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# Black Fridays



*Par Michael Sears*

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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurMeet Jason Stafford, a former Wall Street hotshot who has made some bad moves and paid the price. After two years in prison, Jason is no longer welcome on Wall Street. But due to his financial crime expertise, one firm wants him to quietly look for irregularities in the books of one of their junior traders, whose body was just pulled from the Long Island Sound. Raising an autistic five-year-old alone, Stafford can't refuse the lucrative offer. The job is supposed to last two weeks, tops. But soon he's facing threats and intimidation, and more people are dying. Stafford must fight for his life-while struggling to save his son from a different kind of danger...Black Fridays is the first in an explosive new series, perfect for fans of Peter James, John Grisham and Lee Child.ExtraitTHE WOMAN SCREAMED for the first three seconds. Three seconds took her down only fourteen stories she still had twenty- four to go. She fainted. Her arms and legs stopped flailing, her body went limp.The few pedestrians on Maiden Lane, forced by circumstance to

brave the baking midafternoon sidewalk on the hottest first day of summer in New York City history, all froze at the sound, like grown-up children playing a game of Statues. The bicycle messenger, a recent veteran of two tours of duty in Afghanistan, was busy chaining his vehicle to the no parking sign. When he heard the scream, he dove clear across the sidewalk, landing behind a large concrete planter. Wind resistance on the woman's skirt, combined with the relative effects of gravity upon the denser mass of her head, spun her so that when she struck the roof of the idling Town Car at more than one hundred miles per hour, she hit headfirst like a bullet. Her heart, unaware that the woman was now legally dead, continued to pump for another few seconds, spewing streams and geysers of blood out of various wounds and orifices. Despite some doubts, the investigating team from NYPD found no reason not to treat the situation as a straightforward successful suicide thereby both clearing a case and, with the same stroke of the pen, keeping the murder rate down below the previous years, a measure of great importance to the Mayor's Office of Tourism. No one paid much attention to the shaky veteran who told anyone who would listen, When you want to die, you don't scream like that. I WAS THE FIRST alumnus from my MBA class to make managing director. I was also the first, as far as I know, to go to prison. They make you skip breakfast the day they release you. It's not the final indignity, and far from the worst, but it's such a small thing, so petty, so unnecessary, that it just hammers home one last time, as though you needed another reminder, that in prison you are nothing. Nothing. I followed the guards down a short corridor, through a final electrically controlled gate, and into a small room with a metal door, two molded plastic chairs, and a three-inch-thick plexiglass window on the far wall. Through the window I could see my father in the next room, showing his ID and signing his name with a pen that was chained to a clipboard. They probably had to throw the whole thing away whenever they ran out of ink. He saw me staring at him and gave a short wave. He had been to visit only a month before, but he looked years older, grayer, paler, shorter. I imagined there were more pleasant things to do on a late-summer morning than pick up your only son from prison. My sentence had ended at midnight; that's the way they do it. For two years, time had been marked by lights on, meals, lights off, with random violence the only relief from boredom. The guard, polite, almost respectful for the first time, had arrived a few minutes early. It didn't matter I hadn't slept. Good luck, Jason. My cellmate was awake as well. He had another four months to go on a two-year stint. He was a car wash owner turned tax protester, who had believed some Internet nonsense about income taxes being unconstitutional. So for a pissy hundred grand or so, he had become a guest of the state, learning the hard realities behind constitutional law. Take care, Myron. Give me a call sometime. I doubted he would. Neither of us would want to remember where we had met. There were a few murmured good-byes from the darkened cells as the two guards walked me off the block. Otisville harbored a more congenial, less confrontational clientele than Ray Brook, where I had served the first eighteen months of my sentence. At Otisville, it was possible to play a game of cards that did not lead to getting jumped in the yard the next day. I hadn't exactly made friends there, just acknowledged fellow travelers. Two years. Two years earlier, in the midst of a plea bargain meeting, I thought I had misheard. Two years. For an accounting shuffle? Ridiculous. You pay a fine and move on. Time served. That's how these things end up. But the Feds wanted my scalp. It was a half-billion-dollar accounting shuffle, which had come close to bringing down a major investment bank. The stock had plummeted. Investors were outraged. The president's mother-in-law lost almost ten thousand dollars! The Feds needed someone to put in the stocks and get pelted with stones and rotten fruit. I was their man. My first stop was Ray Brook. It's about a long home run from the Canadian border, high in the Adirondacks. It's the real deal. Somehow, when you do time for a white-collar crime, you think you're going to spend the days passing around Barrons and discussing your portfolio with like-minded individuals. Work out, grow a beard, and catch up on your reading. It wasn't like that. Most of the habitués were there on drug charges, racketeering, or both. It was an eye-opening master class in Diverse Patterns of Confrontation in Modern Gang Culture. I barely passed. The macho posturing of Wall Street does nothing to prepare you for the moment when a three-hundred-pound Latino man with a dark purple scar running across his throat looks up at you from across the chow hall table and rasps out the words, Hey, baboso. Give me your lunch. I rapped twice on the table and offered him the bread and mashed potatoes. Truce. In comparison, Otisville was cake. It's no country club, no matter what the Wall Street Journal implied when I was moved there, but the prisoners are all short-timers and less prone to violent solutions to minor disagreements; no one wants to risk getting his sentence extended when he's marking off the last days till he goes home. And the food was better. Mr. Stafford? I hadn't heard him come in. He was a clerk, not a guard. A little pudgy baby-faced. Happy to have a ten-dollar-an-hour clerical job with full benefit, even if it was the night shift at the federal prison camp. I had a sudden flash of panic; they weren't going to let me leave. There was a mistake and

this unlikely boob had been assigned the job of letting me know. In your release expediter. I have some forms to go over with you. I sucked in a breath, let it out slowly, then did it again. My pulse rate slowed. Will this take long? As though I had an appointment. I'll do what I can. His voice went up at the end of every sentence, making it a question. I didn't know how much of it I could take. I know you have someone here to pick you up. He nodded toward the window. A guard was steering my father into an office and out of view. I hope to get you out in no time at all. He wanted to be nice. He wanted me to be nice, too. I thought of some of the other detainees he must have mustered out. It was a high-stress job. I decided to try to make it easy on him. What do you need from me? Forms. He explained them in bureaucratic detail. I signed them. He handed me a big padded envelope that held my clothes from the first day I entered the system. Underwear, jeans, and a polo shirt. I signed for them. I signed a release form that said I had been advised of the necessary procedures I would have to take in the event that I wished to protest any violations of my civil rights I may have suffered during my incarceration. I signed a separate form that absolved the Federal Government of all responsibility for any such violations committed by employees and a third form that said there hadn't been any such violations anyway. For such a brutal, stone-cold bureaucracy, the powers in charge were pretty sensitive about covering their asses. That's it, then. You can get changed now. I'll be back to get you in a while. The clothes didn't fit. My waist and hips were slimmer, my chest and shoulders broader. At the ancient age of forty-four, for the first time in my life I had pecs. In a while was still on prison time. No one was rushing to speed my way home. My father was still hidden in the office. I sat down, propped my feet on the other chair, and tried to imagine life on the outside. No man ever admits to having been asleep, but I had dreamed. Dreams of pain and torture. My body was on a rack, and each click of the wheel shot sharp spasms along my spine. Fuck! I staggered upright and stretched. I had felt much younger going into prison than I did coming out. Outside, two years is an episode; inside, an eternity. My stomach was telling me it was six, maybe seven. I thought about the hamburger at the 21 Club. Actually, any hamburger would do. And a cold beer. The door slammed back against the wall. Stafford! It wasn't the clerk; it was a dull-eyed dayshift guard. That meant it was already after eight. This way. He stepped back and waved me out ahead of him, looking me over as though he expected to find I'd stolen a chair and hidden it down my pants. He swung the final door open and I felt like I was taking my first full breath in two years. My father wrapped his arms around me and while I wanted to pull away, it just felt too good. I let him go on hugging me until he pulled away in damp-eyed embarrassment. Hey, son. I looked him in the eye; I owed him that. Hey, Pop. There was too much to say regrets, recriminations, disappointments so we did what we always did. We said none of it. It was raining and windy. The tail end of summer was giving way to fall all too quickly. The chill came right through the light nylon jacket he had brought for me. The coll...