

# SIDNEY SHELDON

MORNING,  
NOON &  
NIGHT



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**MORNING**



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# Chapter One

Dmitri asked, "Do you know we're being followed, Mr. Stanford?"

"Yes." He had been aware of them for the past twenty-four hours.

The two men and the woman were dressed casually, attempting to blend in with the summer tourists strolling along the cobbled streets in the early morning, but it was difficult to remain inconspicuous in a place as small as the fortified village of St.-Paul-de-Vence.

Harry Stanford had first noticed them because they were *too* casual, trying *too* hard not to look at him. Wherever he turned, one of them was in the background.

Harry Stanford was an easy target to follow. He was six feet tall, with white hair lapping over his collar and an aristocratic, almost imperious face. He was accompanied by a strikingly lovely young brunette, a pure-

white German shepherd, and Dmitri Kaminsky, a six-foot four-inch bodyguard with a bulging neck and sloping forehead. *Hard to lose us*, Stanford thought.

He knew who had sent them and why, and he was filled with a sense of imminent danger. He had learned long ago to trust his instincts. Instinct and intuition had helped make him one of the wealthiest men in the world. *Forbes* magazine estimated the value of Stanford Enterprises at six billion dollars, while the *Fortune* 500 appraised it at seven billion. *The Wall Street Journal*, *Barron's*, and *The Financial Times* had all done profiles on Harry Stanford, trying to explain his mystique, his amazing sense of timing, the ineffable acumen that had created the giant Stanford Enterprises. None had fully succeeded.

What they all agreed on was that he had an almost palpable, manic energy. He was inexhaustible. His philosophy was simple: A day without making a deal was a day wasted. He wore out his competitors, his staff, and everyone else who came in contact with him. He was a phenomenon, larger than life. He thought of himself as a religious man. He believed in God, and the God he believed in wanted him to be rich and successful, and his enemies dead.

Harry Stanford was a public figure, and the press knew everything about him. Harry Stanford was a private figure, and the press knew nothing about him. They had written about his charisma, his lavish life-style, his pri-

vate plane and his yacht, and his legendary homes in Hobe Sound, Morocco, Long Island, London, the South of France, and of course his magnificent estate, Rose Hill, in the Back Bay area of Boston. But the real Harry Stanford remained an enigma.

"Where are we going?" the woman asked.

He was too preoccupied to answer. The couple on the other side of the street was using the cross-switch technique, and they had just changed partners again. Along with his sense of danger, Stanford felt a deep anger that they were invading his privacy. They had dared come to him in this place, his secret haven from the rest of the world.

St.-Paul-de-Vence is a picturesque, medieval village, weaving its ancient magic on a hilltop in the Alps Maritimes, situated inland between Cannes and Nice. It is surrounded by a spectacular and enchanting landscape of hills and valleys covered with flowers, orchards, and pine forests. The village itself, a cornucopia of artists' studios, galleries, and wonderful antiques shops, is a magnet for tourists from all over the world.

Harry Stanford and his group turned onto the Rue Grande.

Stanford turned to the woman, "Sophia, do you like museums?"



"Yes, *caro*." She was eager to please him. She had never met anyone like Harry Stanford. *Wait until I tell mie amice about him. I didn't think there was anything left for me to learn about sex, but my God, he's so creative! He's wearing me out!*

They went up the hill to the Fondation Maeght art museum, and browsed through its renowned collection of paintings by Bonnard and Chagall and many other contemporary artists. When Harry Stanford casually glanced around, he observed the woman at the other end of the gallery, earnestly studying a Miró.

Stanford turned to Sophia. "Hungry?"

"Yes. If you are." *Must not be pushy.*

"Good. We'll have lunch at La Colombe d'Or."

La Colombe d'Or was one of Stanford's favorite restaurants, a sixteenth-century house at the entrance to the old village, converted into a hotel and restaurant. Stanford and Sophia sat at a table in the garden, by the pool, where Stanford could admire the Braque and Calder.

Prince, the white German shepherd, lay at his feet, ever watchful. The dog was Harry Stanford's trademark. Where Stanford went, Prince went. It was rumored that at Harry Stanford's command, the animal would tear out a person's throat. No one wanted to test that rumor.

Dmitri sat by himself at a table near the hotel entrance, carefully observing the other patrons as they came and went.

Stanford turned to Sophia. "Shall I order for you, my dear?"

"Please."

Harry Stanford prided himself on being a gourmet. He ordered a green salad and *fricassée de lotte* for both of them.

As they were being served their main course, Daniele Roux, who ran the hotel with her husband, François, approached the table and smiled. "*Bonjour*. Is everything all right, Monsieur Stanford?"

"Wonderful, Madame Roux."

And it was going to be. *They are pygmies, trying to fell a giant. They're in for a big disappointment.*

Sophia said, "I've never been here before. It's such a lovely village."

Stanford turned his attention to her. Dmitri had picked her up for him in Nice a day earlier.

"Mr. Stanford, I brought someone for you."

"Any problem?" Stanford had asked.

Dmitri had grinned. "None." He had seen her in the lobby of the Hotel Negresco, and had approached her.

"Excuse me, do you speak English?"

"Yes." She had a lilting Italian accent.

"The man I work for would like you to have dinner with him."

She had been indignant. "I'm not a *puttana*! I'm an actress," she had said haughtily. In fact, she had had a walk-on part in Pupi Avati's last film, and a role with

two lines of dialogue in a Giuseppe Tornatore film. "Why would I have dinner with a stranger?"

Dmitri had taken out a wad of hundred-dollar bills. He pushed five into her hand. "My friend is very generous. He has a yacht, and he is lonely." He had watched her expression go through a series of changes from indignation, to curiosity, to interest.

"As it happens, I'm between pictures." She smiled. "It would probably do no harm to have dinner with your friend."

"Good. He will be pleased."

"Where is he?"

"St.-Paul-de-Vence."

Dmitri had chosen well. Italian. In her late twenties. A sensuous, catlike face. Full-breasted figure. Now, looking at her across the table, Harry Stanford made a decision.

"Do you like to travel, Sophia?"

"I adore it."

"Good. We'll go on a little trip. Excuse me a moment."

Sophia watched as he walked into the restaurant and to a public telephone, outside the men's room.

Stanford put a *jeton* in the slot and dialed. "Marine operator, please."

Seconds later, a voice said, "*C'est l'opératrice maritime.*"

"I want to put in a call to the yacht *Blue Skies*. Whiskey bravo lima nine eight zero. . . ."

The conversation lasted five minutes, and when Stanford was finished, he dialed the airport at Nice. The conversation was shorter this time.

When Stanford was through talking, he spoke to Dmitri, who rapidly left the restaurant. Then he returned to Sophia. "Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Let's take a walk." He needed time to work out a plan.

It was a perfect day. The sun had splashed pink clouds across the horizon and rivers of silver light ran through the streets.

They strolled along the Rue Grande, past the Église, the beautiful twelfth-century church, and stopped at the *boulangerie* in front of the Arch to buy some fresh baked bread. When they came out, one of the three watchers was standing outside, busily studying the church. Dmitri was also waiting for them.

Harry Stanford handed the bread to Sophia. "Why don't you take this up to the house? I'll be along in a few minutes."

"All right." She smiled and said softly, "Hurry, *caro*."

Stanford watched her leave, then motioned to Dmitri.

"What did you find out?"

"The woman and one of the men are staying at Le Hameau, on the road to La Colle."

Harry Stanford knew the place. It was a whitewashed farmhouse with an orchard a mile west of St.-Paul-de-Vence. "And the other one?"

"At Le Mas d'Artigny." Le Mas d'Artigny was a Provençal mansion on a hillside two miles west of St.-Paul-de-Vence.

"What do you want me to do with them, sir?"

"Nothing. I'll take care of them."

Harry Stanford's villa was on the Rue de Casette, next to the *mairie*, in an area of narrow cobblestone streets and very old houses. The villa was a five-level house made of old stone and plaster. Two levels below the main house were a garage and an old *cave* used as a wine cellar. A stone staircase led to upstairs bedrooms, an office, and a tiled-roof terrace. The entire house was furnished in French antiques and filled with flowers.

When Stanford returned to the villa, Sophia was in his bedroom, waiting for him. She was naked.

"What took you so long?" she whispered.

In order to survive, Sophia Matteo often picked up money as a call girl between film assignments, and she was used to faking orgasms to please her clients, but with this man, there was no need to pretend. He was insatiable, and she found herself climaxing again and again.

When they were finally exhausted, Sophia put her arms around him, and murmured happily, "I could stay here forever, *caro*."

*I wish I could*, Stanford thought, grimly.

They had dinner at Le Café de la Place in Plaza du Général-de-Gaulle, near the entrance to the village. The dinner was delicious, and for Stanford the danger added spice to the meal.

When they were finished, they made their way back to the villa. Stanford walked slowly, to make certain his pursuers followed.

At one A.M., a man standing across the street watched the lights in the villa being turned off, one by one, until the building was in total darkness.

At four-thirty in the morning, Harry Stanford went into the guest bedroom where Sophia slept. He shook her gently. "Sophia . . . ?"

She opened her eyes and looked up at him, a smile

of anticipation on her face, then frowned. He was fully dressed. She sat up. "Is something wrong?"

"No, my dear. Everything is fine. You said you liked to travel. Well, we're going to take a little trip."

She was wide awake now. "At this hour?"

"Yes. We must be very quiet."

"But . . ."

"Hurry."

Fifteen minutes later, Harry Stanford, Sophia, Dmitri, and Prince were moving down the stone staircase to the basement garage where a brown Renault was parked. Dmitri quietly opened the garage door and looked out onto the street. Except for Stanford's white Corniche, parked in front, it seemed deserted. "All clear."

Stanford turned to Sophia. "We're going to play a little game. You and I are going to get in the back of the Renault and lie down on the floor."

Her eyes widened. "Why?"

"Some business competitors have been following me," he said earnestly. "I'm about to close a very large deal, and they're trying to find out about it. If they do, it could cost me a lot of money."

"I understand," Sophia said. She had no idea what he was talking about.

Five minutes later, they were driving past the gates of the village on the road to Nice. A man seated on a bench watched the brown Renault as it sped through the gates. At the wheel was Dmitri Kaminsky and beside him was Prince. The man hastily took out a cellular telephone and began dialing.

"We may have a problem," he told the woman.

"What kind of problem?"

"A brown Renault just drove out of the gates. Dmitri Kaminsky was driving, and the dog was in the car, too."

"And Stanford wasn't in the car?"

"No."

"I don't believe it. His bodyguard never leaves him at night, and that dog never leaves him, ever."

"Is his Corniche still parked in front of the villa?" asked the other man sent to follow Harry Stanford.

"Yes, but maybe he switched cars."

"Or it could be a trick! Call the airport."

Within minutes, they were talking to the tower.

"Monsieur Stanford's plane? *Oui*. It arrived an hour ago and has already refueled."

Five minutes later, two members of the surveillance team were on their way to the airport, while the third kept watch on the sleeping villa.

As the brown Renault passed through La Coalle-sur-Loup, Stanford moved onto the seat. "It's all right to sit up, now," he told Sophia. He turned to Dmitri, "Nice airport. Hurry."



