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## Kingsfield Meditates

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KINGSFIELD MEDITATES

*John Jay Osborn\**

299

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If Professor Kingsfield had been looking out the window of his office, he would have seen law students on their way to their first class of the year. But Professor Kingsfield's eyes were shut. His arms were extended out, hands palms up, resting on the leather arms of his wing chair. His breaths came in long, low deliberate sighs. His mind sought nothingness, and the calm peace began to fill him as he concentrated on his breathing. Professor Kingsfield was meditating.

He had started the practice because of the dreams, which had begun four years ago. Half dead law students, with huge black eyes, funny, jerky movements, stumbled toward him relentlessly, bellowing “Kingsfield, Kingsfield, Kingsfield ...” What were they called? Was it zombies? Whatever they were, night after night, they came for him in his dreams, chasing him across Cambridge, through the snow, cornering him in the Harvard Yard, blocking the exits. Just before they got him, he would wake up, dripping sweat.

His blood pressure was through the roof. Sleep was a nightmare. The doctor told him to meditate. This advice sounded ridiculous to Kingsfield. How about sleeping pills? No, he was to meditate. Just try it for God’s sake, the doctor pleaded. And so Kingsfield did.

Incredibly, it worked. As he got better at meditating, the dreams disappeared. His blood pressure went down. His temper seemed banked, a fire covered for the night. And he began to see connections. Had he not been a law student at one time? Had he not known what it was like to be humiliated before the class? Had he not felt the pain?

Even though Kingsfield was concentrating on his breathing, he was aware that it was time to put on his jacket, pick up the casebook he had written so many years before, and leave for class. Meditating had given him this sixth sense of knowing, without thinking, exactly what time it was. Amazing. He opened his dark eyes.

All the students were in their seats when Kingfield, at exactly ten past nine, stepped through the small door behind the stage and quietly put his casebook and seating chart on the lectern. Kingsfield moved around the lectern, until there was nothing between him and the class. He looked into the student eyes individually, a benevolent smile on his face.

“Good morning,” Kingsfield said his voice deep and melodic. “As you know our subject matter is contract law. Let’s turn to our first case, *Hawkins v. McGee*. I wonder if anyone would like to volunteer to tell us the facts of the case?”

He looked over the class, more than a hundred and twenty students. Not

a single one raised their hand. Ah well. Kingsfield knew his reputation, forged over the years. He was thought to be a dangerous, difficult teacher, a sadist.

He studied the class, trying to sense a student who might take this first journey with him. For a moment Kingsfield shut his eyes, letting his mind float. He felt a pull from the left side of the classroom. From approximately half way up the rows of students. Now he opened his eyes. He was looking directly at a young man who was looking directly at him. Kingsfield felt a connection. What was it? He wasn't sure, but he wanted to explore it.

"Might I ask your name?"

"Hart," the student said slowly, nervously.

"What did you think of the *Hawkins* case?" Kingsfield asked.

"I haven't read it," Hart said in a panicked voice. "I didn't get the email. My account is messed up. I didn't know it was assigned, that there was an assignment."

"There are other ways to find out what is assigned," Kingsfield said. "Ask a classmate, for example. You could even ask me. The door to my office is always open."

"I'm really sorry about this," Hart said. His voice was shaking. "I promise you, it won't happen again."

"A promise, Mr. Hart?" Kingsfield said. "Promises are the building blocks of contract law. I take them very seriously."

"I do too," Hart said, his voice steadying.

"In return for your promise to always know the assignment," Kingsfield said. "I will tell you the facts of *Hawkins v. McGee*."

Kingsfield made a mental note of the bargain he had just struck with Hart. Simple as it seemed, it brought up many important issues of contract law. He would discuss, with Hart, those issues and their little contract at an appropriate time. This thought gave Kingsfield pleasure. Hart. He plugged the name into his deep memory. He would not forget it.

"Well, Mr. Hart," Kingsfield said. He stepped off the lectern, down onto the floor, and took two steps up the aisle, toward Mr. Hart. "Once there was a farm boy who injured his hand. He went to a doctor who wanted to experiment in skin grafting." He stopped ten feet or so from Mr. Hart and *felt* the distance. It felt a comfortable, close enough to be friendly, as if they were colleagues, yet far enough away not to scare Hart.

“The boy was dubious, unsure about going ahead with the operation. To persuade the boy to go through with it, the doctor promised to restore the hand one hundred percent, to give the boy a perfect hand. So the boy had the operation. The result? The boy received a hand that was still deformed, and now also covered with matted hair.”

Hart was looking intently at Kingsfield.

“Let me ask you this, Mr. Hart,” Kingsfield said. “How would you *feel* if you were the boy?”

Hart did not answer right away, and Kingsfield gave him time to think it over.

“You mean should he sue the doctor?” Hart said after a moment.

“We will get to that,” Kingsfield said. “But I was wondering if you could put yourself into the boy’s shoes? Young Hawkins. And ask yourself, what did he *feel* when he saw the result of the operation? What would you have felt? Suppose you were a lawyer, and the boy came to you as a client. Don’t you think it would be a good idea to put yourself into the boy’s shoes?”

Hart blinked, he looked at Kingsfield.

“Yes,” Hart said suddenly. “Yes I do!”

He smiled at Kingsfield.

Kingsfield smiled back.