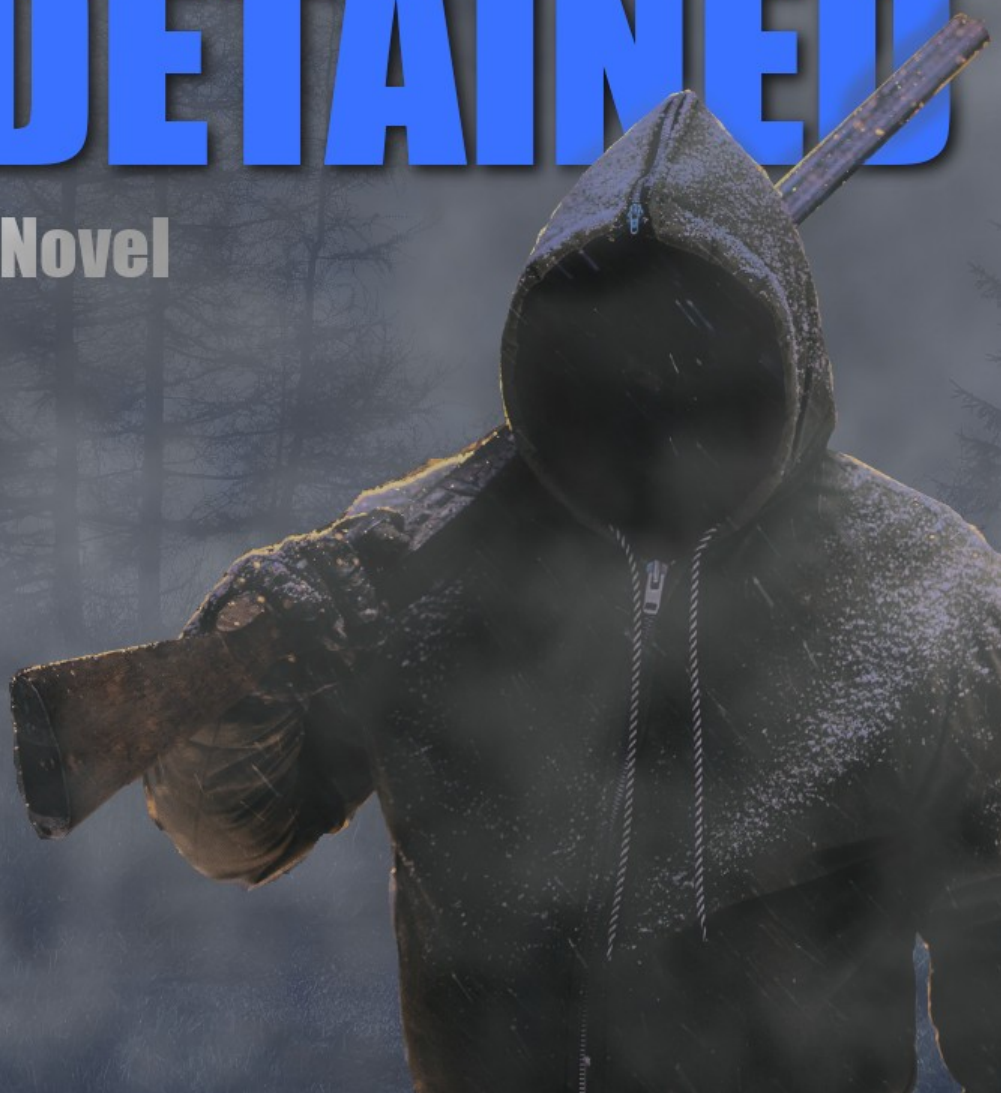


**JEFF SOMERS**

# **DETAINED**

**A Novel**



# DETAINED

## Chapter 16

by Jeff Somers

### 16. Candace

She steeled herself. She could hear her father again, the man who'd supplied most, if not all, of the sage advice she'd received over the course of her life: *Sometimes you just gotta step in it.* He'd said that any time he had to do something without the luxury of preparation, research, or practice. Like the time he had to give a speech at her Eighth Grade class because the father who was scheduled to talk about Career Day got sick, and he had to just step up to the podium in front of twenty-three disinterested kids and their even less-interested parents and talk about being a Plumber.

Correction: A *Master* Plumber, something that at least got a laugh from the class. And when she'd informed him that the teacher had suggested Mr. Cuddyer for an impromptu speech, she remembered the frightened look on his face, and then the immediate, warm smile as he'd shrugged, looked at her, and said *well, sometimes you just gotta step in it.*

She took a deep breath and thought, *well, Dad, here I go stepping in*

*the biggest pile of it I've ever seen*, and started walking across the bar towards Dr. Raslowski.

She knew the paths of the bar perfectly. She'd covered every square foot of the worn wood, she'd gone through countless pairs of sneakers weaving her way between tables for tips. She kept her eyes locked on Raslowski's pale, skinny frame as she moved, because she was worried if she looked at any of the soldiers they'd know what she was about to do, and if she saw them knowing she'd lose her nerve, because there was the very real possibility of being shot, just like poor Mr. Simms.

Raslowski was concentrating on a compact piece of equipment that he'd put on his crowded table. She could see he'd inserted one of her blood samples into a slot on its side, and he was typing instructions into a tiny chiclet-style keyboard. His glasses reflected the light of the tiny LED screen, making him look eyeless, like a monster.

She thought she could feel the whole place stiffen as she drew close to him. The two guards by the front door each stepped forward slightly, and she knew every single soldier had their eyes on her.

"You get what you need?" she asked, trying to make her voice bitter and acidic, which wasn't very difficult.

Raslowski didn't look at her. "Please go away," he said.

"Do I have it?"

That made him blink and glance at her, though he looked at her midsection instead of her face. “What did you say?”

“Do I have it? It’s a disease, right? A bug? Am I sick?”

Mike had made a joke about an alien virus, but something told her it couldn’t be that simple—a disease. As Glen had pointed out, no one was following any sort of containment protocol. No one seemed worried about contracting anything. But it seemed like a perfect excuse to act like an idiot.

He stared at her belly for a moment more, then turned to look back at his work. “Go away.” he said with an irritated sigh.

*Well, Dad, she thought. Here I go.*

“You think you can just snap your fingers and have me *tackled* and do whatever you want,” she spat. “But maybe you don’t, you son of a bitch!”

She launched herself forward and slapped him across the face as hard as she could. It hurt like hell as he hand made contact. Raslowski let out a squawk of combined surprise and pain and was spun out of his seat, one laptop and the testing machine clattering to the floor. Candace herself was overbalanced and she staggered forward and to the side, crashing into one of the tables and chairs, which skidded across the floor and allowed her to gracelessly hit the floor, landing on her ass with a single bounce that made her click her teeth together.

*Up*, she thought, head suddenly buzzing. *Get up, goddammit.*

She clawed her way up using a chair as a brace. The two guards from the front door were almost on her, so she pivoted away, off balance, and crashed into another fourtop. She took hold of the edge of the table and dragged it around, swinging it into their path as she skipped into another lane.

She stole a glance at the guards by the hall entrance. They were on high alert, tense and following the action, but they hadn't moved yet. There wouldn't be any other chances; if they subdued her, she had little doubt Hammond would be tired of the constant trouble and would order they just be restrained. Or killed.

She whirled. She had four soldiers in pursuit. She needed more, she needed them all, which meant she was going to have to somehow stay ahead of them long enough to pull everyone in.

She leaped up onto the nearest table. Took another leap, and immediately another, and she was ten feet away from them. She hesitated, crouching on top of the tables, as two more soldiers left their posts to join in pursuit. But not the two by the hallway.

She leaped to another table, then another, then with an effort that sent the table under her skidding backwards into the shins of her pursuers, she launched herself for the bar itself. Glen scrambled to the other end as she hopped over.

A strange feeling of delirious excitement descended on her as she

plucked two of the heavy beer mugs from under the bar and came up throwing. Her first one hit one of the soldiers in the shoulder, spinning her around. The second missed as the rest ducked, but she dived down and returned with more ammunition, tossing one at the knot of four working their way towards her. Then she pivoted, forced herself to exhale, and took aim at the two by the hallway, making the one to the left duck in shock as the mug exploded into glass shrapnel over his head.

She ducked and retrieved four more mugs, holding three awkwardly in the crook of one arm and striding quickly down the length of the bar towards the hallway.

*You motherfuckers, she thought grimly, you're going to move from that spot if I have to set you on fire.*

There had been one moment in her life as exciting as this. Senior year of high school, drunk with some friends, she'd broken into the school and run around the dark, empty halls playing pranks. Looking back, it was all silly, juvenile stuff—toilet paper everywhere, a thousand photocopies of her friend Shelly's ass littering the halls—but in the moment she'd had this white-hot thrill, that sense that the moment she'd engaged in a little casual breaking and entering she'd crossed a line and had a free pass. She was already in more trouble than she'd ever been, so why *not* stay ten more minutes and break into Mr. Hemming's office and retrieve four years' worth of

confiscated items?

It was the same feeling she felt now as she ran to the end of the bar and planted herself to lob glassware at the two soldiers. She'd crossed that line thirty seconds before. If they were going to shoot her, if they were going to tie her up, whatever it was they were going to do, it was already going to happen. Nothing she did was going to change that fact, and there was this incredible sense of freedom because she literally couldn't make things worse.

Glen ducked down and ran back the other way, intercepting the pursuing soldiers by apparent accident in his haste to escape danger. *You go, old man!* she thought. If nothing else the Weirdest Day of Her Life had shown her a side to old Mr. Eastman she was glad to be aware of. She hadn't realized it before, had never consciously thought about it, but the way Mr. Eastman had transformed from the history-spouting PE teacher of her teen years into the slightly ridiculous old man hanging around the bar all the time, always happy to discuss his theories on sovereign citizenship and the myriad ways the government had abandoned the original intention of the Founding Fathers had been sad for her. Seeing him show this kind of spirit was exciting.

She hurled a mug at the closest soldier, and he ducked and scrambled away. She sent another one trailing him, then launched a third at his partner, who dived behind the nearest table. She sent one

more glass bomb in his direction, then spun and ran back along the length of the bar. Two soldiers appeared at the other end while two paced her on the other side. She was aware that someone was yelling, bellowing really, but she didn't have the time to home in on it.

With a leap she was on the bar, sliding a few inches on her ass before spinning and leaping to the floor. She stumbled, an ankle turning under her weight, and staggered forward. Two of the uniformed men were just a few feet ahead of her. She froze, and one of them stepped aggressively towards her, then stopped.

She stared at the soldier's suddenly perplexed face. Then her eyes dropped to the crossbow bolt sticking out of his thigh.