

# sidney sheldon

the master of the unexpected

## a stranger in the mirror

international bestseller



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*Los Angeles Times*

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SIDNEY SHELDON

*A Stranger in the Mirror*

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## A STRANGER IN THE MIRROR

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](http://www.sidneysheldon.com)

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*The Other Side of Midnight*  
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*The Best Laid Plans*  
*Tell Me Your Dreams*  
*The Sky is Falling*  
*Are You Afraid of the Dark?*  
*The Other Side of Me*



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THE AUTHOR



## NOTE TO THE READER

The art of making others laugh is surely a wondrous gift from the gods. I affectionately dedicate this book to the comedians, the men and women who have that gift and share it with us. And to one of them in particular: my daughter's godfather, Groucho.



If you would seek to find yourself  
Look not in a mirror  
For there is but a shadow there,  
A stranger . . .

SILENIUS, *Odes to Truth*



## PROLOGUE

On a Saturday morning in early November in 1969, a series of bizarre and inexplicable events occurred aboard the fifty-five-thousand-ton luxury liner SS *Bretagne* as it was preparing to sail from the Port of New York to Le Havre.

Claude Dessard, chief purser of the *Bretagne*, a capable and meticulous man, ran, as he was fond of saying, a 'tight ship'. In the fifteen years Dessard had served aboard the *Bretagne*, he had never encountered a situation he had not been able to deal with efficiently and discreetly. Considering that the SS *Bretagne* was a French ship, this was high tribute, indeed. However, on this particular summer day it was as though a thousand devils were conspiring against him. It was of small consolation to his sensitive Gallic pride that the intensive investigations conducted afterwards by the American and French branches of Interpol and the steamship line's own security forces failed to turn up a single plausible



explanation for the extraordinary happenings of that day.

Because of the fame of the persons involved, the story was told in headlines all over the world, but the mystery remained unsolved.

As for Claude Dessard, he retired from the Cie Transatlantique and opened a bistro in Nice, where he never tired of reliving with his patrons that strange, unforgettable November day.

It had begun, Dessard recalled, with the delivery of flowers from the President of the United States.

One hour before sailing time, an official black limousine bearing government licence plates had driven up to Pier 92 on the lower Hudson River. A man wearing a charcoal-grey suit had disembarked from the car, carrying a bouquet of thirty-six Sterling Silver roses. He had made his way to the foot of the gangplank and exchanged a few words with Alain Safford, the *Bretagne's* officer on duty. The flowers were ceremoniously transferred to Janin, a junior deck officer, who delivered them and then sought out Claude Dessard.

'I thought you might wish to know,' Janin reported. 'Roses from the President to Mme Temple.'

*Jill Temple.* In the last year, her photograph had appeared on the front pages of daily newspapers and on magazine covers from New York to Bangkok and Paris to Leningrad. Claude Dessard recalled reading that she had been number one in



a recent poll of the world's most admired women, and that a large number of newborn girls were being christened Jill. The United States of America had always had its heroines. Now, Jill Temple had become one. Her courage and the fantastic battle she had won and then so ironically lost had captured the imagination of the world. It was a great love story, but it was much more than that: it contained all the elements of classic Greek drama and tragedy.

Claude Dessard was not fond of Americans, but in this case he was delighted to make an exception. He had tremendous admiration for Mme Toby Temple. She was – and this was the highest accolade Dessard could tender – *galante*. He resolved to see to it that her voyage on his ship would be a memorable one.

The chief purser turned his thoughts away from Jill Temple and concentrated on a final check of the passenger list. There was the usual collection of what the Americans referred to as VIPs, an acronym Dessard detested, particularly since Americans had such barbaric ideas about what made a person important. He noted that the wife of a wealthy industrialist was travelling alone. Dessard smiled knowingly and scanned the passenger list for the name of Matt Ellis, a black football star. When he found it, he nodded to himself, satisfied. Dessard was also interested to note that in adjoining cabins were a prominent senator and Carlina Rocca, a South American stripper, whose



names had been linked in recent news stories. His eyes moved down the list.

David Kenyon. Money. An enormous amount of it. He had sailed on the *Bretagne* before. Dessard remembered David Kenyon as a good-looking, deeply tanned man with a lean, athletic body. A quiet, impressive man. Dessard put a CT, for captain's table, after David Kenyon's name.

Clifton Lawrence. A last-minute booking. A small frown appeared on the chief purser's face. Ah, here was a delicate problem. What did one do with Monsieur Lawrence? At one time the question would not even have been raised, for he would automatically have been seated at the captain's table, where he would have regaled everyone with amusing anecdotes. Clifton Lawrence was a theatrical agent who in his day represented many of the major stars in the entertainment business. But, alas, M. Lawrence's day was over. Where once the agent had always insisted on the luxurious Princess Suite, on this voyage he had booked a single room on a lower deck. First class, of course, but still . . . Claude Dessard decided he would reserve his decision until he had gone through the other names.

There was minor royalty aboard, a famous opera singer and a Nobel Prize-declining Russian novelist.

A knock at the door interrupted Dessard's concentration. Antoine, one of the porters, entered.

'Yes - what?' Claude Dessard asked.



Antoine regarded him with rheumy eyes. 'Did you order the theatre locked?'

Dessard frowned. 'What are you talking about?'

'I assumed it was you. Who else would do it? A few minutes ago I checked to see everything was in order. The doors were locked. It sounded like someone was inside the theatre, running a movie.'

'We never run films in port,' Dessard said firmly. 'And at no time are those doors locked. I'll look into it.'

Ordinarily, Claude Dessard would have investigated the report immediately, but now he was harassed by dozens of urgent last-minute details that had to be attended to before the twelve o'clock sailing. His supply of American dollars did not tally, one of the best suites had been booked twice by mistake, and the wedding gift ordered by Captain Montaigne had been delivered to the wrong ship. The captain was going to be furious. Dessard stopped to listen to the familiar sound of the ship's four powerful turbines starting. He felt the movement of the *SS Bretagne* as she slipped away from the pier and began backing her way into the channel. Then Dessard once again became engrossed in his problems.

Half an hour later, Léon, the chief veranda-deck steward, came in. Dessard looked up, impatiently. 'Yes, Léon?'

'I'm sorry to bother you, but I thought you should know . . .'

'Hmm?' Dessard was only half listening, his



mind on the delicate task of completing the seating arrangements for the captain's table for each night of the voyage. The captain was not a man gifted with social graces, and having dinner with his passengers every night was an ordeal for him. It was Dessard's task to see that the group was *agréable*.

'It's about Mme Temple . . .' Léon began.

Dessard instantly laid down his pencil and looked up, his small black eyes alert. 'Yes?'

'I passed her cabin a few minutes ago, and I heard loud voices and a scream. It was difficult to hear clearly through the door, but it sounded as though she was saying, "You've killed me, you've killed me." I thought it best not to interfere, so I came to tell you.'

Dessard nodded. 'You did well. I shall check to make certain that she is all right.'

Dessard watched the deck steward leave. It was unthinkable that anyone would harm a woman like Mme Temple. It was an outrage to Dessard's Gallic sense of chivalry. He put on his uniform cap, stole a quick look in the wall mirror and started for the door. The telephone rang. The chief purser hesitated, then picked it up. 'Dessard.'

'Claude -' It was the third mate's voice. 'For Christ's sake, send someone down to the theatre with a mop, would you? There's blood all over the place.'

Dessard felt a sudden sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach. 'Right away,' Dessard promised. He hung up, arranged for a porter, then dialled the ship's physician.



‘André? Claude.’ He tried to make his voice casual. ‘I was just wondering whether anyone has been in for medical treatment . . . No, no. I wasn’t thinking of seasick pills. This person would be bleeding, perhaps badly . . . I see. Thank you.’ Dessard hung up, filled with a growing sense of unease. He left his office and headed for Jill Temple’s suite. He was halfway there when the next singular event occurred. As Dessard reached the boat deck, he felt the rhythm of the ship’s motion change. He glanced out at the ocean and saw that they had arrived at the Ambrose Lightship, where they would drop their pilot tug and the liner would head for the open seas. But instead, the *Bretagne* was slowing to a stop. Something out of the ordinary was happening.

Dessard hurried to the railing and looked over the side. In the sea below, the pilot tug had been snugged against the cargo hatch of the *Bretagne*, and two sailors were transferring luggage from the liner to the tug. As Dessard watched, a passenger stepped from the ship’s hatch onto the small boat. Dessard could only catch a glimpse of the person’s back, but he was sure that he must have been mistaken in his identification. It was simply not possible. In fact, the incident of a passenger leaving the ship in this fashion was so extraordinary that the chief purser felt a small *frisson* of alarm. He turned and hurriedly made his way to Jill Temple’s suite. There was no response to his knock. He knocked again, this time a little more loudly. ‘Madame



Temple . . . This is Claude Dessard, the chief purser. I was wondering if I might be of any service.'

There was no answer. By now, Dessard's internal warning system was screaming. His instincts told him that there was something terribly wrong, and he had a premonition that it centred, somehow, around this woman. A series of wild, outrageous thoughts danced through his brain. She had been murdered or kidnapped or – He tried the handle of the door. It was unlocked. Slowly, Dessard pushed the door open. Jill Temple was standing at the far end of the cabin, looking out the porthole, her back to him. Dessard opened his mouth to speak, but something in the frozen rigidity of her figure stopped him. He stood there awkwardly for a moment, debating whether to quietly withdraw, when suddenly the cabin was filled with an unearthly, keening sound, like an animal in pain. Helpless before such a deep private agony, Dessard withdrew, carefully closing the door behind him.

Dessard stood outside the cabin a moment, listening to the wordless cries from within. Then, deeply shaken, he turned and headed for the ship's theatre on the main deck. A porter was mopping up a trail of blood in front of the theatre.

*Mon Dieu*, Dessard thought. *What next?* He tried the door to the theatre. It was unlocked. Dessard entered the large, modern auditorium that could seat six hundred passengers. The auditorium was empty. On an impulse, he went to the projection booth. The door was locked. Only two people had keys to