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Hard choices can be easy

By Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, Va. The phone rang at 11:35 p.m. It was too late for a bill collector, but just right for bad news out of the darkness. I picked up.

Hi, its Hillary!

After a long pause, I said: Its been a long ti me.

Its been 40 years. Are you still cute? she asked.

Then she giggled.

Cute? You must be calling the wrong number. Nev er was. These days, I occasionally manage respectable—mostly for funerals. Are you still cute in that doggedly earnest way you had at Yale?

Cute? Me? Come on! Wholesome, maybe. Seri ous, certainly. Focused, yes. Determined. I still dont know why he picked me?

Because you were smarter and gooder. He didnt I ike that. So he had to capture it.

I dunno about that. Why havent you kept in touch with me?

I dont care for your husband. His lies and self-indulgences tarnished our whole generation. Hes dragged you in his direction.

He has his points. Im sure.

So what should I do? Dump the big lug.

No, I mean about the race in 2016?

Dump the big lug and run. The worst that can happen is that youll lose. Thats better than not trying.

Hes popular. Hes polling at more than 65 percent approval. He was above 70 percent at the end of 1998 even after

all the mess with that woman and the impeachment hearings.

I agree that favorable public opinion is sometimes hard to understand, I said.

I didnt say that. Anyway, Ive stood by my man through so much of that...stuff...over the years that it would look like I was being a calculating opportunist to cut him off now.

Sugar pie, that boy gonna blow you up aga in. Mark my words.

He is who he is, she said. Everybody knows it. If he makes another error in judgment during the campaign or in my White House, itll make me look wronged unfairly one more time. People will sympathize with my predicament. Ill benefit politi cally. Itll be just the same-old, same-old. Ho-hum.

Ho-hum, indeed.

I wouldnt feel right about calling it qu its with him before the primaries or the general, not after all weve been through.

Anyway, we dont see each other that much.

Its your call. People get used to the unhap piness thats familiar. Lookit Thats my girl from Illi-noise.

Oh shut up. It would be a lot easier to b e in the White House with him and his baggage than to be there by myself. I couldnt go out on a date. Who would want me as POTUS? Hes the least b ad of my bad alternatives.

I guess youre right.

But heres the reason I called. I want so me straight advice. I want people to like me.

Thats a tough one. No doubt about that. Obama said I was likeable enough. Damning with faint praise.

Obviously, I know that. ...you know...being me in public has taken a lot out of me. I cant show my smarts. I ca nt show my temper. I cant say what I think or feel. I cant show that I m just like everyone else.

Youre not like everyone else, so forget bei ng likeable and running as Miss Personality, I said. Embrace your

strengths—you're experienced, you've failed at some things and succeeded at others, you were an effective Senator who worked with Republicans. You are as prepared as anybody could be.

Should I let my hair get long? Change the color? Wear dresses?

No. Be yourself. Stick with dowdy. DOWDY!

Let voters decide whether they want you as their leader, not whether they like you. You might win on the first; it's...doubtful on the second. ...said as an old friend.

Thanks a lot.

Come across like Germany's Angela Merkel —smart, capable, effective. She doesn't try to look like a Hollywood starlet. Of course, you can always bake some cookies for the grandchild in the wings. You do know about cookies?

Yeah, of course. Some come in bags; some come in frozen rolls. That's a joke.

Right, I said. One thing I would not do if I were you is to try to out-hawk the hawks. Whatever bomb you drop on the enemy will never be big enough.

America should do something in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Ukraine, Nigeria. There's so much craziness in the world....

Better to contain it by showing life here as a better alternative than to bomb religious fanatics. Religions are not states. You'll never get an unconditional surrender from Islamic jihadists like we did from Nazi Germany. When their own people have had enough, they'll run 'em out of town.

At a high cost in pain and suffering,

At a very high cost in pain and suffering, I said. Your career has been about advocating for children. Every American soldier is somebody's child. Don't fritter them away like low cards in a pennyante game.

Would you vote for me?

Depends on who's running against

you. Some old pal, you are.

Lets see how you present yourself. Governing is a n easier job for you than campaigning. So lets see how you carry of f something that you have to do that you dont like doing.

So...if I asked you to write some speeches for me, yo u would say...?

Not if the big lugs in the room. Sorry.

Ill take that as a maybe. Thanks for the perspect ive.

Ill send you Grandma Doras recipe for chocolate- chip cookies. Ive eaten at least five million.

What would I do with it?

Give it to your spouse. Maybe the old dog can learn one new trick.