

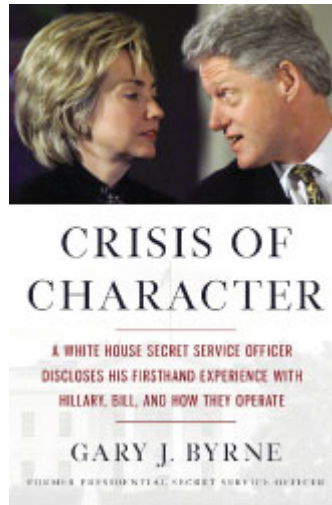


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Sworn to Serve, No Matter Whom

Crisis of Character: A White House Secret Service Officer Discloses His Firsthand Experience With Hillary, Bill, and How They Operate, by Gary J. Byrne, New York, New York: Center Street/Hachette Book Group, 2016, 285 pages, hardcover.



Among the myriad of strange creatures that one finds in the realm of ancient Greek mythology, one of the most grotesque and fearsome is the being known as a Harpy. Harpies were, according to the Oxford Classical Dictionary, “supernatural winged beings ... who ‘snatch’, as the name [in Greek] implies, and carry off various persons and things.” Webster’s New World Dictionary is more comprehensive in its description when it says that Harpies are “any of several hideous, filthy, rapacious winged monsters with the head and trunk of a woman and the tail, legs, and talons of a bird.”

The Harpies of the ancient Greeks are, needless to say, wholly fictional. They do not exist and have never existed. However, in modern usage, a Harpy is defined as someone either extremely ill-tempered and unpleasant or unendingly greedy and grasping — or in the worst cases, a composite of all of these attributes. That such individuals most certainly have existed and do exist is proven, some say, by a certain former first lady, whose personality and character are explored in Gary J. Byrne’s fascinating book *Crisis of Character: A White House Secret Service Officer Discloses His Firsthand Experience With Hillary, Bill, and How They Operate*.

Byrne is a patriotic American who wished to devote himself to protecting the country he loves. *Crisis of Character* is the true story of his experiences as a member of the U.S. Secret Service during the administrations of George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton and, later, as a federal air marshal.

The duty of the U.S. Secret Service, insofar as the White House is concerned, is to protect the president and his family and to assure their safety at all times. USSS officers are pledged to put themselves physically between the president and danger, if necessary to the point of sacrificing their own lives. They are not there to serve the president or his family in any other way. As the author explains, even if an officer sees the president or his spouse struggling with luggage, they may not assist since that would involve the use of their hands that must be free at all times to respond in seconds to any danger. They are not in the White House to follow the orders of the president or his family but to follow a set of strict protocols that define the exact parameters of their job duties, which are demanding and require crystal-



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clear focus at all times.

The bulk of this volume relates to the author's first-hand observations of the Clintons, both Hillary and Bill. For those familiar with the reputations and temperaments of the Clintons, there are few surprises here. Their total self-absorption, shamelessness, sleaziness, and ruthlessness were legendary even before they occupied the White House. All of that is confirmed in this book, yet there are still some occasional shocks. For example, not only is Hillary Clinton not the amiable, warm person that the media portrays, but when Secret Service officers would greet her politely in the morning, she would snarl back with a particularly foul four-letter expletive. According to Byrne, she has an intense dislike of men wearing uniforms, especially military or police uniforms, and so took out her hostility on the uniformed men assigned to protect her. She detested the sight of them so much that, as she walked through the halls, she expected them to disappear, to jump into a closet or alcove, so she wouldn't see them. "It's insulting that I should just disappear because the very sight of us bothers her," Byrne rightly complained.

On another occasion, Hillary Clinton demanded, in a flurry of profanity and threats, that Byrne oversee a group of VIP visitors to the Oval Office. He flatly refused, explaining that he could not carry out his duties and watch over tourists at the same time, and added that in no circumstances could visitors be allowed in the Oval Office unescorted. The first lady retreated in a huff, and the VIPs were sent to a less-sensitive area.

The author writes of Hillary Clinton that her "private leadership style was based on pure fear and loathing." Protecting her during the Clinton years came to be seen as a punishment detail, not, as with every other First Lady, an honor. She was always harsh and humorless, always mean-spirited and churlish, looking down on what she thought of as her social inferiors as if she were an empress, born to the purple. The Clintons pretended to be, as Byrne says, "bright, shining stars who cared deeply for the little guy." In fact, nothing was (or is) further from the truth. Except when the cameras were on, the "little guys" were ignored or treated with contempt.

Compared to Hillary, Bill was reasonably friendly toward the officers assigned to protect him, though when it came to his dalliances with young women, and there were several during his White House years, he was dangerously careless. The satisfaction of his insatiable sexual appetites always ranked before national security and before any sense of the duties or dignity of his high office, which is why the author wondered "how our nation's leaders could be so reckless, so volatile, and so dangerous to themselves and to our nation." As we know, because of that recklessness, the country had to endure the ongoing embarrassment of the publication and broadcast of all the disgusting details of the Monica Lewinsky affair. It was no different in Arkansas where, according to some accounts, Governor Bill Clinton forced his attentions on many women while his enabler wife tolerated his conduct, using threats of violence to try to silence Bill's accusers. As usual, of course, Bill lied repeatedly and went so far as to perjure himself. Hillary's conduct in recent years has been precisely the same, to lie her way out of any mistakes or misdeeds and to continue lying even in the face of positive proof to the contrary. The levels of arrogance, brazenness, and lack of character in each case are simply astounding.

The interaction between the two is also significant. The author writes that Hillary "always looked uncomfortable around her husband." He adds, "If you saw them privately, they never seemed to meld at all. But turn on a camera or bring in a fat-cat donor, and the ice suddenly melted. They'd smile at each other, laugh, trade little jokes. They'd move in closer to each other, turn warmer — yes, even romantic.



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They might even hold hands. They could flip that emotional light switch whenever they had to, then switch it back off again when the crowds and cameras departed.” Their marriage is in reality less a marriage than a business partnership. Hillary could not have cared less about Bill’s philandering, so long as he was careful not to allow anything to become public. When he was not careful, Hillary would explode with rage, since it endangered the success of their business arrangement to seek money and power. On one occasion, for instance, the first lady threw an antique vase at the president, shattering the historical artifact and giving Bill a nasty black eye.

The last portion of *Crisis of Character* involves the author’s tour of duty with the Federal Air Marshal Service. The first problem he spotted was that the air marshals were required to dress like professionals — suit and tie. They also boarded the planes ahead of first-class passengers. That they were air marshals was obvious to other passengers, as it would also likely be to any terrorists. Management finally changed that policy to allow the marshals to dress like other passengers and board with the other passengers, and hence maintain their cover.

At some point the Federal Air Marshal Service was required to adopt hiring policies that assured that women and minorities were given equal opportunities for employment. Unfortunately, to implement this new policy, management lowered the qualifications rather than, as he says, “creating tough standards, and holding everyone equally accountable.” As for physical requirements, to guarantee “fairness,” an independent review board ruled that “three pull-ups, a mile and a half in fifteen minutes, and thirty-five push-ups in a minute” was to be the standard for all. The author’s concern is whether a person who meets only these minimum qualifications would “be able to fight to the death against someone committed to dying to succeed in taking down a plane.” Unhappily, the answer is probably *no*.

Crisis of Character confirms many of our worst suspicions and fears about the people who govern this country, or who wish to govern it. Yet a word of caution is apropos; this book contains a good bit of coarse language, by which I mean four-letter words. If readers are easily offended thereby, this book may not be for them. Apart from that, it is truly eye-opening, and well worth the time it takes to read it through.



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