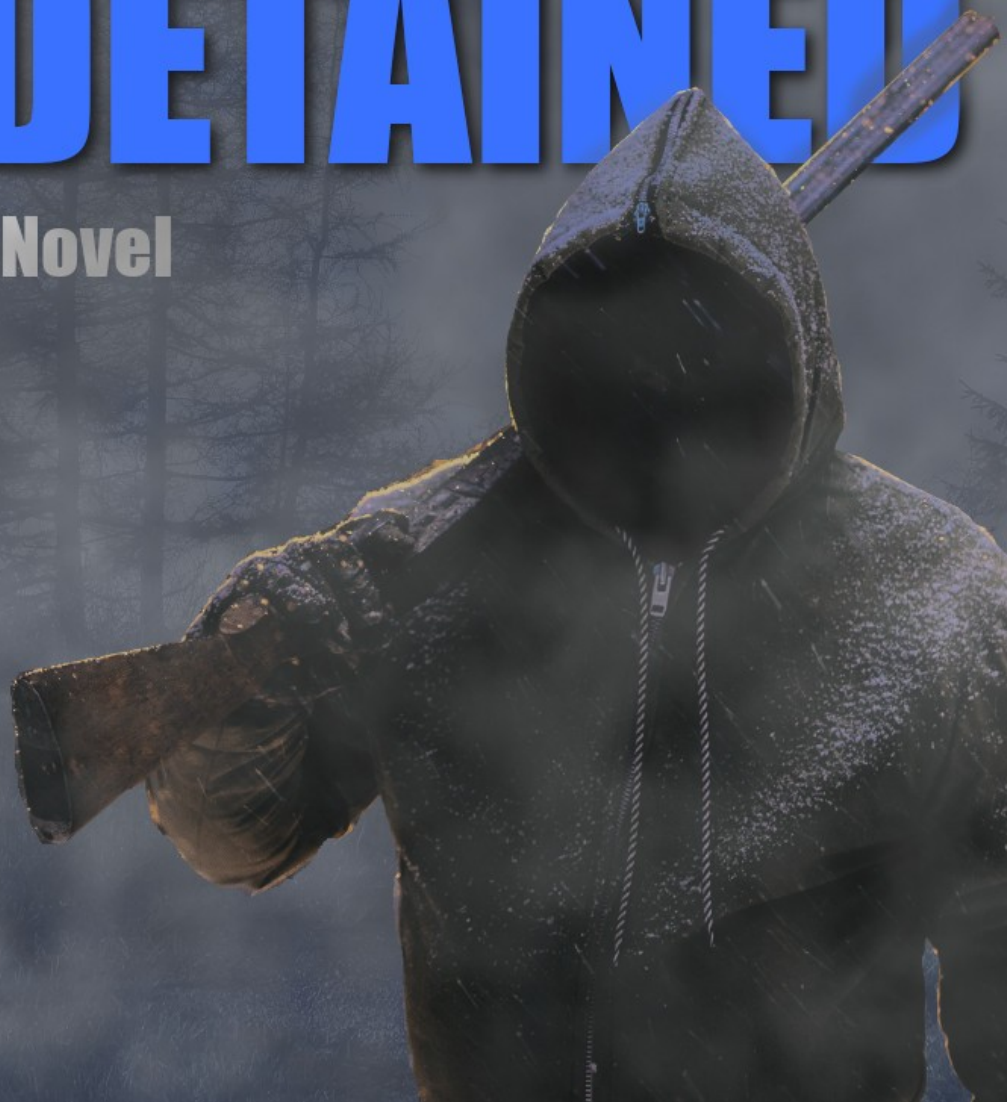


**JEFF SOMERS**

# **DETAINED**

**A Novel**



# DETAINED

## Chapter 18

by Jeff Somers

### 18. Candace

Jack McCoy was dead.

At first she thought they were going to pull it off almost perfectly. When the shooting started, she'd panicked for one moment, ducking down behind the bar and freezing. The gun in Jimmy's hand was louder than anything she'd ever experienced before, and she could tell that things weren't going exactly like they'd planned, although at first the soldiers were obviously taken completely by surprise. When they started returning fire, the sound was unbearable.

Slowly, she pulled herself together. What Mike said rang true for her: If this failed, they wouldn't get another chance. They would be tied up and imprisoned at best—shot at worst. And no one was going to listen to her if she argued that she'd cowered behind the bar instead of taking part. And if her friends died because she'd been too terrified to help, she'd never forgive herself.

She forced herself up into a crouch and peered around the end of the bar. She couldn't see what she could do without a weapon. She

turned to look behind the bar for something she could use just as Jack McCoy screamed, spinning around to face her, his chest a sudden explosion of blood. For one second that seemed to last much longer they looked at each other, and then he folded up and collapsed, dropping to the floor. The crossbow bounced towards her.

For some reason, this snapped her into action. She didn't yell, or scream, or cry—she felt the shock rolling through her, but it burned away her panic. She crawled forward and took the crossbow, cocked and ready, still warm from his hands. She took a deep breath.

Out in the bar, as if from a very great distance, she heard someone shouting. *Down! All of you, weapons down!*

She stood up, raising the crossbow and ready to take a shot, just as Raslowski dashed from behind an overturned table and ran out into the night.

She ran without thinking; she saw Raslowski sprint out the front, and she thought everything they'd just gone through would be rendered meaningless if he, if he—she didn't know. Called for help? Maybe. Reported their mutiny? She wasn't sure. She simply had an instinctive sense that letting Dr. Raslowski escape spelled disaster.

For a moment the outside was disorienting. It had only been a few hours, but rushing out into the open, chilled air made her feel like the world was spinning away. And for one brief moment she thought, *I could just keep running*. She was out, she was free, and if she told

herself she would call the authorities, send assistance, or just assume the others had the situation well in hand, she could excuse herself.

Except she couldn't. She couldn't leave Jimmy, or Mr. Eastman—or even Mike, who she barely knew but already liked tremendously. It wasn't how her father had raised her.

She put her head down and got her knees up like Mr. Eastman had taught her so long ago in gym class, and she ran after Raslowski.

He kept glancing back at her, his round white face tense with fear. He was slowed down by his fumbling attempts to get something out of his pocket, and with a lance of fear she thought it might be a gun. They hadn't seen Raslowski handle a weapon—hadn't seen him do anything except tap on his laptops and operate other pieces of equipment—but that didn't mean he didn't have one. He was with a military unit, after all.

It was dark, and she had to rely on her memory of the place. She knew the parking lot and the woods around One Eyed Jack's like she knew her bedroom at her father's house, which existed in a strange state between her adolescent taste and attitude and the bland neutrality of a guest room. In the same way she knew which floorboards in that small bedroom squeaked, knew without measuring what would fit or not fit in the closet, or every divot and scratch on the old kid's desk that still sat in the corner, she was almost able to imagine the rocks and other features in the parking lot

that would trip her up. Raslowski had no such advantage, and he stumbled and tripped his way through the dark, letting her slowly gain on him.

He didn't seem to know where he was going, anyway; he weaved this way and that, changing direction seemingly at random. He was nearing the tree line, and she knew if he made it to the trees she'd have a much harder time keeping him sight, and might even lose him.

She stopped running.

She knelt down on one knee and steadied the crossbow on it, sighting on Raslowski. She'd never hunted with a crossbow before, but she'd taken down her share of deer, and there was no time to worry over the finer points of shooting a bow as opposed to a gun. She squinted down the sight, tried to compensate for his erratic path, and squeezed the trigger.

He kept running and didn't even seem aware that someone had taken a shot at him. She tried to find the button that would autoloading the next bolt, but her fingers kept missing it, and she didn't look down at the bow for fear of losing track of where he was. As she frantically ran her hand over the bow, she saw him finally free whatever it was he'd been trying to pull out of his pocket.

He spun and brought his arm up just as she found the little bump and pressed it, the crossbow humming smoothly in her hands as if it

was happy to be doing the task it had been designed for. As Raslowski stumbled backwards from the force of his own momentum, a thrill of adrenaline and terror swept through her: *He was pointing a gun at her.*

Despite what had happened in the bar over the last few hours, this was a wholly new experience for her, and her reaction was almost involuntary: Her finger twitched, and the crossbow hummed, and then Raslowski was spun into the darkness as a crossbow bolt sank into his shoulder. There was the report of the gun going off, and then she was racing towards him, trying to keep her eyes on him in the gloom.

She thought her heart might just fail, it was beating so fast and ragged. It kept skipping beats, and then seemed to overcompensate with a lurching series of half-beats. As she ran, she felt weak and giddy, almost like laughing.

“Ah, fuck,” she heard Raslowski moaning, gasping. “Ah fuck you *shot* me!”

She staggered to a stop and loomed over him. She could see at a glance that the wound wasn’t going to kill him, at least not without some willful negligence. She knelt and retrieved his Beretta, feeling the weight. Feeling dog-tired, she held out her hand. “Come on,” she said gruffly, certain she had a good therapeutic vomit in her future.

Back in the bar, the eerie quiet made her pause, hefting the bow.

It didn't seem possible that things were that quiet, after the chaos and violence of the previous few minutes. Pushing Raslowski ahead of her, she crept in, nerves sizzling, but found everything under control: The five surviving soldiers, including Hammond, were all kneeling with their hands behind their heads while Mike tied them all up with their own plastic zipties. The unconscious one from the back room had been brought in, and was on the floor, breathing peacefully. Jimmy covered everyone with one of the soldiers' handguns, which had been piled on the bar along with several extra magazines.

The bar was a mess. Raslowski's equipment was strewn across the floor, several tables had been chopped up by gunfire, hunks of wood and broken glass were everywhere, crossbow bolts jutted from the walls. Two of the soldiers were wounded, although to her untrained eye none of the injuries looked life-threatening. Three bodies lay still on the floor, and she avoided looking at them.

Her eyes caught on something and she looked back at the bar itself, searching until the movement caught her eye. She couldn't stop a small, amazed smile from blooming on her face: The goddamn Dipping Bird was still going, completely unscathed.

"Good," Mike said, smiling at her. "You had me worried for a moment."

Hammond, who had been staring at the floor, motionless, looked

up sharply.

Mike frowned, looking at Raslowski. "You okay?" he asked her, crossing over to them.

"I'm *not*," Raslowski said sourly, grunting in pain. "Thanks for asking."

Haggen stepped over and took Raslowski by the arm. "Look on the bright side, Doc," he said. "If Candace Cuddyer can't kill you, chances are you can't be killed by any mortal means."

Mike guided her to a table. She realized she was numb and shaking from reaction. She'd come close to killing another human being. She'd hadn't meant to, and hadn't actually done it, but it still left her shaken. And even if she hadn't actively killed anyone, she'd been involved with the deaths of other people. Her eyes kept finding their bodies, no matter how hard she tried to ignore them.

A glass of whiskey was placed on the table in front of her, and she looked up sharply to find Glen Eastman looking down at her with obvious concern. She smiled at him and lifted the glass, but didn't drink right away. "Thanks."

"You're *lucky* he isn't *dead*," Colonel Hammond snapped.

Candace looked up, surprised. The colonel was leaning forward and staring at her fixedly, her eyes intense.

"Why?" Mike asked, stepping around to position himself between Hammond and Candace.



Candace couldn't see Hammond as she replied, but she could hear the tone of her voice, which sent chills down her spine. "Because," Hammond said steadily, "if that man dies, then every one of us, and everyone *else*—*everyone*, everywhere, all over the world—is as good as dead."