

# Say it Ain't So, Joe

*a light tragedy*

chamber opera by Curtis K. Hughes composed for Guerilla Opera  
text adapted from public records, with additions by Curtis K. Hughes

## ACT 1

### PRELUDE

#### Act 1, Scene 1

Sarah Palin (2) is seated in the living room of her home in Wasilla, Alaska in January 2009, before an interviewer of uncertain identity.

PALIN2: (*dreamily*) I was happy to come home to my own closet and put my own clothes on again.

INTERVIEWER: (*overlapping - insistently*) I don't mean to harp on it, but how did this become an issue?

PALIN2: (*suddenly focused*) I don't know, and I don't know if people are asking: Who did hair and make-up for the democrat nominees?

INT: What was the biggest mistake made in the '08 campaign?

PALIN2: If I would have been in charge, I would have spoken with more reporters, but the interviews I did were not necessarily those I would have chosen.

INT: Let me ask you a little bit about media scrutiny, because some in the media wonder why you don't go on some of the twenty-four hour cable networks. What is your response to that?

PALIN2: Well, sometimes it just doesn't do any good. I mean, you set yourself up just to be continually mocked. The comment about: You can see Russia from Alaska. You can! You can see it. Something like that, a factual statement taken out of context and mocked - What you have to do is let that go.

INT: Were there moments during the campaign where you thought: "What am I doing here? This is almost not worth it"?

PALIN2: Unfair shots were taken at my kids, and that kind of disgusted me. I know a lot of people are capitalizing on, or perhaps, doing some exploiting via me, my family my administration. That, that, that's a little bit perplexing. That also says a great deal though about our society.

INT: Did it ever get under your skin?

PALIN2: When I heard Barack Obama state in one of his interviews that, you know, attack me, I'm the public official, 'n we'll duke it out if need be, but family's off limits, I thought: Okay, they, they respected that in him, naively believing: Oh, that must apply to all of us, right? But it didn't apply.

INT: And what was the most important lesson you learned from the campaign?

PALIN2: (*overlapping - ignoring the interviewer, addressing the audience*) Is it political? Is it, is it sexism? What, what is it that drives someone to perpetuate the worst in terms of gossip and lies? It's all these anonymous pathetic bloggers in their parents' basements wearing their pajamas!

INT: But what about women journalists, left leaning feminists, those who have spoken about you unfavorably?

PALIN2: (*returning focus to the interviewer*) I consider myself too a feminist, whatever that means. I would like to see some of these feminists open up their minds in consideration of a working mom who represents much of what they have fought for all these years.

INT: Governor, what are your current legislative priorities?

PALIN2: (*ignoring the interviewer again*) I've also been interested to see if Caroline Kennedy will be handled with kid gloves, and as we watch that, we will, perhaps, be able to prove that there is, um, a class issue here.

INT: (*eager, increasingly insistent*) Also, the clothes: What is the story on the clothes?

PALIN2: (*overlapping*) No, I don't come from the self proclaimed 'movers and shakers' group and that's fine with me!

INT: Did you order the clothes?

PALIN2: (*acknowledging the interviewer, but rising and addressing the audience*) Did not order the clothes. Did not ask for the clothes. I would have been happy to have worn my own clothes from day one...

INT: (*overlapping*) But did you have other people go to those stores for you?

PALIN2: (*without any hint of acknowledging the interviewer*) Susan B Anthony. I have great respect there for the history. She was a pro-life feminist, and those things that she stood for....

INT: (*overlapping*) Were you surprised by the margin of the Obama victory?

PALIN2: (*Striding towards the audience*) It's mind-boggling to consider what we were up against with the media lies. (*coming between the interviewer and the audience*) I knew the truth, and I could prove it, but it took too long to un-ring that bell which had been rung.

INT: (*Unsuccessfully trying to regain Palin's attention*) Can I bring up the wardrobe, Governor Palin? The clothes?

PALIN2: I'll tell you, yesterday they called again to ask, double, triple check: Who is Trig's real mom? And I said: Come on, are you kidding me? We're gonna answer this?? (*EXITS the stage*)

INT: (*oblivious to Palin's departure*) Governor, when was the last time you were at a Wendy's and had a Frosty? And you ordered it yourself?

## INTERLUDE

### Act 1, Scene 2

October 2, 2008 - The 2008 Vice Presidential  
Debate, Washington University, St. Louis, MI  
Two podiums are set up for Sarah Palin (1) and Joe Biden.  
Moderator Gwen Ifill is seated at a table between the two.

IFILL: Welcome to the first and only 2008 Vice Presidential Debate between the Republican nominee, Governor Sarah Palin of Alaska, and the Democratic nominee, Joe Biden of Delaware. Tonight's discussion will cover a wide range of topics including domestic and foreign policy matters. It will be divided roughly into five minute segments. Each candidate will have ninety seconds to respond to a direct question and then an additional two minutes for rebuttal and follow up. The order has been determined by a coin toss. The audience here in the hall has promised to remain very polite. No cheers, applause, no untoward outbursts...

(MUSICAL OUTBURST)

IFILL: ...except right at this minute now as we welcome Governor Palin and Senator Biden.

(PALIN and BIDEN enter and shake hands, as music evokes noise of applause.)

PALIN: Nice to meet you.

BIDEN: It's a pleasure.

PALIN: Hey, can I call you Joe?

BIDEN: You can call me Joe.

PALIN: Okay, thanks. Thank you.  
Thank you Gwen. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

(PALIN and BIDEN move to their podiums.)

IFILL: Welcome to you both. The House of Representatives this week passed a bill, a big bailout bill, or didn't pass it I should say, the Senate decided to pass it. As America watches these things happen on Capital Hill, Senator Biden, was this the worst of Washington, or the best of Washington that we saw play out?

BIDEN: Let me begin by thanking you, Gwen, for hosting this. Governor it's a pleasure to meet you, and it's a pleasure to be with you. Um, I think it's neither the best or worst of Washington but it's evidence of the fact that the economic policies of the last eight years have been the worst economic policies we've ever had. But, uh, Barack Obama, um, uh, laid out four basic, uh, criteria for any kind of, uh, rescue plan here. He first of all said...

*(Biden continues to move his lips as though speaking, but drowned out by the music.)*

He secondly said... (*as before*)

Thirdly he said that... (*etc.*)

And lastly... (*etc.*)

And, uh, so, as a consequence of that, it brings us back to maybe the fundamental disagreement between Governor Palin and me, and that is that, the, uh, we're going to fundamentally change the focus of the economic policy.

IFILL: Thank you Senator. Governor Palin?

PALIN: Thank you Gwen. And I thank the commission also. I appreciate this priv'lege of being able to be here and speak with Americans. You know I think a good barometer here as we try to figure out has this been a good time or a bad time in America's economy is: Go to a kids' soccer game on Saturday and turn to any parent there on the sideline and ask them, "How are you feelin' about the economy?" And I'll bet'cha you're gonna hear some fear in that parent's voice.

Now John McCain thankfully has been one representing reform. Two years ago remember it was John McCain who pushed so hard with the Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac reform measures. He sounded that warning bell. People in the Senate with him, his colleagues, di-'n wanna listen to him and would-'n go towards that reform that was needed then. I think that the alarm has been heard though, thanks to John McCain's bipartisan efforts that he was so instrumental, uh, even suspending his own campaign to make sure he was putting excessive politics aside and putting the country first.

IFILL: Senator Biden, how as Vice President would you work to shrink this gap of polarization that has sprung up in Washington?

BIDEN: Well that's what I've done my whole career, Gwen, on, uh, very very controversial issues. And uh, I, I think it's fair to say that I have as m... almost as many friends on the Republican side of the aisle as I do on the Democratic side of the aisle. But I, am I able to respond to, are we able to stay on the, uh, the topic?

IFILL: You may if you like.

BIDEN: Yah, well, you know, uh, until two weeks ago, it was two Mondays ago, John McCain said at nine o'clock in the morning that the fundamentals of the economy were were strong. Nine o'clock the economy was strong, eleven o'clock that same day, two Mondays ago, John McCain said that we have an economic crisis. That doesn't make John McCain a bad guy, but it does point out he's out of touch.

IFILL: Governor Palin, you may respond.

PALIN: John McCain, in referring to the fundamental of our economy being strong, he was talking to, and he was talking about the American work force. And the American work force is the greatest in this land. That's a positive, that's encouragement, and that's what John McCain meant. Now what I've done, as a governor and as a mayor, is truly had that track record of reform, and I've joined this team that is a team of mavericks with John McCain, also with his track record of reform, where we're known for putting partisan politics aside to just get the job done. Now, Barack Obama of course, he's pretty much only voted along his party lines. And that's why, with all due respect, I do respect your years in the U S Senate, but I think Americans are craving something new and different and that new commitment. I think that's why we need to send the maverick and put him in the White House, and I'm happy to join him there.

IFILL: Governor, Senator, neither of you really answered that last question. I'm gonna come back to that.

(BIDEN and PALIN grin and chuckle.)

IFILL: The next question is to talk about the sub-prime lending melt-down. Who do you think was at fault? Um, was it the greedy lenders?

PALIN: Uh, Darn right it was the predator lenders who tried to talk Americans into thinking that, uh, it was smart to buy a three hundred thousand dollar house if we could only afford a one hundred thousand dollar house. There was deception there. And there was greed, and there is corruption on Wall Street. And we need to stop that. Again, John McCain and I, that commitment that we have made, and we're gonna follow through on that, getting rid of that corruption. One thing that Americans do at this time also though, is let's commit our selves, just every day American people, Joe Six-pack, hockey moms across the nation. I think we need to band together and say: Never again.

IFILL: Senator?

BIDEN: Well, Gwen, uh, two years ago Barack Obama warned about the sub-prime mortgage crisis. Uh, we let Wall Street run wild. Ah, John McCain, and he'a a good man, but John McCain thought that the answer was that tried and true (*stuttering briefly, as if about to say 'right-wing'*) ri, ri, r-r Republican response: Deregulate, deregulate. You had actually the belief that Wall Street could self-regulate itself. So deregulation was the promise. And guess what? I was recently at my local gas station, asked a guy named Joey Danko, I said, "Joey, how much did it cost to fill your tank?" You know what his answer was? He said, "I don't know, Joe, I never have enough money to do it." The middle class needs relief, tax relief. They need it now. They need help now. The focus will change with Barack Obama.

IFILL: Governor, please, if you want to respond to what he said about deregulation?

PALIN: (*interrupting*) I, I'd like to respond about the tax increases and, uh, y-you know we, we can speak in agreement here that darn right we need tax relief for Americans so that jobs can be created here. Barack had ninety-four opportunities to side on the people's side and ninety-four times he voted to increase taxes. I think that is the way to kill jobs and to continue to harm our economy.

IFILL: Senator?

BIDEN: The charge is absolutely not true. Barack Obama did not vote to raise taxes. The vote she's referring to, John McCain voted the exact same way. Number two: Using the standard that the Governor uses, John McCain voted four hundred and seventy-seven times to raise taxes. It's a bogus standard. But if you notice, Gwen, the governor did not answer the question about deregulation.

IFILL: Would you like to have an opportunity to answer that before we move on?

PALIN: Oh, I'm still on the tax thing because I want to correct you on that again. And I may not answer the questions the way that either the moderator or you wanna hear, but I'm gonna talk straight to the American people and let 'em know my track record also. And... (*interrupted, as though time has suddenly accelerated*)

IFILL: Okay our time is up here. We've got to move on to the next question. Senator Biden, you have proposed raising taxes on people who earn more than two hundred fifty thousand dollars a year. Why is that not class warfare?

BIDEN: Well Gwen, where I come from, it's called fairness. Just simple fairness. The middle class is struggling. The economic engine of America is the middle class. It's the people listening to this broadcast. When you do well, America does well. We have a different value set. The middle class is the economic engine. It's fair. They deserve the tax breaks, not the super wealthy who are doing pretty well. And by the way, they'll pay no more than they did under Ronald Reagan.

IFILL: Governor?

PALIN: I, I do take issue with some of the principle there with that redistribution of, of wealth principle that seems to be espoused by you but, now, you said recently that paying higher taxes was patriotic. That's not patriotic. Patriotic is sayin', government, you know you're not always the solution. In fact, too often you're the problem.

IFILL: Governor, are you interested in defending Senator McCain's healthcare plan?

PALIN: I am, because he's got a good healthcare plan that is detailed and I want to give you a couple of details on that. He's proposing a five thou... (interrupted, as if time suddenly jumps forward)

IFILL: Thank you Governor. Senator?

BIDEN; Gwen, I don't know where to start. (*chuckles*) We don't call a redistribution in my neighborhood, Scranton, Claymont, Wilmington, not giving Exxon Mobil another four billion dollar tax cut. We call that fairness number one. Number two factually.... (*interrupted, as though time is rapidly accelerating*)

You know, it's with one hand you giveth the other you take it. You know how Barack Obama--excuse me do you know how John McCain... (*interrupted, as before*)

(*as if time has been wound backwards briefly, restarting*) You know how John McCain pays for his five thousand dollar tax credit? He taxes, as income, ev'ry one of you out there... (*subsumed by the instruments*)

(*gesturing towards the instrumentalists*) ...and I call that the ultimate bridge to nowhere.

(*suddenly resuming the reality of the debate*) ...none of which is as my, uh, as the governor characterize..., uh, characteriza, characterized. The bottom line here is that, a number of things I don't have time because the light is blinking, but one of which is the hundred billion dollar tax dodge. I call that unpatriotic. I call that unpatriotic.

IFILL: Governor?

BIDEN: (*overlapping*) That's what I'm talking about.

IFILL: Governor?

PALIN: You know what I had to do in the state of Alaska? I had to take on those oil companies, and that's why Tillerson at Exxon and Mulva at Conoco Phillips, bless their hearts they're doing what they need to do as, um, corp'rate CEOs, but they're not my biggest fans.

IFILL: So, Governor, as vice president there is nothing that you have promised that you wouldn't take off the table because of this financial crisis we're in?

PALIN: There is not, and, well, how long have I been at this, like five weeks?

(LIGHTS OUT abruptly.)

### Act 1, Scene 3:

(August 28, 2008) Sarah Palin (2) strides onstage and reflects on the impending announcement of her candidacy for Vice President...

PALIN2:

I am the future of the Republican party.

I breathe life into its vacant corpse.

Come gaze on me with wholesome lust as the big oil flows through my breasts.

There is no crisis. There is no crisis.

Your energy, your nourishment. now emanates from me. From me. From me, your homegrown nat'ral resource.

Show me where the open door is, maybe it's just cracked a little, maybe I'll just plow right on through that.

Two thousand eight, twenty twelve, twenty sixteen...

My God hears me when I call out to him, which I do a lot.

There is no limit to the scope of my vision, the fertile landscape I survey.

Come visit my garden which bursts with hot Alaskan flowers to shatter all your icy crusts, to melt your glacial lethargy.

I am the Belle of the Grand Old Party Ball.

You are all my children now.

There is no crisis.

America yearns for my embrace, to feel the sweet crush of my stalwart arms.

You are my patriot fledglings

and I am your future.

### INTERLUDE

## Act 1, Scene 4:

Sarah Palin, Joe Biden and Gwen Ifill are again  
seen at the Vice Presidential Debate, as in Scene 2.

(In this scene, the debate is presented in a less realistic manner, with  
frequent interruptions and discontinuities.)

PALIN (simultaneous with BIDEN): ...in addition to nearly a trillion dollars in new spending is the backwards way of trying to grow our economy.

BIDEN (simultaneous with PALIN): ...none of which is as my, uh, as the governor characterize..., uh, characteriza, characterized.

PALIN: It is a crisis. It's a toxic mess, really.

BIDEN: I'm, I'm paraphrasing, number one. Number two...

PALIN: I wanna talk about, again, uh, my record on energy versus your ticket's energy, uh, ticket also. It's a nonsensical position that we are in when we have domestic supplies of energy all over this great land. And... East coast politicians who don't allow states like Alaska to produce these, to tap into 'em.

IFILL: Governor, I'm happy to talk with you now about energy issues. What is true, and what is false about what we have heard about climate change?

PALIN: Yeah, well I'm not one to attribute every man, uh, every activity of man to the changes in the climate. But there are real changes going on, and I don't wanna argue about the causes. What I wanna argue about is: How are we gonna get there and positively affect the impacts?

IFILL: Senator, what is true and what is false about the causes?

BIDEN: Ahhhh, well, I think it is man made. I think it's clearly man made. If you don't understand what the cause is, it's virtually impossible to come up with a solution. We know what the cause is. The cause is man made. That's the cause. That's why the polar ice-cap is melting.

IFILL: Do you support, as they do in Alaska, granting same sex benefits to couples?

BIDEN (simultaneous with PALIN): Absolutely. Do I support granting same sex benefits? Absolutely positively. Look, that's only fair. It's what the Constitution calls for. And so we do support, we do support it.

PALIN (simultaneous with BIDEN): (Tsk), well, not if it goes closer and closer towards redefining the traditional, um, definition of marriage. And unfortunately that's sometimes where these steps lead. But I, I also want to, um, clarify, you know I am tolerant, and I have, um, a very diverse family...

IFILL: Lets try to avoid nuance here. Do you support gay marriage?

BIDEN (simultaneous with PALIN): No, Barack Obama nor I support redefining, from, uh, ah, from a civil side what constitutes marriage. We do not support that.



PALIN (simultaneous with BIDEN): Your question to him was whether he supported gay marriage and my answer is the same as his, and it is that I do not.

IFILL: Wonderful. You agree.

You both have sons who are headed to Iraq. You, Governor Palin, have said that you want to see a real clear exit strategy. What should that be, Governor?

### Act 1, Scene 5:

October 2008 - Senator Hillary Clinton is seated across from television host Diane Sawyer, on the diner car of a train, part of the set of the "Good Morning America" television show.

SAWYER: For whatever reason they ask it, people want to know how you feel about Sarah Palin, as a woman.

CLINTON: I think she's very good. It's amazing: She's been thrust into the national spotlight with very little preparation and I think that, all things considered, you saw a very composed and effective debater last night.

SAWYER: Senator Claire McCaskill said recently that it was a dangerous decision to pick Governor Palin, because of John McCain's age, and his health. Do you agree?

CLINTON: You know, this goes way beyond any one candidate. It's really about fighting for our future.

SAWYER: So you're not going to endorse what she said?

CLINTON: I think the point is not the other side's VP candidate, with all due respect.

SAWYER: Sarah Palin has said that she bets Barack Obama regrets now that you aren't his running mate. What do you think?

CLINTON: Joe Biden is a friend of mine. He's been a strong leader and I'm happy to support him. Look, we should all be proud of Sarah Palin's historic nomination, and I congratulate her, but her policies would take America in the wrong direction.

SAWYER: And I just wonder with the eighteen million cracks of the glass ceiling, however you disagree with her policies, will part of you be cheering if she makes it, because she's female?

CLINTON: I think that people are missing the boat here. That's not a good enough reason to vote for that ticket!

## Act 1, Scene 6:

The setting is that of Scenes 2 and 4, the 2008 Vice Presidential Debate, but Ifill is absent and both Palin (1) and Biden appear to be frozen at their podiums, coming to life only briefly to utter sound-bites.

BIDEN: Deregulate, deregulate.

PALIN: ...ninety-four times..

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BIDEN: Twenty million of you will be dropped.

PALIN: The chant is, "Drill, baby, drill."

BIDEN: Big mistake.

PALIN: ...raping the outer continental shelf.

BIDEN: We do support, we do support...

Number one. Number two...

Number two. Number one...

PALIN: a reckless, reckless comment...

BIDEN: Number one. Number two...

PALIN: ...a stinking corpse...

BIDEN: ...Scranton, Claymont, Wilmington...

PALIN: Iraq (*pronounced "Eye-rack"*)

BIDEN: ...Iraqi government...

PALIN: Iran (*pronounced "Eye-ran"*)

BIDEN: Just simple fairness.

PALIN: Huge blunders.

BIDEN: That's the cause.

Well, Gwen, uh....

PALIN: ...a white flag of surrender...

BIDEN: ...but, uh...

PALIN: ...truly...

BIDEN: ri, ri, r-r Republican...

PALIN: ....and I'll bet'cha...

BIDEN: ...and that is that, um....

Um...

PALIN: Uh, darn right...

BIDEN: Number two:

...um, uh...

And uh, I, I think it's...

PALIN: Uh, darn right...

BIDEN: Well Gwen...

PALIN: I, I'd like to re...

I, I do take issue with some of the principle there with that re... (*violently interrupted by the instrumental music*)

BIDEN: ...fundamental difference. We will end this war.

END of Act 1

# Say it Ain't So, Joe

## ACT 2

### PRELUDE

#### Act 2, Scene 1

Late 2008...

Samuel Wurzelbacher, aka 'Joe the Plumber,' is being interviewed by Diane Sawyer on television. The two are apparently communicating via a closed circuit feed, as implied by their positions on opposite sides of the stage, facing slightly away from each other, never making eye contact. During the interview, Wurzelbacher wanders what may be a grassy field in Ohio, while Sawyer is in the television studio. Sawyer appears to be straining to hear Wurzelbacher throughout, while Wurzelbacher is apparently unconcerned with any lack of clarity in their communication.

WURZELBACHER: (*brash, confident*) Robin Hood stole from greedy rich people and redistributed it to the peasants so to speak, so if Barack Obama is calling us peasants, I kind of resent that. I'm the same class of people that, you know, I've been a plumber for 15 years. And I'm being punished for fulfilling the American dream. It's a slippery slope. When's it going to stop?

SAWYER: So, Mr. Worste..., Mister Wurrelbach...

WURZ: You can call me Joe. You know, I asked the question but I still got a tap dance almost as good as Sammy Davis Junior.

SAWYER: So, Mr. Woosterbracken, what was it like when you met Sarah Palin for the first time?

WURZ: "Hi Joe," she said, genuinely pleased to meet me, "You are a great American." "You are a great American," I promptly told her. I'm not one to blow smoke up my skirt, but I think I'm a pretty nice guy. You know I can sing. I'm not a professional but I can sing! I'm going to put out a country album on inauguration day!

SAWYER: Tell me more about what your feeling is for Sarah Palin.

WURZ: Absolutely incredible woman. She really wants to serve America. Do I think she should give 'em another chance? I dunno. I mean, America tore her up. I think I've got a pretty good bullshit detector and I didn't smell any from her. (*suddenly wistful*) I like Sarah Palin a lot, actually. I just don't know if that's where God's leading her. (*suddenly angry*) Some people use God as a punch line! You know my Dad has always been a solid Christian. (*aside*) I used to feel the snap of his belt every day.

SAWYER: Mr. Woozlebarker, can you tell us about your trip to the Middle East?

WURZ: Listen, you don't want my opinion on foreign policy! I know just enough to probably be dangerous. Someone said to me, "A vote for Obama is a vote for the death of Israel." Yeah, I'll go ahead and agree on

that. I'm a nice guy. *(suddenly exuberant)* I'm gonna be a congressman. I'm gonna plunge the crap out of Washington!

SAWYER: Well, um, thank you Mr. Wurzelbacher, uh, Joe... *(ending the interview)*

WURZ: *(ignoring the end of the interview)* It's imperative for all Americans to come together and do all we can to learn about the digital television transition.

*(Wanders offstage, as though lost in thought)*

## Act 2, Scene 2

The setting is the same as in Act 1, Scenes 2, 4 and 6, but at first Palin(1) is alone at or near her podium. Biden and Ifill enter or appear one at a time as they make their vocal entrances. During the scene, both Palin (1) and Biden occasionally wander away from their podiums and then abruptly return, as if unaware of having "drifted" away.

PALIN: Oh, man, and it's so obvious that I'm a Washington outsider. And someone just not used to the way you guys operate. Because here ya voted for the war and now you oppose the war. You're one of those who says, "I was for it before I was against it," or vice versa. Americans are cravin' that straight talk and just want to know, hey if you voted for it, tell us why you voted for it, and it WAS a war resolution.

BIDEN (simultaneous with PALIN): I never supported John McCain's strategy on the war. John McCain said exactly what Dick Cheney said... Exactly what Dick Cheney said.

PALIN (simultaneous with BIDEN): Um, your plan is a white flag of surrender in Iraq and that is not what our troops need to hear right now. I have great respect for your family and the honor that you show our military. Barack Obama though, who voted to cut off funding for the troops? That's another story.

IFILL (simultaneous with BIDEN and PALIN): Senator, can you clarify your position on the vote to authorize this war?

BIDEN: *(greatly exasperated)* John McCain voted to cut off funding for the troops. Let me say that again. He voted against funding because, he said, the amendment had a time line in it to end this war. and he didn't like that. But let's get straight who has been right and wrong. John continues to tell us that the central war in the front on terror is in Iraq. I promise you, if an attack comes in the homeland, it's going to come from al Qaeda in the hills of Afghanistan and Pakistan. That's where they live. That's where they are. That's where it will come from. John McCain has been dead wrong. I love him. As my mother would say, god love him, but he's been dead wrong. Barack Obama has been right. There are the facts.

PALIN: I think we need a little bit of reality from Wasilla Main Street. No, in fact, when we talk about the Bush administration, there's a time, too, when Americans are going to say, "Enough is enough with your ticket," on constantly looking backwards, and pointing fingers and, and doin' the blame game.

IFILL: Just looking backwards, Senator?

BIDEN: Look, uh, past is prologue, Gwen. The issue is: How different is John McCain's policy going to be than George Bush's? I haven't heard anything yet. I haven't heard how his policy is going to be different on Iran than George Bush's. I haven't heard how his policy is going to be different with Israel than George Bush's. I haven't heard how his policies in Afghanistan are going to be different than George Bush's. I haven't heard how his policy in Pakistan is going to be different than George Bush's. It may be. But so far, it is the same as George Bush's. And you know where that policy has taken us. We will make significant change so, once again, we're the most respected nation in the world. That's what we're gonna do!

IFILL: Governor, I want you to answer this one. Secretaries of State Baker, Kissinger, Powell, they have all advocated some level of engagement with enemies. Do you think they are all wrong on that?

PALIN: No, diplomacy is very important. First and foremost, that is what we would engage in. But again, with some of these dictators who hate America and hate what we stand for, with our freedoms, our democracy, our tolerance, our respect for women's rights, they cannot be met with just sitting down on a presidential level as Barack Obama had said he would be willing to do. That is beyond bad judgment. That is dangerous.

BIDEN: Um, Can I, can I clarify this? This is simply not true about Barack Obama. The fact of the matter is, our friends and allies have been saying, Gwen, "Sit down. Talk. Talk. Talk." John McCain said he wouldn't even sit down with the government of (*greatly accentuated*) Spain. I find that incredible!

IFILL: Probably the biggest cliché about the vice-presidency is that it's a heartbeat away. Everyone's waiting to see what would happen if the worst happened. (*overlapping with BIDEN and PALIN*) What would you do if that were to happen? What would you do? What would you do if that were to happen? What would you do if that were to happen... What would you do...

PALIN (simultaneous with IFILL and BIDEN): Heaven forbid that would ever happen with either party. What I would do is to continue the good work he is so committed to. What I would do if that were to happen... What I would do...

BIDEN: (simultaneous with IFILL and PALIN): God forbid that would ever happen. It would be a national tragedy of historic proportions if it were to happen. Ladies and gentlemen, this is the most important election you have ever, ever voted in. There are such stark differences. Look, the people in my neighborhood, they get it. They get it. They know they've been getting the short end of the stick.

(*alone*) So walk with me in my neighborhood.

(*In response to PALIN's next comments, BIDEN chuckles to himself, and shakes his head throughout the rest of the scene.*)

PALIN: (*extremely nasal*) Aw, say it ain't so, Joe. There you go again pointing backwards again. You prefaced your whole comment with "the Bush administration." Now doggone it, let's tell Americans what we have to plan to do for them in the future. And by the way, here's a shout-out to the third grade at Gladys Wood Elementary School. You get extra credit for watching this debate.

IFILL: (*addressing the audience*) Everyone gets extra credit tonight.

## INTERLUDE

### Act 2, Scene 3

A Republican campaign rally somewhere in Ohio,  
in late October 2008. Palin (2) addresses the opera  
audience as if they are the crowd at the rally.

PALIN2: He's a fellow Alaskan, and he's a former military man who served our country proudly. I'd like you to meet my new friend: Please welcome Joe the Plumber!

*(WURZELBACHER enters, with a swagger...)*

WURZELBACHER: God, with all the love in this room, it's making me horny!*(suddenly stepping back, as if embarrassed by his own comment)* But about this election, I'm here to say that Sarah Palin is the real deal. She doesn't have that gleam in her eye for power and money. She's just like you and me. Now I'm the most famous unemployed person in America, and since the economy took such a big dump, I know many of you can relate to me.

PALIN2 (overlapping with WURZ): Joe the plumber represents us. He has a future and a dream. Barack Obama came to his neighborhood. Joe asked him a simple question...

WURZ (overlapping with PALIN2): You know, I'm not seeking the spotlight. I don't actually like my face on TV or any of that stuff. I do have a message though, and I will pray for you. That's why I'm here, brother.

PALIN2: The media excoriated him. The government questioned his record. But Joe the Plumber got Obama to tell the truth.

PALIN2 and WURZ: *(addressing the audience)* America is the greatest country in the world, and it's good to see so many real Americans in this room tonight. You are the patriots. You are what makes this nation worth fighting for. And we will fight for you. Two-thousand-eight, twenty-twelve, twenty-sixteen. Our God is a mighty fortress. And he has chosen us to speak for you. So God bless America. God bless America. God bless America... *(etc.)*

*(PALIN (2) and WURZELBACHER EXIT, waving to the crowd.)*

### Act 2, Scene 4

The 2008 Vice Presidential Debate as before, but Palin(1) and Biden are facing each other more directly than before, and are locked in direct eye contact throughout the scene. Facial expressions are affectless. (Ifill is absent.)

BIDEN (simultaneous with PALIN): All you have to do is go down Union Street with me in Wilmington or walk into Home Depot with me where I spend a lot of time and ask anybody there whether they are better off than they were.

PALIN (simultaneous with BIDEN): "Nukular" weaponry of course would be the be-all and end-all of just too many people in too many parts of our planet, so those dangerous regimes cannot be allowed to acquire (*alone*) "nukular" weapons.

BIDEN (simultaneous with PALIN): The reason No Child Left Behind was left behind was that the money was left behind. We didn't fund it.

PALIN (simultaneous with BIDEN): My experience as an executive will be put to good use and I think that's very important.

BIDEN: (*alone*) Facts matter, Gwen. (*simultaneous with PALIN*) The fact is that our commanding general in Afghanistan said today that the surge principles used in Iraq...

PALIN (simultaneous with BIDEN): And it is my executive experience that is partly to be attributed to my pick as (*alone*) VP with John McCain not (*simultaneous with BIDEN*) not only as a governor but earlier on as a mayor.

BIDEN (simultaneous with PALIN): Our commanding general in Afghanistan said that the surge, (*alone*) well let me say this again, (*overlapping with PALIN*) the surge principles used in Iraq will not work in Afghanistan.

PALIN (*overlapping with BIDEN*): In my comment there it was a lame attempt at a joke, and yours was also (*alone*) a lame attempt at a joke I guess 'cause nobody got it.

BIDEN (simultaneous with PALIN): Vice president Cheney has been the most dangerous vice president we've had probably in American history.

PALIN (simultaneous with BIDEN): Of course we know what a vice president does and that's not only to preside over the Senate and I will take that (*alone*) very seriously...

(*overlapping with BIDEN*) I would also work on issues that are near and dear to my heart, for instance energy independence and in those arenas John McCain has already...

BIDEN (*overlapping with PALIN*): The idea that he's part of the Legislative Branch is a bizarre notion invented by Cheney to aggrandize the power of a unitary executive, and that is (*alone*) very dangerous. (*overlapping with PALIN*) Now I have a history of...

PALIN (*overlapping with BIDEN*): He's already said to me, (*alone*) "That's where I want you."

BIDEN: Now I have a...

PALIN: (*interrupting*) "I want you to lead." (*overlapping with BIDEN*) I said, "I can't wait to get there and work with you."

BIDEN: (*overlapping*) ...a history of getting things done in the United States Senate (*alone - like an LP record gradually slowing to a halt*) and I think that John McCain would acknowledge that.



## Act 2, Scene 5

Hillary Clinton appears alone on one side of the stage  
and addresses the audience directly...

CLINTON: We've opened doors of opportunity, but sometimes it has taken a while to get through them. If we can blast fifty women into space, we will someday launch a woman into the White House. In no society are women treated equally yet. I believe strongly that if women are not full participants, the society does not advance the way it could.

But, you know, this is very personal for me. It's not just political. It's not just public. I see what's happening, and we have to reverse it. But some of us are right, and some are wrong. Some of us are ready, and some are not.

*(Sarah PALIN (2) suddenly appears on the opposite side of the stage and addresses the audience simultaneously.)*

PALIN2 (overlapping with CLINTON): I consider myself, too, a feminist, whatever that means. I am of course a working mom. I will protect my children from the media. And any mother of a special needs child would understand *(alone)* the challenges I face.

CLINTON (overlapping with PALIN2): I believe I am a work horse. I believe that is what our country needs right now. We need a president who will roll up her sleeves for this nation and will tackle the problems we all confront.

CLINTON (overlapping with PALIN2 and PALIN1): Although we were not able to shatter that highest glass ceiling, this time, thanks to you it's got about eighteen million cracks in it.

PALIN2 (overlapping with CLINTON and PALIN1): For Trig. For Track. For Bristol. For Willow. For Piper. I will stand strong.

*(Sarah PALIN (1) becomes visible at her podium from the debate...)*

PALIN1 (overlapping with PALIN2 and CLINTON): It is my connection to the heartland of America. Being a Mom.

PALIN2 and PALIN1 (overlapping with CLINTON): I will stand strong. I will stand strong. I will stand strong.

CLINTON (overlapping with PALIN2 and PALIN1): And the light is shining through like never before, filling us all with the hope that the path will be *(alone)* a little easier next time.

*(CLINTON EXITS)*

PALIN1 (overlapping with PALIN2): This is my connection to the heartland of America: Being a Mom, with a son in the war. With a special needs child.

*(PALIN (2) moves almost into the audience, removing her glasses for the first time.)*

PALIN2 (simultaneous with PALIN1): I am not leaving you now. This is not a retreat. I am ascending North to the sky.

*(PALIN (2) EXITS)*

## Act 2, Scene 6

Again, the setting is the 2008 Vice Presidential Debate, with a return (at first) to a more realistic lighting and configuration than in Act 2, Scene 4. Biden, Palin (1) and Ifill are in their original positions from Act 1, Scene 2.

*(PALIN (1) resumes without transition, as though her utterances in both Scenes 5 and 6 are all taking place in the same setting.)*

PALIN: But even more important is that world view that I share with John McCain. That world view that says that America is a nation of exceptionalism. And we are to be that shining city on a hill, as President Reagan so beautifully said, that we are a beacon of hope, and that we are unapologetic here. We are not perfect as a nation. But together we represent a perfect ideal. And that is democracy, and tolerance, and freedom, and equal rights. Those things that we stand for that can be a force for good in this world.

IFILL: Senator, the conventional wisdom is that your Achilles heel is your lack of discipline. What is it really for you?

BIDEN: You're very kind suggesting my only Achilles heel is my lack of discipline. Others talk about my excessive passion. I'm not going to change. I have thirty-five years in public office. People can judge who I am. I haven't changed in that time.

Look, I understand what it's like to be a single parent. When my wife and daughter died, and my sons were gravely injured... I understand what it's like to wonder if your kid's gonna make it. I understand what it's like to sit around that kitchen table with a father who says, "I've got to leave, champ, 'cause there's no jobs here." I understand what it's like.

I'm much better off than almost all Americans now. I have a good salary, and a beautiful house. So I, I am much better off now. But the notion that somehow, because I'm a man, I don't know what it's like to raise two kids alone, I don't know what it's like to have a child you're not sure is going to... is going to make it...

I understand. I understand as well as, with all due respect, the governor, or anyone else, what it's like for those people sitting around that kitchen table. And guess what? They're looking for help. They're looking for help. They're not looking for more of the same.

IFILL: Governor?

PALIN: Uh, People aren't looking for more of the same. They are looking for change. And John McCain has been the consummate mav'rick over all these years. Change is coming. And John McCain is the leader of that reform.

BIDEN: Can I respond to that? Look, the maverick, let's talk about the maverick John McCain is. And again, I love him, but he has been no maverick on the things that matter to people's lives. He has not been a maverick on providing healthcare to people. He's not been a maverick when it comes to education. He's not been a maverick on the war. He's not been a maverick on virtually anything that genuinely affects things.

(MUSICAL OUTBURST)

BIDEN: So, maverick he is not. Maverick he is not, on the important, critical issues that affect people at that kitchen table.

IFILL: Governor Palin, you get the chance to make the first closing statement.

PALIN: Well again, Gwen, I do want to thank you and the commission. This is such an honor for me. I like being able to answer these tough questions without the filter of the mainstream media. I'd rather be able to just speak straight to the American people, like we just did.

I want to assure you that John McCain and I, we're going to fight for America. *(emerging from behind the podium, and beginning to drift towards the audience)* I know what the hurts are. I know what the challenges are. *(directly in front of the audience, obstructing the view of IFILL and BIDEN, who remain in position)* And, thank God, I know what the joys are of living in America.

IFILL: *(addressing PALIN's podium as though she is still in position at the debate, where PALIN 2 has now appeared in her place)* Thank you Governor. Senator Biden?

BIDEN: Gwen, thank you for doing this, and Governor, it really was a pleasure to meet you. Look, folks, this is the most important election you've ever voted in... *(gradually fading into silence, as though continuing to speak at a sub-audible level)*

PALIN *(overlapping with BIDEN)*: And we must fight for our freedoms. *(as though unaware of the continuation of the debate behind her)* We are so blessed. It was Ronald Reagan who said that freedom is always just one generation away from extinction.

BIDEN: *(suddenly becoming audible again)* ...and may God protect our troops.

IFILL: That ends tonight's debate. Thank you Governor, Senator. Good night everybody.

PALIN *(overlapping with IFILL)*: We have to fight for it...

*(IFILL, BIDEN and PALIN 2 rise and shake hands, then begin silently but visibly shaking hands with members of the stage crew. All of this takes place behind PALIN as she continues her closing remarks to the audience, with no indication of any awareness of the debate having concluded.)*

PALIN: ...or we're going to find ourselves spending our sunset years telling our children and our children's children about a time in America, back in the day, when men and women were free.

*(Immediately after the clarinetist, the percussionist and saxophonist respectively play their final notes, one by one, each in turn rises and goes onstage to greet and shake hands with IFILL, BIDEN, PALIN 2 and any other participants. The cellist remains in place.)*

PALIN: *(with a slight hint that she may be starting to realize that she has been abandoned by the rest of the ensemble)* And there is only one man in this race who has ever really fought for you, and that's...

*(The lights are abruptly extinguished, interrupting Palin in the middle of her sentence, in a manner similar to the sudden turning off of a television.)*

(END OF OPERA)

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