



SIDNEY
SHELDON

THE
STARS SHINE
DOWN



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Sidney Sheldon

 HarperCollins e-books

This One is for Morton Janklow, a Man for All Seasons

The stars shine down And watch us live Our little lives and weep for us.

—MONET NODLEHS

Table of Contents

[Dedication](#)

[Epigraph](#)

[BOOK ONE](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[BOOK TWO](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Chapter Fourteen](#)

[Chapter Fifteen](#)

[Chapter Sixteen](#)

[BOOK THREE](#)

[Chapter Seventeen](#)

[Chapter Eighteen](#)

[Chapter Nineteen](#)

[Chapter Twenty](#)

[Chapter Twenty-one](#)

[Chapter Twenty-two](#)

[Chapter Twenty-three](#)

[Chapter Twenty-four](#)

[Chapter Twenty-five](#)

[Chapter Twenty-six](#)

[Chapter Twenty-seven](#)

[Chapter Twenty-eight](#)

[Chapter Twenty-nine](#)

[BOOK FOUR](#)

[Chapter Thirty](#)

[Chapter Thirty-one](#)

[Chapter Thirty-two](#)

[Chapter Thirty-three](#)

[Chapter Thirty-four](#)

[Chapter Thirty-five](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Praise](#)

[Books by Sidney Sheldon](#)

[Copyright](#)

[About the Publisher](#)

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 souffles 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."