



sidney sheldon

the master of the unexpected

windmills of the gods



international bestseller

SIDNEY SHELDON

Windmills of the Gods

HARPER

For Jorja

This novel is entirely a work of fiction.
The names, characters and incidents portrayed in it are
the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to
actual persons, living or dead, events or localities is
entirely coincidental.

Harper

An imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers
77-85 Fulham Palace Road,
Hammersmith, London W6 8JB

www.harpercollins.co.uk

This paperback edition 2006

1

First published in Great Britain by
Fontana 1987

Copyright © Sheldon Literary Trust 1987

The author asserts the moral right to
be identified as the author of this work

ISBN-13: 978 0 00 722827 0

ISBN-10: 0 00 722827 9

Set in Sabon by Palimpsest Book Production Limited,
Polmont, Stirlingshire

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be
reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted,
in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical,
photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior
permission of the publishers.

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not,
by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out or
otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent
in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it
is published and without a similar condition including this
condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

WINDMILLS OF THE GODS

A master storyteller, Sidney Sheldon is the author of eighteen novels (which have sold over 300 million copies), over 200 television scripts, twenty-five major motion pictures and six Broadway plays, ranking him as one of the world's most prolific writers. His first book, *The Naked Face*, was acclaimed by the *New York Times* as 'the best first mystery novel of the year' and subsequently each of his highly popular books has hit No. 1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list.

For more about Sidney Sheldon, visit his website at www.sidneysheldon.com

Visit www.AuthorTracker.co.uk for exclusive information on Sidney Sheldon.

Books by Sidney Sheldon

The Naked Face
The Other Side of Midnight
A Stranger in the Mirror
Bloodline
Rage of Angels
Master of the Game
If Tomorrow Comes
Windmills of the Gods
The Sands of Time
Memories of Midnight
The Doomsday Conspiracy
The Stars Shine Down
Nothing Lasts Forever
Morning, Noon & Night
The Best Laid Plans
Tell Me Your Dreams
The Sky is Falling
Are You Afraid of the Dark?
The Other Side of Me

We are all victims, Anselmo. Our destinies are decided by a cosmic roll of the dice, the whims of the stars, the vagrant breezes of fortune that blow from the windmills of the gods.

A Final Destiny H. L. Dietrich

PROLOGUE

Ilomantsi, Finland

The meeting took place in a comfortable, weather-proofed cabin in a remote, wooded area some 200 miles from Helsinki. The members of the Western Branch of the Committee had arrived discreetly at irregular intervals. They came from eight different countries, but their visit had been quietly arranged by a senior minister in the Valtioneuvosto, the Finnish Council of State, and there was no record of entry in their passports. Upon their arrival, armed guards escorted them into the cabin, and when the last visitor appeared, the cabin door was locked and the guards took up positions in the full-throated January winds, alert for any sign of intruders.

The members seated around the large, rectangular table were men in powerful positions, high in the councils of their respective governments. They had met before and under less clandestine

circumstances, and they trusted one another because they had no choice. For added security, each had been assigned a code name.

The meeting lasted almost five hours, and the discussion was heated.

Finally, the chairman decided the time had come to call for a vote. He rose, standing tall, and turned to the man seated at his right. 'Sigurd?'

'Yes.'

'Odin?'

'Yes.'

'Balder?'

'We're moving too hastily. If this should be exposed, our lives would be -'

'Yes, or no, please?'

'No . . .'

'Freyr?'

'Yes.'

'Sigmund?'

'Nein. The danger -'

'Thor?'

'Yes.'

'Tyr?'

'Yes.'

'I vote "yes". The resolution is passed. I will so inform the Controller. At our next meeting, I will give you his recommendation for the person best qualified to carry out the motion. We will observe the usual precautions and leave at twenty-minute intervals. Thank you, gentlemen.'

Two hours and forty-five minutes later, the cabin

was deserted. A crew of experts carrying kerosene moved in and set the cabin on fire, the red flames licked by the hungry winds.

When the Palokunta, the fire brigade from Ilomantsi, finally reached the scene, there was nothing left to see but the smouldering embers that outlined the cabin against the hissing snow.

The assistant to the fire chief approached the ashes, bent down and sniffed. 'Kerosene,' he said. 'Arson.'

The fire chief was staring at the ruins, a puzzled expression on his face. 'That's strange,' he muttered.

'What?'

'I was hunting in these woods last week. There was no cabin.'

BOOK ONE

ONE

Washington, D.C.

Stanton Rogers was destined to be President of the United States. He was a charismatic politician, highly visible to an approving public, and backed by powerful friends. Unfortunately for Rogers, his libido got in the way of his career. Or, as the Washington mavens put it: 'Old Stanton fucked himself out of the Presidency.'

It was not that Stanton Rogers fancied himself a Casanova. On the contrary, until that one fatal bedroom escapade, he had been a model husband. He was handsome, wealthy, and on his way to one of the most important positions in the world, and although he had had ample opportunity to cheat on his wife, he had never given another woman a thought.

There was a second, perhaps greater irony: Stanton Rogers' wife, Elizabeth, was social, beautiful and intelligent, and the two of them shared a common interest in almost everything, whereas

Barbara, the woman Rogers fell in love with and eventually married after a much-headlined divorce, was five years older than Stanton, pleasant-faced, rather than pretty, and seemed to have nothing in common with him. Stanton was athletic; Barbara hated all forms of exercise. Stanton was gregarious; Barbara preferred to be alone with her husband or to entertain small groups. The biggest surprise to those who knew Stanton Rogers was the political differences. Stanton was a liberal, while Barbara had grown up in a family of arch-conservatives.

Paul Ellison, Stanton's closest friend, had said. 'You must be out of your mind, chum! You and Liz are practically in the *Guinness Book of Records* as the perfect married couple. You can't throw that away for some quick lay.'

Stanton Rogers had replied tightly, 'Back off, Paul. I'm in love with Barbara. As soon as I get a divorce, we're getting married.'

'Do you have any idea what this is going to do to your career?'

'Half the marriages in this country end in divorce. It won't do anything,' Stanton Rogers replied.

He had proved to be a poor prophet. News of the bitterly fought divorce was manna for the press, and the gossip papers played it up as luridly as possible, with pictures of Stanton Rogers' love nest, and stories of secret midnight trysts. The newspapers kept the story alive as long as they could, and when the furore died down, the powerful friends who had

backed Stanton Rogers for the Presidency quietly disappeared. They found a new white knight to champion: Paul Ellison.

Ellison was a sound choice. While he had neither Stanton Rogers' good looks nor his charisma, he was intelligent, likeable and had the right background. He was short in stature, with regular, even features and candid blue eyes. He had been happily married for ten years to the daughter of a steel magnate, and he and Alice were known as a warm and loving couple.

Like Stanton Rogers, Paul Ellison had attended Yale and was graduated from Harvard Law School. The two men had grown up together. Their families had adjoining summer homes at Southampton, and the boys swam together, organized baseball teams, and later, double-dated. They were in the same class at Harvard. Paul Ellison did well, but it was Stanton Rogers who was the star pupil. As editor of the *Harvard Law Review*, he saw to it that his friend Paul became assistant editor. Stanton Rogers' father was a senior partner in a prestigious Wall Street law firm, and when Stanton worked there summers, he arranged for Paul to be there. Once out of law school, Stanton Rogers' political star began rising meteorically, and if he was the comet, Paul Ellison was the tail.

The divorce changed everything. It was now Stanton Rogers who became the appendage to Paul Ellison. The trail leading to the top of the mountain

took almost fifteen years. Ellison lost an election for the Senate, won the following one, and in the next few years became a highly visible, articulate lawmaker. He fought against waste in government and Washington bureaucracy. He was a populist, and believed in international détente. He was asked to give the nominating speech for the incumbent president running for re-election. It was a brilliant, impassioned speech that made everyone sit up and take notice. Four years later, Paul Ellison was elected President of the United States. His first appointment was Stanton Rogers as Presidential Foreign Affairs Adviser.

Marshall McLuhan's theory that television would turn the world into a global village had become a reality. The inauguration of the forty-second President of the United States was carried by satellite to more than 190 countries.

In the Black Rooster, a Washington, D.C., hang-out for newsmen, Ben Cohn, a veteran political reporter for the *Washington Post*, was seated at a table with four colleagues, watching the inauguration on the large television set over the bar.

'The son-of-a-bitch cost me fifty bucks,' one of the reporters complained.

'I warned you not to bet against Ellison,' Ben Cohn chided. 'He's got the magic, baby. You'd better believe it.'

The camera panned to show the massive crowds

gathered on Pennsylvania Avenue, huddled inside their overcoats against the bitter January wind, listening to the ceremony on loudspeakers set up around the podium. Jason Merlin, Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, finished the swearing-in oath, and the new President shook his hand and stepped up to the microphone.

‘Look at those idiots standing out there freezing their asses off,’ Ben Cohn commented. ‘Do you know why they aren’t home, like normal human beings, watching it on television?’

‘Why?’

‘Because a man is making history, my friends. One day all those people are going to tell their children and grandchildren that they were there the day Paul Ellison was sworn in. And they’re all going to brag “I was so close to him I could have touched him.”’

‘You’re a cynic, Cohn.’

‘And proud of it. Every politician in the world comes out of the same cookie cutter. They’re all in it for what they can get out of it. Face it, fellas, our new President is a liberal and an idealist. That’s enough to give any intelligent man nightmares. My definition of a liberal is a man who has his ass firmly stuck in clouds of cotton wool.’

The truth was that Ben Cohn was not as cynical as he sounded. He had covered Paul Ellison’s career from the beginning and, while it was true that Cohn had not been impressed at first, as Ellison moved up the political ladder, Ben Cohn