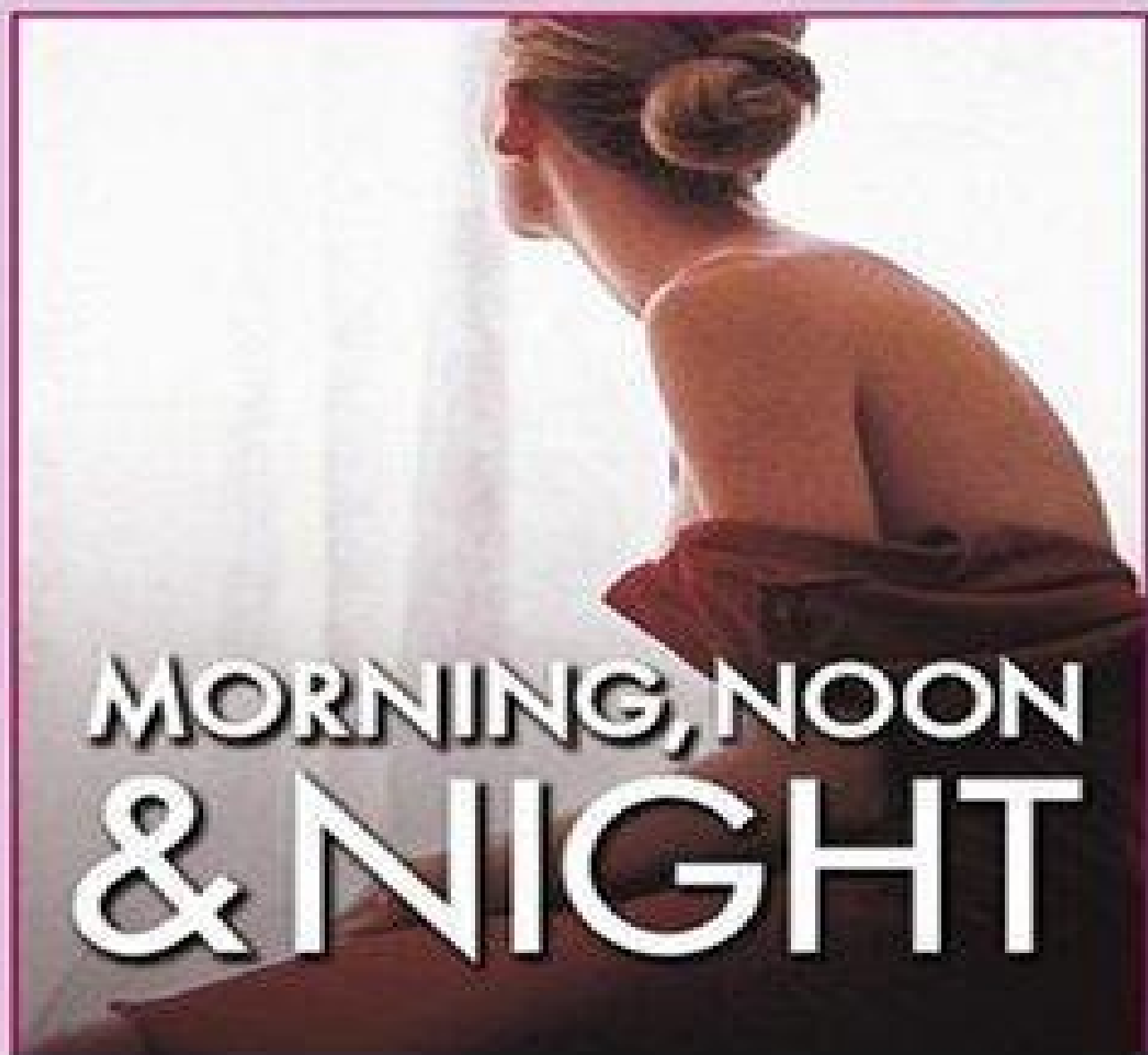


SIDNEY SHELDON



MORNING, NOON
& NIGHT

Sidney Sheldon - Morning Noon Night

Morning Noon Night [151-139-066-4.0]

By: Sidney Sheldon

Category: Fiction Thriller

Synopsis:

The Stanford family is one of the most respected in America - but behind the facade of fame and glamour lies a hidden web of blackmail, drugs and murder.. When Harry Stanford, one of the wealthiest men in the world, mysteriously drowns while cruising on his yacht off the rugged coast of Corsica, it sets off a chain of events that reverberates around the globe. At the family gathering following the funeral in Boston, a strikingly beautiful young woman appears. She claims to be Stanford's daughter and entitled to a share of the tycoon's estate. Is she genuine, or is she an imposter? Sweeping from the splendours of the Italian Riviera, to the fashion salons of Paris and New York, and the opulence of Boston and Florida, Morning, Noon & Night twists and turns its way through intrigue, smoke and mirrors to a surprise ending you'll never forget... 'Sheldon is a writer working at the height of his power.. powerful enough to drag us along with him. I hung on till the very end.'

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Books by

Sidney Sheldon IF TOMORROW COMES MASTER OF THE GAME
RAGE OF ANGELS

**BLOODLINE A STRANGER IN THE
MIRROR THE OTHER SIDE OF
MIDNIGHT THE NAKED**

FACE WINDMILLS OF THE GODS THE SANDS OF TIME MEMORIES
OF MIDNIGHT THE

DOOMSDAY CONSPIRACY THE STARS SHINE DOWN NOTHING LASTS FOREVER

SIDNEY

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purchaser.

To Kimberly with love

Allow the morning sun to

warm. Your heart when you are young And let the soft winds noon Cool your
passion, But beware the night For death lurks there, Waiting, Page 1

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waiting, waiting.,

ARTHUR RIMBAUD MORNING

Chapter One.

Dmitri asked, ' you know we're being followed, NIT Stanfordt '.' 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 private plane and his yacht, and his legendary homes in Hobe Sound, Morocco, Long Island, London, the South of France, and of course his 4 magnificent estate, Rose Hill, in the Back Bay area of Boston. But the real Harry Stanford remained an enigma. ' 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 antique 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, 'you like museums?' 'Yes, caro.' She was eager to please him. She had never met anyone like Harry Stanford. Wait until I tell my girlfriends 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

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gallery, earnestly studying a Mir6. Stanford turned to Sophia.

"Hungry?" 'If you are.' 'Must not be pushy.' '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. '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, Danielle Roux, who ran the hotel with her husband, Fran, approached the table and smiled. 'Is everything all right, Monsieur Stanfordt

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

problem. Stanford had asked. Dmitri had grinned. ' ." He had seen her in the lobby of the Hotel Negresco, and had approached her. ' me, do you speak English?' ' . She had a lilting Italian accent. ' man I work for would like you to have dinner with him.' She had been indignant. "m not a puttana! I'm an actress she had said haughtily. n 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. ' would I have dinner with a stranger?' Dmitri had taken out a wad of hundred-dollar bills. He pushed five into her hand. ' 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. ' it happens, I'm between pictures.' She smiled. ' would probably do no harm to have dinner with your friend."

"Good. He will be pleased.' ' is he?' ' .-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. ' you like to travel, Sophia?' ' 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 ajeton in the slot and dialed. ' operator, please.' Seconds later, a voice said, ' lop6atrice maritime.' ' 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. ' you ready?'

' . "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 tgjise, 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 ' standing outside, busily studying the church. Dmitri was also waiting for them. Harry Stanford handed the bread to Sophia. ' don't you take this up to the house? I'll be along in a few minutes! ' right! She smiled and said softly, ', caro! Stanford watched Page 3

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her leave, then motioned to Dmitri. ' 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. ' the other one ' Le Mas d'Artigny.' Le Mas d'Artigny was a Provençal mansion on a hillside two miles west of St.-Paul-de-Vence. ' do you want me to do with them, sir?

' 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. ' took you so long?' she whispered. In order to survive, Sophia Matteo, often picked up money between film assignments as a call girl, 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, ' could stay here forever, caro.' I wish I could, Stanford thought, grimly. They had dinner at Le C66 de la Place in Plaza du General-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 ' 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. ' ... T 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. ' something wrong?' ', MY dear. Everything is fine. You said you liked to travel. Well, were going to take a little trip.' She was wide awake now. ' this hourr '. We must be very quiet.' '@i .. ! '!' Fifteen minutes later, Harry Stanford, Sophia, Dmitri, and Prince were moving down the stone. Chapter Two.

Half an hour later, at Nice airport, a converted Boeing 727 was slowly taxiing down the runway to the takeoff point. Up in the tower, the flight controller said, ' certainly are in a hurry to get that plane off the ground. The pilot has asked for a clearance three times. 9 "Whose plane is itt ' Stanford *King Midas himself.' "s probably on his way to make another billion or two.' The controller turned to monitor a Lea@et taking off, then picked up the microphone.

"Boeing eight nine five Papa, this is Nice departure control. You are cleared for takeoff. Five left. After departure, turn right to a heading of one four zero.' Harry Stanford's pilot and copilot exchanged a relieved look. The pilot pressed the microphone button. '. Boeing eight nine five Papa is cleared for takeoff. Will turn Fight to one four zero.' A moment later, the huge plane thundered down the runway and knifed into the gray dawn sky. 14 The copilot spoke into the microphone again. 413eparture, Boeing eight nine five Papa is climbing out of three thousand for flight level seven zero.' The copilot turned to the pilot.

"Whew! Old Man Stanford was . anxioi for us to get off the ground, wasn't het The pilot shrugged. ' not to reason why, ours but to do and die. How's he doing. back theret The copilot rose and stepped to the door of the cockpit, and looked into the cabin. "s resting.' They Page 4

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telephoned the airport tower from the car. '. Stanford's plane ... Is it still on the groundt ', monsieur. It has departed.' ' the pilot file a flight plant ' course, monsieur.' ' where?' ' plane is headed for JKF.'

' you.' He ' to his companion. '.

We'll have people there to meet him.' When the Renault passed the outskirts of Monte Carlo, speeding toward the Italian border, Harry Stanford said, "s no chance that we were followed, Dmitrit ', sir. We've lost them.' '!' Harry

Stanford leaned back in his seat and r .. There was nothing to worry about. They would be tracking the plane. He reviewed the situation 15 in his mind. It was really a question of what they knew and when they knew it. They were jackals following the trail of a lion, hoping to bring him down. Harry Stanford smiled to himself. They had underestimated the man they were dealing with. Others who had made that mistake had paid dearly for it. Someone would also pay this time. He was Harry Stanford, the confidant of presidents and kings, powerful and rich enough to make or break the economies of a dozen countries. The 727 was in the skies over Marseilles. The pilot spoke into the microphone. ', Boeing eight nine five Papa is with you, climbing out of flight level one nine zero for flight level two three zero.' ' ' The R ' reached San Remb shortly after dawn. Harry Stanford had fond memories of the city, but it had changed drastically. He remembered a time when it had been an elegant town with first-class hotels and restaurants, and a casino where black tie was required and where fortunes could be lost or won in an evening. Now it had succumbed to tourism, with loud-mouthed patrons gambling in their shirtsleeves. The Renault was approaching the harbor, twelve miles from the French-Italian border. There were two marinas at the harbor, Marina Porto Sole to the east, and Porto Communale to the west. In Porto Sole, a 16 marine attendant directed the berthing. In Porto Communale, there was no attendant. ' one?" Dmitri asked. ' Communale,' Stanford directed. Ae fewer people around, the better. ', sir.' A few minutes later, the Renault pulled up next to the Blue Skies, a sleek hundred-and7zgnty-foot motor yacht.

Captain Vacarro and the crew of twelve were lined UP on deck. The captain burned down the gangplank to greet the new arrivals. ' morning, Signor Stanford,' Captain Vacarro said. "ll take your luggage, and .. '

luggage. Let's shove off.' ', sir.' ' a minute.' Stanford was studying the crew. He frowned. ' man on the end. He's new, isn't he?' ', sir. Our cabin boy got sick in Capri, and we took on this one. He's highly -' '

rid of him,' Stanford ordered. The captain looked at him, puzzled. ' ...

?' ' him off.

Let's get out of here.' Captain Vacaffo nodded. ', sir.' Looking around, Harry Stanford was filled with an increasing -sense of foreboding. He could almost reach out and touch it. He did not want any strangers near him. Captain

Vacarro, and his crew had been with him for years. He could trust them. He turned to look at the girl. Since Dmitri had picked her up at random, there was no danger there. And as for Dmitri, his faithful bodyguard had saved his life more than once. Stanford turned to Dmitri. "Stay close to me," sir. Stanford took Sophia's arm. "Go aboard, my dear." - Dmitri Kaminsky stood on deck, watching the crew prepare to cast off. He scanned the harbor, but he saw nothing to be alarmed about. At this time of the morning, there was very little activity. The yacht's huge generators burst into life, and the vessel got underway. The captain approached Harry Stanford.

"You didn't say where we were heading, Signor Stanford." "I didn't, did I, captain? He thought for a moment. "Yes, sir." "The way, I want you to maintain strict radio silence." Captain Vacarro frowned.

silence? Yes, sir, but what if ... T Harry Stanford said, "Don't worry Page 5

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about it. Just do it. And I don't want anyone using the satellite phones." "Yes, sir. Will we be laying over in Portofino?" "I'll let you know, captain." Harry Stanford took Sophia on a tour of the yacht. It was one of his prized possessions, and he enjoyed it very much. It had a 91

show it off. It was a breathtaking luxuriously appointed master suite with a sitting room and an office. The office was spacious and comfortably furnished with a couch, several easy chairs, and a desk, which was enough equipment to run a small town. On the wall was a large electronic map with a small moving boat showing the current position of the yacht. Sliding glass doors opened from the master suite onto an outside veranda deck furnished with a chaise longue and a table with four chairs. A teak railing ran along the outside. On balmy days, it was Stanford's custom to have breakfast on the veranda. There were six guest staterooms, each with hand painted silk panels, picture windows, and a bath with a Jacuzzi. The large library was done in koa wood. The dining room could seat sixteen guests. A fully equipped fitness salon was on the lower deck. The yacht also contained a wine cellar and a theater that was ideal for running films. Harry Stanford had one of the world's greatest libraries of pornographic movies. The furnishings throughout the vessel were exquisite, and the paintings would have made any museum proud, now you've seen most of it," Stanford told Sophia at the end of the tour. "I'll show you the rest tomorrow." She was awed. "I've never