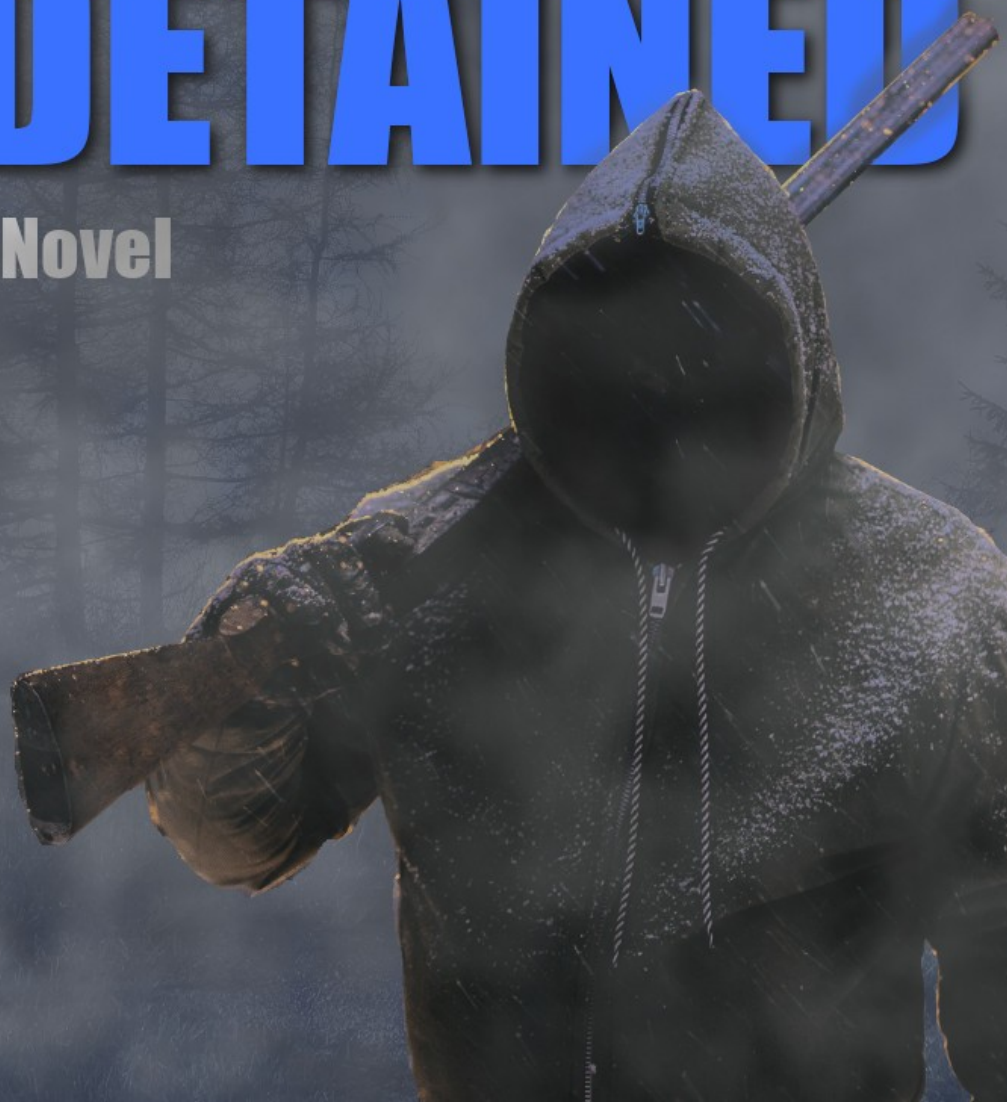


JEFF SOMERS

DETAINED

A Novel



DETAINED

Chapter 17

by Jeff Somers

17. Mike

The moment she started walking, he wanted to reach out and stop her, call her back. For a second the insanity of what they were doing hit him, and hit him hard. The chances they would all wind up dead were stacked against them. Then he reminded himself that chances were they were going to end up dead no matter what, and taking a chance at going out in charge of their own destiny was better than sitting on his ass in this shithole bar, waiting to be executed, or to start coughing up blood.

He watched her storm over to Raslowski, though, and thought it should be him out there with a target on his back.

He watched with admiration as she laid into the scientist, fighting back the urge to grin. When she leaned in and slapped him hard enough to send the short man spinning to the floor, he was as surprised as anyone in the room. As the two guards by the front door leaped into the chase, he stepped behind the bar, nodding to Eastman and making his way to the trap door again. No one was

looking in his direction.

He wouldn't be any use in the front room. He wasn't armed, and if Candace failed to pull the guards away from their posts, they would be on high alert and intolerant of any other misbehavior—and he didn't doubt the next step would be to simply restrain them all. He had to put himself where he thought he might be of some use, and that was with McCoy and Haggen.

He dropped into the crawlspace and started moving, crawling as fast as he could. Glass cracked under his hands and knees and cut him, but he ignored it, listening to the noise in the bar as it receded and yet swelled and swelled. Sweat streamed into his eyes and dust and cobwebs choked him. When the second trap loomed above him he pushed himself up and climbed onto the floor of the back room.

He held a finger up to his mouth, breathing loudly through his nose. McCoy and Haggen had both turned with their weapons, and each nodded as he walked briskly for the door and back up the hallway. He pushed webs and dust off his clothes and pushed his bloody hands through his hair, composing himself just before he stepped into the office, saying "Colonel you had better get out here!" as he turned the corner.

Hammond was already out of her chair and around her desk, on her way to investigate the noise of chaos drifting from the bar. She stopped, and for a split second they stared at each other.

Her arm moved. Mike threw himself forward.

Candace needed time, she needed chaos and confusion. He'd seen enough of Colonel Hammond to know she was the sort of commander who took control of situations very quickly, effectively—with one order she would have everything back under control, and he needed to stop her from issuing that order. He needed to ensure she wouldn't get in McCoy and Haggan's way, either, or creep out behind them.

He locked onto her right arm, using his weight and momentum to drive her back into the desk. She bared her teeth and tried to push him off, but he was too heavy and had the advantage—she was off balance and he was driving forward with his legs. With her free hand she slapped at his face, trying to get a finger into his eye, forcing him to whip his head around to avoid her.

He leaned forward, bending her back over the desk and pinning her arm and holster between them. He pushed his free arm up and over hers and bent it down towards the desk, putting his weight into pinning it down.

Without warning, Hammond swiveled her pelvis and somehow rolled him; with all his force concentrated on pinning her down he was easily shifted horizontally, and suddenly she was pushing *him* until he crashed into the wall with teeth-shaking force. He hung onto her arm with everything he had, and then suddenly she went still.

“All right, Colonel,” he heard Haggen say. “Back on off.”

He had Warner’s sidearm pressed against Hammond’s head. After a moment’s hesitation, she decided to take him seriously and put her hands up by her shoulders. Mike leaned forward and snapped open her holster, removing her sidearm with one clean motion. Keeping his eyes on hers, he felt around her pockets, locating one extra magazine and pocketing it.

Out in the bar, the noise had reached incredible volume. Mike flicked the safety off the weapon and stepped back from Hammond.

“Not exactly the plan you outlined, huh?” Haggen said.

“Had to improvise; the guards didn’t cooperate. Thanks for the assist. I’ll take it from here.”

Haggen sketched a lazy salute. “I live to serve, motherfucker,” he said, grinning, and turned to step back out into the hallway.

“Take out a ziptie,” he said to Hammond. “And go to the radiator.”

She didn’t move right away. “You’re making a terrible mistake here,” she said.

He shook his head. “Colonel, you made the mistake when you swept in here and didn’t tell us anything. When you treated us like prisoners. You didn’t leave us any choice.” He gestured with the gun. “Ziptie. Radiator.”

She turned and started walking, fishing in her pocket. He watched her hands. “Maybe so,” she said. “I’d like the opportunity to

explain what's at stake, why our orders are what they are."

"You'll get it," he said, following her a few steps behind. "Once we're in control."

She snapped off a sudden, angry laugh. "*We're* not even in control, Mr. Malloy."

She held a ziptie up in one hand as she stopped in front of the radiator.

"Loop it around the radiator's feed pipe," he instructed. "Don't pull it tight." He watched her do it. "Put your wrists through the loop." She did so, settling down on the floor. He leaned in quickly with one hand and pulled the ziptie tight.

"Ow!"

"Sorry," he said. "Hopefully you won't have to be like this for long."

"If they end up cutting off my hands, I'm bringing that bill to you."

"Noted." He turned just as the noise out in the bar died away completely—followed immediately by a scream and a volley of gunfire.

He started to run.

As he neared the dividing line between the dark hallway and the bright bar, he forced himself to slow down and pressed himself against the wall. He took a breath and checked the Beretta before leaning forward to look in.

Five of the guards were down, two with arrows in their thighs, one

clutching a gunshot wound in his shoulder that was bleeding heavily. The other four were gathered behind an impromptu breastwork of flipped tables, exchanging fire with Haggen and McCoy, who were behind the bar, popping up and dropping down. He couldn't see Candace or Eastman.

Taking another deep breath, he ran into the room and turned right, racing along the wall until he was perpendicular with the soldiers behind the tables. For a moment they were completely exposed to him and unaware of his presence, and he took aim.

He remembered his anatomy lessons with his shooting guru, a plump, taciturn man named Jerry who lived on a rundown ranch in Montana, tons of acres his family had owned for decades. Jerry made a living as a ballistics expert, and had been happy to take what amounted to a year's salary to teach Mike how to shoot—and a lot of other things about guns that went beyond shooting.

"You don't shoot at someone to *wound*," Jerry had complained of the request. "That's hippie bullshit. First of all, you can't have that kind of control. Second, no matter where you aim you can hit something vital and kill them. But mainly, you shoot to *stop*. Someone coming at you, you need to drop 'em. If you try to aim for some fucking *nonlethal* spot, you'll end up missing, or killing them by accident. You want nonlethal, kid, shoot rubber bullets."

"Yeah," Mike remembered saying around his beer. "But say I just

want to *know*. Maybe I'm writing a book."

Jerry, he recalled, had sighed in resignation, obviously reviewing the money Mike was paying him. "Well," he said, "if you actually *were* dumb enough to try and drop someone *non-lethally*, you got to avoid bones. Bone shatters bullets and keeps them in the body—shoot someone in the ribs and that bullet's gonna dance around in there. The torso's where you drop people, but you can hit the heart. The head's less fatal than you would think—most headshots don't actually kill anyone, because they tend to be grazes, the head's a smaller target than you think at distance, and skulls are *thick*. Arms and legs—too many arteries, too easy to bleed someone out." He shrugged, taking a pull from his beer. "If I was looking to wound someone, and stop them, I'd go for the foot. Reasonable size of target if you're close enough, chances of fatality are low, hurts like fuckin' hell and immobilizes them."

Mike thought: *Aim for their feet.*

Remembering Jerry's eternally aggrieved training, he took a breath, steadied himself, and sighted on the nearest soldier's boot.

He didn't shoot.

Instead, he moved the gun slightly until the next soldier's boot was right in the crosshairs. Then he moved the gun back, exhaled, and squeezed the trigger. The familiar kick and ear-splitting noise, and the nearest soldier rocketed backwards, screaming as his boot

exploded into gore. Mike moved the gun and settled himself, not hesitating, not worrying about what the others were doing (“Easiest way to get dead is to try to shoot and watch your target at the same time,” Jerry had said, chewing on a cigar) and squeezed the trigger again.

Another scream.

He stepped forward rapidly. “Down! All of you, weapons down!” In his peripheral vision he saw someone stand up behind the bar. There was a tense moment when he wasn’t sure it was over, then the two guards dropped their guns and put their hands up.

Mike realized he was trembling. *Get the weapons*, he thought, *first gather up their weapons. Then first aid. Then*

He didn’t know what then. He almost didn’t believe they’d won.

A second later there was a commotion near the front door, and Mike looked up in time to see Raslowski dash out of the bar, something in his hand that might have been some sort of radio or phone. Before he could react, Candace dashed from behind the bar, carrying McCoy’s crossbow, and without a glance back sprinted after him.