

I AM GREENWALD, MY FATHER'S SON

HE HAD BROUGHT THEM BACK FROM THE RENTAL GALLERY of the Art Institute. The paintings hung on the wall facing his desk, and already he could feel the warmth from the colors, vivid reds and oranges and yellows, soft earth colors, abstract whorls that spun in sensuous patterns. He had grouped the paintings around an oval collage of Bets and the children.

He particularly liked one picture, a large water-color and ink sketch of a group of angels carrying a shrouded figure of a woman. It was named *The Assumption of St. Catherine of Alexandria*. The angels were flat-faced Oriental princesses, almost Byzantine, and their robes were elegantly embroidered red silk, filigreed with half moons and asteroids. The figure of St. Catherine was also flat-faced, with high cheekbones, and black vacant pinpoints for eyes. She was enshrouded in gray muslin, and the supporting angels flew with her corpse and held her gently like litter bearers. Below the angels were the rooftops of ancient Alexandria, tiny houses, cubes of ivory done in bright sun colors of the ancient desert. When he looked from his desk across the room at the painting, he often imagined himself standing in the hills overlooking some exotic port city, looking down at the water and at the harbor. He knew though that he would never make it out of Chicago.

Carter Greenwald was a partner in the firm of Kelly, Heifetz, Greenwald, Baugh & Vonier, a firm of eighty-seven lawyers with offices on the thirty-fifth, thirty-sixth, and half of the thirty-seventh floors of the old Chicago Midland Exchange Building. The firm was celebrating its centennial year and had been founded just after the Civil War by John Kroft and William Greenwald, Carter's great grandfather. Old William Greenwald had been succeeded by his only son, Peter S., Carter's grandfather, and then William Carter Greenwald II, Carter's father, who had died last year after fifty years of practice with the firm. Carter had been a partner for ten years and had moved from the trial department, to antitrust, to labor, and now probate. He was still a junior partner though, his share of the firm profits (%.75693) churned out by the computer biweekly in the form of a flat white envelope containing a check for \$1,250. This was augmented by another flat white computer envelope placed on his desk by the office manager on Christmas Eve day of each year with an additional two to eight thousand dollar bonus voted by the firm's executive committee. It was enough to live well, and he maintained a home in Winnetka, an old, white clapboard house on a ravine lot with his wife Betsy, two children, three dogs, one beat-up Chevy wagon, a new, steel-gray Volvo wagon that he had bought partly financed, and a sleek, purple XKE Jaguar racing coupe he had quietly acquired with some of the cash from his father's estate.

It was obvious to his partners that Carter didn't have the drive of W.C. II, his father. He had the old man's dark, intense face though and the familiar tall, angular body. But Carter's father had been a competitor, a slashing, combative man who loved litigation and who could sense an opponent's weak spot and lead a trial group of juniors to victory. He was a true legal general, a man who could argue and win a complex antitrust case or a proxy fight. He had been a member of the boards of many of the city's largest corporations. Above all, he was a businessman, shrewd and talented in fee setting and the gathering and currying of clients. The old man had been hard and concise and profane; the son, although willingly joining the firm after Yale Law School, seemed destined to slip gradually down the same ladder that his father had climbed. The younger man didn't have the stomach for the combat of trial work. He liked the travel associated with labor law, but he soon grew tired of motels and planes and being away from his family. He wasn't good at negotiating contracts with tough union negotiators. He found antitrust boring except for research. He enjoyed preparing memorandums, working late in the library, his books piled high around him, a young secretary from the pool staying late. He thought that some of the briefs he had written in the appellate section of antitrust had been good. The firm had even bound some in Moroccan leather and had shelved them in the glass bookcases that were reserved for work the Partners considered distinctive. Several times lately, when he'd been down late at the office and only the scrub women were with him in the library, Carter would open the glass case and remove the three slim volumes that bore his name inscribed in gold on the binding, "C.P. Greenwald." The language of the briefs, though, brought no real feeling of accomplishment. The subjects were esoteric, the words not concerned with life. They were the dead words of a technocrat.

Perhaps he should just leave. Go out West, a small town in Colorado or Wyoming, hang up his shingle, put his feet up on a desk and deal with people. Perhaps be an Indian law specialist, traveling to tribal courts, adjusting disputes, occasionally flying to Washington to argue before the Supreme Court.

Perhaps he should learn a craft. Like glass-blowing. He had seen a young man once, in Door County, Wisconsin, a young bearded glass blower who had an open furnace in a barn on an abandoned farm. Carter and Bets and the children had watched an exhibition at night, the young man using his glass-blower's tube like a wand in the moonlight, his shadow dancing in the glow of the kiln, his face alive and infused with the mystery and magic of his craft. The young man had touched something alive with his hands. It was the same feeling that Carter tried to find with his briefs, but the triumph had eluded him.

Now he was stuck in the probate section. He'd been there for the past three years. But at least here things were orderly, and Carter was good at drawing his wills and trusts. The language was precise, and he would draft and redraft his instruments until he was certain that he had honed them down to white bone, like finely rubbed scrimshaw. He was a good draftsman, but the firm had recently bought three automatic typing machines to reproduce standard estate instruments. If you needed a Marital A and B Trust, you could slip in a pre-coded card and the typewriters would whir out the trust, perfectly typed. The whole procedure took about ten minutes. Since the machines were purchased, Carter was hardly doing any drafting at all. He'd probably drafted only four wills in the last three months and had dragged those jobs out as long as he could with hours of unnecessary tax research. He still met with clients though, and now, with the machines emptying his life, he looked forward to the personal contact. He was particularly good with little old ladies and represented the firm at luncheons given by bank trust departments for wealthy widows who were clients of the firm. He was good at sitting at these luncheons in dark panelled rooms up in the bank towers. He knew what to say and when to be quiet. He did not have to be told that the old ladies were important to the firm. They controlled their husbands' estates. The banks received annual commissions as trustees and the firm annual fees as attorneys for the trustees. He was paid to be circumspect, and he kept his mouth shut as he sat at the tables with the silver candelabras in the luncheon rooms. He would nod and sip his consommé and only occasionally accept one of the after luncheon cigars, cautious not to blow smoke and offend the widows. He saved the cigars for his office and the long afternoons facing him.

Lately, in the afternoons, with his office door closed, Carter had begun to compile a list. It was his list of what he thought was going wrong at the office, and tangentially, going wrong with his life. One of the children had brought home a purple grease-point pen from school, and Carter snatched the pen and brought it down on the train to his office and began the list, writing on a yellow legal pad in vivid purple ink.

This afternoon, Carter had returned from another luncheon at one of the bank trust departments and had quietly closed his office door and hung up his jacket. He removed an old telescope from the wall cabinet above his desk and trained the scope on the lake's harbor until he caught a freighter with rust on its sides, a tricolor flying at its stern, and two men in berets and heavy quilted jackets standing at the rail, smoking in the gray December afternoon. He tried to focus on their faces, but he couldn't catch them. The freighter was moving slowly along

the breakwaters, and he followed it until it was lost behind the window frame. Then he shut the scope and pulled the curtains. He lit the cigar he had saved from the luncheon and sat back in his desk chair, his feet on the desk. After a moment, he looked up at the painting of St. Catherine, hoping the mosaic of the housetops would soon unscramble into his familiar dream. St. Catherine's eyes were slanted even though shut in death. The eyes had a particular cant, a familiar configuration. And so did the angels' faces, the faces done in the same deep rose color of the intricate robes. There was no expression in the faces though, not even the slightest trace of life in the faces.

Carter lifted his phone. "No calls, please," he said gruffly to the operator. The dream wouldn't come, so he began to look over his list. He began to read, his horn-rimmed half-glasses down on his nose.

Office and Other Problems C.P.G., was the title. Then he had drawn a thin purple line through that and had written, A Memorandum to All Partners—Matters of Concern in Firm Administration C.P.G., and again a line through that, changed to, Memorandum to All Partners re: Problems of Firm Administration C.P.G., and then finally another deletion and a change simply to, Office Memorandum C.P.G.

OFFICE MEMORANDUM C.P.G.

To All Partners:

For some time I have been troubled by certain matters in the routine of the firm and have not spoken out. I have concluded to remain silent no longer. There are many items of daily annoyance that I think could be (must be) eliminated or changed. I have drafted this memorandum for the purpose of calling your attention to those things that I find particularly distressing. I would like to discuss them further at a meeting of the Managing Committee that I propose be held within one week. The items are as follows:

Bells—The matter of the constant sounding of bell chimes when a lawyer cannot be reached on his office phone. I feel like Pavlov's dog being called to the phone. My particular signal is dong, dong, ding (pause two seconds), dong. I have no particular bitch with the alliteration. But I do feel like we're all trapped in a large department store. This constant chiming.

Brown Bagging in Offices—I notice that many of the older associates are now bringing lunch to the office. They eat with their office doors open in full view of clients and partners who pass along the corridors.

The odor of fruit and sandwiches can be detected outside their rooms. This simian practice should be immediately discontinued.

Time Sheets—Each day the assistant office manager places a “Daily Time Sheet” at my desk. I’m expected to fill it out and turn it in the following morning before I receive a fresh sheet. I dislike having to enter every phone call I make, i.e., “Call to Smith 1/4, Call to Jones 1/4.” Can each phone call possibly take a quarter of an hour? Perhaps a fairer method of billing a client would be to have a glass full of sand at the lawyer’s desk and as a call is made the sand glass could be tilted to flow down into a special receptacle. At the end of each day the total volume of sand could be picked up by the assistant office manager who would then carefully weigh it. I also am beginning to develop less tolerance for the cross hatches and grids on the time sheets that divide each day into hours and fractions of hours. The lines remind me of fourth grade mimeos brought home by my children. Calendars of school events drawn with a shaky stylus.

Floorboards—The floorboards in the corridors squeak. New carpet padding should be purchased. There is also an awful creaking on the interior stairways and the stairway carpeting is worn in several places. Certainly the bottom step leading to the library floor looks as pitted as the surface of Mars.

Rolling Pennies on Library Bookshelves—I’m sure our library is one of the most extensive private collections in the city. Often when I go down there (on the threadbare stairway carpet) the librarian and his assistant are rolling pennies along the vinyl tops of the bookcases. Admittedly, the librarian and his assistant are young law students and part-time employees, but they should be advised that their games are out of order. They should be made to sit at their desks. Also, they neglect to wear their gray dust jackets. They should be required to wear these jackets.

Computers and Auto-Types—The computer is surely a monster. All the lights blinking and ratchets and spools whirring. Destroy it. Destroy it before it destroys me. At least hang some rattan matchstick shades over the glass partitions surrounding the computer room. This monster (aided by the Executive Committee no doubt) has computed my partnership percentage at .75693. My God, by whose autocratic fiat am I, Carter Greenwald, human being, to be forever .75693? For God’s sake move me up to 1.00000 percent and be done with it. At least then I won’t have to invade my patrimony if Bets and I want to fly out to Aspen. And the auto-types . . . they’re doing me out of a job. Smash them with a sledge. What do they know about the Rule Against Perpetuities? I can extemporize, the machines can’t. I’ve read Moynihan’s hornbook. Could an auto-type write this memorandum? You are turning us all into dying technocrats, dry little old men, servile and dyspeptic.

Firm Letterhead—The paper is too thin and has too parchmenty a feel. The watermark is too prominent and is visible in weak light. It's like the crested paper of a deluxe French hotel. I don't like the battery of names on our stationery and the arrangement of partners not by alphabet but by prominence within the firm. I am forty-second in the pecking order. Why? Why should Carter Greenwald be a thin engraved smudge of ink in a roster? I am alive and I have needs and my family has needs. We have human concerns. The lines of partners' names took like a mass obituary.

And the names of deceased partners on the right side trail down the edge of the paper like the footprints of little black mice. It's as if a pack of mice had scampered over our stationery, their tiny feet inked and leaving impressions everywhere. Why not just print the name of the firm across the top. "Kelly, Heifetz, Greenwald, Baugh & Vonier." Neatly engraved. No partners' names, no associates, no deceased partners, no one "Of Counsel," no Washington or Los Angeles Office. Just the firm name, address, and telephone number.

Office Softball Team—Gentlemen should not play softball. We are gentlemen. Our profession is a learned profession. Why softball? Who ordered the shirts with "KHGB&V" in a scroll across the front? I can't stand seeing the young jocks from the trial department with their gloves and bats on soft June afternoons.

CCH Reports—Who's filling the binders? The last Report Letters are often four to six weeks old. These services cost us thousands, tens of thousands. They must be kept up. Who's in charge of keeping up? (Another reason for lighting a fire under the librarians.) There's a high pile of CCH envelopes rising unopened on their desks. Open up the the goddamned envelopes, librarians! Stop rolling pennies!! The decimal notations on the CCH reports remind me of my partnership percentage. Decimals, decimals, despair, despair.

Magazines and Periodicals—It's the routing and initialing. The defiling of perfectly good glossy covers of these publications with the insane scrawl of partners' initials. Why should I get my *Taxes* magazine with sets of initials on the right edge? TT, FDJ, KPT, to which I am required to add CPG and then pass the periodical on to JKM? Why the routing? And why the initialing? Don't you trust me to read? I read. And while we're on magazines, who chooses them for the reception room table? *Fortune*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *Nations Business*, *The Economist*, *Dow Jones Magazine* . . . why not the *New Republic* or something racy like *Penthouse*, something compact like that new little *Penthouse Forum* with the satyrs on the cover?

Switchboard Operators—As I pass the switchboard room all I hear is the rising murmur . . . "Kelly, Heifetz, Kelly, Heifetz." It's like a

litany, some ancient liturgical chant, this answering of the phone with the greeting “Kelly, Heifetz, Kelly, Heifetz.” At least have the operators say “Good Morning,” or “Good Morning, Kelly, Heifetz.” This constant “Kelly, Heifetz” chant, it’s almost mesmerizing, to me at least, as I pass the operators, their pallid faces with black cups on their ears, cups blotting out life sounds, brown wisps of hair gone to gray under the steel bands of head-sets, lips pursed and whispering “Kelly, Heifetz . . .” Why not “Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna”? Dress them in saffron robes. Better yet, why not “Kelly, Heifetz and *Greenwald*”? I am Greenwald. My father’s son.

Pro Bono Work—In the past few years by vote of the Executive Committee, four Associates and two Partners have been assigned to Pro Bono work. Can’t we construct a private entrance for our Pro Bono clients? How do I explain the presence of people in working clothes to my suburban widows dressed in black silk suits from Saks? Also, our Pro Bono lawyers are badly in need of haircuts.

Christmas Gifts—I find the giving of Christmas gifts of liquor to court clerks and clerical employees in the County and Federal buildings rather suggestive, if not a form of bribery. The cache of brightly wrapped packages of bottles in the storeroom appearing two weeks before Christmas, while attractive and festive, hardly seems in keeping with our role as seekers of justice, keepers of the law. There’s a certain transference in political gift giving. The donor ultimately winds up smitten with the disease of the donee, a laying on of hands, a transmutation.

Charitable Donations—I am embarrassed on July evenings when I study my concert program by candle-light in the grass at Ravinia and I see the name of our firm listed as a donor. Oh, I know that all the major firms are listed, our competitors, but they, at least, are in the thousand dollar category and we’re five hundred dollar donors. There I am, seated at a table on the lawn with our friends, dining elegantly with silver service, our faces aglow in the candle shadowing. I await the opening notes of the concert and tremble that our penury will be unmasked. Either up the donation to a thousand or get out of the book. Either support art or abandon it. Don’t denigrate it.

Personal Notes.

T.S.S.—Don’t search for me on the commuter train. I don’t enjoy your company. You advise on crosswords. I know the Italian word for work is “opera.” Your breath is bad. I can’t abide a discussion of collapsible corporations when all I want to do is look out the window at vague shapes. Your preciseness has become intolerable. Why do you wear an Astrakhan in spring? Wholly to be a fool?

O.N.D.—We say good night to each other, you say “take care.” Can’t you simply say, “good night”? “Take care” of whom, what? “Take care” of you? You seem to be doing a good job of that. “Take care” of myself? Isn’t that implied by my very being, my essence, so to speak? Are you suggesting I require a Conservator? Will you act without fee? You who were once Order of the Coif, insisting on chutney for the Christmas party?

W.E.B.—You have a silver tea service on a rolling cart in the anteroom of your office. Your secretary serves coffee to clients and uses tongs with the cubes. A replica of your law school seal is framed in purple satin over the tea set, “Sanctus Ivo, Patronus Advocatorum—Bon Droit Et Raison.” You pretentious bastard—with your Gucci loafers and tassels. I’ve seen you dictating to a hand-set on your way to the office from Union Station. Someday that oppressed woman who tongs your cubes will drive a letter opener between your shoulder blades.

H.J.L.—Good and worthy man. Why a buzzer on your wristwatch? Time passes soon enough.

A.K.N.—Trial lawyer of note. Your depositions are as tedious and arcane as *The Canterbury Tales*. Must you wear cleats on your heels? All the juniors in your trial section are now wearing heels with cleats. Your team. All glen-plaids from Brooks and scissored haircuts. “Sanctus Ivo, Patronus Advocatorum.” Old black men limp into your offices to shine your shoes. You flip them quarters.

Greenwald stopped reading and took the purple grease pen and added the initials C.P.G. to his personal notes. What should he say about Carter P. Greenwald? C.P. Greenwald? He put the pen down and picked up a dart and looped it at a cork bull’s-eye target that hung in a corner of the office. The dart landed with a thwack sound and quivered and fell to the floor. He closed his eyes and tried to remember himself as a law student. The class picture, he stands at the end of the first row, 1954, in the courtyard of Yale Law School, his Harris tweed jacket unbuttoned, trousers just a touch short, not breaking on his shoe tops but nevertheless knife-creased khakis. Where had he gone wrong? He should never have returned to Chicago. He could have stayed in New Haven, or perhaps gone out West to try jury cases. In twenty years he had never tried a jury case. He’d become a businessman, not a lawyer. A corporate hand-maiden. Assuaging old ladies for commissions. He could have been a defender of the poor. Had a storefront office. The word L A W Y E R in block letters on the window. Late in the afternoon the shadows of L A W Y E R would reflect back through the glass and bend along his desk or across his face as he advised some working man, using his Spanish 31, “Hola, amigo, yo soy abogado . . .” A B O G A D O. In Tucson. In a

storefront near the university. "C. Greenwald, A B O G A D O", the letters bending in soft shadow over his desk. He had never faced a man accused of crime. Talked to a man behind bars. Argued for a man's liberty. Yo Soy A B O G A D O. Sanctus Ivo. He could have at least tried being a Federal Defender. One of his classmates had offered him an appointment, but the Executive Committee had prohibited it in 1970; they didn't want partners doing Pro Bono.

He got up from the desk and pulled open the curtains again. The gray winter mist was floating up to him now, shrouding the city as the figure of St. Catherine was shrouded in the painting. He tugged the window wide open and looked down. The left side of his head seemed to be filled with the same grayness, the fog of the city winter reaching into him, seeping, as if the gray shroud of St. Catherine were folding over him. He stared at the painting. Those vacant pin points of eyes. The Byzantine faces. Red-faced angels in their elegant robes. The rooftops of Alexandria, ivory cubes and triangles. He reached for another of his darts and dropped it through the open window down to the empty courtyard thirty-five floors below. It disappeared, whirling into the murk.

The litter of angels with the slanted faces waited. Arrayed in their red robes. The covey of angels called to him in the soft call of angels, whispering "Sanctus Ivo . . . Sanctus Ivo." He could place one foot on the sill and then another and sit down and slowly lower himself out, and then roll into the outstretched arms of the angels. It would be easy. It would be comforting.

He sat down on the sill with his back to the window and held another dart to his heart. He could see himself in his first year contracts class. The highly varnished student's desk. The arched gables of the lecture hall. The dry, professorial tones of the lecturer, the finger hovering on the seating chart. "Ah . . . Ah . . . Mr. Greenwald . . . where do you find the mutuality of obligation in this situation . . . Ah, Ah . . . Mr. Greenwald, is the consideration flowing to the offeree actual or illusory in the case at hand?" He held the dart and flicked its feathered fins with the nail of his right index finger. "Sophistry," he should have answered. "Mr. Greenwald, are you being facetious?" A tittering in the classroom. "Teach us to be lawyers, sir. I have come here to become a lawyer. How do I become a lawyer?"

He looked up at his framed oval collage of photographs of Bets and the children and then slowly he lowered himself down from the window sill and closed the window and pulled the curtains. He went over to his desk, sat down, and turned on his dictaphone. The red nodule glowed "on," he stared at it, it seemed to recess deep into his brain, like a ruby on a genie's turban, only burning into him and glowing into his head,

filling him with its redness as it burrowed into him. His hand reached for his memorandum. He wanted to begin dictating into the machine. He knew he couldn't write the section about C.P.G. He tried to speak. The words wouldn't come. His tongue was being cleaved by the red nodule, a glowing diamond drill, cleaving his tongue and paralyzing his speech. He put the papers down and reached for the purple grease pen. Mute, his tongue not working, slowly, laboriously he printed the letters on his forehead. He wrote L A W Y E R. Then he began to cry.