I

Winter on the Mountain

(April 1993)

It was freezing in the mountains, about ten degrees below zero. All across Colorado, drifts of snow swept halfway up the sides of the barns and the cabins. Without waking his wife, Gary Hart got up before dawn and walked downstairs to his living room, a cavernous place with a vaulted ceiling, high windows, and walls of lodgepole pine. It is a mountain house out of a plutocrat's fondest four-color dream. Hart could sit by the fire and see deer, elk, mountain lions, and red fox move through the woods as the sun came up over the foothills of Kittredge. Lately, a Corsican ram had been climbing around the rocks near the house, and the dogs barked up at him. Hart built the house a couple of years ago for his wife, Lee, he would tell me, "because Lee had never had anything like this and Lee deserved it."

Hart was making real money now, as a lawyer and an international businessman. Born to Nazarene evangelicals in Kansas, he confessed to sometimes feeling "a little funny" about all the opulence: the poolroom, the sauna, the walk-in closets, the state-of-the-art appliances. It seemed sinful somehow. But the unease of

living here was more severe than a passing case of guilt; it was endless and deep.

This was not the house that Gary Hart had thought he would be living in. At the start of the 1988 presidential campaign, he had been headed, as if on a greased chute of destiny, for the White House. But out of vanity, it seemed, and stubborn refusal to curb his extramarital liaisons for the purposes of high politics, he threw it all away long before the first primary. He could rage at the press for its blithe savagery, its puritan hypocrisy. But he should have known. In fact, he did know: he knew the risks and he ignored them. In May of 1987, he even invited the press to "follow me around" during the campaign. "I don't care. I'm serious," he told *The New York Times*. "If anybody wants to put a tail on me, go ahead. They'd be very bored." In the end, Hart paid for the sins of the flesh as no one else had done in two hundred years of American political history.

Hart's exile was immediate and absolute. To venture from the mountains of Colorado was to open himself to further humiliation. When he went to the 1988 Democratic Convention, in Atlanta, the only way he could enter the arena was with a Colorado delegate's pass. When he reached the convention floor, the Democratic chairman, Paul Kirk, put a few security men between him and the television cameras. Hart's sense of martyrdom and piety was acute. "All our heroes are dead," he told Maureen Dowd, of the *Times*. "John is dead. Bobby is dead. And I'm dead—walking dead."

Now, five years on, Hart dispensed with self-pity and stuck to a handful of pitiful jokes. "Sometimes I'll be walking down the street in Washington and someone'll come up to me and say, 'Aren't you Gary Hart?' And I give 'em this little joke. I say, 'Yeah, I used to be.' And they laugh—'Ha! Ha! Ha!' "

After the convention was over, Hart had wanted to get on with his life. He was constantly on the road, especially in Russia, trying to set up business projects—seaports, airports, banks, phone systems—that would enrich his clients and connect him, in some marginal way, to public life. But the 1988 bruises still hurt. Hart was convinced that he would never have lost to George Bush, that his fall was "an accident, a car crash in history." When his friend and adviser Paul Tully died, last September, Hart ran into Richard Gephardt, the House majority leader, at the funeral. The election was only weeks away, and Gephardt, ever the Eagle Scout, could barely keep a cap on his fizzy enthusiasm.

"I think Bill's gonna do it!" Gephardt said.

"Yeah," Hart said darkly. "But Bush never should have won in the first place."

When Bill Clinton finally did win, Hart tried not to betray his mixed feelings. "He was glad Clinton won," his daughter, Andrea, said. "But he does have that feeling—'It could have been me, I could have done as good a job as this man.' " In 1972, when Hart was in charge of George McGovern's campaign for president, he had hired Clinton, a law student on summer break, to help lead the Texas organization. "My impression was of a guy with a lot of enthusiasm and a lot of hair," he said. Now that kid was president, the savior of his party. But didn't anyone see that Hart, and not Clinton, had reinvented the Democrats? He had been preaching military reform, national service, and economic investment as a senator from Colorado when Clinton was still getting to know the precincts of Arkansas. But no one much cared. Hart had lately sent memos to the White House but had got no answers.

Hart's frustration in exile was not just a matter of failed ambition—nothing as vain and petty as that. Take the winter of 1990–91. The Harts were moving into the new house, on Troublesome Gulch Road—just up the path from their old log cabin—but Gary felt no great happiness. Like everyone else in the country, he was spending hours in front of the television watching the bombing raids over Baghdad. In the press, many of the armchair analysts were predicting that when the land war finally began, thousands of American soldiers

would die. Hart reflected that if he had been in the White House he would have gone the "sanctions route" a good deal longer. "I was terrified we'd lose a lot of people," he said later. "If thousands of American lives had been lost, I would have felt personally responsible."

Personal responsibility for thousands of dead—all for a weekend trip to Bimini on the good ship *Monkey Business*. This was what it was, at times, to be Gary Hart. "When you talk about Gary Hart now, people don't focus on anything except that here was this guy who got out of the race and the Donna Rice episode," Billy Shore, one of Hart's closest aides from the early days, said in February. "If he'd been hit by a bus the week before all that happened, the *Times* would have written an obituary paying tribute to 'a legislator's legislator.' " Now he was a living punch line.

"I don't like 'feel' questions," Hart said as we drove in his Jeep from Denver west to Kittredge. Over and over, in Kittredge, in Denver, and in Washington, Hart would dip lightly into the waters of the personal and then suddenly yank himself out. "It's all part of my death struggle with ego," he said.

Rarely has an American ego been more thoroughly probed, indulged, and, ultimately, destroyed. After his weekend became public knowledge, Hart quickly toppled from the pinnacle of public life, to join that shadowy population of Americans who are ready fodder for "Where Are They Now?" columns. They are figures first of irony and then of trivia; after a while, the game is guessing whether they are alive or dead. But Gary Hart's story will prove grander than that. His rise to prominence and fall from grace ring of Hawthorne and Dreiser, and played a critical role in the election of Bill Clinton.

Hart, whose parents forbid dancing, movies, alcohol, and the indulgences of the flesh, marries Lee Ludwig, a Nazarene girl from a good family, and they head east to New Haven. It is the age of John

Kennedy; and Hart, at Yale Law School, is swept up in Kennedy's charisma and call to public service. In 1972, he runs McGovern's children's campaign against the demonic Richard Nixon. The loss is overwhelming, but is eventually redeemed somewhat by Watergate. In 1974, Hart is elected to the Senate, where he gains a reputation as an innovative advocate of reform, the best of a new generation of "neoliberals." In 1984, he runs for president and stuns the experts by placing second in the Iowa caucus and winning the New Hampshire primary. One estimate has him suddenly gaining three million supporters a day. "Not since the Beatles had stormed onto the stage of *The Ed Sullivan Show* twenty years before had any new face so quickly captured the popular culture," Paul Taylor, of *The Washington Post*, writes. Hart is told by Warren Beatty, "Watch out. You've become famous too fast." If it hadn't been for the Democratic party machinery and a botched campaign in Illinois, Hart could well have won the nomination in 1984. He finishes the race with a string of victories, but loses narrowly to Walter Mondale. In 1987, Hart is the odds-on favorite to win the party's blessing and challenge George Bush in November. But then, in May of 1987, he vanishes under the wave of scandal as *The Miami Herald* stakes out his house and *The Washington Post* snags a detective report commissioned by a jealous husband. Hart quits the race. In December, he reenters it, but he can never regain his footing. In Iowa, he gets less than 1 percent of the vote and finishes last. Five weeks later, he goes home to stay.

Hart still has the rangy, handsome look that his handlers always hoped would be seen as a Colorado version of "Kennedyesque." In deepest winter, he still wears cowboy boots with his business suit, and no overcoat. Aware that his tag has come to be "aloof," or "imperious," Hart makes an effort to charm. As we drove through the foothills of the Rockies, past one old mining town after another, he told some familiar Nixon stories in a dead-on Nixon voice. His set piece is about the day he found himself seated next to Nixon at the funeral of Jacob Javits.

"All of a sudden I feel him tapping me on the knee. . . . Whap! Whap! Whap! . . . And he says, 'That music. Is that Bach or Brahms?' . . . Bach or Brahms? . . . I said I didn't know. And he says, 'Bach is much better than Brahms. Because Bach is *tougher* than Brahms.' "

Hart is fascinated by Nixon—by his cynicism and his uncanny ability to remain in the political limelight. Though Hart would be appalled by the idea, he and Nixon are historical partners. Both men were always remarkable analysts of everyone but themselves. Their downfalls were successive chapters in the history of the media and American politics. Watergate represented the apogee of investigative reporting on the presidential level; the Hart scandal took the public's right to know beyond any previous limit. It was Nixon who acknowledged this strange kinship when he wrote to Hart in 1987:

> Dear Gary,
> This is just a line to tell you that I thought you handled a very difficult situation uncommonly well. . . . What you said about the media needed to be said. They demand the right to ruthlessly question the ethics of everyone else. But when anyone else dares to question their ethics, they hide behind the shield of freedom of speech. They refuse to make the distinction that philosophers throughout the centuries have made between freedom and license.

Hart drove slowly along the road that cuts through his property, of 170 acres. He pointed to a spot where he had seen a fox the week before and to the gate where, in 1987, hundreds of reporters had hunkered down, waiting for another glimpse of scandal. The Harts haven't had many reporters at their house since those days. They had invited me for dinner and to stay the night, and, in a clumsy attempt to thank them, I'd bought flowers in Denver and brought them as a gift.

Getting out of the Jeep, Hart smiled thinly at the bouquet. "It's gonna take a lot of flowers to make Lee feel any better about reporters," he said. "Lee was pretty brutalized, you know. I think she's all right now."

As we walked through the snow toward the house, we were greeted by the barking of dogs and then by Lee Hart, standing in the doorframe. She looked eager and nervous at the same time. Since "the events of 1987," as her husband often calls them, Lee Hart has kept out of the public eye. Even some of the Harts' closest friends are bewildered by the endurance of their marriage.

"Babe, why don't you give him the tour, and get that over with?" Hart said.

"That's what I was going to do, Gary."

Perhaps the thing that struck me most about the house, besides its sheer splendor, was how few signs there were that one of its owners had been so close to becoming the most powerful person on earth. Politicians usually keep several dozen grip-and-grin photos around—self-gilding memorabilia from the old campaigns or the trips abroad. At the Harts', just a few black-and-white pictures had been tacked up—familiar images from the campaign trail, with both Gary and Lee all smiles and looking a bit younger.

We sat by the fire and talked about *The Good Fight: The Education of an American Reformer*, a book that Hart was getting ready for publication. "I really wanted to title the book *The Diary of a Failed Reformer*, but they wouldn't let me," he said. "My editor had a fit. They give no credit to people for a sense of irony. The truth is, I don't think I was a failure. I just wasn't a success."

Hart's is a willfully soulless book. Throughout, he uses "the reformer" in place of the first person—a device that was intended to make the book seem less self-conscious and succeeds only in making it seem more so. Instead of paying tribute to Henry Adams with this device, as Hart had intended, he evokes Norman Mailer's old alter ego, Aquarius. That might not be so grating if Hart had

written openly, bravely, even angrily, about his own experience. He has not. His reticence is at constant war with his sense of injury, and the conflict produces a tinny, self-righteous effect.

Hart wrote with far more passion in a number of letters to his editor at Random House, Jonathan Karp. One reads:

> You must condition yourself and your colleagues to the fact that nothing short of suicide will satisfy the skeptics and the cynics or even the asinine acquaintances. The reason simply is this: a newly aggressive and intrusive press establishment, never comfortable with my refusal to be categorized, exploited (and possibly created) an incident very near the bone. . . . I will never escape from this event, as you say, simply because the press cannot afford to let me escape it and because social and political exile is demanded to sustain the hypocrisy. *Nothing,* I repeat, *nothing,* I say in the foreword would solve these two problems. It would require an act of utmost contrition, which I am incapable of making.

In *The Good Fight,* Hart writes a skeletal history of various reformers in America and the ways they have been stifled, thwarted, or killed. Although he propounds no grand conspiracy theory, he is fascinated by the conspiratorial elements in the murders of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Kennedys, and in the defeats of McGovern and the reformer. A prominent Washington journalist once told me that Hart, after a couple of drinks on an airplane five years ago, described his own fall in 1987 as a conspiracy of power elites: the military establishment, the energy industry—in short, all the institutions he planned to reform as president.

I told Hart I thought there was an acute sense of conspiracy running through the new book linking his own trials with those of the Kennedys and King.

He seemed genuinely surprised. "If you think that a paranoid sense of conspiracy runs through the book, then you're misreading it, or maybe I should rewrite it," he said. "And I may put myself in line with reformers, but it doesn't mean my loss was in any way equal to their losses. You can be a good Christian or a follower of Christ or Paul and not think you are Christ or Paul. My own impression of my experience in politics is that it was very minor. Virtually none of the things I wanted to get done got done."

Lee Hart called us in to dinner. She had prepared an elaborate salad of greens, bacon, cheese, and fruit, and then chicken breasts with wild rice and, for dessert, the richest chocolate cake this side of Lyons.

"This wine's a little tart, though, isn't it, babe?" Hart said. "Musta been a lemon vintage."

Lee Hart looked mortified. "Maybe another bottle . . ."

Hart smiled. "Don't bother, babe. This'll do."

I asked Lee Hart how the two of them had managed to pull themselves together after the disaster of 1987.

There was a pause. Then Lee said, "We were redoing the kitchen in the old house, where Andrea's living now. And Gary cut a lot of logs. Some were *The Miami Herald,* others were *The Washington Post*—"

Gary Hart's face turned the color of claret. "Now, babe," he said, in a voice freighted with anger and meaning.

"I just meant—"

"Babe, speak for yourself. Sure, it was hard. And if it was a career it was the tragic end of a career. But if you take it as public service, the way I did, then it's just the end of that part of your life."

"That's true, Gary. You always said that."

"The key thing is your attitude going into it. When I was elected to the Senate, I was eager to be there. But I never thought that this

would be it, senator for life, or climb the ladder to the presidency. I just decided in the eighties that the Democratic party had to be the party of change. And 'up or out' became my attitude. I just could not stand to look at the lack of courage in the Senate. And then after I lost in '84—well, you really can't go back to the Senate after running for president, and rejoin those silly, inane discussions. I'm against the two-term limit, but people should leave voluntarily. They have to avoid being co-opted by the permanent Washington crowd—the journalists, the friendship. They get co-opted after a couple of terms. I want to go back to an earlier time, when politicians didn't hobnob with the press, and they saw themselves as public servants for a time. I was made fun of, even ridiculed, because I always said 'Mr. Koppel' or 'Mr. Brinkley' when I was on TV. My staff and family gave me hell about it . . ."

"I didn't," Lee said.

"Now, babe. C'mon. But for me it was an important thing. I thought I should be businesslike. Chumminess on television, the 'David' and 'Ted' stuff, was symbolic of the problem."

I tried to get back to the question of how the Harts went on with their lives in 1987.

"I left the presidential race at noon Friday and I was back in my law office at eight o'clock Monday morning," Hart said. "To prove something to everyone—that life goes on. Being president isn't everything in the world. If you are a mature adult and you have your values straight, you just go ahead and do the next thing. The hardest thing to deal with was the continual drumbeat of the press. I was out of politics, but it kept coming. I mean, how many times can you kill someone? How many times can you be dead?"

"Gary, don't make it seem as if—"

"Speak for yourself, babe," Hart said.

"Well, okay," she said. "A lot of people have the idea that you just didn't want to be president."

"Well, that's just . . . Look. We are at the stage where we think that you've got to be all-consumed by the idea of becoming president. But it's nonsense. Thomas Jefferson gave his inaugural speech and then walked home through the mud to his boardinghouse. Now they think that your life is ruined if you fail. The danger of running for the presidency is that if you don't make it—and that's the case for almost everyone who tries—then you are considered a failure."

After dinner, we had coffee in the living room, and I asked the Harts about the '92 race.

"When Clinton began to pick people for his team, there was a moment of elation for me when I saw Eli Segal, John Emerson, and those people—people who had been with me once—getting serious jobs in the administration," Hart said.

I asked him whom he had supported initially in the race. He seemed embarrassed, and Lee broke in, saying, "I supported Tsongas in the primaries. Clinton's idea of a middle-class tax cut was just pandering to voters. I also didn't like the Japanese-bashing. Gary, you said the same thing."

Hart reddened once more.

"Just let me recollect, babe," he said, and then, "Tsongas's famous little book looked like a lot of my stuff. When he called me and said, 'I'm going to run for president,' I started laughing. And he did, too. It was like an unspoken thing on how crazy it is to run for president."

"I remember you said, 'Paul, I knew you weren't feeling well, but I didn't think you were sick in the head.' "

"Maybe, babe. Maybe. But we went on laughing for three minutes or so, and then, a few days later, he announced." Hart said he was tired and ready for bed, but before he left I asked him what he did now on a typical day when he was not traveling abroad.

"It's very boring," he said. "I sit behind a desk. I make telephone calls, draft proposals. I give speeches. I negotiate proposals for air-

ports and seaports. I'm an advocate. In '88, I tried to figure out a way to maintain a link to the private sector, to do something in the private sector related to what my goals had been in the public. I went to Taiwan, to Argentina, but it didn't lead to anything."

"You got to play a lot of tennis," Lee Hart said.

"Yeah, babe. And to Czechoslovakia, Japan. When I traveled, I discovered there was a lot of bewilderment out in the world about why I hadn't succeeded. They still thought I had something to say, even if no one at home did. That was very vivid."

Lee Hart and I stayed up and talked awhile in the kitchen. I was grateful to her for the trouble she had gone to. No matter how much the Harts steered away from the "events" that Hart had ruled out of bounds, the presence of yet another reporter could only have been painful to both of them.

"You know, it's different for Gary from what it is for me," she said. "He was the one running for office, and, contrary to what some people might have thought, I really never fantasized about being in the White House. That was putting the cart before the horse. I did think Gary should have been president. I didn't fear the White House. There were all sorts of things I would have worked on. But I had no long-standing ambitions. Maybe that was a mechanism of self-protection. You protect yourself against disappointment. I'm delighted with Hillary. Early on, she made a few faux pas, which happens, but she's a good speaker and doesn't have a lot of mannerisms that drive you crazy."

I said it seemed strange that the Clinton administration had asked Mondale, Hart's 1984 opponent, to be the ambassador in Moscow—an appointment that Mondale eventually turned down, and that went to Thomas Pickering. Friends and family had told me that Hart, who wrote a book on perestroika and travels to Moscow

several times a year, was particularly galled by the Mondale appointment.

Lee Hart's face tightened into an expression infinitely sad.

"I'd have been stunned if he had been asked," she said. "But it tells you something. Gary has never, ever, abused the public trust. And when we know the garbage that's come out of that city . . . The truth is, Gary is trashed anytime there's anything negative brought up about anyone else. Clinton would never have been president had it not been for what happened to Gary. The Clinton people know that they got off easier than Gary did. Clinton also had the support of the Democratic party people, who hung in there with him, which Gary never had. I was just very happy that they survived. The press seemed to have learned—or I hope so, for the sake of the country. Otherwise, who would ever run for office?" Lee Hart's eyes widened and filled. "In many respects," she said slowly, "our situation was just so simple, but it was not what they thought it was or said it was. It never was."

While Gary Hart was still running for president in 1988, he mapped out in his mind the first months of his term. The first thing he would do was invite Gorbachev to the inauguration, and then he'd get a quick arms-control treaty on strategic arms and nuclear testing. "I may flatter myself, but I think Gorbachev sensed in me a dramatic figure who was like him, at least in some small way," he said. Then he would get started on the Middle East, break some of the old molds on defense policy, the economy, energy policy.

Some of Hart's former aides found themselves wandering through the inaugural events in Washington this year and thinking, This should have been us—four years ago.

Hart had hoped that Clinton, as president, would make a bold gesture to the Russians, as he said he himself would have done. He

told some of Clinton's aides that they ought to invite Boris Yeltsin to the inauguration, as an indication of support for democratic reform. "I got back mumbo-jumbo about who was where last, the protocol of it," he said, rolling his eyes. "They missed the whole point."

But even if Clinton didn't ape Hart's inaugural strategy, the political debt of the new president to the exile is undeniable. For one thing, the White House is stocked with former Hart people: John Emerson, the deputy director of personnel; Eli Segal, the head of the fledgling national service program; David Dreyer, the director of planning; Jeremy Rosner, the counselor and director of legislative affairs at the National Security Council. And Larry Smith, who was Hart's key aide on defense policy, became the counselor to Secretary Les Aspin, at the Pentagon.

The influence goes beyond mere personnel. In Denver, Hart and I watched the State of the Union speech together. He spent some of the time laughing at the standing ovations and the primping of his old colleagues, and the rest of it, and he nodded paternal assent to the policy initiatives coming from the podium: a streamlined defense, an economy based on investment rather than on consumption, a program of national service. In Hart's time, all this was known as neoliberalism, the sharp break with the ideological orthodoxy of the Hubert Humphreys and Walter Mondales of the Democratic party. "In 1984, Hart fired the first shot at the fortress of the Democratic party and lived to tell the story, which inspired a bunch of others who might have been scared off," Bruce Reed, a domestic policy adviser to Clinton, told me. "To the extent that he made the world safe for new ideas, Gary Hart made his mark."

Where Hart and Clinton differed profoundly was in their style of personal politics. Hart's was cool, intellectual, while Clinton's is more that of a populist, a hugger, a figure of almost preternatural resilience. The joke about Hart among his aides during the 1984 and 1987 campaigns was that the candidate would go to a reception

for five hundred people, and after it was over his aides would ask, "Well, did he meet any of them?" The joke about Clinton last year was that the duty of the Secret Service was to protect the people from the candidate.

But Clinton's edge didn't consist only of his natural warmth toward people and crowds; he had history, and Gary Hart, to learn from. In 1987, when the press first started asking Hart questions about his marriage and his sex life, he knew there was static in the Washington air. At the same time, he had faith—an unwise and luckless faith—in precedent and the secrets that the press had always kept. Hart's staff members were far from ignorant about "the Issue." They had prepared explanations in 1984, too. But they continued to suspend disbelief. They wished away disaster. Then, in April of 1987, just two weeks before the scandal broke, Larry Smith went to Colorado for a "blue skies" meeting with the campaign leadership. He asked the group what they intended to do about rumors of Hart's womanizing. "One of the campaign's leaders laughed, and said, 'We never talk about it,' " Smith recalled. "I said, 'Well, you'd better think about it.' "

Reporters might whisper, but what would the papers actually print? Just look at what had gone on before, they said. Andrew Jackson was married to a bigamist. Grover Cleveland supported an illegitimate child. Wendell Willkie had an affair with an editor of the *New York Herald Tribune* at the very time the paper was promoting his candidacy. Franklin D. Roosevelt and Dwight Eisenhower had affairs, and the Homeric catalog of John Kennedy's afternoons of leisure surely needs no recounting.

But, as Hart well knew, the atmosphere had changed immeasurably after the Watergate scandal. The press had become adversarial, wary of being duped or of being seen as "in the tank" for a public official. And the truth was that reporters never really warmed to Gary Hart. They found him imperious, aloof, reckless, a little strange. Somehow, that made it easier to bring him down.

"It's like with George Romney in 1967," I was told by Richard Cohen, the *Washington Post* columnist who traveled with the Hart campaign in 1984. "The press knew that Romney was an idiot, but the question was: How do you write it? So along come his comments about being brainwashed, and—*wham!*—they take him out. He's history. Same with Hart. There was always this sense among the press that he just wasn't—well, right. That he was weird. But how do you write it? And then along comes Donna Rice."

After *The Miami Herald* rushed into print with the results of its stakeout of Hart's townhouse, on Capitol Hill, "Hell Week" began for the campaign. Nothing like this had ever happened in American politics. The rules had suddenly changed, and the Hart cadres, young, and scattered across the country, were utterly confused. The newspapers and the television stations were in a mad dash to win the race to nail Hart. "I thought the whole system had gone awry," says Kathy Bushkin, who was once a close aide of Hart's and is now an executive at *U.S. News & World Report*. "For whatever reason, Gary Hart showed bad judgment, and for whatever reason, the press seemed determined to get something on him. Inside the campaign, people were stunned, frightened, frustrated. These were people who had come to politics out of great idealism. They weren't prepared for things like spin control and damage control."

John Holum, who worked with Hart in both presidential campaigns, told me, "When the story broke, Gary called me. No one else was talking to the press. We needed to do something. I said, 'What's going on?' He said, 'John, I'm not crazy.' So I said, 'So it's not true.' He said, 'Right, it's not true.' So I went on television and got hung out to dry saying that I had known Gary Hart for seventeen years and I believed him. Now I think he did lie. I was very angry. What really made me angry is that he could let all those people pin their hopes on him and then not have the personal discipline to make his candidacy viable."

While Hart struggled to keep his candidacy alive—while he faced unprecedented questions from the press on the order of "Have you ever committed adultery?"—editors and reporters at *The Washington Post* looked into a detective's report they had been given which provided evidence that Hart had been carrying on an affair with a Washington lobbyist. When the *Post* called Hart and said that it was preparing to run a story on the subject, Hart quit the race and went home to Kittredge.

"No one looks back on that with great memories, but the rules evolve," says Dan Balz, a political writer at the *Post*. "We're in a period like that now, with baby-sitters and nannies sinking cabinet appointees. What Hart did was wrong, because he misrepresented his own marriage and life in a way that became fatal. For a lot of people in this country, the simple fact of infidelity is disqualifying. Also, his actions were contemporaneous with the race. He stretched the limits."

David Dreyer, who was a key Hart aide in the Senate and is now a member of Clinton's staff, naturally sees it otherwise. "I think he was treated shabbily by the press," he says. "His privacy was invaded. The trials he went through after the campaign were disproportionate to what he had done. He was treated as a nonperson, almost as a political prisoner in a totalitarian system. He's off the political radar screen."

While Hart always denied to his staff that there was a problem, Bill Clinton acknowledged from the start that there would be questions, and he intended to act before the press did. In September of 1991, John Holum and other Democratic activists went to a meeting of an exploratory committee of the Clinton campaign at the Quality Inn on New Jersey Avenue in Washington. "Clinton himself brought up the question of the marriage," Holum told me. "Clinton said, 'I know you are all concerned about this. Here's the situation:

There were problems in our marriage and we've worked them out.'. I was so gratified. No, I was *thrilled* that he was doing this."

To compare Hart's shock and his steely defensiveness at his press conferences during Hell Week with Bill and Hillary Clinton's command of the same subject in the early stages of their campaign is to see consummate politicians learning from the foibles of a deeply flawed teacher. Hart made himself into a martyr. He went before his supporters and the cameras and said that his campaign was a "crusade," and that "if I'm right about that, it really doesn't matter if the leader is struck down in battle or with a knife in the back, because the cause goes on and the crusade continues."

Clinton and his aides watched Gennifer Flowers unleash her unholy confession in the *Star* and went immediately on the counteroffensive, charging her with profiteering and saying that taped conversations with the candidate had been doctored. On January 26, 1992, just after the Super Bowl, Clinton and his wife went on *60 Minutes* and seemed to speak past the host, Steve Kroft, and straight to the voters, in a way never seen before in presidential politics. When Kroft asked for the specifics of the problems in the marriage, Clinton replied with a combination of frankness, indirection, and a knowing vocabulary which was designed to admit imperfection and, at the same time, shield him from further assault. "I think the American people—at least, people that have been married for a long time—know what it means and know the whole range of things it can mean," he said. "You go back and listen to what I've said. You know, I have acknowledged wrongdoing. I have acknowledged causing pain in my marriage. I have said things to you tonight and to the American people from the beginning that no American politician ever has. I think most Americans who are watching this tonight, they'll know what we're saying; they'll get it, and they'll feel that we have been more than candid."

And then, perhaps even more important, Hillary Clinton echoed her husband, and did so without apology or embarrassment: "You know, I'm not sitting here—some little woman standing by my man, like Tammy Wynette. I'm sitting here because I love him, and I respect him, and I honor what he's been through and what we've been through together. And, you know, if that's not enough for people, then, heck, don't vote for him."

The Clinton campaign had it easier. If there had been extramarital affairs, they were presumably not going on during the campaign. Hart had not given voters reason to believe the same of him. And Clinton was not taken by surprise. His young campaign handlers, some of whom run the White House communications office today, were no longer fooled by even the friendliest of reporters.

"The Clinton cadre had no illusions about what the press was capable of doing, while the Hart people were stunned by it," a party activist who worked in both candidates' campaigns said. "With the Hart episode, people on the Democratic side began to understand about reporters. 'Okay,' they said about the reporters, 'they may be our age, they may look like us, and even vote like us, but they are not us. They are another political force, an adversary.' The Clinton people hated the press even more than the Hart people."

On a clear, cold evening this winter, I went out to the Pentagon and was led to Larry Smith's office. Smith's rooms were newly painted and bare. "We're just finding out where the coffeepot is," Smith said by way of greeting. Smith worked as Hart's top aide in the Senate from 1978 to 1982, leaving the office just as the other aides were discussing strategy for the first presidential race.

"Let me begin by saying this," he said. "Gary is a truly tragic figure. Though I love him, I left him in the late spring, early summer of 1982 because I lost confidence in him. I believed he felt himself in a way to be divine."

A mixture of anger, dismay, and real, lasting affection was characteristic of every former Hart aide I had met, but Smith was the one who was most willing, or able, to display his feelings.

"There is a theology that says that if you sin you are cast into the outer darkness called hell," Smith said. "If you are mortal, like most of us, you have to deal with the fact of sin, so when you do sin you are in your own mind condemned to hell. That is, if you are human and do not deny that fact. The only other way is to insist that you are above the usual rules. I came to believe that Gary Hart felt that the fate of Gary Hart was that he was destined to be president of the United States and he was not bound by the disciplines that impinge on the rest of us. In the end, the guy broke everybody's heart.

"Look at what Clinton did. He signaled that he had come short of the glory of God. But he looked into the camera and acknowledged it and said he still felt worthy of support. In other words, he is like us. He is human. That was a powerful political act."

I interrupted Smith to say that Hart had told me he could not have stayed in the race, because "other lives" would have been dragged through the press and ruined.

"Maybe so, maybe so," Smith said. Then he said, "I want you to hear something."

Smith crossed the room and found a hardbound copy of the collected poems of Yeats, a gift from Gary Hart. He leafed to one of the later poems—"Come Gather Round Me, Parnellites," an ode to the Irish hero and statesman whose political career faltered when he became a corespondent in the divorce case of his mistress, Kitty O'Shea.

"I can't read this without thinking of Gary," Smith said. And he read:

The Bishops and the Party
That tragic story made,

A husband that had sold his wife
And after that betrayed;
But stories that live longest
Are sung above the glass,
And Parnell loved his country,
And Parnell loved his lass.

Larry Smith's eyes filled with tears as he closed the book. "That's the tragedy," he said. "But with Gary it's worse. He didn't even love the lass. Now he is walking around like a ghost. What I want for my friend is to have a fine peace on this earth."

Gary Hart is in Washington looking for work at a new law firm. He sits by the window of a trendy Washington restaurant, i Ricchi, drinking cappuccino.

"Clinton was a watershed," he says. "There was the scandal, and it was dealt with for a couple of weeks, and then it went away. It wasn't just how he handled it. I hate that word 'handle.' They say Clinton handled his situation better than I did. Poppycock. It wasn't the decision to go on *60 Minutes*. It was the editorial decision not to pursue it any further. I didn't see editors this time sending reporters halfway around the world to peek in a politician's window. And that was good for the country. The wife of a very prominent Washington journalist told me the other day that everyone in Washington thinks Bill Clinton never would have been elected president without Gary Hart. Maybe. The idea is that I somehow carried away the burden of scandal. Maybe she also means that I plowed new ground on the party and the issues. If that's the case, I'm a happy man. You don't always have to win to win. You don't always have to achieve the highest office to succeed.

"The hardest adjustment was having a platform for twelve years and then having it disappear overnight. See, you don't have to be

president to have a platform, but when you lose you've lost your platform. Even if you are speaking in an empty Senate, when it's a sea of mahogany, you can feel you are contributing. That urge doesn't end overnight. Imagine a writer told he could not write. It was a way of expressing myself, my convictions. One day, you're speaking ten times a day, and then, suddenly, you're not. I was in London, and one of the papers sent around a reporter to interview me. They also sent over a photographer to take my picture. I'd met her before, and we started talking to kill time while she set up. I kind of interviewed her. She said she was married, but the marriage wasn't too happy, and someone had suggested she get involved in photography. And now, she said, her camera had become her whole life. 'If someone ever took away my camera,' she said, 'I'd be lost.' Then she started asking about my life and my situation. And I said, 'Well, you know how you would feel if someone took away your camera? You'd be completely lost. Well, that is how I feel. I've lost my platform, my chance to influence things and contribute.' And when she turned around there were tears streaming down her face.

"So now I have no public role. I don't have a platform. You are limited at the *Times* op-ed page to one appearance every six months or so. I tell them that doesn't seem to apply to Henry Kissinger, but that doesn't matter. Every time I call there with something to say, I get a new young thing on the line. Very nice, smart, but they just don't want to hear from me. This is not an American ethos, it's an American journalistic ethos. There are a handful of people who decide who is going to have a platform and who will not. The golden Rolodex. My category—my place in the Rolodex—is the Privacy Issue for Public Officials. Which is the only thing I won't talk about. My friend Billy Shore gets on me to write about Yugoslavia, and I say, 'For whom? Who cares what I think about Yugoslavia?' The young thing at the other end of the

phone says, 'When were you last in Yugoslavia?' I'll bet they never ask Nixon that."

In 1995, Hart considered running for the Senate in Colorado, but decided to stay out of the race.