

A city skyline, likely New York City, is viewed through the curved frame of an airplane window. The scene is bathed in the warm, golden light of a sunset or sunrise, with the sky transitioning from yellow to orange and red. The buildings are silhouetted against the bright sky, and some windows are lit up. The overall mood is dramatic and urgent.

A KILLER VIRUS IS UNLEASHED;
IT'S UP TO HER TO STOP IT.

AIRBORNE

DIANN
MILLS

PRAISE FOR DIANN MILLS

BURDEN OF PROOF

“DiAnn Mills never disappoints. . . . Put on a fresh pot of coffee before you start this one because you’re not going to want to sleep until the suspense ride is over. You might want to grab a safety harness while you’re at it—you’re going to need it!”

LYNETTE EASON, bestselling, award-winning author of the *Elite Guardians* and *Blue Justice* series

“Taking her readers on a veritable roller-coaster ride of unexpected plot twists and turns, *Burden of Proof* is an inherently riveting read from beginning to end.”

MIDWEST BOOK REVIEW

“Mills has added yet another winner to her growing roster of romantic thrillers, perhaps the best one yet.”

THE SUSPENSE ZONE

HIGH TREASON

“In this third book in Mills’s action-packed FBI Task Force series, the stakes are higher than ever. . . . Readers can count on being glued to the pages late into the night—as ‘just one more chapter’ turns into ‘can’t stop now.’”

ROMANTIC TIMES

“This suspenseful novel will appeal to Christian readers looking for a tidy, uplifting tale.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

DEEP EXTRACTION

“A harrowing police procedural [that] . . . Mills’s many fans will devour.”

LIBRARY JOURNAL

“Few characters in Mills’s latest novel are who they appear to be at first glance. . . . Combined with intense action and stunning twists, this search for the truth keeps readers on the edges of their favorite reading chairs. . . . The crime is tightly plotted, and the message of faith is authentic and sincere.”

ROMANTIC TIMES, 4½-star review, Top Pick

DEADLY ENCOUNTER

“Crackling dialogue and heart-stopping plotlines are the hallmarks of Mills’s thrillers, and this series launch won’t disappoint her many fans. Dealing with issues of murder, domestic terrorism, and airport security, it eerily echoes current events.”

LIBRARY JOURNAL

“From the first paragraph until the last, this story is a nail-biter, promising to delight readers who enjoy a well-written adventure.”

CHRISTIAN MARKET MAGAZINE

DEADLOCK

“DiAnn Mills brings us another magnificent, inspirational thriller in her FBI: Houston series. *Deadlock* is a riveting, fast-paced adventure that will hold you captive from the opening pages to the closing epilogue.”

FRESH FICTION

“Mills does a superb job building the relationship between the two polar opposite detectives. With some faith overtones, *Deadlock* is an excellent police drama that even mainstream readers would enjoy.”

ROMANTIC TIMES

DOUBLE CROSS

“DiAnn Mills always gives us a good thriller, filled with inspirational thoughts, and *Double Cross* is another great one!”

FRESH FICTION

“For the romantic suspense fan, there is plenty of action and twists present. For the inspirational reader, the faith elements fit nicely into the context of the story. . . . The romance is tenderly beautiful, and the ending bittersweet.”

ROMANTIC TIMES

FIREWALL

“Mills takes readers on an explosive ride. . . . A story as romantic as it is exciting, *Firewall* will appeal to fans of Dee Henderson’s romantic suspense stories.”

BOOKLIST

“With an intricate plot involving domestic terrorism that could have been ripped from the headlines, Mills’s romantic thriller makes for compelling reading.”

LIBRARY JOURNAL

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Airborne

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Airborne is a work of fiction. Where real people, events, establishments, organizations, or locales appear, they are used fictitiously. All other elements of the novel are drawn from the author's imagination.

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CHAPTER ONE

HOUSTON
EARLY JULY
MONDAY, 6 P.M.

Vacations offered a distraction for those who longed to relax and rejuvenate, but FBI Special Agent Heather Lawrence wrestled with the decision to take an overseas trip alone. Normally she arrived for a flight at IAH eager to embark upon a new adventure. Not this time. Her vacation expectations had bottomed out over four weeks ago after Chad had slammed the door on reconciliation. Was she working through her grief or avoiding the reality of a husband who no longer wanted her?

She waited to board the flight in a designated line at the gate. The hum of voices blended with airport beeps, and announcements swirled around her as though enticing her to join the enthusiasm. In the line beside her, passengers shifted their carry-ons and positioned their mobile devices or paper boarding passes. Ready. Alert. People eager to be on their way.

Heather offered a smile to those nearest her. An adorable little blond boy with an older woman found it hard to stand still. A middle-aged couple held hands. The bald head and pasty skin of the man indicated a medical condition. He stumbled, and the woman reached for him. A robust man held a violin case next to his heart. A twentysomething woman with pink hair and a man behind her with a scruffy beard exchanged a kiss.

Chad used to steal kisses.

If she pinpointed the exact moment when he chose to separate himself from her, she'd say when he returned from a third trip for Doctors Without Borders late last fall. He'd witnessed suffering and cruel deaths that had scarred him. She'd encouraged his desire to help others, not realizing their future would take a backseat. While he drove toward success, their marriage drifted across the lanes and stalled in a rut.

The boarding line moved toward the Jetway. Each step shook her to the core as though she should turn and try to reverse the past seven months. She'd ignored her and Chad's deteriorating relationship in an effort to make him happy. A huge mistake. But she didn't intend to add the labels *beaten* or *weak* to her dossier.

A cell phone sounded, and a man boarding in front of her stopped to answer it. His shoulders stiffened under a tan sports coat, and he talked in hushed tones. Heather dug her fingers into her palms and forced one foot in front of the other while the man pocketed his cell phone and proceeded into business class.

A flight attendant greeted her, a dark-haired young man wearing a wide smile, relaxed and genuine, an obvious sign he enjoyed his job. She returned the gesture. His black jacket with two rows of silver braid on the sleeves and black trousers were magazine perfect.

Heather walked to a rear aisle seat in business class and hoisted her tote bag into the overhead compartment. Although it held essentials for every emergency in case her luggage was delayed, the bulging piece weighed less than the burden on her heart.

Easing onto her seat, Heather pulled the brochure from her shoulder bag describing Salzburg's music festival, a celebration of musicians past and present. First a layover in Frankfurt and then on to her destination. She'd rented an apartment for ten days within walking distance of the historical center. The flexibility allowed her to choose her itinerary and cook or dine out. From the online photos, the centuries-old building had just enough updates to be comfortable without damaging its historic charm. She'd have hours to explore Mozart's roots, museums, the many churches, immerse herself in the culture, and think.

A female passenger, sporting red spiked hair and chin-length hooped earrings, stopped beside her. The woman carried a Venti Starbucks. "Excuse me." Her German accent a reminder of the destination. "Would you mind holding my coffee while I store my carry-on?"

"Of course." Heather held the cup while the woman shoved her small suitcase into the overhead bin.

"Sorry for the inconvenience. I wasn't thinking when I bought the coffee."

"It smells heavenly." Heather stood to let the woman pass and then handed her the cup.

"Thank you." The woman blew on the lid and took a sip. "I'm Mia."

"I'm Heather."

"Long flight ahead but soon I'll be home." She pointed to Heather's brochure. "Salzburg?"

"Yes. For a much-needed vacation."

"I'm from Frankfurt. Really missing my daughter and husband."

"You'll see them soon."

Mia broke into a wide smile. "We've done FaceTime and texted, but I want to touch their faces and hug them."

Heather continued to read the Salzburg brochure to avoid any personal comments from Mia, like whether she was taking a vacation

solo. An elderly man wearing a straw fedora and a white mustache sat in the aisle seat across from Heather. He pulled his phone from his pant pocket and used his thumbs on the keyboard like a kid.

Mia placed her coffee on the tray and made a phone call. "*Wie geht es meinem kleinen Mädchen?*"

Heather translated the German. *How is my little girl?* The woman's excitement resonated through every word. Love. Laughter. Priceless commodities that Heather didn't possess. Yet this trip offered an opportunity to rekindle her faith in God and chart a course for the future.

While the attendants made their way through business class with drink orders, Heather longed to have confirmation she'd made the right decision to take this trip. No one knew of her vacation plans except her parents and Assistant Special Agent in Charge Wade Mitchell in Houston. No one needed to know the why of her trip until she made a few decisions.

Stuffing the Salzburg brochure into her bag, she snatched the aircraft's information and confirmed the layout for 267 passengers, restrooms, exit doors, in-seat power, on-demand entertainment, and three galleys. She always noted the details of her surroundings, another habit of working so many FBI cases. Always be prepared for the unexpected.

If the trip had been FBI sanctioned, her present circumstances might not hurt so much. How ironic she worked the critical incident response group as a behavior analyst, and she wrestled to understand her own life.

Right on time, the flight attendants took their assigned posts while miniature screens throughout the plane shared the aircraft's amenities and explained the passenger safety instructions. The captain welcomed them moments before the plane lifted into the clouds.

On her way. No turning back. She prayed for a safe journey and much-needed answers.

Food smells from business class caught her attention, a mix of roasted chicken and beef. Too often of late, she forgot to eat or nothing appealed to her. To shake off the growing negativity, she paid for Wi-Fi and grabbed her phone from her bag. Time to concentrate on something other than herself.

She glanced at the incoming notifications. No texts. Her emails were an anticipated list of senders when she longed for a change of heart from Chad. Sighing, she closed her eyes. Between her job, Chad, and stress, too often she fought for enough pillow time.

Two hours later, she woke from a deep sleep to the sound of a woman's scream.