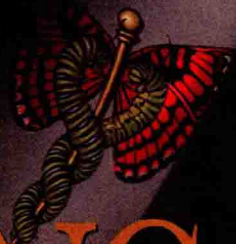


SIDNEY
SHELDON

A N O V E L

NOTHING
LASTS
FOREVER



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THE NAKED FACE

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TO ANASTASIA AND RODERICK MANN, WITH LOVE

The author wishes to express his deep appreciation to the
many doctors, nurses, and medical technicians
who were generous enough to share
their expertise with him.

What cannot be cured with medicaments is cured by the knife, what the knife cannot cure is cured with the searing iron, and whatever this cannot cure must be considered incurable.

—HIPPOCRATES, CIRCA 480 B.C.

There are three classes of human beings: men, women, and women physicians.

—SIR WILLIAM OSLER

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Prologue

San Francisco
Spring 1995

District Attorney Carl Andrews was in a fury. “What the hell is going on here?” he demanded. “We have three doctors living together and working at the same hospital. One of them almost gets an entire hospital closed down, the second one kills a patient for a million dollars, and the third one is murdered.”

Andrews stopped to take a deep breath. “And they’re all women! Three goddam women doctors! The media is treating them like celebrities. They’re all over the tube. *60 Minutes* did a segment on them. Barbara Walters did a special on them. I can’t pick up a newspaper or magazine without seeing their pictures, or reading about them. Two to one, Hollywood is going to make a movie about them, and they’ll turn the bitches into some kind of heroines! I wouldn’t be surprised if the government put their faces on postage stamps, like Presley. Well, by God, I won’t have it!” He slammed a fist down against the photograph of a woman on the cover of *Time* magazine. The

caption read: "Dr. Paige Taylor—Angel of Mercy or the Devil's Disciple?"

"Dr. Paige Taylor." The district attorney's voice was filled with disgust. He turned to Gus Venable, his chief prosecuting attorney. "I'm handing this trial over to you, Gus. I want a conviction. Murder One. The gas chamber."

"Don't worry," Gus Venable said quietly. "I'll see to it."

Sitting in the courtroom watching Dr. Paige Taylor, Gus Venable thought: *She's jury-proof*. Then he smiled to himself. *No one is jury-proof*. She was tall and slender, with eyes that were a startling dark brown in her pale face. A disinterested observer would have dismissed her as an attractive woman. A more observant one would have noticed something else—that all the different phases of her life coexisted in her. There was the happy excitement of the child, superimposed onto the shy uncertainty of the adolescent and the wisdom and pain of the woman. There was a look of innocence about her. *She's the kind of girl*, Gus Venable thought cynically, *a man would be proud to take home to his mother. If his mother had a taste for cold-blooded killers.*

There was an almost eerie sense of remoteness in her eyes, a look that said that Dr. Paige Taylor had retreated deep inside herself to a different place, a different time, far from the cold, sterile courtroom where she was trapped.

The trial was taking place in the venerable old San Francisco Hall of Justice on Bryant Street. The building,