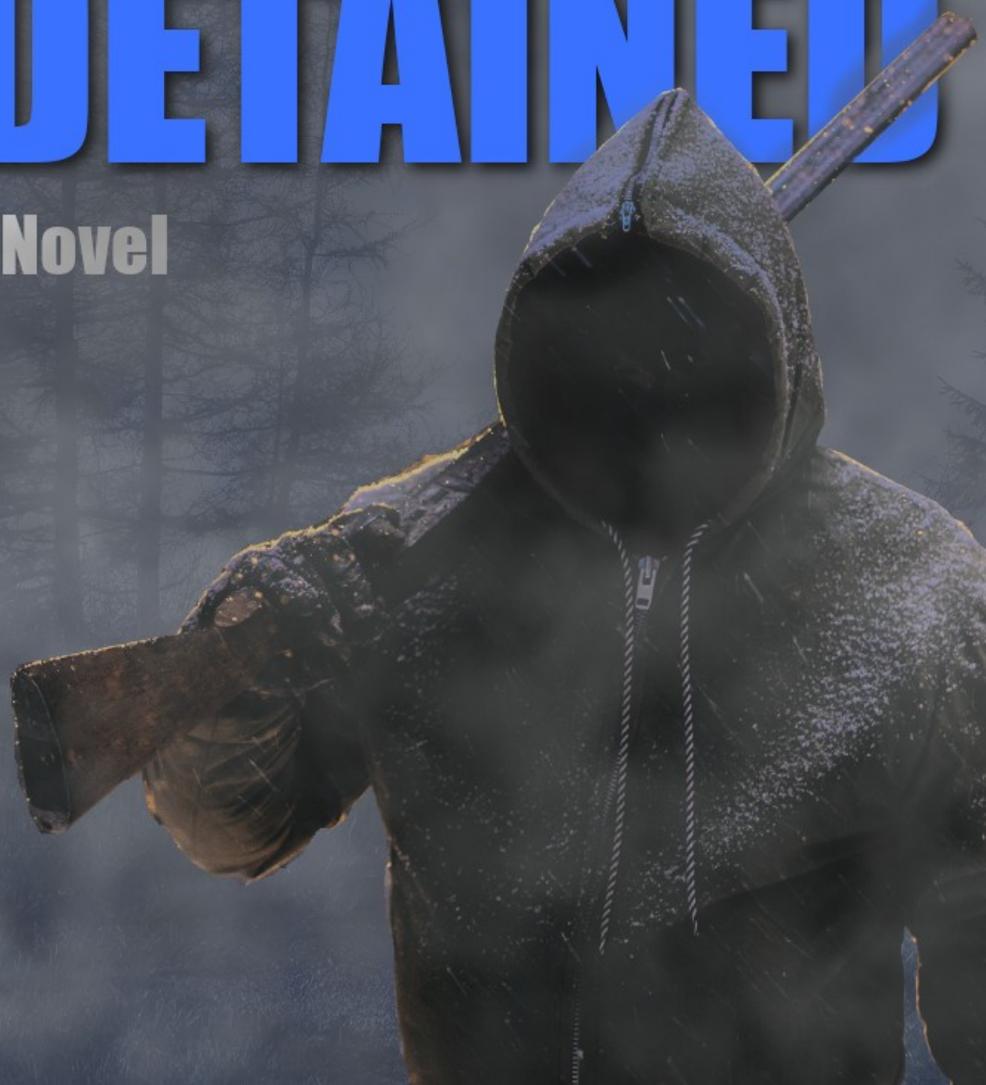


JEFF SOMERS

DETAINED

A Novel



DETAINED

Chapter 35

by Jeff Somers

35. Mike

The waiting was excruciating. He'd given in and had a whiskey, and then another, and didn't feel a thing. He sat stiff with tension, trying to hold a pose he hoped resembled relaxation and calm.

He'd never had employees. Prior to his travels after Julia's death, he'd never had a *job*, not even when he'd been younger and his parents hadn't had any money, making his financial situation much more modest; his parents had sometimes talked about forcing him to get a part time job to earn his own money but had never quite gotten around to making it an order or a requirement, and his father had always been willing to cheerfully hand over twenty bucks whenever asked.

He'd worked several shitty jobs since embarking on his travels. There were always places willing to hire someone off the books for cash, usually to do physical labor. He'd stocked some shelves, pitched some hay, cleaned out latrines, and helped build a house. Now he sat at the table at One-Eyed Jack's and watched his employees

pretending to have a good time and felt like an asshole. What else could he be? He had hired a private army. He was paying fifty-four men and women to shoot at what he wanted them to shoot at, to take someone else's property, to infringe on someone else's rights.

Hiring them had been surprisingly easy. He'd given Robbie the contact information for Todd and his merry band of militiamen, authorized him to make deals, and that had been that. Once Todd and his crew had satisfied themselves that Robbie really did represent their pal Mike Malloy and not some nefarious sting operation from the Feds, they spread the word and applications came in. Todd himself had joined up and functioned as a sort of commanding officer, an affable man in his fifties who smiled a lot, made a lot of jokes, and carried a laminated card-sized print of the Constitution in his wallet. He liked to make a bet that he could recite it perfectly from memory, and would pull out and offer the card to anyone who wanted to test him.

As he'd told Robbie, as long as they were fighting back against government overreach, they would die fighting. Todd had set out several rules: No civilians would be targeted or harmed, no theft just for theft's sake, private property would be respected. He'd assigned three people to keep track of the bar's owner and employees and ensure they were kept safe. Mike had given him a sketch of the layout—a layout drawn from memory of a place he'd never actually been—

including the trap door and crawl space. And then they'd all come to the bar on their own, with a list of basic materials to bring with them. In twos and threes, they'd traveled and congregated and Mike knew that Jack McCoy was puzzling over the best night his bar had enjoyed in years as dozens and dozens of people piled in.

And now he was waiting. For the lights, the noise. The soldiers. For Hammond, and Raslowski, and King, and all the others. He was waiting for them to crash in to detain him, Jimmy Haggen, Glen Eastman, and Candace, and they were going to get a surprise.

Haggen poured himself another drink, and Mike noted with muted alarm that the bottle was half empty. He worried that Haggen might be a loose cannon, a drunk careening through whiskey and cigarettes to explode and screw up the plan. He didn't *know* Jim Haggen. He had an *impression* of him which wasn't, actually, any better, but he had no idea how he might control Haggen's behavior in any way.

He glanced at Eastman, who appeared to be genuinely relaxed, smiling as he watched the band. Glen had been crucial in two ways: He'd jumped into the negotiations with Todd, and the two discovered a spiderweb of shared contacts and opinions, names that could be dropped, and shorthand that magically opened doors. Without Glen Eastman and his befuddled, thick-glasses brand of retiree thoroughness Mike didn't think he'd have an army in place.

He drummed his fingers on the table. The tension was unbearable, knowing something was going to happen and just waiting for it. For the first time in two years, he wanted to get high, just to pass a few moments a little faster. That had always been the appeal for him. You took drugs, everything sped up, and you didn't get so bored and tense waiting for things to happen—they came at you in a constant, shocking wave.

He thought of checking on Candace, tied up as comfortably as possible in the storage room next to Jack McCoy, who'd gone from enjoying his windfall to being deeply outraged to now simply being confused. He felt badly about having to treat her that way, but he was certain that they all had to be here. If she wasn't here, then Raslowski's work would reveal that—and it might even render them unimportant, no longer a threat, locked out and unable to ever get close to the black box again. He would make it up to her. As soon as they had secured the box and controlled the situation, he would make amends and even offer her the chance to make adjustments even though she hadn't contributed. She might change her mind when the dust had settled, when she saw that it was a done deal.

Something told him otherwise, though. Something told him she wasn't going to be very forgiving about being dragged in and tied up. He smiled a little. He was going to have to be careful not to get hurt when they let her go.

He realized with a start that he could feel a tremor in the floor boards.

This is it, he thought. He looked at Jimmy, who nodded, and then at Glen, who was already on his feet.

“All right, everyone!” Glen shouted as the music stopped abruptly. “We’re live. Be careful!”

No one said anything. Mike stood and there was a calm, organized reaction as tables were overturned and positions were taken. Rifles and handguns were produced. Mike knew that out in the tree line, another thirty or forty people were waiting to encircle the place and flank the soldiers; one thing he had to admit about supposed “patriots”: There were an awful lot of them.

“The doctor!” he shouted. “Raslowski! You’ve all seen a photo. He can’t be allowed to slip away.”

He took his phone out of his pocket and pressed SEND on a message he’d typed out at the beginning of the evening: NOW.

For a moment, the bar hung in stasis, and he wondered at himself. A few years ago he’d been a shiftless addict, wasting everything—his life, his money. Then he’d been a pilgrim, still wasting time, trying to pretend anything he did mattered. And here he was trying to take control of the universe.

Through the windows he could see bright lights bouncing around, filling the place. Mike waited. Everyone waited.

Then the front door opened and two soldiers stepped into the bar, men dressed in camouflage, sidearms on their hips. Six of Mike's people swarmed in from the sides and put guns to their heads, pulling them away from the door.

A female officer he recognized as Colonel Hammond was in the doorway. Behind her, he could see her troops being swarmed, a few shots fired, isolated bursts. She started to turn, but his people grabbed her and pulled her in.

Mike glanced down at his phone. It was going so well he was having a hard time believing it. He and Glen had tried to plan it so that no one got hurt, so that it was a bloodless coup, but he hadn't believed it was possible. But maybe the element of surprise was so powerful, that they would be ready for them so unexpected, that it was going to work.

Hammond was pulled in and disarmed, zipties wrapped around her wrists. She stared around coldly, her icy blue eyes landing on Glen, then Jimmy, then Mike. For a second they stared at each other. Then she looked around the bar, eyes roaming.

Looking for Candace, he thought.

More gunfire outside, but still just single shots, nothing that sounded like a sustained firefight. He kept his eyes on the screen.

"Colonel Hammond," he said, glancing up to see if she reacted to his knowing her name. "Will you order your people to stand down?"

No one has to be hurt, here. We all walk away if you'll give that order."

The woman in front of him was exactly as he'd expected her to be: Quiet, calm, with an air of authority he couldn't deny. She looked around, then back at him.

"You've got quite the squad of irregulars," she said.

He nodded. "We share a dislike for the government knocking down our doors and detaining us without due process," he said, more for the benefit of his allies than any real conviction. They were being paid, but money wasn't everything to these folks. He felt the phone buzz in his hand, but he kept his eyes on her. "Will you give the order, Colonel?"

She pursed her lips. Outside, things had gone quiet. "Very well," she said after a moment. "Rowland, pass the word: Stand down. No resistance. We've been sacked."

One of the soldiers who'd come in with her, a handsome black guy, nodded. With a glance at Mike, he turned for the door. After a moment's hesitation, two women standing guard over the entrance stepped aside and let him pass.

"Glen," Mike said, looking down at his phone. "Take a couple of people and make sure we've got Raslowski out there."

"Sure thing," Glen said. He gestured at a group and they hustled out, guns at the ready.

On Mike's phone, the text message read ROME HAS FALLEN.

He looked up as Glen returned, pushing Dr. Raslowski ahead of him. The scientist looked around in complete confusion. His glasses were bent and hung on his face at an odd angle.

Mike found Jimmy Haggan, still sitting at the table with a glass of whiskey. Their eyes met.

“We’ve got it,” Mike said. “The facility’s ours.”