

AMERICAN RHAPSODY

THE SENSATIONAL NATIONAL BESTSELLER



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JOE ESZTERHAS

WITH A NEW CHAPTER FOR THE VINTAGE EDITION, "THE COMEBACK KID'S LAST COMEBACK"

American Rhapsody

JOE ESZTERHAS



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*Love is like a cigar. Once it goes out, you can't light it again. It's never
the same.*

—RICHARD M. NIXON

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Author's Note

Nearly three years ago, afraid that my public persona as a screenwriter was overwhelming my creative life, I went to the island of Maui with my wife and our three children, shut my phone down, stopped doing interviews, and pretended I wasn't a public man.

I played with my wife and played with my kids, let the sun beat me up, and thought about things. About values and success. About the sixties. About my past relationship with the women I'd used and my present relationship with the wife I adored. Somehow or other, those thoughts about my life inevitably led me to Bill Clinton.

I thought I recognized and knew Bill Clinton and what made him tick. I understood the ambition, the success, the political duplicity, the Hollywood charm. I understood the mad priapic obsession that has always fuel-driven his life . . . because it had driven mine until I met Naomi. I understood the fierce boom-box rhythms of his inner life the same way I understood and loved the demons shrieking in the darkness inside the Stones, the Doors, the artist now known as Prince, and Dr. Dre.

I started reading everything ever written about Bill Clinton when we finally came back to Malibu, our phone still shut down, living a near-reclusive life now, not even calling agents, lawyers, and friends back, still refusing all interview requests. I was lost in a mirrored sea of my own creation, in snorkeling pursuit of myself and Clinton, swimming through his past in search of my own soul.

As the impeachment psychodrama began, I watched every minisecond of it, bleary-eyed, haggard, and grizzled, maniacally flicking channels, indulging gluttonously in the national bacchanal of information and bulimia of rumor. I read everything, I saw everything, digested whatever I could, and learned a lot . . . about myself and Bill Clinton and about America, the country I love as only an immigrant who grew up in the ethnic ghettos of Cleveland can love her.

I wasn't just thinking of Bill Clinton anymore, but about a generation, *my* generation, which, in some ways, even though it was entrenched in power, creeping up on sixty, was still struggling to find itself. I was thinking about the state of the union and the state of our hearts and privates as we tried not to stumble and slide on the treacherous Internet ice of the new millennium.

The book you are holding in your hand is filled with everything I thought about and learned. Ah, yes, except it's not that simple. If only it were . . . but it never is.

I am loath to confess that I have had a writing partner who has cursed my career from the time I was in the sixth grade at Saint Emeric's School and published a class newspaper, thanks to the toy printing set that I had received as a Christmas gift. I wrote some of the stories in the *Saint Emeric's Herald* and my writing partner wrote others. I wrote childish investigative reports about the river in the valley below the school, in the smoky part of the city known as the Flats, a river so polluted with industrial chemicals that it burned your eyes as you watched it from the bluffs above. (Many years later, the river literally burst afire!) My writing partner wrote sensational exposés about which girls in our class were kissing which boys. (Hot off the press! *A Herald* exclusive! Frances Madar and Robert Zak!)

By the time I got to Hollywood, I knew my partner well enough to acknowledge him condescendingly in interviews as “the twisted little man inside me.” We wrote about different things, you see, but it all came out under my name. I wrote *Music Box*, *Telling Lies in America*, *F.I.S.T.*, and *Betrayed*. He wrote *Basic Instinct*, *Showgirls*, *Sliver*, and *Jade*—although sometimes he even intruded his back-alley homunculus self into *my* work: Why, after all, was there a need for lengthy, sexually graphic courtroom descriptives in a movie as aesthetically ambitious and as morally lofty as *Music Box*?

And as I wrote this book—about a cultural shadow war that resulted in the figurative assassination of a president (Bill Clinton)—I realized that the Twisted Little Man was writing feverishly, too. And hallucinating. Daydreaming. Wet-dreaming. Projecting. About Kenneth W. Starr’s secret lust. About George W. Bush and Tricia Nixon. About Hillary and her forlorn, intimate relationship with Eleanor Roosevelt. About Al Gore’s heartbreaking, cuckolded fears. About Bob Dole and his electable missing shoulder. About “John Wayne” McCain’s painful broken promise and his love of identical Long Tall Sallies. About Monica and her spoiled-princess extortion of the president of the United States. About Bill Clinton and his eternal true love, his Willard.

Are the things the little lowlife wrote about true? Well, as a matter of fact, no. But that’s also not so simple. Because in the little scuzzball’s cockeyed, fun-house view, they are. He uses facts wickedly to shape his outrageous fictional perspective. He is a contortionist and a juggler of the historical record. No mere imposter, he is an abysmal, excrescent python who swallows his subjects, spits them back out, and spews *his* venom from *their* mouths. Is this little vermin a liar? Well, you know, in Bill Clinton’s mind, oral sex isn’t sex. Is the little slime, as Mark Twain defined himself, “a professional liar,” making up fictions to reveal truths? Well, he is certainly supporting himself in Hollywood by professionally dressing up his tawdry, realistic lies.

I have decided, finally, after all these years of living with him as my writing partner, that it is time to distinguish what is his and what is mine.

If you are reading this typeface, the writing is mine, sometimes interpretive but based on well-researched facts.

If you are reading this typeface, the writing is fictional and his, starting with well-researched facts but blasted through and transformed by his hallucinatory dreams.

I’ll put it another way, too. If you get angry while you’re reading this brazen book, blame it on the crude, insulting little prick—Lord knows, he’s gotten too many people terribly angry through the years. If you find things in this reflective book that frighten you, or if you find yourself laughing against your determined will, blame it on a little boy endlessly watching a sun-kissed river that makes him cry.

Writing my book about Bill Clinton, his political peers, and our national ethos has had a pronounced personal effect upon me. Now I want to play with my wife and children *all the time!* I want to pretend permanently that I am not a public man. Our phones, while not shut down, have gatekeepers with disembodied voices to safeguard our family’s bliss. Me, my wife, our boys, the massive pinheaded bulldog we call Rep. “Mud” Nadler, the anti-impeachment Democrat from New York . . . and the Twisted Little Man.

The little devil and I had a nerve-racking, maddening, revolting, hilarious, and climactic time writing

this book. We hope that your time reading it will be similar.

Joe Eszterhas

Point Dume, California

[Act One]

HEARTBREAK HOTEL

From my own voice resonant, singing the phallus . . .

*The President with pale face asking secretly to himself,
What will the people say at last?*

—WALT WHITMAN, *Leaves of Grass*

The Whole World Is Watching

“We gotta get you laid,” Monica said.

“Oh, God,” Linda Tripp said, “wouldn’t that be something different? New and different. I don’t know. After seven years, do you really think that there’s a possibility I’d remember how?”

“Of course you would.”

“No,” Linda Tripp said.

My friend Jann Wenner, the editor and publisher of *Rolling Stone*, the rock and roll bible, called me excitedly the day after Bill Clinton was nominated for the presidency. He had spent the previous night at a party, celebrating with Clinton. “He’s one of us,” Jann said. “He’ll be the first rock and roll president in American history.”

I had come to the same conclusion. He was one of us. Even if, on occasion, he tried to deny it. *Of course* he had dodged the draft, just another white Rhodes Scholar nigger who agreed with Muhammad Ali and had no quarrel with them Vietcong. *Of course* he had smoked dope, inhaling deeply, holding it in, bogarting that joint.

Bill Clinton, Jann told me, had always read *Rolling Stone*, so I smiled when, shortly after the election he was photographed jogging in a *Rolling Stone* T-shirt, the same T-shirt I had worn to my son’s Little League games. Well, this really was a cosmic giggle: *Good Lord, we had taken the White House!* After all the locust years—after Bebe Rebozo’s boyfriend, after the hearing-impaired Marlboro Man, after that uppity preppy always looking at his watch—*America was ours!* In the sixties, we’d been worried about staying out of jail. Now the jails were ours to run as we saw fit.

Carter had given us false hope for a while, but Bill Clinton was the real deal: undiluted, uncut rock and roll. Carter, we had discovered, wasn’t one of us. Oh, sure, Jimmah allowed his record-mogul pal Phil Walden and Willie Nelson to smoke dope on the White House roof, and he had told *Playboy* he had “committed adultery in my heart many times,” but the unfortunate, terminally well-intentioned dip was such a cheesy rube, definitely not rock and roll, with his beer-gutted Libyan-agent brother, his schoolmarm wife, and the Bible-spouting sister who was secretly having sudsy, lederhosen romps with married German chancellor Willy Brandt. No, definitely not rock and roll, proven forever when he fe

on his face jogging, claiming breathlessly that a bunny rabbit had jumped in front of him, falling on his face while wearing *black socks*.

His Secret Service agents nicknamed Bill Clinton “Elvis,” but we knew better. Elvis had been Sgt. Barry Sadler’s ideological sidekick, a slobby puppet on a carny barker’s strings, in love with his nark badges, informing on the Beatles, toadying up to Nixon, The Night Creature. Those wet panties hurled onstage at his concerts were size 16 and skid-marked. Bill Clinton wasn’t Elvis. With his shades on and his sax gleaming, Bill Clinton looked like a pouchier Bobby Keyes playing backup for the Stones. No, that wasn’t quite right, either. Not Bobby Keyes, but a pop-gutted Jumpin’ Jack Flash and grayin’ Street Fightin’ Man . . . Bill Clinton was Mick on cheeseburgers and milk shakes, Taco Bell, and Che Boyardee spaghetti.

Rolling Stone called his inauguration “the coming of a new age in American politics.” Fleetwood Mac was playing “Don’t Stop.” That was Fleetwood Mac up there, not Pearl Bailey or Sammy Davis, Jr., or Sinatra or Guy Lombardo or Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians. That was rock and roll we were hearing, not the Sousa Muzak the big band-era pols in the smoky back rooms had forced on us for so long. Dylan, our messiah, was there. And that was Jack Nicholson at the Lincoln Memorial, Abe’s words brought to life by our lawyerly Easy Rider. Bill Clinton’s White House was rock and roll, too, full of young people, full of women, blacks, gays, Hispanics; a White House, as Newt Gingrich’s guru Alvin Toffler, said, “more familiar with Madonna than with Metternich.” That was just fine with us. It looked like Bill Clinton was continuing what he had begun in Arkansas, where he’d been criticized for having a staff of “long-haired, bearded hippies” who came to the office in cutoffs and patched jeans. The boss himself had been seen in the governor’s mansion barefoot, in jeans and a T-shirt.

He had a Yippie-like zaniness about him we could identify with. Out on the golf course in Arkansas, one of his partners noticed that he could see Bill Clinton’s underwear through his pants. “They weren’t bikinis he had on,” the partner said, “but it was some kind of wild underwear.” Bill Clinton’s favorite joke was one he had told over and over on the Arkansas campaign trail, a joke closer in spirit to Monty Python than to the Vegas lounge meisters favored by so many other presidents: “There was a farmer who had a three-legged pig with a wooden leg. And he bragged on this pig to everybody who came to visit. The farmer would tell how this pig had saved him from a fire. People would be amazed! And he’d say, ‘Well, that’s not all; this pig saved my farm from going bankrupt.’ And the folks would be amazed. And the farmer would say, ‘That’s not all; this pig saved the entire town once when the dam broke.’ Then somebody said to the farmer, ‘Well, gosh, it’s pretty amazing that you have this pig, but you never did explain why it only has three legs.’ And the farmer said, ‘Well, hell, you wouldn’t want to eat a pig this special all in one sitting!’ ”

He certainly was a rock and roller. The light blue eyes, the lazy, sexy smile. The lips that were called “pussy lips” in Arkansas. Girls loved him. At age twelve, a classmate said, “Little girls were screaming, ‘Billy, Billy, Billy, throw me the football.’ All the girls had crushes on him. He was the center of their attention.” A reporter covering one of his Arkansas campaigns said, “You could see the effect that he had on people in the eyes of the teenage girls who came to see him. Their eyes would light up. You would think that a rock star had just come into the Wal-Mart.” He had rock and roll habits, too. Gennifer Flowers remembered the time he told her, “I really got fucked up on cocaine last night.” There was even a Jagger-like androgyny he allowed some of his women friends to see. He put on girlfriend Sally Perdue’s dress one night, high on grass, and played Elvis on his sax. He asked Gennifer to meet him at a bar dressed as a man, and he liked her putting eyeliner, blush, and mascara

on his face. Underneath it was a rock and roll restlessness, what Gennifer called his feeling that he was “bullet-proof,” which allowed him at times to flaunt his relationship with her.

There was no doubt he loved the music. Janis’s “Pearl” . . . the Seekers’ “I’ll Never Find Another You” . . . Peter and Gordon’s “A World Without Love” . . . “Here You Come Again” (which reminded him of Gennifer) . . . Steely Dan . . . Kenny Loggins . . . the Commodores’ “Easy” and “Three Times Lady” . . . Joe Cocker . . . Jerry Lee Lewis . . . anything by Elvis. He had his own band when he was a kid, called The Three Kings, which the other kids called Three Blind Mice because they all wore shades. A high school friend said, “I remember driving down this road and Bill singing Elvis songs at the top of his voice. He loved to sing. He just liked music and he was always playing music. I think that was one of the reasons he went to church so much as a kid. To hear the music.”

One of the things that attracted him to Gennifer was that she was a rock singer with her own band—Gennifer Flowers and Easy Living—at about the same time that his little brother, Roger, had his band—Roger Clinton and Dealer’s Choice. Roger was like Chris Jagger to Mick: He wanted to be a rock star, but he wasn’t very good. Roger’s taste leaned to Grand Funk Railroad, REO Speedwagon, and Alice Cooper. But Roger shared his love of the music. Bill Clinton’s memory of his first appearance on *The Tonight Show* was that Joe Cocker was there. “He was telling me about the show,” *Arkansas Democrat* columnist Phillip Martin said. “He was telling me about Joe Cocker’s band. He said ‘Man, they were bad; they were just a kick-ass band, man!’ You know, he really wanted to play with Joe Cocker rather than going out there and playing ‘Summertime’ on his sax. But he was afraid to ask. He was really in awe.” And when Stephen Stills asked Roger up onstage once, he said, “I was so excited, I thought I would pee my pants.”

He was one of us, it became apparent, in another special way, too, the classic sixties child in love with his car, addicted to the pleasures provided him by his penis, which he called “Willard.” There was even a cartoon flyer circulated around Arkansas early in his political career that showed Bill Clinton looking down and saying, “Dick, you kept me from being the President of the United States.”

He was a *southern* rock and roller, a hillbilly cat like Elvis and Jerry Lee, growing up in Hot Springs, Arkansas, a neon-lit haven of gamblers and whores, once patronized by Al Capone, Bugsy Siegel, and Lucky Luciano. Bill Clinton may have been born in Hope, but he grew up in Sin City, with a mama who painted her eyebrows, pasted on false eyelashes, loved the racetrack, and helled around in her convertible, drink in hand, from the Vapors to the Pines to the Southern Club, with or without her husband. A ripe peach of a woman, there to be tasted.

He developed a lifelong yen for those ripe peaches, for rock and roll, and for convertibles. It all came together in August 1977, the perfectly realized, transcendent Bill Clinton rock and roll moment, when he was already a married man, the attorney general of Arkansas. Dolly Kyle, a ripe-peach girlfriend he hadn’t seen for a while, now also married, came to see him in his office. He introduced her around the office as an old and good friend and then walked her out to her car and he . . . just flipped out! It was a brand-spanking-new turquoise Cadillac El Dorado convertible, 500-horsepower, nineteen feet long, eight-track tape player, AM/FM radio. It was the ultimate hepcat thing, a chrome-plated, poke-your-eye-out, southern gothic Elvismobile, hotter even than the Caddy convertible Chance Wayne (and Pat Newman) drove in *Sweet Bird of Youth*.

He asked if he could drive it, and Dolly said sure, so Bill Clinton got behind the wheel and took her out on the freeway and juiced her up over a hundred, veering, skidding a little, laughing like a kid. He took his foot off the pedal then and let her drift, just gliding along, grinning. Elvis was singing on the eight-track and he sang along . . . “Treat me right, treat me good, treat me like you really should.”

Bill Clinton pulled off into a field, with no houses nearby, and got out and popped the hood open and looked at her motor. Then he looked into her trunk and found some blankets and got back in the front seat and started kissing Dolly. He put the blanket over the front seat and pulled the convertible’s top down and told Dolly to take her dress off. He took off every stitch of his clothing, including his cuff links, and put his clothes neatly into the backseat. The sun was shining . . . it was a radiant, warm day . . . the Cadillac was gleaming . . . and they got it on. He put his finger into the sweat inside her belly button and he licked his finger. He reached into the backseat, put his pants back on, and walked back to the trunk for some water. He drank, offered her some, and took his pants off again. He moved her hand to Willard and said, “Touch it.” They got it on again. They got dressed and started driving back to his office. He put the Elvis eight-track back on and he started humming along to the song.

“Today’s my wedding anniversary,” she told him.

“Are you happy?” he asked.

“Are you?” she said.

He said nothing until they got to his office.

“Good-bye, pretty girl,” he said, and walked away. She got behind the wheel and popped the tape out to put in another one and she heard the disc jockey on the radio say that Elvis Presley was dead in Memphis. She started to cry and drove away, the tears streaming down her face.

The transcendent rock and roll moment . . . and it ended with a crash and a burn. Roaring down the highway in a brand-new Cadillac, rock and roll blasting, the sun shining, a beautiful girl with her legs up on the dash, a little water to slake your thirst, getting it on again, and then . . . *death*.

A slice of life at Altamont, only four months after Woodstock, love and peace and beads splattered by blood, the beauty of naked bodies at Woodstock obliterated forever by an obscenely naked fat man with a knife plunged into his mottled, greasy flesh. Oyez, oyez, darkness once again at the heart of rock and roll. Darkness and danger and sex. Knives and guns and Cadillacs careening into the pitch-black night. Forget the Beatles and their “good day sunshine.” Rock and roll was about sex, not about love. It was about excess, not about romance. Bill Clinton understood that. It was exactly why he loved it. Bill Clinton was a rock and roll hog.

So was I. I knew it, too, having seen it, even tasted it, firsthand. As a writer for *Rolling Stone*, I had helicoptered into a crowd of 100,000 drunken, naked kids in Darlington, North Carolina, with Alice Cooper and Three Dog Night and watched as Alice guillotined chickens onstage, spraying blood over these sunburned and sweaty, naked kids, who’d rub the blood into one another’s privates. I’d sat, afterward, around the pool of a Holiday Inn with the bands and a hundred local groupies as everyone got naked and the night blazed into a chlorine-smelling human blur of contorted wet bodies.

As a screenwriter, I’d waited in the living room of a Denver hotel suite at eight one morning for Bob

Dylan to emerge from his bedroom. A half-full quart of Jim Beam stood on the living room cocktail table, along with three or four broken lines of coke. A pair of black silver-toed cowboy boots was under the table. One girl came out of Bob's bedroom, then another, then another. They looked tired and sleepy and were scantily and hastily dressed. They said hi in a shy and embarrassed way and then they left. Five minutes later, Bob came out, bare-chested and barefoot, wearing jeans, his hair an airborne jungle, his complexion graveyard gray. He sat down at the cocktail table, took a long slug of the Jim Beam, did a line of coke, smiled, and said, "Howya doin?"

That's what rock and roll was about! Brakes screeching, knives flashing in the moonlight, bodies aswirl in a lighted pool, blood spraying naked flesh, Mick with a whip in his hand, Keith's skull ring gleaming, a bottle of Jim Beam, silver-toed cowboy boots, a girl in a Cadillac with her legs up, a finger being sucked clean of the juice in her navel.

Rock and roll was Elvis doing "One Night" and "Mystery Train" before Colonel Parker and Hollywood tried to turn him into the Singing Eunuch . . . Jerry Lee Lewis spraying more lighter fluid on his already-burning piano . . . Otis Redding running down a fire escape as an irate husband shot at him from a window above . . . Chuck Berry videotaping himself as he urinated on a hooker . . . Little Richard getting a backstage blow job as the curtain went up from the groupie whom Buddy Holly was doing doggy-style at the same time . . . the Stones passing that catatonic naked blonde over their heads in *Cocksucker Blues*.

Rock and roll was a young Jerry Lee sneaking over to Haney's in Natchez and watching an old black man play boogie-woogie piano. It was a young mascaraed Elvis sneaking down to Beale Street in Memphis, watching an old black man with a tin cup singing a Robert Johnson song. It was a young Billy Clinton watching the curvy, ripe-peach painted women taking their tricks into the Plaza or the Parkway or the Ina Hotel in Hot Springs.

All three learned to play their instruments in proximity to that corrupt, exhilarating, and life-giving red neon glow. Jerry Lee had his piano, Elvis had his voice, and Billy Clinton had a silver tongue.

It was easy to forget now, in the nineties, when we were parents or grandparents so busily reshaping our pasts to become role models for our children or our junior executives, that behind the idealism and the social commitment and the herbal experiments related to self-awareness, the sixties were about sex.

Even the drugs were tied to it: grass made us ecstatically sensitive to the slightest flick of a dry-mouthed tongue. A little bit of coke on our willard or her labia was a marathon stuntlike sex act. Quaaludes tranced us into an endless stretch toward orgasm. The sixties were, in a world without the lethal dangers of AIDS, a sexual smorgasbord. No small talk, no courting, no foreplay, just "Do you wanna fuck?" Or, if you wanted to be a little Jane Austenish about it, "I'd really love to ball you."

I spent the years from 1971 to 1975 as a senior editor at *Rolling Stone* in San Francisco, recently arrived from the Midwest, and found myself dining at this pink smorgasbord quickly and heartily. Some of the women at *Rolling Stone* were going to Braless Day rallies, where they hurled girdles, bras, and panties into a "Freedom Trash Can." All the *Rolling Stone* editors, all of us male, expressed fervent solidarity with the gesture.

The women at *Rolling Stone* were young, nubile, attractive and liked the phrase “I really want to ball you.” And they *did*. Goodness knows, I did, too . . . with Deborah and Kathy and Shauna and Sunny and Robin and Leyla and Janet and Deborah again, realizing quickly that they were balling the other editors on alternate nights, that this was about nothing, really, but a little bit of exercise and lots of pleasure. It was about having fun. It was a combination of athletics and theatrics, intimate communal performance art, best exemplified by the staffer who took his girlfriend into the parking lot each noon while other staffers lazily watched from the windows upstairs as she fellated him. (We named the show “Clarabel and the Zit Queen.”) When Jann went out of town, some of us borrowed his office for our couplings, but he came back from one trip, enraged to find “coke and come” all over his desk, and started locking his door.

As I watched Bill Clinton with Hillary and heard Gennifer’s account of how Bill wanted to have sex with her in a rest room while Hillary stood outside, a few feet away, I remembered that during those years at *Rolling Stone*, I was married . . . and so were many of the other editors. And after those office or parking lot or backseat or Van Ness Avenue motel couplings, I’d go home to my wife, still smelling of sex, with Acapulco Gold coursing through my blood, and she and I would talk about Watergate or the price of not-yet-taboo abalone at Petrini’s.

My wife wasn’t one of the hot and willing young sweetmeats at *Rolling Stone*. She was, in fact, sort of like Hillary: smart, poised, responsible, a partner in most ways, except the sexual ones. I didn’t marry my wife for sexual reasons, and it became obvious to me that Bill Clinton didn’t marry Hillary for sexual reasons, either. You could call Hillary many things, but not sexy. Drawn to Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds, Bill Clinton had married Judy in Disguise with Glasses.

Was it possible to imagine Bill wanting to take Hillary into that rest room while wife Gennifer was standing out there? But there was another deadly flip to that question: Would Bill Clinton have felt the need to take anyone into that rest room had he been married to Gennifer instead of Hillary? No one was saying that Bill and Hillary didn’t have a sex life, but the whole world knew by now that it didn’t amount to much.

So our rock and roll president started having what the press called “affairs,” although, except for Gennifer, the euphemism didn’t bear scrutiny. These weren’t affairs—they were backstage exercises. Mick cutting a swath through groupies, the political rock star run amok at the sexual smorgasbord. A woman was Connie Hamzy to him. Connie was a rock and roll groupie whom he’d met in Little Rock. Not just any groupie, royalty groupie, made famous as “Sweet Sweet Connie” in Grand Funk Railroad’s smash hit “We’re an American Band”: “Sweet sweet Connie was doin’ her act . . .” Connie had done singers and drummers and managers and roadies and bus drivers by the time Bill Clinton spotted her by a hotel pool, and the first thing he said to her was, “I want to get with you.”

He was using women’s bodies still, the way he and we had callously and selfishly used one another’s bodies in the sixties. The point was a pair of lips, a pair of tits, a nice ass. The point was skin, flesh, meat. The point was a hole. And was it any wonder that he hadn’t matured? That, simply due to age and wisdom, he hadn’t learned to treat his fellow human beings with more humanity? Well, look at Mick Jagger, who was pushing sixty. He was just a rock star, not even the most powerful man on earth, the president of the United States. Mick still wasn’t interested in women. He was still interested in holes.

The trouble with holes, if you were a politician, was that you couldn’t run on them. The public

smirked when Mick knocked up a new honey, and they said, “Look at that Mick! And he’s almost sixty!” But you couldn’t run for president and say, “Listen, people, I’m married and I love my wife, but I’ve got this thing about vaginas and fellatio and if I don’t get enough, I’ll sit around the White House masturbating.”

If you couldn’t say that, and if you were a career politician whose only talent was to collect votes, you had to lie. You had to become a practiced and constant world-champion liar. And if you saw yourself getting away with this lie for many years, and continued collecting votes in the statehouse and in the White House, then why not lie about everything? If your whole inner dynamic was structured on a fundamental lie that you were getting away with, then why not adopt the same successful strategy—*lying*—about everything? You dodged the draft? Lie and say you didn’t. You smoked dope? Lie and say you didn’t inhale. You were humping Gennifer whenever you could? Lie and say it never happened. A White House intern? “I want to say one thing to the American people. I did not have sex with that woman, Miss Lewinsky.”

A semen stain on a blue dress? DNA? *What? Hoo-boy! Jesus God!* We didn’t need the National Center for Atmospheric Testing to tell us there was a skunky odor in the air. America felt like it needed a psychic disinfectant. We were Gassed Out, Pissed Off, and Ready to Throw Up—a nineties twist on “Tune in, turn on, drop out.”

It was the stain that got him, of course. Technology. Who would have thunk it? Exposed as a liar forever, impeached, red-faced, jabbing his finger, lying. In the same boat as Nixon. “I am not a crook.” The same boat as Nixon! Nixon the Night Creature! Devil incarnate to us in the sixties! Not Nixon at the end, sneaking into Burger Kings in New Jersey for a forbidden cheeseburger, but Nixon full bore: lying about Pat’s cloth coat and Checkers and Ellsberg and the break-in at the Watergate. Exposed, too, as gutless as Nixon, which was why Nixon lied too. Nixon could have admitted it, could have said the break-in was wrong and a mistake, but he didn’t have the guts to do that or to burn the tapes. (“If he had destroyed the tapes,” former House Speaker Tip O’Neill said, “he could have remained in office until the end of his second term. Not to destroy them was irrational.”)

Clinton could have admitted it, could have said, Yes, I’ve always had a problem with sex. My marriage has never fulfilled me. I’m a horndog, dadgummit! But no, it was impossible for him. He had lied from the beginning about everything because he had lied about . . . the holes . . . and gotten away with it. (“It’s not a lie,” former Reagan secretary of state Al Haig said, “it’s a terminological inexactitude.”)

Oh boy, a sad, sad story. A sixties kid, waging the good fight against the forces of racism and intolerance, against Nixon and the Marlboro Man and the right-wing pentecostal nutbags possessed and held in thrall by the unborn fetus and the Confederate flag and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion . . . and then this happened! In the same leaky boat as the Night Creature, way up shit creek . . . revealed, disgraced, and all this after a landslide victory over Bob Dole, an old man who had ED—erectile dysfunction. (Everyone sensed something, but no one knew.) Bob Dole couldn’t even get it up at the same time Bill Clinton was frolicking with Willard on aide Nancy Hrenreich’s couch. Oh boy. Sad.

Only Hunter Thompson, our mad prophet, had had any reservations about Bill Clinton, claiming that

Clinton made him uncomfortable, that he didn't have a sense of humor, that he hogged the french fries. ~~When Bill Clinton said he hadn't inhaled, Hunter wrote, "Only a fool would say a thing like that."~~ He's just a disgrace to an entire generation . . . Bill Clinton doesn't inhale marijuana, right? You bet. Like I chew on LSD but don't swallow it." Hunter didn't like Bill Clinton from the first time he met him. "He treated me like a roach from the get-go. Like maybe he had such a pure, clear goddamn nose from never inhaling that he could actually smell what he thought was some kind of drugs in my pocket. Or maybe it was me that was actually responsible for what happened to his brother. Sure! Like it was me that told the cops to go ahead and put the poor despised little bastard in a federal prison. For his own good, of course. Nobody would have Roger locked up for their own political reasons, would they?" But Hunter endorsed Bill Clinton anyway, despite his reservations, just like he'd endorsed Jimmah, because he thought Bill Clinton would be the first rock and roll president in American history: one of us.

So he was one of us and now many of us couldn't wait to get him out of sight—what the hell, a lot of us had seen too much of Mick's tired circus act, too. Eighteen months before his final term ended, America had already turned to the next election. The news shows were covering it as if it were next week. Why so early? Why were we so caught up with an election eighteen months away? Because so many of us wanted it to be over already, because so many of us wanted Bill Clinton gone. He was the first rock and roll president of the United States and he had become the first elected president to ever be impeached. Impeached for lying about his ripe peaches. He should have been infibulated instead of impeached.

It sure wasn't supposed to end this way. Our first rock and roll president was supposed to rock the world . . . but not like this. He was supposed to put our kick-ass primal inner beat into the Oval Office. He was supposed to tell the truth—finally—after all the White House liars we'd grown up and grown older and grown more cynical with.

He made us feel queasy now. We saw a freeze-frame of a fifty-three-year-old man, tired, red-faced, overweight, a father, sitting alone in a plush office, his fly open, Willard in hand, staring, coming. Bill Clinton was the literal nineties realization of that mythical moment in the sixties: Jim Morrison onstage in Miami, unzipping his fly, showing off his dick, and simulating masturbation and oral sex in front of thousands of people. Bill Clinton was the wet spot on America's bed.

It had gotten so tawdry in Washington that even the reporters, as they were asking their questions, seemed shocked by their own actions—as shown in an exchange between White House correspondent and Clinton press secretary Mike McCurry.

A reporter: "Does Clinton have a sexually transmitted disease?"

Another reporter: "Jesus!"

McCurry: "Good God, do you really want to ask that question?"

Another reporter: "Mike, are you saying the President does not now have and has not since he entered the White House been treated for a sexually transmitted disease?"

McCurry: "Boy, I tell you, I'm astonished you're asking that question."

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