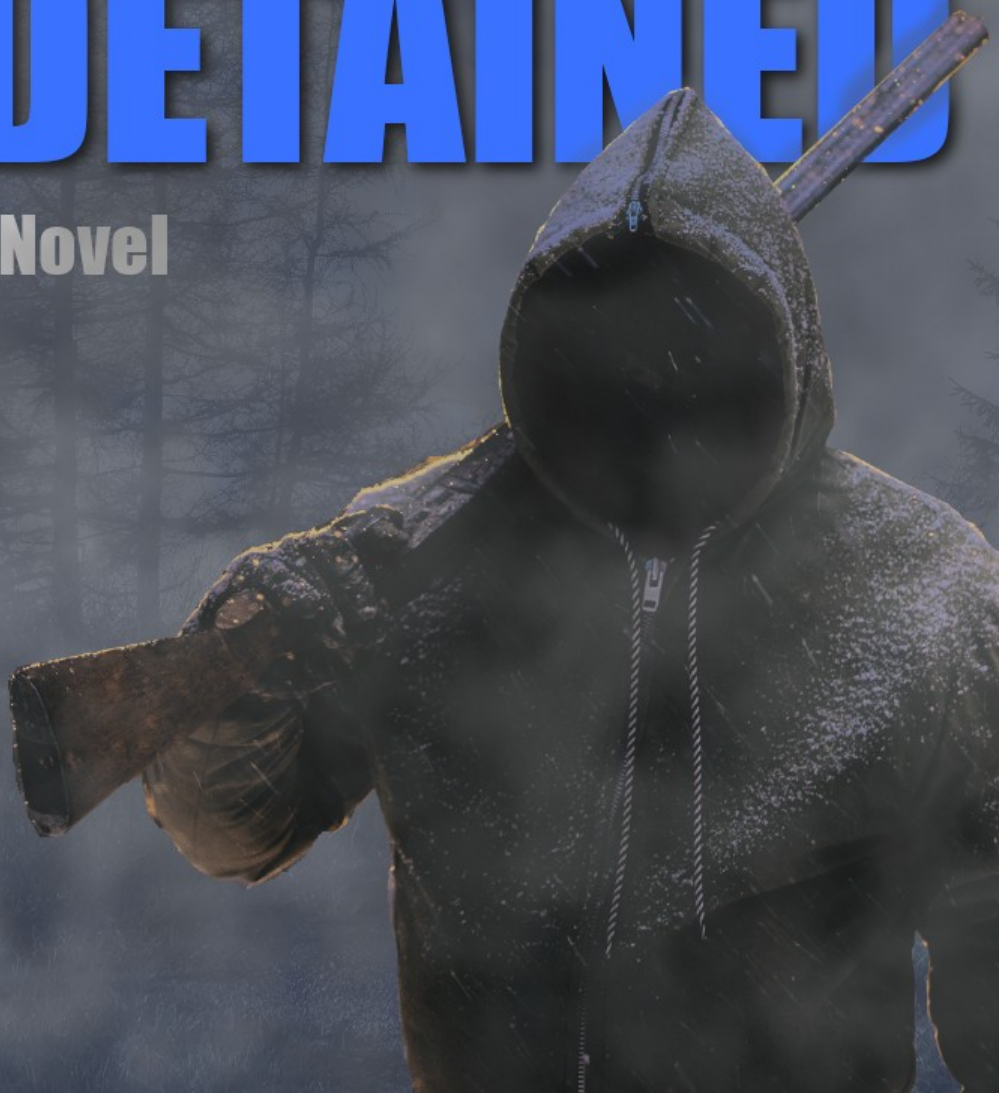


JEFF SOMERS

DETAINED

A Novel



DETAINED

Chapter 19

by Jeff Somers

PART TWO

19. Mike

A tense silence greeted Hammond's words. Jimmy stepped away from Raslowski, who sat slumped in a chair, breathing hard and sweating as he stared at the protruding shaft of the bolt in his shoulder. Jimmy put his handgun close to Hammond's head. She didn't flinch, or take her eyes off of Mike.

"My friend Jack's dead because of you," Jimmy said. "He was kind of a prick and we argued a lot and I'm not really sure he liked me all that much, but you know it makes me not really care if you're next."

Mike felt another exhausting dump of adrenaline as he realized Haggen was maybe off the rails a little. But he didn't disagree. These people had marched in and taken them prisoner. They'd killed first. He didn't think the townsfolk had any choice but to fight back, and he wouldn't feel bad if Jimmy shot them all. But he also thought it would be a mistake.

"Jim," he said, stepping up behind him, slowly, careful, "We need

to ask them questions. We need information.”

Jimmy nodded. “Sure,” he said. He extended the gun a little further and wagged it at her. “We’re going to ask you some questions. And you’re going to answer them. Or I’m going to shoot you dead.”

Hammond didn’t react. She stared at Mike, not Haggen.

“There’s no time—”

“No,” Mike said, pulling a chair from the floor, setting it in front of her and sitting down. He didn’t know what to do, how to proceed, but he didn’t see any profit in admitting that. “No, we’re not going to play that game. Here’s what’s going to happen.” He looked over his shoulder. “Glen, would you see to Dr. Raslowski? Don’t pull the bolt out, but get him some water, maybe, and make sure he isn’t bleeding too much.” He looked back at Hammond. “You’re going to tell us what’s happening, or Mr. Haggen here is going to shoot you. I’m going to ask Mr. Haggen to shoot you someplace non-fatal, so we can keep asking your questions—”

Haggen snorted.

“—but I don’t know if he’ll listen. Or if he’s good enough with that gun to miss your arteries. So, Colonel Hammond: What’s happening?”

The colonel rolled her head on her neck and stared at Mike in silence.

Frustration and anger boiled inside him. “Last chance, Colonel,” Mike said. “Why’d you storm in here and detain us? What’s going on at that facility up the road?”

Hammond swallowed. “I don’t relish the idea of a bullet, Mr. Malloy,” she said. “But I am unable to answer your queries because this is a matter of national—”

Haggen cocked the hammer of the gun. Mike held up his hand. He had the sense that this situation was hanging by a thread and could turn into disaster. If Haggen killed Hammond, he wasn’t sure they’d ever find out what was happening.

“A disease?” he said. “An experiment gone wrong? Radiation?”

Hammond’s face was tight with tension. “I am unable to answer your queries—”

Haggen stepped forward and pushed the gun into Hammond’s forehead. The colonel closed her eyes tightly, but didn’t move.

“Colonel!” Mike said, leaning forward. He was worried Haggen would do something too quickly. They needed time for Hammond to really think about being killed, being hurt. They needed it to sink in, to give them a shot of getting some information from her. He couldn’t say so to Haggen, so he tried to inject some urgency into his voice. “Colonel, you said if we lost Raslowski, if he died, we were all already dead. Why? You’ve already told us that much. Fill in the blank. Let’s start there.”

Mike pictured Detective Avvy Ramirez, Jersey City Police, who he'd hired for a week to give him lessons in interrogation techniques. Bald, loud, chubby, he was the sort of cop who wore gold chains and broke into spontaneous dancing while talking, suddenly swaying his hips to an imaginary salsa beat. He had a reputatioon as the guy you sent into the box to question someone, because he more often than not got guys to talk when no one else had been able to.

Ramirez stressed that *everyone* wanted to talk. Everyone wanted to tell their story. The trick was getting around their natural reluctance. And Detective Ramirez had taught him to look for chinks in the armor, stubs—things the subject had *already* said. They were almost always more willing to say more on the same subject, and once people started talking they had a tendency to *keep* talking.

She swallowed, eyes still shut. For one second Mike thought he had her. Then she opened her eyes, and they were clear, and her gaze was steady.

"I am unable to answer your queries," she said in a steady voice. "Because this is a matter of national security."

"Son of a *bitch*," Haggen said, jaw clenching. Hammond closed her eyes again. Mike half-stood, reaching for Haggen.

"It doesn't matter if *I'm* dead."

Everyone froze. Mike stood up, looking over Hammond at Raslowski. Glen Eastman hovered over the physicist uncertainly, but

the doctor didn't seem to be about to pass out any more. He was staring at Mike with a bright, alert expression.

Haggen turned and trained the gun on him, but Raslowski didn't pay him any attention. Hammond twisted around, face going red.

"You are *not authorized* to offer any data or assets to non-cleared individuals, Doctor!" Hammond snarled.

"Jim!" Mike shouted, stepping forward and putting a hand on Haggen's arm. "Jim, he's volunteering, man. He's a *volunteer* here, okay?"

"Doctor!" Hammond shouted.

"Shut up," Raslowski snapped. "It doesn't matter. You think *this* scenario is salvageable?" He barked an unsteady laugh, and Mike thought the good doctor was further gone than he'd assumed. "We had one goddamn job, Colonel. All we had to do was preserve the status quo. All we had to do was prevent anyone from leaving for a few hours."

"No one's left," Hammond said, her voice like gravel.

Raslowski snorted derisively. "Sort of, close to, kind of—it doesn't matter. We had a clear baseline, and we have deviated from it *severely*. Imagining that we have accomplished our mission is ludicrous. But say we have! Say that despite this *clusterfuck* all around us, we're still on target, praise *Jeee-sus*! Then it *still doesn't matter*. Because then it's over."

The other soldiers murmured. Mike thought Hammond was going to explode, and he was ready to jump on her. Then he stole a glance at Haggen, who was sweating and kind of wild-eyed. Mike figured he'd never killed anyone before. Never threatened someone in cold blood. They were all crashing from the fight, getting achy and shivery in reaction. He thought he had better take control of the situation soon, get things sorted out, or they were going to lose their chance to find out what was going on.

"Candace," he said without looking away. "You ever fire an automatic handgun?"

There was a beat of silence. "No. But I could sure try."

He smiled. "Take one from the bar, come here, and I'll give you the five-second lesson. Jim. *Jim.*"

"What!" Haggen said, too loud. He was blinking sweat from his eyes. "What?" he repeated, more softly.

"Candace and me are going to take Raslowski into Jack's office, so he can talk freely, okay?"

Haggen nodded, eyes locked on the doctor. "Okay."

"Keep things cool out here for us, right?"

Haggen nodded, but he was still holding the gun on Raslowski. Mike reached up and put his hand on Jimmy's shoulder. He jumped, then lowered the gun and looked at Mike. "Yeah, okay, okay," he said.

"Thanks." Mike turned and found Candace standing next to him,

holding one of the Berettas.

“Safety,” she said, demonstrating. “Trigger.”

He nodded. “Good enough for now. Keep the safety on.” He turned and gestured at Raslowski. “Come on. Can you walk? We’ll patch you up while we talk.”

“I’m coming with you,” Glen Eastman said, looking ridiculously portly as he cleaned his glasses. “I want to hear this.”

Mike watched Raslowski struggle to his feet and walk towards him. He didn’t want Glen getting in the way, and he wanted to control the information. Maybe it didn’t make any sense, him thinking he would be the best person to be in charge, maybe he couldn’t justify it, but he didn’t want anyone else making decisions for him.

“Glen,” he said. “We’ve got a manpower shortage. It’s already me and Candace in there with one prisoner. Would you mind staying out here and backing up Jim? We’re gonna come right out and report back to y’all.”

He’d thrown in the *y’all* on purpose. As he said it, he pinched his nose and rubbed it, mirroring Eastman as best he could. One of the things he’d learned in his travels: Mirroring. It worked remarkably well; by adopting people’s expressions and gestures, they saw themselves in you and trusted you. It was subtle—it wasn’t magic—but it was effective.

Eastman pursed his lips, then nodded curtly. "All right. I can see that. I'll even things up out here." He turned and walked to the bar where the confiscated sidearms were piled. Mike and Candace looked at each other and he almost felt psychic, knowing she was wondering if letting her old gym teacher have a gun was a good idea. But one battle at a time.

Raslowksi was pale, and when Mike leaned down to help him walk he didn't object, steadying himself with a hand on Mike's shoulder. Once in the office, Mike pointed at the desk. Raslowksi sat on it, sliding himself onto it with a pained grimace. He looked defeated and tired, Mike thought; a spray of blood had stained his neck and hair.

"Let me take a look," Mike said, leaning in to examine the bolt in the shoulder. It wasn't terribly deep, but he remembered the bolts McCoy had loaded in it. After making sure the wound wasn't bleeding actively, he nodded.

"Well, Doc, that's a barbed head in there, which means it will tear your shoulder to pieces if we try to pull it out. It doesn't seem to have hit an artery, so I'm sorry to tell you that our best course of action is to just leave it in place. We can wrap it in some bandages to secure it so it doesn't get moved around, and make a sling for your arm. Until we have some real medical services, that's all I think we should do."

Raslowksi grunted. "Fine." He looked around. His glasses had

been bent at some point and sat at a crazy angle on his face, but his eyes, bright blue, were bright and alert and intelligent.

“So,” Candace said, casually holding the gun at her side in what Mike thought was an implied—and impressive—threat. “What’s going on, Doc?”

Raslawski shifted his weight and grimaced. “It’s simple. We came here to make sure you couldn’t leave, because you’re all going to do terrible things in the near future.”

Mike and Candace exchanged a look. “Who’s going to do terrible things?” he asked, looking back at the older man.

Raslawski sighed. “All of you.”