



SIDNEY
SHELDON

WINDMILLS
OF THE GODS

Windmills of the Gods

Sidney Sheldon

 HarperCollins e-books

For Jorja

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

—H. L. DIETRICH,
A Final Destiny

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Prologue

Perho, Finland

The meeting took place in a comfortable weather-proofed cabin in a remote, wooded area 200 miles from Helsinki, near the Russian border. The members of the Western branch of the Committee had arrived discreetly at irregular intervals. They came from eight different countries, but their visit had been quietly arranged by a senior minister in the Valtioneuvosto, the Finnish council of state, and there was no record of entry in their passports. Upon their arrival, armed guards escorted them into the cabin, and when the last visitor appeared, the cabin door was locked and the guards took up positions in the full-throated January winds, alert for any sign of intruders.

The members seated around the large rectangular table were men in powerful positions, high in the councils of their respective governments. They had met before under less clandestine circumstances, and they trusted one another because they had no choice. For added security, each had been assigned a code name.

The meeting had 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 Perho, finally reached the scene, there was nothing left to see but the smoldering 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

1

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’s 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 archconservatives.

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 World 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 had 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