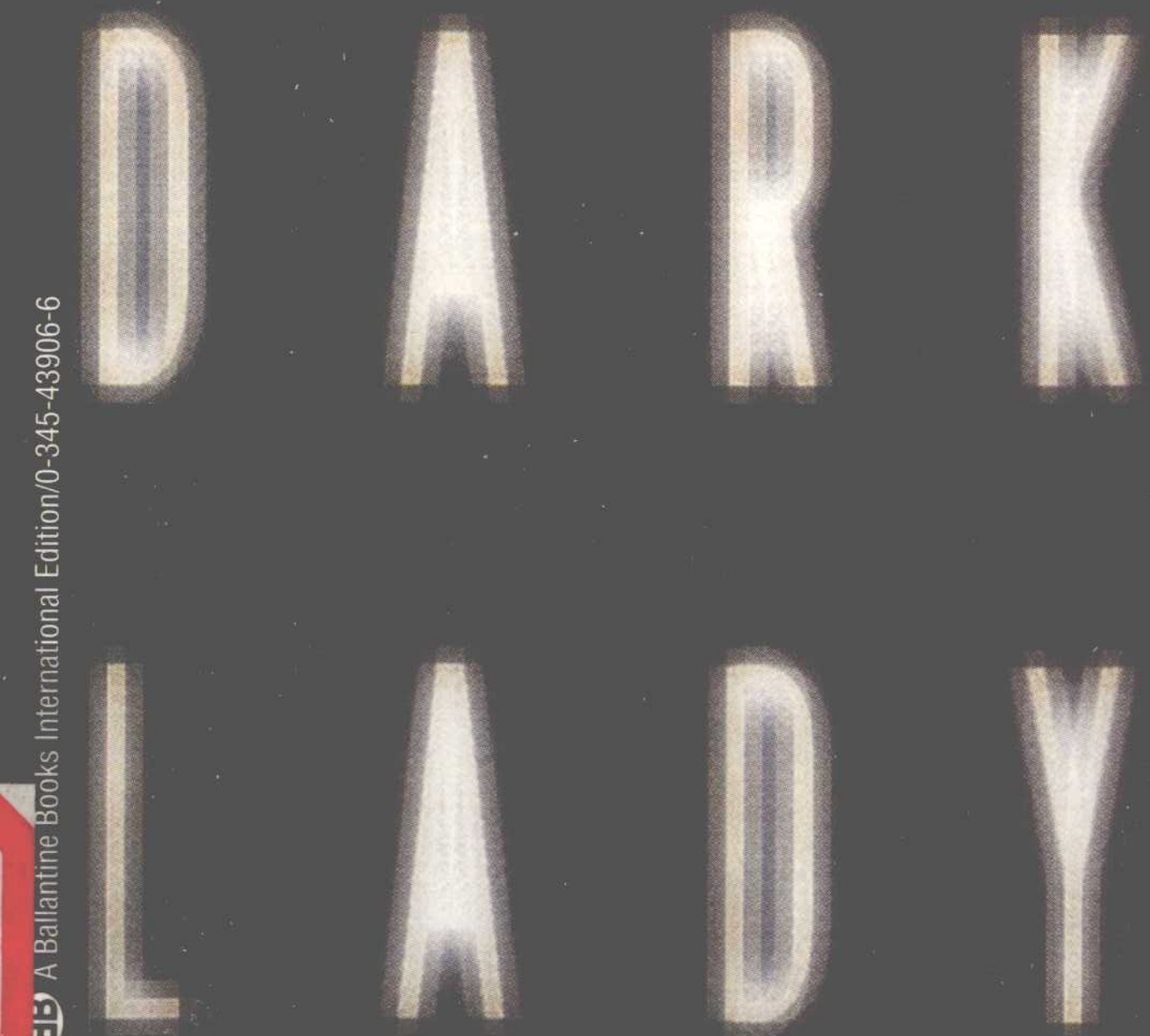
THE *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLER

Richard North Patterson

"A gifted writer."—*The Washington Post Book World*



A Ballantine Books International Edition/0-345-43906-6

DARK LADY

Richard North Patterson

BALLANTINE BOOKS • NEW YORK

A Ballantine Book
Published by The Ballantine Publishing Group

www.randomhouse.com/BB/

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 99-91531

ISBN 0-345-43906-6

This edition published by arrangement with Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Random House, Inc.

Manufactured in the United States of America

First Ballantine Books International Edition: July 2000

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Praise for RICHARD NORTH PATTERSON

"Patterson is a natural storyteller who never breaks the thread of action."

—*The New York Times*

"One of the best in the business."

—*Time*

"What distinguishes Richard North Patterson from other bestselling authors . . . is that you become so emotionally involved with his characters that you can't bring yourself to give his books away. I routinely pass on my Scott Turows and John Grishams, but Patterson's last three books are lined up neatly on a shelf."

—*Los Angeles Times Book Review*

By Richard North Patterson
Published by Ballantine Books:

THE LASKO TANGENT
THE OUTSIDE MAN
ESCAPE THE NIGHT
PRIVATE SCREENING
DEGREE OF GUILT
EYES OF A CHILD
THE FINAL JUDGMENT
SILENT WITNESS
NO SAFE PLACE
DARK LADY

For George Bush and Ron Kaufman

DARK LADY

PART ONE

ARTHUR BRIGHT

ONE

IN THE MOMENTS before the brutal murder of Jack Novak ended what she later thought of as her time of innocence, Assistant County Prosecutor Stella Marz gazed down at the waterfront of her native city, Steelton.

At thirty-eight, Stella would not have called herself an innocent. Nor was the view from her corner office one that lightened her heart. The afternoon sky was a close, sunless cobalt, typical of Steelton in winter. The sludge-gray Onondaga River divided the city as it met Lake Erie beneath a steel bridge: the valley carved by the river was a treeless expanse of railroad tracks, boxcars, refineries, cranes, chemical plants, and, looming over all of this, the smokestacks of the steel mills—squat, black, and enormous—on which Steelton's existence had once depended. From early childhood, Stella could remember the stench of mill smoke, the stain left on the white blouse of her school uniform drying on her mother's clothesline; from her time in night law school, she recalled the evening that the river had exploded in a stunning instant of spontaneous combustion caused by chemical waste and petroleum derivatives, the flames which climbed five stories high against the darkness. Between these two moments—the apogee of the mills and the explosion of the river—lay the story of a city and its decline.

By heritage, Stella herself was part of this story. The mills had boomed after the Civil War, manned by the earliest wave of immigrants—Germans and British, Welsh and Irish—who, in the early 1870s, had worked fourteen hours a day, six days a

week. Their weekly pay was $11.50; in 1874, years of seething resentment ignited a strike, with angry workers demanding twenty-five cents more a week. The leading owner, Amasa Hall, shut down his mills, informing the strikers that, upon reopening, he would give jobs only to those who agreed to a fifty-cent cut. When the strikers refused, Hall boarded his yacht and embarked on a cruise around the world.

Hall stopped at Danzig, then a Polish seaport on the Baltic. He advertised extensively for young workers, offering the kingly wage of $7.25 a week and free transport to America. The resulting wave of Polish strikebreakers—poor, hard-working, Roman Catholic, and largely illiterate—had included Stella's great-grandfather, Carol Marzewski. It was on their backs that Amasa Hall had, quite systematically, undercut and eventually wiped out the other steel producers in the area, acquiring their mills and near-total sway over the region's steel industry. And it was the slow, inexorable decline of those same mills into sputtering obsolescence which had left Stella's father, Armin Marz, unemployed and bitter.

Recalling the flames which had leaped from the Onondaga, a brilliant orange-blue against the night sky, had reminded Stella of another memory from childhood, the East Side riots. Just as the West Side of Steelton was home to European immigrants—the first wave had been joined by Italians, Russians, Poles, Slovaks, and Austro-Hungarians—so the city's industry had drawn a later influx of migrants from the American South, the descendants of former slaves, to the eastern side of the Onondaga. But these newcomers were less welcomed, by employers or the heretofore all-white labor force. Stella could not remember a time in her old neighborhood, Warszawa, when the black interlopers were not viewed with suspicion and contempt; the fiery explosion of the East Side into riots in the sixties—three days of arson and shootouts with police—had helped convert this into fear and hatred. A last trickle of nonwhites—Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Koreans, Haitians, Chinese, and Vietnamese—felt welcome, if at all, only on the impoverished East Side. And so the split symbolized by the

Onondaga hardened, and racial politics became as natural to Steelton as breathing polluted air.

This divide, too, shadowed Stella's thoughts. In the last six years, she had won every case but one—a hung jury following the murder trial of a high school coach who had made one of his students pregnant and who, devastated by Stella's particularly ruthless cross-examination, had thereafter committed suicide. It was this which had led a courtroom deputy to give Stella a nickname which now enjoyed wide currency among the criminal defense bar: the Dark Lady. But only recently had they become aware of her ambition, long nurtured, to become the first woman elected Prosecutor of Erie County.

Though this was a daunting task, it was by no means impossible. Stella was a daughter of the West Side, a young woman her neighborhood was proud of—an honors student who had worked through college and law school; had remained an observant Catholic; had not turned her back on Steelton and its problems, as had so many of her generation; had already become head of her office's homicide unit. Stella was not a vain woman, and had always seen herself with objectivity: though she lacked the gifts for bonhomie and self-promotion natural to many politicians, she was articulate, truthful, and genuinely concerned with making her office, and her city, better. She was attractive enough without being threatening to other women, with a tangle of thick brown hair; pale skin; a broad face with a cleft chin and somewhat exotic brown eyes, a hint of Eurasia which Stella privately considered her best feature; a sturdy build which she managed to keep trim through relentless exercise and attention to diet, yet another facet of the self-discipline which had been hammered into her at home and school. And if there were no husband or children to soften the image of an all-business prosecutor or, Stella thought ruefully, her deepening sense of solitude, at least there was no one to object or to say, as Armin Marz might, had he not lost the gifts of memory and reason, that she was reaching above herself.

But her biggest problem, Stella knew, was not that she was

a woman. It was as clear to her as the river which divided her city: she was a white ethnic with no base on the black East Side. And with that, her thoughts, and her gaze, moved to the most hopeful, most problematic, aspect of the cityscape before her—the steel skeleton of the baseball stadium Mayor Krajek had labeled Steelton 2000.

It was not the first improvement in this vista: the lake and river were cleaner; the air less polluted, if only because the mills had declined; the once seedy downtown area, formerly the preserve of prostitutes and muggers, now featured shops, theaters, and restaurants which were slowly drawing suburbanites and young people; some new glass office towers had kept clean industry from leaving. The public mall along the lake remained intact, the center city's only expanse of green, across which stretched City Hall and the County Courthouse, two beaux arts masterpieces from the turn of the century, the age of monumental architecture and municipal self-confidence. But it was the stadium-to-be which, for Stella and many others, symbolized the battle for the soul of their city.

The Steelton Blues baseball team dated back to 1901. Starting with her great-grandfather, four generations of the Marz family had gone to its games; *five,* Stella corrected herself, if her younger sister, Katie, and her husband had begun to take their kids. The Blues were part of the city's fabric: a voice on the radio; an argument in a bar; a conversation between a father and son who might have little else to talk about; years of statistics documenting a futility so epic—the Blues' last World Series appearance was in the 1930s—it had created a perverse fascination that a baseball team could so perfectly mirror its home.

But now *that* was a problem, too: attendance was off, the franchise was depressed in value, and the spoiled superstars who were baseball's princes could demand far more money to play in better media markets. Peter Hall, the heartless steel baron's great-grandson and current owner of the Blues, had threatened to sell the team to a group from Silicon

Valley who would move the team to California. But, just as Hall did not relish being vilified as the callous owner who sold the Blues, Thomas Krajek, the young and ambitious mayor of Steelton who had risen from Stella's own neighborhood, was determined not to be the once-promising politician who had let Steelton's identity be sold to a pack of computer-chip millionaires.

The upshot had appeared, week by week, before Stella's eyes. Once it had been an artist's rendering, used by Krajek and Hall to sell their vision of Steelton 2000 in a hard-fought special election to float $275 million worth of municipal bonds. Now it rose, skeletal against the featureless gray canvas of Lake Erie: the ghost of a ballpark, its steel girders in place; the cement which would encircle it taking shape in stages; its timeless geometry imposed on bare earth. Above it, cranes stood watch like the bones of prehistoric animals; beside it, the trailers of contractors and subcontractors, though they were deserted today, a Sunday, had proliferated as Stella watched. It would be a modern classic, another Camden Yards or Jacobs Field—in 2000, when the Blues took to the field, the spirit of Steelton would be reborn. Or so Mayor Krajek promised, and Stella wished to believe.

And this, Stella knew, was her biggest problem of all.

Krajek was up for reelection this November. But, first, he faced a bitter Democratic primary. That this was inevitable stemmed from the race of Krajek's opponent, Arthur Bright, and one of Bright's principal contentions—that Steelton 2000 was a shameful diversion of public financing from such pressing needs as better schools, better housing, and safer streets. Bright was the first African-American ever elected Prosecutor of Erie County, and it was he who had made Stella his head of homicide. She owed him loyalty; more important, she admired him. And *her* political future depended on his: the prosecutor's office would be vacant only if Bright defeated Krajek; Stella could win election only if Bright supported her among the East Side voters who were his base. In either case, much

depended on whether Bright could persuade voters to take a second, harsher, look at Mayor Krajek and his field of dreams.

It was *this* thought which, finally, drove Stella from her brooding inspection of Steelton 2000, and back to her desk.

She saw the usual mess: a coffee cup with cold, half-bitter dregs; her gym bag; status reports on homicide cases; police files. But squarely facing her was the one document so delicate that she had discussed it with Bright himself—the police report on the death, three days earlier, of Tommy Fielding.

She had not known Fielding but, from what little she knew of him, it was not a death she would have predicted. His maid had found his body in the bedroom of his town house, naked, next to a dead black prostitute named Tina Welch. Fielding's kitchen sink contained the primitive chemistry set—lighter, spoon, cotton balls, glassine Baggy with a white residue of powder—used to cook heroin. The police lab could find no fingerprints on these implements, and no prints traceable to Welch anywhere; the initial police canvass of the neighborhood turned up no one who knew Fielding well, but no one who had imagined him using heroin or hookers. His former wife, the mother of his only child, had, according to the police, been too shocked to be coherent. Nor did his status in life square with the meanness of his death: Fielding had been Peter Hall's lieutenant, an officer of Hall Development Company, and the project supervisor for Steelton 2000. Stella had barely read the headline in the *Steelton Press*, "Ballpark Official Found Dead," when Arthur Bright appeared in her office.

Stella, he said, must handle this herself; he had already called Nathaniel Dance, Steelton's Chief of Detectives, to make sure that everything went through her. The inquiry would be straight down the middle: thorough, impartial, professional. Most likely, Tommy Fielding had been the victim of an accidental overdose. But whatever the cause, only a fool could ignore that a man at the center of Steelton 2000 had died a puzzling death. And then, as Stella knew it would, their talk had turned to politics.

* * *

"I SUPPOSE," Bright said in a sardonic voice, "it's a welcome example of racial amity. 'Hands Across the Onondaga'—black hooker teaches white executive to shoot up. How will that play in Warszawa, Stella?"

Stella did not have to answer: Bright knew, almost as well as she, that most of her parents' generation, and many in her own, were so mired in bias that Tommy Fielding's death would merely buttress their suspicion of all blacks. Never mind that Arthur Bright had devoted much of his professional life to a relentless fight against drugs—tougher enforcement, stiffer sentences, more education, better treatment facilities. All was lost in the neighborhood's deepest fear: that, should Bright become mayor, "the blacks" would take over Steelton for good. Finally, Stella replied, "You could get some votes there, Arthur. If you can make them see past race."

"What they see," Bright answered wearily, "is just another black man—the predator they cross the street to avoid." He leaned forward in his chair, restless. "I'd run stronger in a dress. White voters can cast black women in a nurturing role, like cook or nanny or housekeeper, at least if they're older and fatter than Tina Welch. Sort of like Mammy in *Gone With the Wind*."

"I can find you the dress," Stella rejoined, "but you'd better start eating." Her tone grew sharper. "You've been fighting this for years now. Why all the self-pity?"

Bright frowned at Stella's tile floor. He was wiry, smooth faced, much younger looking than his fifty years, and wire-rimmed glasses gave him a scholarly appearance. Stella had seen him fire up an auditorium with an impassioned speech, reminiscent of Malcolm X at his incisive best. Yet, for Stella, his hidden core had a certain tenderness—wounds that Stella could sense but not see, and which would never quite heal.

"Polls," Bright said bluntly. "My own. I've got ninety percent support on the East Side, less than sixteen on the West Side. And stuck there." He looked up at Stella. "So how's *your* campaign? You've been very decorous—I'd even say ladylike,

if I didn't know you better. But I hear you've been popping up among the ethnics, eating pierogi and giving speeches."

Sensing where Bright was headed, Stella forestalled him with a smile. "I *am* a lady," she responded, "who wants to run for a law-and-order job. So I'm changing my name to Duke."

Despite himself, Bright laughed. "Duke Marz," he mused. "How does old Duke feel about the death penalty?"

"Still against," Stella answered crisply. Her distillation of Catholic teaching had its disadvantages, she knew, among them a stubborn consistency regarding what "life" meant—that it was sacred for a fetus, and even for a murderer. "But it's the law in this state," she continued, "so I'm bound to apply it fairly and judiciously. Which is what I tell people on those grim occasions when they ask."

"If you run," Bright responded, "they'll ask. Charles Sloan will make sure of *that*—it's his ticket to a few votes in your neighborhood."

Bright was playing her, Stella knew, like a fish on the line. And the mention of Charles Sloan was the bait—Sloan was Bright's First Assistant and oldest associate, a veteran black lawyer now positioning himself as Bright's political heir. But it was too early for either Sloan or Stella to push for a commitment and Bright, with an earlier race to run, was using that to keep them off-balance. Knowing this, Stella remained silent.

"So," Bright continued. "How do you make a virtue of being a woman? And who votes for you on the East Side?"

The first question, though the easier, nettled Stella. "Since I joined homicide," she answered, "I've put twenty-four murderers in jail for life, and three more on death row. My religious beliefs didn't stop me, and neither did my sex. Where gender and religion help me is with other causes I believe in—like Catholic Charities or Big Sisters, or taking kids out of abusive or neglectful homes before they're warped or murdered or tossed out on the streets." Her voice slowed. "Women on the East Side know what *that's* about, Arthur. A lot of them are already raising other people's kids, and doing the best they