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**A NOVEL BY N. H. KLEINBAUM**

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**HYPERION**

LOS ANGELES • NEW YORK

## CHAPTER 1



Inside the stone chapel of Welton Academy, a private school nestled in the remote hills of Vermont, more than three hundred boys, all wearing the academy blazer, sat on either side of the long aisle, surrounded by proud-faced parents, and waited. They heard the reverberations of the bagpipes as a short, elderly man swathed in flowing robes lit a candle and led a procession of students carrying banners, robed teachers, and alumnae down a long slate hallway into the venerable chapel.

The four boys who carried banners marched solemnly to the dais, followed slowly by the elderly men, the last of whom proudly carried the lighted candle.

Headmaster Gale Nolan, a husky man in his early sixties, stood at the podium watching expectantly as the procession concluded.

"Ladies and gentlemen . . . boys . . ." he said dramatically, pointing toward the man with the candle. "The light of knowledge . . . books"

The audience applauded politely as the older gentleman stepped slowly forward with the candle. The bagpiper marched in place at the corner of the dais, and the four banner carriers, lowering their flags that read, "Tradition," "Honor," "Discipline," and "Excellence," quietly took seats with the audience.

The gentleman with the candle walked to the front of the audience where the youngest students sat holding unlit candles. Slowly, he bent forward, lighting the candle of the first student on the aisle.

"The light of knowledge shall be passed from old to young," Headmaster Nolan intoned solemnly, as each boy lit the candle of the student sitting next to him.

"Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished alumni, and students . . . This year, 1959, marks the hundredth year that Welton Academy has been in existence. One hundred years ago, in 1859, forty-one boys sat in this room and were asked the same question that now greets you at the start of each semester." Nolan paused dramatically, his gaze sweeping the room full of intense, frightened young faces.

"Gentlemen," he bellowed, "what are the four pillars?"

The shuffle of feet broke the tense silence as the

students rose to attention. Sixteen-year-old Todd Anderson, one of the few students not wearing the school blazer, hesitated as the boys around him rose to their feet. His mother nudged him up. His face was drawn and unhappy, his eyes dark with anger. He watched silently as the boys around him shouted in unison, "Tradition! Honor! Discipline! Excellence!"

Nolan nodded, and the boys sat down. When the squeaking of chairs subsided, a solemn hush fell over the chapel.

"In her first year," Dean Nolan bellowed into the microphone, "Welton Academy graduated five students." He paused. "Last year we graduated fifty-one students and over 75 percent of those went to Ivy League schools!"

A burst of applause filled the room as the proud parents sitting next to their sons congratulated Nolan's efforts. Two of the banner carriers, sixteen-year-olds Knox Overstreet and his friend Charlie Dalton, joined in the applause. They both sported Welton blazers, and, sitting between their parents, they personified the Ivy League image. Knox had short curly hair, an outgoing smile, and an athletic build. Charlie had a handsome, preppy look about him.

"This kind of accomplishment," Dean Nolan continued as Knox and Charlie looked around at their schoolmates, "is the result of fervent dedication to the principles taught here. This is why parents have

been sending their sons here and this is why we are the best preparatory school in the United States." Nolan paused for the applause that followed.

"New students," he continued, directing his attention toward the newest boys to join the ranks of Welton Academy, "the key to your success rests on the four pillars. This applies to seventh graders and transfer students alike." Todd Anderson squirmed again in his seat at the mention of transfer students, his face revealing his self-consciousness. "The four pillars are the bywords of this school, and they will become the cornerstones of your lives.

"Welton Society candidate Richard Cameron," Nolan called, and one of the boys who had carried a banner snapped to his feet.

"Yes, sir!" Cameron shouted. His father, sitting beside him, beamed with pride.

"Cameron, what is tradition?"

"Tradition, Mr. Nolan, is the love of school, country, and family. Our tradition at Welton is to be the best!"

"Good, Mr. Cameron.

"Welton Society Candidate George Hopkins. What is Honor?"

Cameron sat stiffly as his father smiled smugly.

"Honor is dignity and the fulfillment of duty!" the boy answered.

"Good, Mr. Hopkins. Honor Society Candidate Knox Overstreet." Knox, who also held a banner, stood.

"Yes, sir."

"What is discipline?" Nolan asked.

"Discipline is respect for parents, teachers, and headmaster. Discipline comes from within."

"Thank you, Mr. Overstreet. Honor candidate Neil Perry."

Knox sat down, smiling. His parents, sitting on either side of him, patted him with encouragement.

Neil Perry rose to his feet. The breast pocket of his Welton blazer was covered with a huge cluster of achievement pins. The sixteen-year-old stood dutifully, staring angrily at Dean Nolan.

"Excellence, Mr. Perry?"

"Excellence is the result of hard work," Perry replied loudly in a rotelike monotone. "Excellence is the key to all success, in school and everywhere." He sat down and stared directly at the dais. Beside him his unsmiling father was stony eyed and silent, not acknowledging his son in the least.

"Gentlemen," Dean Nolan continued, "at Welton you will work harder than you have ever worked in your lives, and your reward will be the success that all of us expect of you.

"Due to the retirement of our beloved English teacher, Mr. Portius, I hope that you will take this opportunity to meet his replacement, Mr. John Keating, himself an honors graduate of this school, who, for the last several years, has been teaching at the highly regarded Chester School in London."

Mr. Keating, who sat with the other members of

the faculty, leaned slightly forward to acknowledge his introduction. In his early thirties, Keating, who had brown hair and brown eyes, was of medium height—an average-looking man. He appeared to be respectable and scholarly, but Neil Perry's father eyed the new English teacher with suspicion.

"To conclude these welcoming ceremonies," Nolan said, "I would like to call to the podium Welton's oldest living graduate, Mr. Alexander Carmichael, Jr., Class of 1886."

The audience rose to a standing ovation as the octogenarian haughtily shunned offers of help from those beside him and made his way to the podium with painstaking slowness. He mumbled a few words that the audience could barely make out, and, with that, the convocation came to an end. The students and their parents filed out of the chapel and onto the chilly campus grounds.

Weathered stone buildings and a tradition of austerity isolated Welton from the world beyond. Like a vicar standing outside of church on Sunday, Dean Nolan watched students and parents say their good-byes.

Charlie Dalton's mother brushed the hair out of his eyes and hugged him tightly. Knox Overstreet's father gave his son an affectionate squeeze as they walked around the campus pointing to its landmarks. Neil Perry's father stood stiffly, adjusting the achievement pins on his son's jacket. Todd

Anderson stood alone, trying to unearth a stone with his shoe. His parents chatted nearby with another couple, paying no heed to their son. Staring at the ground self-consciously, Todd was startled when Dean Nolan approached him and tried to get a look at his name tag.

"Ah, Mr. Anderson. You have some big shoes to fill, young man. Your brother was one of our best."

"Thank you, sir," Todd said faintly.

Nolan moved on, strolling past parents and students, greeting them and smiling all the time. He stopped when he reached Mr. Perry and Neil, and he put his hand on Neil's shoulder.

"We're expecting great things of you, Mr. Perry," the dean said to Neil.

"Thank you, Mr. Nolan."

"He won't disappoint us," the boy's father said to Nolan. "Right, Neil?"

"I'll do my best, sir." Nolan patted Neil's shoulder and moved on. He noticed that many of the younger boys' chins quivered, and tears slipped out as they said good-bye to their parents, perhaps for the first time.

"You're going to love it here," one father said, smiling and waving as he walked quickly away.

"Don't be a baby," another father snapped at his frightened and tearful son.

Slowly the parents filtered out and cars pulled away. The boys had a new home at Welton Acad-

emy, isolated in the green but raw woods of Vermont.

"I want to go home!" one boy wailed. An upper-classman patted his back and led him away toward the dorm.

## CHAPTER 2



"Walk, gentlemen. Slow down," a teacher with a Scottish brogue called out. The forty members of the junior class hurried down the dormitory staircase while fifteen senior boys tried to crush their way up.

"Yes, sir, Mr. McAllister," one of the juniors called back. "Sorry, sir." McAllister shook his head at the boys who dashed out of the dorm and across the campus.

Once inside the oak-paneled Academy Honor Room, the juniors stood around or sat in the crinkly old leather chairs, waiting for their turns. Several eyes peered up the staircase against the wall that led to a second-floor door.

Moments later the door opened and five boys filed silently down the stairs. An old gray-haired teacher shuffled to the door.

"Overstreet, Perry, Dalton, Anderson, Cameron," Dr. Hager called out. "Come."

The boys filed up the staircase while two boys sitting below watched them intently.

"Who's the new boy, Meeks?" Pitts whispered to his classmate.

"Anderson," Steven Meeks whispered back. Old Hager spotted the conversation.

"Misters Pitts and Meeks. Demerits," he called down dourly. The boys looked down, turning their heads together, and Pitts rolled his eyes.

Dr. Hager was old, but his eyes were sharp as an eagle's. "That's another demerit, Mr. Pitts," he said.

The boys whom Dr. Hager had called followed him into Headmaster Nolan's inner office, passing his secretary and wife, Mrs. Nolan.

They stood in front of a row of chairs facing Dean Nolan, who sat behind his desk, a hunting dog resting at his side.

"Welcome back, boys. Mr. Dalton, how's your father?"

"Doing fine, sir," Charlie said.

"Your family move into that new house yet, Mr. Overstreet?"

"Yes, sir, about a month ago."

"Wonderful," Nolan smiled briefly. "I hear it's beautiful." He patted the dog and gave him a snack while the boys stood awkwardly waiting.

"Mr. Anderson," Nolan said. "Since you're new

here let me explain that at Welton I assign extra-curricular activities on the basis of merit and desire.

"These activities are taken every bit as seriously as your class work, right boys?"

"Yes, sir!" the others said in military unison.

"Failure to attend required meetings will result in demerits. Now, Mr. Dalton: the school paper, the Service Club, soccer, rowing. Mr. Overstreet: Welton Society Candidates, the school paper, soccer, Sons of Alumni Club. Mr. Perry: Welton Society Candidates, Chemistry Club, Mathematics Club, school annual, soccer. Mr. Cameron: Welton Society Candidates, Debate Club, rowing, Service Club, Forensics, Honor Council."

"Thank you, sir," Cameron said.

"Mr. Anderson, based on your record at Balincrest: soccer, Service Club, school annual. Anything else I should know about?"

Todd stood silent. He struggled to say something, but the words just wouldn't come out.

"Speak up, Mr. Anderson," Nolan said.

"I . . . would . . . prefer . . . rowing . . . sir," Todd said, his voice barely audible. Nolan looked at Todd, who started to shake from head to toe.

"Rowing? Did he say rowing? It says here you played soccer at Balincrest?"

Todd tried to speak again. "I . . . did . . . but . . ." he whispered. Beads of sweat broke out on his brow, and he clenched his hands so tightly