

# DIVISIBLE MAN™



*“A gripping,  
timely,  
and twisty  
thriller.”*

*—Kirkus Reviews*

## THE THIRD LIE

THE SIXTH DIVISIBLE MAN NOVEL BY

# HOWARD SEABORNE



**DIVISIBLE MAN<sup>TM</sup>**  
**THE THIRD LIE**

by

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.

### **SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL BOOKSELLER**

The entire DIVISIBLE MAN™ series is available from the many local independent booksellers who offer online ordering for in-store pickup or home delivery.

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*For all who didn't make it.  
And for those who tried to save them.*

“Lie to me once, you’re on my shit list.  
“Lie to me twice, we’re done.  
“Lie to me a third time, I’m coming for you.”

—*Earl Jackson*

# **PART I**

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# 1

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“Stop.” My wife pressed her hand against my bare chest where a moment ago she had been idly tracing three capital letters with the tip of her index finger.

“What?”

“You can’t start a story like that.” She rolled to face me. “That’s the original cliché.”

“Whoa, whoa! You asked me how it went. I’m telling you how it went.” I picked up her hand. “Go back to doing what you were doing.”

“What...this?” She traced the three letters slowly, starting at my navel and ending just above my diaphragm.

“Yes,” I said. “That. Now let me tell my story.”

Gold-flecked green eyes warned me of undisclosed mischief. She dropped her cheek to my shoulder. Her hair spread on my skin and I drew in the intoxicating scent she uses to enslave me.

“Fine,” she said. “You may begin again.”

“Okay. It was a—” her hand slipped down to my ribs, then up into my armpit, where I am ridiculously ticklish “—about an hour and fifteen minutes after civil twilight and radar showed widespread convective activity across most of lower Michigan and Ohio. In other words... it was dark. It was stormy. It was night. I don’t know how else to put it.”

Her hand slid back to my chest. Reprieve.

I scanned the engine instruments. Oil pressure looked good, but the right engine oil temperature wiggled on the high side. I tabbed through several screens on the Insight engine monitor and stopped at the display for individual cylinder head temperatures.

*Gotcha.*

I checked our position on the moving map. Nine thousand-plus feet below, the northwest shoreline of Lake Erie slid behind me. I touched the audio panel to join my headset to the in-cabin intercom.

I glanced back.

Sandy Stone and Arun Dewar faced each other across a small foldout table. They traded Education Foundation papers back and forth under a cone of warm light from the cabin overhead. Sandy pushed aside a tired lock of blonde hair and glanced toward the cockpit. Catching her eye, I tapped my headset. She untangled hers from the seat's armrest and slipped it on. Arun followed suit.

I said, "We've got a problem."

Arun's dark eyes grew wide. "What kind of problem?"

His reaction tempted me to reply with *It looks like the right wing is loose* but it's bad form to screw with sensitive passengers.

"I've got a cylinder running hot." Arun opened his mouth to panic. Sandy raised a calming hand. "I'd like to land in Detroit and have it looked at."

"Will there be anyone to work on it at this hour?"

“No. I know a shop on the field at Willow Run that will give us priority in the morning. If it’s minor, we could be on our way by noon. If not, Arun can get us a flight out of Detroit Metro. Either way, it’s an overnight stop.”

It had been a long day, our third on the road. The Pennsylvania trip followed closely on the heels of two trips last week and one the week before. With the start of the school year nearing, Sandy seemed determined to cram in as many Education Foundation trips as she could before returning to teaching kindergarten.

“Whatever you think is best, Will,” Sandy said.

“Arun, do your logistics magic. I recall a nice Holiday Inn close to the Willow Run airport.”

“On it.” He reached for his phone.

I returned to the flight controls and flicked off the autopilot. My fingertip hovered over the push-to-talk switch on the control yoke, waiting for an opening on the busy ATC frequency. The sector controller had his hands full helping flights work their way around the weather. He wasn’t going to appreciate my request.

THE CYLINDER HEAD in question suffered a sticky valve. A sharp Willow Run mechanic named Nolan knew it before he had the cowling off the next morning. He said he could take care of it but needed a few days. I called Doc, the resident Airframe & Powerplant mechanic at Essex County Air Service, for a second opinion. I hoped he would put together a parts-and-tools kit and get Earl Jackson, our boss, to run him across the big lake for a ramp repair. Instead, Doc asked to speak directly with Nolan. The two gear-heads agreed that Nolan was better equipped for the job. I broke the news to Sandy. Arun pulled out his phone and booked three seats on an 8:20 p.m. Delta flight that had us arriving in Milwaukee at 8:27, accounting for the time change.

I don’t like flying commercial. Flying a Piper Navajo cabin-class twin for Sandy Stone’s Education Foundation means I can deliver Sandy from the stairs of the airplane to the door of a waiting car at any of ten thousand general aviation airports. Commercial flying, laden with the cattle-drive process of check-in, security and reporting to the gate for boarding, takes far longer. In the hours required to make a commercial flight from Detroit to Milwaukee (only forty minutes of which consist of actual flying) I could have flown us over and back again and still met Andy for dinner.

After threading our way through the eye of the TSA needle at Detroit’s Wayne County Airport, the airport tram and people-mover combination

carried us to our gate with relative efficiency. I began to think the process wouldn't be as painful as I anticipated.

I was wrong.

"Is that...?" Arun pointed at the wall of windows near the gate.

"Some serious weather," I finished his thought.

Bruised and boiling clouds loomed in the western sky. Lightning crawled between giant cumulus buildups and stabbed the earth. An angry line of aerial violence blotted out the setting sun.

We found seats in the waiting area. The terminal grew darker. Anxious passengers swiped device screens. Arun pulled out his iPad and studied ugly blotches of radar imaging.

"There's a tornado watch in effect," he reported, his voice high and tight. Born and raised in Britain, Arun didn't have much experience with Midwestern tornados. I was less concerned with a twister than the fact that the jetway for our gate had no airplane attached.

"*Watch*," I said, "means conditions *might* produce a funnel cloud, but it does not mean an actual tornado has been spotted."

Arun buried his nose in his screen, looking for better news.

The gate agent picked up her microphone.

"Ladies and gentlemen as you can see, we have a bit of weather approaching. We've just been informed that air traffic control is holding arrivals until these conditions pass. It means that the aircraft taking Flight 1931 to Milwaukee has not landed yet and will be late reaching our gate. When it arrives, we will unload and service the aircraft quickly and try to get you on your way. We appreciate your patience."

"Aw, fuck that shit!" A loud voice behind me turned heads. "*What the fuck! Let's get this show on the road!*"

Someone laughed. The loudmouth had an audience.

I twisted in my seat.

They were a party of three. Two men and a woman. Loudmouth stood at the center of their small cluster. I guessed his age to be in the mid- to late-twenties. He easily topped six-feet-six and showed off a heavily muscled physique with a tight silver t-shirt that advertised a fitness club. He wore crewcut hair bleached bright white with three horizontal black stripes on each temple. Thick gold chains hung around his neck. Gold bands adorned one wrist and a heavy, multi-dialed watch—the kind of watch people think pilots use, which we don't—weighed down the other.

The young woman on his arm wore bright pink tights that left nothing anatomical to the imagination. On top, she bundled a pair of abundant breasts into what looked like a yellow elastic bandage. She covered a

minimum of it with a tiny leather jacket decorated with dozens of silver studs. Her scarlet hair and heavy makeup spoke as loudly as her boyfriend.

The third star in this constellation wore long hair in a man bun and squeezed himself into a “tiny suit”—a jacket three sizes too small over trousers tapered to a snug fit at the calf. Under the glossy suit jacket he wore a black t-shirt weighed down by gold chains, although not quite the mining haul the trio leader draped across his chest.

Loudmouth carried on.

“C’mon! Get us some pilots with balls and let’s bounce! I’ll fly the motherfucker!” The girl tugged on his bulging arm.

“Derek, buy me another drink!”

Derek gave it a beat. Then he turned to a heavysset man who had been trying hard not to pay attention from a nearby seat.

“Dude watch my stuff,” Derek commanded. He pointed at the man and then at three bags laying in the aisle. “I’m holding you responsible! Anybody fucks with my stuff it’s on you.”

The hapless man stared at Derek’s thigh-sized arms.

Derek and his troop set off for the bar on the other side of the next gate.

I thought about reporting the unattended bags. Airport police destroy first and ask questions second. The policy struck me as perfect justice for an ass of this magnitude. I decided instead to watch the other storm—the one dumping sheets of rain on the runways. Lightning speared the earth while thunder cracked. The absence of delay between flash and boom betrayed the proximity of the strike.

I checked on Arun. He was staring at the trio strutting toward the bar. He wore an alert expression, the sort one might adopt when encountering a snake. Arun is a small, bookish young man. I wondered if hard experience had outfitted him with a visceral wariness of bullies.

It took another two hours for the weather to clear, for our plane to reach the gate, and for the aircraft to be unloaded, serviced and made ready for boarding. No imagination was required to see that most, if not all, of the Milwaukee-bound passengers were on the last leg of a long day of travel. Listlessness and too much carry-on luggage weighed people down. Only a few passengers, universally under the age of six, exhibited anything resembling energy by the time we lined up to board.

Before stepping into the jetway, I glanced back at the cluster of carry-on bags orphaned between two now-empty rows of gate seats. I crossed my fingers that Derek and his pals were too busy chumming with Jack Daniels to notice that the flight had been called.

Thanks to last-minute booking, our boarding passes took us to uncom-



fortable seats in the rear of the plane. Arun and Sandy squeezed into the window and middle seats on the right side of the aisle. I slid into a left-side aisle seat one row back. A woman in her sixties or seventies nestled politely beside Sandy, who tossed me a relieved glance.

Sandy Stone is a remarkably attractive young woman who has confided in me that her greatest fear when flying is sitting beside a man attempting to generate enough conversation to justify a marriage proposal by the end of the flight. She, like everyone else on this flight, simply wanted to go home.

My watch said we would land in Milwaukee after eleven. It would take several hours after that to reach Essex.

A loud voice erupted from the forward section of the plane.

“Move it or lose it!”

I looked up. Derek and his dominoes lined up in the aisle. Derek towered over everybody. He bobbed and danced impatiently to a beat in his own head. A family ahead of him hurried to settle themselves. His shuffling steps were unsteady. His eyes, bleary.

“Let’s go people,” he said. “Let’s light the fuse on this rocket!”

His girlfriend giggled and jiggled. Her heavily lidded eyes scanned the men she passed, daring them to gaze at her chest. The third wheel in the group shuffled along wearing mirrored sunglasses and a stone face, wobbling slightly, as if the still earthbound plane navigated light turbulence.

Derek compared his boarding pass to the seat numbers. “Ariel, baby, *what did you do?* You got us sitting in fucking Siberia!”

“It was all they had, honey!”

The trio worked their way past me trailing a cloud of cologne and whiskey. They found their assigned seats two rows aft of mine. The new issue became the packed overhead bin.

“What is all this shit!” Derek jerked open one plastic door after another. He tried shoving bags sideways to make room. “Fuck!”

“Sir, your bag will fit under the seat.” A flight attendant ventured into the fray. “If you would please take your seats now.”

“*If you would please take your seats now,*” Derek mimicked. “Bitch, where’m I gonna put my feet?”

The flight attendant, whose day had probably started four cities ago, chose not to engage.

After aggressive jostling and maneuvering, the carry-on bags were stowed under the seats. Third Wheel took the window. Ariel took the center seat and immediately flipped the armrest up to snuggle against her man. Derek dropped in the aisle seat with one leg in the aisle.

The show might have been over if we had pushed back from the gate.

Instead a voice from the flight deck told us that although the heavy weather had passed, ground control remained backed up.

“Folks,” the captain said with a marked lack of enthusiasm, “we are now holding for clearance to push back.”

The storm may have moved on, but the effects of diverted and delayed traffic, compounded by the late hour, stacked up against us.

We waited.

“Fucking plane is overloaded,” Derek announced. Someone shushed him. It might have been Ariel. He paid no attention. “I saw this shit online. They overload the plane and it messes up the gravity. Puts all the controls out of balance.”

*Idiot*, I thought.

“This one plane, they put too much baggage in the back. It took off and the front end went up and then it did a big old nosedive right into the runway. Splat!” Heads turned to issue reproachful looks. I gave the effort small odds. Subtlety is lost on those who wear loafers without socks. “Every freakin’ person on board died,” Derek continued. “They couldn’t tell which body parts belonged to which passenger. Fucking goo.”

“Sir,” a woman said quietly, “please. There are children here.”

“That’s what happens, lady. They overload these planes and they just fall outta the sky!” Inexplicably, Ariel giggled, which made Derek laugh.

“Hey!” A man’s voice this time. “Can you keep it down, pal?”

“Pal? Are we pals? Cuz’ I don’t remember having any pals with such an ugly-ass face.”

“Just keep it down.”

“Or what?”

The man did not reply.

“Fucking pilots don’t know shit and that’s why people get turned to jelly in these things, *pal*.”

I unsnapped my seatbelt. Sandy shot me a warning glance, but it was too late. I took to my feet and stepped into the aisle. At the back of the plane, a flight attendant caught sight of my move and started forward. I didn’t wait for her. I turned and hurried up the aisle to the forward cabin. The lead flight attendant, preparing for the safety briefing, saw me coming.

“Sir, you need to—”

I pulled my wallet from my jeans pocket and flipped it open. I held it up and gestured for the woman to step up into the space behind the cockpit door, which had already been closed. The wallet move—hinting at law enforcement—threw her. She stepped back.

“I’m a pilot.” I held up the plastic flap that showed my FAA license.

It wasn't what she expected. She rebounded quickly. "Sir, you really—"

"Listen," I said softly. "You've got a problem passenger in row forty-three. He's drunk and he's running his mouth and frankly, he's upsetting the other passengers. He's also looking for a fight."

Her gaze shot to the back of the plane and landed on Derek. I hadn't told her anything she didn't already know.

"Here's the thing," I said. "Federal Aviation Regulation ninety-one point seventeen states that 'Except in an emergency, no pilot of a civil aircraft may allow a person who appears to be intoxicated to be carried on that aircraft.' Now, I don't want to cause you trouble, but it's going to get ugly back there. I for one don't want to be cooped up in this pressurized tube with him when it does. That man and his companions are clearly drunk. He is menacing and scaring the passengers around him."

She sent a resigned look in Derek's direction.

"Listen, I don't want to be an ass about it. But you've now been made aware. If things go bad—and I sincerely believe they will—this crew will be operating in violation of FAR ninety-one seventeen."

She looked at me like I was the bigger asshole. I didn't blame her.

"No one wants that. May I make a suggestion?"

THE FLIGHT ATTENDANT handled it beautifully. A few moments after I returned to my seat, she strolled back, leaned down, and spoke softly into Derek's ear.

"Yeah, baby! That's what I'm talking about! Grab your shit, sweetcakes. We're movin' on up!"

The flight attendant backed away. Derek stood up a little too quickly and lost his equilibrium. He leaned into the row across the aisle. His hand went wandering. A woman shrieked. "Whoa, lady!" he muttered. "Don't get your panties wet. You ain't got anything special up there anyway."

Ariel threw the woman a superior look and pushed her boyfriend forward. The forward attendant met them in the aisle. "We just need a few minutes to clear the seats and restock with fresh pillows and blankets. Please follow me." She dished out a big smile. "Can I offer you a complimentary beverage?"

Derek ordered a whiskey sour and weaved his way forward, pinballing off the seatbacks as he went. At the front of the plane, the smiling lead flight attendant said, "We'll just have you wait on the jetway while we prepare your seats in First Class." She ushered all three through the still-open door onto the jetway.

I leaned over and tried to see out the nearest side window. The view wasn't great, but through slit windows on the jetway I caught sight of law enforcement uniforms. Almost immediately, the attendants closed the forward door, a chime sounded, and a tired-sounding voice welcomed us aboard for what the crew hoped would be a short, smooth flight to Milwaukee.

A cheer rippled through the cabin.

"WHAT DID YOU TELL THEM?" Arun asked.

He hurried to keep pace beside me, anxious to learn a new secret. Except for the stream of passengers exiting our flight, the Milwaukee terminal lay empty. The shops wore metal grates for the night. A maintenance worker pushed a vacuum across a sea of carpet.

"I told them to offer the asshole a first-class accommodation. They did. First Class courtesy of the Wayne County Sheriff."

We followed the subdued flow of passengers to the escalator that descended to the baggage claim. Arun grinned.

"I've never seen that before! Brilliant!" Something about the episode charmed him.

"It's against federal law for a pilot to operate an aircraft carrying someone who appears to be intoxicated."

Sandy laughed. "That's got to be one of the least enforced laws on the books!"

I hopped the escalator and shrugged. "Maybe. Flight crews don't like confrontation. They *really* don't like to remove a passenger. It's bad for business, especially with everyone carrying video cameras. Most often, if they can just get a plane in the air, it quiets people down. That guy was not going to settle down. The crew got lucky, getting him off the plane."

Approaching the bottom of the escalator I spotted a familiar face.

"Hey, Lyle! What are you doing here?"

Lyle Traegar works with my wife as a part-time patrol officer on the City of Essex Police Department. He served under her supervision when she still wore sergeant's stripes. I hadn't seen much of him since she moved up to detective, although I remembered him in uniform at Mike Mackiejewski's funeral.

Lyle stood with his overweight frame stuffed in a black suit, white shirt and black tie. The neatly printed sign in his meaty hands told me that if he was still working for the Essex PD it remained part-time.

"Hi, Will!" he grinned. "My other job." He wiggled the sign.

“You’re a driver? Chauffeur, I should say.”

“’Til I can get Chief Ceeves to hire me full time. Tell your wife to put in a word for me. How ‘bout her making detective! That’s something!”

“She never ceases to amaze me.” I sidestepped his request that I nudge my wife on his behalf.

Arun tapped me on the shoulder. “I’ll get a car.” He bounded off toward a row of rental car desks with more energy than seemed possible at this late hour. I didn’t like his odds. The desks looked deserted.

“You just come in from Detroit?” Lyle asked. “Flight 1931?”

“Yeah.”

“That’s the flight I’m waiting for. Jesus, you’re like three hours late. I’ve been cooling my heels here forever. What happened?”

“Weather.” I read the sign in his hands. “D. Santi? That wouldn’t be a Derek Santi, would it?”

Lyle looked at me like I’d just done a magic trick. For a big man, he had a boyish veneer—the perpetual look of someone who didn’t quite get the grown-up joke. I wondered if that might be the reason Chief Ceeves hadn’t offered him a full-time position with the department. “You know him?”

“Nope. Wild guess. I’m afraid you may have a really long wait.” I explained what happened. Lyle dropped the sign to his side and shook his head.

“Yeah, that sounds like the guy. He was an entitled ass on the phone. Demanded top shelf liquor in the car.” Lyle cast a glance up the stairs. The last of the passengers from our flight had already descended and milled around the baggage carousel. “Crap. Yours is the last flight from Detroit tonight.”

“Oh, he won’t be flying tonight. Not commercial, at least.”

“I guess I’m dead-heading back up to Essex.”

“Want company?”

“Sure!”

I waved at Sandy. “We have a ride! In style, I might add. I’ll go fetch Arun.”

Three hours later, in bed, I finished explaining to my wife why a stretched limousine dropped me at our back door. She said nothing. Her hand lay motionless on my chest. Her breath came and went in a slow, steady cadence. I estimated she had fallen asleep around the time I got to the part about the cylinder head temperature.

The war council gathered around my counter-height kitchen table. A light evening breeze whispered through the open kitchen windows. Andy sat to my right. A slim blonde woman with a low tolerance for fools took the seat opposite Andy, which represented more than just a seating arrangement. Most of what Lillian—whose last name she refused to divulge—had to say landed in direct opposition to my wife. Lillian may have been a rocket scientist and mathematician with multiple doctorates, but Andy continued to refer to her as “The UFO Nut.”

The fourth member of the council floated on Andy’s laptop screen. Dr. Doug Stephenson joined us from his home office via Facetime. Andy propped the laptop on an empty Evermore shipping box.

Stephenson inadvertently introduced Lillian to our lives and my secret after she got wind of someone who had tripped over a piece of debris from my accident. The debris shared the characteristics of *the other thing*—a mystery unresolved.

Lillian, in what had become a pattern, dominated the floor.

“Evermore, North Carolina. Lewko built the town from scratch and named it after his company. Christ, I think he’ll name his firstborn after the company. The state had a collective orgasm when the press reported the location as the new site for Evermore’s corporate headquarters. Imagine their surprise when Lewko announced it was only a research facility and shipping hub. Things got testy between the bureaucrats and the billionaire because the state gave him a huge package of tax incentives. When the

legislators suggested rolling back the tax package, Lewko threatened to drop the whole thing and the state caved. The corporate welfare check came to well over a billion. The state picked up the tab for the infrastructure while Lewko retained the deed to all the land. It's the same playbook Foxconn used here in Wisconsin. And may I say, you guys really got hosed on that one."

Andy ignored Lillian's political leaning. "How sure are you that he took the *thing* to North Carolina?"

"It's there."

"A little proof would be nice."

Lillian huffed. "Lewko dropped out of sight. Going to that kind of trouble means he's doing something important. Nothing, believe me, is more important to him than the piece of debris from Will's crash. I've got sources that put him in Evermore, so that's where the artifact is."

"What sources?" Andy demanded.

"Dark web sources."

"That doesn't prove anything."

"Dark web?" I asked. It always sounds like something from a comic book to my ear. "What? Do they follow the guy?"

Lillian looked at me like I was stupid. "They follow all those guys. Bezos. Zuckerberg. Brin and Page. Gates. Jobs, back in the day. They'd get stool samples if they could. It's all about trend, and no piece of intelligence is insignificant. Knowing where the major players nibble their *foie gras* is golden. It gets checked against other players—financiers, bankers, Senate committee chairmen. It signals conversations, coalitions, chemistry. Every discarded Dixie cup is a clue. Can you imagine the stock run if you had intel that Larry Ellison booked the same B&B as the CEO of Southern California Electric?"

Lillian says everything like she thinks you should know what it means. After tolerating a moment of blank stares, she blurted out, "Nuclear power! Oracle in bed with nuclear power!"

Stephenson patiently reeled her in. "Is there any intel on his team?"

Lillian shook her head, but she eyed the screen suspiciously. "Spill it Big Bear. What are you groping for?"

"Big Bear?" I looked at Stephenson. The neurologist may be in his seventies, but the man looks twenty years younger. Andy and I knew he and Lillian were casual sexual partners.

Stephenson hesitated. The video connection made it hard to tell who he was looking at. "Do we tell her, Will?"

I guessed it was me.

“Tell me what?” Lillian stiffened. She shot glances between Stephenson and me. “What?! Are you two holding out on me? That’s not our deal!”

I wasn’t aware we had a *deal*. Stephenson raised a hand to calm her.

Andy shifted uncomfortably on her chair. This was touchy for her. It had not gone over well when I confessed to her that Stephenson and I were testing one of the unexpected characteristics of *the other thing*. Andy wasn’t against it. She also wasn’t for it.

“Either we’re all in or I’m out!” Lillian declared.

“Relax, Honeybee,” Stephenson said.

I clamped my jaw against a grin.

“Will?” Stephenson asked.

Lillian fixed her laser-focused glare on me.

“Okay,” I said slowly. “You know about the disappearing act. You know that when I vanish, gravity lets go, which is good and bad. You know that I lose my mass—”

“Inertia. That’s different,” Lillian corrected me.

“Inertia. Fine. I’m not subject to the laws of inertia and mass and gravity.”

“We went over all this, Will. What are you holding out on me?”

“He wasn’t holding out on you,” Andy said tersely. “We’ve just been cautious about revealing too much. I’m sure you can appreciate that.”

Lillian gave no sign of reading Andy’s tone. “I don’t solve equations in the dark. What haven’t you told me?”

I swallowed. “It turns out I can take people along for the ride.”

“Like the little girl in the fire. What’s-her-name.”

“Lane,” Andy said sharply.

“At first, I thought I had to wrap them up. You know, like wrap my arms around them. But it seems like all I need is a good grip on someone. If I push hard—in my head—they vanish with me.”

“And?”

“And...it has a side effect,” I added. “Last Christmas, well it’s kind of a long story, but I had an Angel Flight—a charity flight where we take—”

“I know what Angel Flight is, Will.”

“Right. So, we had this little girl with leukemia, and we were trying to get her into Marshfield for treatment, and the weather was shit, and we couldn’t make the landing. She was going downhill, so I did my thing—and I bailed out of the plane with her and dropped her off at the hospital.”

“You bailed out?”

“No, not like that. I didn’t abandon the airplane. Jesus! Pidge was flying the plane.”



“Pidge. Who the hell is Pidge?”

I explained. Then added, “Pidge and the flight nurse stayed in the plane.”

“Christ!” Lillian slapped her hand on the table. “Two people saw you?! Why don’t you just take out an ad in the *New York Times*? What about Greg LeMore? Does he know? Because you told me not to tell him why we were looking for Lewko! He’s going to think I’m a bumbling—”

“No. Greg doesn’t know.”

Lillian rolled her eyes.

“That’s not the point here, Lillian,” Andy said.

“No,” I jumped in before something caught fire. “It’s not. The point of this story is what came after. That kid, that little girl—”

“What about her?”

I shrugged. I didn’t know how to put it.

“Lillian,” Stephenson came to my rescue, “the child emerged from the effect in remission.”

Three of us gave Lillian a moment to calculate. She turned to Stephenson.

“Partial?”

“Full.”

“N.E.D.?”

“Appears to be.”

“Cellular regeneration?”

“Regeneration. Cleansing. I don’t know. I wasn’t privy. She exhibited Polycythemia Vera, which metastasized into Leukemia, which—simply went away. Will climbed out of the aircraft with a dying child in his arms. He handed a child in full remission over to the staff at the hospital.”

Lillian stared at the screen. I knew better than to think of her as speechless.

“I’ve done what I could to follow up,” Stephenson continued. “I know her primary. He can’t stop talking about her. It’s been over six months. The child is healthy. Better than healthy.”

Her gaze slowly shifted between me and Stephenson.

“Subsequent testing?”

He nodded.

“Blind?”

“Ish.”

“Quantifiable results?”

“We don’t have access. We think eighty-eight percent.”

“How many subjects?”

“To date...twenty-nine.”

*DIVISIBLE MAN: THE THIRD LIE*

I thought about a girl named Anastasia, who drew pictures of her own death. I thought about a little boy named Benny, who giggled when I took him flying. I thought about others I'd held in my arms in the dead of night. Frail. Light. Pale skin that seemed to glow in near darkness. I didn't think of them as *subjects*.

Numbers crunched behind Lillian's eyes.

"This is bad," she said slowly. "This is very bad. I need some air."

Lillian slid off her chair and stepped out of our kitchen without another word. We heard the screen door slam. Andy and I traded glances.

"Give her time," Stephenson suggested. "Call me later."

The screen winked out.

Andy pulled a pair of cold Coronas from the refrigerator and suggested we move to the front porch to catch the last of the evening light. I steeled myself for a serious and one-sided discussion about Lillian. There hadn't been an opportunity for conversation since the woman rolled her Prius into our yard unannounced that afternoon.

Two weeks had passed since Lillian sent me a text message claiming she and Greg LeMore knew where Spiro Lewko had taken the only known piece of debris from my midair collision. In that time, she made contact only twice. Both times, she offered no elaboration on her first message. Instead, she breathlessly asked if we were being watched, then abruptly ended the calls.

Andy led me to our front porch. The yard surrounding our rented farmhouse isn't large, but Lillian had disappeared—probably by taking a stroll down the old cow lane behind the barn. The lane leads to a woods and former pasture on the other side of the corn fields behind our house. Ample expanse for meditation.

I settled on my ratty old lounge chair. Andy slid onto the cushion facing me, nestling a knee against my thigh. She held up her cold beer.

“Us,” I said, clinking mine against hers.

“Us.” She sipped and I mirrored her move. She turned and studied the evening sky. “I called the rehab hospital in Omaha.”

This was about Lee Donaldson, the injured FBI agent who had pulled Andy into his off-book investigation of the internet conspiracy theorist and

all-around jackass Josiah James. Donaldson had sustained a bad head injury thanks to another jackass wielding a baseball bat.

I felt mild relief that we weren't going to argue over Lillian.

"Anything new?"

"No. Nothing since his last surgery." Agent Donaldson's head injury put him in a coma. Serious swelling prompted several surgeries.

"I'm sorry, kiddo," I said, taking her hand. She nodded and her eyes acquired a light glitter.

I never trusted Donaldson. But the blow he took had been meant for my wife. Things like that elevate a man.

"The FBI won't talk to me," Andy said. "I don't dare call his boss. That was made clear."

"But that's because—"

"Oh, I know what you're going to say. I made a deal."

"I wasn't—"

"And I get it. Rayburn is doing me a favor. He's keeping me out of it."

Special Agent in Charge Rayburn's investigation into a Russian oligarch's funding of an internet conspiracy theorist's media empire ignited a national firestorm. I shared the FBI agent's desire to keep my wife out of it.

"I get that," Andy said. "But he's putting a wall up around Lee, too."

"He's also putting Lee up as the agent who broke the story. He doesn't want you muddying that."

"That's crap. Rayburn is protecting Rayburn's claim to fame."

"Dee, the FBI—and law enforcement in general—has taken a lot of shit from the administration about Russia. Yes, Rayburn is an opportunist, but his ambition aligns with setting the record straight. I'm okay if it also protects you."

"Rayburn is making sure Rayburn gets the credit," she muttered.

"Doesn't matter. Lee's in good hands."

She looked out through the screen at a pastel blue sky. Dreamy pink cumulus slowly fragmented as the sun headed for the horizon, taking its atmospheric energy with it.

"I want to see him," she said distantly. She turned quickly back to me and took my hand. "You know what I mean. Visit him."

"I know." Jealousy triggers easily with me, but I also know when it's unfounded and irritating to Andy. "Tom read you the riot act about taking any more time away from Essex." The chief of police had been pleased to see his protégé drawn into an FBI case—and in equal measure annoyed that once again the trail she followed took her away from her job.

"Tell me about it. I won't be asking for any vacation time for a while."

“On the other hand, I just happen to know a pilot who might be willing to make a quick run to Omaha.”

Andy’s face brightened. Something told me this was her plan all along. “Are you sure? What about Sandy?”

“Oh my God, Dee! That woman is constantly pushing me to take you someplace—preferably with palm trees. Why not Omaha?”

“Are you *really* sure?”

“Affirmative! It’s only a couple hours. We’ll do an overnight next time you have two days off.”

She hesitated. “What about this thing with—you know. You can guess what *she* wants. She wants you to retrieve that thing.”

“Maybe.”

“What do you mean, ‘maybe?’ She’s in an absolute panic that it’s in Lewko’s hands. It’s one of the few things she and I agree on.”

I wasn’t sure I felt the same but didn’t want to argue the point. Not yet.

“Doesn’t mean we can’t bop out to Omaha. When are you off again?”

“I’m on for the next eight straight. This weekend I’m covering for Jeff.” She broke out a smile. “Your wife is lead detective.”

I clinked my beer against hers. We drank a silent toast to her success. In mid-gulp I leaned sideways and squinted into the western sunset at a figure on our quiet country road. At first, I thought Lillian had found her way around the cornfield. Then I saw that the person approached on a bicycle.

Lane Franklin pumped the pedals. She swerved off the narrow blacktop, dove through the ditch, popped across our driveway and rolled wildly up to our porch. She dismounted the rolling bike on the run. It might have been mistaken for urgency, but it was just Lane being Lane. Her bright eyes competed with a brilliant smile. Her long black hair flew wildly in her wake.

“Hi, Mister Stewart! Hi Andy!” She hopped the porch steps and threw a hug around Andy.

Lane, the fifteen-year-old daughter of Essex County Air Service’s real boss, Rosemary II, often strikes me as an optical illusion. She is her mother’s daughter, a beauty in the making, capable at times of looking like a woman well beyond her adolescent years. Then in a flash, the awkward knees and elbows of a growing girl emerge. The two images conflict, jumping back and forth like the start and end of time lapse photography.

“Hey, Lane,” I greeted her as she doled out a hug for me, though I did not rise. “Who are you going to fly for?”

“Anybody I want, given the pilot shortage. When do we start?”

She meant flying lessons. A delicate subject. I had every confidence Lane would begin soon. The trick would be convincing her mother. That was a bridge under construction and had been for most of the past year—one that was not ready for traffic. Her single-parent mother harbored fears of aviation diverting an academically exceptional girl from more serious studies. Rosemary II also worried about the looming cost of college and more than once had labeled flying lessons a frivolous financial drain. Andy and I still had

not settled on a means of telling Rosemary II that her daughter's education, at college and in the air, had a leg up on funding, thanks to a sack of cash I'd stolen over a year ago from a drug dealer.

"Patience, young pilot. What brings you to Casa Stewart today?"

"Oh, just out and about. Thought I'd swing by to say Hi. I didn't know you had company." She glanced at the Prius in the yard. "I should go."

"No," Andy said. "Our guest is wandering the fields. Meditating. Or contacting the mothership. You're not interrupting anything."

I caught a glint of relief in Lane's eyes, and with it a nervous glance at Andy. "Well...um..."

Andy picked up the hint.

"Some girl talk?" She took Lane by the arm. Lane nodded. Andy turned to me. "Don't you have little propeller thingies to play with in the garage?"

I grabbed my Corona and stood. "I do. By the way, Lane, check it out. Basic Linear Aerial System for Transport, Electric Rechargeable."

"BLASTER! That's awesome!" Lane bounced on the balls of her feet.

"Do not encourage him." Andy kissed me on the cheek. "You. Scoot!"

Lane smiled, proud of Andy's big-sister attention. The growing girl image flashed.

"It *is* awesome," I muttered on my way off the porch.

I STOPPED in the mud room at the rear of the house and snagged two BLASTER units from the cabinet, feeling renewed admiration for their new name. I stuffed a propeller and one power unit—roughly the size and shape of a compact flashlight—in my back pocket. I snapped a prop onto the second power unit. A flick of the slide control produced a strong spin of the prop.

At the top of the back steps, I stopped. The sun touched the horizon and the perfect evening air held its breath. Every leaf in the yard hung motionless. The string of thunderstorms that interrupted the Pennsylvania return trip had been generous. Fresh-washed air shimmered with a crystalline quality. Lush leaves competed to show off supernatural hues of green.

Perfect flying conditions.

I filled my lungs with the rich, clear air and took a two-step leap off the top of the back stoop.

*Fwoomp!*

I vanished. A cool sensation enveloped my skin. Gravity relinquished its grip and the leap sent me gliding across the backyard grass toward our small free-standing garage. Had I launched with a purpose in mind, I would have

aimed the power unit—which vanished with me—up and over the black asphalt shingles. Instead, I pulsed the BLASTER briefly. The spinning prop pulled me left. I aimed for the tractor path that began where the driveway ended. The path curved around the old red barn.

I know without testing the theory that air resistance will eventually bring me to a stop. But it takes a while. I let myself glide in silence about ten feet above the tractor lane. The barn flowed past. Cornfields spread out before me as I inched higher.

*Flight!* The sensation flooded my senses like a drug, fed by the magical shift of perspective as I rose.

I hit the power unit again and adjusted my path over the old cow lane that goes straight north from the back of the barn. The lane bisects the cornfields but is too narrow for the industrial-strength harvesters our landlord uses. He doesn't care what happens to it. I keep it mowed. Some evenings Andy and I walk the lane to the woods and a small creek on the far side of the cornfields, usually before the mosquitos claim the night for their bloodlust.

I cruised twenty feet up, imagining the lazy twice-daily march of the milk cows that were once raised on this farm. Perhaps the owner strolled behind them, nudging the herd to the barn. Perhaps he dispatched his children who would have prodded slow movers with sticks—when they weren't slapping the cow pies with the same sticks.

I cruised to the end of the lane, which opened into a wooded area that once doubled as a pasture. Pastoral woods are only that because livestock munches away the undergrowth. With the cows long gone, the land beneath this stand of old hardwood trees had gone wild, choked with buckthorn.

I zigzagged between tree trunks, loosely following the main path toward a small creek that snaked through the property.

Lillian sat on a fat log—all that remained of a tree that had gone over ages before I rented the property, taking its fan of roots with it to create a vaguely oriental sculpture. She faced the creek. Water moved beneath her feet with more haste than usual, thanks to the recent rains.

I wasn't sure whether to reappear and stroll up, giving her fair warning—or sneak up and startle her. I compromised.

"This is a nice spot," I said.

"Except for the mosquitos." She slapped her arm.

She turned around to say something more, then stopped when she failed to see me. The gimmick didn't throw her for more than a second.

"Cute."

"I figured you should see how it works." I moved the slide on the power



unit and swung off the path above the tall grass. I performed a circle maneuver with Lillian as the apex. Her hearing didn't fail her. She turned her head and followed the low hum.

"Is that your propulsion system?"

"I call it a BLASTER."

"Good God, Stewart, are you twelve?"

"Pretty much."

I completed the circuit. She stopped following me and went back to watching the water burble past her feet. I maneuvered toward her, lifted my feet over the log and aimed for a position beside her. I meant to drop onto the log when I reappeared, but it took some adjusting and maneuvering and the trick was spoiled. When I finally reappeared—

*Fwoomp!*

—I dropped a little farther than I expected and almost bounced off the log. Lillian threw out a hand and grabbed my arm to steady me.

"Yeah, it's not as easy as it seems," I admitted.

She laughed. I hadn't seen that before. She nurtures the image of a serious, often paranoid woman with an intellectual chip on her shoulder.

Lillian's mirth faded quickly.

"I was wrong. In Florida. I was wrong to tell you to run. You were right to go after those morons in Wichita. If you had been a day earlier, you would have been in time."

"...could'a...would'a...should'a.."

"Will, you have to get that thing away from Spiro Lewko. And this time it will be nothing like breaking in on some pizza-eating, beer-guzzling gamers. This time there will be serious risk."

"Oh, I think I'm pretty hard to catch." I plucked a strip of loose bark from the log and tossed it in the creek. It sailed downstream.

"That attitude will get you killed," she snapped. "Tell me something."

"Sure."

"Bashar al-Assad."

"Syrian dictator."

"The man is a mass murderer and a tyrant. Do you agree?"

"It's well documented."

"Then, why don't you fly into his palace and assassinate him? You might save the next village he plans to gas."

I've had this discussion with Pidge.

"Aside from certain moral issues, there are practical problems. I don't speak Syrian. Arabic? I don't even know what language is spoken in Damascus."

“What difference does that make?”

“Really? What building is he in? What room is he in? What’s his schedule? What did one guard just say to the other guard? How do I unlock the door to his chambers? How do I even get in the country?” I held up the power unit. “This thing is nice for hopping around Essex County, but it’s only got about half an hour’s power and it makes noise.”

She listened somberly. I waited for her to score my response.

“That’s good. You see the minutia. The logic. The limits. That’s something in your favor. People who make plans like low-budget movie plots are idiots.”

“Not to mention that what you’re proposing is murder. My wife has issues with that.”

“No doubt. What about you?”

I sidestepped. “What does this have to do with Lewko?”

“Evermore. Lewko’s home-built town. His research facilities are more private than The Pentagon and he deploys better security. Full techie overkill. Getting within fifty miles of the place without having your picture taken and fed into his servers is almost impossible. Except maybe for you. But that means you won’t be able to take anyone with you—not anyone normal. And you’re going to need help. Unlike said movie plot, we have no real idea what he uses to lock the doors. Or which door has the artifact behind it.”

I tossed another slice of bark into the water.

“What?” she asked.

“It’s just...okay, I’m—”

“If you say ‘thinking outside the box’ I will slap you. I fucking hate that expression.”

“Fair enough. But who says we have to go *get* this thing?” Storm clouds formed across her brow. “No, hear me out. It’s a piece of something that knocked me and my airplane out of the sky. It can’t be seen, and it isn’t affected by gravity. Your guess is probably the same as mine. What happened to me *came* from that thing, or whatever it was connected to, because I think we’re both pretty sure this chunk broke off of something bigger. Good so far?”

“Your point?”

“What if we don’t go get it? You said it yourself, Lewko has a cutting-edge research facility. He’s working on next-generation phones, self-driving cars, brain implants, God-knows-what else. Didn’t you say he’s got his own space program? Why not let him play with it? He might forego the government’s tendency to militarize a find like this. Why not let him spend his

billions figuring out what that thing is? I certainly don't have the resources or the knowledge to tackle the question. Why don't I just go there and introduce myself and work with the guy? I know those clowns in Wichita didn't give me up to him, but he's not stupid. He's going to figure out my involvement at some point." Lillian opened her mouth to set me straight, but I interrupted her. "Furthermore, let's consider the scenario that says the object I hit was military—that it belongs to the government. If that's true, they're only going to want it back. Isn't it better to have civilian researchers work on it?"

"Low percentage—that it's military," she said. I thought I knew what she considered high percentage. This is what prompts my wife to refer to her as a "UFO Nut."

"Point is, it's not like we can give it over to the government. They're either going to lock it—and probably me—away somewhere to study it, or they already know what it is, and they'll lock it and me away just for tripping over it in the first place. They'll put us both in a box in that warehouse with the Lost Ark."

"Well, you're right about one thing. We have three prominent choices here. Government research, which is a non-starter. Private research by an amoral billionaire, which likely results in terrible abuse of whatever this thing is. Or you get it back and bury it somewhere here on this farm and never speak of it again."

"Well, that's bleak. I'm not sure there isn't a fourth option."

She pulled a piece of bark from the log and tossed it.

"You're getting it in your head that it can be used to save little children with Leukemia."

"What if it does? I can't do that alone. That's highly impractical. But maybe something about that piece of debris can be harvested to do something genuinely good. Not by me. Tinkering with it in my garage would be stupid. But a guy like Spiro Lewko? Someone who has the resources and the cash to do serious research...?"

"You'd have to reveal yourself to him."

"And steer him in the right direction."

"No good deed goes unpunished, Will," she said. "Ever hear of the Sackler family?"

I lifted my shoulders. I had no idea.

"Pharmaceutical. Came up with a revolutionary pain killer. An opioid. OxyContin...you may have heard of it. Highly effective. But it wasn't enough to render it unto the medical community to relieve pain and suffering. They schemed to plow that stuff into anyone with a back twitch, real or imagined. They made billions and tore a hole in the soul of this country."

I knew what she meant. I'd seen it first-hand. Lane Franklin nearly paid the ultimate price as collateral damage.

"Will, suppose that thing *is* capable of curing cancer? Have you considered what would happen if control of the technology or magic or whatever it is comes down to one man? One corrupt billionaire?"

"That's the way it is now. One man. Who goes to bed every night thinking he shouldn't be resting—he should be out visiting another hospital. What if Lewko's resources can find a way to make it distributable? Instead of me sneaking in and out of random hospitals, praying I don't wake the wrong patient."

"Don't act on hope, Will."

"Why not?"

"Because hope kills. Read history. Hope is going to take you away from all this—" She waved her hands at the quiet country scene. "—and lock you up in some lab to be dissected. I've been clear about this from the start, Will. It might be the one and only thing your cop wife and I agree on. You've got to get that piece of debris back! Then bury it. Or better yet, shoot it out into space. Just pick it up and throw it as hard as you can toward the sun. If it has the properties you say it does, that should be enough."

"And sacrifice what it could mean to science? To a possible cure for cancer?"

She fell silent, but her silence failed to mask that she never stopped calculating. Her gaze settled on a vague middle distance, seemingly on nothing, yet seeing clearly, looking down dozens of possible paths, factoring variables into equations that engineered scores, perhaps hundreds of possible outcomes. To no one, certainly not me, she shook her head slightly from side to side as each outcome revealed itself.

Purple dusk settled around us, turning the trees to black silhouettes against the fading glow in the sky.

Lillian said nothing for several long minutes.

When she finally spoke, she said, "My sister died of Leukemia. When she was fourteen. Her name was Eileen."

I waited.

When she added nothing, I said, "I'm sorry."

Without looking at me, Lillian said, "Now you know the price of my convictions."

Lillian and I walked back from the creek. I offered to give her a ride, but she waved me off like I'd suggested a neck tattoo. Dusk lingered until we strolled through the yard to the house. Photosensitive yard lights lit up the grass, casting diamonds on the lawn as dew formed.

Andy's car was gone. It's not unusual for Lane to bike out for some big sister time with Andy. When the chatter runs late, Lane texts her mother for permission to stay longer on a promise that Andy will load her bike in the trunk of the car and drive her home. I was surprised they had departed already. I expected to find them huddled on the porch, conspiring against me.

We have guest bedrooms, but no guest beds. I set up the pullout sofa in the living room and warned Lillian that the mattress was once used by the Spanish Inquisition. When I went for clean sheets from the linen closet, she stopped me. She made a quick trip to her car and returned with a backpack and a rolled-up sleeping bag. I offered a pillow, but she claimed to have everything she needed.

While she unrolled her sleeping bag, I checked my phone.

A text message from Nolan the Mechanic at Willow Run airport reported the Foundation Navajo as airworthy. I logged into the Flight Schedule for Essex County Air Service. The gods smiled on me. Pidge had a morning deadhead to Lansing. I sent a text to her that said I'd be taking a jump seat and would need a drop-off at Willow Run. Before I could thumb my way to a new screen, she fired back a response.

DIVISIBLE MAN: THE THIRD LIE

*Then you can fucking preflight. Have my coffee ready. ;)*

“You know, I used to be chief pilot...” I muttered through a half smile.

“Beg pardon?” Lillian asked.

“Oh,” I waved my hand, “just talking to the phone. I now have a butt-crack-of-dawn departure. Andy and I have a rule that I don’t use *the other thing* in the house without letting her know or wearing a bell. These old floors creak, so you may hear me sneaking out in the morning.”

“Creaking floors I can ignore. The idea of you floating around the room would keep me up all night. I appreciate the protocol. Does this mean I won’t see you tomorrow? We have unfinished business.”

“You’ll see me. I should be home by lunchtime.” The phone in my hand vibrated and another message appeared. “Um, looks like Andy got called in to the office. She says she’ll be late tonight and not to wait up. I’ll let her know I set you up here in the living room.”

“Emergency?”

“Probably just small-town cop business,” I said. “Happens all the time.”

“Your wife is not a small-town cop. You should know that by now.”

I t doesn't matter what time I set on the alarm; I wake up ten minutes before it goes off. Rolling over to hit the switch, I discovered that Andy hadn't come home. Her side of the bed remained untouched. I lifted my phone off the nightstand. It offered nothing new since Andy's warning that she would be late. I knew better than to call, so I tapped out a text telling her about the trip to pick up the Navajo.

I dressed quickly and tip-toed through the house. I was about to pat myself on the back for not disturbing Lillian when my eyes adjusted to the dark and revealed that the sofa bed lay empty. I checked the driveway. No Prius.

Lillian had gone.

PIDGE WASN'T KIDDING about making me pull the plane from the hangar and perform the preflight. She showed up ten minutes before the scheduled departure time, strolling across the ramp with her flight bag in one hand and a McDonald's coffee in the other.

"I love having an FO to do the grunt work," she declared, climbing into the cabin and taking the pilot's seat.

Pidge ran through the pre-takeoff rituals and had us in the air quickly. We climbed east to meet the dawn over Lake Michigan. Except for sharing the airwaves with the disembodied voice of air traffic control, we had the

cockpit to ourselves. We didn't speak until after Green Bay Departure handed us off to Chicago Center.

"The captain with that Challenger told me to call him for a right seat job."

Pidge said it quietly. Voices over a good intercom system are intimate, transmitted directly into your head via noise-cancelling earphones.

"The one with the blown nose tire?" The visiting jet had blown a tire on landing. I theorized that the captain came in hot and rolled long and had taken the turn to the taxiway too fast. The captain claimed it was foreign object debris. Either way, the jet sat idle on the ramp while Earl Jackson oversaw repairs. "Could be a good gig," I offered.

"Captain makes six figures. He says. They're based in Newark. Regular runs up and down the east coast. Out west. Sometimes South America."

"Jet time."

"Uh-huh."

We fell silent.

At twenty-three, Cassidy Evelyn Page—or Pidge, as she had been nicknamed shortly after she began taking flying lessons at Essex County Airport—holds every rating except rotorcraft and seaplane. She's logged more than enough hours to sign on with any regional air carrier. She's the best pilot I've ever known, and I include myself in the competition. Twice, she's used an unwieldy cabin class airplane like a surgical tool to save my life. She's what chief pilots dream of finding in a stack of job applicants.

I had always known that she would eventually move on.

I glanced at her—a petite blonde girl-woman sitting on an extra cushion with the seat pulled all the way forward so that her feet could reach the pedals. She'd been my student and it filled me with pride to see her knock off one rating after another. But the student had long ago surpassed the master.

I wanted to ask if she planned to apply, then realized I didn't want to hear the answer. Which made no sense. I, more than anyone, wanted to see Pidge ascend the ranks of professional pilots.

She had similar wishes for me. Pidge is one of a handful of people who know that I can vanish at will. On more than a few occasions, she has harangued me to use the unexplained ability to do something meaningful—although from her it always has a comic book ring to it. Superspy. Crime fighter. She wants to see me do more.

"You should go for it," I said, confronting my reluctance head-on. "They'd be idiots not to take you."

"It would sure as hell beat having Earl up my ass all the time."



*You'd miss him most of all*, I thought. I wanted to talk about something else. "Hey, how are things with you and Arun?"

"Screw you, Stewart," she laughed a little too abruptly. I sensed relief in the change of topic. "I'm not telling you about my love life!"

"Jesus, Pidge, you used to tell me the size of a guy's—"

"That was my sex life, dummy! Not my love life!"

I mock-gawked at her. "Did you guys trade the 'L' word? Oh my god!"

"Shut up! No! We haven't!"

"Seriously, have you guys even traded spit yet?"

"Fuck you."

I kept the grin on my face for a few nautical miles, just to harass her. She didn't bring up the question of a career move again.

PIDGE DROPPED me off at the FBO at Willow Run. I think if she'd had the choice, she would have done a low pass and literally dropped me. She let the engines run while I jumped out. She started to roll before I had time to close the airstair. I had to jog a few yards to get it latched. When she turned, I saw her laughing.

Willow Run airport once housed a Ford-built factory nearly a mile long that, at its peak during World War II, produced one B-24 Liberator bomber every 58 minutes. Henry Ford built the factory from bare ground after the war began. It teetered on the brink of failure, then gained momentum to become an enduring symbol of America's wartime role as the Arsenal of Democracy. I sometimes wonder what it might have been like in its heyday. The sound of countless rivet guns hammering. The shriek of air drills. The rumble of the assembly line pushing silver aircraft forward day and night. Thousands of workers toiling in heat and cold under relentless pressure. I wondered if they felt a lifelong pang of loss after the war ended and production shut down. A loss of comradeship. A loss of cohesion with a nation on a mission. The factory never found a meaningful purpose afterward. Today, only a single section remains standing, though still imposing.

As Pidge taxied away, I strolled past a handful of executive jets and into the FBO annex attached to the original factory building turned hangar. Several years ago, on my first trip into Willow Run, I'd been curious. A willing FBO manager showed me around the huge hangar. A General Motors president kept his personal L-39 fighter jet in the hangar. The manager told me another section of the building once contained the shattered remains of a Northwest Airlines MD-80 that crashed on takeoff from Detroit Metro

Airport. He said the parts and pieces were kept in limbo for a couple decades until the last of the lawsuits were settled, then they simply disappeared.

I remember looking at the bare concrete floor and wondering what it must have been like. Since then, after my own accident—after seeing my own aircraft in pieces—I harbored no desire to enter the vast hangar again.

“Nolan around?” I asked the woman behind the counter.

She looked up at me with a narrow face and a wide smile. “Are you Will?”

“All day.”

She rose and pulled a work order from a slotted plastic divider. After shuffling and separating papers, she pushed a sheet toward me. I gave it a glance and handed her the Foundation credit card. She took both and headed for an interior office.

The FBO lounge was empty. A flatscreen TV mounted in the far corner caught my eye. I turned around and leaned on the counter. Onscreen, a reporter stood in front of a low, modern-looking brick building that could have been a twin to the Essex Police Department building where Andy works. I idly wondered if the same architect had designed both before I woke up to the caption on the screen that said, “NFL Hall of Famer Arrested in Essex, WI.”

“Here’s your card.” The woman’s voice came from behind me. “Just sign here.” She put the receipt slip on the counter where it curled up under a pen.

“Can you turn that up?” I pointed at the screen.

“Ach! I can never find the darn remote.” She rummaged around the desktop as I stared at the screen.

No question. The CNN reporter performed her on-the-scene remote from the sidewalk in front of the Essex PD building. Behind tinted glass over the reporter’s left shoulder, my wife maintained her busy but orderly cubicle—and maybe stood watching me as I watched her.

“Found it!”

Too late. The reporter mouthed a few words, then set her face in a “Back to you, Bob” expression. The scene changed.

The FBO clerk behind me held her arm out and jabbed the buttons on the remote. Nothing happened. She rose on her toes and extended her arm farther as if an extra inch would do the trick.

“Any idea what that’s about?” I asked. I pointed at the screen again.

“That? That’s been going on for a couple days. Horrible. Can you imagine? Why isn’t this working?” She examined the remote.

“A couple days?”

“It’s all anyone is talking about.”

I glanced back at the screen. The frame behind an anchorwoman showed a telephoto shot of a farm. Half a dozen emergency vehicles, lights strobing, sat in the driveway and on the road. I tried to place the location but couldn't. The screen caption had changed.

FARM FAMILY BRUTALLY MURDERED

"In Wisconsin?"

"That? No that's up north. Near Pellston."

I squinted at her in confusion. "And they arrested an NFL player?"

"What? No. I don't think so. I don't think they've caught anyone yet."

She shook her head at me, then glanced at the TV and the light went on. "Oh, you're talking about a different one. I'm talking about this story." She pointed the remote at the screen again and jabbed it forward while she tried the volume button again without success. She shrugged and gestured at the TV. "This one is the one that's on non-stop. Just horrible. Parents and kids killed, and they're saying that whoever did it cut up the—"

"Sorry," I interrupted her. I had no doubt it was horrible, but I didn't need to hear the details. "I meant the story before that."

She looked at me blankly.

"Never mind."

I hurried out of the FBO. Outside, I found a spot shaded from the early August sunshine and pulled out my phone. Nothing from Andy.

She stays busy when she's on duty. And if a television crew had camped outside the City of Essex police headquarters streaming a national story to CNN, busy would be an understatement.

Before closing the phone, I touched a screen icon for CNN headlines. Half a dozen news links appeared. At the top:

MICHIGAN MURDERS SHOCK AUTHORITIES

I scrolled down. The Essex arrest story apparently hadn't transitioned from Breaking News to online content. I tried Google, looking for something about Essex and a football player, but I am neither adept at internet spying nor patient enough to succeed. A useless list of links to sports sites appeared.

I tucked my phone in my pocket and headed for the freshly repaired airplane. Sitting on the ramp, it looked as if it had had enough of the earth and needed to fly.

Me, too.

AN HOUR after breaking the wheels free of Willow Run, I closed the Foundation hangar door back at Essex County Airport. The Navajo's engines ticked against silence as they cooled. My phone rang.

*DIVISIBLE MAN: THE THIRD LIE*

“Is Lillian gone?” Andy spoke in a low near-whisper. I heard voices around her.

“She was when I left this morning.”

“Did she come back?”

“I’m not home yet. What’s going on? Can you talk?”

“Not now. It’s a mess. I’ll be home for dinner.”

My wife trusts me to know when to hang up.

“Okay. ’Bye.”

“’Bye.”

I may be clumsy around a search engine, but I knew someone who wasn't. "Arun, buddy." I leaned into his office. "Got a minute?"

"Will, I was about to come and tell you: I just got off the phone with Ms. Stone. Minnesota is confirmed for Wednesday." Arun cannot call Sandy by her first name. He also knows better than to email trip itineraries to me.

*Sandy is really squeezing the schedule.*

"Can you run a search on the computer for me?"

"Of course, but may I ask you something first?" He gestured at one of his occasional chairs. I hesitated. I wondered if this involved his crush on Pidge. I visualized myself flying out the door fast enough to leave behind cartoon contrails and a ricochet sound effect. My fears heightened when he swallowed and nervously twined his fingers.

"What's up?"

"The other night...um, what would have happened to us if the engine had stopped?"

"Huh?"

"You know...when you said we had a problem. If the engine stopped, what would happen? Would we...crash?"

The impulse to make a joke bubbled up. I bit my tongue.

"Oh, hell no. Arun, where's this coming from?" I took the seat.

"I didn't really know when I took this job how much I would be flying in a little airplane." I hate it when people refer to general aviation aircraft as *little*. He read my slightly stiffened posture. "I mean to say light aircraft. I

did some research. The safety record for piston-engine twins is not very good. I thought two engines would be better, but so many times when one engine stops the airplane crashes.”

I leaned forward. “First off, I’m glad you decided to talk to me about this. Arun, if you ever have any concerns about flying, tell me, okay? Second, your research is not off the mark.”

My admission surprised him.

“The record for piston twin aircraft is not stellar. But there are factors to consider when you look at the statistics. Yes, we fly a piston twin. Yes, they have a poor, or let me say poor-er, safety record, but the way we operate, it’s safer. For example, I wouldn’t fly a single-engine airplane across any of the Great Lakes.”

“Why?”

“Simple. The chance of an engine failure is miniscule, *but—!* If such a thing does happen, and they do, and you’re over the lake in a single engine airplane, you’re going to wind up in the lake. And you will die. Period. Even in the middle of August when the water is as warm as it ever gets you will die of exposure. A life jacket only keeps the dead body afloat.”

“We fly across the lake all the time!”

“Yes. In a twin. If we’re forced to shut down an engine, we have a means of making it to land.”

Relief dawned on his face but slipped away quickly. “Then I don’t understand the statistics for twin-engine airplanes. Why do they crash if one engine is running?”

I chose my words carefully. “A twin offers a margin of safety, but performance on one engine isn’t guaranteed. Weight, density altitude, height above terrain and pilot proficiency all come into play. Fully loaded on a hot day, we might not be able to maintain altitude with one engine.”

“We would crash?”

“No. We would gradually descend to an emergency landing.”

“Then I don’t understand the statistics.”

“Because there’s one more thing involved. Let’s say we lose an engine. And let’s say we can’t hold altitude, but I do something stupid. I keep pulling on the yoke to make the airplane stay up. Pitching up bleeds off airspeed.”

The blank look on his face told me to start with basics.

“Look, if you go out in the hangar and turn the controls all the way to the right, will the airplane turn in the hangar?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

He thought about it. "Because there isn't enough wind to make the controls work."

"Airspeed. Exactly. You need air flowing over the control surfaces to make the controls work and make the airplane do what you want it to do. And how do you get airspeed?"

He tipped his head to signal that I was talking to him like a child.

"The engines."

"Yes. But, what about a glider? Doesn't have an engine."

"It's gliding."

"Exactly. We either use engines or altitude to create airspeed. Either way, speed is life."

"But if we lose one engine, do we lose our airspeed?"

"Not necessarily. Besides, that's not the issue you're asking about. Picture the average piston twin." I held up my hand to make an airplane in the air. "You have an engine on this side, and an engine on this side. Both use power to pull the airplane through the air. Hundreds of horsepower on each side. But if you take away one engine, what happens?"

"Less power? Less airspeed?"

"Less power, but not necessarily less airspeed. Remember, I can push the nose down to gain airspeed. But what else? What's no longer symmetrical?"

He looked at my hand, picturing the airplane.

"Power is not symmetrical. You have power on one side, but not the other."

"Correct! I have loads of power out there on the left wing trying to pull the airplane around." I rolled my hand to the right. "To counter that asymmetrical thrust, I input left rudder—the thing on the vertical part of the tail."

"I know what a rudder is."

"At cruise speed, I don't need full rudder deflection. Why?"

"Lots of air flowing across the control surface."

I gave him a respectful nod. "Talk that way around Pi—er, Cassidy—and she'll swoon."

He might have blushed.

"But the slower I go the more rudder is needed. Is that variable infinite?"

"No!" he said brightly. "Eventually you will be applying the maximum deflection of the rudder. You run out!"

"And what happens when I run out of rudder, but the good engine continues to give us full power?"

"The airplane turns!"

"Violently. And right there is where your piston twin safety record goes bad. Pilots who have lost an engine for whatever reason who then allow their

speed to decay to the point where the thrust from the good engine overpowers the controls and torque-rolls the airplane. And if it happens at low altitude, where there's no room to recover..."

His eyes went wide.

"Arun, you're one of the smartest people I know. Let's say you're the pilot, and you're holding left rudder, but your speed is decaying. You're headed into this kind of torque-roll-stall situation." I demonstrated with my hand. "What's the simple, idiot-proof way of avoiding it?"

"You lower the nose to gain airspeed. Trade altitude for airspeed, which assures you of control."

"But what if you're too low? What if you just took off?"

He stared blankly.

"C'mon man!" I said. "How do you get rid of asymmetrical power that's threatening to flip the airplane?"

He grimaced. "You...turn off the good engine?"

I pointed. "Bingo! Reduce the power on the good engine."

"But now you're going to crash!"

"Probably. But *you maintain control*. Period. If that means maintaining control so that you can glide to a landing on a runway, great. If it means maintaining control so that you steer the airplane between two buildings or through a highway overpass or into an open field, great."

"I don't like the sound of that."

"The other night...let's say I had to shut down the right engine. I can tell you without doing the math that at our weight I could have easily maintained a safe altitude *and* a safe airspeed, and therefore maintained control. We were at ten thousand feet. We had plenty of altitude. Even if we were unable to maintain altitude at a safe speed, we could have sacrificed two or three hundred feet per minute for a long time without any issue. And the lower we went, the denser the air. Eventually, we would no longer need to descend to maintain airspeed."

"Then it is the airspeed that matters."

"The critical airspeed is called *V<sub>mc</sub>*."

"Vee em cee?"

"Minimum controllable airspeed. The number gets hammered into a pilot's head when flying a twin. But even more important than that is *V<sub>yse</sub>*. Best rate of climb speed, single engine. We can actually climb on one engine at *V<sub>yse</sub>*. Or at least minimize the descent. If I ever lose an engine in a twin, you won't see me go below *V<sub>yse</sub>*."

"Then why are there accidents?"

I heaved the sigh shared by all pilots who read NTSB reports. "Some-



body should have pulled the throttle on the good engine—and that’s incredibly hard to do—in order to crash straight ahead rather than have the airplane flip out of control.”

He sat thinking. It worried me.

“Arun, having two engines is safer than having one. Plus, you have one hot-shit pilot up front who’s never going to let it get to the point of losing control. You’re in good hands. Ask Cassidy.”

He blew out a cleansing breath. “It’s good to know the mechanics, I suppose.”

“Sit up front with me sometime and I’ll demonstrate.”

His hands flew up between us. “Oh, no! Theory suits me. I do not need a demonstration.”

We both laughed. His felt forced.

I pointed at his silver laptop—the only item on an otherwise spotless desk. “I saw something on the news at an FBO in Michigan this morning. Something about a football player being arrested here in Essex last night. Can you run a search for me?”

“Oh, my God! Oh, my God, Will! You haven’t heard about that?”

“Just a blip on a muted television.”

“Here,” he said. He waved for me to step behind him and limbered up his fingers. “It’s a major news story. I am certain Andrea is on this case!”

He clicked and scrolled and jumped pages. When I first started flying, I struggled with motion sickness. I worked hard to overcome it, but if I’m forced to watch someone rolling and scrolling a computer screen my eyeballs start to spin. I glanced away until he said, “Here it is!”

#### ALL PRO STAR RUNNING BACK ARRESTED

The story came from the online pages of *The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*.

“May I?” I reached for the laptop and turned the screen, mainly to keep Arun’s fingers away from the touchpad.

I scrolled through the story at my own pace. When I finished, I rotated the keyboard back to Arun. He looked up at me with an eager expression. I headed for his office door.

“Where are we going?”

“What?”

“In Minnesota...where in Minnesota?” I didn’t want to talk about what I had just read. Not until I got the real story from Andy. I also needed to untwist the knot in my gut that came with wondering if Lane Franklin’s need to talk to Andy had anything to do with a sexual assault arrest.

“Oh,” Arun replied. “Brainerd.”

Andy had suggested we meet at Los Lobos—the restaurant attached to the *other* bowling alley in Essex.

The server arrived to take drink requests. I ordered for both of us, but Andy quickly turned down a Corona. “I might have to go back.”

“Jesus, Dee! You haven’t slept!”

She shrugged. Unchecked, Andy would work until she dropped. I detected a hint of omission in her averted eyes.

“Tom booted you out, didn’t he? I bet he told you not to show your face until morning.”

A protest formed on her lips, but I cut it off.

“Two,” I said, holding up fingers to make sure the server understood. He ducked away quickly.

Andy pushed her fingers into the smooth tight sheen of her tied-back hair, then lifted her arms and worked her ponytail free. She shook her hair onto her shoulders and rubbed her eyes.

*I win.*

The server came back carrying two bottles with lime wedges jammed in the necks. They know us at Los Lobos. They probably pulled the bottles from the cooler the minute we walked in.

We touched glass to glass.

“Us,” she said.

“Us.”

Andy took a sip, then looked around. Being early on a Monday, we had the dining room to ourselves.

“Usual disclaimer?”

“Usual disclaimer.”

She settled in her seat, dipped another chip in salsa and took a bite. Her eyes met mine. In stark contrast to her tired affect, her eyes were alight.

“You already know we arrested Clayton Johns last night. This morning, technically.”

“I saw it on CNN while I was in Detroit. Jesus, Dee!”

She made a sour face. “Those TV trucks jammed up the whole street at the station. They’ve been there since dawn. I’d like to know how they found out so fast.”

“Five-time pro-bowler. League MVP at least once that I know of. I’m surprised you didn’t have reporters from ESPN.”

“They might have been there,” Andy said, dipping another chip. “We’ve got stations from Green Bay, Milwaukee and Madison. And they’re feeding national outlets. CNN. Fox News. How much do you know?”

She munched the chip and dipped another while I talked.

“When I got back, Arun looked up the online story from *The Journal*. I only know what they reported.”

“First things first. Did Lane showing up last night have anything to do with this?”

“Ah. You got that. I couldn’t leave you a note with any details last night.”

“Tell me she’s not involved.”

“She’s not. Not directly. She might have to be interviewed for background, but she’s in the clear.”

Andy’s reassurance didn’t feel reassuring.

The server returned to ask for our order. I went with the three-taco plate I always choose. Andy asked for a shrimp quesadilla. She waited until he cleared the room and then lowered her voice.

“Lane needed to talk last night. I thought it might be about her mom. All teenaged girls go to war with their mothers and they’ve been butting heads for a while. But that wasn’t it. Lane started right in about Sarah.”

“Lewis?” Lane’s friend Sarah figured prominently in a case Andy worked last winter. I remembered how the girl’s brush with suicide came to our attention during another Los Lobos dinner. “Is she okay?”

“Sarah? She’s okay, although when a kid who goes as close to the edge as she did, you worry. The path to self-destruction has been broken in.”

“How do Lane and Sarah connect to a retired NFL running back?”

“This gets a little teen-twisted, but here goes. Lane said Sarah was feeling the gravitational pull—yeah, I know, that’s how Lane put it—of some of the older girls on the pompon squad that Sarah joined. Juniors and seniors. Sarah told Lane those girls were partying at some rich kid’s house on The Lakes. Some upperclassman. Parents away on weekends—the usual John Hughes screenplay. Lane said Sarah was trying to get invited, but after school let out Sarah’s parents sent her away to camp for a few weeks, which diffused the issue.”

It felt like taking the long way around, but Andy likes to stand up all the dominoes before she flicks the first one over.

“When Sarah came home last week, the story changed. The *in* for these parties wasn’t the girls on the pompon squad, it was through another girl, Stella Boardman.”

Andy lifted her eyes at me. Like I should know the girl. I shrugged.

“Boardman? Will, you’ve heard the name. They live in Horizon Homes. Their house was a regular stop when I was on uniform patrol. The Battling Boardmans?”

I had no idea but nodded with great authority. Andy has often talked about the Horizon Homes subdivision in the southeast corner of Essex, a low-quality 1960s development that attracted frequent visits from the police.

“The apple and the tree, I’m afraid. The parents are a piece of work; the girl has been on our radar for a while. She’s had half a dozen run-ins. It seems she’s the conduit to these parties, and she’s the one that reached out to Sarah.”

“Why? Doesn’t sound like they’re crowd compatible.”

“They’re not. But, remember I said the story changed? Turns out the house at the lakes isn’t where some junior or senior boy lives. Lane told me last night that the parties are hosted by older guys—men—who like to mix with younger girls. The Boardman girl has the in. She invited Sarah, only it wasn’t Sarah she wanted. It was Lane.”

“Lane?” My skin crawled.

“The Boardman girl sold it to Sarah as way better than immature Essex High boys. She told Sarah these guys are sophisticated, hot and experienced. Ready to party. She told Sarah getting an invitation is a great way to...lose *it*...with someone who knows what they’re doing.”

“It?”

“*It*, Will. You know! At some point a girl has to think about things like that.”

“Are you saying Lane—?”

“No! Yes. I mean, no, Lane is nowhere near ready for anything like that,

but yes, she's thought about it and we've talked about it and she's got her head on straight."

*Of course, she does...I hope...*

"Lane said that Sarah said that Stella said that lots of girls are going up to this lake place. There's a pool, a hot tub, and a chance to, as Sarah put it to Lane, *do things* if the girl wants to."

"And what if they don't want to? God!" I rubbed down the goose bumps rising on my arms. "Wait, you said that the Boardman kid wanted to go through Sarah to invite Lane. Why?"

"I'll get to that. Anyway, the Boardman girl didn't take the rejection well and got a little ugly about it. She told Sarah she would take Verna Sobol instead."

"Jesus Christ! Who's Verna Sobol?"

Andy tipped her head and raised her eyebrows at me. "Sobol? Her dad's a city maintenance supervisor. Cecil? You've met him, Will!"

Me and names and faces; I'm terrible, but I have an out. Andy knows and remembers everyone. I figure that knowing Andy covers me.

"They're one of the only other African American families in Essex. Verna is a year younger than Lane."

"Younger? She's only fourteen?"

Andy nodded slowly. "And a bit of a wild child, according to Lane. Which is why Lane needed to see me last night."

"Are they friends? Lane and Verna?"

"Not particularly. Lane thinks it's funny that everyone thinks they're supposed to be, like they're some sort of color combination. But no, not really. There's the age difference. A year at that age is a big difference. And they move in different circles. But last night Sarah told Lane that Stella told Sarah that she was taking Verna instead."

"Say that three times, fast."

"I guess it was meant to stick it to Sarah and Lane for turning her down."

"Given the older man component, I'm going to guess you called Cecil."

"I did call Cecil. But Verna's older brother answered. Cecil and Diane went away for the weekend. I called Cecil's cell, but it went to voice mail. While I was on the phone with the brother, I asked for Verna. He said she was staying overnight with a friend."

"Ding! Ding! Ding! Alarm!" I lifted my beer and took a healthy drink, calculating the distance to empty, the timing of the delivery of our meals, and the prospects of ordering a second. Andy's stood largely untouched.

"Exactly. Suddenly I have a situation. Lane didn't know where on The Lakes this animal house is, but she thought Sarah might. I decided it would

be best to have that discussion in person. Sarah trusts me—and it would be harder for Sarah to withhold something to my face. I packed up Lane and we drove over to the Lewis place. I got lucky. Sarah’s mom was at choir practice and her dad was at the Planning Commission meeting.”

“Oh, right. That.” Robert Lewis, Sarah’s father, had tried to recruit Andy to a citizens group fighting state highway expansion in the northeast corner of the county. Andy, citing the fact that the city signs her paychecks, declined.

“Sarah was home alone, so it was just us girls. Sarah didn’t know the address, but she knew it was on Leander Lake, at the north end, and that the house has an infinity pool.”

“A what?”

“One of those swimming pools where it looks like there’s no edge. I immediately knew the property. I’ve been there.”

“Is that the place with the crazy sculptress?”

Andy nodded and sipped her Corona.

“The one whose husband threw all her iron statues into the lake? And then she threw him in?”

“The same. I responded to six calls up there before they divorced and moved away.”

“To be replaced by a retired NFL player with a taste for young—”

“Don’t say it! Yes. And I hate to put it in these terms because it has undertones I don’t subscribe to, but it made sense that Stella Boardman was recruiting two pretty young African American girls in Essex to party with an African American sports figure.”

I left that alone, knowing how hard Andy works to walk a colorless line in her job.

“More to the point, I suddenly had knowledge of a minor child who might be in jeopardy. I made a bee line to drop off Lane and called the station to see who had Eastside Patrol last night. Guess who?”

I had no idea, but I could tell Andy wasn’t pleased. I came up with Sims, because he’s the smallest officer in the department. I pictured Sims up against a muscle-bound ex-NFL player.

“Sims is on paternity leave. It was Traeger. Your chauffer-buddy. He’s not the brightest bulb.”

“But a nice guy.”

“Not my first choice, Will, when I’m about to knock on the door of a very wealthy, very well-known individual and ask if he’s committing statutory rape. The guy probably has lawyers live streaming. I called County and asked them to have a deputy meet us there.”

Andy leaned forward, signaling an uptick in the story's intensity. She checked the small room for the tenth time to assure herself that all the other tables remained empty.

"You're not going to believe what happened next." I misread the cue and started to guess, but she cut me off. "I stopped around the curve, you know, where Sunset Circle swings across the top of the lake? I waited for Traeger. He pulls up behind me but leaves his headlights on and then sits in his car waiting for *me* to get out. Seriously, Will. I get why the chief is holding back on him. Anyway, I go back to his car and get him to turn off his damned lights, although my night vision is now shot. He's on the radio with Mae at dispatch. Guess what?"

"Um..."

"There's a noise complaint. Somebody's partying with loud music at the Johns place. So, I told Traeger to follow me in. That property is huge, Will. I think the original owner wanted to build a hotel there.

"Anyway, we got to the front door and there's no answer. I told Traeger to keep trying the bell. I went around the side of the building and down to the deck with the pool. By now I can hear the music, only it's not coming from the house. There's nobody in the house that I can see. Nobody in the pool or hot tub. And while I'm poking around the deck, I almost had a heart attack because Lyle came around the corner with his hand on his weapon. I told him if I see him do that again his arm will wind up in a cast. I mean—I like the guy, but not behind me in the dark!"

"It's a boat," I said. "The music was on a boat. Boy, that's a big no-no on Leander Lake after dark. Homeowners up there are absolutely rigid about that kind of shit."

Andy ignored me, which told me I was right.

"I grabbed Traeger's flashlight and went down to the boat dock. There was no moon last night, but I picked up a reflection from one of those big aluminum pontoons—way out on the water. There was no other boat at Johns' dock, so I sent Lyle to the next property over because they had one. He woke up the owners and got the keys to their speed boat and picked me up. He might be a little clumsy as a cop, but he sure can handle a boat.

"We found one of those big pontoon party boats about a quarter of the way down the lake, just sitting there. No lights. Motor off. Music blasting."

Dinner interrupted. After assuring the server we needed nothing further and waiting for him to return to the bar, Andy leaned over her plate and spoke just above a whisper.

"Johns was there. So was Verna Sobol. She was on one of the side cush-

ions. Passed out. Nothing on.” Andy tipped her head slightly, wordlessly filling in the rest.

“What about Johns?”

“We found him across the deck from her. On his ass on the floor, also passed out. And...”

“And?”

“And it was all hanging out. He didn’t have a stitch on and...um, it was pretty obvious what happened.”

I must have given her a blank stare. She spun her hand in a *you know what I’m talking about* gesture.

“Oh. You sure?”

I got The Look. She was sure.

“Lyle pulled alongside. I jumped on the boat and checked to make sure the girl had a pulse and was breathing. She smelled like a distillery. Her clothes were all over. Knotted up—you know, like pulled off in a hurry. I’ll wait for the lab report, but if she wasn’t roofied, I’ll eat the report. The thing is, I think Johns accidentally roofied himself.”

“What?”

“There were bottles and glasses and a lot of liquor, and I think he slipped her something, but then must have drunk from the wrong glass because he was incoherent. Even after we rolled him over and cuffed him, he was barely conscious.”

“Jesus! That could have been Lane!”

Andy leaned back. “I don’t think she’d ever put herself in that position.”

“The girl...did he...?”

Andy nodded. “No question. It was...on her. I recorded the scene with my phone. That’s why I couldn’t call you. I took a bunch of photos then had Traeger bag my phone. Traeger called in the cavalry and I have to say, he did a decent job of towing that boat back to the dock.”

“Wow.”

“No kidding! In pretty short order, we had everyone there. The chief. The sheriff. Westside Patrol. County. The night supervisor. EMTs. The works. Tom got right down in Johns’ face and told him to stay put. Tom himself took swabs off the guy. He got pretty agitated, but the chief made a big impression.”

“Can you do that? Swab a guy like that?”

“The guy was a walking crime scene, Will! Sure, his lawyers will try to have it all tossed, but this wasn’t a search warrant situation. We found him that way. Plus, I had photos. *Close up photos.*”

“So many questions I don’t want to ask. What about the girl? Verna?”



“As soon as the EMTs arrived, Tom put me in charge of her. As in, ‘Don’t let her out of your sight.’ I spent the better part of the morning at the hospital. I would have preferred going back to the scene. DCI is lending their forensic team. The parents didn’t show up until almost eleven. I guess they were over in the Dells and forgot to pack phone chargers.”

I’d been working over my tacos while Andy talked. Her dinner sat nearly untouched. Now, for just a moment, she stared at her plate. She lost herself in deep thought.

“It sounds like this is a slam dunk,” I said.

“Huh...”

I waited, but she didn’t move.

“For Johns. Pretty hard to play the He Said She Said card. Or the ‘I thought she was older’ card.”

Her eyes came up slowly, squinting, looking through me.

“Did Verna’s parents consent to the rape kit?”

“What? Oh, yes. Yes, Johns is toast ...” She trailed off.

“What?”

“Okay, I know this comes a little after the fact. Maybe it’s the alcohol talking...”

“Dee, you’ve had like two sips.”

She leaned back in her chair and stared at me.

“Thinking back on it, now that I’ve had a chance to think, I remember something I kinda put aside at the time. When it was just me and Traeger. Before the whole circus arrived. A feeling...”

“Like?”

“Like I was being watched.”

ANDY DIDN’T FINISH her beer. I did. After paying the bill, I proposed driving her home. One word to the owners and her car could stay in the Los Lobos lot overnight. I promised to get up with her at any hour and return her to it.

She refused.

“I’m going back.” She pulled her keys from her bag.

“What? No! That’s ridiculous! Don’t make me call the chief.”

“I need to find out who called in the noise complaint. We might have a witness.”

She stepped close to me, slipped her arms around me and pressed her body against mine. Gold-flecked green eyes blinked at me beneath long dark lashes, sending a coded message I didn’t understand but my body did.

“Dammit, woman,” I muttered. She grinned.

*DIVISIBLE MAN: THE THIRD LIE*

“I won’t be long.”

She cut off my ironclad objection with a kiss.

I watched her drive away, thinking *What just happened?*

SOMETIME AFTER MIDNIGHT my wife slipped into our bed. Her breathing quickly eased into the smooth rhythm of unencumbered sleep, telling me that whatever had drawn her back to the station had been settled, at least for the night.

“Have fun!” I flipped Sandy and Arun a jaunty wave as they walked away from the airplane. Neither looked back. Their attention had already fixed on the small welcoming committee waiting inside the Brainerd Lakes Airport FBO. The anxious cluster looked like every other welcoming committee I’d seen since I began flying Sandy to these meetings. Expectant. On their best behavior. Hoping their plea to the Christine and Paulette Paulesky Education Foundation would yield a new science curriculum, or a chance to replace outdated computers, or hire new teachers to relieve overcrowded, underfunded classrooms.

It would, of course. No one got to the point of a physical visit without having been thoroughly vetted by Arun. And Sandy’s heart did not have the capacity to say No. I liked to think that every time Sandy wrote a check, it gave Bargo Litton, the corrupt billionaire who funded the Foundation, albeit at gunpoint, a stab of pain in his dried up, black heart.

This trip promised a treat for me. Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport hosts the Wings Airport Café. I’d been to the café before. After Arun told me the destination, I skipped breakfast in anticipation of a divine airport meal.

My expectations were well met.

At the cashier’s counter, I peeled off a generous tip, which earned me a sweet smile from the girl who made my change.

“You have a great day and a wonderful flight, now,” she said.

“And you take the rest of the day off. Tell ‘em I said it was okay.”

She laughed. “I wish!”

*DIVISIBLE MAN: THE THIRD LIE*

I gave her a parting smile and then stopped. A small display on the counter caught my eye. A glass pickle jar held wrinkled singles and a layer of change. A hand-made card, lettered in a rainbow of colors read:

FOR ANGELINE.  
HELP HER WIN HER FIGHT AGAINST LEUKEMIA.

A photo taped below the card showed a thin young woman standing on the stoop of a plain-looking home. Two small boys leaned against her legs and stared at the camera with expressions that said, *I AM smiling!*

Their mother wore a brave, cheerful face beneath a bright silk kerchief tightly wound around her head. Her smile beamed light and warmth, but the shallow depressions in her cheeks and the prominence of her facial bones told another story. Thin fingers clutched the two boys as if hoping the moment, like the photo it rendered, could last forever.

“How’s she doing?” I pointed.

Sadness flashed in the girl’s eyes.

“Angie? Oh, she’s hanging in there! She’s a fighter. Can you spare a little something for her? We’re trying to help with some of her medical bills and maybe something to help take care of her two boys.”

“I can,” I said, pulling a few singles from my wallet, “but I wonder...do you think you could tell me how to get in touch with her or the family?”

“I don’t think we can give out any personal information, but if you want to give me your name and a message, I can see that she gets it.”

I shrugged. “It’s just that—that plane out there—the one I flew in? It belongs to a charitable foundation. They help a lot of different people with a lot of different things. It’s always a lengthy process, though. There’s an application and it goes to a committee and blah blah blah—but I might be able to get the ball rolling faster. Does she have an advocate? Maybe a doctor or attorney overseeing things? I’m here for a couple hours and I’d be happy to talk to somebody.”

“Millie!” the girl called over her shoulder. “Millie, can you come out here?”

A formidable block of woman with a tight hair bun and a generously stained apron joined the conversation. I noted a family resemblance with the counter girl.

“This fellow wants some information about Angie. He’s...um...”

“I’m with a charitable foundation. I saw the card here. It looks like a tough situation.”

“It is,” the woman said, settling a judgmental gaze on me. “That gal’s

been through the mill. She went into remission last year, but this year it's not so good."

"It seems to me if anyone could use a little help, she could. I have a few hours to kill. I have some forms with me. I'd just leave them with you, but honestly, it could shave months off the process if I could meet her and get her to apply today. You have no idea."

Millie huffed a sad sigh. "Time is not that poor dear's friend." She took a long look at me. "You got a name?"

"I'm Will." I put out my hand. She wiped hers on the apron and we shook.

"Let me make a phone call, Will."

THE FBO DIDN'T HAVE a crew car, but they offered rentals. I pulled out a credit card. The young man behind the counter looked like he had better things to do.

"How long do you need it for?" he asked.

"About an hour."

"Tell you what. Just take it. If you keep the car, I get to keep your airplane." He slid a set of keys across the glass counter. "It's not worth the paperwork. Just put some gas in it when you're done. It's the red Camry in the second space from the end."

"Thanks!"

I ducked out of the office with my flight bag in hand and a slip of paper containing an address in my shirt pocket. Behind the rental's steering wheel, I took a moment to pull my iPad and map out the directions to the address I'd been given. Millie had spoken to someone who said they would meet me.

The drive took me into Brainerd, a town with broad streets and well-spaced older homes matching the plain construction of the home in the pickle jar photo. I found my way through town on Washington Avenue and turned left onto a placid, tree-lined 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The blue line on the iPad took me past an elementary school into a neighborhood of small, square cottages. Awnings from the 1950s hung over doors and windows. The yards were neat, the gardens simple.

The house number I hunted for stood in black wrought-iron relief on white siding. A severe-looking old man sat on the stoop. He wore a white t-shirt and cobalt blue work pants. He had thin strands of hair the color of iron swept back on a largely bald head and held in place with shiny grease. He watched me pull up and step out of the car.

"You Will?" he asked before I could close the door.

“I am. Are you Mister—” I glanced at the note “—Landry?”

“That’s my daughter’s married name.” He didn’t seem inclined to give his name and I didn’t press. He looked at me with a mix of weariness and suspicion.

“I don’t mean to interrupt anything.”

“Nothing here to interrupt. Same old same old.” He stood and took a step toward me. The step looked like it caused pain. “Millie said you needed something signed.”

“Is your daughter here?”

“She’s resting. I can sign whatever papers you have. I have her power of attorney.”

“That won’t be necessary. I just needed to verify some information. The address. Correct spellings. Is this where your daughter lives? Here with you?” I read the address and opened my iPad to take notes on the ForeFlight scratchpad.

“This is where she lives. With me.” I caught the warning and made a note. “What kinda help are we talking about here?”

“We have several different programs. Assistance with medical costs. Assistance with living expenses. Help with the children’s education. Help with treatment programs.”

He drove a steady stare into me. I felt the kind of flutter that awakens when the edges of a lie begin to fray.

“She’s done with treatment now.”

“Is she doing better?” The look on his face made me wish I hadn’t asked.

“No. She’s just done with treatment. It was too much, too painful. She knows it won’t do any good and it only runs up the bills—not that it matters anymore. Those bills won’t be paid in either of our lifetimes. I ‘spose you’re gonna tell me that you don’t shell out money for lost causes.”

“No sir.”

The awkward silence that fell between us softened his expression slightly.

“Well, then, if there’s anything you can do, it will be appreciated.”

“Sir, are you sure I can’t see her? Just for a minute?”

He shook his head. “My daughter was a pretty girl. And proud. She—she doesn’t like to be seen the way she is now. I tell her—” His voice hitched. His faded eyes glittered. “I tell her she’ll always—”

He stopped. Gathered himself. Nodded twice.

“I think I have everything I need. Thank you for your time.”

He turned and climbed the stoop, then disappeared inside.

*Shit.*

. . .

I PARKED the Camry around the corner and checked the homes lining the street. No gardeners. No one mowed their lawn. I tucked a power unit and prop into my shirt and waited for a car to pass. I took one more look around.

*Don't fly angry.*

I couldn't help it. I didn't like lying. I didn't like having to skulk around. I didn't like feeling helpless or bumping into the limits imposed on the help I could provide.

I didn't like being told by Lillian that I should take what I can do and bury it.

*Fwoomp!*

I vanished and popped the car door open. Clear of the door, I realized I couldn't swing it closed. Floating next to the car gave me no leverage. I checked the street again. Seeing no one, I reappeared long enough to slam and lock the door, then vanish again. I pulled out the power unit, added power and surged over the roof of the car and across a lawn. I angled right and cruised a few feet above the grass across two yards to the former Landry home.

My first move took me to the front door. It was a warm day, suitable for leaving a front door open with a screen door to welcome a fresh breeze.

No such luck. The closed door and locked knob forbid entry.

Plan B. Check the back door. After that, maybe the old Ring the Doorbell trick. I backed away and eased the power unit into a low growl that pulled me off the front stoop and over a short concrete driveway that ended at a slightly sagging garage. My path took me around the small rectangle of house.

I killed the power abruptly when I saw them. The old man sat in a white plastic lawn chair with a hardcover book on his lap and a mug of coffee on a matching white plastic lawn table.

Angeline Landry lay on a folding lawn chair. Despite the warmth, a patchwork quilt covered her legs. Another enveloped her shoulders. The chair had been angled to face the midmorning sun. She wore nothing on her head, which glowed like a pale mushroom.

I drifted. The yard lay silent, forcing me to slow myself with a bare minimum of power. Most of the small lawn passed beneath me before I halted short of a low fence at the back of the property. I turned around and eased back toward her.

She was pretty, despite the way disease had drained health and life from her skin. She had fine features, a movie starlet's nose, and large child-like

eyes, which gazed at the blue sky. She wore the inverse of her father's bitterness and resignation, a veneer of peace and expectation.

She was also farther gone than children I'd seen at night in hospital rooms. And older. Well into her twenties, if I had to guess.

I had no idea if this would work—not that I ever had any assurances. Making matters worse, she had a witness within touching distance. I wondered if I could draw him away. Would he hear the doorbell if I rang it?

*Why does this have to be so hard?*

I aimed for her chair. The glide across the lawn took forever, hindered by a light breeze. When the old man looked up from his book, I cut the humming power completely.

He looked around. Lacking a satisfactory explanation for the sound, he returned his attention to his book.

I had just settled on simply grabbing the girl by her fragile-looking hands when she turned her head and spoke.

“Daddy?”

“Mmmm?”

“Would you bring me some water?”

*Yes!*

The old man stood up, marked his page with a bookmark, and limped toward the house without a word.

I was committed to a collision with Angeline. I had no choice. I goosed the power unit to stop. The prop buzzed and the old man turned. He looked around the yard. After a moment he huffed and resumed his trek. The back-door screen slammed behind him. I drifted closer.

*Fwoomp!*

I dropped to the grass within arm's reach of the young woman and jammed the power unit into the back pocket of my jeans.

She startled and jerked against the lawn chair.

“Hi!” I said, smiling as brightly as I could. I leaned over and grabbed her hands.

*FWOOMP!* I pushed it hard and we both vanished. She pulled to free herself, but I held on, trying not to squeeze fine bones.

She gasped. A desperate sound grew in her throat, rising and eventually escaping as a thin, hitching moan. She pulled and twisted but her arms lacked strength.

*How long?* I wondered. I have no idea. Logic suggests that holding someone in the vanished state longer should be more effective. She struggled and kicked and that was not good. Her kicks sent us upward. Her quilt, which had vanished with us, fell away and snapped into view.



“Shhhhhhh!” I realized immediately how sinister that sounded.

She yanked her hands trying to free them, which had the effect of shooting us back and forth toward each other like swing dancers.

Eight inches and climbing.

Too much higher and I would have to come up with a way to get her back down again. I didn't want to let go of one hand to try and use the power unit, so I decided to end it. I released both hands and felt the electric snap that crosses my skin when I let something go.

She popped back into view about twelve inches above the thin plastic straps of the lawn chair. Wide-eyed and flailing, she dropped, hit the chair and tore through faded old straps, sagging comically so that her butt touched the grass below. She screamed.

The screen door slammed open. Her father staggered forward, sloshing water from a glass he had drawn. He stopped beside her and watched her kick at the quilts and fight the aluminum frame.

“What in Heaven's name did you do?”

I didn't stick around for her answer.

The police waited for us when we landed. I saw them from a thousand feet up as I eased the Navajo into the downwind leg of the traffic pattern. Three vehicles arrayed on the ramp in front of the Essex County Air Service hangar winked blue and red lights against long shadows and dusk. I said nothing to Sandy and Arun. She stared into a paperback. He shuffled papers and reports, as he often did until we rolled to a stop.

I greased the landing as if I had an audience—which I did. My mind raced through possible reasons for the reception.

Angeline described me to her father.

Angeline's father connected me to Millie. *That guy you sent here attacked Angeline.*

Millie remembered the airplane. *He said his name was Will.*

The kid at the FBO counter matched me up to the airplane. *Look up the N-number officer!*

Brainerd police called Essex PD. *We're looking for a Will Stewart...*

*Shit! Shit! Shit!*

I let the airplane roll out on Runway 31, saving the brakes and taking the last taxiway. All doubt disappeared. They waited for me. In addition to the three marked units, two unmarked units and Andy's car sat on the ramp. Men in uniform, men in suits and one strikingly attractive woman watched me hang a left and pull up in front of the Foundation hangar.

I wondered if it would be Andy putting on the handcuffs. *"Will Stewart, my darling idiot husband, you're under arrest for assault."*

My mouth went dry.

“Um, Will, do you have any idea what’s going on?” Sandy asked from the cabin after I pulled the mixture controls and killed the engines.

“Your guess is as good as mine,” I replied as innocently as possible. I ran through the shutdown checklist and then heaved myself out of the pilot’s seat. I squeezed past Arun and Sandy and opened the airstair door. They followed me down the steps.

Andy led the way across the ramp. She looked grim. The chief, towering over her, walked two steps back. He led a troop of men wearing suits and the look of professional law enforcement. Andy’s eyes met mine. I expected her to speak first, but she deferred to one of the crew-cut men in a suit.

“Sandra Stone?” he asked. “We need you to come with us.”

Andy hurried forward to clasp Sandy’s arm. “It’s okay. They’re with the FBI.”

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



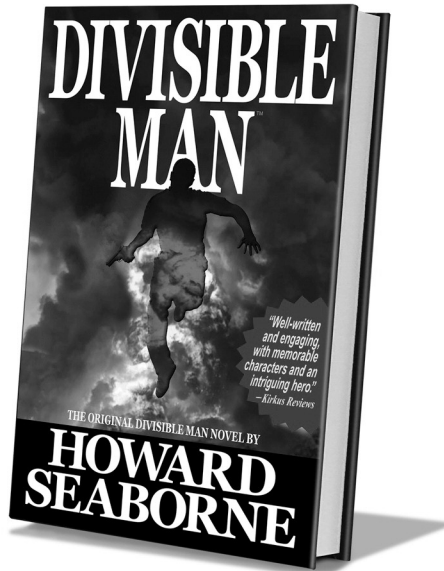
HOWARD SEABORNE is the author of the DIVISIBLE MAN™ series of novels and a collection of short stories featuring the same cast of characters.

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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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.*

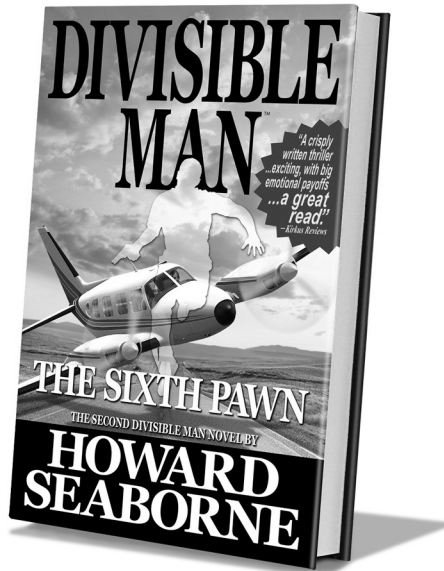
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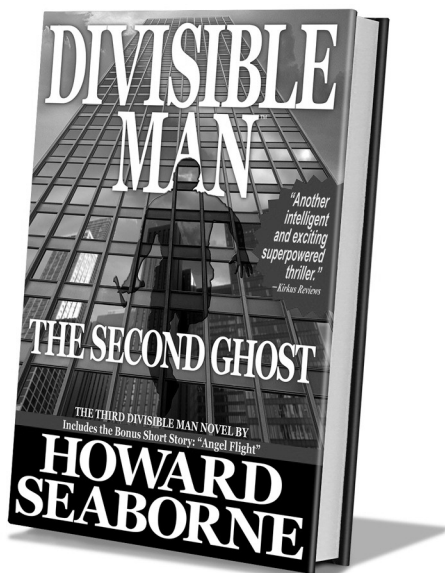
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**Includes the short story, "Angel Flight," a bridge to the fourth DIVISIBLE MAN novel that follows.**

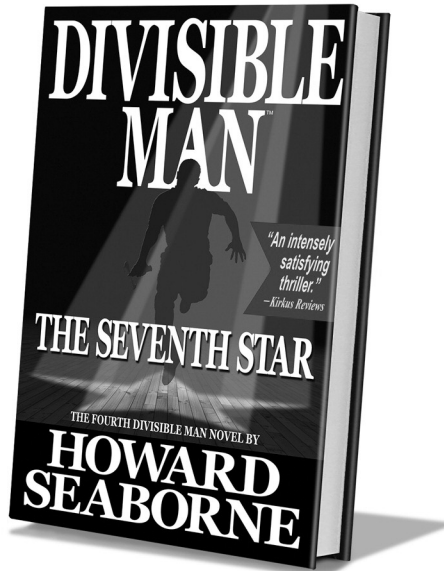
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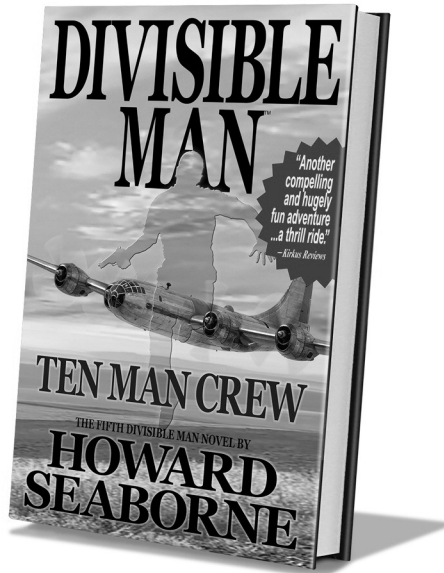
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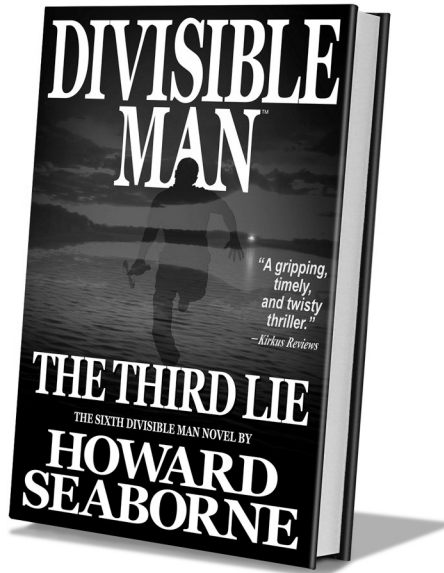
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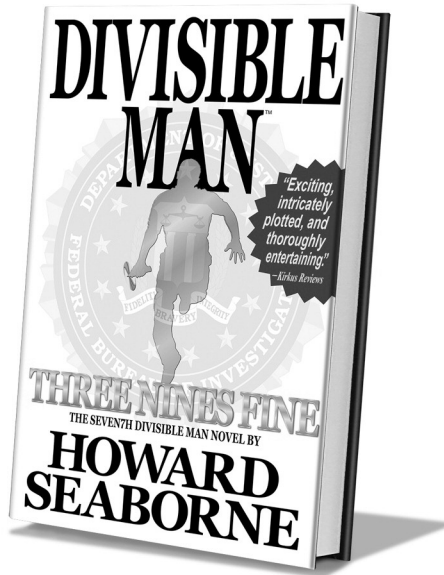
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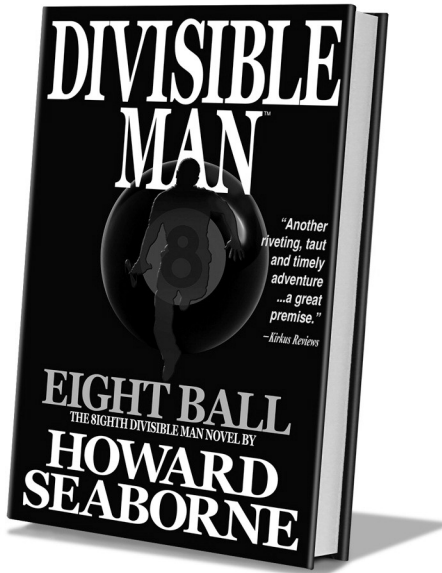
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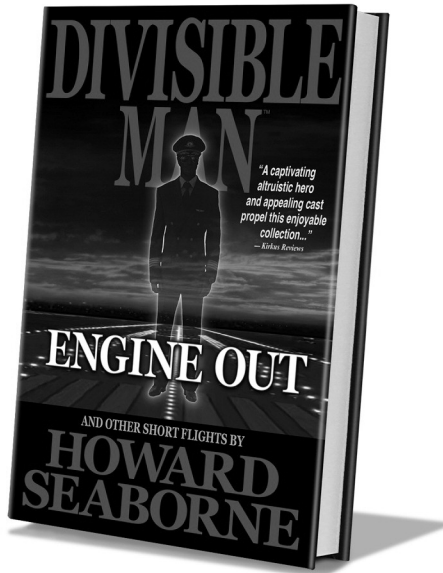
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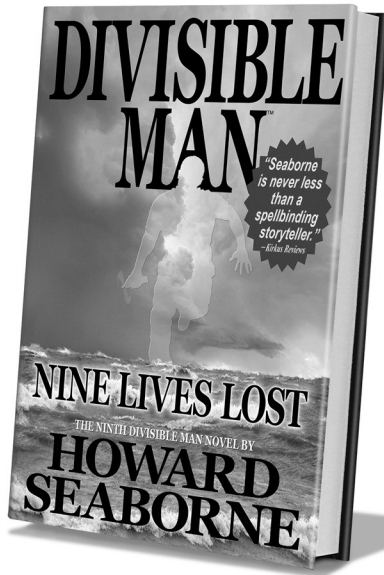
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