



## **SALLY MAE HAS AN ERUPTION**

**owen mould**

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As Friday segued with dissolving clouds into a dappled Saturday and a thoroughly blue-sky Sunday, the tides receded from the collapsed pathways along the Strand bringing out the joggers and strollers and all the folks blinking in the suddenly bright air and the Mullah was seen strolling along with nuns in tow with great enjoyment of all god's creation once again.

Mr. Howitzer emerged from his doorway down by Empire Way waving his cane in the air with his bowtie undone by exertion and shouting imprecations at Sally Mae who, sitting there in the office before her typewriter, had experienced an eruption.

Before talking about Sally's eruption, let us talk about her typewriter. The tool in question, was an IBM Selectric with a self-correction feature that had long been allowed to fall into disuse, for Mr. Howitzer refused to expend funds on the frivolity of such things as correction ribbons. The secretaries must type correctly or do it all over and that was that as far as Mr. Howitzer was concerned.

Expenditures were devoted to significant and advanced business-related issues. Not for the likes of secretaries and their comfort and the failures due to incompetence. Incompetence was a sin which Mr. Howitzer would never forgive. And many were those who adhered to his philosophy. Including Mr. Tarkieff, who insisted on each visit upon absolutely clean copy. Free of powderpuff and facepaint.

The copy might have no sign of such marks to the objective observer, but Mr. Tarkieff held to the principle of effectiveness and absolutism over shilly shally and Sally suffered for it. As one can imagine. When Mr. Tarkieff arrived – he was mostly absent on client calls, as it was given, and in the snug of Kreplach’s House of Convivial Spirits, as it was in reality – he owned the Lower Office with truculent force, for he had paid for most of it and one was not to place so much as a bottle of whiteout or a binder clip anywhere near, for the passage must be made straight and unobstructed. Should there be need, in the event of fire, for people to go bounding from one desktop to another avoiding the flames and the great floods beneath. Nevertheless, the Lower Office was so choked with all of Mr. Tarkieff’s stuff: golf clubs, belljar fantods, lava lamps, mass trade paperbacks, a 200 pound block of granite table-top, a spare sink, any number of unworkable tiffany lamps, piles of used typewriter ribbons, greasy parts from any one of his three Morris Minors, at least one sledgehammer and a conceptually useful box of ballpoint pens.

But no one was allowed to touch anything or use any of the duct tape in the drawers, for that was personal property. And as Sally learned the hard way in

her first days, could bring down litigious wrath and docking of pay for use of a single ballpoint.

Shelly, the third member of the Management Team, let into poor Sally Mae with language that caused a pair of sailors passing by the door to turn pale. It seemed at times, in fact, that Shelly's vocabulary had become inextricably bound to just three foci that came into play with the near certainty of a light switch whenever vocalization occurred as an event, and these happened to be excrement, fornication, and the subject's parental lineage.

For well on ten years, as Sally had felt compelled to work for the property management firm of Tarkieff, Howitzer, and Shelly that long, she had put up with imperious demands for cups of coffee, brutish insults and late nights at the office handling any number of the frequent lawsuits this company seemed to bring on itself; for Sally was not alone as a recipient of Mr. Howitzer and Mr. Tarkieff's sense of personal *ubermenschlich* superiority. Wo betide the tenants that found themselves under the autocratic rule of this company.

Tenants cannot choose their overseers – with some exceptions – and Sally must needs work for a living.

As Mr. Howitzer would lovingly extoll, you must work to pay for what you cannot afford so as to afford the credit that you overextend so as to pay the fees for what you must support so that you can work that much more. He really liked that speech and he would deliver it often on a Friday afternoon about five-thirty and would sometimes continue extempore some thirty minutes more past the

departure of the Island ferry. He was quite the Republican and well respected among his kind in California.

Mr. Howitzer dearly loved his own words, perhaps even more than he loved his own money, although any cogitation upon the matter of which he valued more would most likely cause Mr. Howitzer distemper and anyone else pangs of despair over *la condition humaine*. This value-set made Mr. Howitzer unusual among his kind.

Ah, but to return to Sally's typewriter, it was a simple IBM Selectric, commanded to print contracts, letters, agenda, minutes, missives to sundry mistresses, invitations to grand fetes, memos, budgets of every kind and description and much more for Sally must needs be adjutant, secretary, amanuensis, accountant, clerk, and galley slave to the extreme and all this for some ten years, as mentioned previously.

On this particular day, Sally happened upon the image in the mail -- she was commanded to sort and deliver mail among her duties -- of a leaping fish in the ad for a Mexican holiday in the Baja. It was one of those travel adverts about the delights of resort package vacations and such. What struck her was not the vivid blue of water, nor the excited and delighted face of the fisherman, nor the spume of the flung spray, but the image of the Dorado captured by artist photographer in mid leap as it fought for life. It seemed the photographer, perhaps some college-age artist making minimum wage, had focussed not on the fun loving sportsman, nor upon the scenery, but upon the desperation and

crispness and color of the Dorado, who appeared in gorgeous rainbow colors shot through with gold and incarnadine of the most vigorous shine.

This would have been the end of it, leaving perhaps only a vivid memory and the snapshot of a life from which she was forever excluded, for how on earth could anyone such as her enjoy a single minute of such a life in Mexico chasing the dolphin fish?

She was nothing. Mr. Howitzer often implied that. He never said such a thing, for saying such a thing outright would be considered gauche and perhaps illegal by some. She was just not meant for interaction with complex personalities. Managers were managers and servants were servile because that was the inherent nature of each respective individual. Each to their station. It had all been laid out by Plato long ago. Everyone had their station and Society was built upon such foundations. That was the opinion of Mr. Howitzer. And Mr. Tarkieff.

So she agreed so as to keep her job so that she could pay her credit fees that enabled her to continue to pay for the things that let her keep her job. It seemed to make sense.

But then the sun came through that Saturday and made a rainbow across her desk like the leap of the Dorado in the picture. The Dorado, you must know, is often called "the dolphin fish". Dolphins are mammals, like you and me and Sally Mae. They have brains almost like humans and can understand speech between each other, between humans and each other and between themselves and humans.

This itself is remarkable.

The fact that Sally Mae would connect the colors of a chance rainbow across her desk with the colors of a soon-to-die Dorado in a photograph is also remarkable. One might say that this sort of connection is precisely the sort of thing that puts old Plato in the circular file and makes human beings something more remarkable than fish. What is more remarkable than all these is what transpired next.

Mr. Howitzer requested in his usually demanding tones that Sally make another pot of coffee, for the previous one had gone sour. That is not unusual. Bosses do this kind of thing all the time to their subservients in America, and they would express their intent using exactly the same words.

You and I might have delivered the message somewhat otherwise. You might have said, "Go to hell you bonobo! Take your coffee and shove it up where the sun don't shine."

We prefer to grant the reader the utmost of benefit and observance here.

We, in far cruder terms, would have said, "F--- off, you God d-----d Sh--head!" But Sally was a daycent gal from Gallway and disinclined to vulgar language.

Sally Mae said, "Make your own darn coffee Mr. Howitzer. You are a big baby and I don't want to work for you any longer."

Now we come to the eruption. In every Shakespear play, after all the messy tragic stuff, something rotten in Denmark, mad kings upon the heath, spouting hurricanoes, twenty trenched gashes, and much hullabaloo, always

some bloke wanders on stage to set things right again and restore order to the State. Mr. Howitzer saw himself each day just so, as a mature Fortinbras.

Sally Mae jumped up and Mr. Howitzer jumped up and Sally Mae, seeing the colors of the Dorado thrashing for its life down there in waters off Mexico imagined she was fighting for her own life and Mr. Howitzer, enraged at his coffee and things not going according to plan at all, that all of Society was going to hell in a handbasket, sought to restore order and save Society by chunking a fit bigger than Hercules, and so failed to accomplish his aims, as noble as they may have appeared.

Sally Mae rushed out of that office knowing it was all over there, and at least she would get decent employment at a place where they used at least a word processor instead of a dead old IBM Selectric and where she would earn at least a little Respect, well she rushed out and never was seen again in those parts. Not ever again.

Mr. Howitzer rushed out as we first saw him with his cane and shouting and Officer Popinjay from the Highway Patrol had to come in and calm the poor man down with brandy and an investigation. Officer Popinjay left shaking his head and Mr. Howitzer has yet to obtain another hire the likes of Sally Mae, although the ad remains out to provoke the most recent hire and the investigation remains officially open, although it seems unlikely that there will be a resolution any time soon as the act appears vague to the officials, and without criminal intent.

Other than these events, life has been quiet here on the Island. No word on what Harlan, the madman of Lincoln Street has to say about all of this.



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