



BY SHANA ALEXANDER

I'D WONDERED WHAT BECAME OF SALLY

Washington has no heroes left. Not only has the spreading scandal destroyed our national leadership—all of it, not just the man at the top—but familiarity has rubbed the stardust from the shoulders of the men who did the job, the various lawyers, prosecutors, investigators and members of the Senate committee. Judge Sirica and possibly lawyer Cox are exceptions, but their enduring shine is the luster of the law itself.

I'm not complaining. It's necessary to toss out old heroes from time to time, spring cleaning of the mind. But we have hit a unique dead spot in the national cardiogram; the pulse is nearly flat. A few weak blips of admiration do appear on the scope, but they are not heroes. They are heroines, and minor ones at that: Rose Mary Woods, Sally Harmony, and all the others who helped their bosses Get Things Done. Strictly speaking, these heroines are not all secretaries, not even all female. We feel the same stirrings of sympathy for Odle the office manager, Sloan the accountant, and even for the four "Cuban-Americans" whose quick slapstick turn in blue gloves was curtain raiser to the drama.

But the virtues of these low-level aides were quintessential secretarial virtues; loyalty, discretion and organization. Without such support, an executive wobbles like a broken three-legged stool. Too often, a fourth secretarial ideal—ready likability—is sacrificed to the imperative of the other three.

PRETTY MISS HARMONY

But this was surely not so in the case of Sally Harmony. The secretary to G. Gordon Liddy was immediately likable from the moment she stepped on-camera last spring in her pleasant smile, pretty fluffy hair-do, and nice office-chic polka-dot frock. Miss Harmony! Even her name must have been reassuring to the frazzled executive. As for the cardinal virtues of loyalty, discretion and order, the girl was a paragon. With perfect composure, she testified how she had spent days transcribing tapes of gabble, garble and gobbledygook between personages named Sedan Chair One and Sedan Chair Two, onto special "Gemstone" stationery, without ever wondering what the hell was going on.

Miss Harmony had a wonderful way of expressing herself. "To me, 'clandestine' does not mean illegal; but I can keep a secret," is one of Sally's more memorable secretarial quotes that I find scribbled in one of my old notebooks.

As for *her* old notebooks, they don't exist. Miss Harmony is such a model of orderliness and discretion that, she also swore, after she had shredded every scrap of office paper on which Liddy's handwriting appeared, she even fed her own notebooks into the shredding machine—so selfless an act as to constitute secretarial infanticide.

DANCING ALONE?

I had been wondering what happened to Sally after her first appearance on page one. Did she ever get that promised trip to Florida, the one they said her overtime exertions at the shredder had earned? In November, I was pleased to notice that Sally was the only member of the old CREEP office staff who didn't show up for their gruesome-sounding election-night anniversary party. "Good old Sally," I thought. I knew that girl had taste. But what had become of her? Was she too dancing alone somewhere, like Rose Mary Woods, who had been seen one warm summer night doing a tango solo poolside at San Clemente? Had Sally, like poor, forsaken Rose Mary, been forced to hire and huddle with legal counsel of her own?

Then suddenly this week Sally was back on page one. Asserting the public's "right to know," Federal Judge Charles R. Richey, God bless him, ordered made public a sealed deposition Miss Harmony had given last May regarding Howard Hughes's campaign contributions. That Sally "reappeared" in stenographic, deposition form seemed a nice touch.

Sally testified that before the new campaign-gift law went into effect, a Hughes man delivered a bunch of signed checks. They were made out to the re-election committee, but the amounts were left blank. Sally's job was to type in the numbers. Needless to say, she could remember every detail of this except how much money was involved.

When my daughter was little, she used to talk about her memory and her "forgettery." Sally's was a beaut.

Sally's reappearance reminded me of another beautifully named Washington secretary, Mildred Paperman, secretary to Sherman Adams's friend Bernard Goldfine, during the Eisenhower years. Mildred even went to jail for her boss. Later, when she was out but Goldfine was still serving time, the ever-loyal Miss Paperman used to smuggle the boss's letters in and out of the clink.

As loyalty is the supreme virtue in the Nixon regime, it is not surprising

that its only heroines, or heroes, turn out to be secretaries. Secretarial loyalty is not the exclusive property of any Administration or party. But if any President put a premium on the secretarial virtues, it is Mr. Nixon. He has always sought some kind of filter between himself and reality. That filter may be bulletproof glass or rose-colored glass as the occasion demands; it may be isolation gained by geographical distance (the tropical and mountain retreats) or the electronically achieved distance from others seemingly offered by the tapes; it may be a phalanx of perfect secretaries led by the redoubtable Miss Woods, each with telephone hold button and glib excuses at the ready.

'UNAWARE'

I have already written of the President's seeming compulsion not to know details of what is going on in his own Administration ("The Need (Not) to Know," *NEWSWEEK*, Aug. 6) and then to deliberately place that need in opposition to the public's right to know as guaranteed by the Constitution. This strange information phobia turned up again last week in the official White House explanations of the ITT case and the milk deal, in which Mr. Nixon asserted that he was "unaware of any commitment by ITT to make a contribution to the expenses of the Republican National Convention."

In any case I am glad that "Operation Candor" is over; the two so-called "white papers" turned out to be an embarrassing shade of tattle-tale gray. Not for the first time, a Nixon position turns out to mean the opposite of what it appears to say: "full disclosure" means cover-up, "war on drugs" means war on drug victims and "peace with honor" turns out to be not much honor and no peace.

Defending his record last March or April, the President asked rhetorically "who is to blame?" and then in slow, magisterial cadence replied, I accept "responsibility," which is not quite the same. But it now appears that once again the reverse is the case, that Mr. Nixon will accept the blame for Watergate if he has to, but still refuses responsibility.

In that other ugly utterance when he said, "I'm not a crook," he might more precisely have said "I'm not *even* a crook." For it now appears that the entire basis of his present defense is that, like Sally, he did not understand anything that was going on.

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