

In the few days between arrival at Harvard Law School and the first classes, there are rumors. And stories. About being singled out, made to show your stuff. Mostly, they're about people who made some terrible mistake. Couldn't answer a question right. One concerns a boy who did a particularly bad job. His professor called him down to the front of the class, up to the podium, gave the student a dime and said, loudly: "Go call your mother, and tell her you'll never be a lawyer."

Sometimes the story ends here, but the way I heard it, the crushed student bowed his head and limped slowly back through the one hundred and fifty students in the class. When he got to the door, his anger exploded. He screamed- "You're a son of a bitch, Kingsfield."

"That's the first intelligent thing you've said," Kingsfield replied "Come back. Perhaps I've been too hasty."

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PROFESSOR KINGSFIELD, who should have been reviewing the cases he would offer his first class of the year, stared down from the window forming most of the far wall of his second story office in Langdell Hall and watched the students walking to class.

He was panting. Professor Kingsfield had just done forty push-ups on his green carpet. His vest was pulled tight around his small stomach and it seemed, each time his heart heaved, the buttons would give way.

A pyramid-shaped wooden box, built for keeping time during piano lessons, was ticking on his desk and he stopped its pendulum. Professor Kingsfield did his push-ups in four-four time.

His secretary knocked on the door and reminded him that if he didn't get moving he'd be late. She paused in the doorway, watching his heaving chest. Since Crane had broken his hip in a fall from the lecture platform, Professor Kingsfield was the oldest active member of the Harvard Law School faculty.

He noticed her concern and smiled, picked up the casebook he had written thirty years before, threw his jacket over his shoulder and left the office.

Hart tried to balance the three huge casebooks under one arm, and with the other hold up his little map. He really needed two hands to carry the casebooks-combined, they were more than fifteen inches thick, with smooth dust jackets that tended to make the middle book slide out-and he stumbled along, trying to find Langdell North and avoid bumping into another law student.

Everything would have been easy if he had known which direction was North. He had figured out that the dotted lines didn't represent paths, but instead tunnels, somewhere under his feet, connecting the classrooms, the library, the dorms and

the eating hall in Harkness. He knew that the sharp red lines were the paths—little asphalt tracks winding along through the maze of granite buildings.

Some of the buildings were old. Langdell was old: a three story dark stone building, built in neoclassical renaissance. It stretched out for a block in front of and behind him, with the library on the third floor. Hart had been circling it for ten minutes trying to find an entrance that would lead to his classroom.

The other buildings he'd passed were more modern but in an attempt to compromise with Langdell had been given the library's worst features. They were tall concrete rectangles, broken by large dark windows, woven around Langdell like pillboxes, guarding the perimeter of the monolith. It seemed that everything was interconnected, not only by the tunnels, but also by bridges which sprung out from the second and third floors of Langdell like spider legs, gripping the walls of the outposts.

Hart took a reading on the sun, trying to remember from his Boy Scout days where it rose. He absolutely refused to ask anyone the way. He disliked being a first year student, disliked not knowing where things were. Most of all, he disliked feeling unorganized, and he was terribly unorganized on this first day of classes. He couldn't read his map, he couldn't carry his casebooks. His glasses had fallen down over his nose, and he didn't have a free hand to lift them up.

He had expected to have these troubles, and knew from experience that he wouldn't want to ask directions. Thus, he had allowed a full twenty minutes to find the classroom. His books were slowly sliding forward from under his arm, and he wondered if he should reconsider his vow never to buy a briefcase.

He moved into a flow of red books, tucked on top of other casebooks. Red. His contracts book was red. He followed the flow to one of the stone entrances to Langdell, up the granite steps. In the hallway, groups of students pushed against each other, as they tried to squeeze through the classroom door.

Every now and then books hit the floor when students bumped. A contagious feeling of tension hung in the corridor. People were overly polite or overly rude. Hart pulled his books to his chest, let his map drop to the floor, and started pushing toward the red door of the classroom.

Most of the first year students, in anticipation of their first class at the Harvard Law School, were already seated as Professor Kingsfield, at exactly five minutes past nine, walked purposefully through the little door behind the lecture platform. He put his books and notes down on the wooden lectern and pulled out the seating chart. One hundred and fifty names and numbers: the guide to the assigned classroom seats. He put the chart on the lectern, unbuttoned his coat, exposing the gold chain across his vest, and gripped the smooth sides of the stand, feeling for the indentations he had worn into the wood. He did not allow his eyes to meet those of any student—his face had a distant look similar to the ones in the thirty or so large gilt-framed portraits of judges and lawyers that hung around the room.

Professor Kingsfield was at ease with the room's high ceiling, thick beams, tall thin windows. Though he knew the room had mellowed to the verge of decay, he disliked the new red linoleum bench tops. They hid the mementos carved by generations of law students, and accented the fact that the wooden chairs were losing their backs, the ceiling peeling, and the institutional light brown paint on the walls turning the color of mud. He could have taught in one of the new classrooms with carpets and programmed acoustics designed to hold less than the full quota of a hundred and fifty students. But he had taught in this room for thirty years, and felt at home.

At exactly ten past nine, Professor Kingsfield picked a name from the seating chart. The name came from the left side of the classroom. Professor Kingsfield looked off to the right, his eyes

following one of the curving benches to where it ended by the window.

Without turning, he said crisply, "Mr. Hart, will you recite the facts of *Hawkins versus McGee*?"

When Hart, seat 259, heard his name, he froze. Caught unprepared, he simply stopped functioning. Then he felt his heart beat faster than he could ever remember its beating and his palms and arms break out in sweat.

Professor Kingsfield rotated slowly until he was staring down at Hart. The rest of the class followed Kingsfield's eyes.

"I have got your name right?" Kingsfield asked. "You are Mr. Hart?" He spoke evenly, filling every inch of the hall.

A barely audible voice floated back: "Yes, my name is Hart."

"Mr. Hart, you're not speaking loud enough. Will you speak up?"

Hart repeated the sentence, no louder than before. He tried to speak loudly, tried to force the air out of his lungs with a deep push, tried to make his words come out with conviction. He could feel his face whitening, his lower lip beat against his upper. He couldn't speak louder.

"Mr. Hart, will you stand?"

After some difficulty, Hart found, to his amazement, he was on his feet.

"Now, Mr. Hart, will you give us the case?"

Hart had his book open to the case: he had been informed by the student next to him that a notice on the bulletin board listed *Hawkins v. McGee* as part of the first day's assignment in contracts. But Hart had not known about the bulletin board. Like most of the students, he had assumed that the first lecture would be an introduction.

His voice floated across the classroom: "I ... I haven't read the case. I only found out about it just now."

Kingsfield walked to the edge of the platform.

"Mr. Hart, I will myself give you the facts of the case. *Hawkins*

versus *McGee* is a case in contract law, the subject of our study. A boy burned his hand by touching an electric wire. A doctor who wanted to experiment in skin grafting asked to operate on the hand, guaranteeing that he would restore the hand 'one hundred percent.' Unfortunately, the operation failed to produce a healthy hand. Instead, it produced a hairy hand. A hand not only burned, but covered with dense matted hair.

"Now, Mr. Hart, what sort of damages do you think the doctor should pay?"

Hart reached into his memory for any recollections of doctors. There were squeaks from the seats as members of the class adjusted their positions. Hart tried to remember the summation he had just heard, tried to think about it in a logical sequence. But all his mental energy had been expended in pushing back shock waves from the realization that, though Kingsfield had appeared to be staring at a boy on the other side of the room, he had in fact called out the name Hart. And there was the constant strain of trying to maintain his balance because the lecture hall sloped toward the podium at the center, making him afraid that if he fainted he would fall on the student in front of him.

Hart said nothing.

"As you remember, Mr. Hart, this was a case involving a doctor who promised to restore an injured hand."

That brought it back. Hart found that if he focused on Kingsfield's face, he could imagine there was no one else in the room. A soft haze formed around the face. Hart's eyes were watering, but he could speak.

"There was a promise to fix the hand back the way it was before," Hart said.

Kingsfield interrupted: "And what in fact was the result of the operation?"

"The hand was much worse than when it was just burned ..."

"So the man got less than he was promised, even less than he had when the operation started?"

The Paper Chase by John Jay Osborn, Jr. (1971)

Kingsfield wasn't looking at Hart now. He had his hands folded across his chest. He faced out, catching as many of the class's glances as he could.

"Now, Mr. Hart," Kingsfield said, "how should the court measure the damages?"

"The difference between what he was promised, a new hand, and what he got, a worse hand?" Hart asked.

Kingsfield stared off to the right, picked a name from the seating chart.

"Mr. Pruit, perhaps you can tell the class if we should give the boy the difference between what he was promised and what he got, as Mr. Hart suggests, or the difference between what he got, and what he had."

Hart fell back into his seat. He blinked, trying to erase the image of Kingsfield suspended in his mind. He couldn't. The lined white skin, the thin rusty lips grew like a balloon until the image seemed to actually press against his face, shutting off everything else in the classroom.

Hart blinked again, felt for his pen and tried to focus on his clean paper. His hand shook, squiggling a random line. Across the room, a terrified, astonished boy with a beard and wire-rimmed glasses was slowly talking about the hairy hand.