I got up on Election Day and burst into tears — not a genteel twin trickle but a great heaving, wracking burst, zero to firehose. Tears spattered the inside of my glasses, dripped from my lips, and left mascara-tinged rosettes blooming black in my cereal milk.
“Honey,” my husband crooned, “honey, it’s going to be okay. The numbers are still good. It’s okay.”

But it wasn’t the numbers. I wasn’t sobbing because I was afraid Hillary Clinton was going to lose. That would come later. I was sobbing Tuesday morning because, as I poured my coffee, I’d caught a glimpse of a cable news interview with Mrs. Clinton just after she voted for herself in Chappaqua, N.Y. She seemed breathless, exhilarated, a little overwhelmed. Over her shoulder, Bill Clinton stared at his wife and beamed.

My husband stares at me like that sometimes. It’s not just love — we expect husbands to love their wives — but something less traditional, more conditional and gendered. It’s professional respect. It’s pride. We’re accustomed to that pride flowing the other direction, from wife to husband, because men in our culture get to be more than just bodies, do more than just nurture. Men get to act and excel and climb and aspire and thrive and win and rule and be the audacious, hungry fulcrum of public life. It is normal for men to have ambition. It is normal for women to stand aside.

I thought about Bill Clinton meeting Hillary Rodham at Yale in 1971, and how tenacious and intense she must have been even back then, how undeniable and potent. Mr. Clinton describes the moment in his memoir: “She conveyed a sense of strength and self-possession I had rarely seen in anyone, man or woman…she was in my face from the start.” He says he once told her, during those years, “I have met all the most gifted people in our generation and you’re the best.”

And then I thought about Mr. Clinton rising steadily through his political career, on the track we have built for charismatic, competent white men. He must have known, every second, how good his wife was. Not just good, but “the best.” Better than everyone he’d ever met; better than him, even. And he watched her stand next to him and wait, and wait, and wait, underestimated and degraded and excoriated for wanting more out of life than cookies. And she didn’t quit! She swallowed slander and humiliation and irrational hatred for three decades and she didn’t quit, and here she was, just a hair’s breadth from the presidency of the United States—the first woman ever to be trusted with the rudder of the world. He must be so proud of her, I thought. It made me cry.

I cried because I want my daughters to feel that blazing pride, that affirmation of their boundless capability — not from their husbands, but from their world, from the atmosphere, from inviolable wells of certainty inside themselves. I cried because it’s not fair, and I’m so tired, and every woman I know is so tired. I cried because I don’t even know what it feels like to be taken seriously—not fully, not in that whole, unequivocal, confident way that’s native to handshakes between men. I cried because it does things to you to always come second.

Whatever your personal opinion of the Clintons, as politicians or as human beings, that dynamic is real. We, as a culture, do not take women seriously on a profound level. We do not believe women. We do not trust women. We do not like women. I understand that many men cannot see it, and plenty more do not care. I know that many men will read this and laugh, or become defensive, or call me hysterical, or worse, and that’s fine. I am used to it. It doesn’t make me wrong.

But maybe this election was the beginning of something new, I thought. Not the death of sexism, but the birth of a world in which women’s inferiority isn’t a given.

That grain of hope glowed inside me until around dinner time on Tuesday, the final day of an election cycle so openly misogynist that the question “sexual assault: good or bad?” was credulously presented for debate.

Today doesn’t feel real. It is indistinguishable from fresh, close grief. But if there’s one lesson we can take from Mrs. Clinton, politics aside — and even Mr. Trump acknowledged it in the second debate — it’s the limitlessness of human endurance. Those of us who have been left in the cold by this apparent affirmation of a white supremacist patriarchy (and sorry, white women who voted for Mr. Trump, but your shelter is illusory) are so tough.

We have been weathering this hurricane wall of doubt and violence for so long, and now, more crystalline than ever, we have an enemy and a mandate. We have the smirking apotheosis of our oppression sliming, paw-first, toward our genitals. We have the popular vote. We have proof, in exit polls, that white women will pawn their humanity for the safety of white supremacy. We have abortion pills to stockpile and neighbors to protect and children to teach. We have the right woman to find. We have local elections in a year.

The fact that we lost doesn’t make us wrong; the fact that they don’t believe in us doesn’t make us disappear.

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