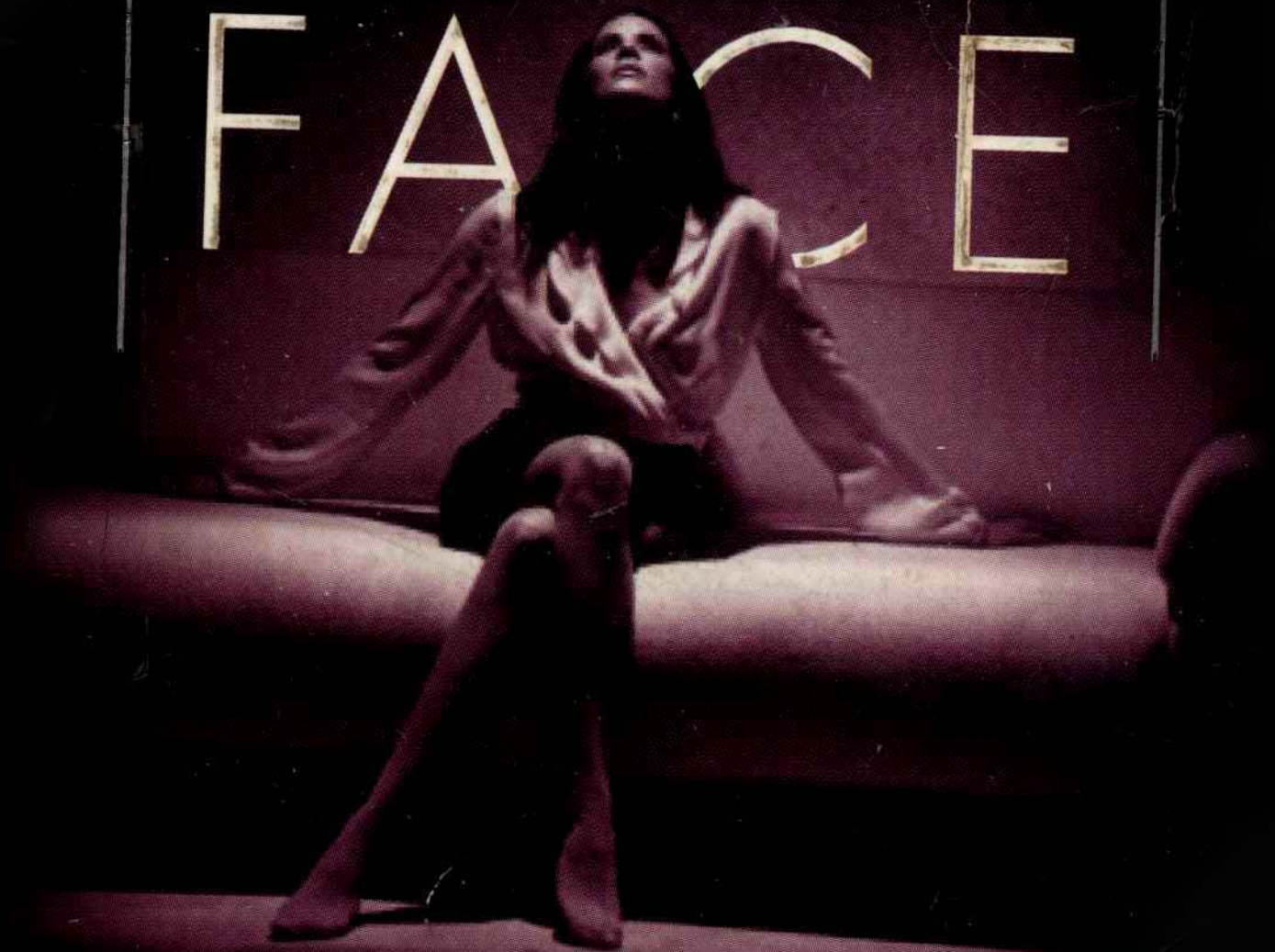


SIDNEY SHELDON

THE
NAKED
FACE



SIDNEY SHELDON

**THE NAKED
FACE**

WARNER BOOKS

NEW YORK BOSTON

If you purchase this book without a cover you should be aware that this book may have been stolen property and reported as "unsold and destroyed" to the publisher. In such case neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this "stripped book."

WARNER BOOKS EDITION

Copyright © 1970 by Sheldon Literary Trust

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review.

This Warner Books Edition is published by arrangement with William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10019

Art direction by Jackie Merri Meyer

Cover design by Bradford Foltz

Cover photography by Herman Estevez

Hair and make-up by Belinda Moss

Styling by Sharon Spiak

Warner Books, Inc., 1271 Avenue of the Americas, NY, NY 10020

Visit our Web site at www.twbookmark.com



A Time Warner Company

Printed in the United States of America

First Warner Books Printing: February 1984

Reissued: July 2001

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

ATTENTION: SCHOOLS AND CORPORATIONS

WARNER books are available at quantity discounts with bulk purchase for educational, business, or sales promotional use. For information, please write to: SPECIAL SALES DEPARTMENT, WARNER BOOKS, 1271 AVENUE OF THE AMERICAS, NEW YORK, NY 10020

The Incomparable Sidney Sheldon

Best known today for his exciting blockbuster novels, Sidney Sheldon is the author of *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*. Almost all have been number-one 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 Award. 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 Bachelor and the Bobby Soxer*. He has written the screenplays for twenty-three motion pictures, including *Easter Parade* (with Judy Garland) and *Annie Get Your Gun*. In addition, he penned six other Broadway hits and created three long-running television series, including *Hart to Hart* and *I Dream of Jeannie*, which he also produced. A writer who has delighted millions with his award-winning plays, movies, novels, and television shows, Sidney Sheldon reigns as one of the most popular storytellers of all time.

To learn more about this book and author, visit www.sidneysheldon.com located on our Web site, www.twbookmark.com.

NOVELS BY SIDNEY SHELDON

Best Laid Plans

Bloodline

The Doomsday Conspiracy

If Tomorrow Comes

Master of the Game

Memories of Midnight

Morning, Noon & Night

The Naked Face

Nothing Lasts Forever

The Other Side of Midnight

Rage of Angels

The Sands of Time

The Sky is Falling

The Stars Shine Down

A Stranger in the Mirror

Tell Me Your Dreams

Windmills of the Gods

*To the Women in my Life—
Jorja, Mary, and Natalie*

one

AT TEN MINUTES before eleven in the morning, the sky exploded into a carnival of white confetti that instantly blanketed the city. The soft snow turned the already frozen streets of Manhattan to gray slush and the icy December wind herded the Christmas shoppers toward the comfort of their apartments and homes.

On Lexington Avenue the tall, thin man in the yellow rain slicker moved along with the rushing Christmas crowd to a rhythm of his own. He was walking rapidly, but it was not with the frantic pace of the other pedestrians who were trying to escape the cold. His head was lifted and he seemed oblivious to the

passersby who bumped against him. He was free after a lifetime of purgatory, and he was on his way home to tell Mary that it was finished. The past was going to bury its dead and the future was bright and golden. He was thinking how her face would glow when he told her the news. As he reached the corner of Fifty-ninth Street, the traffic light ambered its way to red and he stopped with the impatient crowd. A few feet away, a Salvation Army Santa Claus stood over a large kettle. The man reached in his pocket for some coins, an offering to the gods of fortune. At that instant someone clapped him on the back, a sudden, stinging blow that rocked his whole body. Some overhearty Christmas drunk trying to be friendly.

Or Bruce Boyd. Bruce, who had never known his own strength and had a childish habit of hurting him physically. But he had not seen Bruce in more than a year. The man started to turn his head to see who had hit him, and to his surprise, his knees began to buckle. In slow motion, watching himself from a distance, he could see his body hit the sidewalk. There was a dull pain in his back and it began to spread. It became hard to breathe. He was aware of a parade of shoes moving past his face as though animated with a life of their own. His cheek began to feel

The Naked Face

numb from the freezing sidewalk. He knew he must not lie there. He opened his mouth to ask someone to help him, and a warm, red river began to gush out and flow into the melting snow. He watched in dazed fascination as it moved across the sidewalk and ran down into the gutter. The pain was worse now, but he didn't mind it so much because he had suddenly remembered his good news. He was free. He was going to tell Mary that he was free. He closed his eyes to rest them from the blinding whiteness of the sky. The snow began to turn to icy sleet, but he no longer felt anything.

two

CAROL ROBERTS heard the sounds of the reception door opening and closing and the men walking in, and before she even looked up, she could smell what they were. There were two of them. One was in his middle forties. He was a big mother, about six foot three, and all muscle. He had a massive head with deep-set steely blue eyes and a weary, humorless mouth. The second man was younger. His features were clean-cut, sensitive. His eyes were brown and alert. The two men looked completely different and yet, as far as Carol was concerned, they could have been identical twins.

They were fuzz. That was what she had

smelled. As they moved toward her desk she could feel the drops of perspiration begin to trickle down her armpits through the shield of anti-perspirant. Frantically her mind darted over all the treacherous areas of vulnerability. Chick? Christ, he had kept out of trouble for over six months. Since that night in his apartment when he had asked her to marry him and had promised to quit the gang.

Sammy? He was overseas in the Air Force, and if anything had happened to her brother, they would not have sent these two mothers to break the news. No, they were here to bust her. She was carrying grass in her purse, and some loudmouthed prick had rapped about it. But why two of them? Carol tried to tell herself that they could not touch her. She was no longer some dumb black hooker from Harlem that they could push around. Not any more. She was the receptionist for one of the biggest psychoanalysts in the country. But as the two men moved toward her, Carol's panic increased. There was the feral memory of too many years of hiding in stinking, overcrowded tenement apartments while the white Law broke down doors and hauled away a father, or a sister, or a cousin.

But nothing of the turmoil in her mind showed on her face. At first glance the two detectives saw only a young and nubile, tawny-

The Naked Face

skinned Negress in a smartly tailored beige dress. Her voice was cool and impersonal. "May I help you?" she asked.

Then Lt. Andrew McGreavy, the older detective, spotted the spreading perspiration stain under the armpit of her dress. He automatically filed it away as an interesting piece of information for future use. The doctor's receptionist was up-tight. McGreavy pulled out a wallet with a worn badge pinned onto the cracked imitation leather. "Lieutenant McGreavy, Nineteenth Precinct." He indicated his partner. "Detective Angeli. We're from the Homicide Division."

Homicide? A muscle in Carol's arm twitched involuntarily. *Chick! He had killed someone. He had broken his promise to her and gone back to the gang. He had pulled a robbery and had shot someone, or—was he shot? Dead? Is that what they had come to tell her?* She felt the perspiration stain begin to widen. Carol suddenly became conscious of it. McGreavy was looking at her face, but she knew that he had noticed it. She and the McGreavys of the world needed no words. They recognized each other on sight. They had known each other for hundreds of years.

"We'd like to see Dr. Judd Stevens," said the younger detective. His voice was gentle and polite, and went with his appearance.

She noticed for the first time that he carried a small parcel wrapped in brown paper and held together with string.

It took an instant for his words to sink in. So it wasn't Chick. Or Sammy. Or the grass.

"I'm sorry," she said, barely hiding her relief. "Dr. Stevens is with a patient."

"This will only take a few minutes," McGreavy said. "We want to ask him some questions." He paused. "We can either do it here, or at Police Headquarters."

She looked at the two of them a moment, puzzled. What the hell could two Homicide detectives want with Dr. Stevens? Whatever the police might think, the doctor had not done anything wrong. She knew him too well. How long had it been? Four years. It had started in night court....

It was three A.M. and the overhead lights in the courtroom bathed everyone in an unhealthy pallor. The room was old and tired and uncaring, saturated with the stale smell of fear that had accumulated over the years like layers of flaked paint.

It was Carol's lousy luck that Judge Murphy was sitting on the bench again. She had been up before him only two weeks before and had gotten off with probation. First offense. Meaning it was the first time the bas-