ERICH SEGAL

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THE CLASS

HARDCOVER PUBLICATION
MAY 1985

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BANTAM BOOKS
TORONTO • NEW YORK • LONDON • SYDNEY • AUCKLAND

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This is a novel about The Harvard Class of 1958.

The main characters—Andrew Eliot, Daniel Rossi, Jason Gilbert, George Keller, and Theodore Lambros—are all creations of the author's imagination. These fictional members of the Class illustrate some of the divergent directions taken by young men of this generation into the fields of politics, the arts, intellectual life or in voyages of self-discovery. In tracing their years at Harvard, and thereafter until their 25th Reunion, the author portrays a number of events in which public figures from American political and artistic life appear. The author has included portrayals of these public personalities as symbols of certain influences in American life of the past twenty-five years. The reader should understand that the specific conversations and incidents involving these personalities are the author's own creations.

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A Bantam Book / May 1985

ISBN 0-553-05084-2

Published simultaneously in the United States and Canada

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For Karen and Francesca
The class in my life

There must be . . . some possible ground in reason for one's boiling over with joy that one is a son of Harvard, and was not, by some unspeakably horrible accident of birth, predestined to graduate at Yale or at Cornell.

WILLIAM JAMES,
M.D., 1869

THE CLASS

ANDREW ELIOT'S DIARY

May 12, 1983

My Harvard Twenty-fifth Reunion is next month and I am scared to death.

Scared to face all my successful classmates, walking back on paths of glory, while I have nothing to show for my life except a few gray hairs.

Today a heavy, red-bound book arrived that chronicles all the achievements of The Class of '58. It really brought home my sense of failure.

I stayed up half the night just staring at the faces of the guys who once were undergraduates with me, and now are senators and governors, world-famous scientists and pioneering doctors. Who knows which of them will end up on a podium in Stockholm? Or the White House lawn?

And what's amazing is that some are still married to their first wives.

A few of the most glittering successes were close friends of mine. The roommate I once thought of as a fruitcake is the candidate likeliest to be our next Secretary of State. The future President of Harvard is a guy I used to lend my clothes to. Another, whom we barely noticed, has become the musical sensation of our age.

The bravest of them all laid down his life for something he believed in. His heroism humbles me.

And I return, resplendent in my failure.

I am the last Eliot of a great line to enter Harvard. My ancestors were all distinguished men. In war, in peace, in church, in science, and in education. As recently as 1948, my cousin Tom received the Nobel Prize for Literature.

But the brilliance of the family tradition has grown dim with me. I don't even hold a candle to Jared Eliot (Class of 1703), the man who introduced rhubarb to America.

Yet I do have one tenuous connection with my noble forebears. They were diarists. My namesake, Reverend Andrew Eliot, '37, while bravely tending his parishioners, kept a daily record—still extant—describing what the Revolutionary War was like during the siege of Boston in 1776.

The moment the city was liberated, he hurried to a meeting of the Harvard Board of Overseers to move that General George Washington be given an honorary doctorate.

His son inherited his pulpit and his pen, leaving a vivid account of America's first days as a republic.

Naturally, there's no comparison, but I've been keeping notebooks all my life as well. Maybe that's the single remnant of my heritage. I've observed history around me, even if I didn't make any of it.

Meanwhile, I'm still scared as hell.

COLLEGE YEARS

We took the world as given. Cigarettes
Were twenty-several cents a pack, and gas
As much per gallon. Sex came wrapped in rubber
And veiled in supernatural scruples—call
Them chivalry. . . .

Psychology was in the mind; abstract
Things grabbed us where we lived; the only life
Worth living was the private life, and—last,
Worst scandal in this characterization—
We did not know we were a generation.

JOHN UPDIKE
CLASS OF '54

They glanced at one another like tigers taking measure of a menacing new rival. But in this kind of jungle you could never be sure where the real danger lurked.

It was Monday, September 20, 1954. Eleven hundred sixty-two of the best and brightest young men in the world were lined up outside that monstrous Victorian Gothic structure known as Memorial Hall. To register as members of the future Harvard Class of '58.

Running the sartorial spectrum from Brooks Brothers to hand-me-downs, they were variously impatient, terrified, blasé, and dumb. Some had traveled thousands of miles, others a few blocks. Yet all knew that they were now merely at the beginning of the greatest journey of their lives.

Shadrach Tubman, son of the president of Liberia, flew from Monrovia via Paris to New York's Idlewild Airport, whence he was driven to Boston in his embassy's limousine.

John D. Rockefeller, IV, unpretentiously took the train up from Manhattan and splurged on a taxi from South Station to the Yard.

Apparently the Aga Khan simply epiphanized. (Other rumors had it that he'd flown there on a magic carpet—or a private jet.) In any case, he stood in line waiting to register just like any mortal.

These freshmen had arrived already luminaries. They had been born directly into the limelight.

But on this last day of summer 1954, more than a thousand other potential comets were waiting to burst from dark anonymity to light up the sky.

Among them were Daniel Rossi, Jason Gilbert, Theodore Lambros, and Andrew Eliot. They—and a fifth, still half a world away—are the heroes of this story.

DANIEL ROSSI

I thought the sparrow's note from heaven,
Singing at dawn on the alder bough;
I brought him home, in his nest, at even;
He sings the song, but it cheers not now,
For I did not bring home the river and the sky.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON
CLASS OF 1821

From earliest childhood Danny Rossi had a single, desperate ambition—to please his father.

And one single haunting nightmare—that he never could.

At first he believed there was a legitimate reason for Dr. Rossi's indifference. After all, Danny was the slender, unathletic brother of the toughest fullback in the history of Orange County, California. And all the time that Frank Rossi was scoring touchdowns and attracting college scouts, Dad was too involved with him to pay attention to his younger son.

The fact that Danny got good grades—which Frank never did—made no impression whatsoever. After all, his brother stood a mighty six feet two (a head taller than Danny), and his mere entrance on the field could bring a stadium of cheering pepole to their feet.

What could little bespectacled red-haired Danny do that earned applause? He was, or so his mother constantly reported, a gifted pianist. Almost a prodigy. This would have made most parents proud. And yet Dr. Rossi never once had come to hear him play in public.

Understandably, Danny felt enormous pangs of envy. And a resentment growing slowly into hatred. Frank is not a god, Dad. I'm a person, too. Sooner or later you're going to notice me.

But then in 1950, Frank, a fighter pilot, was shot down in Korea. Now Danny's pent-up jealousy transformed, in painful

stages, first to grief and then to guilt. He somehow felt responsible. As if he'd wished his brother's death.

At the ceremony in which they named the school athletic field for Frank, his father wept uncontrollably. Danny looked with anguish at the man he so admired. And he vowed to bring him consolation. Yet, how could he give his father joy?

Even hearing Danny practice annoyed Arthur Rossi. After all, a dentist's busy day was orchestrated to the grating noise of drills. And so he had a cork-lined studio built in the cellar for his sole surviving son.

Danny understood this was no act of generosity, that his father wished to be freed from the sight as well as the sound of him.

Yet, Danny was determined to keep fighting for his father's love. And he sensed sport was the only way for him to rise from the cellar of paternal disapproval.

There was just one possibility for a boy of his size—running. He went to see the track coach and asked shyly for advice.

He now got up at six ecah morning, slipped on sneakers, and left the house to train. His excessive zeal during those early weeks made his legs sore and heavy. But he persevered. And kept it all a secret. Till he had something worth telling Dad.

On the first day of spring, the coach made the entire squad run a mile to gauge their fitness. Danny was surprised that he could actually stay near the real runners for the first three quarters.

But suddenly his mouth was parched, his chest aflame. He started to slow down. From the center of the field he heard the coach call out, "Hang in there, Rossi. Don't give up."

Fearing the displeasure of this surrogate father, Danny drove his weary body through the final lap. And threw himself, exhausted, onto the grass. Before he could catch his breath, the coach was standing above him with a stopwatch.

"Not bad, Danny. You sure surprised me—five minutes forty-eight seconds. If you stick with it, you can go a heck of a lot faster. In fact, five minutes can sometimes cop third place in our dual meets. Go to the supply desk and get a uniform and spikes."

Sensing the proximity of his goal, Danny temporarily abandoned afternoon piano practice to work out with the team. And that usually meant ten or twelve grueling quarter-miles. He threw up after nearly every session.

* * *

Several weeks later, the coach announced that, as a reward for his tenacity, Danny would be their third-miler against Valley High.

That night he told his father. Despite his son's warning that he'd probably get badly beaten, Dr. Rossi insisted on attending.

That Saturday afternoon, Danny savored the three happiest minutes of his childhood.

As the fidgety runners lined up at the middle of the cinder track, Danny saw his parents sitting in the first row.

"Let's go, son," his father said warmly. "Show 'em the good old Rossi stuff."

These words so ignited Danny that he forgot the coach's instructions to take it easy and pace himself. Instead, as the gun went off, he bolted to the front and led the pack around the first turn.

Christ thought Dr. Rossi, the kid's a champion.

Shit, thought the coach, the kid's crazy. He'll burn himself out.

As they completed the first lap, Danny glanced up at his father and saw what he had always thought impossible—a smile of pride for him.

"Seventy-one seconds," called the coach. "Too fast, Ross. Much too fast."

"Looking good, son!" called Dr. Rossi.

Danny scored through the next four hundred yards on wings of paternal approval.

He passed the halfway mark still in the lead. But now his lungs were starting to burn. By the next curve, he had gone into oxygen debt. And was experiencing what runners not inaccurately call rigor mortis. He was dying.

The opposition sped past him and opening a long lead. From across the field he heard his father shout, "Come on, Danny, show some guts!"

They clapped when he finally finished. The sympathetic applause that greets the hopelessly outclassed competitor.

Dizzy with fatigue, he looked toward the stands. His mother was smiling reassuringly. His father was gone. It was like a bad dream.

Inexplicably, the coach was pleased. "Rossi, I've never seen a guy with more guts. I caught you in five minutes fifteen seconds. You've got real potential."

"Not on the track," Danny replied, limping away. "I quit."

He knew, to his chagrin, that all his efforts had only made matters worse. For his embarrassing performance had been on the track of Frank Rossi Field.

Humiliated, Danny returned to his previous life. The keyboard became an outlet for all his frustrations. He practiced day and night, to the exclusion of everything else.

He had been studying since he was six with a local teacher. But now this honorable gray-haired matron told his mother candidly that she had nothing more to give the boy. And suggested to Gisela Rossi that her son audition for Gustave Landau—a former soloist in Vienna, now spending his autumnal years as music director of nearby San Angelo Junior College.

The old man was impressed by what he heard and accepted Danny as a pupil.

"Dr. Landau says he's very good for his age," Gisela reported to her husband at dinner. "He thinks that he could even play professionally."

To which Dr. Rossi responded with a monosyllabic, "Oh." Which meant that he'd reserve all judgment.

Dr. Landau was a gentle if demanding mentor. And Danny was the ideal pupil. He was not only talented but actually eager to be driven. If Landau said go through an hour of Czerny's keyboard exercises every day, Danny would do three or four.

"Am I improving fast enough?" he'd ask anxiously.

"*Ach,* Daniel, you could even work yourself a little less. You're young. You should go out some evenings and have fun."

But Danny had no time—and knew nothing that would bring him "fun." He was in a hurry to grow up. And every waking moment when he was not in school, he spent at the piano.

Dr. Rossi was not unaware of his son's antisocial tendencies. And it upset him.

"I'm telling you, Gisela, it's unhealthy. He's too obsessive. Maybe he's trying to compensate for his shortness or something. A kid his age should be going out with girls. God knows Frank was a real Casanova by this time."

Art Rossi was distressed to think that a son of his could have turned out to be so . . . unmanly.

Mrs. Rossi, on the other hand, believed that if the two men were a little closer, her husband's qualms might disappear.

And so at the end of dinner the next evening, she left them on their own. So they could chat.

Her husband was perceptibly annoyed, since he always found talking to Danny a disquieting experience.

"Everything okay at school?" he inquired.

"Well, yes and no," Danny replied—just as uneasy as his father.

Like a nervous infantryman, Dr. Rossi feared he might be crossing into a minefield.

"What seems to be the matter?"

"Dad, everybody at school sort of thinks I'm weird. But a lot of musicians are like me."

Dr. Rossi began to sweat. "How is that, son?"

"Well, they're really passionate about it. I'm that way, too. I want to make music my life."

There was a brief pause as Dr. Rossi searched for an appropriate response.

"You're my boy," he said at last, as an evasive alternative to an expression of sincere affection.

"Thanks, Dad. I think I'll go down and practice now."

After Danny left, Art Rossi poured himself a drink and thought, I guess I should be grateful. A passion for music was better than several others he could have imagined.

Just after his sixteenth birthday, Danny made his debut as a soloist with the Junior College Symphony. Under the baton of his mentor, he played Brahms's arduous Second Piano Concerto before a packed auditorium that included his parents.

As Danny stepped on stage, pale with fright, his glasses caught the glare of the primitive spotlight, nearly blinding him. When at last he reached the piano, he felt paralyzed.

Dr. Landau walked over and whispered, "Don't worry, Daniel, you are ready."

Danny's terror magically dissipated.

The applause seemed to go on forever.

As he bowed and turned to shake his teacher's hand, Danny was startled to see tears in the old man's eyes.

Landau embraced his protégé.

* * *

"You know, Dan, you made me real proud tonight."

Ordinarily, a son so long starved for paternal affection would have been ecstatic to get such a compliment. But that evening Daniel Rossi had been intoxicated by a new emotion: the adoration of a crowd.

From the time he entered high school, Danny had his heart set on going to Harvard, where he could study composition with Randall Thompson, choral master, and Walter Piston, virtuoso symphonist. This alone gave him the inspiration to slog through science, math, and civics.

For sentimental reasons, Dr. Rossi would have liked to see his son at Princeton, the university celebrated by F. Scott Fitzgerald. And which would have been Frank's alma mater.

But Danny was impervious to all persuasion. And finally Art Rossi stopped his campaign.

"I can't get anywhere with him. Let the kid go where he wants."

But something occurred to shake the dentist's laissez-faire attitude. In 1954, the zealous Senator McCarthy was focusing his scrutiny upon "that Commie sanctuary Harvard." Some of its professors would not cooperate with his committee and discuss their colleagues' politics.

Worse, the President of Harvard, the stubborn Dr. Pusey, then refused to fire them as Joe McCarthy had demanded.

"Son," Dr. Rossi asked with growing frequency, "how can anyone whose brother died protecting us from communism even dream of going to that kind of school?"

Danny remained taciturn. What was the point of answering that music isn't political?

As Dr. Rossi persevered with his objections, Danny's mother tried desperately not to take sides. And so Dr. Landau was the only person with whom Danny could discuss his great dilemma.

The old man was as circumspect as possible. And yet he confessed to Danny, "This McCarthy frightens me. You know, they started out in Germany like this."

He paused uneasily, now pained by unhealed memories.

Then he continued softly, "Daniel, there is fear throughout the country. Senator McCarthy thinks he can dictate to Harvard, tell them whom to fire and so forth. I think their president has