

SIDNEY SHELDON



A STRANGER
IN THE
MIRROR

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MIRROR**

WARNER BOOKS

NEW YORK BOSTON

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NOTE TO THE READER

The art of making others laugh is surely a wondrous gift from the gods. I affectionately dedicate this book to the comedians, the men and women who have that gift and share it with us. And to one of them in particular: my daughter's godfather, Groucho.

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**PRAISE FOR #1 NEW YORK TIMES
BESTSELLING AUTHOR
SIDNEY SHELDON**

"When you want a novel you simply can't put down, go to Sheldon."

—New York Daily News

"Grab a spoon . . . a steaming bowlful of glamour, sex, and sizzle."

—People on *The Sky Is Falling*

"When it comes to concocting plots full of twists, Sheldon has no peers."

—Associated Press

"A master storyteller."

—USA Today

"Sheldon hypnotizes the reader as he brings distinctive characters alive."

—Baltimore Sun

"Terrific . . . from the beginning to the end, an absorbing story unfolds."

—Chattanooga Free Press on *Morning, Noon & Night*

"Sheldon still has the knack for creating characters and a story that readers care about."

—Detroit Free Press

"A storyteller for readers who like to be entertained."

—Pittsburgh Press

more . . .

"Deliciously steamy . . . almost impossible to put down."

—*Boston Herald on Nothing Lasts Forever*

"A fast-paced mystery tour. . . . The man knows how to deliver magic . . . suspenseful storytelling . . . his signature twists, turns, and ironic surprises."

—*New York Post*

"A page-turner . . . international intrigue, passion, and deceit. . . . Sheldon fans won't be disappointed."

—*USA Weekend on The Domsday Conspiracy*

"The master of the storytelling genre."

—*People*

"Easy to read and hard to put down . . . another winner for the acclaimed novelist."

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"Fast paced. . . . We get the vengeful heroines that made the author instantly famous."

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"Intriguing . . . Sidney Sheldon [has] a unique way to make ordinary scenes come alive. His novels stand out."

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"Sidney Sheldon scores with another tale of money and deception. . . . There's nothing to do with this novel but enjoy it."

—*San Antonio Express News on
Morning, Noon & Night*

The Incomparable Sidney Sheldon

Best known today for his exciting blockbuster novels, Sidney Sheldon is the author of *Are You Afraid of the Dark?*, *The Sky is Falling*, *Tell Me Your Dreams*, *The Best Laid Plans*, *Morning, Noon & Night*, *Nothing Lasts Forever*, *The Stars Shine Down*, *The Doomsday Conspiracy*, *Memories of Midnight*, *The Sands of Time*, *Windmills of the Gods*, *If Tomorrow Comes*, *Master of the Game*, *Rage of Angels*, *Bloodline*, *A Stranger in the Mirror*, and *The Other Side of Midnight*. All have been international bestsellers. His first book, *The Naked Face*, was acclaimed by the *New York Times* as "the best first mystery of the year" and received an Edgar nomination. Most of his novels have become major feature films or TV miniseries, and there are more than 300 million copies of his books in print throughout the world.

Before he became a novelist, Sidney Sheldon had already won a Tony Award for Broadway's *Redhead* and an Academy Award for ~~*The Bad Girl*~~ *and the Bobby-Soxer*. He has won several ~~Box Office Awards~~ and has written the screenplays for ~~twenty-five~~ motion pictures, including *Easter Parade* (with Judy Garland) and *Annie Get Your Gun*, both of which won ~~High Screen~~ Writers Guild Awards. In addition, he penned six other Broadway hits and created three long-running television series, *The Patty Duke Show*, *I Dream of Jeannie*, which he also produced and for which he received an Emmy nomination, and *Hart to Hart*. A writer who has delighted millions with his award-winning plays, movies, novels, and television shows, Sidney Sheldon reigns as the master storyteller.

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This is a work of fiction. Except for the names of theatrical personalities, all characters are imaginary.

If you would seek to find yourself
Look not in a mirror
For there is but a shadow there,
A stranger . . .

—SILENIUS, *Odes to Truth*

PROLOGUE

On a Saturday morning in November in 1969, a series of bizarre and inexplicable events occurred aboard the fifty-five-thousand-ton luxury liner *S.S. Bretagne* as it was preparing to sail from the Port of New York to Le Havre.

Claude Dessard, chief purser of the *Bretagne*, a capable and meticulous man, ran, as he was fond of saying, a "tight ship." In the fifteen years Dessard had served aboard the *Bretagne*, he had never encountered a situation he had not been able to deal with efficiently and discreetly. Considering that the *S.S. Bretagne* was a French ship, this was high tribute, indeed. However, on this particular day it was as though a thousand devils were conspiring against him. It was of small consolation to his sensitive Gallic pride that the intensive investigations conducted afterward by the American and French branches of Interpol and the steamship line's own security forces failed to turn up a single plausible explanation for the extraordinary happenings of that day.

Because of the fame of the persons involved, the story was told in headlines all over the world, but the mystery remained unsolved.

As for Claude Dessard, he retired from the Cie. Trans-atlantique and opened a bistro in Nice, where he

never tired of reliving with his patrons that strange, unforgettable November day.

It had begun, Dessard recalled, with the delivery of flowers from the President of the United States.

One hour before sailing time, an official black limousine bearing government license plates had driven up to Pier 92 on the lower Hudson River. A man wearing a charcoal-gray suit had disembarked from the car, carrying a bouquet of thirty-six Sterling Silver roses. He had made his way to the foot of the gangplank and exchanged a few words with Alain Safford, the *Bretagne's* officer on duty. The flowers were ceremoniously transferred to Janin, a junior deck officer, who delivered them and then sought out Claude Dessard.

"I thought you might wish to know," Janin reported. "Roses from the President to Mme. Temple."

Jill Temple. In the last year, her photograph had appeared on the front pages of daily newspapers and on magazine covers from New York to Bangkok and Paris to Leningrad. Claude Dessard recalled reading that she had been number one in a recent poll of the world's most admired women, and that a large number of newborn girls were being christened Jill. The United States of America had always had its heroines. Now, Jill Temple had become one. Her courage and the fantastic battle she had won and then so ironically lost had captured the imagination of the world. It was a great love story, but it was much more than that: it contained all the elements of classic Greek drama and tragedy.

Claude Dessard was not fond of Americans, but in this case he was delighted to make an exception. He had tremendous admiration for Mme. Temple. She was—and this was the highest accolade Dessard could tender—*galante*. He resolved to see to it that her voyage on his ship would be a memorable one.

The chief purser turned his thoughts away from Jill Temple and concentrated on a final check of the passen-