

Turn out the lights

by the St. Louis Post-Dispatch

If Hillary Clinton truly is the workin' gal she portrayed herself to be in Indiana last week, then surely she must remember this classic Willie Nelson lyric:

Turn out the lights,

The party's over.

They say that all

Good things must end.

Several metaphors suggest themselves for the New York senator's refusal to concede the Democratic presidential nomination to Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois. Is she Scipio Africanus, the Roman consul who salted the earth around Carthage so that nothing would grow? Is she Blanche DuBois in "A Streetcar Named Desire," hoping against hope to recapture her faded glory?

Or is she just the party guest who won't take a hint?

And there were lots of hints flying around Wednesday, some veiled and others not-so-veiled. She could have made a case, albeit a thin one, for staying in the race had she won Tuesday's Indiana primary convincingly. She did not, squeaking by with an advantage of less than 2 percentage points. She could have bolstered her case by putting up a close fight in North Carolina. Instead, Obama beat her by nearly 15 points in that state's primary.

Tuesday's results left Clinton trailing Obama in pledged delegates, 1,840 to 1,684. He needs only 185 more to reach the clinching number of 2,025. Unless she drops out of the race, he won't reach the magic number in the five states and Puerto Rico that are left on the primary calendar, which will leave the race to be decided by the so-called "superdelegates," party officials and elected leaders.

Should they cast their lot with Clinton, despite Obama's lead in both the delegate count and popular vote, it would be like salting the earth around the Democratic Party. Nothing would grow there for 50 years.

Democratic leaders know that. So, too, does Clinton, although apparently she can't bring herself to say it. One sign of that: Top Clinton staff members have begun packing their parachutes. One of them told The Washington Post, using the past tense, "We lost this thing in February" (when Obama racked up his huge lead).

Another "senior campaign official" told Lawrence O'Donnell of HuffingtonPost.com, "We will have a nominee by June 15."

On Wednesday, former Democratic Sen. George McGovern of South Dakota, who knows a little something about lost causes, urged Clinton to end her campaign. The party's 1972 presidential nominee had been a Clinton supporter, but on Wednesday switched his support to Sen. Obama.

The surest sign that the party's over came late Tuesday night when the Clinton campaign grudgingly admitted that Clinton, like Blanche DuBois, no longer could depend on "the kindness of strangers." She lent her campaign \$6.4 million in the last month, on top of the \$5 million loan she made in January. Democrats like to throw money at problems, but not usually at campaigns that aren't going anywhere. Her once fearsome fundraising machine has clanked to a halt.

Now it's time for her to pull the plug on her campaign. She could spare her party and the country three more weeks of attacks on Obama. She could salvage at least some credibility as a Democrat more loyal to party than to self. She could set herself up as the likely heir to Obama should he lose in November to Republican John McCain. She even might be offered the second spot on the ticket.

Stranger things have happened: for instance, John F. Kennedy's decision to offer the vice presidential slot to Lyndon B. Johnson in 1960 despite the Kennedy family's contempt for Johnson. Clinton would turn 69 two weeks before the 2016 presidential election, making her three years younger than McCain will be this fall. Don't think she hasn't done the math.

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