



Fall from Grace: A Novel

By Richard North Patterson



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From #1 bestselling author Richard North Patterson comes a “spellbinding”* psychological puzzle filled with unexpected legal twists, potentially criminal turns, and one family’s shocking fall from grace.

After ten years away from home, Adam Blaine returns to Martha’s Vineyard to attend the funeral of his estranged father, Ben, a famous and charismatic writer who was fond of sailboats, good wine—and women other than his wife. When Adam learns that Ben disinherited his family in favor of his mistress, he begins to wonder if his father’s death—caused by an inexplicable fall from a cliff—might have been suicide or murder. Using his training as a CIA operative, Adam unearths some shattering revelations about the mistress’s past. But even more disturbing are the family secrets that can’t stay buried any longer—secrets that make Adam question everything he thought he knew about every player in this fateful game. Even himself. . . .

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Editorial Review

Review

“A skillfully plotted murder mystery ripe with twisted, painful family dynamics, as readable and rewarding as Mr. Patterson’s forays into more dangerous corners of the world. *Fall from Grace* is an excellent read, an exciting mystery and character study.” -Vineyard Gazette

“*Fall from Grace* is a stunning tale of betrayal and love—family members torn apart as the possible murder of the patriarch, whose power and prestige have dominated for decades, unravels secrets and scandals against the dramatic backdrop of the unforgiving Vineyard landscape. Richard North Patterson delivers thrilling suspense every time.”

—Linda Fairstein, author of *Silent Mercy*

“*The Devil’s Light* will grab you from the very first page and never let go. Patterson’s amazing storytelling is made all the better by his emotionally complex characters. I was intrigued.”

—Kathy Reichs, #1 *New York Times* best-selling author of *206 Bones*

“Richard North Patterson is a terrific novelist.” —*The Washington Post*

“Readers...will be dazzled by [Patterson’s] depth of knowledge.” -*The New York Times*

“Patterson has redefined himself as a writer willing to take risks.” —*USA Today*

About the Author

Richard North Patterson is the author of *The Devil’s Light*, *In the Name of Honor*, *The Spire*, and sixteen other bestselling and critically acclaimed novels. Formerly a trial lawyer, he was the SEC liaison to the Watergate special prosecutor and has served on the boards of several Washington advocacy groups. He lives in Martha’s Vineyard, San Francisco, and Cabo San Lucas with his wife, Dr. Nancy Clair.

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One

Sliding into the taxi, Adam Blaine told the cabbie where to drop him, and resumed his moody contemplation of his father.

The driver, a woman in her fifties, stole a glance at him in the rearview mirror. Though it was his practice in such proximity to be pleasant, Adam remained quiet. The past consumed him: he had returned to Martha’s Vineyard, the home he had once loved, for the first time in a decade. Benjamin Blaine had made this possible by dying.

Leaving the airport, they took the road to Edgartown, passing woods and fields on both sides. At length, the driver said, “Forgive me, but aren’t you related to Benjamin Blaine, the novelist?”

For a moment, Adam wished that he could lie. “I’m Adam. His son.”

The woman nodded. “I saw you play basketball in high school. Even then you looked just like him.”

It was inescapable, Adam knew: for the rest of his life, he would look in the mirror and see a man he loathed. “I’m so sorry for your loss,” the woman continued quietly. “I drove him to the airport several times. Such a vigorous, handsome man, so full of life. To die like that is tragic.”

Was it tragic for his mother, Adam wondered, or would release from Ben Blaine’s dark vortex be an unspoken mercy? “It was certainly a shock,” he responded. *But not as much of a shock*, he thought to himself, *as the last time I saw him*.

Understanding none of this, the driver said sympathetically, “I guess you came back for the funeral—I can’t remember seeing you in years. Where do you make your home now?”

“Everywhere and nowhere.” Adam paused, then deployed his usual cover story. “I’m an agricultural consultant in the third world, helping farmers improve their growing practices. Right now I’m in Afghanistan, on contract with the government.”

Her eyes in the mirror were curious and perplexed. “Doing what, exactly?”

Adam chose a tone that implied his own bemusement. “The project’s a little peculiar. I survey land, and try to encourage the locals to consider growing something other than poppies. In Afghanistan, the Taliban turns opium into guns.”

Her face darkened. “That sounds dangerous.”

Adam kept his voice casual. “Maybe, if it weren’t so dumb. It’s a dangerous place, it’s true, but I’m well below soldiers and spooks on the hierarchy of risk. Why would the Taliban kill a hapless American on a hopeless mission? I’d be a waste of bullets.”

Quiet now, the driver steered them through the outskirts of town. When they reached the church, the doors were shut. “I hope you haven’t missed the service,” she said.

Adam wondered if this mattered. In his heart, he had buried his father ten years ago. But his presence might help three people he deeply loved cope with their ambivalence. Though all had suffered at the hands of Benjamin Blaine, they lacked Adam’s clarity of mind.

“I imagine I’ll make the eulogy,” he said, and handed the woman an extra twenty. “Can you drop my suitcase at the Blaine house?”

“Jack, or Ben?”

“Ben. Do you remember where it is?”

The driver nodded. “Sure.”

Adam thanked her and got out. For a moment he gazed at the Old Whaling Church, absorbing the strangeness of his return. The deep blue sky of a flawless summer day framed the church, an imposing Greek revival with stone pillars and an ornate clock tower, all painted a pristine white. Along with the redbrick courthouse beside it, the church was the focal point of Edgartown, a place Adam thought of as the quintessential New England theme park—picket fences, manicured lawns, white wooden homes built in the 1800s. Though the church was now a performing arts center, it was the only place of worship on Martha’s

Vineyard, past or present, which could accommodate the hundreds of people who wished to honor a famous man. Had he foreseen his death, Benjamin Blaine would have chosen it himself.

A policeman guarded the door. On the steps reporters or curiosity seekers had clustered, perhaps eager for a glimpse of the statesmen, writers, actors, and athletes who counted themselves as Ben's friends. Standing taller, Adam strode toward them. He even moved like his father, he remembered people saying, with his father's grace and vigor. As he reached the steps, the curse of their resemblance struck again.

"Adam Blaine?" A young woman blocked his path, her look of birdlike alertness accentuated by quick, jerky movements of her head. "I'm Amanda Ferris of the *National Enquirer*."

Despite his annoyance, Adam almost laughed in her face—this must be a slow week for Brad and Angelina, or the supposed progeny of Venusians and sub-Saharan adolescents. Instead, Adam brushed past her, ignoring her shrill question, "How do you feel about the circumstances of your father's death?"

"I'm Adam Blaine," he told the burly policeman at the center door, and stepped inside.

The interior was as Adam remembered it, bright and airy, its tall windows on three sides admitting shafts of light. As softly as he could, he walked down the center aisle toward the front, glimpsing the varied players in Benjamin Blaine's restless and protean life—a human rights activist from the Sudan; a veteran war correspondent; a retired Spanish bullfighter; an ex-president; a TV anchor; a young black man whose college education was a gift from Ben; the islanders, a more modest group, many of whom had known Ben all his life. Some of the latter, noting him, registered surprise at his presence. Adam nodded at a few—his old basketball coach, a teacher from third grade—all the while wishing that he could disappear. In the decade of his absence, he had learned to dislike standing out.

Reaching the first pew, he spotted his mother between his uncle, Jack, and brother, Teddy. He paused, glancing at the casket, then slid between Clarice Blaine and his brother. His mother remained almost perfect in appearance, Adam thought—the refined features, sculpted nose, and composed expression of an East Coast patrician, her blond hair now brightened by artifice. As he gave her a brief kiss on the cheek, her blue eyes filled with gratitude, and she clasped his hand. Then Adam felt Teddy grasp his shoulder.

Inclining his head toward his brother, Adam caught the complex smile on Teddy's sensitive face—fondness for Adam, bemusement at their circumstances. "Can you believe he's in there?" Teddy whispered. "I'm still afraid this is a prank."

Silent, Adam stared at the burnished coffin, the white cloth cover filigreed with gold. However richly Benjamin Blaine deserved the hatred of both sons, the enormity of his death was difficult to absorb—a man in his sixties, still ravenous for life, cut short in so strange a way. How many times, Adam wondered, had Teddy wished aloud to him for this moment? Yet its reality left Adam with the fruitless, painful wish that he and his father had been different, that he could feel the ache of love and loss instead of this wrenching bitterness, the painful question *Why?* for which no answer could suffice. He was back, Adam realized, and once more Benjamin Blaine had shattered his illusions. Adam had not resolved their past.

Nor would this service from the Book of Common Prayer, the touchstone of Clarice Blaine's heritage, provide balm for her sons' souls. "The trouble with Protestant funerals," a colleague had remarked to Adam after the murder of a friend, "is that they offer no catharsis." But for his mother the familiar ritual, that with which she had buried both her parents, might spread the gloss of decorum over the deeper truths of her marriage.

Standing near the casket, a young Episcopal priest recited the Burial of the Dead:

I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord;

he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live;

and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. . . .

Adam believed none of it. In his recent experience, death was random, ugly, and very final, all too often the work of men whose God commanded these acts. That world, like this service, offered no transcendence. His only comfort was that the survivors loved one another, and now might find some peace.

Adam glanced at his mother, then his brother, trying to read their faces. Clarice wore her public expression, a mask of dignity she used to conceal more complicated feelings. But Teddy's dark eyes, cast now at the polished wooden floor, seemed to hold some anguished memory. At whatever age, Adam knew, some part of us is always a child, feeling pleasure at a parent's love or the wounds of a parent's disdain. The man inside the coffin had wounded Teddy long ago, too deeply to forget. From beneath the drone of the service, a memory of their father surfaced unbidden, as much about Teddy as Adam.

It was from that final summer, meant to be a bridge between Adam's first and second years at law school, after which life would become too serious to savor the days of sun and sea and wind so evocative of his youth. The summer that instead transformed Adam's life completely.

At the helm of his sailboat, Ben grinned with sheer love of the Vineyard waters, looking younger than his fifty-five years, his thick silver-flecked black hair swept back by a stiff headwind. To Adam, he resembled a pirate: a nose like a prow, bright black eyes that could exude anger, joy, alertness, or desire. He had a fluid grace of movement, a physicality suited to rough seas; in profile there was a hatchetlike quality to his face, an aggression in his posture, as though he were forever thrusting forward, ready to take the next bite out of life. "When Benjamin Blaine walks into a room," *Vanity Fair* had gushed, "he seems to be in Technicolor, and everyone else in black and white." As a boy, Adam had wanted nothing more than to be like him.

On this day, Adam enjoyed his father's enthusiasm for his classic wooden sailboat. "Well into this century," Ben had explained when he taught the eight-year-old Adam to sail, "the Herreshoff brothers designed eight consecutive defenders of the America's Cup. They built boats like this for the richest, most sophisticated families of their time—the Vanderbilts, the Whitneys. I bought this one from your grandfather Barkley." His voice lowered, to impress on Adam the import of his next words. "To own one is a privilege, but to race one—as you someday will—is a joy. I mean for you to learn the primal joy of winning."

On this sail with Adam, fifteen years later, Ben was preparing for racing season yet again, his lust for competition unslaked. "This is the best thing in the world," he exclaimed. "Even better than hunting deer. Are you ever going to try that with me?"

Adam adjusted the mainsail, catching the wind as it shifted. "I doubt it."

Ben shot him a look of displeasure. "You're too much like your mother, Adam. But in this family you're the only game in town."

At once, Adam caught the reference. However demanding their father could sometimes be with Adam, for years Ben had treated Teddy less like a son than an uninvited guest who, to Ben's surprise and displeasure,

kept showing up for dinner. But the role of favorite by default no longer gave Adam pleasure. “So Teddy’s not like us,” he rejoined. “So what? I can’t paint, and neither can you. Only Teddy got that gene.”

“Among others,” Ben said flatly.

As Ben steered them starboard, gaining speed, Adam felt his own tension, years of too many retorts stifled. “Welcome to the twenty-first century,” he replied. “Has it ever occurred to you that Teddy being gay is no different from you and I being left-handed? No wonder he never comes home.” He paused, then ventured more evenly, “Someday people won’t read you anymore. You’ll be left with whoever is left to love you. It’s not too late for Teddy to be one of them.”

Unaccustomed to being challenged, Ben stared at him. “I know it’s supposed to be genetic. So call me antediluvian, if you like. But genetics gave me a firstborn who feels like a foundling.” His voice slowed, admitting a regretful note. “You like the things I like. Teddy never did. He didn’t want to fish or sail or hunt or enjoy a day like this, God’s gift to man. When I wanted someone to toss around a baseball with, you were like a puppy, eager to play. Not Teddy. He just gave me one of his looks.”

“Did you ever care about what Teddy liked?” Adam paused, then came to the hard truth he too often felt. “Do you love me for me, Dad, or because I’m more like you than he is?”

Ben’s face closed, his pleasure in the day vanishing. “We’re not the same person, for sure. But we’re alike in ways that seem important. Think of me what you will, but I desire women. I’ve seen almost everything the world contains—wars, poverty, cruelty, heroism, grace, children starving to death, and women treated like cattle or sold into sexual slavery. There’s almost nothing I can’t imagine. But one thing I can’t imagine is you looking at a man the way you look at Jenny. Teddy sees a man and imagines him naked, lying on his stomach. Assuming,” Ben finished, “that Teddy is even the protagonist of that particular act.”

In his anger, Adam resolved to say the rest. “I’ve always loved Teddy,” he replied coldly, “and always will. But given how you feel about him, it’s a good thing that he’s in New York. And given how I feel about *that*, it might be good for you to remember that I’m the son you’ve got left.”

Ben gave him a level look, deflecting the challenge. “He’s in New York for now,” he said at length. “It’s where artists go to fail. Inside him, Teddy carries the seed of his own defeat. My guess is that he’ll slink back here, like Jack did. The larger world was a little too large for him.”

Listening, Adam marveled at the casual ease with which Ben had slipped in his disdain for his older brother. “Just who is it that you *do* respect, Dad?”

“Many people,” Ben answered. “But in this family?” He paused, regarding Adam intently. “You, Adam. At least to a point.”

Staring at his father’s coffin, Adam wished that he had never learned what that point was. In kinship, he placed his hand on Teddy’s shoulder.

Users Review

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Annie Hendricks:

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