

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. "

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."