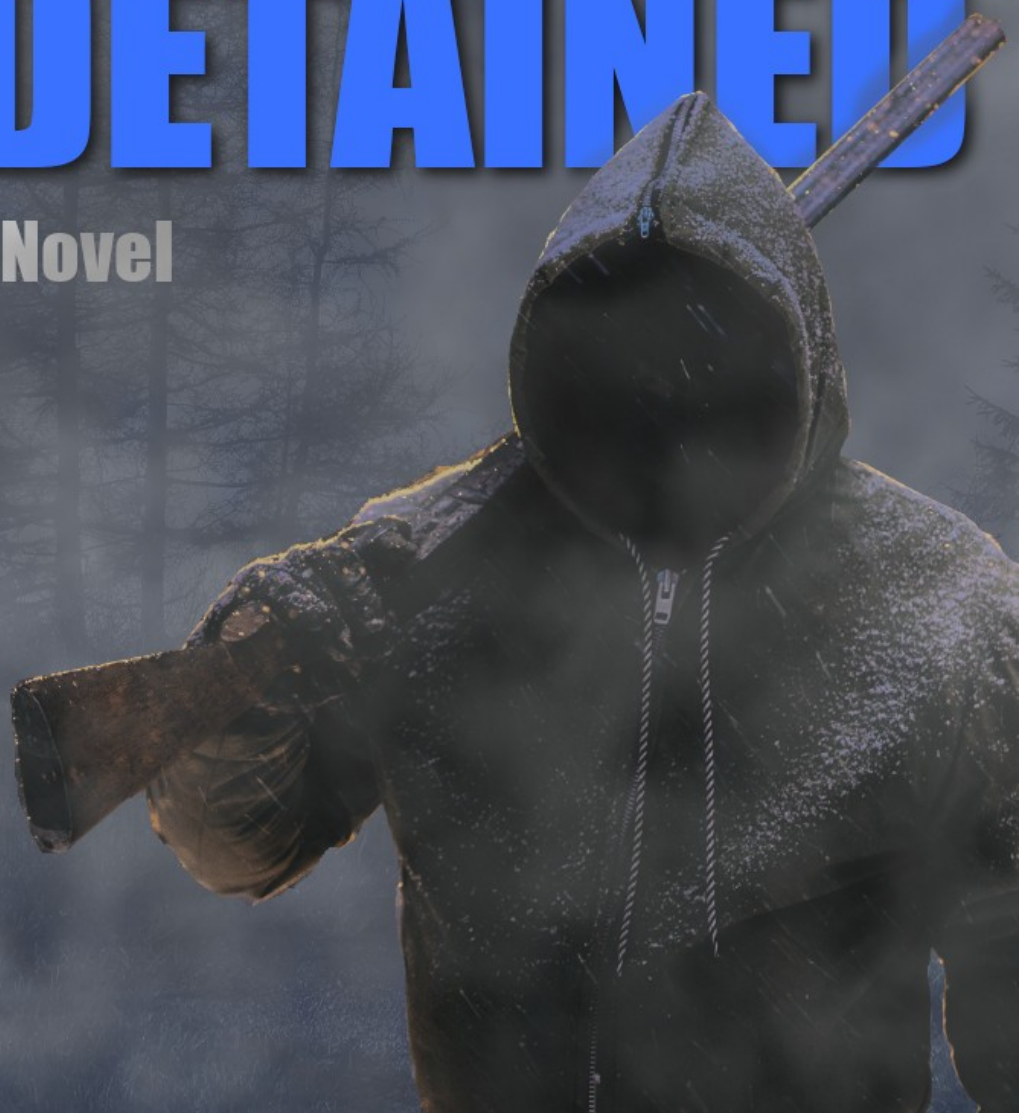


**JEFF SOMERS**

# **DETAINED**

**A Novel**



# DETAINED

## Chapter 31

by Jeff Somers

### 31. Mike

He stared down into his glass. Bourbon, and not the best bourbon either—though he was probably spoiled on that account. Black credit cards meant you could be one of those people who insisted on his favorite whiskey wherever he went, even if the bar or restaurant or hotel had to send someone on a lengthy road trip to fetch it.

*You're going where? Robbie had asked him. For god's sake, why? You just got back from the Mike Malloy Finds Himself Tour!*

He looked up nervously and realized he still didn't have an answer that would make any sense to anyone.

"How long have you—" Candace started to say.

Haggen cut her off. "I set this place up three, four months ago," he said. "This was some *Field of Dreams* shit, wasn't it?"

She shrugged, staring at Mike. "I don't know what it is, frankly. For me, it was all kind of sub-conscious, you know? Feelings. A few images. What about you?"

Mike frowned. "For me it was more coherent, I guess. I spent the

last year or so traveling around—it's a long story. I felt compelled to just keep moving, and I made arrangements with people to learn things, you know? I was restless. And I wanted to be a better person, more in the moment, more *capable*." He grimaced. "I sound like an asshole, don't I?"

"Definitely," Haggen said, grinning around his own tumbler of bourbon. "Like a *rich* asshole, though, if that helps."

"Wait a sec," Candace said. "You guys *know* each other?"

Mike nodded. He liked her. She had a Look; it was experience, years, but not in a bad way. Like wearing off some of the tread had honed her, revealed something better underneath. "Like I said, my plan, such as it was, involved driving around and, well, hiring people. A few weeks learning how to hot wire a car, a few days learning how to weld. Anything, really."

Jimmy snorted. "So one day I get a call from some New York asshat named Rob Kittle, asking me if I want to make some money teaching some other New York asshat to hunt and track and, you know, not kill themselves in the wild," Jimmy said. "And, seeing as I have the fucking state up my ass about back taxes, it was an opportune moment to relieve Mr. Malloy, Millionaire, here of his cash."

Mike smiled. "So I came down here and we met at One-Eyed Jack's, and ... it's hard to explain."

“You felt like you already knew Jim?” Candace said.

Mike looked at her, smiling. “*Exactly*. Him and Glen Eastman.”

Candace blinked, her face crumpling into confusion. She looked at Jimmy, and Mike felt a pang of jealousy. “Mr. *Eastman*?”

Jimmy nodded. “It makes sense,” he said. “Give it a moment. Think about it.”

Mike watched her, and saw her working through it just as he had—though for him it was worse, eh figured, because he didn’t know any of these people. Except he *did*.

“We started talking, and we’re both freaked out,” he said, and Haggren nodded. “We’re both fighting this weird sense that we’ve met, that this is important, that we’ve been sort of hanging around waiting for this. And then Glen comes up and just sits down and he’s doing the same thing. And we started trading stories—things we’ve been thinking, like mantras. Images that keep repeating.”

Candace nodded. “I keep seeing ... that old Dipping Bird from Jack’s,” she said, sounding hesitant, he thought, like this was the first time she’d risked saying it out loud.

Jimmy sighed. “Well, me and Glen ... we had this moment a long time ago. I’ve been keeping a journal. Anything that seems related—random thoughts, weird dreams, *deja vu*—I wrote it down. Glen did the same.”

Mike cleared his throat as Jimmy stood up. “We’ve been

comparing notes, and we've pieced some things together—things that we all agree on, things we've all seen or thought repeatedly.”

Jimmy picked up an old-school marble notebook and brought it over to her. “I tried to make it a little neater.” He turned and looked at Mike and winked. “I always was a kiss-ass in school. Candy will tell you.”

She opened the book. Mike knew what it looked like at first glance: *Insanity*. Haggen had filled every line with neat block printing that felt like a horror movie prop, occasionally spicing things up with doodles and surprisingly complex and detailed diagrams, and sketches of several people that had been rendered with eerie, lifelike realism, including a hard-faced older woman, a pretty younger woman with bright red hair, and an older man, scowling unhappily. It was disturbing, and if Mike had seen it in a courtroom he would have voted *guilty* without hearing another word.

But, he recognized most of it.

Not in a literal way. He couldn't say he'd ever actually met those people, or heard the terms *transmogrifier* or *Raslawski Field*. But the moment he saw them or read them, he realized he was familiar with them. The best way he'd figured out how to describe the sensation was a conversation in the next room overheard as you were falling asleep: Occasionally a phrase or word would carry through to your dreams, and haunt you.

He watched Candace read and sipped whiskey. He'd never seen her before, but yet the moment she'd arrived at the door he'd known her, he'd felt comfortable with her, like something was slipping into place. And now that she was sitting here, he couldn't imagine her anywhere else.

Her face told a story, starting with skepticism, bleeding into surprise, and finally settling into a mask of intense concentration. When she finished, she looked from Jimmy to him.

"Jesus," she breathed. "Did any of that really happen?"

Mike shook his head. "Nope."

"But I almost remember it. Almost."

Mike waited a beat. He was about to say things he'd been thinking for weeks, for months now, but he knew that on one level they were insane things.

"That's because they really happened," he said. "And then they got changed."

The words hung in the air for a moment, heavy.

"It took me a while, too," he went on, swirling whiskey in his glass. "Once you think of it, though, it's the only thing that makes sense. Hell, we're here because it all really happened. I came here because I've *been* here before, in a sense. Jimmy was here at this cabin because this is where he ... ended things before. You came *back* because you were here when it happened. And Glen Eastman's been waiting for

the rest of us, just biding his time.”

“So you think,” she started, then shook her head. “You *believe* they invented a way of changing *reality*, of plugging some numbers into a machine and pressing a button and changing the fundamental facts of existence, came here because our names—*us*—came up in their simulations or whatever, they detained us at One-Eyed Jack’s, we *broke free* and killed a bunch of soldiers, stole their magic reality box, and came to *The Sprawl* where I used to shotgun beers while standing in a horse tub, and Jimmy here hacked the box and reset the last few years of our lives?”

“Yeah,” Jimmy said, grinning.

“And so do you, or you wouldn’t be here,” Mike added. “And there’s this: It’s all happening again.”

Candace blinked. “What?”

“Like he said, Glen’s been obsessing over this shit for years now. He’s been keeping an eye on the old abandoned factory up the road. He says that six months ago, there was a lot of activity—trucks in the middle of the night, workers, soldiers—but you wouldn’t know it to drive by. It looks dead and empty.”

“But the security system is active,” Mike added.

Jimmy nodded. “Right.”

Candace shook her head. “Look, all right, I’ll admit it: I’m here because of something I can’t quite explain. Okay. I remember things

that never happened. I remember some of the stuff in this *notebook*, for god's sake!"

She tossed the notebook onto the floor. Opened her mouth, then shut it. After a moment, Mike thought she sort of ... collapsed, shrinking down into herself. Then she took a deep breath and looked at him. The shock of familiarity was electric.

"Fine. I admit it. I believe it. I can remember a whole different six years. I didn't leave town, I didn't fail out of school, I didn't get a job at Rudy's on Ninth Avenue. I stayed here, I buried my father, I worked at Jack's, and one night you walked in and ordered an expensive whiskey and then we were detained." She nodded, once crisp. "Fine, I admit it."

"So, we're in the same situation," Mike said. "If they're set up at the facility again, if we're all *here* again, then they're watching us. Which means our names are still coming up in their model. Which means at some point—"

"We'll find ourselves at One-Eyed Jack's and they come busting in."

Jimmy stood up and pointed at her. "Bingo."

Mike waited. The Candace he didn't exactly remember would jump at the chance. she wouldn't want to be left behind, left out. She wouldn't want to let fate choose her path. If nothing else, she would want to keep her hand on the stick.



After a moment, she nodded. “Okay. I’m not gonna lie; I’m here because something I can’t explain has drawn me here. Fine. Let’s get to the bottom of it. I’m in.”

Mike smiled.

“So what’s the plan?” Candace asked, looking from Mike to Jimmy.

Mike took a breath, but Jimmy beat him to it, draining his glass and slamming it down on the floor.

“Step one,” he said with a grin, “is go get a drink.”