



sidney sheldon

the master of the unexpected

windmills of
the gods

the international bestseller

SIDNEY SHELDON

Windmills of the Gods

HARPER

For Jorja

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the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to
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Harper

An imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers
77-85 Fulham Palace Road,
Hammersmith, London W6 8JB

www.harpercollins.co.uk

This paperback edition 2006

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First published in Great Britain by
Fontana 1987

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ISBN 978-0-00-783695-6

Set in Sabon by Palimpsest Book Production Limited,
Polmont, Stirlingshire

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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WINDMILLS OF THE GODS

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

Visit www.AuthorTracker.co.uk for exclusive information on Sidney Sheldon.

We are all victims, Anselmo. Our destinies are decided by a cosmic roll of the dice, the whims of the stars, the vagrant breezes of fortune that blow from the windmills of the gods.

A Final Destiny H. L. Dietrich

circumstances, and they trusted one another because they had no choice. For added security, each had been assigned a code name.

The meeting lasted almost five hours, and the discussion was heated.

Finally, the chairman decided the time had come to call for a vote. He rose, standing tall, and turned to the man seated at his right. 'Sigurd?'

'Yes.'

'Odin?'

'Yes.'

'Balder?'

'We're moving too hastily. If this should be exposed, our lives would be -'

'Yes, or no, please?'

'No . . .'

'Freyr?'

'Yes.'

'Sigmund?'

'Nein. The danger -'

'Thor?'

'Yes.'

'Tyr?'

'Yes.'

'I vote "yes". The resolution is passed. I will so inform the Controller. At our next meeting, I will give you his recommendation for the person best qualified to carry out the motion. We will observe the usual precautions and leave at twenty-minute intervals. Thank you, gentlemen.'

Two hours and forty-five minutes later, the cabin

was deserted. A crew of experts carrying kerosene moved in and set the cabin on fire, the red flames licked by the hungry winds.

When the Palokunta, the fire brigade from Ilomantsi, finally reached the scene, there was nothing left to see but the smouldering embers that outlined the cabin against the hissing snow.

The assistant to the fire chief approached the ashes, bent down and sniffed. 'Kerosene,' he said. 'Arson.'

The fire chief was staring at the ruins, a puzzled expression on his face. 'That's strange,' he muttered.

'What?'

'I was hunting in these woods last week. There was no cabin.'

BOOK ONE

ONE

Washington, D.C.

Stanton Rogers was destined to be President of the United States. He was a charismatic politician, highly visible to an approving public, and backed by powerful friends. Unfortunately for Rogers, his libido got in the way of his career. Or, as the Washington mavens put it: 'Old Stanton fucked himself out of the Presidency.'

It was not that Stanton Rogers fancied himself a Casanova. On the contrary, until that one fatal bedroom escapade, he had been a model husband. He was handsome, wealthy, and on his way to one of the most important positions in the world, and although he had had ample opportunity to cheat on his wife, he had never given another woman a thought.

There was a second, perhaps greater irony: Stanton Rogers' wife, Elizabeth, was social, beautiful and intelligent, and the two of them shared a common interest in almost everything, whereas

Barbara, the woman Rogers fell in love with and eventually married after a much-headlined divorce, was five years older than Stanton, pleasant-faced, rather than pretty, and seemed to have nothing in common with him. Stanton was athletic; Barbara hated all forms of exercise. Stanton was gregarious; Barbara preferred to be alone with her husband or to entertain small groups. The biggest surprise to those who knew Stanton Rogers was the political differences. Stanton was a liberal, while Barbara had grown up in a family of arch-conservatives.

Paul Ellison, Stanton's closest friend, had said. 'You must be out of your mind, chum! You and Liz are practically in the *Guinness Book of Records* as the perfect married couple. You can't throw that away for some quick lay.'

Stanton Rogers had replied tightly, 'Back off, Paul. I'm in love with Barbara. As soon as I get a divorce, we're getting married.'

'Do you have any idea what this is going to do to your career?'

'Half the marriages in this country end in divorce. It won't do anything,' Stanton Rogers replied.

He had proved to be a poor prophet. News of the bitterly fought divorce was manna for the press, and the gossip papers played it up as luridly as possible, with pictures of Stanton Rogers' love nest, and stories of secret midnight trysts. The newspapers kept the story alive as long as they could, and when the furore died down, the powerful friends who had

backed Stanton Rogers for the Presidency quietly disappeared. They found a new white knight to champion: Paul Ellison.

Ellison was a sound choice. While he had neither Stanton Rogers' good looks nor his charisma, he was intelligent, likeable and had the right background. He was short in stature, with regular, even features and candid blue eyes. He had been happily married for ten years to the daughter of a steel magnate, and he and Alice were known as a warm and loving couple.

Like Stanton Rogers, Paul Ellison had attended Yale and was graduated from Harvard Law School. The two men had grown up together. Their families had adjoining summer homes at Southampton, and the boys swam together, organized baseball teams, and later, double-dated. They were in the same class at Harvard. Paul Ellison did well, but it was Stanton Rogers who was the star pupil. As editor of the *Harvard Law Review*, he saw to it that his friend Paul became assistant editor. Stanton Rogers' father was a senior partner in a prestigious Wall Street law firm, and when Stanton worked there summers, he arranged for Paul to be there. Once out of law school, Stanton Rogers' political star began rising meteorically, and if he was the comet, Paul Ellison was the tail.

The divorce changed everything. It was now Stanton Rogers who became the appendage to Paul Ellison. The trail leading to the top of the mountain

took almost fifteen years. Ellison lost an election for the Senate, won the following one, and in the next few years became a highly visible, articulate lawmaker. He fought against waste in government and Washington bureaucracy. He was a populist, and believed in international détente. He was asked to give the nominating speech for the incumbent president running for re-election. It was a brilliant, impassioned speech that made everyone sit up and take notice. Four years later, Paul Ellison was elected President of the United States. His first appointment was Stanton Rogers as Presidential Foreign Affairs Adviser.

Marshall McLuhan's theory that television would turn the world into a global village had become a reality. The inauguration of the forty-second President of the United States was carried by satellite to more than 190 countries.

In the Black Rooster, a Washington, D.C., hang-out for newsmen, Ben Cohn, a veteran political reporter for the *Washington Post*, was seated at a table with four colleagues, watching the inauguration on the large television set over the bar.

'The son-of-a-bitch cost me fifty bucks,' one of the reporters complained.

'I warned you not to bet against Ellison,' Ben Cohn chided. 'He's got the magic, baby. You'd better believe it.'

The camera panned to show the massive crowds

gathered on Pennsylvania Avenue, huddled inside their overcoats against the bitter January wind, listening to the ceremony on loudspeakers set up around the podium. Jason Merlin, Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, finished the swearing-in oath, and the new President shook his hand and stepped up to the microphone.

‘Look at those idiots standing out there freezing their asses off,’ Ben Cohn commented. ‘Do you know why they aren’t home, like normal human beings, watching it on television?’

‘Why?’

‘Because a man is making history, my friends. One day all those people are going to tell their children and grandchildren that they were there the day Paul Ellison was sworn in. And they’re all going to brag “I was so close to him I could have touched him.”’

‘You’re a cynic, Cohn.’

‘And proud of it. Every politician in the world comes out of the same cookie cutter. They’re all in it for what they can get out of it. Face it, fellas, our new President is a liberal and an idealist. That’s enough to give any intelligent man nightmares. My definition of a liberal is a man who has his ass firmly stuck in clouds of cotton wool.’

The truth was that Ben Cohn was not as cynical as he sounded. He had covered Paul Ellison’s career from the beginning and, while it was true that Cohn had not been impressed at first, as Ellison moved up the political ladder, Ben Cohn

began to change his opinion. This politician was nobody's 'yes' man. He was an oak in a forest of willows.

Outside, the sky exploded into icy sheets of rain. Ben Cohn hoped the weather was not an omen of the four years that lay ahead. He turned his attention back to the television set.

'The Presidency of the United States is a torch lit by the American people and passed from hand to hand every four years. The torch that has been entrusted to my care is the most powerful weapon in the world. It is powerful enough to burn down civilization as we know it, or to be a beacon that will light the future for us and for the rest of the world. It is our choice to make. I speak today not only to our allies, but to those countries in the Soviet camp. I say to them now, as we prepare to move into the twenty-first century, that there is no longer any room for confrontation, that we must learn to make the phrase "one world" become a reality. Any other course can only create a holocaust from which no nation would ever recover. I am well aware of the vast chasms that lie between us and the Iron Curtain countries, but the first priority of this administration will be to build unshakeable bridges across those chasms.'

His words rang out with a deep, heartfelt sincerity. *He means it*, Ben Cohn thought. *I hope no one assassinates the bastard.*

* * *

In Junction City, Kansas, it was a pot-bellied stove kind of day, bleak and raw, and snowing so hard that the visibility on Highway 6 was almost zero. Mary Ashley cautiously steered her old station wagon towards the centre of the highway, where the snowploughs had been at work. The storm was going to make her late for the class she was teaching. She drove slowly, careful not to let the car go into a skid.

From the car radio came the President's voice: '... are many in government as well as in private life who insist that America build more moats instead of bridges. My answer to that is that we can no longer afford to condemn ourselves or our children to a future threatened by global confrontations and nuclear war.'

Mary Ashley thought: *I'm glad I voted for him. Paul Ellison is going to make a great President.*

Her grip tightened on the wheel as the snow became a blinding white whirlwind.

In St Croix, a tropical sun was shining in a cloudless, azure sky, but Harry Lantz had no intention of going outside. He was having too much fun indoors. He was in bed, naked, sandwiched between the Dolly sisters. Lantz had empirical evidence that they were not truly sisters. Annette was a tall, natural brunette, and Sally was a tall, natural blonde. Not that Harry Lantz gave a damn whether they were blood relatives. What was important was that they were both expert at what