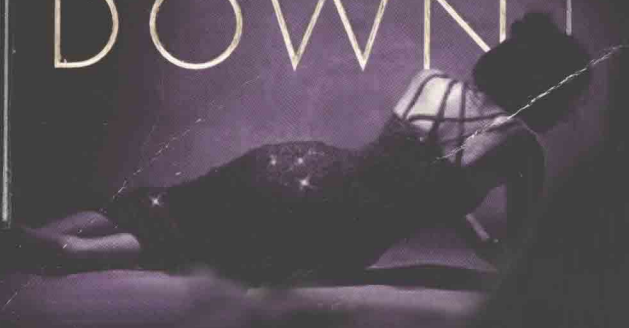


SIDNEY SHELDON

THE STARS SHINE DOWN



SIDNEY SHELDON

THE STARS

WARNER BOOKS

NEW YORK BOSTON

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**PRAISE FOR *THE STARS SHINE DOWN*
AND #1 *NEW YORK TIMES*
BESTSELLING AUTHOR
SIDNEY SHELDON**

"Sidney Sheldon does it again with a suspenseful, well-crafted yarn to keep readers turning the pages. . . . Sheldon's fast-paced twelfth novel is set against the backdrop of the glamorous world of international business. . . . The ending is totally unexpected. *Stars* is provocative, stunning, romantic, and classic Sheldon."

—*Milwaukee Sentinel*

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

—*Denver Rocky Mountain News*

"A master storyteller."

—*USA Today*

"Sheldon hypnotizes the reader as he brings distinctive characters alive. He takes you by the scruff of the neck and defies you to put down the book."

—*Baltimore Sun*

"Fast moving . . . a novel that will keep the reader's attention from beginning to end."

—*San Antonio Express-News*

"Sheldon provides enough twists and turns to satisfy even the most jaded roller-coaster-ride reader."

—*Associated Press*

more . . .

"Sheldon is able to open the door to escapism so cleverly that the threshold is crossed unknowingly. That sort of doorsmanship lifts storytelling to an honorable and worthy calling."

—*Kansas City Star*

"Sheldon is a master teller of tales, a wizard of words who casts an uncanny spell over his readers."

—*Fort Worth Star-Telegram*

"Sheldon is a storyteller for readers who like to be entertained."

—*Pittsburgh Press*

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

—*Detroit Free Press*

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

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The musical mavens who invited me inside their private world—Mona Gollabeck, John Lill, Zubin Mehta, Dudley Moore, André Previn, and the Trustees of the Leonard Bernstein Estate.

I wish also to express my appreciation to the citizens of Glace Bay for their warm hospitality. I hope they will forgive me for the few dramatic licenses I felt it necessary to take.

The expertise in the book belongs to those listed above. Any errors are mine.

BOOK ONE

Chapter One

Thursday, September 10, 1992
8:00 P.M.

The 727 was lost in a sea of cumulus clouds that tossed the plane around like a giant silver feather. The pilot's worried voice came over the speaker.

"Is your seat belt fastened, Miss Cameron?"

There was no response.

"Miss Cameron . . . Miss Cameron . . ."

She was shaken out of a deep reverie. "Yes."
Her thoughts had been drifting to happier times, happier places.

"Are you all right? We should be out of this storm soon."

"I'm fine, Roger."

Maybe we'll get lucky and crash, Lara Cameron thought. It would be a fitting end. Somewhere, somehow, it had all gone wrong. *It's the Fates,* Lara thought. *You can't fight the Fates.* In the past year her life had spun wildly out of control.

She was in danger of losing everything. *At least nothing else can go wrong, she thought wryly. There is nothing else.*

The door of the cockpit opened, and the pilot came into the cabin. He paused for a moment to admire his passenger. The woman was beautiful, with shiny black hair swept up in a crown, a flawless complexion, intelligent eyes, cat-gray. She had changed clothes after they had taken off from Reno, and she was wearing a white, off-the-shoulder Scaasi evening gown that accented a slender, seductive figure. Around her throat was a diamond and ruby necklace. *How can she look so damn calm with her world collapsing around her?* he wondered. The newspapers had been mercilessly attacking her for the past month.

"Is the phone working yet, Roger?"

"I'm afraid not, Miss Cameron. There's a lot of interference because of the storm. We're going to be about an hour late getting into La Guardia. I'm sorry."

I'm going to be late for my birthday party, Lara thought. Everyone is going to be there. Two hundred guests, including the Vice President of the United States, the governor of New York, the mayor, Hollywood celebrities, famous athletes, and financiers from half a dozen countries. She had approved the guest list herself.

She could visualize the Grand Ballroom of the Cameron Plaza, where the party was being held. Baccarat crystal chandeliers would hang from the ceiling, prisms of light reflecting a dazzling diamondlike brilliance. There would be place settings for two hundred guests, at twenty tables. The finest linens, china, silver, and stemware would adorn each place setting, and in the center of each table would be a floral display of white orchids mixed with white freesias.

Bar service would have been set up at both ends of the large reception hall outside. In the middle of the hall would be a long buffet with an ice carving of a swan, and surrounding

it, Beluga caviar, gravlax, shrimp, lobster, and crab, while buckets of champagne were being iced. A ten-tier birthday cake would be in the kitchen waiting. Waiters, captains, and security guards would all be in position by now.

In the ballroom a society orchestra would be on the bandstand, ready to tempt the guests to dance the night away in celebration of her fortieth birthday. Everything would be in readiness.

The dinner was going to be delicious. She had chosen the menu herself. Foie gras to begin with, followed by a cream of mushroom soup under a delicate crust, fillets of John Dory, and then the main course: lamb with rosemary and pommes soufflés with French beans and a mesclun salad with hazelnut oil. Cheese and grapes would be next, followed by the birthday cake and coffee.

It was going to be a spectacular party. She would hold her head high and face her guests as though nothing were wrong. She was Lara Cameron.

When the private jet finally landed at La Guardia, it was an hour and a half late.

Lara turned to the pilot. "We'll be flying back to Reno later tonight, Roger."

"I'll be here, Miss Cameron."

Her limousine and driver were waiting for her at the ramp.

"I was getting worried about you, Miss Cameron."

"We ran into some weather, Max. Let's get to the Plaza as fast as possible."

"Yes, ma'am."

Lara reached for the car phone and dialed Jerry Townsend's number. He had made all the arrangements for the party. Lara wanted to make sure that her guests were being looked after. There was no answer. *He's probably in the ballroom*, Lara thought.

"Hurry, Max."

"Yes, Miss Cameron."

The sight of the huge Cameron Plaza Hotel never failed to give Lara a glow of satisfaction at what she had created, but on this evening she was in too much of a hurry to think about it. Everyone would be waiting for her in the Grand Ballroom.

She pushed through the revolving door and hurried across the large spectacular lobby. Carlos, the assistant manager, saw her and came running to her side.

"Miss Cameron . . ."

"Later," Lara said. She kept walking. She reached the closed door of the Grand Ballroom and stopped to take a deep breath. *I'm ready to face them*, Lara thought. She flung open the door, a smile on her face, and stopped in shock. The room was in total darkness. Were they planning some kind of surprise? She reached for the switch behind the door and flicked it up. The huge room was flooded with incandescent light. There was no one there. Not one single person. Lara stood there, stunned.

What in the world could have happened to two hundred guests? The invitations had read eight o'clock. It was now almost ten o'clock. How could that many people disappear into thin air? It was eerie. She looked around the enormous empty ballroom and shivered. Last year, at her birthday party, this same room had been filled with her friends, filled with music and laughter. She remembered that day so well. . . .

Chapter Two

One year earlier Lara Cameron's appointment schedule for the day had been routine.
September 10, 1991

- 5:00 A.M. Workout with trainer
- 7:00 A.M. Appearance on *Good Morning America*
- 7:45 A.M. Meeting with Japanese bankers
- 9:30 A.M. Jerry Townsend
- 10:30 A.M. Executive Planning Committee
- 11:00 A.M. Faxes, overseas calls, mail
- 11:30 A.M. Construction meeting
- 12:30 P.M. S&L meeting
- 1:00 P.M. Lunch—*Fortune* magazine interview—
Hugh Thompson
- 2:30 P.M. Metropolitan Union bankers
- 4:00 P.M. City Planning Commission
- 5:00 P.M. Meeting with mayor—Gracie Mansion
- 6:15 P.M. Architects meeting

6:30 P.M. Housing Department

7:30 P.M. Cocktails with Dallas investment group

8:00 P.M. Birthday party at Grand Ballroom—
Cameron Plaza

She had been in her workout clothes impatiently waiting when Ken, her trainer, arrived.

"You're late."

"Sorry, Miss Cameron. My alarm didn't go off and . . ."

"I have a busy day. Let's get started."

"Right."

They did stretches for half an hour and then switched to energetic aerobics.

She's got the body of a twenty-one-year-old, Ken thought. *I'd sure love to get that into my bed.* He enjoyed coming here every morning just to look at her, to be near her. People constantly asked him what Lara Cameron was like. He would answer, "The lady's a ten."

Lara went through the strenuous routine easily, but her mind was not on it this morning.

When the session was finally over, Ken said, "I'm going to watch you on *Good Morning America*."

"What?" For a moment Lara had forgotten about it. She had been thinking about the meeting with the Japanese bankers.

"See you tomorrow, Miss Cameron."

"Don't be late again, Ken."

Lara showered and changed and had breakfast alone on the terrace of the penthouse, a breakfast of grapefruit, cereal, and green tea. When she had finished, she went into her study.

Lara buzzed her secretary. "I'll do the overseas calls from the office," Lara said. "I have to be at ABC at seven. Have Max bring the car around."

* * *

The segment on *Good Morning America* went well. Joan Lunden did the interview and was gracious, as always.

"The last time you were on this program," Joan Lunden said, "you had just broken ground for the tallest skyscraper in the world. That was almost four years ago."

Lara nodded. "That's right. Cameron Towers will be finished next year."

"How does it feel to be in your position—to have accomplished all the incredible things you've done and to still be so young and beautiful? You're a role model for so many women."

"You're very flattering," Lara laughed. "I don't have time to think about myself as a role model. I'm much too busy."

"You're one of the most successful real estate developers in a business that's usually considered a man's domain. How do you operate? How do you decide, for instance, where to put up a building?"

"I don't choose the site," Lara said. "The site chooses me. I'll be driving along and I'll pass a vacant field—but that's not what I see. I see a beautiful office building or a lovely apartment building filled with people living comfortably in a nice atmosphere. I dream."

"And you make those dreams come true. We'll be right back after this commercial."

The Japanese bankers were due at seven forty-five. They had arrived from Tokyo the evening before, and Lara had arranged the meeting at that early-morning hour so they would still be jet-lagged after their twelve-hour and ten-minute flight. When they had protested, Lara had said, "I'm so sorry, gentlemen, but I'm afraid it's the only time I have. I'm leaving for South America immediately after our meeting."