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At the Pinnacle of Hillary Clinton's Career Secretary of State Clinton has won over her harshest critics and become so popular that some Democrats are envisioning a future in which she replaces Joe Biden as vice president on the 2012 ticket and then—dare they imagine it—takes the top job in 2016.

By Rachael Combe
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I am late for a black-tie dinner, running down Manhattan's West Side Highway in a cocktail dress and bare feet, evening sandals clutched in one hand, a recorder and notebook in the other. In a covered garage at Chelsea Piers, I catch up to my mark—a string of town cars, SUVs, and police cars, lights blazing—just as Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton steps onto the red carpet.

Her entourage files into a curtained-off room to the side of the banquet hall, and her security detail waves me in behind them—I've been following her for a few weeks now, from Washington, DC, to Europe and now New York City. I'm frantically scanning the group for the State Department press aide, my eyes still adjusting to the darkened antechamber, when I practically walk into Secretary Clinton. She looks at me; I look at her. Her eyes are disarmingly blue; my face is red.

Her gaze travels down to the stilettos in my hand, then to my bare feet. I follow suit, as if I'm in one of those dreams where you find yourself in high school French, taking a test you didn't study for, and you suddenly realize that you forgot to put on clothes.

She laughs—not one of the full-throated cackles she's known for, just a little chuckle. "Those are cute," she says, nodding at the shoes, which are bright orange satin.

I stare at her dumbly, still breathing heavily from my jog, unable to think of a word to say. "Thank you," I finally mumble.

"You should put them on," she says, smiling kindly, and disappears into the party, for the nonprofit International Crisis Group's awards ceremony, where she'll be the keynote speaker.

Former president Bill Clinton arrives late, after his wife—he doesn't get the police escort afforded the secretary of state and got stuck in the same traffic jam I did—and is rushed to the podium in front of an audience of dignitaries that includes Queen Noor of Jordan, Wesley Clark, and Colin Powell. "I know I'm just sort of a warm-up act," he says, to laughter. He thanks the honorees and Hillary for their efforts to advance women's rights. "Some day we hope to liberate every man on earth from the tendency as old as human history to identify our strength and manhood with the ability to control the lives, limit the chances, and doom the dreams of women and girls," he says. Then, as if to emphasize that he's not one of those bad guys, he abruptly returns to his seat.

"That's the shortest speech he's ever given," jokes the evening's MC, Wolf Blitzer. "Madame Secretary, is that right?" he asks, looking to Hillary. He goes on to call her "devoted" and "fearless." Marc Lasry, a billionaire hedge fund manager and cochair of the event, introduces her and tells the crowd that Hillary is a great dancer. Before anyone else can get up to declare their love and obeisance, the secretary takes the stage.

War has changed, she begins: In World War I, 90 percent of the casualties were soldiers, but in Africa's recent conflicts, 90 percent of casualties are civilians. So peacemaking and peacekeeping must change too, she says. Her solution, unsurprisingly, is to increase women's participation. But before the crowd's eyes can glaze over at the prospect of hearing another speech about the justice of giving women a voice or how they're morally superior to men, Clinton, like the Yale-trained lawyer she is, makes a fact-based case: Women's complex community ties make them invested in the well-being of many groups and more likely to raise issues that truly influence quality of life and maintain peace: education, health, justice, employment. Often marginalized themselves, women are more apt to speak up for ethnic and religious minorities. Since they're usually not doing actual fighting, they can serve as mediators and mobilize other noncombatants to pressure soldiers to lay down their arms. "Women are the largest untapped reservoir of talent in the world," she says. "It is past time for women to take their rightful place, side by side with men, in the rooms where the fates of peoples, where their children's and grandchildren's fates, are decided."

A Human Rights Watch worker at my table—who's presumably heard this kind of thing before—holds her hand over her heart as if she's been shot. "That may have been the coolest speech I've ever heard in my life," she says, joining the standing ovation.

These days Hillary Clinton seems to get standing ovations whenever she opens her mouth. From the moment she entered the State Department and the staff came out to cheer for her (a blogger likened it to the Munchkins welcoming Dorothy to Munchkinland), to this past December when she was widely applauded for her historic speech in Geneva on LGBT rights, Clinton is enjoying almost unprecedented popularity in the United States. As she sails into her last year at State—she's said that she'll step down in 2013, regardless of whether Obama wins a second term—her favorability rating is hovering at about 60 percent (up from a low of 45 percent during her 2008 presidential campaign), while her negatives have dropped to roughly 30 percent, making her the most popular member of the Obama administration and, according to Gallup, the most admired woman in America (she beats Oprah!).

Clinton has been adored overseas since her days as first lady and was able to hit the ground running as secretary of state and score a series of successes, from negotiating the response to Libya to smoothing over hurt feelings after WikiLeaks revelations and opening up dialogue with Asia, notably including Burma. But while she's arguably the most powerful woman in the world, Americans traditionally have felt torn about her. Or perhaps torn isn't the word—schizophrenic? As longtime Clinton aide Melanne Vermeer recounted, the pollster in charge of running focus groups to prep for Clinton's New York Senate run told her after listening to polarized women voters talking about Clinton, "That conversation didn't need a pollster; it needed a shrink."

But since 2008, when the Democratic presidential nomination slipped through Clinton's fingers—in part because Americans and the media didn't think she was "likable"—Clinton and her fellow citizens have inched closer and closer to one another, like a couple in an arranged marriage who find themselves, after years of upheaval and misunderstanding—suddenly, astonishingly—in love.

She's dropped much of her famous reserve with the press. I'm not the only journalist she's reduced to speechlessness with a bit of unexpected bonhomie. On one flight, she came back to the press section of her plane and chatted excitedly about going to visit the new baby of one of her close aides. "The week before she was due, I told her to go home and relax. I wanted her to be ready. My baby came early, and I wasn't ready," she said merrily, as the row of male wire reporters nodded their heads, looking a shade terrified. (Oh my God, is Hillary Clinton about to tell us about her C-section?) She's shared Bellinis with journalists in Rome and Irish coffees in Shannon, and the result is a raft of glowing pieces.

Newsweek described her as "more at ease with her own role...than ever before," and Time ran a beauty shot of her on the cover recently along with a poll showing that if she were in the 2012 presidential race, she'd beat all the Republican candidates more resoundingly than Obama.

Though nobody serious has called for her to challenge the president in 2012, columnists and pundits across the country have been urging Obama to perform a switcheroo, placing her in the role of VP and Biden in the State Department. (All three have denied this is a possibility.) Bill Keller, former executive editor of The New York Times and the most

prominent of the "Draft Hillary" team, framed making Clinton VP as Obama's duty to his party because of the boost she could deliver in independent and Democratic voter turnout, giving the party a nationwide mandate going into Obama's lame-duck term. "She has gotten better, actually," Keller said on NPR of her campaign skills. "She seems more comfortable in her own skin. There's a kind of warmth, a sort of accessibility that she has grown into."

Most of her critics, including Republicans, have gone silent or even changed their tune. As a longtime Washington insider put it to me, with a shrug: "There's no coin in criticizing her anymore." Hillary hating has jumped the shark.

In part, that's because there's less to criticize. Though she's serving a Democratic administration, her job is essentially nonpartisan. She's out championing America's interests around the world, and it doesn't look good to undercut her. Further, a lot of the old complaints and anxieties about her have been neutralized. No longer can opponents say she's Bill's puppet; he's stayed notably mum on his wife's work, kibitzing more about Obama's domestic policy, if anything. The notion of a carpetbagging, power-mad Hillary, with a take-no-prisoners ambition that would destroy the Democratic party, has been trounced, as Hillary put her ego aside to serve Obama. (When I told one of her press aides that many of the DC journalists I spoke to said the story everyone wants is about Clinton's and Obama's power struggles, he agreed: "But if it weren't fictional bullshit, you'd be reading it every day. I mean, it's not like the press doesn't want to write that story very badly. In three years, they haven't because they can't find a thing.") And the claim that Clinton had no aptitude for foreign policy, that her years as first lady were little more than an extended tea party—a claim put forth by the Obama campaign—now just seems silly.

Though she's been asked over and over to gloat—doesn't she get a little pleasure out of the deflation of the Obamaniacs? The nullification of Newt?—Clinton, ever disciplined, doesn't take the bait. "I've just been around now a long time," she says when I ask her to explain the defanging of her critics. "There's a certain consistency to who I am and what I do, and I think people have finally said, 'Well, you know, I kinda get her now.' I've actually had people say that to me."

We are in the sitting room of her office on the seventh floor of the State Department building, under a painting of the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor. She's being photographed later for ELLE, and her makeup is perfect, her hair down and blown out. When she's on the road, she often has it pulled back in a simple chignon or ponytail, a look that causes Hillary Hair Watchers much chagrin but merely means she's pressed for time, as a State Department official told me: "As a chick, it's a big pain in the butt. The weather is different, and you're in and out of the plane. [The staff] gets off that plane looking like garbage most days, but she has to look camera ready. She said the reason she grew her hair long was that it's easier. She has options." The official added, because, it seems, no American alive can resist critiquing Clinton's hair: "But some of us are looking to ban the scrunchies."

Feminists and supporters will often wail for everyone to stop focusing on Clinton's hair and clothes and listen to her ideas, but that's sort of a backhanded compliment. (People, she's too smart to care that she looks like crap.) The truth is, Clinton does care (she's a bottle blond! Do you know how much work that is?), and, to my eye, she's finally hit her personal-style groove. She's wearing teardrop-shape sapphires on her ears and a blue shirt. She's been wearing blue a lot lately—the pastel pantsuits have gone to the back of the closet—and the color flatters her, bringing out her eyes.

Clinton is both relaxed and engaged as she talks, laughing frequently, making jokes, and imitating Bill's Southern twang. And it strikes me that it's not just the media, the public, and Clinton's foes who've accepted her, for better or for worse. Unhitched from her husband's position, her daughter successfully launched, freed from the "permanent campaign" that defined the Clintons' years in elective office, with a bully pulpit to agitate all over the world for her lifelong passion—women's and children's rights—Hillary Rodham Clinton seems to be finally having fun being Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Clinton has frequently called herself a Rorschach test for America, and the inkblot has revealed complicated and sometimes ugly feelings about women and power in our country. But Clinton is, of course, a product of the same culture and era that we all are. If she's a Rorschach for the country, she's both test and test taker, working out how to combine all her roles just like the rest of us.

She defines herself by the place and era in which she grew up: She's a middle-class girl, from the middle of the country, born in the middle of the last century. Clinton is, at her core, still a good girl. She won over the old boys in the Senate by pouring them coffee, letting them stand in the center of photographs, and generally respecting the established hierarchy of the institution. On the road, she greets every gray-headed blowhard in a suit as though he were her first appointment of the day, rather than, as is true in most cases, her fifteenth. At a security conference in Munich one Saturday morning, she was in the front row, a few seats down from the congressional delegation (or "CODEL," in DC lingo) of Senators John Kerry, John McCain, and Joe Lieberman. The speaker was giving a talk in droning German. The CODEL wandered in late. None of them bothered to put on the translation headphones that were provided. Kerry sat down and immediately began to bite his nails and look off into space. Lieberman and McCain whispered to each other and giggled. Clinton, on the other hand, donned her own pair of headphones, took notes, and nodded, her full attention on the speech.

Though she came of age in a time of great changes in women's roles (she graduated in 1969 from Wellesley College) and has been held up as the prototype of a liberated woman—remarkable among first ladies, she's had her own career and outearned her husband—many of her choices have been defined by her instinct to be the obedient daughter, the loyal wife. Biographer Carl Bernstein wrote that her father was despotic and abusive, but Clinton describes a "father knows best" childhood in her autobiography, *Living History*, and attributes her famed work ethic to her dad.

Her decision to scrap her burgeoning career in Washington, DC, to follow her then boyfriend Bill Clinton to Arkansas, where he was launching his first campaign for U.S. Representative, is part of the Hillary legend. Hillary Rodham was an up-and-comer in progressive circles back in the early '70s, and many have speculated that she might have come to prominence without the ride on Bill's coattails.

Her picture appeared in *Life* after she spoke about the Vietnam War protests during her commencement address at Wellesley (the first given by a student), she was a protégé of the Children's Defense Fund's Marian Wright Edelman, and she served as the only female on the Nixon impeachment inquiry legal team. After that case wrapped up, she was considering becoming a trial lawyer. But when at the closing dinner she mentioned her aspirations to her boss, a famous litigator, she says he told her to forget it. "Not that you're not smart enough, talented enough, hardworking enough, but there's no way that a woman can be—or I think he said girl—can be a litigator, because you don't have a wife," Clinton recounts. When she asked him what in the world he meant, he said, "Well, you know, my wife lays out my clothes in the morning and makes sure I have clean socks."

Having failed the DC bar exam (a fact she reportedly never revealed even to friends until she wrote her autobiography), she decided to head down to Arkansas, where she became Bill's wife (and had passed the bar). She wasn't exactly washing his socks—she taught law, became the first female partner at the Rose Law Firm, and led a successful education initiative after Bill became governor—but their lives were defined by Bill's ambitions. "[Bill] was pretty much Andy of Mayberry," says Betsy Ebeling, Hillary's best friend from high school.

"He would walk around, it was his town. The very fact that he got Hillary to go there—I remember when she called and said, 'I am going to go to Arkansas to give this a try'...that's when I knew it was something very special."

Hillary's friend and mentor Sara Ehrman, who drove her to Arkansas for the move, has said that she spent the entire trip trying to change Hillary's mind and, when they arrived and Hillary was as dead set as when they got in the car, Ehrman cried.

As Bill ascended the political ladder, Hillary honed her campaign skills, but she insists that, through it all, she considered elected office "incredibly out of my lane." Ebeling backs her up: "Practicing law, teaching law, working on things such as children's hospitals—all of those were very much in her sights, but I'm not sure she had a world stage in mind."

Hillary documents in *Living History* the moment she realized she was no longer the advocate she'd set out to become, when Bill signed welfare-reform legislation and Marian Wright Edelman wrote an open letter to the President published in *The Washington Post* excoriating him. "In the painful aftermath," the former first lady writes, "I realized I had crossed the line from advocate to policy maker. I hadn't altered my beliefs, but I respectfully disagreed with the convictions and passion of the Edelmans and others who objected to the legislation.... [U]nlike Bill, they didn't have to negotiate with

Newt Gingrich and Bob Dole or worry about maintaining a political balance in Congress. I remembered all too well the defeat of our health care reform effort, which may have happened in part because of a lack of give-and-take."

Both supporters and opponents accused Clinton of becoming a jaded political operator when she opted to stay in her marriage after the Lewinsky scandal, surmising that she traded her dignity for Bill's help with her Senate campaign. But her favorability ratings at the time—as high as they are now—show that regular Americans understood something that the talking heads didn't: Betrayal in marriage is common, and finding the empathy for your partner and confidence in yourself to forgive and rebuild can be admirable. Late-night comedians still joke about the frigidity of the Clinton union, but friends and colleagues cite it as one of the truer examples of partnership in American life, saying the two adore each other. A reporter who once followed Bill to Africa told me that he was constantly using the satellite phone to call his wife after meetings, exclaiming, "Hillary, I wish you were here with me! You've got to see this!"

But Clinton's personal faith in Bill hasn't always served her professionally. Rebecca Traister argues in *Big Girls Don't Cry*, her book about the 2008 election, that fundamentally, Clinton's presidential campaign hit the skids not because the American people didn't believe in her, but because Clinton didn't believe in herself and her longtime staffers. "She hired men who'd put other men in office, her husband included," Traister said, "instead of the people who'd given her a base of counsel, loyalty, and strength over the years." Without this anchor to who she really was, she foundered, getting caught up in what many called a tone-deaf effort to seem like a member of the old boys' club.

Though it was too late to win, Clinton did gain traction by the end of that campaign, when she started emphasizing that she was, first and foremost, a woman and a fierce fighter for the under-dog—distancing herself from pollster Mark Penn, who'd advised Clinton to ignore her gender and instead convince Americans that she was, hold onto your seats, a father figure.

We Recommend The Number: How Often Should Couples Have Sex? (ELLE.com - Life & Love) Ask E. Jean: Picking Up the Dude's Vibe (ELLE.com - Life & Love) SponsoredWorld's Greatest Retirement Lie Dupes Baby Boomers (Newsmax.com) Divide and Conquer: Married But Separate (ELLE.com - Life & Love) [?] Clinton seems to have learned her lesson well. It's as though she's finally returned to the days when she was just Hillary Rodham, a smart girl with big glasses, brimming with ideas, not bound by duty to husband or country or precedent. In the past three years, she's grown increasingly vocal about her original mission, working her worldview into the fabric of the State Department and seeding the staff with Hillaryland denizens. She created Verveer's job, ambassador at large for global women's issues, to look at every office in State to find ways each could advance the economic, social, and political rights of women. Kris Balderston, Clinton's former deputy chief of staff in the Senate, has been working on a project to provide clean cookstoves to women in developing nations. It may sound trivial, but the stoves could prevent the deaths of 2 million children and women a year from pneumonia and other lung diseases and significantly reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and black carbon.

If Clinton feels any ire toward Obama, I can't get a friend or coworker to admit it, on the record or off. "It worked out," Clinton herself says, only a little wistfully, when I ask about it. "There is a sense that things, if you keep positive and optimistic about what can be done, do work out. Running for president was the most extraordinary experience. I would have preferred it turned out differently, but even the outcome of it was what led to this experience here in the State Department."

When Obama asked her to take the job, "I was reticent. I really didn't want to leave the Senate. I didn't want to leave New York," she says.

"And then I got to thinking, Look, if I had won and I asked him to serve our country with me, I would have hoped he would have said yes.

So how could I not agree?"

Lissa Muscatine, Clinton's speechwriter and collaborator on her books, said she encouraged her to take the president up on his offer as a way of breaking free from Obama Drama. "If she stayed in the Senate, she was always going to be seen through the prism of Obama, in relation to him and her ambitions. She'd never escape it," Muscatine said when we spoke in her office at Politics and Prose, the DC bookstore that she and her husband bought after she left the State

Department. "I also thought that if she became secretary of state, she's speaking to the world. I said, 'This is a great opportunity to do stuff you care about.'"

Traister noted that it's the irony of ironies that, though Bill Clinton has been trying for years to pay back his wife for all the sacrifices and humiliations she suffered on his climb to the top, it's Obama who handed Hillary her Get Out of Jail Free card. "Obama gave Hillary power, which I think is the thing that Bill has wanted to give Hillary more than anything else in the world. Bill wanted Hillary to reform health care, which was the most important thing in the United States," she says. "Then he wanted to make her president at all costs.

He couldn't do it. In fact, he was screwing it up—he was shooting her in both feet everywhere he went. So then this guy comes and he's president and what's the first thing he does? He does the thing that Bill has been unable to do for his partner for his whole life."

I supported Clinton in 2008, first simply as a satisfied New York constituent but, by the end, as though the fate of humanity depended on it. I was pregnant with my daughter at the time and particularly undone by the "iron my shirt" crowd. I couldn't bear the idea that my girl would have fewer opportunities than my son. And while you can't blame sexism alone for Clinton's loss in 2008, I still haven't shaken the feeling that the world is stacked against women in ways I hadn't realized.

It was a bit like the scene from *Rosemary's Baby* when Rosemary walks into the party and discovers all her neighbors are satanists. I looked around and saw that the number of women in Congress was stuck at about 17 percent, that only about 11 percent of heads of state worldwide are women (and America is lagging behind most developed Western countries in never having elected a woman to the top job), and that only 2.4 percent of Fortune 500 companies are run by women. According to the Congressional Research Service, at the rate we're going, it will take 500 years to reach gender parity in government. "Baby," I had to admit to my newborn girl, "we have not come as long a way as I thought."

My travels with Clinton bucked me up, though. She's started the Women in Public Service Project, a cooperative venture between the Seven Sisters colleges and the State Department to encourage more women to go into public service, with the goal of achieving parity in 2050, accelerating our current pace by about 460 years. The kickoff event was inspiring, with speakers such as Gloria Steinem, Madeleine Albright, International Monetary Fund managing director Christine Lagarde, and Atifete Jahjaga, the 37-year-old female president of Kosovo. When I got back home to New York, I talked excitedly about it at a cocktail party filled with parents from my kids' school—all liberal professional types. But everybody told me I was crazy if I thought women would be equally represented in elected offices by 2050. "It's never going to happen," one high-powered working mother said, "because women have children. It's biological. If Hillary had more kids, she'd never be in the position she is now." I went home and ordered a "This Is What a Feminist Looks Like" T-shirt for my daughter to wear to school, but I was a little deflated.

When I tell Clinton what our neighbors (we both live in Westchester County in New York) are saying, she's nonplussed. "I don't take issue with how difficult this is, but I do reject the idea that it's a 'never.' Because I don't believe that in the course of human history, the 'nevers' have been proven right. Take same-sex marriage, for heaven's sakes. I mean, really? We're talking about something that has evolved so quickly in the last 20 years, it's astonishing."

As to whether you can be successful and have a passel of kids, she's indignant. "But I just didn't have any more children," she says, "not that I didn't want any more." (She and Bill have said they had an appointment with a fertility specialist when Chelsea was conceived.) "Look at Nancy Pelosi! She had five children.... People—especially young women—need to rid their minds of this baggage that has been inherited.

Because you can unfortunately caricature anybody: 'Oh, she's the woman who never wanted to get married and have children.' Well, you don't know what her life is like. Or, 'She's the woman who gave up her career and stayed home.' Well, maybe that's what she found most fulfilling. We have got to get beyond all of that pigeonholing."

I think we're just rehashing the Working Mommy/Stay-at-Home Mommy debate and ragging on my friends when suddenly Clinton ties it to the Arab Spring. "One of the big difficulties we're facing around the world is how we create better understanding among people of different religions, tribes, ethnicities.... It's just human nature to categorize:

'I don't like that, I like that.' But when it has the consequence of holding people back"—or worse, she adds, of creating "open season" on people who are judged as "less human" because of their religion or some other difference—it's obviously disastrous. "A lot of the work I do here in the State Department on women's or human-rights issues is not just because I care passionately—which I do—but because I see it as [a way] to increase security to fulfill American interests. These are foreign-policy and national-security priorities for me." Hear that, ladies? When you bitch about your fellow woman, the terrorists win.

Throughout our conversation, Clinton is stern with American women: It's time to stop complaining and bickering and step up to the plate.

I tell her she sounds like Sheryl Sandberg, the Facebook COO (and onetime official in the Clinton administration) who's made news by telling women to quit moaning about how the Man is keeping them out of the corner office and address their own "ambition gap."

Clinton agrees: "I know Sheryl and have the greatest regard and affection for her," she says. "She sees women, as I have over the course of my career, who are perfectionists and never think anything they do is good enough, and they're competing against men who think everything they do is star quality.... I could sit here and say, 'Am I the smartest person to have ever been secretary of state?' Well, I don't know. Thomas Jefferson was secretary of state. I have no idea. 'Was I the smartest person who ever served in the United States Senate?' Well, you don't know those things. You can't ever know them until you actually get out there and try. And it's the trying that's the most exciting part of the whole journey."

I want to reply, paraphrasing Yoda, "There is no try, Hillary, only do": Get out there and run for president in 2016. Show my daughter she can do anything. But Clinton has repeatedly contended that she's moved on. She said on the Today show, "I have made my contribution. I'm very grateful I've had a chance to serve, but I think it's time for others to step up." And at a town hall meeting at the State Department, she recently told staffers that, after 20 years "of being on the high wire of American politics, and all of the challenges that come with that, it would probably be a good idea to just find out how tired I am."

Perhaps, but many of the much younger staffers and journalists who follow her seem far more shattered by the pace than she does.

Sometimes I think she's been constructed by NASA engineers to be the first woman president, she's so indefatigable. Her senior adviser, Philippe Reines, tells me part of her secret is her "militaristic" approach to sleep. If she wants to, she can fall asleep anywhere, anytime; this is how she functions at such a high level on a round-the-clock schedule. "If there were an Olympic event for sleeping, she would be a five-time gold medalist," he says. If Living History is to be believed, she only had insomnia twice during her tumultuous White House years: when her father died, and before she had to testify before a grand jury about Whitewater.

But when I bring up her iron constitution, Clinton paints it as more evidence of her human frailty than superhuman strength. She tells me she read an article recently about how extroverts gain energy from social interaction, while introverts are drained by it. Clinton says she recognized herself in the introvert. "When I would work a rope line and people were pulling on me and telling me they were for me and asking me to help them, I was just, 'Okay, okay,'" she says, her voice growing distressed. "My husband works a rope line, and he is sucking the energy out. I mean, part of it is because he's tall and he's not lost in this crowd, feeling enveloped, but some of it is just his personality." When Bill stepped off a rope line, she says, he'd crow: "Oh man, that was great!" She, on the other hand, would say, "Oh my God, I'm so tired"—and be primed for a power nap.

Okay, so this does not sound like someone who can't wait to get back on the campaign trail. On the other hand, when I ask if she'd ever consider crossing back over the line and becoming an advocate again, she answers before I finish the question. "Absolutely! Yes!" she says excitedly. "Obviously, working on behalf of women and children around the world, I feel like I'm an advocate for the United States. I felt like I was an advocate for New York as senator. But the kind of not-for-profit advocacy I'd done all my life before being first lady is something I highly value." She says she expects to start her own foundation or work "under the umbrella of my husband's foundation with my own separate piece."

Perhaps Clinton feels less personally motivated to run again since the presidency is in a Democrat's hands, and just lately, with the Republican candidates beating each other bloody in the primary, predictions are that it may remain there through 2016. And it's true that, as she says, there are many young Democrats with presidential aspirations (New York governor Andrew Cuomo, New York senator Kirsten Gillibrand, Maryland governor Martin O'Malley, Virginia senator Mark Warner). And, yes, as colleagues point out to me, she's still in debt from the 2008 campaign and loath to fundraise again. Ebeling even ventured that the Clintons might want to enjoy their golden years together, instead of with "separate schedules" and a "frantic pace."

She, perhaps wishfully, wondered if Clinton might not like to tend to the garden her late mother planted at her home in DC or "really learn to cook."

Muscatine has no doubt Clinton is looking forward to relaxing and having some fun. "When Hillary kicks back, she really kicks back," she said. But at the same time, she noted that Clinton is a "workaholic" who's shown no aptitude for resting on her laurels: "There's a need for a lot of activity there." When they were writing *Living History*, she said, the publication date was moved up half a year. With three months to go before the deadline, Muscatine, another Hillaryland veteran, and a researcher would meet at Hillary's house at 7:30 A.M., before Clinton left for the Capitol. After a full day there, the senator would come home, eat dinner, and then do legislative work until between 11 P.M. and midnight. Then it was time for Muscatine's team to present the day's writing, which Clinton would edit before they'd all meet around her dining room table at three o'clock to plan for the next day. Muscatine knows she drove home at 4 A.M. because, when she got in her car, she'd hear BBC London's 9 A.M. broadcast. "At one point, I finally looked at these two younger women and said, 'You know what's really funny? She does not think there's anything weird about us meeting at her dining room table at three in the morning.'"

Many of Hillary's closest colleagues will admit off the record that they wish their beloved boss would run for president—whether or not it's best for her personally. And they will allow that there's always the possibility. Anything can happen in American politics in four years. It wouldn't be wise to count Hillary Clinton out just yet. When we were talking about advancing human rights, Clinton herself probably said it best: "'Never' shouldn't be a word that crosses the lips of anyone lucky enough to live a privileged life in our country."