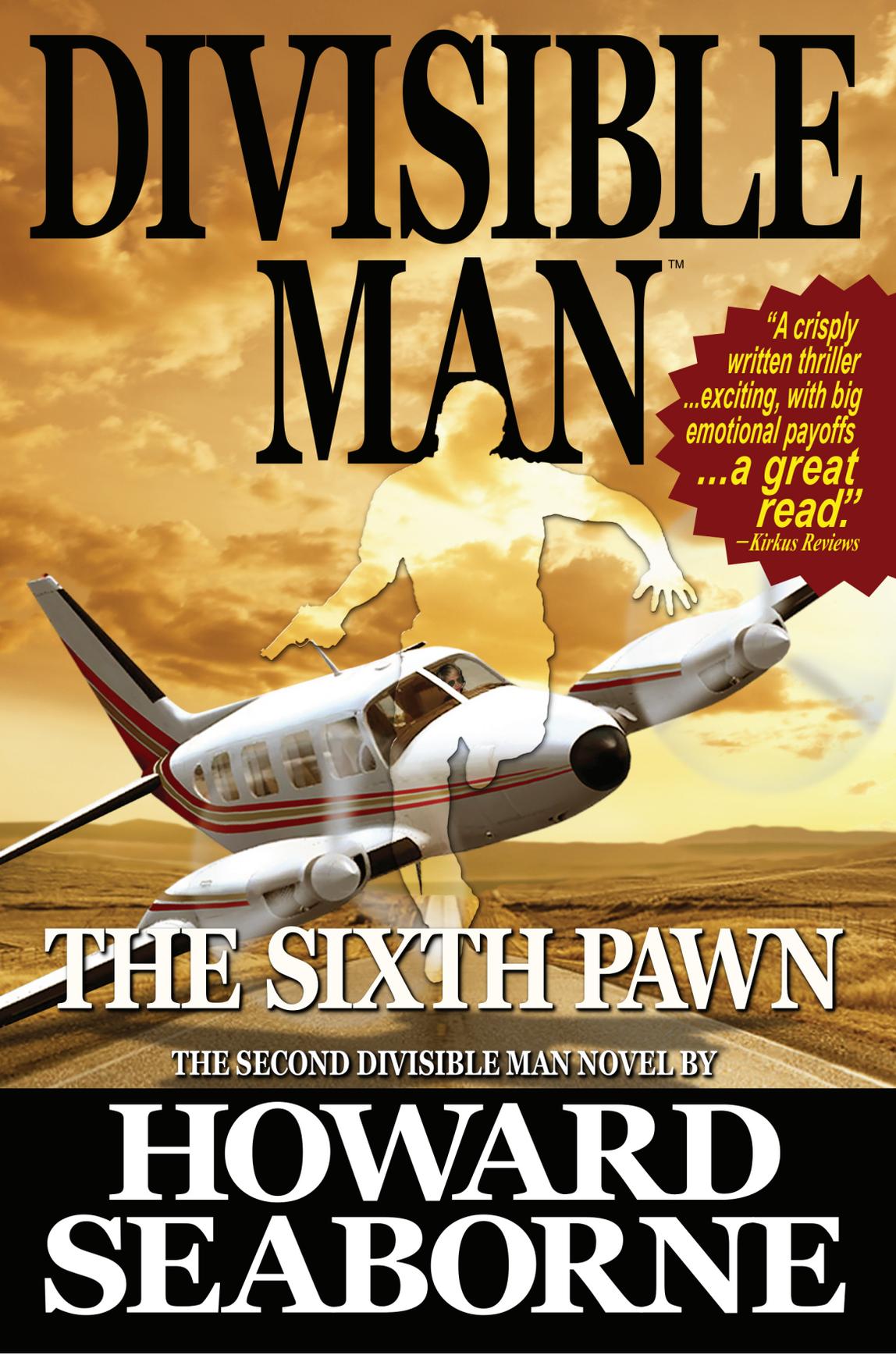


DIVISIBLE MAN™



*"A crisply
written thriller
...exciting, with big
emotional payoffs
...a great
read."
—Kirkus Reviews*

THE SIXTH PAWN

THE SECOND DIVISIBLE MAN NOVEL BY

HOWARD SEABORNE



DIVISIBLE MAN™

THE SIXTH PAWN

by

Howard Seaborne



DIVISIBLE MAN: THE SIXTH PAWN

HOWARD SEABORNE



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ALSO BY HOWARD SEABORNE

DIVISIBLE MAN

A Novel – September 2017

DIVISIBLE MAN: THE SIXTH PAWN

A Novel – June 2018

DIVISIBLE MAN: THE SECOND GHOST
ANGEL FLIGHT

A Novel & Story – September 2018

DIVISIBLE MAN: THE SEVENTH STAR

A Novel – June 2019

DIVISIBLE MAN: TEN MAN CREW

A Novel – November 2019

DIVISIBLE MAN: THE THIRD LIE

A Novel – May 2020

DIVISIBLE MAN: THREE NINES FINE

A Novel – November 2020

DIVISIBLE MAN: EIGHT BALL

A Novel – September 2021

DIVISIBLE MAN: ENGINE OUT
AND OTHER SHORT FLIGHTS

A Story Collection – June 2022

DIVISIBLE MAN: NINE LIVES LOST

A Novel – June 2022

DIVISIBLE MAN: TEN KEYS WEST

A Novel – May 2023

PRAISE FOR HOWARD SEABORNE

DIVISIBLE MAN - TEN KEYS WEST [DM10]

“The best possible combination of the Odd Thomas novels of Dean Koontz and the Jack Reacher novels of Lee Child.”

— *Kirkus Reviews*

“The soaring 10th entry in this thriller series is as exciting as the first... Seaborne keeps the chatter fun, the pacing fleet, and the tension urgent. His secret weapon is a tight focus on Will and Andy, a married couple whose love—and bantering dialogue—proves as buoyant as ever.”

— *BookLife*

“The author effectively fleshes out even minor walk-on characters, and his portrayal of the loving relationship between his two heroes continues to be the most satisfying aspect of the series, the kind of three-dimensional adult relationship remarkably rare in thrillers like this one. The author’s skill at pacing is razor-sharp—the book is a compulsive page-turner...”

— *Kirkus Reviews*

DIVISIBLE MAN - NINE LIVES LOST [DM9]

“Seaborne’s latest series entry packs a good deal of mystery. Everything Will stumbles on, it seems, dredges up more questions...All this shady stuff in Montana and unrest in Wisconsin make for a tense narrative...Will’s periodic sarcasm is welcome, as it’s good-natured and never overwhelming...A smart, diverting tale of an audacious aviator with an extraordinary ability.”

— *Kirkus Reviews*

DIVISIBLE MAN - ENGINE OUT & OTHER SHORT FLIGHTS

“This engaging compendium will surely pique new readers’ interest in earlier series installments. A captivating, altruistic hero and appealing cast propel this enjoyable collection...”

— *Kirkus Reviews*

DIVISIBLE MAN - EIGHT BALL [DM8]

“Any reader of this series knows that they’re in good hands with Seaborne, who’s a natural storyteller. His descriptions and dialogue are crisp, and his characters deftly sketched...The book keeps readers tied into its complex and exciting thriller plot with lucid and graceful exposition, laying out clues with cleverness and subtlety...and the protagonist is always a relatable character with plenty of humanity and humor... Another riveting, taut, and timely adventure with engaging characters and a great premise.”

— *Kirkus Reviews*

DIVISIBLE MAN - THREE NINES FINE [DM7]

“Seaborne is never less than a spellbinding storyteller, keeping his complicated but clearly explicated plot moving smoothly from one nail-biting scenario to another...The author’s grasp of global politics gives depth to the book’s thriller elements...Even minor characters come across in three dimensions, and Will himself is an endearing narrator. He’s lovestruck by his gorgeous, intelligent, and strong-willed wife; has his heart and social conscience in the right place; and is boyishly thrilled by the other thing. A solid series entry that is, as usual, exciting, intricately plotted, and thoroughly entertaining.”

— *Kirkus Reviews*

DIVISIBLE MAN - THE THIRD LIE [DM6]

“Seaborne shows himself to be a reliably splendid storyteller in this latest outing. The plot is intricate and could have been confusing in lesser hands, but the author manages it well, keeping readers oriented amid unexpected developments...His crisp writing about complex scenes and concepts is another strong suit...The fantasy of self-powered flight remains absolutely compelling...Will is heroic and daring, as one would expect, but he’s also funny, compassionate, and affectionate... A gripping, timely, and twisty thriller.”

— *Kirkus Reviews*

DIVISIBLE MAN - TEN MAN CREW [DM5]

“Seaborne...continues his winning streak in this series, offering another page-turner. By having Will’s knowledge of and control over his powers continue to expand while the questions over how he should best deploy his abilities grow, Seaborne keeps the concept fresh and readers guessing...The conspiracy is highly dramatic yet not implausible given today’s political events, and the action sequences are excitingly cinematic...Another compelling and hugely fun adventure that delivers a thrill ride.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

DIVISIBLE MAN - THE SEVENTH STAR [DM4]

“Seaborne...proves he’s a natural born storyteller, serving up an exciting, well-written thriller. He makes even minor moments in the story memorable with his sharp, evocative prose...Will’s smart, humane and humorous narrative voice is appealing, as is his sincere appreciation for Andy—not just for her considerable beauty, but also for her dedication and intelligence. An intensely satisfying thriller—another winner from Seaborne.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

DIVISIBLE MAN - THE SECOND GHOST [DM3]

“Seaborne...delivers a solid, well-written tale that taps into the near-universal dream of personal flight. Will’s narrative voice is engaging and crisp, clearly explaining technical matters while never losing sight of humane, emotional concerns. Another intelligent and exciting superpowered thriller.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

DIVISIBLE MAN - THE SIXTH PAWN [DM2]

“Seaborne...once again gives readers a crisply written thriller. Self-powered flight is a potent fantasy, and Seaborne explores its joys and difficulties engagingly. Will’s narrative voice is amusing, intelligent and humane; he draws readers in with his wit, appreciation for his wife, and his flight-drunk joy...Even more entertaining than its predecessor—a great read.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

DIVISIBLE MAN [DM1]

“Seaborne’s crisp prose, playful dialogue, and mastery of technical details of flight distinguish the story...this is a striking and original start to a series, buoyed by fresh and vivid depictions of extra-human powers and a clutch of memorably drawn characters...”

—*BookLife*

“This book is a strong start to a series...Well-written and engaging, with memorable characters and an intriguing hero.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Even more than flight, (Will’s relationship with Andy)—and that crack prose—powers this thriller to a satisfying climax that sets up more to come.”

—*BookLife*

THE SERIES



While each DIVISIBLE MAN™ novel tells its own tale, many elements carry forward and the novels are best enjoyed in sequence. The short story “Angel Flight” is a bridge between the third and fourth novels and is included with the third novel, DIVISIBLE MAN - THE SECOND GHOST. “Angel Flight” is also published in the ENGINE OUT short story collection along with eleven other stories offering additional insights into the cadre of characters residing in Essex County.

DIVISIBLE MAN™ is available in hardcover, paperback, digital and audio.

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PART I

“I am so getting laid tonight.” Pidge adjusted herself in the little black dress she had miraculously squeezed around her petite body. I doubted the structural integrity of the thing. Parts of her threatened to pop out. “Ten groomsmen, eight ushers. Fucking fish in a barrel.”

“Half of them are married, Pidge,” Andy warned.

“Good. Maybe they’ll know what they’re doing. I’m going to the bar!” She charged off toward one of eight bars on the perimeter of the wedding tent, a determined 24-year-old blonde pixie in high heels.

“God help them, they don’t stand a chance,” I said. I looked at my wife. “What about me? Do I stand a chance?”

“Of what?” Andy fluttered her lashes at me. I made a show of examining her dress, a nearly-black, purple delight that shimmered on her curves and set off the warmth in her flowing auburn hair. Her structural integrity cried out for closer inspection.

“Of hooking up with a very hot woman tonight,” I said.

“Depends.” She moved closer and fidgeted with my tie. She pressed her hips against mine. “If I see one, I’ll ask if she’s interested.”

“Oh, please, would you two get on with hating each other like a decent married couple,” Earl Jackson growled. He snagged a water glass from the round table beside us. The table seated eight. Folded place cards beside expensive-looking china displayed our names in gold script. A

lavish centerpiece of sculpted white flowers dominated the table. “How long have you two been married, anyway? A week?”

Earl signs my paycheck as well as Pidge’s. That and prize fighter stature topped with a permanent scowl makes him hard to ignore but I tried.

I put my hands on Andy’s waist and pulled her tighter. “Has it been a week? Already?”

“Lipstick,” she warned. I kissed her anyway. She kissed back. When she pulled away, she looked at Earl with green and gold-flecked eyes and said, “Three years, two months, and one day. But you’re right. Hardly seems like a week.” She smiled. Andy’s smile and magazine model looks should carry a warning. More than a few men in the tent around us stole long glances at my wife.

“Get a room,” Earl muttered. He twisted and tugged at his suit, which looked like it came off a rack in 1956. Andy threw him a loving look. A fissure appeared in his scowl. I feared if he smiled back his face might crack.

“I’m going to fix my lipstick.” She gave me another sweet kiss. “Again.”

“I’ll stay here and count billionaires.” I shamelessly watched her maneuver between the tables. Her combination of high heels, short dress, and inexplicable locomotion made me forget there were five hundred other people milling around under the gigantic tent.

Earl watched her, too. Earl Jackson loves my wife like a daughter, but also appreciates her architecture. When she slipped out of sight, he put one of his calloused claws on my shoulder. “You don’t deserve her.”

“Nobody does. I just try to keep up.”

“So, whaddya figure? Half a million? Million?”

“What?”

He waved an arm in a semicircle. “All this. Senator Mealy-Mouth marrying off his little girl.”

“I could not begin to guess. But I have to ask—how’s he taking it that Sandy’s marrying one of the governor’s A-Team boys?”

“She would have been better off bringing home a crack addict!” Earl laughed. “Bob hates our pinhead governor. Speak of the devil.”

Earl pointed at a cluster of guests. A short man held court at the

center. His prominent bald spot reflected dots from the thousands of tiny white lights strung above our heads.

“If you want to count billionaires, go over by pinhead and swing a dead cat. There’s half a dozen. Lester Brodling. Ira Waters. Bargo Litton, the energy guy. Couple of hedge fund guys. Fifty percent of the cash flowing into the Republican coffers in our happy ‘swing state’ is standing right over there eating bacon-wrapped water chestnuts.”

“Your pal runs in quite the circle.”

Earl snorted. “Bob? Bob may be a brainwashed elephant worshiper, but he doesn’t give those kingmakers the time of day. In fact, he goes out of his way to be a pain in their collective asses. Oh, no. They’re all here for the kid.”

Earl might call State Senator Bob Stone names, but they had been friends since the first grade. Earl Jackson proclaims himself a life-long Democrat and keeps a framed picture of FDR on his office wall. Bob Stone waves the Republican banner, although in the last year Stone bucked his own party twice on high profile votes. Earl used it as merciless fodder for occasional Saturday morning breakfast debates with his friend at the Silver Spoon diner.

I didn’t care one way or the other. Politics is the filler I mute on television while I’m waiting for the weather report. I had no stake in this extravagant wedding, either. I rode in as Andy’s plus one. She belonged to a book club with the bride, Sandra Stone, and the two had formed a friendship. I’ve met Sandy any number of times, but never the groom. Sandy teaches kindergarten at James Madison Elementary School in Essex. To hear Andy describe it, Sandy loves teaching as much as her adoring children love her.

Andy’s invitation to the Essex County Wedding Of The Century promised two free nights at the Cinnamon Hills Golf Resort, a lavish dinner, dancing, and other delights. I had no complaints. This was as close to a vacation as Andy and I expected to get for a while. We were broke.

In June, working as an air charter pilot for Earl Jackson, I crashed one of the company’s Piper Navajo twin-engine airplanes. I have no memory of the event.

Three things emerged in the aftermath.

First, I became a minor celebrity. My fifteen minutes of fame came

from the fact that I fell out of a disintegrating airplane at a hundred and forty miles per hour and dropped five hundred feet into a marsh. I wound up on soft earth, sitting in the pilot's seat with a broken pelvis.

Second, I spent a week in the hospital which ran up a huge bill. As a police officer, Andy enjoys health insurance through her employer, the City of Essex, but the major medical policy carries a five-thousand-dollar deductible, which wiped out our savings and put us on a payment plan. The broken pelvis still hurts, though they tell me it is healing nicely. I spent most of the last sixty days using crutches. I ditched the crutches a little over two weeks ago but don't have a lot of stamina for standing. Or sitting, for that matter. On the plus side, I can now tell when it's going to rain, and I don't have to drag myself out of bed and go running with my wife.

Third, I came away from the crash with something I can't explain.

The other thing.

I vanish. When I vanish, I defy gravity and no longer obey the physical laws governing mass and inertia. *The other thing*, I am now convinced, accounts for me surviving the in-flight breakup of an airplane. Because nobody falls that far at that speed and lives.

As of the wedding weekend two months after the crash I still had no idea what it was or how it became a part of me. I do, however, know how to control it.

Only two other people know about *the other thing*. Lane Franklin, the fourteen-year-old daughter of Essex County Air Service's office manager, learned about *the other thing* when it saved us both from a burning building. The second person who knows about *the other thing* is Sergeant Andrea Katherine Taylor Stewart of the City of Essex Police Department—my wife Andy, or Dee as I sometimes call her. She learned of it after she killed the man who put Lane in the burning building in the first place.

Andy being Andy, she had questions.

THE NIGHT I demonstrated *the other thing* to Andy she gasped at the impossibility of it. Not only because I vanished, but because I also took her in my arms and we both disappeared, then I showed her how gravity ceases to exist in the vanished state. We floated through angled sunbeams

in the barn behind our rented farmhouse like a romantic pair of space station astronauts.

Afterward, we took up station on the farmhouse front porch and watched the setting summer sunshine kiss the corn tassels across the road.

“How do you know you’ll come back? That you’ll be visible again?” Andy demanded. “How do you know you won’t get stuck that way?” Leave it to my wife to find The Worry. “Well? How do you know?”

“I don’t,” I said. “I just have faith that if I can turn it on in my head, I can turn it off.”

“And you do that with the levers you described—the ones you imagine?”

“Yup. Push the levers up, disappear. Pull the levers back, reappear. It seems to, I don’t know, *wrap* me up. You felt it, didn’t you?”

“That cool sensation? Weird. Of course, what am I saying, this whole thing is weird... *Will, my God!* How is this possible?”

My wife, the cop, has a strong need to connect dots. I had a theory.

“I know you don’t want to see Six Nine Tango.” The wreckage of the airplane that had broken apart all around me at a hundred and forty miles per hour lay in a hangar at Essex County Airport. “But you heard Connie Walsh from the NTSB. She thinks I *hit something*. I think she’s right. And I think whatever I hit—I think that’s what did this to me. I think it saved me.”

Andy’s lower lip gained prominence, a sign of deep thought—or a signal to run for your life. I took it as the former.

I said, “You and I just floated around the barn like astronauts. I didn’t want to scare you, so I kept us just above the floor. But I did some testing with this when you weren’t here. I flew all over the barn, all the way up to the top, and then floated back down again. There’s no way I survived that aircraft breakup and the fall—I don’t care how soft the ground was—unless I *floated* down.”

“The same way you got in and out of Andre’s penthouse,” Andy observed. She referred to the man who kidnapped Lane, the man she killed. She chased away the memory with a slug from her Corona.

“Yeah. Twenty stories up. Freaked me out.”

“What did you hit?”

“Million-dollar question. Get out your science fiction catalog and

pick a page. Wrinkle in time-space. Wormhole. Alien spaceship. Secret government test vehicle. Wizards flying through the RNAV 31 approach course on their brooms.”

“This is insane,” she said, not for the first time that evening.

We talked into the night. I flipped back and forth a few times, vanishing and reappearing, just to show her how easy it was. In retrospect, I think it scared her more than eased her mind.

Since that night, as summer slipped into fall, we talked about it often. We played with it a few more times, although Andy didn’t like it when I took her along for the ride. Most of my practice sessions were conducted while she worked her patrol shift. She asked if I thought it might be radioactive and might give me cancer. She wondered if we should have a test done—at which point we both agreed we didn’t want to share this with anyone. She didn’t ask me to stop doing it, but I think she wanted to.

Lane often came to visit because the secret between us would have burst her open otherwise. When she visited, Andy and I took her to the barn and I let her throw her arms around me and we would vanish and fly between the rafters and beams with Andy smiling on the sidelines, tracking us by the sound of Lane giggling and laughing.

After one such session, Andy’s posed another burning question.

“What are you going to do with this?”

I teased that I planned to go to Las Vegas to see how much cash I can carry out of a vault. She was not amused.

I wasn’t *entirely* teasing.

During the episode that found me flying out of a burning building with Lane in my arms, I stole sixty-three thousand dollars in cash from a gang of drug dealers. I kept the money for Lane. Andy, heart and soul the professional police officer, frowned on my thievery once I summoned the courage to tell her. I reminded her the money came from the people who kidnapped and nearly killed Lane. They owed it to her. Call it reparations. Lane and her mother are not well off, so I convinced my wife we could slip the money into an education investment account for Lane, a little at a time.

Neither of us considered, even for a moment, using a dime of the money to deal with our health insurance deductible problem. I, on the other hand, wanted to go back to the hospital and have a heart-to-heart

talk with a certain public relations executive who had hounded us during my stay, because of my celebrity survival status. One of the hospital's nursing assistants—later arrested for dealing drugs—swapped my pain killers with counterfeits. I figured a story like that might persuade the hospital to reduce the bill.

Andy would have none of it.

“The only reason we know any of that is because I was the investigating officer. I'm not about to use my badge to leverage freebies—not from anyone!” she declared.

Well, when you put it that way.

I could not answer her question. I had no idea what I planned to do with *the other thing*.

“Stewart!” I heard my name over the crowd noise and the string quartet playing in the wedding tent. Andy had not yet returned from the land of lipstick adjustment. A familiar face wove through the tables toward me.

“Jesus Christ,” I said, “the people you meet when you haven’t got a gun.”

Dave Peterson, looking solid and tan in an expensive suit, took and shook my hand. He broadcast a smile from a wide, boyish face. An Essex County Air Service alum, Dave moved on two years ago, landing a corporate pilot job. Small air charter companies like Essex Air feed a steady stream of young pilots to the airlines and corporate flight departments. The latter had hired Dave. Before moving on to the big time, he and I did most of the flying for Earl.

“How are you, man? I heard about your fuckup!” He grinned.

“Yeah. I ruined my perfect record of one landing for every takeoff.”

“Seriously, what happened?”

Most people don’t ask me directly, but Dave and I flew a lot of trips and tipped a lot of after-hours beers together. Dave counted himself among the handful of people who attended the wedding when Andy and I married.

“I have no idea. Really. No clue. No memory of it.”

“I heard in-flight breakup! And you wound up in a swamp? Is that really true?”

“Sitting in the pilot’s seat.”

“Wow. That’s crazy!” He went on about it for a few minutes, interrogating me for details, for the status of the investigation, for a report on my injuries. I told him what I could, but often came back to the same blank spot in my memory. In the end, he looked at me with naked wonder. “I’m glad you’re still vertical, man. Honestly.”

“Not as glad as me.”

He switched the conversation away from life and death—onto something genuinely serious. “I heard they pulled your ticket. What the hell for?”

“Mostly for the fun of it, I think. The NTSB people are great, but they’re coming up with some blanks on this one. The FAA wants to fill in the blank with my name. And since I have this memory issue they’re trying to pin ‘Pilot Incapacitation’ on me.”

“Fuckers.”

“It’s not official. Temporary suspension, pending the NTSB report and review, and a medical eval. I already passed a new First-Class medical exam. The application is winding its way through Oklahoma City, I guess.” I wished. Nobody had said word one to me about the progress of my application.

“Still working for Genghis Khan?”

“He hasn’t fired me yet. I may be a penguin, but he’s been trying to keep me busy. Wants to buy a King Air, so he has me doing a lot of legwork on that.”

“A King Air! Finally!”

“What are you flying?” I jumped at a chance to change the subject.

“Falcon 20, but we just added a G-II. I’m scheduled for first officer school in December.” Dave grinned.

“Gulfstream,” I said, showing genuine appreciation. “The Rolls Royce of executive jets. Company must be doing all right.”

“The company’s opening up markets in South America, so we need longer legs. They told me to learn Spanish.”

“I forgot ... what do they do?”

“Prisons. Private prisons. Huge and growing industry. We’re one of the largest in the U.S. and they’re tapping a big market in South Amer-

ica. Billion-dollar industry. People can't seem to keep out of jail. Here in the U.S. the state governments want to outsource."

I gestured at the tent above us. "What got you into this shindig?"

Dave pointed at a cluster of men in suits and women in elegant wedding wear. "That's the CEO, the guy with the perfect white hair. Pearce Parks. He's got the keys to the company jet. We fly him all over. He's pals with the groom, who pals with the governor, who's around here somewhere. We had his lordship on a flight out to California just last week, although I'm not supposed to mention that. We flew into Madison yesterday. Drove up here. They took pity on us throttle jockeys and let us tag along. I'm hoping to get in a round of golf in the morning. Say, how's Andy? Is she here?"

"She is. She went to fix her face."

"That girl's face needs no fixing. You're one lucky man. She still a cop?"

"Blue to the core."

"I believe that. And Pidge? Is she still terrorizing Earl?"

"Working on killing him. She pestered him to make her his Plus One. She's here."

"No shit!"

"She's looking to get laid, but don't get your hopes up. She's got a target lock on those guys in tuxedos."

"Ah, she brushed me off a couple years ago. I don't think she likes pilots." Dave took my hand again and shook it. "Listen man, it's great to see you. I gotta get back to the entourage, but let's grab a beer after dinner and catch up!"

Dave sauntered away, leaving me to think about the great division in my world—those who fly airplanes and those who don't. And how I was among the latter these days.

“I saw a guy with fucking makeup on,” Pidge announced as she sat down and pulled her chair up to the round table. “A dude! And it was thick! What’s that shit all about?”

“Where?” I asked.

She pointed at one of the bars on the tent perimeter. The guests stood three deep attempting to refuel before the big sit-down meal. I could not pick out a dude wearing makeup.

“It’s a brave new world,” Earl grumbled. He waved off the waiter who offered to pour dinner wine. Earl doesn’t drink.

“Bald, Caucasian, medium build, wearing a brown suit?” Andy, seated beside me, asked Pidge.

“Yeah. Who wears a brown suit to a fucking wedding?” Pidge got her nickname—Pigeon—as a teenaged student pilot. She talks dirty and she flies. She began flying at Essex County Air Service when she was sixteen and powered her way through her ratings and licenses. On the day she earned her commercial pilot’s license she walked into Earl’s office and told him to hire her because she was the best pilot he would ever have on the payroll. I think he would have flatly refused, if not for the fact that what she said was true.

“I think the makeup is covering up tattoos,” Andy offered.

“All over his face? Who would fucking put tattoos all over their face?”

Andy turned her head and gazed at the bar. I assumed she searched for the man with the makeup, but the look on her face said she wasn't looking as much as pondering Pidge's question.

Andy the Cop, seeing things the way cops see them.

After a moment she turned back to me and seemed to let it go. I picked up the freshly poured dinner wine and raised the glass. She followed my move.

“To free vacations,” I said.

“Free vacations.” We touched glasses and sipped.

The string quartet broke into a classical version of “The Girl from Ipanema,” a song that always reminds me of my wife, more so in the dress she now wore. Healing pelvis or not, I planned to dance tonight. And more. The *bossa nova* beat carried my thoughts to Andy, sitting so close beside me. She caught me looking at her as she flexed minutely to the music.

“Lipstick,” she warned me, reading my mind. “And I'm not going to go fix it again.”

She leaned over and whispered something in my ear as a consolation, something that made me wish the dinner and dancing portion of the evening lay behind us. She stroked my thigh as she sat back in her chair.

A moment later, the string quartet stopped, and the PA system began blasting a hip hop song I'd never heard by an artist I could not possibly identify. On a stage at the center of the tent, someone picked up a microphone and announced the imminent arrival of the bridal party.

“Andy!”

My wife pushed back her chair and rose to embrace the bride. Sandra Stone, now Jameson, had been working her way around the room after her big entrance. A photographer trailing the bride quickly targeted the two. Behind him, an assistant with a note pad turned to a second assistant and said, “Who is that? I think that’s somebody. Find out who that is.”

“Oh, sweetie, you look absolutely stunning!” Andy gushed.

All brides look stunning, but Sandy Stone started from an advantage. Her light blonde hair had been spun up in a complex style accented with tiny blue flowers that caught and reflected the color of her eyes. She had sun in her skin, which set off a sweet crescent smile, framed in ruby red. I have a bias toward my wife, but seeing the two of them side by side, I had to admit that Sandy held her own. Together, they were show stopping, and the photographer snapped away, jumping from angle to angle.

“I cannot believe I made it this far,” Sandy said. She flicked a bright smile at me. “Hi, Will! Your wife is gorgeous!”

“Said the beautiful bride,” I smiled back at her. “All I can say, Sandy, is—holy crap!” I waved my arms. “Nice party.”

She rolled her eyes. “Okay, so it’s supposed to be the bride who goes berserk, right? What’s the term for Groom-zilla? This is all Todd! He

planned everything! I'm not even sure I picked the dress!" She laughed, an honest kindergarten teacher laugh.

"But it's beautiful. You deserve every bit of it," Andy said.

"I deserve to get out of these shoes," she said, making a face. She took Andy's hands. "I am *so* glad you came, both of you! Hi, Mr. Jackson! Don't you dare start a fight with my dad tonight!"

"Your dad and I never fight. I enlighten. He chooses not to be enlightened," Earl replied. "I promise we will behave in your honor."

Sandy leaned down and kissed Earl on his bald head. The blush that followed blended into his scowl and conjured a combination that camouflaged itself as rage. Pidge giggled.

Andy and the bride traded small talk before Sandy moved on to the next table.

"She wasn't kidding," Andy said, seating herself again beside me. "A couple weeks ago she told me she was *this close* to calling it off. It just kept getting bigger, and bigger. All Todd. Eighty percent of the guest list is Todd." Andy lowered her voice. "I was really afraid she would ask me to be in the wedding party."

"I could have helped you with that," I said. "Made you disappear."

“S eriously, what are you thinking of doing with it?” Andy asked one night, close to midnight, after her shift ended and we settled in on the sofa for a late snack. “*The other thing*. Assuming it stays. Assuming it belongs to you now.”

“I think I did a pretty good job of busting up a drug gang,” I said.

Andy frowned. When she learned of my role in rescuing Lane, while deeply grateful and a little impressed, a part of her was not happy.

“You’re not trained for that,” she said flatly.

“*No one* is trained for this.”

“Suppose you did use it, undercover. Nothing you learn could be used to build a case for prosecution. You could not testify. It would be like planting a listening device without a court order. Not to mention you’re going to want to keep it secret. Or else wind up in some government lab somewhere...” She trailed that last part off, like it had not occurred to her before.

“True, but information is information,” I said quickly. “You work from anonymous sources all the time. Information doesn’t have to be admissible to be effective—or preventative. I could work for the DEA. Get into cartel strongholds no one else can penetrate.”

“God forbid! That’s ridiculously dangerous!”

“Or be on call for the fire department if there’s a high-rise fire. Just float people down to the street safely.”

“This is not getting better.”

“Infiltrate terrorist groups in the middle east? Dismantle rogue state nuclear programs?”

“I’m going to hit you. If you want to fight crime, how about white-collar crime? Sneak into board rooms when they meet to steal the pension plan. Catch the CEO plotting to violate SEC regulations or exposing himself to the office girls.”

“Wouldn’t work,” I said. “It would be so boring I’d fall asleep and wouldn’t be able to remember what they said. Let’s revisit the Las Vegas idea. They wouldn’t notice a few million missing from the counting room...”

“I would arrest you myself,” she said. “Be serious, Pilot. This is a part of us now. So, I have a say.”

“That’s why we’re having this conversation.”

“Okay. Then, whatever you do with it, I need a couple promises from you.” She squared herself up, facing me. “First off, no sneaking into the shower with me. I swear, I’ll make you wear a bell.”

“Damn. I hadn’t thought of that...”

“And second,” she grew serious, “I know you did some dangerous things to rescue Lane, but no more dangerous stuff. Deal?”

Gunfire ripped through the hubbub of dinner conversation. An automatic weapon. The rip-saw sound silenced the crowd.

“DOWN! EVERYBODY DOWN!”

A voice boomed, overly loud and distorted by the PA system that had been used for the wedding speeches and toasts. The command dominated the shocked silence suspended in the wake of the gunfire. Andy twisted, looking for the source. She reached for her handbag.

I followed Andy’s searching eyes to the stage. Musical equipment and instruments stood at the ready, but the band had wandered off during the dinner hour. A man in a brown suit, his head covered with a black balaclava, held a microphone in one hand and a pistol in the other. Whoever had fired, it wasn’t him.

“ON THE GROUND! COVER YOUR EYES! YOU LOOK, YOU DIE!”

The room rumbled as five hundred people squeezed out of folding chairs and found space on the ground.

Earl pulled out Pidge’s chair and hustled her to the floor, then ducked down beside her. All around us heads disappeared below the table line.

Andy and I kneeled. She looked directly at me. I glanced down. She had extracted her Glock 17 handgun from her purse.

“You’re outgunned! You can’t!”

“I know. Too many people.”

“I can.” I held out my hand.

She knew what I meant. We had only seconds, time when the confusion would cover me. I reached for the pistol, but she jerked it away.

“Eyes only! Nothing else!” She gripped my arm. “Nothing else!”

I checked to be sure no one was watching. Everyone near us obediently pressed palms and fingers to their eyes. I glanced back at Andy and nodded. I made a motion as if to drop to the floor, then—

Fwoomp!

—I vanished. *The other thing* wrapped my entire body in a cool sensation. Weightlessness replaced gravity.

She blinked twice, startled by the effect.

“Get down!” I pushed her chair out of the way. She lowered herself to the floor. Head down, she gripped the pistol in her right hand and folded it out of sight in her lap. She put her left hand loosely over her eyes.

“NOW! NOW! EVERYONE DOWN!”

Another burst of automatic gunfire, painfully loud, accelerated the rumble of the wedding guests moving to comply.

Holding the back of my chair, I did the opposite. I pushed myself upright. A sea of empty tables, cluttered with glassware and plates abandoned in mid-meal, spread out around me. Five hundred people, the young, the old, the wealthy and the far wealthier all found space below the tables to lie, kneel, or bend themselves into pretzel shapes with their hands pressed over their eyes.

The few people who remained standing carried weapons.

The man on the stage paced, microphone in one hand, pistol in the other.

“This is either a robbery, and everyone goes home unhurt, or it’s a mass shooting. You choose. Those of you carrying concealed weapons, know this: If anyone tries to play hero, we start shooting everybody. If anyone raises a phone or camera, we shoot everybody. If anyone looks at us, we shoot everybody. Those of you with bodyguards, we don’t give a shit about you, so tell your dogs to sit!”

Caucasian. Brown suit.

Four more dressed in black patrolled the perimeter of the dance floor in the center of the tent. All four carried rifles. At least one, and probably

all, had been converted to fully automatic. All four men walking the floor wore heavy vests. All four wore black full-head balaclavas showing nothing but their eyes.

As soon as I tallied up five, a sixth appeared. He jogged up the outdoor aisle the wedding party used for their grand entrance. The aisle had been laid out as a wide curve on the resort lawn, starting at the main building, arcing around a small koi pond, then sweeping into the massive tent. A natural corridor of perfectly spaced trees spread a canopy above the home stretch of the aisle. In front of each tree, a faux Greek statue stood draped with garlands of fresh flowers.

The late arriving man hurried to a span of tables set behind the head table. Piles of wrapped gifts stretched across the tables. He ignored the gifts. He jogged to the center where a tall silver urn nested in a bed of white roses. He pulled a duffle bag off his shoulder and scooped envelopes and small packages out of the urn, into the duffle bag.

It struck me as stupid. *What good are piles of checks made out to the bride and groom?*

I looked at the path the last man had followed. Beyond a curve where the bridal aisle swung toward the resort, an embankment rose to a parking lot.

Escape route. They would have a vehicle waiting.

I rose and swung my legs to a horizontal position above my chair. Using my wrists, I pushed off the chair toward the nearest edge of the tent. My glide path avoided the tall, flowered centerpieces on each of the intervening tables. Guests huddled below me. Most froze in silence; a few sobbed. I passed over them unseen. At intervals, I grabbed chair-backs and the lips of tables to adjust my course. Reaching the edge of the tent, I grabbed a support pole and used it to accelerate.

I aimed for the first tree and screwed up. Instead of reaching the tree, my path took me to the polished Greek figure posing beside the tree, along the aisle. I worried the statue might be made of Styrofoam and I might topple it. Having no choice, I grabbed the pedestal base. My hands closed on several hundred pounds of plaster. The statue didn't budge. I stopped.

A garland of flowers linked the next statue in the line, and the next after that. I heaved myself in the direction of the second statue, brushed past it, and sailed on to the third, then the fourth where the aisle curved

toward the resort. I guessed this would be the point where the thieves would break from the path, climb the embankment, and make their escape.

At the apex of the embankment, on the edge of the parking lot, I spotted the gray roof of a large crew cab pickup truck.

Bingo. Idling engine sound confirmed my suspicion.

I shifted from the statue base to the tree behind the statue and stopped, stymied. A flight path to the truck would take me uphill. But there were no trees, posts, or poles to grapple. Nothing to aim for, nothing to anchor me. Launching uphill would send me on a trajectory up and over the parking lot, with nothing to stop me from continuing to climb, higher and higher.

Once moving, unaffected by gravity, *the other thing* treats me like an astronaut in space. Without a tether, without a grip on something, I simply float. Caught on an upward trajectory, my choices would be to continue into the upper atmosphere to die of hypoxia or reappear and let gravity yank me down. Too high, and the fall would kill me. Visible, the thieves would probably kill me.

In the tent, the brown suited emcee shouted through the PA system.

“Time!”

Heavy footsteps pounded the carpeted aisle behind me, drumming the plywood laid beneath.

Calling out “Time” suggested these thieves had discipline. It gave me hope that there would be no further gunfire. Gunfire that would force Andy to break cover and shoot back.

The footsteps on the aisle behind me grew louder. I had only seconds.

I locked one arm on the tree behind the statue and turned to gather information for Andy.

One. Gun. The first thief rushed past me carrying a black AR rifle with a strap. Customized. *Gun.*

Two. Shoe. The second thief, crepe soled work boots, jeans, a wallet chain, like a biker. *Shoe.*

Three. Tree. The money guy, arms like tree branches, strong for carrying. Tattoo. Army duffel bag. Worn. No weapon. *Tree.*

Four. Door. Too fast. The fourth man, carrying his rifle, raced alongside the duffel bag man. I could not record an impression. *Door.*

Inside the tent, the man with the microphone shouted, “NOBODY

MOVES FOR THREE MINUTES!” Electronic feedback shrieked when the microphone hit to the floor.

Gunshots!

Single barking shots fired in steady succession bit into my unprotected hearing. One—two—three—four—five—six—I saw flashes in the tent.

None of the escaping thieves turned around.

Part of the plan.

Not an automatic weapon. Pistol shots.

This isn't a firefight. This is a warning.

Seven—eight—then four more in rapid succession.

Please, Andy, keep your head down!

I focused on my mission.

Five. Hive. The fifth man carried a military-style rifle. This one stopped directly below me on the other side of the statue. A hive of red hair under the edges of his mask. *Hive.*

The last man—the emcee—jogged up behind Red Hair, pistol in hand. His mask bore light smudges around the edges. Makeup.

The man Pidge had seen. He wore a brown business suit.

“Kill the first one out the door!” the sixth man ordered Red Hair before jogging up the embankment.

The fifth man took a knee and brought his weapon to bear, taking aim at the tent.

NO!

I knew who would be first out of the tent. She wouldn't have a chance. Andy would be shot just to make a point.

I didn't calculate it or think it through. I moved between the tree and the plaster Greek statue, a warrior holding a spear. I fixed my back against the tree and my feet on the warrior's back. If the pedestal had been anchored, this would have come to nothing. But the statue and pedestal together probably weighed over three hundred pounds and served as their own anchor on the grass. Eight feet up, against the tree, I prayed for enough leverage.

I shoved the statue with all the strength my legs could bring to bear. Silently, both statue and pedestal leaned over and dropped on the kneeling thief whose attention never left his optical gun sight. Bones encased in muscle and flesh snapped. He screamed. The statue

compressed his crouching body. His legs twisted awkwardly. His left shoulder, crushed, took on a gruesome shape and his left arm flopped at his side. The rifle dropped to the carpet.

Halfway up the hill, the sixth man halted, turned, and aimed his weapon directly at me. I cringed, expecting a shot.

The weapon swept the space I occupied, then the aisle, then side to side. He stared at the statue wobbling on top of his man. He searched for the cause. Wild eyes followed his gunsights.

I froze my hands on the tree trunk. I held my breath.

The sixth man broke his deadly focus and raced back to his companion. Red Hair screamed and clawed at the carpeting with his right hand.

The sixth man studied the scene briefly. Then, with a gloved hand, he pressed his pistol into the outstretched hand of his comrade. He picked up the fifth man's rifle.

One handed, he aimed and fired. One shot to the head. The screaming stopped.

The big pickup truck's engine revved, calling out to these last two to hurry. The killer turned and ran, carrying the rifle, leaving the handgun.

Tires squeaked on the parking lot pavement. The engine raced. The sound faded quickly.

I HUNG FROZEN in shock for a moment, still seeing the pistol pointed directly at me, reconciling the certainty that I'd be shot with the realization that I had not been seen. I didn't think to climb higher in the tree for a look at the truck. When I began to breathe again, I eased down the side of the tree. On the back side of it, hidden from the tent, I reappeared.

Fwoomp! I stepped into view and caught sight of Andy. First out of the tent. She dashed toward me with her weapon drawn.

First out. First to be shot. I could not unsee the imagined horror.

In the tent behind her, shock wore off and people shifted to after-the-fact panic. Guests streamed out of the tent on all sides. An initial crowd rushed up the aisle behind Andy, but on finding the dead man, broke through the flower garland and crossed the lawn in the direction of the resort building.

Andy satisfied herself that the fifth man was dead. She nudged the weapon out of his reach on the off chance he resurrected himself. She

hurried a few paces up the embankment, to confirm nothing was to be found in the parking lot. I noticed she had kicked off her shoes.

She returned with a scowl on her face.

“I told you not to do anything!”

“Hey!” I turned on her. “He was stationed to shoot the first person coming out. I knew that would be you. And I’m fairly sure you were outgunned. So, don’t—*just—don’t!*”

She met my rigid expression with her own. She could not see what I had imagined, picturing her rushing into an ambush. She could not know that even without it happening, it now existed in my head, horrible, indelible. I rolled my eyes to the sky and pulled air into my lungs to settle myself.

“Okay,” she said. “Let’s just deal with this.”

I nodded.

“My phone is inside. I need to call the Chief,” she said. She reached for me and squeezed my arm. I pressed my hand to hers.

We connected and transmitted unspoken messages.

Fresh screams came from the wedding tent.

“We need a doctor! He’s been shot! Someone, call an ambulance!”

“Over here, too! Over here!”

Andy pulled away.
“Keep everyone away from the body,” she commanded. She turned and worked her way against the fleeing crowd.

I pointed at three men hurrying toward the resort with their wives or dates.

“You, you and you. Help me,” I commanded. “Stand here, here and here.” I pointed. “Don’t let anyone near the body.”

One of the women wanted nothing to do with me. She urged her husband to keep going. He shrugged helplessly at me and followed her. The other two stepped up grimacing.

Security people hustled their important charges out of the tent, across the lawn and into the resort. My new colleagues and I waved people away from the crushed body on the aisle. A few stopped and gaped, horrified by the blood leaking onto the white carpet.

Voices in the tent cried out.

“He’s been shot!”

“We need a doctor!”

I struggled to slow my heart rate.

Sirens awakened in the distance. I searched the crowd and the relative darkness in the wedding tent, trying in vain to spot Andy.

What the hell happened?

The sixth man had issued his commands, then fired a steady sequence of shots. I had taken the meter of his gunfire as a warning while he crossed the dance floor and made his exit. The shots were cadenced, measured. All for show. There was no uncontained firefight, no wild exchange. I assumed he fired his warning into the air. Had he gone mad and randomly targeted defenseless people on the floor?

Uniformed state troopers arrived. A pair of them jogged down the hill. I credited them with amazing response time, until I remembered that the governor had been somewhere in the tent.

“This is one of the perpetrators,” I said to the first trooper to arrive. “These guys have been guarding the body for you.” I gestured at my two companions.

“Step away from the body,” he commanded. “Clear this sidewalk!”

I took the opportunity to slip away.

Large, serious men—professional security—urgently ushered their charges away from the wedding tent. One bodyguard, moving a man with white hair toward the resort building, reached out and plucked a cell phone from a bystander shooting cell phone video. The bodyguard crushed the phone with a heel, never breaking stride, never looking back, ignoring the phone owner’s outcry.

I worked my way into the tent and looked for Andy.

The sun had slipped well below the trees on the far side of the lake, leaving a curtain of high, bloodstained clouds. Strung inside the tent, thousands of tiny white lights hung in vain celebration over empty tables. The wedding tent seemed to swell in size for being largely vacated. Two clusters of people remained. At the center of each cluster, someone suffered.

In the strange warping of time that surrounds any emergency, it took both forever and no time for the first ambulance to arrive. A City of Essex rescue squad parked at the top of the embankment where the thieves had boarded their getaway truck. EMTs unloaded equipment cases, descended the embankment, and hurried into the tent.

Bystanders urged and guided the EMT teams to the wounded. Someone lay prone, attended by a guest who worked with trained, bloodied hands. I took him for a doctor. He spoke to the EMTs with authority.

Blonde, beautiful and wearing twenty thousand dollars-worth of

wedding dress splashed with blood, the bride knelt, cradling the wounded man's head. Bloody handprints imprinted the dress around her waist and down her thighs. She wasn't shot. No one attended to wounds on her body. Streaks of tears cut glossy paths down Sandy's face. Her new husband hovered nearby.

Andy materialized out of nowhere, issuing measured commands. She spoke to those present and into her phone. Two men in suits approached her and showed badges. She gave them urgent instructions and they hurried away in different directions.

Activity heightened when the medical team moved the wounded man onto a stretcher and rushed him out of the tent toward an ambulance. A train of shocked and worried guests, including the bridal party, hurried after it.

Officer Mike Mackiejewski appeared in his Essex PD uniform. He rushed up to Andy and she briefed him. He listened, spoke into a radio mic mounted near his shirt collar, listened for more, radioed more.

I stood a few paces from one of the bars occupying a section of the perimeter—the same bar Pidge had pointed out. I noticed the bartender, a young woman, staring, transfixed. I walked directly into her line of sight. It took a second for her to focus her eyes on my face.

“Captain Morgan, spiced, on the rocks with a dash of pineapple,” I said.

The woman blinked, not comprehending. I waved a hand between us. She spoke. “Uh ... I think we're closed.”

“It's okay. I'm with the police. CSI. I need to test all the liquor. Let's start with Captain Morgan, spiced, on the rocks with a dash of pineapple.”

She blinked at me again.

“Please.”

Her hands went to work slowly, automatically. “I'm sorry. I don't—I don't know—I've never—”

“It's okay. None of us have ever. Hey!”

Startled, she looked up from the act of pouring rum over ice cubes.

“Pour one for yourself,” I said.

She nodded blankly and produced another glass. Her hands did the work on autopilot. When she finished, I picked up mine and waited until

she picked up hers. Her hand shook. Ice in her glass sang a tiny wind chime song.

“Relax,” I said. “Take a sip.”

“I can’t believe this happened.” She drank. “Can NOT believe this happened.”

“May I ask you a question? Did you see a guy here tonight wearing makeup on his face?”

It took a moment of concentration for her to realized I had asked a question.

“Brown suit?” I prompted her. “Makeup on? On his face?”

Her face lit up. “Yes! Heavy makeup on his face! It was getting dark in here, but I totally saw it. Mostly because his skin had no sheen. You saw him, too?”

“Did he drink?”

“Water. He asked for a bottled water!”

“I don’t suppose you noticed what he did with the water bottle...?”

She shook her head.

“But you did see him, you got a look at his face.”

She nodded. “I was sorta fixated on his makeup.”

“Did you notice anything else about him?”

She took a strong hit from the tumbler of rum. “Yes! When he asked for the bottled water, I put it on the bar, but he didn’t pick it up. He just looked at it. And I thought I did something wrong you know? But he didn’t say anything, and it was really, really busy, so I took another order. I think he didn’t want me to see him pick it up, because he waited until I was filling the other order. I think it was because of the tattoo on his hand.”

“Tattoo? Did you see it?”

“I was bending over to scoop some ice. He didn’t see me looking. I saw it. Eighty-eight.”

“The words?”

“The numbers. 88. On the back of his right hand.”

I raised a glass to her and took a long drink. The liquid warmed my throat. The warmth spread and massaged my tight nerves.

“Was he one of them?” she asked, suddenly frightened.

“Maybe,” I said. “But it’s okay, he’s gone now. Can you stay right here? I want you to meet someone.”

. . .

ANDY INTERVIEWED THE BARTENDER. I watched the EMTs work over the second person who had been shot. I saw my wife glance out at the aisle where she had given me the assignment to watch over the dead body. Two state troopers stood near the bleeding corpse. I presume seeing them got me off the hook for abandoning my post, because Andy didn't say anything.

After assuring the woman she could finish her drink, Andy took me aside.

"I'm sorry," she said. "For snapping at you."

Her green eyes met mine. I gave her credit. Switching gears from full-on cop to something personal at this moment took a lot for her.

"Likewise," I said. "I got a little edgy, too."

The moment ended. She took my arm and pulled me farther from the nearest set of ears.

"What did you see?"

I started by describing the execution of the fifth man.

"That doesn't make sense." She shook her head. "Why leave someone who can be identified?"

"Or ... why take someone with you who needs medical attention? Or whose body needs disposing of if he doesn't make it?"

"Cold."

"Killing him was cold."

"Shooting up the place doesn't make sense. They could have been in and out with no one hurt."

"Get out your phone," I said. "Record me. I'll give you what I can from when I was outside, while it's fresh. You'll have to come up with a creative way of using it because I can't be a witness."

Andy produced her cell phone and touched the screen.

"It's recording."

I closed my eyes.

One. Gun. "First guy carried a black AR-15 with a strap. There was a pin or medallion on the strap near the stock. Five eight. Hundred sixty. Black tactical pants, looked brand new." *Two. Shoe.* "Second guy, construction work boots. Crepe soles. Leather laces. Big guy. Six-foot. Two twenty, two thirty. Blue jeans with a biker chain on his wallet. Beer belly. Leather wrist bands." *Three. Tree.* "Third guy, five ten, maybe six-foot. Muscle man. Body builder. He carried a duffle bag, a military bag.

It looked well worn. Green, not tan. Black tactical clothing ... um, and a tattoo! Right forearm. Emblem of some kind. Formal. A crest or a military tattoo.” *Four. Door.* “Fourth guy was too fast. I could not get—wait! He carried his rifle in his left hand. Left handed.” *Five. Hive.* “Number five, he’s over there.” I opened my eyes. “Pretty sure you can get more from him than me. And number six...”

“He did the talking, on the stage. Seemed to be in charge.”

“The guy with the makeup.”

“Covering a tattoo, or a face full of them.”

“Andy.” I touched her arm. “He gave the order to number five to cover the rear and shoot the first person to come out the door. There was no hesitation. No question. The guy went to a firing stance immediately.”

“Military discipline?”

“Something like it. Although the commander obviously didn’t subscribe to the doctrine of leaving no man behind. He finished number five off like it was nothing.” I’d seen that kind of murder before. Too recently.

Andy switched off the recording and looked at me with naked wonder.

“What?”

“How did you do that? Heat of the moment—how did you get all that?”

“Mnemonic device. From a book. I taught myself.”

She stared at me.

“I got tired of forgetting the limes when I stop for groceries.”

Every now and then I get a look of unabashed admiration from my wife. Priceless.

“Can you stay with her?” She gestured at the bartender. “Until I can get someone over here?”

“Sure. What does it mean? 88?”

“I have no idea.”

Andy didn't send anyone to speak to the bartender. Essex PD had jurisdiction over the resort and Andy was ranking officer. She quickly became the eye of the storm, issuing orders and organizing control of the crime scene. At one point she called out a command to gather all the wedding guests in the resort ballroom. I took the cue and invited the young bartender to walk to the building with me.

Putting the wedding guests in the ballroom turned it into a petri dish for rumors. One person was dead. Six people were dead. Senator Stone was dead. The bride was dead (I knew that was false). One of the robbers was dead (I knew that was true). It was a robbery. It was a mass shooting. There were two men. There were ten men. Nobody knew anything for certain. The bride, groom and the entire wedding party had been sequestered elsewhere. The governor was nowhere to be seen. And not that I rub elbows with billionaires, but the guests with the most money seemed to be long gone.

I found Earl and Pidge.

"Where the fuck did you disappear to?" Pidge asked.

"Andy shoved me to the floor. I got tangled up with the people on the other side of the table."

"This is some fucked up shit." Tough girl or not, her mascara had run.

“Bob got hit,” Earl growled. “They’re saying Sandy, too.”

“Sandy’s okay,” I said. “I saw her.”

“Who fucking robs a wedding? What? Did they need a Cuisinart?”

Earl shook his head at Pidge and explained. “The governor is *real* close with whatzisname, the groom. That’s why His Majesty was here. The kid’s been the governor’s go-between with the Chinese. And there’s been a lot of business with the Chinese in the last couple years. *A lot.*”

“What’s that got to do with it?”

“There was a bunch of them here. They’re probably all chums now, got to know each other’s family and all. Got invited to the wedding.”

“So?” Pidge asked.

“So, their tradition is to give the universal gift. Cash. Lots of cash. Somebody said those assholes emptied out the gift card stash. You can bet they’ll burn the envelopes with checks and movie gift cards, but my guess is they coasted outta here with close to a quarter million in cash. Easy.”

Earl Jackson doesn’t act the part, but numerically he counts among the richest men in the county. I conceded that he knew the rare-air culture far better than I ever would.

“Fuck! I should’ve grabbed a couple envelopes!” Pidge exclaimed.

“I don’t know where you’d put ‘em,” Earl rumbled back at her.

“Untraceable,” I mused, thinking of the robbery.

“No fucking shit!” Pidge said.

The resort staff appeared and rolled out carts filled with chairs and tables. Something told me we were in for a long wait.

“I saw Dave Peterson,” I said.

“No kidding?” Earl said. “Ungrateful little shit didn’t even come over to say Hi.” I happened to know Earl pulled strings to get Dave the interview for his new job, and that Earl thought the world of him. “Is he here?”

“He was planning on looking for you guys after dinner, but he was here with a bunch of his company top brass. I bet they hustled out right quick.”

“Could’a at least parked their big-assed jet at Essex and bought some fuel,” Earl griped.

We spent a long three hours waiting before investigators from the state Division of Criminal Investigations called us over to a table.

Looking at their credentials, I wondered if bigger guns had displaced Andy and the Essex PD.

The interview lasted only minutes. Like most of the guests—half of which had been released from the ballroom at that point—we were on the floor, didn't see anything, heard the shots, and it was all over before we knew it. That's what Pidge and Earl said.

I let them talk and nodded a lot.

Shortly after midnight, I keyed my way into the room Andy and I had been assigned. The room offered soothing silence compared to the tense, non-stop rumble of conversation in the ballroom. I fumbled with the lights, eventually figuring out which switches lit which fixtures.

An iced bottle of champagne, compliments of the wedding party, sat on the bureau in front of a flat screen TV. The champagne wore a coat of condensation. At least one life had been lost, a wedding destroyed, a lifetime of bad memories recorded. Yet looking at the unopened bubbly, I managed to find resentment that my plans with Andy for the night, for the weekend, had been ruined. I wasn't proud of that.

After hanging up my one and only suit, I stripped down to boxers and a t-shirt. The champagne beckoned, but I fought off the urge. If I opened it without waiting for Andy, I would drink the whole damned thing myself and wake up in the morning with the Eighth Air Force bombing the inside of my skull. I considered breaking into the minibar to see if Captain Morgan had any shipmates but imagined the same outcome and declined. Plus, even though the accommodations were generously included in the invitation, I had a feeling the minibar charges would wind up on the credit card. Tiny, expensive bottles of liquor were not in the Stewart budget.

I cracked open one of the complimentary water bottles stationed by the coffee maker, turned off the lights and stretched out on the bed.

I thought of Sandy Stone.

One hell of a way to start a marriage.

Andy knew Sandy better than I did. She told me Sandy wasn't just a silver-spoon-bred state senator's daughter, marking time until the rich husband came along. Sandy loved teaching. Despite what the bride said about her new husband running wild with the wedding plans, today had been Her Day. It should have been magical.

I wondered, not for the first time, if I hadn't cheated Andy out of Her Day, given our simple marriage ceremony. Andy's father had as much if not more money than State Senator Bob Stone, but a long-standing rift separated Andy from her father. Maybe I should have pushed Andy to reconcile with him, with her family. Maybe she harbored secret dreams of string quartets and Greek statues. All she really got out of the deal was me.

As often happened when we are apart, or the hours grow small and dark, I wondered if I was enough.

I also wondered who the hell thought putting LED lights all over a hotel room was such a great idea.

On one of those unanswered questions, I fell asleep.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

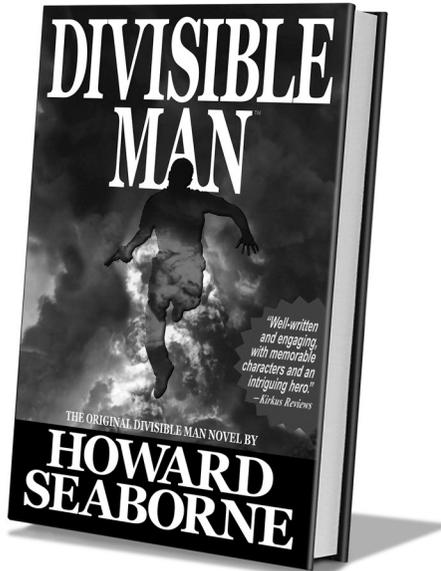


HOWARD SEABORNE is the author of the DIVISIBLE MAN™ series of novels and a collection of short stories featuring the same cast of characters. He began writing novels in spiral notebooks at age ten. He began flying airplanes at age sixteen. He is a former flight instructor and commercial charter pilot licensed in single- and multi-engine airplanes as well as helicopters. Today he flies a twin-engine Beechcraft Baron, a single-engine Beechcraft Bonanza, and a Rotorway A-600 Talon experimental helicopter he built from a kit in his garage. He lives with his wife and writes and flies during all four seasons in Wisconsin, never far from Essex County Airport.

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DIVISIBLE MAN



The media calls it a “miracle” when air charter pilot Will Stewart survives an aircraft in-flight breakup, but Will’s miracle pales beside the stunning aftereffect of the crash. Barely on his feet again, Will and his police sergeant wife Andy race to rescue an innocent child from a heinous abduction

—if Will’s new ability doesn’t kill him first.

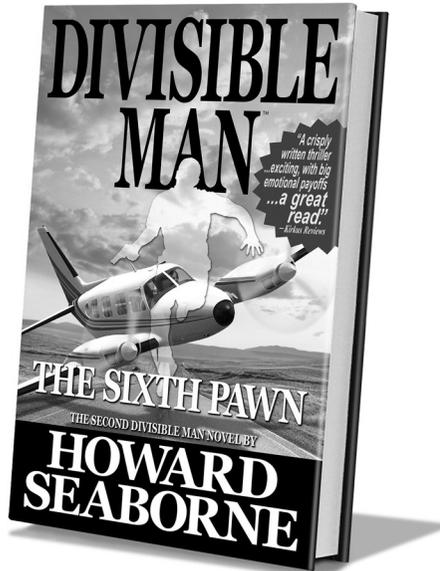
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DIVISIBLE MAN: THE SIXTH PAWN



When the Essex County “Wedding of the Century” erupts in gunfire, Will and Andy Stewart confront a criminal element no one could have foreseen. Will tests the extraordinary aftereffect of surviving a devastating airplane crash while Andy works a case obstructed by powerful people wielding the sinister influence of unlimited money in politics.

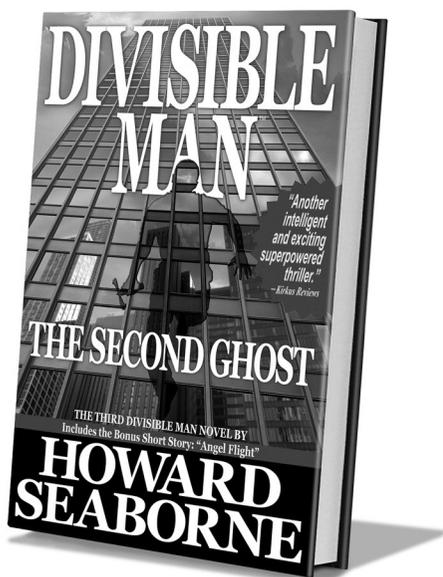
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DIVISIBLE MAN: THE SECOND GHOST



Tormented by a cyber stalker, Lane Franklin's best friend turns to suicide. Lane's frantic call to Will and Andy Stewart launches them on a desperate rescue. When it all goes bad, Will must adapt his extraordinary ability to survive the dangerous high steel and glass of Chicago as Andy and Pidge encounter the edge of disaster. **Includes the short story, "Angel Flight," a bridge to the fourth DIVISIBLE MAN novel that follows.**

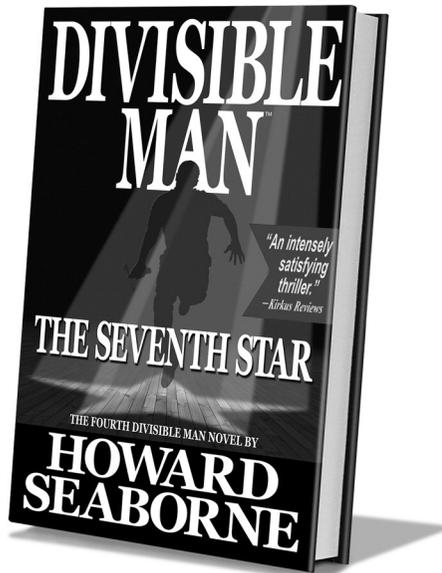
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DIVISIBLE MAN: THE SEVENTH STAR



A horrifying message turns a holiday gathering tragic. An unsolved murder hangs a death threat over Detective Andy Stewart's head. And internet-fueled hatred targets Will and Andy's friend Lane. Will and Andy struggle to keep the ones they love safe, while hunting a dead murderer before he can kill again. As the tension tightens, Will confronts a troubling revelation about the extraordinary aftereffect of his midair collision.

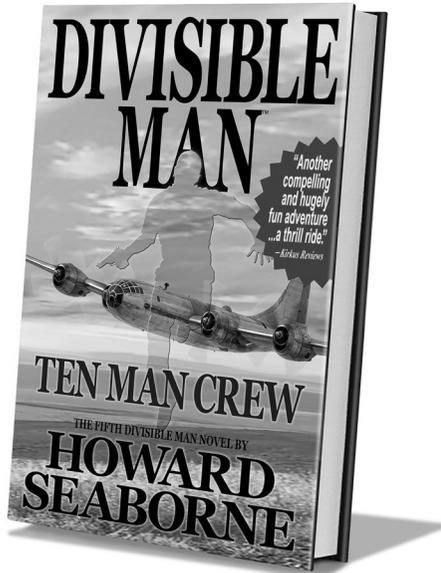
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DIVISIBLE MAN: TEN MAN CREW



An unexpected visit from the FBI threatens Will Stewart's secret and sends Detective Andy Stewart on a collision course with her darkest impulses. A twisted road reveals how a long-buried Cold War secret has been weaponized. And Pidge shows a daring side of herself that could cost her dearly.

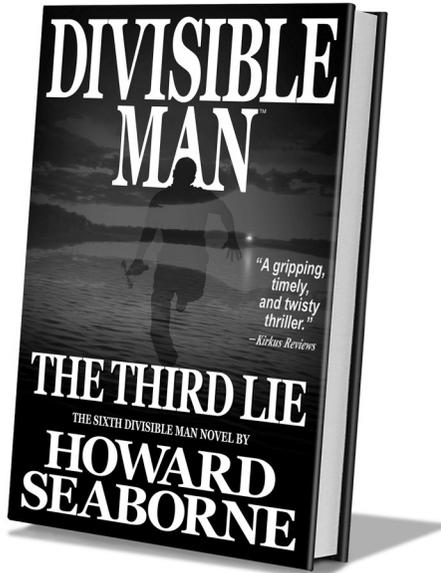
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DIVISIBLE MAN: THE THIRD LIE



Caught up in a series of hideous crimes that generate national headlines, Will faces the critical question of whether to reveal himself or allow innocent lives to be lost. The stakes go higher than ever when Andy uncovers the real reason behind a celebrity athlete's assault on an underaged girl. And Will discovers that the limits of his ability can lead to disaster.

A Kirkus Starred Review.

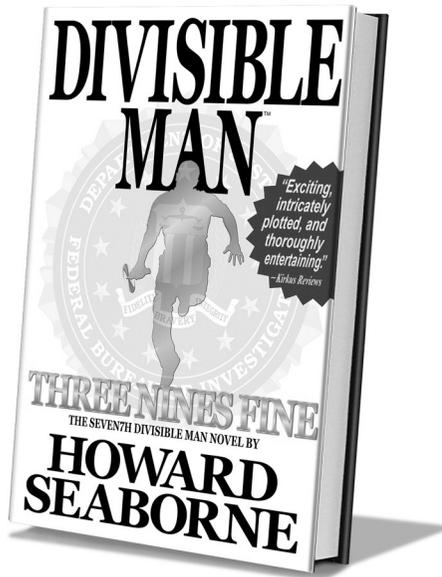
A Kirkus Star is awarded to "books of exceptional merit."

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DIVISIBLE MAN: THREE NINES FINE



A mysterious mission request from Earl Jackson sends Will into the sphere of a troubled celebrity. A meeting with the Deputy Director of the FBI goes terribly wrong. Will and Andy find themselves on the run from Federal authorities, infiltrating a notorious cartel, and racing to prevent what might prove to be the crime of the century.

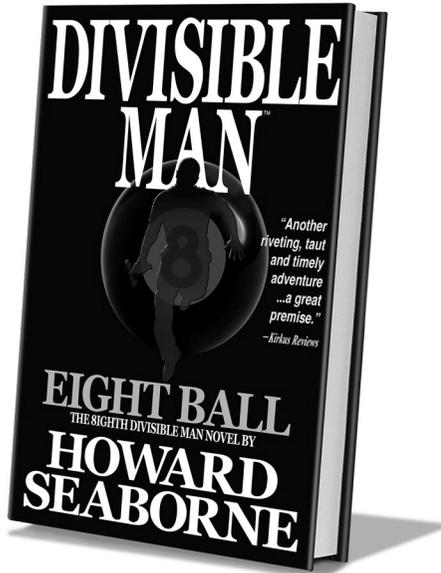
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DIVISIBLE MAN: EIGHT BALL



Will's encounter with a deadly sniper on a serial killing rampage sends him deeper into the FBI's hands with costly consequences for Andy. And when billionaire Spiro Lewko makes an appearance, Will and Andy's future takes a dark turn. The stakes could not be higher when the sniper's ultimate target is revealed.

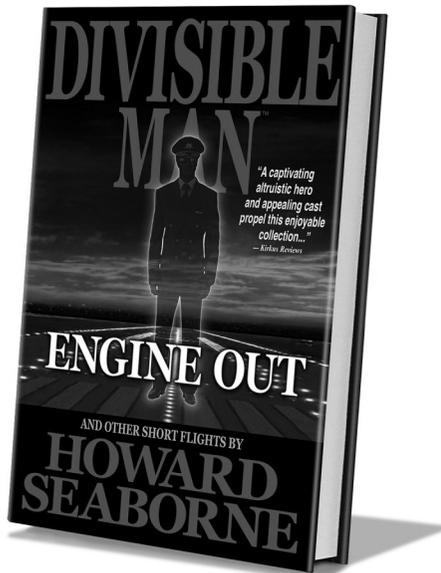
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ENGINE OUT AND OTHER SHORT FLIGHTS



Things just have a way of happening around Will and Andy Stewart. In this collection of twelve tales from Essex County, boy meets girl, a mercy flight goes badly wrong, and Will crashes and burns when he tries dating again. Engines fail. Shots are fired. A rash of the unexpected breaks loose—from bank jobs to zombies.

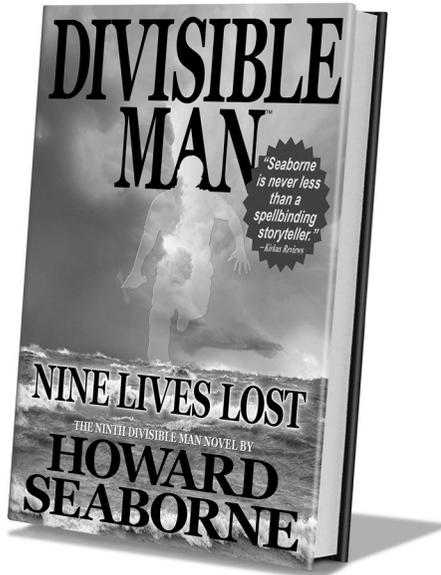
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DIVISIBLE MAN: NINE LIVES LOST



A simple request from Earl Jackson sends Will on a desperate cross-country chase. The twisted path for answers reveals a mystery that literally lands at Will and Andy's mailbox. At the same time, a threat to Andy's career takes a deadly turn. Before it all ends, Will confronts a deep, dark place he never imagined.

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