

Victimized by identity thieves, DJ was urged by coworkers to sign up with an identity theft protection agency. A notification took him by surprise. Several million dollars were deposited in his name.

STUNG

By David Tayoun

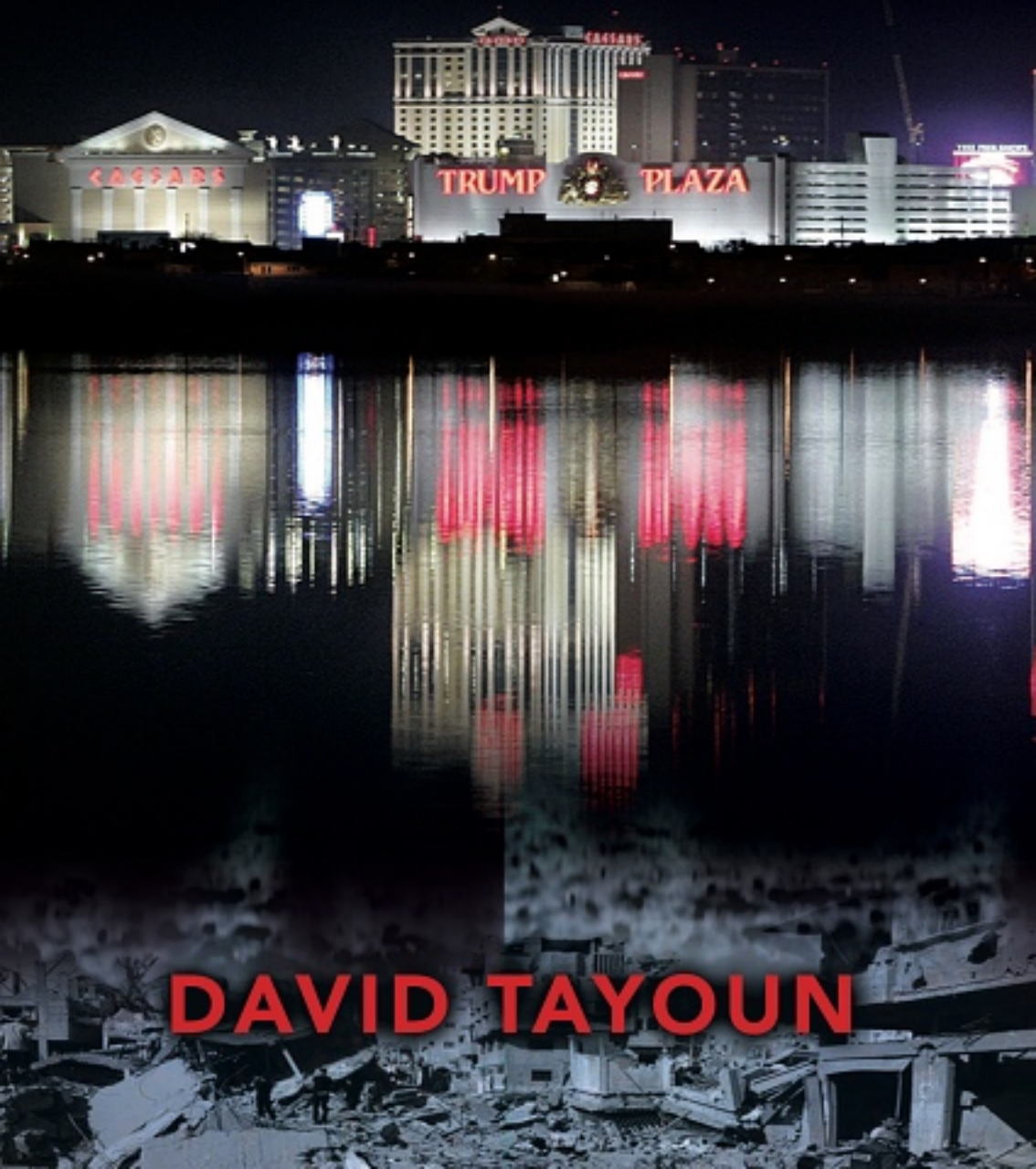
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STUNG

one man trying to get even



DAVID TAYOUN

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Chapter 1:

Wreckage

Pulling into the far- right lane on I-95 South, in Philadelphia, DJ took the exit, or as it should be named the entrance to the Walt Whitman Bridge which would take him across the River into New Jersey.

Aggravated by the glare of the setting sun in his eyes and becoming more annoyed with himself for leaving the city so late because it resulted in him being caught up in rush hour traffic.

He took the drive into Philadelphia to look at a car he saw for sale, online.

Walking into a car dealership can be like walking into a time sucking machine. “Once they get you sitting down at their desk the conversation can start to resemble one of the many police interrogations I dealt with for no reason,” DJ spoke aloud to himself, “First they say you fit the description of a guy waving a gun around and then they barrage you with question after question trying to trip you up. They keep talking and talking until you scream, I DID IT just to get the hell out of there! Or in the case of the car salesperson, okay I give up I’ll take it!”

He sat back in his driver’s seat and smiled. It was one of those huge gloating, I’m so proud of myself type smiles.

When a cartoonish looking plump, bald salesperson wearing an Easter egg tie greeted him before he had his first foot through the dealership door DJ knew he was in for the duration.

The once in a lifetime, bargain priced car he drove all this way to see, of course had been sold that morning. That’s when the high-

pressure well-orchestrated sales dance started. Slowly and overly friendly at first with Bob the salesman's determination growing more desperate with each vehicle he presented to his fresh mark.

Bob and the good cop bad cop routine he had going on with his sales manager drove a good bargain, but DJ stood firm using the old "I need to talk with my wife," line.

After three hours of valuable time, he would never, ever get back just like those bogus police interrogations the trio shook hands. DJ promised them he'd call when he and his wife made their decision.

Chuckling and proud of himself for holding his own he merged onto US-42/South, the Atlantic City Expressway. He began daydreaming about times when Deasia and him actually; did make big decisions like buying a car together.

In the rearview mirror he couldn't help but notice a Camaro, rust colored following or more like tailgating him closely. His first instinct was to slam on the brakes and let the jerk hit him but at this rate of speed that could be disastrous.

As the Camaro pulled up beside him, a smaller car directly in front of him slowed down causing DJ to nearly swerve trying to avoid hitting it. When a pick-up truck pulled within inches of his back bumper, he filled with adrenaline.

"What the fuck is going on?" He yelled. "You wanna play?"

Intense fear quickly replaced his anger when he looked to the left again and saw the teenage passenger pointing a gun directly at him.

His need to flee was overpowering but there was nowhere to go. When the shooting started, DJ's mind tried to convince him the nonstop whizzing sounds and bursts of light were familiar. After all his other nickname was pyro.

The sale of illegal fireworks was his successful side gig and had been for many years.

The constant sound of shearing metal however was not familiar, it was terrifying.

Lowering himself as far as he could without obstructing his forward view, he prayed for an opportunity to escape to present itself.

No longer able to feel anything, fearing he was shot and was now paralyzed he knew he had to get away or he would die.

Realizing he was getting close to Atlantic City he looked to his right. He wondered what would happen if he pulled off to the side of the road, floored it and got in front of the smaller car that had him sandwiched in the front.

Taking deep breaths, he realized he had no other choice. He had to make a move, or it was lights out.

With both hands placed firmly on the steering wheel he pressed down on the gas pedal, slowly at first. As he pulled his car onto the grassy area he could hear the twitching and cracking of twigs under the vehicle. The air was still heavy with sulfur and smelled like rotten eggs. It was now or never. He applied more pressure to the gas pedal and within seconds he was side by side with the piece of crap economy car. He floored the Monte Carlo, aggressively.

The element of surprise was on his side, and he was able to catch his breath as he struggled to maintain control and keep his vehicle from sliding further down into a gully. The small car was having trouble catching up with him the dam Camaro was gaining speed and getting close.

DJ turned the steering wheel slightly to the left and kept the gas pedal pressed to the floor. Seconds from being on solid road again well

ahead of the Junker he took his eyes from the left and straight in front of him was a garbage heap that included tires. Instinct caused him to veer right to go around the pile. He lost control and sometime between the second and third flip, he passed out.

The aggressors pulled over to get a closer look. Deciding the Monte Carlo was totaled and hoping its driver was too, they high fived each other got back into their vehicles and sped off.

A tractor trailer driver who witnessed the car flipping called 911. He relayed the mile marker to the operator and drove on.

Two Atlantic City police cruisers pulled up to the mile marker at the same time. It didn't take long for them to spot the still smoking wreck. Jeering and racing one another they slid down the steep hill.

It was full on dark now. DJ came to. It took him a minute to remember what happened. He heard voices and thought whoever was shooting at him wanted to finish the job.

Stunned by bright lights that were now shining in his eyes, he tried to get up but couldn't move.

“Don't move!” Someone shouted. He caught a glimpse of a badge. Never in his life was he so happy to see a cop. “Help!” DJ yelled as loud as he could. “We're here to help. Where are you hurt?” That thought hadn't occurred to DJ He reached up to feel his forehead. Once he felt the warm blood it was like a signal to his brain saying yes, I'm hurt and in pain. “My heads bleeding.” He started shouting, “I can't move, my legs are stuck!” “More help is here. Breathe normally and we'll get you out of there.” One of the cops said.

“But I think I've been shot.” DJ yelled.

The two officers looked at each other. One of them radioed the 911 operator and asked if she had the phone number for the trucker that

reported the accident. He stepped away from the wreck to make the call. The trucker recalled four cars driving too close to one another and one, the Monte Carlo pulled to the side of the road to avoid hitting the vehicle in front of him. He saw all three cars stop to help, so he didn't bother stopping.

As firefighters worked to rescue him from the wreckage, DJ closed his eyes and struggled to remember every detail of what happened. First he remembered the trash pile. For the life of him he couldn't figure out why these people were trying to kill him.

Convincing himself that the deafening sounds of crunching metal meant that he would be saved any moment, he tried to take a deep breath. The pain in his chest caused him to panic all over again.

He closed his eyes again and remembered how good the beer tasted he had when he made a pit stop to wait out rush hour traffic. "Why'd I stop. If I stayed in traffic this wouldn't have happened."

E.M.S. workers slid him onto a board and placed a brace on his neck. Then they lifted him onto a gurney. In between their barrage of questions as they struggled to carry him up the hill one of the officers fired off his own set of questions.

"Three cars sandwiched me in and started shooting at me. I tried to get away by passing the one on the right, the side of the road and I lost control because of a pile of old tires." "Are you sure you haven't been drinking?" The cop sneered.

"It figures." DJ thought to himself. "Here I am dying and right away this fucker assumes I'm the bad guy. What else is new."

"I stopped at a strip club and had one beer, only one. I've done things in my life that I got away with but this ain't one of them. I'm telling you the truth. These were gang bangers. Yes, they were most definitely shooting at me. Check my car. It's full of bullet holes."

Deciding he was damned if he did and damned if he didn't he made the decision to stop cooperating. These cops didn't even ask him what make of cars the shooters were driving. They assumed he was guilty of something and there was nothing he could do about that now.

A female officer appeared on the scene once they were back up on the side of the road. She asked him if there was someone she could call. Not wanting to scare his mother he asked her to reach in his pocket and get his phone. He told her his wife was listed in his contacts under my baby girl.

She walked away and he couldn't hear the conversation. He was relieved his wife even answered the phone.

"Your wife will get to the hospital as soon as she can." "Thanks." DJ said reluctantly. He didn't want to give any of them an ounce of consideration. Why would he?

Rolling at high speed while lying down facing the opposite direction felt like an amusement ride and DJ was not a fan.

The female officer was quiet. She was sitting in the ambulance, facing the right direction.

It was the E.M.T.'s who were now firing off questions. "Do you have any known allergies, any underlying health issues, or previous surgeries?" The pain in his head and one of his legs was becoming intense. His chest hurt too. It was difficult to breathe and the more he struggled to catch his breath, the more intense the pain in his chest became.

Done cooperating with them too, he closed his eyes and went back to being mad at himself and playing the what if game.

"Why did I stop at that strip club?" He mumbled. "I got enough trouble with the wife."

That was a fact. DJ Davis had more than troubles with his wife. He was so sorry he ever encouraged her to take the pain medication prescribed to her after a car accident on the Atlantic City Expressway.

“Karma is an evil rotten bitch! Here I am now, the victim of a crash on the same damned highway.”

That crash was bad, her car was totaled. She had to have surgery on her ankle. It was so broken they had to use screws and pins to put it back together.

Thinking about how badly it must have hurt her made DJ nauseas.

He wasn't going to lie it was nice having her stuck at home although it did put a lot of pressure on him. He had to be Mom and Dad to their three small kids. He cooked, cleaned, carpooled the kids and nursed Deasia back to health.

She recovered. Unfortunately, she never stopped taking the pain medication. When her doctors finally cut her off she was frantic. Seeking out another doctor and then another to accommodate her habit didn't take effort at first.

People had been following him for some time and now they were shooting at him. Did his wife owe them money for drugs? What else could it be?

~

Frantically, Deasia Davis called her neighbor. The elderly woman loved looking after their kids, when needed.

She pulled on an Eagles sweatshirt and brushed her long black hair. After pulling it into a high ponytail she smeared on lipstick. Rushing towards the front door she rattled off instructions to each of the three kids and to Sophie, their neighbor.

Unable to help herself she smiled at the thought of having prescriptions for pain medication readily available, again.

The thought made her feel bad. With everything that happened and as angry as she was with her husband, deep down she couldn't help thinking of the kind, skinny kid that looked like Chris Rock. They met in high school. She wasn't head over heels in love with him anymore, but she did love him.

As she pulled into the AtlantiCare Hospital emergency room parking lot she was filled with fear. She pushed the button to shut her car off and wondered in what condition she would find her husband.

Pushing the lock button on the key fob, she hesitantly walked towards the entrance to the emergency room.

~

In the trauma bay DJ panicked as nurses scrambled to insert an IV and assess his injuries. They were eerily quiet.

“Everything hurts.” He mumbled. One of the nurses patted his wrist and assured him they would give him something for pain as soon as they could.

A doctor that looked like he was barely eighteen walked in and listened as the nurses and interns rattled off blood pressure and oxygen readings. Then they got serious. The words head injury, possible punctured lung, broken ribs, and broken leg hung in the air because DJ refused to let them in.

The doctor ordered more bloodwork specifying a drug and alcohol screen and a CT scan, stat.

“More assumptions.” DJ thought. His anger resumed.

As attendants lifted him onto the CT scanner a woman entered the room and told DJ his wife was in the waiting room. At first he was relieved. The relief quickly dissolved into indifference.

As the motorized platform he was lying on moved slowly into the machine, DJ felt dizzy before passing out again.

When he came to he was back in the trauma bay. Another doctor, this time a young woman was explaining their findings to him.

“You have two cracked ribs. They’ll heal on their own. your right leg has a clean break so it should heal easily. There’s a deep gash in your forehead that needs stitching. Your lungs are bruised but the good news is they haven’t collapsed and should heal fine. Our worry is your head injury. We’re going to admit you and keep an eye on that as well as the other injuries. Overall, Mr. Davis you are one extremely lucky man.”

Relieved to hear he was going to live and didn’t even need surgery; he took two deep breaths. It hurt!

“How long will he need to be in the hospital?” Deasia asked. The sound of concern in her voice calmed him. “That depends.” The doctor answered.

A team entered the trauma bay to staple the cut on his head. Finally, they finally administered pain medication through his IV which relaxed him, while they placed the staples.

Unable to handle seeing the procedure, Deasia went off in search of coffee.

She returned and asked her husband what caused the accident. When she seemed unfazed by his explanation he demanded to know what she knew about the shooting. “Why would you think I knew anything about that?” She snipped.

DJ made the decision not to respond. Instead, he fumed as she sat on a stool in the corner with her head down, texting.

When transport arrived to take him to have his leg set and put in a brace, he told her to go home and take care of the kids.

She told him she'd be back after she dropped the kids off at school.

He wanted to scream, "Don't bother," But instead he bit his tongue.

The disgust between the two of them was palpable.

Thinking of the wreckage that was once his beloved car in that gully hurt but the thought of pulling the plug on the wreckage that was once a happy marriage was unbearable.

Early the next morning DJ woke up to two of Atlantic City's finest sitting in chairs, drinking coffee in his hospital room.

"There were no bullet holes in your car. Do you want to change your story?" Not believing they even looked at his car and convinced even if they did look it over it wasn't done thoroughly DJ said, "None of it was a story. I explained what happened and every word was the truth. I was surrounded and they shot at me. I had no choice but to drive off the road."

"We had the ER physician run a tox screen." Another scare tactic. "And?" DJ knew they found nothing. One beer was all he had. He closed his eyes and his mouth. A few minutes later they told him he could pick up the police report in a few days.

Chapter 2:

The Cop

With each step Jimmy took the keys attached to the belt loop of his brown Carhartt work pants, jingled forward, and rattled back. To keep the rhythm, he kept a steady pace. He worked longer than intended, and he knew Maria would have dinner waiting.

When he retired from the police force due to injuries sustained in an accident during a high- speed chase he promised his wife he would be home for dinner every night, on time. She was eventually okay with him buying a small warehouse to build custom kitchen cabinets only if he promised it would be part-time, a hobby more than a job. Business was slow at first but lately it was increasing steadily.

Jimmy was considering adding custom granite countertops to his inventory. It would mean more money, and more work. He liked the idea of being able to hire a few more people.

Making a right turn from Raleigh Avenue onto Ventnor Avenue it was clear how ethnically diverse Atlantic City continued to be.

With either the Atlantic Ocean, one of many inlets and the bay within walking distance, the medium sized New Jersey city was a great place to grow up. Whether it's still a good place to start a family depends on which of the forty-eight blocks you live on, and of course your tax bracket.

On the left- hand side of Ventnor Avenue is a row of ten, fifteen-year-old, four level townhouses. Each one with identical bluish gray siding and blue, white, and gray striped awnings over the front porches. These homes were the city's answer to much needed lower cost housing for restaurant, casino, and retail workers. On the right side, set back

from the street is a mustard-colored arts and craft bungalow built in the 1940's. Next is three sets of brick duplexes that were built in the 1960's. Further down the block on the left is fourteen rowhomes with another fourteen on the right side of the street. When built in the early 1900's to house workers from the Hotel Windsor; the Traymore, and a handful of other new large hotels, they were all identical. Today each home sports its own personality. Over the last century some owners have enclosed their front porches, added additions on the back, some added aluminum siding and others used cedar shingles. Some are well loved and cared for while others are in various stages of disrepair.

Jimmy couldn't miss Benito across the street on the corner rocking, almost jumping back and forth incessantly repeating "This is Jimmy's block don't make me call him, this is Jimmy's block don't make me call him."

During the early 20th century Prohibition laws were ignored in Atlantic City. This left the city booming financially, while other cities across the Country were suffering the effects of the depression. At the same time all types of organized criminals set up shop and planted deep roots, some still operating throughout the dark underbelly of the Jersey Shore today.

It was a constant battle keeping the darkness off this block and a war keeping it out of the city.

Jimmy crossed the street. Benny spotted him and yelled, "Jimmy's here, Jimmy's here." The two shook hands and Benny went back to rocking back and forth this time chanting, "Ezee's home, Ezee's home, Ezee's home."

The front screen door sprung open on the last house in the row and Ezekiel, Benny's much older brother bounced down the porch steps.

“Ezee, what’s happening?” Jimmy asked. “Not much Jimmy. It’s been a long, windy winter and I’m looking forward to Spring.” “Same here Ezee. How’s your mom, is she doing okay?” “Winter is always tough on her Jimmy as you know. She can’t get out. She’s looking forward to the warmer weather too.”

Salvador Forero moved young wife and baby boy, Ezekiel to the United States from Puerto Rico in the early 1970’s to work in the casinos. Once settled they added a little girl they named Luisa. Sal worked fulltime in the maintenance department of one casino after another, moving another rung up the ladder which each job move. Wanting to provide the best for his family, he took on freelance repair person and construction jobs on the side. Once Ezee was old enough he worked construction alongside his father.

Later in life with a twenty-four-year-old son and a twenty-year-old daughter Sal and Fausta welcomed Benito into their family. It was obvious baby Benny was different within months of his birth. The diagnosis of autism came years later.

Fausta never recovered from nerve damage suffered during the emergency C-section to deliver Benny, and she was confined to a wheelchair. With a disabled wife, a special needs son, and a daughter in college Sal and Ezee worked day and night to cover the family’s astronomical bills.

Sal suffered a massive heart attack eight years earlier while on a construction site and passed in the hospital a few days later. Luisa graduated college and moved to Puerto Rico with her husband to open a health clinic. This left Ezekiel to care for his mom and younger brother. Ezee’s wife refused to move in with his mother and his mother refused to move in with Ezee and his wife.

This left Ezee in a constant state of guilt because he was working to keep both households afloat while also trying to be there for everyone who needed him.

Jimmy and Maria did what they could to help. They picked up groceries, made sure Benny remembered to put the trash out and gave the two rides to doctor appointments when possible.

“Hey Jimmy, there’s a new dealer hanging on this corner. The bastard put his hands-on Benny, on my little brother, and told him to get off the corner. I’m so pissed Jimmy. Have you seen him? Do you know who he is, who he’s working for?”

“Now Benny saying, call Jimmy talk makes more sense, you teach him that? Jimmy asked Ezee. Both men laughed.

“I haven’t seen him yet, but I’ll be keeping my eyes open.” “Appreciate that man,” Ezee answered, “I’ll try to be around more at night but a friend, my neighbor was in a bad wreck last night. His cars totaled. He’s one of those poor guys that can’t catch a break. I wouldn’t believe it if I didn’t witness it every day with my own eyes. It’s dramatic man, the poor bastard.”

“I have that old jeep if he needs to borrow wheels until he gets back on his feet.”

“Thanks Jimmy, I’ll pass that on.” Ezee said shaking Jimmy’s hand.

Fausta wheeled herself to the front door and called her sons inside to eat, in Spanish. “Go home Jimmy,” she hollered in English, “Maria has your meal ready.” “I’m goin, I’m goin.”

Jimmy assured Ezee he’d keep an eye out for Benny and the latest scumbag who was trying to take up residence on *their* corner. He said goodnight and ran across the street.

The Tayborn house at 3814 Ventnor Avenue was a single split level the couple had built on property owned by Maria's grandparents. This year they would celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary and thirty years in their home.

Lance, the couples medium sized mutt greeted Jimmy at the door by jumping in circles on his back two legs and barking excitedly. "I'm home," Jimmy yelled. "I'm putting dinner on the table, come sit," Maria yelled back.

After giving Lance a quick belly rub, he hung his jacket on a wooden coat tree and removed his weapon from the shoulder harness, checked the safety and placed it in the top drawer of a small chest in the foyer. He locked the chest and then hung the empty harness on the coat rack then walked up the five steps into the living room and then into the kitchen.

"You're late," she said trying to sound angry. "I stopped to talk with Benny," He answered while bending to kiss her on the cheek. "How was your day doll," trying to sound more interested in her than he was in the slab of meatloaf he dropped onto his plate.

Maria went on and on about going to the supermarket that afternoon. She dropped groceries off to her mother and to Fausta. His bride was so kind, and he knew he should be paying attention to her but the cop in him wanted to catch the latest drug dealing slimeball in action. He didn't dare mention it to Maria, he didn't want to upset her.

Instead, he formulated a plan.

Lance bounced into the kitchen and sat at Jimmy's feet. "How bout we go for a walk you little pain in the ass," Jimmy said sending Lance dashing down the steps to sit and whine by the front door. They both laughed.

Jimmy put the dishes on the kitchen counter and Maria rinsed them and put them in the dishwasher. “Go take him for his walk and be careful out there, we have a new drug dealer on the corner.” “You’ve seen him?” He asked, surprised. “I noticed him when I closed the front blinds last night.” He bent down and kissed her other cheek, “I’ll be careful.”

“You can’t take the Jersey outta my girl,” Jimmy thought, “She doesn’t miss a thing.” He put Lance’s leash on and then systematically put on his holster and inserted the weapon. When he reached for his coat Lance could no longer be patient and he started to bark.

The two walked three blocks north, crossed the street and headed south.

Stopping at a house across the street from his own home, Jimmy stopped to pick up a Seven-Eleven Big Gulp cup. He walked up to the side of the house and put it in a trash can. “Slobs.” He bought this house a few years back as a rental investment.

He could make out the shape of a man on Benny’s corner and several people walking towards the figure.

Chapter 3:

Boomer

This corner is no different than a million other corners across the United States. It starts out with a dealer on the corner and a little bit of foot traffic. Then the cars come and go, some speeding, some blocking the flow of traffic, most blaring music from large speakers.

Neighbors call 911 and if lucky a patrol car will occasionally drive by, chasing the dealer and customers but before the cop gets to the end of the street business is back to normal.

Next comes those derelicts shooting up heroin or smoking meth in between homes and then passing out. Unsuspecting homeowners go out their side door to put garbage in their cans and find a junkie sleeping in their bushes. They call 911 and if a cop shows up he wakes the junkie up and chases them off. In most cases they are back again the next night.

It doesn't take long before cars and homes are broken into, the violence starts, and gunshots become a nightly occurrence.

Elderly residents start to die off or move into senior communities selling their lifelong homes off to flippers or worse yet abandoning them which makes the homes the perfect location for dozens of junkies to crash. One drug house leads to another and then another.

Even if a bunch of neighbors get together and insist the police bust the dealer, the arrest only slows them down a few hours, at most a few days. They'll bail out and get right back to work, leaving homeowners feeling completely frustrated and in many cases terrified.

As he got closer Jimmy tried to identify the guy but there was nothing familiar about him. He was big. Jimmy and Lance crossed the street and walked about fifteen feet past the dealer. Turning abruptly Jimmy walked towards him and stopped a foot from him.

“Man listen, you can’t deal here.” Jimmy said. “Get off my corner old man,” the punk answered. Jimmy stood his ground. “I’m not playing with ya kid you can’t do this crap here.” The dealer got in Jimmy’s face and screamed, “SCRAM BEFORE YOU GET HURT BOOMER.” He walked away laughing.

“What did he call me?” Jimmy asked under his breath as he started walking the other way.

Two skinny scraggly looking men walked toward the dealer as the dealer cocked his head back and glared at Jimmy smugly. As Jimmy approached them, Lance growled softly. “Listen guys, I’m retired 5-0, a cop you get that right? I’m out here taking notes and photos of everyone that buys drugs on this corner. Do yourselves and favor and walk on.” The two men turned and walked, slowly in the opposite direction. Three other potential customers did the same.

The dealer screamed, “GET OFF MY CORNER!. I ain’t gonna tell you again.” Jimmy stayed calm but firm. “Kid I’m telling you; I’m retired 5-0 and I’m building a case here. If your smart you’ll bolt, NOW!”

The dealer crossed the street, took his cellphone out of his pants pocket, and made a call. He continued to glare at Jimmy.

Continuing to stand his ground Jimmy turned one of the dealer’s customers after another away.

Shoving the phone back into in his pocket, the dealer stomped away.

“That’s what I thought,” Jimmy said to the dog, Let’s go home buddy. Lance having sat too long tugged on his leash. “It’s a fulltime job keeping this block clean isn’t it partner,” he said to Lance. “We won the first battle with that clown.”

Maria watched the whole scene play out from a small opening in the curtains that lined the large bay window in their living room. She wished her husband would give up his crime fighting obsession but at the same time she also knew if he didn’t do it they wouldn’t be able to stay here, on this block, their block.

Her mind wandered back to the night of the accident. Every cop’s wife imagines the worst at one time or another while at the same time hoping and praying for the best.

That night she’d been out with her mother. They had dinner at a small Italian restaurant in town and talked for a long time over coffee and tiramisu.

Once home Maria sat in the living room. She happened to be looking out the front window as a patrol car pulled up. She assumed Jimmy was taking a break. When the car parked on the street instead of in the driveway, she lost her breath. Frantically she started praying. Lance barked erratically as the knocking on the door started. She couldn’t make her legs move. She didn’t want to hear whatever the message was to her from the other side of that door.

Her cell phone rang and vibrated off the kitchen counter hitting the floor with a loud thud. She forced herself to walk into the kitchen and pick it up.

“I’m okay doll!” It’s Jimmy she kept whispering to herself over and over. She hadn’t really heard another word he said. Tears of relief ran down her face. Lance was still barking at the front door. Maria wiped

her tears with the palms of her hand and with her legs still shaking and wobbly she made her way down the steps to the front door.

“He’s going to be fine,” the young officer said over and over as fast as he could. “If you’d like I can take you to the hospital.” “Come in.” she instructed him.

Maria remembering her husband was on the phone, she put it back to her ear and told Jimmy she’d be there soon. She put her phone and its charger in her purse. Reached for a small gray pitcher she kept on top of the refrigerator she poured out a handful of quarters. She dumped them into her purse and grabbed a heavy sweater from the hall closet.

Paul, the young officer insisted on helping her down the steps and into the front passenger seat of his cruiser. She was finally able to catch her breath and now felt strong enough to know what happened to her husband.

“He was in pursuit of a suspect and was somehow side swiped by another car, we aren’t sure yet if it was the suspect’s car that hit him. All I know is they are evaluating Jimmy’s injuries but he’s going to be fine, there’s nothing life threatening.

Maria breathed a deep sigh of relief.

The back- parking lot by the ambulance entrance was full of police cars. She wondered if they were all there for Jimmy or if criminals were unusually busy getting hurt. The change of seasons always caused an uptick in criminal activity, and it was the beginning of Spring.

~

“Spring,” Maria shook her head. No wonder I’m thinking of that night! This is the same time of year it happened. Four years ago, this week!



Paul guided her through the back entrance of the hospital and down a long brightly lit hallway. He pushed open a door that led to a small, private waiting room. Every seat was occupied by an officer.

They all stood as Maria walked in.

A nurse ushered her back down the hall, through two sets of automatic doors. While the nurse opened the sliding door to the bay that held her husband she couldn't help noticing a bronze plaque on the wall. *This trauma bay was donated by Frank Sinatra.* "Casino family." She said under her breath.

Relieved to see him awake and alert she gently put her arms around him and kissed his forehead. His neck was in a brace. "It's my back babe, it hurts!"

A doctor who looked too young walked in with a serious, almost grim look on his face. "You have a concussion, Jim. Best case scenario it heals itself in a week or so. Two of your ribs are cracked. I'm guessing caused by the airbag and you have a couple of compression fractures in your lower back. Then of course there's the whiplash. All these injuries unfortunately tend to be painful and have long recovery times. The good news is you should recover fully. "No surgery?" Jimmy asked. "No. Not now anyway, hopefully that doesn't change." Maria and Jimmy looked at each other and smiled. "We'll keep you for a few days to keep an eye on the head and back injuries, but my guess is you'll be fine."

Jimmy looked at the doctor and said, "Hey, Doc, this is nothing compared to the ass whomping I took so my wife wouldn't lose her job, when we first met." Maria laughed, "That's not how I remember it happening." The doctor shook his head and said, "As curious as I am, I have other patients to see." Steve said, "I have time and I think it's

interesting and would love to know how you snagged Maria when so many others tried and failed.” Jim started by saying, “Well you know how they wanted us to use control and resistant techniques, in an attempt, to reduce *use of force* lawsuits. So, I guess some jackass politician, after watching a Steven Seagal movie thought that reflected real life. Did he believe that cops with a short five-hour training course could replace years of training from someone that is a professional martial artist, someone like Seagal? So, Maria got a contract, you know probably because of some minority female charity.” Maria trying not to laugh, glared at her husband. She knew that he was trying to get a rise out of her. “Just because I was repeating some of my favorite scenes from martial arts movies as a kid with Joe and Pete, she decides to make an example of me. She told me, don’t go easy on me swing as hard as you can. Hell, I practically twisted myself in a pretzel and put the cuffs on for her.” Steve laughed knowing that the clowning around part was the only truth from Jimmy’s story. Maria said, “If you ‘re done, and only if your done I’ll tell my side of this story.” Jimmy rolled his eyes and said he would only cut in if she couldn’t remember something, or if she was making things up.

The pain medication given by the doctor finally kicked in and Jimmy was doing more mumbling then talking before he passed out. Maria continued, “Yes I remember him making me watch those old Black and white Chinese movies dubbed in accented English to prove that he was using actual techniques after our training session. One was called the Crab Technique, and another was the Drunken Fighter Technique and of course there was the Fighting Monk Technique. Although they were actual techniques, he was far from mastering anything. He finally confessed to being a third-degree brown belt in Tae Kwon Do but last practiced it ten years before joining the police department. Mind you. I had no knowledge of any of this when I saw him hamming it up before my training session. So, I asked him to be

my aggressor to show the effectiveness of the Tae Kwon Do counter fighting techniques using your opponent's weight and aggression against them. After his first He-Man attack, I deflected throwing him to the ground. He subconsciously went into his training form, but a third-degree brown belt not fluid in his form is no match for a tenth-degree black belt that hasn't had a break in training for 20 years.

We went at it for a good hour. I avoided him but knocked him down every time the opportunity presented itself. The point was made that a thin female obviously unmatched in size and strength was able to wear down a mean bear, at least until help arrives or eventually the opportunity presented itself to take him out.

We never got to finish the session because time ran out. He insisted on proving that he learned his techniques from these old movies and by the time we were done he offered me dinner and drinks and one thing eventually led to another. I was the loser because this neanderthal got me as the prize." She laughed and kissed his forehead as he slept.

When he returned to work, he was assigned to a special *No Crime* task force. It was more of a desk job. With it came a new partner, Tommy. Jimmy missed Steve, his long-time partner but he did like Tommy, at first.

Seeing the writing on the wall and knowing he wouldn't be able to serve the way he wanted to, Jimmy looked to the future. He and Tommy went into business together. At once Jimmy realized he made a big mistake.

Tommy was a dirty cop, and he didn't even try to hide it. He bragged about having a million dollars in a special account. Money he skimmed, thousands of dollars after confiscating cash from dealers during various drug busts in Atlantic City. Not wanting anything to do with him on the force or in business Jimmy refunded the down payments for renovation work they collected out of his own pocket.

Not happy that Jimmy reneged on their business venture, he tried to set Jimmy up.

When they first started working together, Tommy told him, “If you ever find yourself in a room with some suits, saying they don’t want to hurt anyone while shaking your hand and telling you they just want to get to the bottom of it, they are going to screw you, and they are looking to lock you up. Be prepared.

Driving down the street on his way home from work one day, he noticed four men on the roof of a house across the street. He didn’t see a work truck out front and after driving around the block there wasn’t one out back either. “They don’t have a permit.”

This was the first time he saw someone at the property in over a year.

He pulled his car over and asked. They yelled back down from the roof, yes they had a permit. Jimmy was sure they didn’t. All contractors place something with their business name on it, a truck, or a sign in front of any property they are working on.

An elderly couple owned the property. They passed- away and left it to their daughter who lived in Washington, D.C. Like most other absentee property owners that make up seventy five percent of Atlantic City property ownership, she hired a local real estate company to manage the rental. The real estate companies care more about collecting fees and rent than they do about who they rent property to. Complaints by tenants about the poor property conditions are managed by paying off code officials rather than fixing the problems.

These houses are like cancerous tumors in the neighborhood. They are used by drug users to get high. The police are constantly being called for domestic violence, for fights and because people refused to leave the property once the drugs are all used up.

Unable to miss the workers putting plywood over the existing shingles, and then putting new shingles on top of that plywood, he was sure they had no permit.

Jimmy called code enforcement. As he guessed they had no permit. The code enforcement officer went to the property and issued a stop work order. He also gave them a \$2000 a day fine for any day they work, up until they got a permit.

A few days later, frustrated after paying a \$2000 fine the homeowner put the house up for sale, as is. At first she wouldn't sell it to Jimmy but three months later she relented because no one was offering even close to what she was asking.

Jimmy was able to get Code Enforcement to Red Tag the building for past unpermitted construction of illegal separate apartment units and it was boarded up and labeled uninhabitable. Jimmy knew he was paying more than what the property was worth, but he thought it was better to pay more now then lose even more with the continued deterioration of his block which would also affect the value of his home.

Soon after he bought the property Jimmy was called to his captains' office. The captain disliked Jimmy because he refused to go along to get along. Once in the office the captain shook Jimmy's hand and introduced him to Frank Furhman and Frank's partner. Both men were FBI agents.

"We're not trying to hurt anyone we just want to get to the bottom of something." The captain said. "Oh fuck." Jimmy thought.

Knowing he did nothing wrong was no comfort to him. He'd seen enough innocent guys that were going after bad cops go down through the years.

Tommy made bogus reports incriminating Jimmy. It took a few weeks, but Frank listened to Jimmy. After a thorough investigation he was able to verify Jimmy's version of the events and was able to clear him.

Although he was cleared of doing anything wrong his injuries were continuing to cause him pain. The stress of the investigation didn't help.

The city doctors told him the MRI of his back showed he reached his maximum medical improvement. He would need to pass a physical endurance test. Jimmy was told he would be notified when the test would be scheduled.

The notification arrived and his test was scheduled for his birthday. Maria made plans for them and a couple of friends to go on a dinner cruise that evening.

Despite trying to reschedule the test for a different day it was set in stone and failure to show up would be an automatic fail. So early that morning Jimmy was more determined than ever to pass the test in record time and have a great celebration that night. He had no doubt he would be back to his old assignment with his old partner Steve in no time.

He was met by a nurse who had lots of forms for Jimmy to sign. Next came a drug test to confirm that he did not take any medication for pain. Jimmy never took what they gave him he didn't like the way it made him feel and he had seen too many people get hooked.

Jimmy tried to make a joke about the test being done on his birthday a thoughtful gift from his employer, but she was all business. Jimmy made it through all the push-ups, the stair climbing, and jumping jacks. Next was lifting or dragging various weights over different obstacles. The last task was the 3-mile run in 20 minutes.

The first mile Jimmy ran at a quick pace. Entering the second mile the pain started shooting across his back, and then down his legs. His feet went numb, and an intense sensation of pins and needles made it increasingly difficult to keep his pace. Halfway through the second mile, not being able to feel his feet Jimmy stumbled and collapsed. He hit the running track with his hands and face scuffing both resulting in minor cuts and bruises.

He was forced to retire.

At his birthday dinner, Jimmy tried to put on a good face on for Maria and their guests but the weight of being forced to retire at the early age of thirty was weighing heavy on him. He was not the kind of guy who wanted to sit on a porch and rock his days away.

Steve came from the bar with two beers and said, "Boy that nurse beat you up as bad as Maria did in the academy. Come on step out onto the deck with me."

It was a great night on back bay with the casinos in the foreground. The water was calm, and the low hum of the boat engines was soothing. Steve said, "Congratulations you lucky bastard." Jim said, "How do you figure that?" Steve said "You just hit the lottery. You got about ten years on and now you are walking with sixty-six and two thirds of your salary. You never have to worry about the corruption in the department and people constantly trying to get you fired. We both know they tried a half a dozen times, even after you still cover up for those scumbags. Jim you're not like me or these other cops you were in law school, you came from a business family." Jim replied, "And, what does that mean." Steve said, "Hell you already have rental property and do side construction work. So, you will find something to do. Not like the rest of us who only wanted to be cops. Hell, we would either drink ourselves to death or do some other drug because we wouldn't be able to think of anything else except get hired as a security guard that sits at a desk by

a door. You have a steady salary with the pension so you're not starting from scratch."

A light went off in Jimmy's head. He realized how true, Steve's comments were, and he realized the opportunity he had in front of him if only he would stop feeling sorry for himself.

Steve said, "Don't be too successful or they'll demand you be retested and forced back to work, so they can fire you. Now let's go in and have some fun since I'm your only friend and this is your birthday slash retirement party."

~

Lance's nails tapped on the tile floor in the foyer. "We're back," Jimmy yelled.

She was relieved. He grabbed the tray full of snacks she prepared from the kitchen counter, and they went downstairs into the family room to watch tv.

"Chased another one," he started, "I should've kicked his ass for what he did to Benny. If he comes back I will." "Oh stop!" Maria scolded.

"Hey, do you know what a boomer is, what does that mean?" "It means you're officially old." She laughed.

About The Author

David Tayoun is the son of a powerful Philadelphia politician, who also owned a Middle Eastern Restaurant that employed many immigrant employees.

He graduated from Julia R. Masterman High School in Philadelphia and received his bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from Temple University. David attended Capitol Law School.

He started his career in the Philadelphia Municipal Courts working with Parolee's in the FOD (First Offender Drug Unit Program).

David went on to become a member of the Atlantic City Police Department and received the Officer of the Year award. He served in the special Investigations Section and on uniform patrol. He retired from the force due to injuries sustained when he was struck by a stolen car during a chase.

Involving himself in politics in Atlantic City he amassed a loyal voter base. David was appointed as Director of Neighborhood Services for the City of Atlantic City, which oversees all business licensing and regulations and all aspects of the construction industry.

After leaving public life David started a successful Kitchen Cabinet and Granite shop employing many local, residents in need of a second chance.

He currently heads a development group TBC Enterprises LLC and runs Tayoun's War House LLC.

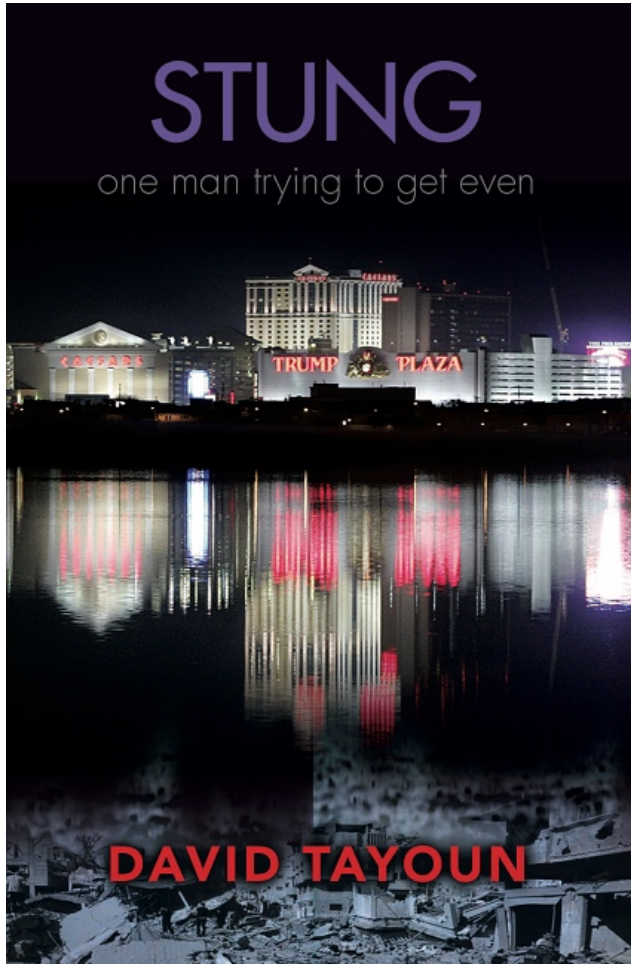
Early Reviews For STUNG

Started reading and had to finish but didn't want it to end. I could not put it down. The story seems like it was straight from news headlines, and it captured my interest with regards to greed and ID theft. If it were a movie with right cast, it would be riveting! Thomas Madamba ~ Atlantic City Police Captain, retired.

Unexpected twists throughout, I had to binge read! There better be a sequel. Nora Truscello~ Two-time best-selling author and international lecturer

I've always enjoyed a good thriller and this one is up there with the best. ~Captain James L. Andros, Atlantic City Police Captain, retired.

The characters were so well crafted! A great story of how three completely different men form a lifetime bond. This story has it all, action, adventure, family drama and a true sense of place. It was educational as well. Identity theft is happening everywhere! Doreen McGettigan~ Best-selling author, speaker, President of Intrepid Marketing



Victimized by identity thieves, DJ was urged by coworkers to sign up with an identity theft protection agency. A notification took him by surprise. Several million dollars were deposited in his name.

STUNG

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