

A Class Apart

Alec Klein

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Enter Stuyvesant High, one of the most extraordinary schools in America, a place where the brainiacs prevail and jocks are embarrassed to admit they play on the woeful football team. Academic competition is so intense that students say they can have only two of these three things: good grades, a social life, or sleep. About one in four Stuyvesant students gains admission to the Ivy League. And the school's alumni include several Nobel laureates, Academy Award winners, and luminaries in the arts, business, and public service.

A Class Apart follows the lives of Stuyvesant's remarkable students, such as Romeo, the football team captain who teaches himself calculus and strives to make it into Harvard; Jane, a world-weary poet at seventeen, battling the demon of drug addiction; Milo, a ten-year-old prodigy trying to fit in among high-school students who are literally twice his size; Mariya, a first-generation American beginning to resist parental pressure for ever-higher grades so that she can enjoy her sophomore year. And then there is the faculty, such as math chairman Mr. Jaye, who is determined not to let bureaucratic red tape stop him from helping his teachers. He even finds a job for a depressed math genius who lacks a college degree but possesses the gift of teaching.

This is the story of the American dream, a New York City school that inspires immigrants to come to these shores so that their children can attend Stuyvesant in the first step to a better life. It's also the controversial story of elitism in education. Stuyvesant is a public school, but children must pass a rigorous entrance exam to get in. Only about 3 percent do so, which, Stuyvesant students and faculty point out, makes admission to their high school tougher than to Harvard.

On the eve of the hundredth anniversary of Stuyvesant's first graduating class, reporter Alec Klein, an alumnus, was given unfettered access to the school and the students and faculty who inhabit it. What emerges is a book filled with stunning, raw, and heartrending personalities, whose stories are hilarious, sad, and powerfully moving.



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