

Hillary Clinton Looks Back in Anger

She talks about Trump, Comey, collusion, “deplorables,” and the power of sexism.

By [David Remnick](#)

September 14, 2017 Issue



The cover of the magazine’s post-election issue, had Clinton won. “I felt that I had let everyone down,” she recalls. “Because I had.”

Illustration by Malika Favre

Hillary Rodham Clinton, who, as she puts it, won “more votes for President than any white man” in American history, is not the first candidate to capture the popular vote but lose the election. She is the fifth. The Founders, for varying reasons, [distrusted popular democracy](#). Southerners were wary of a challenge to slavery; others feared the emergence of a national demagogue. The Electoral College, Alexander Hamilton wrote in Federalist Paper No. 68, would block the rise of a leader with “talents for low intrigue, and the little arts of popularity.” An extra layer of electoral deliberation, he thought, would also insulate the American system from a hostile hack from abroad—“the desire in foreign powers to gain an improper ascendant in our councils.”

Andrew Jackson was the first to suffer this constitutionally enabled result of losing-while-winning, when he conceded the 1824 race to John Quincy Adams. Jackson, whose portrait now hangs in the Oval Office, charged that he had been undone by a rigged ballot. In 1888, Grover Cleveland lost in much the same manner to Benjamin Harrison, but then avenged his humbling four years later. Samuel Tilden fell to Rutherford B. Hayes, in 1876; and yet, after the baroque, months-long struggle inside the Electoral College, Tilden seemed almost relieved. Now, he said, “I can retire to private life with the consciousness that I shall receive from posterity the credit of having been elected to the highest position in the gift of the people, without any of the cares and responsibilities of the office.”

In the ballot of 2000, Albert Gore, Jr., Bill Clinton’s Vice-President for eight years, won half a million more votes than the governor of Texas, George W. Bush. After losing the final battle before the Supreme Court, Gore soon departed Washington to brood in Nashville. He grew a beard. He grew

fat. He seemed, at first, quite lost. When I visited him there, a few years later, he said he would eventually get around to confronting that bitter experience, just not yet. He never fully did so, certainly not at book length. Instead, with time, he shaved his beard, travelled the world giving lectures and making a documentary about climate change, and, in 2007, shared the Nobel Peace Prize with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. He made a fortune as an Apple director, a Google adviser, and a venture-capital partner. He found his way. And whenever someone brought up the election of 2000 he always remembered to lighten matters, saying, “You win some, you lose some, and then there’s that little-known third category.”

For all of Hillary Clinton’s skills of survival, she will have a hard time finding a similar peace or place in public affairs. For one thing, Gore was in his early fifties when he lost. Clinton is sixty-nine. For another, the circumstances surrounding her defeat are immensely more disturbing. Clinton lost a race that few thought possible to lose. Her opponent was not Mitt Romney or John McCain or Marco Rubio but Donald J. Trump, a demonstrably crooked businessman and reality-television star, an unsavory, if shrewd, demagogue whose rhetoric and policy proposals had long flouted the constitutional norms of the United States. She lost because of the tactical blunders of her campaign. She lost because she could never find a language, a thematic focus, or a campaigning persona that could convince enough struggling working Americans that she, and not a cartoonish plutocrat, was their champion. She lost because of the forces of racism, misogyny, and nativism that Trump expertly aroused. And she lost because of external forces (Vladimir Putin, Julian Assange, James Comey) that were beyond her control and are not yet fully understood.

“There are times when all I want to do is scream into a pillow,” Clinton admits in a raw memoir, both apologetic and apoplectic, called [“What Happened.”](#) Clinton describes the daily activity of working on the book with her collaborators, two former speechwriters and a researcher, as “cathartic.” They spent long sessions at her house talking through the details of the campaign, exchanging notes, suggestions, edits. But, as Clinton said when we met recently for a long conversation, the process of thinking about it all—Trump looming over her like a predator at the second debate, the [incessant drumbeat of “e-mails, e-mails, e-mails,”](#) awaking from a nap on Election Night and being told that Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and the election itself had all slipped away—was like willfully reënacting a hideous accident. “Literally, at times when I was writing it, I had to go lie down,” she said. “I just couldn’t bear to relive it.”

But, against the advice of some of those closest to her, she has relived it, for publication. Clinton’s memoir radiates with fury at the forces and the figures ranged against her, but it is also salted with self-searching, grief, bitterness, and fitful attempts to channel and contain that fury. At one point, she writes, “Breathe out. Scream later.” On the night of November 8th, Clinton expected to give a victory speech at the Javits Center, in Manhattan, as the first female President-elect. The stagecraft was in place: she would wear white—“the color of the suffragettes,” the fulfillment of Seneca Falls—and stand on a platform cut into the shape of the United States, under a vast glass ceiling. It was to be a triumph on a historic scale, an American breakthrough as consequential as Barack Obama’s Election Night speech in 2008, at Grant Park. Instead, the next morning, she wore purple, a symbol of the unity of red and blue states, and, before hundreds of shocked, weeping staffers, she made her way through a hastily drafted [message of endurance](#)

[and gratitude](#). Afterward, she and Bill Clinton climbed into their car and, as they were driven along the Hudson River, she was hollowed out, unable to speak, struggling to breathe: “At every step I felt that I had let everyone down. Because I had.”

When Clinton arrived home, she changed into yoga pants and a fleece and wandered outside. She lives on a cul-de-sac called Old House Lane, in Chappaqua, a wooded hamlet in Westchester County. The property is surrounded by a high white fence. Secret Service officers operate out of a red barn in the back yard. It was cold, rainy, quiet, and, she writes, “the question blaring in my head was, ‘How did this happen?’ ”



Before I went to see Clinton, I spoke with some of her top advisers in the campaign. Some still work with her; others stay in close touch, commiserating, exchanging links to stories about Trump-related outrages or malfeasances. They share a sense of colossal failure—of having failed Clinton, and, more, of having

failed the country. They know that she, too, carries a sense of both victimhood and guilt. “There is an exponential quality to the pain she feels,” one of them told me. “It’s the pain of losing an election that you thought you were going to win. And it’s taken to the *n*th power. It’s squared by the fact that this is the second time she has fallen short, and cubed by the fact that the person who won is so deeply unworthy, in her view, and represents a mortal threat to American greatness. There is in her a depth of anguish about the outcome that there is no parallel for in modern memory.”

In the first months after Trump’s victory, Clinton kept mainly out of the public eye. She didn’t want to hear the theories about why her campaign had given America a Trump Presidency; she could not handle easily the gestures of sympathy. She listened with a tight, patient smile as people recommended Xanax and gave her the names of their marvellous therapists. Friends always hastened to praise Clinton for her determination to “keep going,” but they uniformly described her now as angry, confused, bitter, and sad. How did she get from day to day? “Chardonnay helped,” she told me. (It’s become a stock line for her book tour.) She also practiced a form of yoga that involves “alternate-nostril breathing.” That someone might leap on her prescription of white wine and yoga as a parody of blue-state self-care is, in her post-candidate life, irrelevant.

Clinton spent a lot of time around the house. She read Elena Ferrante’s Neapolitan novels of friendship, becoming, and abandonment. She returned to the work of Henri Nouwen, a Dutch-born priest and theologian who wrote about his struggles with depression, spirituality, and loneliness. She consumed mystery novels: Louise Penny, Donna Leon, Charles Todd. She went to her granddaughter’s dance recital. She watched old episodes of “The Good Wife” and “Madam Secretary,” even if that seemed a little on the nose. She teared up watching Kate

McKinnon on “Saturday Night Live” singing Leonard Cohen’s “Hallelujah.” (“I did my best, it wasn’t much . . .”) She went through scores of articles about Russian meddling, offshore “content farms,” Trump-family misadventures. “At times,” she writes, “I felt like C.I.A. agent Carrie Mathison on the TV show *Homeland*, desperately trying to get her arms around a sinister conspiracy and appearing more than a little frantic in the process.” She also spent time thinking about what she might do in the future, “so that the rest of my life wouldn’t be spent like Miss Havisham from Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations*, rattling around my house obsessing over what might have been.” She has yet to settle on anything concrete, save for the conviction that she will never run for office again.

In her concession speech, Clinton had, like Gore before her, gestured to the need for national unity. She mouthed the requisite words of conciliation. (“Donald Trump is going to be our President. We owe him an open mind and the chance to lead. Our constitutional democracy enshrines the peaceful transfer of power.”) But as I sat down with her in a bare conference room in her office on West Forty-fifth Street—a room so drained of decoration that it seemed like a stage set for a production of “Endgame”—she made it plain that, after eight months of Trump’s Presidency, she was through with political politesse. Although her press person had told me that Clinton did not want to be photographed—she writes a long passage in the book about the trials of daily sessions with hairdressers and makeup artists, and all that is required of women in public office to achieve the gloss expected of them—she entered the room looking much as she had throughout the campaign. Still, there was a heaviness to her manner, a kind of grim determination to get a message across, one last time.

“I think the President and his Administration pose a clear and present danger to our democracy,” she said. “I hoped, back on

the day after that election, that I wouldn't be sitting here, all these months later, feeling compelled to say that with a sense of urgency. But I am, and I do.”

Trump, Clinton went on, “is immature, with poor impulse control; unqualified for the position that he holds; reactive, not proactive; not strategic, either at home or on the world stage. And I think he is unpredictable, which, at the end of the description one can give of him, makes him dangerous. The latest incident with North Korea? Going after our ally, South Korea, while North Korea is threatening the region, threatening us? Going after China, which we need, whether we like it or not, to help us try to resolve the aggressive behavior of Kim Jong Un? It puts a smile on Kim's face. Just like him going after *NATO* and the Atlantic alliance puts a smile on Putin's face. He admires authoritarians. In fact, before this crisis with North Korea, he was praising Kim Jong Un. He clearly has a bromance toward Putin, whom he lauds as a great leader. He's being played by the Putins and the Kim Jong Uns of the world. I'm not even sure he's aware of that. Because he has such a limited understanding of the world. Everything is in relation to how it makes him feel. And therefore he has little objective distance, which a leader must have. Making decisions in the Oval Office requires a level of dispassionate, reasoned analysis. We've seen no evidence he's capable of that.”

Diplomacy in the Trump Administration, Clinton said, has become the work of generals, [particularly James Mattis](#), who is “both Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State, as far as I can tell.” She didn't speak critically of Rex Tillerson, but the former Secretary of State said, “There are no diplomats at home. There are no China experts. I don't know who is left in the government at any level of experience and seniority who could be brought into the kind of diplomatic effort that I would advocate for. You should have an envoy that carries the

imprimatur of the President in Korea right now, shuttling between Tokyo and Seoul and Beijing, and trying to figure out what is the best way forward here.”

In all, with Putin behaving like “a Bond villain,” the country on alert against a nuclear North Korea, and the Oval Office occupied by a reality-TV personality, Clinton seemed to feel that a line had been crossed; the country had fallen into a perilous state of unreality.

“It’s like a bad movie,” she said. “You can’t believe anybody would ever green-light it, and all of a sudden it happens.”

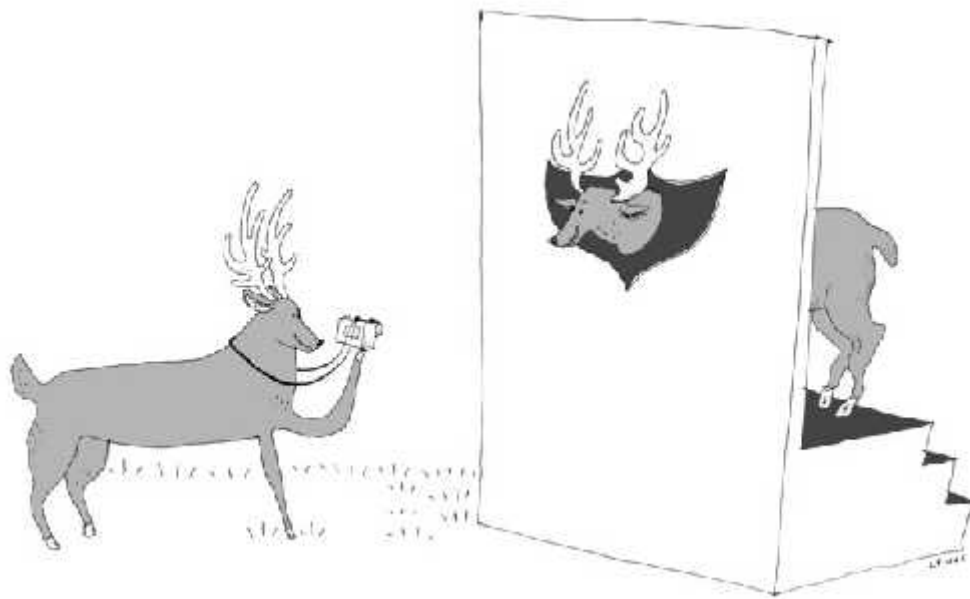
“What Happened” was a No. 1 best-seller on Amazon well before its publication, on September 12th. This is not surprising. Of the more than sixty-five million people who voted for Clinton, and who now feel miserable about the Trump Presidency, not a few want to hear from her again, and gain some consolation from her story, if only to speculate about a through-the-looking-glass world in which she is in the White House, Merrick Garland is on the Supreme Court, and Trump is ranting about “illegals” in a studio at Fox News. Clinton’s previous books—“[It Takes a Village](#),” “[Dear Socks, Dear Buddy](#),” “[Living History](#),” “[Hard Choices](#)”—were more brand burnishment than human expression; they were performances of virtue or anecdotal enumerations of her travels and accomplishments before an upcoming campaign, everything rendered in cautious, sometimes disingenuous, market-tested prose. Such books belong to a well-established tradition. “Living History,” published during her first term in the U.S. Senate, is an evasive, soft-focus memoir. It attempts, for example, to portray her father—a frustrated, angry, and often frightening man—as an ultimately lovable curmudgeon. “Hard Choices,” her chronicle of her years at the State Department,

possesses all the flavor and the nutritional value of a breakfast bowl of packing peanuts and warm water.

“What Happened,” though hardly an Augustinian confession, is much closer to the bone than anything Clinton has ever published. She knows that the voice of the vanquished isn’t always welcome, but she remains defiant: “There were plenty of people hoping that I, too, would just disappear,” she acknowledges. “But here I am.”

The wounds that the new book opens are not just Clinton’s. A few nights before meeting with her, I was at dinner with a political professional who worked on her 2008 campaign. I mentioned that I was going to interview Clinton, and sought his advice about what I should ask. He put down his fork and scowled. “Ask her why she blew the biggest slam dunk in the history of fucking American politics!” he said. A few diners at adjacent tables looked up. “Oh, and ask her if she is going to donate the millions of dollars she’s gonna make on this book to charity. Ask her: Why should you profit from this disaster?” There was more of this.

On the day I was to see Clinton, I read an article in Politico headlined “Democrats Dread Hillary’s Book Tour.” Unnamed “alums” from her Brooklyn campaign headquarters told the reporters that the promotion of “What Happened” was “the final torture.” Others joked about how many stops she’d make in Wisconsin in her campaign to sell books. A top Democratic donor said that Clinton “should just zip it, but she’s not going to.” Senator Claire McCaskill, a Democrat from Missouri, was asked about the book; she replied, “Beg your pardon?,” and walked away. Her colleague from Oregon, Ron Wyden, said, “I’ve always been a looking-forward kind of guy. I think I’ll leave it at that.”



Before publication day, a passage from the book leaked in which Clinton criticizes Bernie Sanders for giving Trump an opening by slashing away at her integrity during the primary campaign. When he was asked about the book by Stephen Colbert, on “The Late Show,” Sanders, who wrote of his own experiences in the 2016 race in a book he published last November, did not miss his cue. “Look, Secretary Clinton ran against the most unpopular candidate in the history of this country and she lost. She’s upset about that and I understand that,” he said. “But our job now is not to go backwards, it is to go forwards. . . . I think it’s a little bit silly to keep talkin’ about 2016.” The bitterness of that primary race will not soon fade. Sanders saw Clinton as a clueless, corrupt, temporizing, buckraking member of the neoliberal élite; she saw him as unserious about the details of policy, reckless, self-righteous, swept up in his own sense of ideological purity, and “not a Democrat.”

Even some of the people closest to Clinton are wary of the book and the inevitable blowback it will invite. “If she carried a cross

and were bleeding on the street, that would not be enough apology for some people,” one adviser told me. According to a recent NBC News poll, Clinton’s favorability rating is now at thirty per cent, the nadir of her public life. This is not a country that countenances losers, it seems, no matter what the popular vote, no matter how badly the rules have been broken, no matter how pernicious the victor. To type “Hillary Clinton” and watch Twitter light up in an efflorescence of insult and wild accusation is an alarming experience. She has been a target of unholy abuse from the start. In 1980, her husband lost the Arkansas governorship after his first term in part because, many voters said, she had the temerity to go by Hillary Rodham. (She soon added Clinton.) Once the Clintons were in the White House, everyone from Rush Limbaugh to Pat Robertson, from Christopher Hitchens to the editorial writers of the *Wall Street Journal*, accused her of heinous crimes: drug running, financial fraud, shadowy doings around the death of Vince Foster. Trump was able to revive many of those old tropes and, through his speeches and tweets and the amplifying force of his incessantly televised rallies, once more cast Clinton as Lady Macbeth.

When I told Clinton that I had looked her up that morning on Twitter, she smiled knowingly and said, “A dangerous thing to do!” She knew all too well what was there, and it wasn’t merely the usual filth about her appearance or her marriage. It was the kind of material that allowed men like Trump, Michael Flynn, and Chris Christie to get in front of roaring crowds and [inspire chants of “Lock her up!”](#)

“I’ve thought a lot about this,” Clinton told me. “And for whatever combination of reasons—some I think I understand, and others I don’t—I am viewed as a threat to powerful forces on both the right and the left. I am still one of the favorite subjects for Fox TV. With the return of [Steve] Bannon to Breitbart, we’ll see him utilizing that publication. It’s because I

do speak out, and I do stand up. Sometimes, you know, what I say is not fully appreciated for years, to be honest. At least, it seems to me that way. But I'm going to continue to speak out. And on the left—there is a real manipulation of the left. In addition to those who are calling me names, we know that Russia has really targeted, through their trolls and bots, a lot of accounts—a lot of Twitter accounts, Facebook accounts, of people on the left—feeding them a steady diet of nonsense.”

Such talk was not a matter of wishful conspiracy thinking. Scott Shane, of the *Times*, recently published an article in which he, with the help of the cybersecurity firm FireEye, detailed the Russian efforts against Clinton in the campaign, far beyond the hack of the Democratic National Committee and John Podesta's e-mail accounts. Shane reported that a “cyberarmy” of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of bloggers and bots with fake American identities spread disinformation about Clinton on various platforms, including Facebook and Twitter.

These tactics, Clinton told me, were “right out of the playbook of Putin and one of the generals whom he listens to, who talked about the kind of war planning and preparation that Russia needed to be engaged in. It was no longer just large, conventional forces and nuclear warheads—it was also cyberwar, covert and semi-covert, even overt, as we saw in Ukraine. This attack on our electoral system was at least publicly encouraged by Trump and his campaign. I hope the investigation in the Congress and by [Robert] Mueller, as well, will give us more information and understanding of what else they really did to us. It's not going away.”

I asked Clinton if she thought Trump or his campaign colluded with the Russians. “I don't want to overstate what we already know publicly, but I think the compilation of coincidence adds up to something more than public support,” she said, referring

to Trump's refusal to criticize Putin ("Why should I tell Putin what to do?") and his encouragement of Julian Assange ("I love WikiLeaks!").

She went on, "The latest disclosure by Facebook about the targeting of attack ads, negative stories, dovetails with my concern that there had to be some information provided to the Russians by someone as to how best to weaponize the information that they stole, first from the Democratic Committee, then from John Podesta. And the refusal of the Trump Administration officials, both current and former, to admit to their involvements with Russians raises a lot of unanswered questions." Putin's motives, she said, went well beyond destabilizing a particular campaign. "Putin wants to undermine democracy, to undermine the Atlantic alliance, to undermine the E.U., to undermine *NATO*, and to resurrect Russian influence as much as possible beyond the borders," she said. "So the stakes are huge here."

If, as Clinton told me, the Russians [had deployed a "new form of warfare" to upend American democratic processes](#), what should President Obama have done in the closing act of the campaign? At a summit in China, Obama told Putin to back off from any election tampering, and he talked about the issue at a press conference. But he did not raise the stakes. Figuring that Clinton would win, Obama was wary of being seen as tipping the election to her and confirming Trump's constant assertions [that the vote was rigged against him](#). When the C.I.A. first told Obama, in August, that the Russians had been meddling in the Presidential race, the agency shared the information with the Gang of Eight—the congressional leadership and the chairs and the ranking members of the intelligence committees. The Administration asked for a bipartisan statement of warning. Mitch McConnell, the Senate Majority Leader, adamantly refused, muffling for weeks any sense of national alarm.

“I feel we sort of choked,” one senior Obama Administration official told the *Washington Post*. Another former Administration official said that national-security people were feeling, “Wow, did we mishandle this.” Clinton, in her book, gingerly “wonders” what the effect might have been had Obama gone on national television in the fall of 2016 “warning that our democracy was under attack.” I asked her whether Obama had failed—whether the issue should have been treated less as a narrowcasted political problem and more as a grave national-security threat.

“Well, I think that I’m very understanding of the position he found himself in,” she said. “Because I’ve been in that Situation Room, I know how hard these calls can be. And I believe that they struggled with this, and they were facing some pretty difficult headwinds.” She was less restrained in her description of the Senate Majority Leader’s behavior. “Mitch McConnell, in what I think of as a not only unpatriotic but despicable act of partisan politics, made it clear that if the Obama Administration spoke publicly about what they knew, he would accuse them of partisan politics, of trying to tip the balance toward me,” she said. “McConnell basically threatened the White House, and I know that was on the President’s mind. It was a predicament for him.” She also lambasted James Comey, the former F.B.I. director, who “refused to publicly acknowledge that there was an investigation, and, with the height of irony, said, ‘Well, you can’t do that so close to the election.’ ” (Comey told the Senate Judiciary Committee that the investigation had not progressed to the point where disclosure would have been appropriate.)

All the same, I asked, did President Obama blow it?

Clinton paused, and spoke very carefully: “I would have, in retrospect now, wished that he had said something, because I think the American people deserved to know.”

WHY DID YOU CANCEL YOUR UBER?



In “What Happened,” Clinton, by way of demanding national resolve against a Russian threat, quotes a maxim attributed to Vladimir Lenin: “You take a bayonet and you push. If you hit mush, you keep going; if you hit steel, you stop.”

“Were we mush?” I asked about the Obama Administration’s response.

Now she did not hesitate. “I think we were mushy,” she said. “Partly because we couldn’t believe it. Richard Clarke, who is one of our nation’s experts on terrorism, has written a book about Cassandras,” unheeded predictors of calamity. “And

there was a collective Cassandra out there—my campaign was part of that—saying, ‘The Russians are in our electoral system, the Russians are weaponizing information, look at it!’ And everybody in the press basically thought we were overstating, exaggerating, making it up. And Comey wouldn’t confirm an investigation, so there was nothing to hold on to. And I think that the point Clarke makes is when you have an initial occurrence that has never happened before, some people might see it and try to warn about it, but most people would find it unlikely, impossible. And what I fear is we still haven’t gotten to the bottom of what the Russians did.”

Surprisingly, Clinton and her advisers believe that the most dramatic day of the campaign, October 7th, [the day of the “Access Hollywood” tape](#), was a disaster for them. Early that day, the director of National Intelligence and the Secretary of Homeland Security released a statement concluding that the Russians had been attempting to interfere in the U.S. election process. But when, shortly afterward, the *Washington Post* released the tape—in which Donald Trump describes how he grabs women by the genitals and moves on them “like a bitch”—the D.H.S. statement was eclipsed. “My heart sank,” Jennifer Palmieri, a top Clinton adviser, recalled. “My first reaction was ‘No! Focus on the intelligence statement!’ The ‘Access Hollywood’ tape was not good for Trump, obviously, but it was more likely to hurt him with the people who were already against him. His supporters had made their peace with his awful behavior.”

That evening, a third media vortex formed, [as Julian Assange went to work](#). WikiLeaks began to dole out a new tranche of stolen e-mails. “It seemed clear to us that the Russians were again being guided by our politics,” Clinton said. “Someone was offering very astute political advice about how to weaponize information, how to convey it, how to use the

existing Russian outlets, like RT or Sputnik, how to use existing American vehicles, like Facebook.”

Clinton has little doubt that Assange was working with the Russians. “I think he is part nihilist, part anarchist, part exhibitionist, part opportunist, who is either actually on the payroll of the Kremlin or in some way supporting their propaganda objectives, because of his resentment toward the United States, toward Europe,” she said. “He’s like a lot of the voices that we’re hearing now, which are expressing appreciation for the macho authoritarianism of a Putin. And they claim to be acting in furtherance of transparency, except they never go after the Kremlin or people on that side of the political ledger.” She said she put Assange and Edward Snowden, who leaked extensive details of N.S.A. surveillance programs, “in the same bucket—they both end up serving the strategic goals of Putin.” She said that, despite Snowden’s insistence that he remains an independent actor, it was “no accident he ended up in Moscow.”

In assessing all the reasons she was defeated last November, Clinton believes that the critical factor was not her failures of tactics or rhetoric, not her misreading of the national Zeitgeist, not her inability to put her e-mail-server blunder to rest, and not even the manipulations of foreign cyberwarriors. The critical factor, in her view, was “the Comey letter”—[James Comey’s announcement](#), eleven days before the election, that the F.B.I. had, in the course of a criminal investigation of the former congressman Anthony Weiner, discovered a cache of e-mails from her that required further study. This revived the e-mail issue that had plagued the campaign from the day in March, 2015, when the *Times* broke the story that Clinton, while Secretary of State, had maintained a private server and merged her personal and professional accounts. The polling expert Nate Silver concluded, “Clinton would almost certainly be President-

Elect if the election had been held on October 27,” the day before Comey released his letter. Silver’s analysis was that Comey’s announcement led to a three-point plunge for Clinton, reducing her chances of winning from eighty-one per cent to sixty-five. Moreover, Silver said, had it not been for the Comey letter and the WikiLeaks publication of stolen e-mails, Clinton would have taken Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Florida. In the end, she lost Florida by 1.2 points, and the others by less than a point.

Clinton talked about the spike in Google searches about WikiLeaks which had been spurred by the Comey letter—particularly in Pennsylvania, “where maybe Obama had squeaked out a win in a town or a county.” “That’s when the bottom fell out,” she said. “Particularly with women in the suburbs of Philadelphia and elsewhere, who thought, Well, that’s it, I wanted to vote for her, I was fighting with my husband, with my son, with my employer, and I told them I was going to vote for her, but they’re right, she’s going to jail, we’re gonna lock her up, I can’t vote for her.”

Time and investigation will tell whether Donald Trump or his surrogates colluded in any foreign interference in the election; what is entirely clear is that he was, with his penchant for exploiting an enemy’s weakness, eager to add weight to the heavy baggage that Clinton, after thirty-five years in public life, carried into the campaign. Trump, who lives in gilded penthouses and palaces, who flies in planes and helicopters emblazoned with his name, who does business with mobsters, campaigned in 2016 by saying that he spoke for the working man, that he alone heard them and felt their anger, and by branding Hillary Clinton an “elitist,” out of touch with her country. The irony is as easy as it is enormous, and yet Clinton made it possible. She practically kicked off her campaign by telling Diane Sawyer that the reason she and her husband

cashed in on the lecture circuit on such an epic scale was that, when they left the White House, in 2001, they were “dead broke.” As earnestly as she has worked on behalf of women, the disadvantaged, and many other constituencies, Clinton does not, for many people, radiate a sense of empathy. A resident of a bubble of power since her days in the Arkansas governor’s mansion, she makes it hard even for many supporters to imagine that her feet ever touch the ground. In “What Happened,” she describes how, when considering whether to run again in 2016, she had to consider all her negatives—“Clinton fatigue,” the dynastic question, her age, the accumulated distrust between her and the press—and then says that she completed the deliberative process by going to stay with Oscar and Annette de la Renta at Casa de Campo, their retreat in the Dominican Republic. “We swam, we ate good food, and thought about the future. By the time we got back, I was ready to run.” This is perhaps not a universally relatable anecdote. Nor did she see much wrong with giving twenty-odd million dollars’ worth of speeches, including to Goldman Sachs and other financial institutions, conceding only that it was, in hindsight, bad “optics.” (“I didn’t think many Americans would believe that I’d sell a lifetime of principle and advocacy for any price,” she writes. “That’s on me.”)

In 2012, Obama won over many working-class voters in the Midwest and elsewhere by reminding them that he had saved the automobile industry and, through strokes broad and subtle, by painting Mitt Romney as the heartless boss who would have handed out the pink slips. Despite Trump’s wealth and his televised role as a big shot who took glee in firing people, “Hillary somehow got portrayed the way Romney did,” a close adviser to Clinton told me. “Those people felt she was against them. It was super gendered and classist. It’s hugely complicated, but she was the uppity woman. . . . Both Bernie

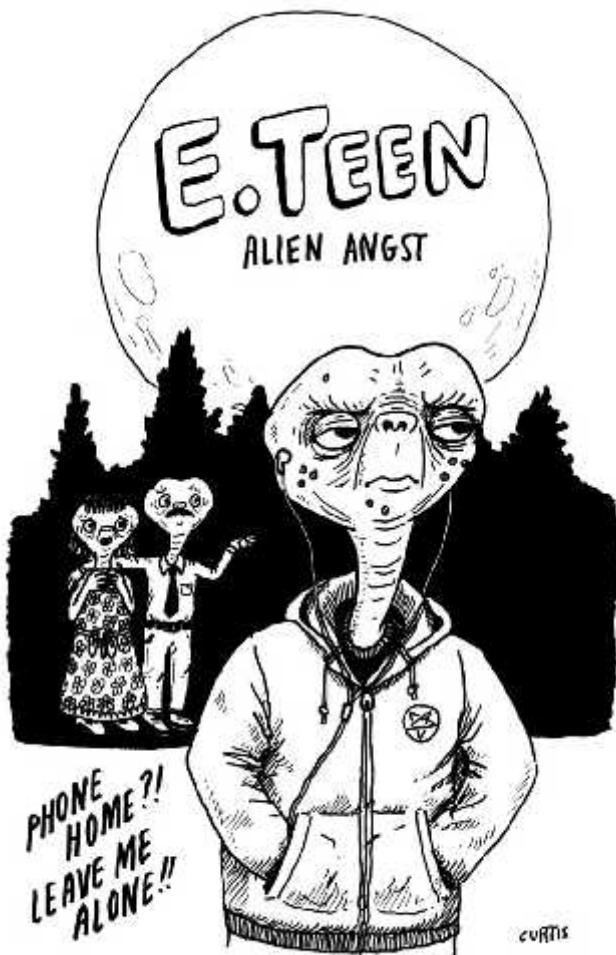
Sanders and Donald Trump drove the message that ‘she looks down on you.’ The ‘deplorable’ thing was awful, but she was losing those people hard by then.”

Clinton’s relation to the press has always been vexed. In the book, Clinton singles out the *Times* for hammering away at her e-mail issue in a way that she says overwhelmed any negative coverage of Trump. “The *Times* covered her like she was a Mafia figure,” one adviser said.

This dynamic has a long history. It was the *Times* that, during the 1992 Presidential campaign, initially broached the Whitewater story—a saga of relatively modest indiscretions and misdeeds. In the White House, the Clintons responded to further inquiries with defensiveness and stubborn resistance, which reinforced suspicion in the press, and the cycle led to conspiracy thinking all around. This cycle of mutual mistrust has continued on and off since then. It was not long before reporters, many of them broadly sympathetic to left-of-center politics, came to view the Clintons with weary skepticism. For other pundits, Hillary Clinton, in particular, came off as sanctimonious, with her New Age homilies about “the politics of meaning.” The Clintons, in turn, came to see the press as the enemy.

In 1993, I was invited to a White House dinner for about fifty people. The Clintons evidently wanted to reestablish some rapport with the press. I was seated next to Hillary. For much of the dinner, she complained about “Saint Hillary,” a caustic profile, by Michael Kelly, published in the *Times Magazine*. Kelly saw Clinton as a self-righteous First Lady who thought she could help concoct a “unified-field theory of life” that encompassed the social gospel of the nineteenth century, the “temperance-minded Methodism” of the twentieth century, the liberation theology of the sixties and seventies, and “the

pacifistic and multiculturally correct religious left of today.” Kelly sternly concluded that Clinton “clearly wants power” and had “amassed more of it than any First Lady since Eleanor Roosevelt.”



From those days onward, Clinton has known that she inspired hostility. Twenty-one years ago, in an article for this magazine called “[Hating Hillary](#),” by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., she admitted, “I apparently remind some people of their mother-in-law or their boss, or something.” In the same piece, Arianna Huffington remarks on Clinton’s “self-righteousness,” Peggy Noonan on her “apple-cheeked certitude.” Gates observed that Clinton was widely perceived as Mrs. Jellyby, the character in

Charles Dickens's "Bleak House" who is as "intent on improving humanity as she is cavalier toward actual human beings . . . the zealous reformer with a heart as big as all Antarctica."

Such ingrained habits of media antagonism proved to be another factor that allowed Trump, the biggest liar in the history of Presidential politics, to be seen by tens of millions of people as a figure of rude authenticity, their champion. In Clinton's view, she could never win with people who had been trained to regard her as a high-minded phony. Her wariness and evasions drained their sympathy; her strained attempts to win people back too often fell flat. Why couldn't she be admired for her intelligence, her competence, her experience?

In "What Happened," she voices her sense of exasperation:

I'll bet you know more about my private life than you do about some of your closest friends. You've read my e-mails, for heaven's sake. What more do you need? What could I do to be "more real"? Dance on a table? Swear a blue streak? Break down sobbing? That's not me. And if I *had* done any of those things, what would have happened? I'd have been ripped to pieces.

She acknowledges that her caution had sometimes made her seem guarded (and "prompted the question, 'What is she hiding?' "), but she notes that many men in politics, though far less scrutinized, aren't asked to "open up, reveal themselves, prove that they're real."

Clinton has come to believe that there is an overriding reason that she has aroused such resentment: her gender. In the book, she points out that both Bill Clinton, as the fatherless son from "a town called Hope," and Barack Obama, as the son of a Kenyan father and a white idealist, had capsule life stories that

helped them reach voters. Clinton was the first woman to have a serious chance to win the Presidency, but “I was unlikely to be seen as a transformative, revolutionary figure. I had been on the national stage too long for that and my temperament was too even-keeled.”

When I asked about this, I pointed out that her popularity was always high when she ran something—when she was Secretary of State, her approval rating was nearly seventy per cent—but suffered when she ran *for* things.

“I was running something in service to someone else,” she told me. “A man. Who I was honored to serve. And so I knew that if I did get into the Presidential race again I would face what women face when you are not serving someone, but you are seeking power yourself.”

Clinton said that she has learned from life, as well as from studies and from conversations with [the likes of Sheryl Sandberg](#), the chief operating officer of Facebook, that “the more successful a man becomes, the more likable he becomes; the more professionally successful a woman becomes, the less likable she becomes.” Her situation, she said, “was Clinton-specific, plus sexism and misogyny.”

But why, when half the voters are female, should gender prove an even greater barrier in American electoral politics than race? I mentioned other countries that have female heads of state, including Great Britain and Germany.

“I think part of it is our system,” she said. “And we don’t yet have that audience. I hope it will change, especially for young women. We have a Presidential system. We have one person—head of state, head of government. Most of the places you mention have a different head of state, to carry on all of the symbolic continuity, whether it’s the crown or the nation, and

the head of government is charged with the responsibility of being a political leader. . . . Parliamentary systems, historically, have proven more open to women. And why would that be? Because you have a party apparatus to support you. You can build relationships and a good sense of competence with your fellow party members. And they can see how effective you are and elect you leader. But you only have to run in your constituency, which is a much smaller and more defined—and, in many ways, open—opportunity to build personal relationships with those who are in your constituency. You know, when I ran for the Senate the first time, here in New York, I won, I think, fifteen counties. Next time I ran, I won all but three.” Close: all but four. “Because I could build that personal relationship, I could produce results, I could demonstrate that I was fighting for the people of New York.”

It’s true that, throughout the campaign, Clinton was described—by Trump, by his surrogates, and by countless people on social media—in the ugliest terms: weak, sickly, a criminal, physically repellent. Clinton, in her book, tells of how, during the second debate, just two days after the “grab ’em by the pussy” tape, she wanted to wheel around at Trump, who was “breathing down my neck,” and say, “Back up, you creep, get away from me, I know you love to intimidate women but you can’t intimidate me, so *back up*.” Instead, she bit her tongue and kept going.

She castigates Trump for inflaming and giving “permission” to misogynists and racists. “Those attitudes have never gone away,” she told me. “But we had successfully—and this is part of the role of civilization—we had rendered them unacceptable: being an overt racist, being an overt misogynist, saying the terrible things that Trump said about immigrants or Muslims. All of that was not political correctness. It was respect. It was tolerance. It was acceptance. But there was a growing

resentment, anger, that came to full flower in this election. . . . The Internet has given voice to, and a home for, so many more people. And so with Trump to light the match, from the first day of his campaign to the last, there was a sense of acceptance, liberation, empowerment for these forces.”



W. M. Ph...

[“O.K., fellas, who wants to make me the happiest guy in the world?”](#)

Did Clinton stand by [her campaign line](#) that a substantial number of Trump’s voters were “deplorables”? She shifted quickly from self-reflection to attack mode.

“I think Trump has behaved in a deplorable manner, both during his campaign and as President,” she said. “I think he has given permission to others to engage in deplorable behavior, as we did see in Charlottesville and elsewhere. So I don’t take back the description that I made of him and a number of his core supporters.”

In conversation and in the book, Clinton’s pain is manifest. When it comes to feminism and her role in the women’s movement, she says, she never figured out “how to tell the story right.” And the country, she believes, is not ready to hear it. Or, at least, not from her. “That’s not who we are,” she writes. “Not yet.”

Elsewhere in the book, she writes, “As the campaign went on, polls showed that a significant number of Americans questioned my authenticity and trustworthiness. A lot of people said they just didn’t like me. I write that matter-of-factly, but believe me, it’s devastating. Some of this is a direct result of my actions: I’ve made mistakes, been defensive about them, stubbornly resisted apologizing. But so have most men in politics. (In fact, one of them just became President with a strategy of ‘never apologize when you’re wrong, just attack harder.’)”

The women in her circle of friends and advisers are particularly outraged by the way that Trump was able to win so many votes among working-class white women. “Trump was, like, I am going to paint a picture of her as someone who will come steal your children and take your guns,” one said. “The million-dollar question will be: What will happen when it isn’t Hillary Clinton, when it’s another woman? For now, neither women nor men trust the ambition of women.”

A few hours after our conversation, I went uptown to Riverside Church, [where Clinton was scheduled to hold a public conversation](#) with Bill Shillady, a Methodist minister and a family friend who during the campaign had e-mailed Clinton hundreds of morning devotionals—Bible passages with accompanying short sermons—and who had helped officiate at Chelsea Clinton’s wedding, in 2010, to Marc Mezvinsky. Now he was publishing those devotionals as a book called “Strong for a Moment Like This.”

Clinton was doing Shillady a kindness, but even in this she couldn’t catch a break. The day before the event, the publisher, Abingdon Press, announced that it was withdrawing the book because it was filled with passages plagiarized from other pastors and sources. Shillady issued an apology, but, naturally, Clinton took the hit in the press. In her fashion, Clinton soldiered through, holding the conversation with another Methodist minister, Ginger Gaines-Cirelli.

The pews were filled with New Yorkers, a majority of them women, who had come to hear Clinton, to shower her with praise, to soothe her and themselves. In the introduction, Amy Butler, the senior minister at Riverside and a friend of Clinton’s, referred to the Trump Administration as a source of anguish and confusion, and everyone nodded solemnly. One got the sense that there would be hundreds of such events in the coming years for Hillary Clinton, and one wondered if they would do anything to ease the sense of failure, the anger at all the forces she could not begin to control. “We praise God for who you are,” a bishop said from the podium. “And most of all, Sister Hillary, we love you.”

Clinton was greeted with a long ovation, which she met with her signature slow head-nodding and an expression at once pleased and pained. She talked about her Methodist church in

Illinois, her youth minister, Don Jones, and her trip to Orchestra Hall, in downtown Chicago, to hear Martin Luther King, Jr., deliver one of his most famous sermons, “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution.” Asked how she was managing, she made her joke about drinking “my fair share of Chardonnay.” She quoted from Galatians: “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.” Her message was endurance, which has always been her watchword. And she made it plain what the election had unleashed.

“Where does that cruelty, that mean-spiritedness, come from?” she said. “It’s not from Christianity. It’s not from people of faith.” This was another source of confusion for her: the evangelical vote went not to the devout Methodist but, rather, to the guy who referred to “Two Corinthians.”

Again, the applause came, but it seemed not to lighten her at all. After the event was over, after the last handshakes, after the last selfie, Clinton climbed in the back seat of her car, the Secret Service all around, and headed back to her white house in the woods.