

DIVISIBLE MAN™



THE ELEVENTH HOURGLASS

THE ELEVENTH DIVISIBLE MAN NOVEL BY

HOWARD SEABORNE

Copyright © 2023 by Howard Seaborne

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, businesses, companies, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

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

DIVISIBLE MAN - THE ELEVENTH HOURGLASS

A Novel – October 2023

PREFACE

THE OTHER THING

It's like this: I wake up nearly every morning in the bed I share with my wife. After devoting a religious moment to appreciating the stunning, loving woman beside me, I ease off the mattress and pick my way across the minefield of creaks and groans in the old farmhouse's wooden floor. I slip into the hall and head for the guest bathroom two doors down—the one with the quietest toilet flush. I take care of essential business, then pull up to the mirror. The face offers no surprises. I give it a moment, then picture a set of levers in my head—part of the throttle-prop-mixture quadrant on a twin-engine Piper Navajo. The levers I imagine are to the right of the standard controls, a fourth set not found on any airplane, topped with classic round balls. I see them fully retracted, pulled toward me, the pilot. My eyes are open—it makes no difference—I can see the levers either way. I close my hand over them. I push. They move smoothly and swiftly to the forward stops. Balls to the wall.

For a split second I wonder, as I did the day before, and the day before that, if this trick will work again. Then—

Fwoomp!

—I hear it. A deep and breathy sound—like the air being sucked out of a room. I've learned that the sound is audible only in my head.

A cool sensation flashes over my skin. The first dip in a farm pond after a hot, dusty day. The shift of an evening breeze after sunset.

Preface

I vanish.

Bleary eyes and tossed hair wink out of the mirror and the shower curtain behind me—the one with the frogs on it—fills in where my head had been. The instant I see those frogs, my feet leave the cold tile floor. My body remains solid, but gravity and I are no longer on speaking terms. A stiff breeze will send me on my way if I don't hang on to something.

The routine never varies. I've tested it nearly every morning since I piloted an air charter flight down the RNAV 31 Approach to Essex County Airport but never made the field. The airplane wound up in pieces and I wound up sitting on the pilot's seat in a marsh. I have no memory of the crash. The running theory is that I collided with something—something I recently found in a winter woods under a crush of broken trees. I believe that object—whatever it was—saved me and left me this way. I may never know how or why. The object is long gone. As time passes, the memory of its discovery plays like a dream.

Since the night of the crash, whenever I picture that set of levers in my mind and I push them fully forward, I vanish. Pull them back, and I reappear. It applies to things I wear, things I hold, and even other people in my grasp.

A gimmick? A party trick? A useful tool for espionage—assuming I knew anything about espionage? I don't know.

There's one aspect of this *thing* that I may never understand. On a fogbound Christmas Eve I held a dying child in my arms and made us both vanish. I found out later that the child stopped dying. That when this *thing* envelops a child stricken by cancer sometimes—often—it leaves the child whole and healthy.

Don't ask. I have no idea.

This *thing*—what I call *the other thing*—saved my life. It allows me to disappear. It defies gravity. It cures where there is no cure.

Those things don't scare me.

Far scarier things greet the dawn every day.

PART I

1

“**Y**ou need to get your ass over here like *right now*.” Pidge delivered the command in a breathless whisper.

“Why?”

“Earl’s holding a baby hostage and the cops are here. *I am not shitting you!*”

“What?”

Pidge ended the call.

I rolled the creeper out from under the Piper Navajo wing where I’d been wiping a film of dirt and oil off the bottom side of the flaps.

“Well, that’s weird.” With no one else in the hangar, I got no argument.

I tossed aside the oily wad of paper towels and levered myself up off the floor. I left the cleaning supplies because, dollars to donuts, this would add up to a waste of my time and I’d be back at this task soon.

The big hangar door hung open, perhaps a little optimistically. Despite the mid-May date on the calendar and a bright sunlit sky, the morning temperature had barely topped 40 degrees. The airport MOS predicted mid-sixties, but it would be afternoon before such glorious warmth crept in.

Still, the air was fresh, and the crystalline sky promised the best a Wisconsin spring had to offer. Lingering traces of what were once snow piles between the hangars melted into the grass. I liked the way the open door caught the sound of student pilot runups or morning charter flights departing. Ordinarily Pidge would have been piloting one of those charters,

either in Earl's Piper Mojave or one of the Beechcraft Barons he operated, but she was in the home stretch of having one arm in a cast. The break she suffered during a misadventure in the Florida Keys did not set properly and had been re-broken and reset using an assortment of pins and screws. Being grounded accounted for her presence in the Essex County Air Service office at 9:15 a.m. In lieu of flying, Pidge updated charter records, tutored students studying for written exams, and relieved Rosemary II of some of the scheduling, but mostly she drove everyone from the building or else insane. Thanks to an earthbound Pidge, not much has been seen of Earl Jackson, the operation's owner, and my former boss. Earl either locked himself in his office or found cause to spend long hours in the engine shop arguing with Doc, the chief mechanic. Rosemary II confided in me that despite the way Pidge and Earl mimic a crate of nitroglycerin on a roller coaster, Earl plans to offer her the chief pilot title before some regional airline lures her away. At twenty-four, she has all the ratings and twice the skill.

Earl's holding a baby hostage and the cops are here.

This I had to see.

EARL STOOD with his feet planted wider than his bowlegged usual. His stance suggested a linebacker ready for the snap of a football. His elbows rode high and away from his fireplug frame. In the scarred and gnarled claws he calls hands, sure as hell, he clutched an infant at arm's length. The bald-headed pair stared at each other.

"Hey, Will." Del Sims, the smallest cop on the Essex Police Department patrol roster, stirred coffee in a mug a few feet from Earl and his hostage. The scent of Rosemary II's mysteriously delicious blend warmed my senses.

"Del." I stopped inside the tinted glass doors to the Essex County Air Service office where, until just short of two years ago, I had been chief pilot. "What's up?"

"Not much. You?"

I shot a look down the hallway. Pidge's mop of short blonde hair poked out of the second office door. She fought to keep a full-blown laugh from slipping through the devilish grin on her face.

"Hey, Earl." I pointed at the bundle in a tiny blue onesie. "Who's your dance partner?"

Earl said nothing. Despite the permanent expression of rage on his aged yet ageless face, I got the distinct impression that the infant was winning the staring contest. I got an equally distinct impression that Del, in full uniform

DIVISIBLE MAN - THE ELEVENTH HOURGLASS

and armed per department policy, was more interested in his coffee than the child. A second glance at Pidge's grin confirmed I'd been had. Still, I wasn't sorry for getting suckered. I wouldn't have wanted to miss this scene.

I contemplated grabbing a photo.

I was about to question Del when the doors behind me swung open and Rosemary II struggled into the office with an armload of grocery bags. I grabbed the door for her. She shoved one of the bags into my hands.

"Uh!" She adjusted the load. "Thank you, Will. I—" She stopped. Her deep brown eyes darted from me to Earl to the baby to Del then back to me, returning laden with questions.

"Beats me." I shrugged before she could ask.

"Earl Jackson, what on earth are you doing?" Rosemary II lowered two loaded paper grocery bags to the floor and darted forward. Before Earl could answer, she swept the child out of his grip. "That's no way to hold a baby!"

I swear the child giggled. Earl remained rooted to the floor with his eyes locked on the kid. Rosemary II cuddled the infant against her chest. Like dawn, a bright smile spread and creased the smooth milk chocolate skin on her face. "And who are you, little one?"

Rosemary II is not much older than me, but she is everyone's mother at the airport. Radiant in that role, she instantly communicated to the infant that its fortunes had changed for the better. It grinned up at her adoring face.

"He's mine. I'm sorry." A meek voice came from the hallway leading to the restrooms. "I'm so sorry. I really, *really* had to go. It's been hours."

A wild shock of long red hair atop a girl with a slender physique emerged from the hallway. The hair framed a face pale enough to have been rendered in marble, with skin as smooth. Shy but piercing blue eyes warily regarded the fresh assembly of strangers.

I knew that face. So did Pidge.

"Kelly?" Pidge hurried up behind me. She looked astonished. "Jesus, Kelly, why did you come back here? Are you under arrest?"

Kelly Pratt darted a glance at her friend Pidge, then at me, then at the woman holding her child. Her expression betrayed the same undertow of ingrained fear I had seen the first time I met her and the last time I saw her, yet she seemed different.

Pidge ducked past me and took her friend in a hug, then sternly gripped her arms. As if Del wasn't standing three feet away, she whispered, "You can't be here. You can't be back here."

The Police stoically sipped his coffee. Something told me he had no idea who Kelly Pratt was or why her presence in Essex might have just blown up

an elaborate and somewhat illegal plan executed for the young woman's own protection.

"I had to come." Kelly turned to face Earl's withering glare. "Mr. Jackson, I had to come. It's your wife. I think someone wants to hurt her."

“Kelly Pratt.” I repeated the name into the phone for Andy. I strolled down the hall, past Earl’s closed office door.

“Back up the truck, Will. What do you mean a hostage situation?”

“Oh, yeah, that. Pidge walked in and saw Earl holding a baby and Del standing there in his gear and she swears she heard Earl tell Del not to get any closer, but in retrospect, I think Earl was talking to the baby.”

“Why was Earl holding Kelly’s baby?”

“Kelly had to go potty. Bad. She was on a bus all night. And then she hitchhiked from the stop on 34.”

“She hitchhiked?”

“Or tried, until Del picked her up. What else are you going to do when you see a girl hitchhiking with a baby? Kelly begged Del to take her to the airport.”

“I’m sorry, Will. I’m trying to get up to speed here. Why was she hitchhiking? More importantly, why did she come back to Essex? Did she come looking for Pidge?” Andy knew the story of Pidge’s friendship with the girl, and of how Pidge had come to Kelly’s rescue.

“Actually, she came for Earl.” I explained Kelly’s message about Earl’s wife—his ex-wife—Candice.

Candice Hammond Stubowsky Day Jackson O’Connor Thorpe. I don’t know why, but the laundry list of Earl’s ex-wife’s married names stuck in my head like lyrics looking for a song. Candice owned Renell Lodge in northern Minnesota, a rustic dream she inherited from one of the husbands—

I forget which—where Kelly had been hiding since Pidge persuaded me and Earl to help the girl and child escape an abusive boyfriend. Andy knew the story of what happened at Halloween, a story I liked to entitle *Attack of the Killer Zombie*. Andy's title of *Criminal Child Abduction by Three Idiots* carried less appeal but landed more on point. The abusive baby daddy could have proven a genuine problem if he had not sacrificed his custody standing by being sentenced to state prison, thanks to the stash of drugs found by the cops after he crashed his pickup truck.

After the Killer Zombie made him crash his truck.

"Hurt Candice how? Who?"

"Dee, I have no idea. The baby started fussing and Kelly went to feed it—"

"Him. If I remember correctly, the baby is a boy. Seth, I think."

"Right. Anyway, Kelly set up in the pilot's lounge to—you know—hook the kid up."

"Breastfeed, Will. It's called breastfeeding and you need to get a little more comfortable with the concept." A lot of new concepts introduced themselves since Andy let me know she was pregnant.

"I know what it's called. And I am perfectly comfortable with the concept. And totally respectful." It was half true. My mind wandered a bit when thinking about Andy in that way. "Anyway, Kelly's feeding the baby. Rosemary II is making Kelly something to eat. Earl locked himself in his office. Del is finishing his coffee. And I called you because—"

"You want to know if Kelly is in any legal jeopardy over the abduction."

"Bingo. I don't think Del knows who she is, but he will certainly remember what happened last Halloween. He was there. I was hoping to head off trouble."

"Off the top of my head, no, there shouldn't be any trouble. Technically Kelly committed an unlawful abduction of a child subject to shared custody, but the ex-boyfriend hadn't filed anything. Lucky for her, we got him on the drug charges before we knew she had fled the state. But if the boyfriend hadn't been in prison he could have filed for custody, and she'd be subject to an open fugitive warrant."

"Can you let Del know? Right now, he's hanging around to drink Rosemary II's coffee, but he says he wants to talk to the girl."

"I'll call him. Please call me when you find out what's going on. Please?"

"Will do. Love you."

"Will."

"What?"

DIVISIBLE MAN - THE ELEVENTH HOURGLASS

“Don’t get tangled up in something here. You have that thing coming up.
On Thursday. With Lewko.”

“Me? Never.”

“I mean it. You know how important it is.”

“Love you, too.”

I joined Pidge behind the front counter. We watched Del answer Andy's phone call. He listened for a moment, then waved at us and pointed at the door. He tucked his phone between his ear and shoulder, freed up his hands to pour himself a to-go cup of Rosemary II's coffee, then slipped out the front door still chatting with Detective Andrea Stewart, my wife.

"Was that Andy?"

"Yeah." I sent Pidge a look that attempted to scold. "Hostage situation?"

"The fuck was I supposed to know it was Kelly? I walked in and saw a cop and Earl holding a baby." She poked my arm. "Come on—you gotta admit. That was priceless. You had to see that." She wasn't wrong.

"Looked to me like Earl was the hostage."

"What did Andy say?"

I explained Andy's assessment of Kelly's standing with the law. Pidge blew out a sigh of relief and chased it with a few choice words for the still-incarcerated ex-boyfriend.

"How did Earl wind up with the baby?" I asked.

"I wasn't here for that part. Rosemary II ran over to the Piggly Wiggly. I was in the back. Earl must have been the only one in the office when she came in. When a girl's gotta go, she's gotta go. I guess she handed the kid off to the only warm body in sight." Pidge gestured at the closed pilot lounge door. "How long does it take to feed one of those?"

"Beats me. I suppose I better learn—" I caught myself before I let

DIVISIBLE MAN - THE ELEVENTH HOURGLASS

Andy's pregnancy slip. Andy and I had decided to hold back any announcement until her condition approached obvious.

"Better learn what?"

"Um...I suppose I better hang around and learn what's going on. Being a co-conspirator and all."

"Do you think?"

"HE'S SUCH A BEAUTIFUL CHILD." Rosemary II sat on the floor beside the cushy leather sofa with her legs curled under her body. She gently stroked the back of the blue onesie. The baby lay belly down on a faded yellow and blue blanket, sound asleep.

He seemed cute enough. He had no hair to speak of. His fair skin reflected that of his mother. For his sake, I hoped his genes favored her. His biological father was hawk-faced and mean looking.

I dropped into one of the fat recliners. Pidge sat on the sofa beside Kelly who threw her arm around her friend and issued a deep squeeze mindful of the cast on Pidge's left forearm.

"Kel, what the fuck? Why did you come back here? You could've gotten in a lot of trouble."

"I need to talk to Mr. Jackson." Kelly looked for Earl in the empty front office outside the pilot lounge door. Pidge glanced at Rosemary II. Kelly followed the glance. "Is he coming back?"

Rosemary II gave the sleeping infant one more gentle stroke, then leaned close to breathe in the scent of his bald scalp.

"Heavens, it's like a drug." She pushed herself upright. "Of course, dear, but best not to talk in here. It might get loud. Let's all step out and let this little one sleep. Will, push that coffee table up against the sofa in case he rolls, would you?"

"On it."

After moving the furniture, I joined Pidge and Kelly at the office front counter. Rosemary II went to fetch Earl. When she returned alone, she carefully pulled the door to the pilot's lounge closed.

"He's making some calls. How long does the child usually nap?" Rosemary II asked Kelly.

"He's a sleeper. He'll be down for at least two hours." Kelly suddenly lifted her arms and pressed her wrists against her shirt. "Oh, gosh. Sometimes they just don't want to shut off. I'll be right back!" She scooped up the baby bag that had not left her side and hurried toward the restroom.

Earl stomped down the hall and joined us. He cast a sharp eye around the office and the lobby.

“Where is it?”

“*He*, Earl, is sleeping.” Rosemary II gestured at the pilot’s lounge. “So, keep your voice down. Is someone going to explain to me what this is all about?”

Earl looked at Pidge, who looked at me.

“What?” I frowned. I waited. No one relented. “Fine.”

I told Rosemary II the story of how Kelly was on the verge of letting herself be enslaved by an abuser, trapped by their shared child, and how Pidge brought the problem to me, and I engaged Earl in a conspiracy to separate Kelly from her dangerous ex-boyfriend on the opening night of the Essex Fall Festival—on Halloween night. I left out the part about how I made Kelly and the baby vanish inside a dark funhouse ride. And the part about how Pidge took off with Kelly and the baby, pursued by the enraged ex-boyfriend. And how I chased the boyfriend’s pickup truck and made myself reappear on the truck’s hood, scaring the bejesus out of the shithead because of the zombie makeup I wore for my role in the haunted funhouse. The ploy caused Kelly’s pursuer to lose control and roll his truck. Pidge delivered Kelly to the airport and Earl flew her and her baby to Minnesota and into the care of Earl’s ex-wife, Candice. The cops scooped up the ex-boyfriend along with possession with intent.

I was about to explain Andy’s assessment that violating the law by abducting her own son was a near miss for Kelly—that she was safe—when Kelly returned from the restroom. Earl lifted an accusing finger in her direction.

“I warned you about getting your panties all wet for your ex and coming back here.” I thought he might scare the girl into the kind of helpless catatonic state he had induced in her when they met last fall.

She surprised me and, I think, everyone.

“Don’t you snap at me, Mr. Jackson. You’re going to listen to what I have to say. Candice always told me not to let you scare me. So...just you *don’t*. Scare me, I mean.” She swallowed hard and stared at Earl who tucked away his finger. “I’ve had a lot of time to think about this, Mr. Jackson, and you’re probably not going to want to hear it, but if I live a thousand lifetimes, I don’t think I can ever thank you enough for what you did for me and Seth. You and Candice. You took me to her, and she didn’t just take me in, she gave me life. Neither of you have ever asked anything in return, but if you did, I would give you anything, so just you don’t...yell...at...me.” The

last few words escaped a quivering lower lip. Kelly rubbed tears from her eyes.

Rosemary II made a move toward hugging the girl, but I closed a grip on her arm. Kelly wasn't finished.

"Now you *listen to me*." She rubbed her face again. "Two nights ago Candice came into my room and told me to pack whatever I could carry and get the baby ready. She said there was no time to explain. I didn't know what to think, but I did as I was told. She said someone was coming for us. I don't know, but it was super scary. I put what I could in this bag. Mostly it's baby stuff. And then she rushed us out of the lodge and into her Jeep and she drove us into Big Fork and made me get out in front of the courthouse and she told me to stay there out of sight until the pharmacy across the street opened. She said that's where the bus stops. She gave me a bunch of money to buy a ticket and she told me not to come back and not to tell anyone where I was going. Just go somewhere safe, she said. You know how she is. She's always so strong and tough. I didn't know where to go, so I bought a ticket to Minneapolis and when I got there, I bought a ticket here to Essex because I had to see you, Mr. Jackson. Something is wrong. Something bad has happened. Candice needs help and you're the only person I could think of who can help her."

Earl curled his claws into fists and mounted them on his hips. He stared at Kelly for a long minute, then lowered his gaze to his shoes. The modulated low rumble of his voice had nothing to do with a sleeping baby in the next room.

"She tell you to come get me?"

"No, sir. The opposite. She said I shouldn't tell anyone. She said I should stay away."

"And you came straight here?"

"Yes, sir. The bus to Minneapolis yesterday morning—then we had to wait all day for a late bus last night to get here. We got off out at the highway stop this morning and hitched here—at least until the policeman picked me up. I told him your name and got him to bring me to you."

Earl showed Kelly the leathery top of his bald skull while he locked his gaze on his steel-toed work boots.

"And she didn't say nothing about nothing?"

"No, sir. She wouldn't hardly talk to me." Kelly waited. None of the rest of us dared move. "I think she was scared, Mr. Jackson. I never seen Candice scared of anything, but I think she was scared and not just for herself. I think she was scared for me and Seth. Whatever it was that was

coming, I think it was coming for her, but she was afraid it might come for me and the baby, too.”

Earl’s head bobbed once. He lifted his face at the girl. She flinched. Beneath Earl’s crags and creases, I saw his judgment of Kelly shift. A curt nod paid her the compliment of both belief and gratitude.

Earl turned to me. “I tried calling. She ain’t answering her cell and the line for the business says it’s out of service.”

“That makes no sense,” Kelly said. “The summer season is starting in a couple weeks. She told me she was booked through October.”

“Boss, you don’t think this is blowback for that old Queen Air you and I pulled outta there. I mean—that outcome was pretty damned public. Anybody with an interest in the airplane and its cargo saw it spread all over cable news.”

“What Queen Air?” Pidge asked.

“Tell you later.” I watched Earl think about it for a moment. He didn’t take long.

“Pidge, get 619 out and gas her up. Will?” He paused. “You in?”

Worst idea ever. In just two days I needed to be in Memphis, and the day after that in Evermore, North Carolina to connect with Spiro Lewko and engage in what might be the biggest test of *the other thing* yet. There was no way I could just charge off on a mission with no plan, no schedule, no idea of duration. Too much had gone into preparing for Evermore. The stage had been set recently in New York City where the world watched Lewko and a child vanish in front of dozens of phone cameras. In a single stroke, Lewko became the focus of a worldwide media frenzy that might otherwise have landed on me. More importantly, the scheme made it possible to organize the still mysterious curative aspect of *the other thing*. In a few days, in Evermore, it would be tested on two dozen eager, desperate children.

Andy would kill me.

“Lemme grab my overnight kit.”

I started for the door when Kelly hooked a gentle grasp on my arm.

“I’m coming, too.”

“The hell you are.” Earl’s growl left no room for negotiation.

Kelly’s voice gained strength I didn’t think she had. “I am, Mr. Jackson. I’m coming, too. You can’t say no. You saved me. You and Cassidy and Will saved me, but Candice changed my life. What she’s done for me made me know I am a person, *a real person*. What I was before would have run and hid. But a real person helps someone who needs help. I won’t go back to being a non-person. *I won’t*. I’m coming, too.”

Earl stepped directly in front of Kelly. This time she did not flinch.

DIVISIBLE MAN - THE ELEVENTH HOURGLASS

“I am not taking no baby. That’s that.”

“The baby can stay with me.” Rosemary II put her arm around Kelly.

“He’s been taking formula,” Kelly said. “I started him...”

Earl looked into the eyes of one of the few forces of nature that he could not overcome. Rosemary II stared right back at him.

“You heard the young lady.”

Earl turned and marched toward his office. “Wheels up in twenty, Will. Anybody else wants a ride, they best not dawdle.”

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.

Visit www.HowardSeaborne.com to join the Email List and get a FREE DOWNLOAD.

