



DIRTY SEXY POLITICS

MEGHAN
MCCAIN

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Sexy
POLITICS

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FOR MY PARENTS,
WHO TAUGHT ME TO LOVE LIFE.

Sex and politics are a lot alike.
You don't have to be good at them to enjoy them.

BARRY GOLDWATER

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Introduction

Freedom is addictive. Once you've tasted it, you will hunt for it again and again. And our passion for freedom brings us together more than it pulls us apart. We have fought to remove obstacles in the way of it—we have battled and died, picketed, paraded, rallied, and staked everything we've had on it. We founded our country with our desire for freedom and it continues to drive our nation's energy and progress.

I was raised in a house that was open to new ideas, new people, and open to our differences. We had rules about how to treat others, rules about being honest and respectful. We had rules about tolerance. But they weren't rules that were supposed to brainwash us and turn us into mini Cindy and John McCains. My brothers and sister and I were raised with a taste of freedom. My parents believed in us—believed in the people we were and the people we would become.

Would they really want me to have tattoos, swear on TV, or even write this book? Uhhmm. Maybe not. And that's the point. I am not a social or physical extension of my mom and dad—except that I represent their great hope that freedom, and room to grow, is how individuals find themselves and create their own lives. Under that big, wide-open sky of Arizona, where I grew up, there seemed to be room for everybody.

Honesty is a quality of freedom—and is addictive and exhilarating in the same way. By being honest about yourself, you are asking for room and space. You are making a declaration of your humanity and independence. If we are honest with ourselves and about ourselves, suddenly everybody has a little more room to be free. We are more trustworthy if we are honest, too. If we are open, we aren't hiding anything.

“There are no secrets” is one of my personal mottos. I feel that hiding is a waste of time and energy. Everybody will figure out what kind of human being you really are. So I like to save people the trouble and just lay it out there. *What you see is what you get*. But I do respect the fact that some people are more private by nature than I am.

Which is why, after writing a draft of this book, I took a step back and considered whether I had been too honest. Maybe I was making a mistake to share so many of the intimate details as I watched my dad run for president. Suddenly, it seemed scary to open the windows and let everybody see a snapshot of my life at a time when I was young, impressionable, and feeling a bit frantic. But the children of politicians have a surreal life and it was time somebody started talking about it.

Did I change any names to protect the innocent? Normally I don't like this kind of thing. But ultimately, I decided to protect the identities of a few campaign staffers and members of the media about whom I had bad things to say. I did not give my parents carte blanche to make changes, nor did my father's senate office have a look at the manuscript before it was published. So if you have a problem with the contents of this book, hold only me responsible.

In a few instances, nicknames are used. This is meant as a goodwill gesture. I am a workaholic in progress—and embarrassed myself many times during the seventeen months that I was on the road with the campaign. I thought it would be only fair to give a few people the break I would hope they would give me.

Did I make stuff up? No. Apparently there is a long-standing tradition of making things up in a memoir so your life seems worse and better than it really was. I get it. There's a need for drama and good plot twists. But in the case of this book, I didn't make things up. As for plot twists, the whole

good plot twists. But in the case of this book, I didn't make things up. As for plot twists, the whole world knows how this book ends already. My dad loses.

If events seem altered, it isn't intentional. It is how I remembered things. I checked dates and facts, and corroborated my accounts with friends and family, but my stories are decided impressionistic rather than reportorial. This is how I remember my time on my father's campaign.

Another thing this book doesn't do intentionally: score settling. Lots of political memoirs are written with an ax to grind. The embittered writer comes off like the wisest or folksiest person around, and, if the world had just listened to her, everything would have been fantastic. Well, I really hope this book isn't like that.

I am not a politician trying to drum up support. I have no plans to ever run for office. My hope is to present a unique account of history without compromising it with attempts to make myself look really good. I turned twenty-three and twenty-four while on the road campaigning and, as you will see, my age and inexperience showed.

I don't have a secret agenda, in other words, aside from wanting to be honest, entertaining, and also insightful about a particularly interesting election in our nation's history. My hope is that this book will encourage readers to become involved in the democratic process—and look at politics in a new way. If I'm totally honest with myself, the only score that I may be trying to settle is one with the Republican Party, which seems to have lost its way in the last ten years.

I realize that it is ironic that this book tells the story of my own struggle to get my act together. But it is one of the bizarre realities of life that you can be a mess yourself but still see so clearly what is wrong with others.

I used to joke that I am hooked on “taking the red pill,” a reference to the science fiction movie *The Matrix* in which the main character, Neo, is “taking the red pill” and choosing to face the reality of the Matrix—rather than “taking the blue pill” and wanting to believe in a lie. When I meet somebody new, I will sometimes say, “He's taking the blue pill.” This means he is living in a dream world.

Here's my dream: The political party that identifies with the color red should start taking pills of the same color.

Honesty. Individualism. Freedom. Back in the day, these concepts were the bedrock of the Republican Party. It wasn't that long ago, either. I am old enough to remember Barry Goldwater, the late senator from Arizona. He was a great conservative visionary, a man of great charm and a playful spirit. As a little girl, I remember goofing around with him. Once, when he and I were having our picture taken together, I stuck my tongue out at him. Without a moment's pause, Senator Goldwater stuck out his tongue at me right back.

Like my dad, Barry Goldwater had an independent spirit. He was a natural leader and natural politician. And even though he ran for president and lost, the principles that he stood for endured and inspired a generation of conservatives who followed him. He believed passionately in freedom and protecting the rights of the individual—ideas that became fundamental to Ronald Reagan twenty years later, and would lead to his success. Goldwater's lifelong crusade against groupthink and the expansion of federal government continue to be relevant today, as we wonder where the Obama bailouts and big programs will take us and our country.

I love the ideas of Barry Goldwater, and what he left behind. Yes, his vision was anti-big government, but even more than that, it was pro-people and pro-freedom. He believed in making room and space for individuals to live their own lives, and create relationships and families and businesses with as little interference from others as possible.

It was about removing fences, not building them. It was about tolerance. It was about appreciating

It was about removing fences, not building them. It was about tolerance. It was about appreciation of differences and new ideas. He was called “Mr. Conservative,” and in Goldwater’s dream for America and the one he fought for his entire life, there was room for everybody to flourish.

These days, the name Ronald Reagan—as well as his legacy—has become oversaturated, just white noise. Conservatives love to evoke him, using him as an example of whatever brand of politics they happen to be selling. But what they seem to have forgotten is that moderates and Democrats elected Ronald Reagan, not the Far Right. The ideas that he stood for—freedom, the individual, and self-reliance—appealed to a broad political spectrum. He believed that it was our independent spirit and our differences that made this country great.

I have to wonder, if he and Goldwater were alive today and could see where their party has gone in the last decade, what they would think. Somehow the walls closed in. The conservative movement seems hell-bent on constricting our freedoms rather than expanding them. The base has moved to the Far Right and, sadly, it seems to be dying there.

Rather than the party of openness and individual freedom, it is now the party of limited messages and less freedom. Along with an ideological narrowness, an important PR battle is being lost. Rather than leading us into the exhilarating fresh air of liberty, a chorus of voices on the radical right is taking us to a place of intolerance and anger. We hear them on the radio and TV. They love to spread fear because it keeps the money rolling in. You know who I’m talking about. The more afraid we are, the richer they get.

If they have their way, we will be scared all the time, particularly of ideas that seem new, or foreign, or different, even if they are great ideas, even if they are in support of freedom.

Rather than being the party of limitless freedom and rejection of groupthink, they want the Republican Party to become a private club. Not everybody is allowed in, or invited. If you don’t hold the accepted attitudes, you don’t fit in. You are called a RINO, or “Republican in Name Only.”

That’s what they call me, in fact—as if I haven’t earned the right to be included in the party.

But why?

If not me, who?

Would Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan be RINOs too?

Somehow, being a Republican isn’t a political decision anymore. It is a lifestyle choice. You have to look one way, think one way, and act one way. Wear the uniform! Embrace groupthink! And for goodness’ sake, no strangers allowed! Somehow it is wrong to consider modern life and the complications and innovations and changes the last thirty years have brought. The doors and windows aren’t just shut. The curtains are drawn.

Let’s open the windows! I don’t like private clubs or secrets or living in a bubble world. Let’s honor our differences, and different lifestyles, even celebrate them. With this book, I hope to bring some fresh air into the room, maybe knock down a few walls. I wouldn’t mind crashing through the ceiling, too. Let the sky open up, and freedom ring. Hey everybody, come on in!

Chapter 1

How Things Went Badly

The night before it was announced that Sarah Palin would be my father's running mate for vice president, I went to sleep joking with Shannon and Heather about what it would be like campaigning across the country with five married Mormon men and all those baby grandchildren of Mitt Romney. My roommates and I had lots of jokes about the Romneys, who seemed doomed to join the campaign any second. They were all so handsome, in a tooth-whitener commercial kind of way, and so serious and wholesome. We wondered whether the Five Brothers, the nickname for the Romney sons, could handle the constant drinking and swearing that went on in our campaign—the press corps included. Not to mention all the tawdry stories about crazy-sex that you never read about.

Crazy-sex, in case some clarification is necessary, is a category of sex on its own. It is sex with somebody who is extremely bad for you. Somebody you probably don't even like that much. But on the road, things have a way of changing. You don't have regular contact with friends. You don't see your family that often. You start to miss them both, and your comfortable bed at home. This causes you to look at the world differently, through what we called "campaign goggles." It was just like "beige goggles," when people around you seem more fascinating the more you drink, except it's caused by prolonged contact. Each day of togetherness on a campaign, stuck on a bus or airplane, listening to one more stump speech, brought you closer and closer until, very slowly over time, even the most boring campaign drones and journalists started to seem attractive. Campaign goggles can distort reality very powerfully and are the cause of almost all crazy-sex and other campaign hookups.

Stories abound, and I'm sure you've heard some, about how wild and raucous and lusty political life can be, especially during a presidential election. When the stakes are high, the behavior gets real low. I don't want to give the impression that I'm immune to bad behavior. But while my father was making a bid for the presidency, I didn't have a death wish—which meant absolutely, positively, no crazy-sex for me. It was the kind of decision that has "survival skills" written all over it.

The night before the announcement, I had a nice big king-sized bed all to myself. It was late and I was having trouble settling down. I swilled Red Bull and Diet Coke all day on the campaign, gorged on pizza and donuts, and at night, after all that sugar and caffeine, it was hard to decompress. Shannon and Heather—my friends, angels, and colleagues who took videos and still photographs for the campaign and my blog—were in an adjoining room. I could hear them laughing. On the road, we were always together, our days spent mostly in transit, on one of the three campaign buses that took everybody around the country. At night, we shared connecting rooms in Holiday Inns—very rarely anything nicer. One room had a king. The next room had two twins. We always took turns getting our own room.

When I finished college, I told my parents that I didn't want to go to graduate school, or open a clothing boutique, as previously discussed. I wanted to join the campaign. They said that I could come along if I paid my own way. The campaign was a sinking ship, or at least financially sunk, when I joined in July 2007. There was no money for extras, and no money for me, or my blog, or the people I'd need to help me produce it. My father's campaign manager, Terry Nelson, and the campaign strategist, John Weaver—who was one of my father's closest friends, and like an uncle to me—had run the operation into near bankruptcy. Poll numbers were slipping. Fund-raising had stalled. Our spirits were low and it was hard to be optimistic, but my dad wasn't resigned to another loss.

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And neither was I. I would do anything for him, and relished the thought of a front row seat on the campaign. To bankroll myself and the blog, I used the money that my grandfather had left me, even if by the end, I had spent every dime. It was a better education than graduate school and more worthwhile to me than opening a boutique. As far as I could tell, the Republican Party was hopelessly unschooled in lots of things, but particularly in its efforts to attract young people by using the Internet in spite of all the millions of dollars spent on "web consulting."

By being independent, and not paid for by the McCain campaign, I'd be free to write what I wanted—or so I hoped—while revealing a more personal side of my dad and my family (the campaign, full of all its experts and big thinkers, seemed particularly bad at this). But my blog had led to conflicts, a bloody mess of them.

IN MY HEART OF HEARTS, I'D ALWAYS HOPED MY FATHER would pick Senator Joe Lieberman as his running mate. Aside from being a brilliant politician, Joe is one of the kindest, friendliest, and funniest people I have ever met, not particularly common traits when it comes to the famous and powerful. Always in good spirits, he never seems affected by the fray, or criticism. Sometimes his jokes alone kept me sane during those endless bus rides throughout the country.

Probably even more important, Joe Lieberman is one of the people whom my father can rely on around—always. For me, this counts for a lot. Like everything else in my life, the personal and the professional are hard to pull apart, and usually I don't want to. If I like somebody enough to be friends with them, that's exactly the kind of person I want to work with.

Politically speaking, picking Lieberman seemed like a brilliant move too. He is a former Democrat, and was previously the running mate of Al Gore. I have to admit, I loved the idea of having two independent-leaning politicians on the Republican ticket against the steadily left-leaning Barack Obama. I thought this would pull moderates like me—there were thirty million or more of us floating around the country—in the party's direction.

But by the time I went to bed on the night of August 28, 2008, I had already been told that Joe Lieberman and Bobby Jindal, the governor of Louisiana, hadn't made the final cut. That left me assuming—to the point of certainty—that Mitt Romney, the former governor of Massachusetts, would be chosen. There was a slight possibility it could be Tim Pawlenty, who had a great head of hair. But aside from this fact, and that he was the governor of Minnesota, I knew nothing else about him.

My focus had been on Romney for months. He was a minor obsession of mine, I have to confess—the politician whom I most loved to watch and ridicule during the primaries. He'd given me so many sublime moments of laughter. It was incredible how he kept switching his story, and backpedaling, and making my father out to be an old has-been and tired Washington insider.

YouTube had an irresistible Romney clip that we'd all seen and laughed over. It showed a heated squabble between the governor and a chubby, semi-dorky AP reporter named Glenn Johnson at a press conference inside a Staples office supply store. Johnson is rumped and sitting on the floor of Staples, legs stretched out, his laptop attached to him like a college student. Romney is standing over him, super-erect, his hair gelled and perfectly black. He's wearing a plaid shirt and a Windbreaker, and like so many of Romney's "spontaneous" moments on his campaign, he seems so unnatural.

From his spot on the floor, Glenn Johnson keeps drilling away with questions about Romney hiring Washington lobbyists on his campaign, while Romney becomes more and more frustrated.

Romney's campaign manager eventually loses it, and pulls the reporter aside. "Don't be argumentative with the candidate!" It's truly priceless, and I loved how Romney, who always came o

argumentative with the candidate: it's truly priceless, and I loved how Romney, who always came off as slick and unreal, had been undone by such a visual mess of a guy. I'd seen the clip at least fifty times and laughed every time. (Much later, I ran into Glenn Johnson on the street in New York and told him how much I loved his YouTube clip. For the record, he'd lost an extreme amount of weight by then and looked great.)

It was hard to adjust to nice thoughts about Romney—or to stop laughing at him. But that's politics. You could loathe somebody during the primaries and then, suddenly, consider him a good guy and shrewd politician as soon as you've beaten him and he's joined your team. Just a few months earlier, Romney's campaign and ours were intense rivals. But now that we were supposed to be the best of friends, I needed to put jokes aside and focus on the tremendous positives Romney would bring to the ticket. He was handsome, smart, and extremely experienced in matters of the economy, an issue that would eventually become lethal to my father's campaign. Also, I had met the governor and some of his campaign operatives and have to admit that they were a lot more easygoing and real than I ever thought possible.

Let's be honest. We needed Mitt Romney. He made perfect sense. We could put down the sword because, at the end of the day, we were fighting for the same political ideals. We were all Republicans—and fought for individual freedom, smaller government, a strong defense. These ideals were things that we cared passionately about, and were supposed to be more important than cultural or religious divides, more important than what kind of clothes we wore, or whether we had sex before marriage—or even whom we had sex with.

That's how it was supposed to be, anyway. But increasingly, the more conservative wing of the Republican Party wasn't accepting of moderates like me. It wasn't enough that we all shared a conservative philosophy that we cared passionately about. It seemed like you had to prove you were *conservative enough*. It made me uneasy. And, like all humor, my jokes about Romney shielded something very real. It wasn't so much that I disapproved of the Romneys. I worried they would disapprove of me—my bleached hair, my swearing, my “edgy” clothes, not to mention my gay friends. Would they accept me or scorn me as some kind of closet liberal who didn't fit in?

Being a Republican was sometimes difficult if you had any wayward ideas or attitudes, or if your lifestyle wasn't conventional—even though what was “conventional” had eroded to the point of being unrecognizable, or didn't exist anymore. Republicans seemed to yearn for the golden era of the Reagan eighties, when AIDS wasn't discussed, along with so many other things. Now, in an effort to pretend nothing had changed, the party seemed like a secret sect, a membership that you had to prove yourself worthy of.

But what about the less “conventional” people who hated groupthink and just wanted to live life without big government breathing down our backs? And what about me? I am passionate about individual liberty. I believe in God and the church, but am as adamantly pro-life as I am passionate about my support of gay marriage. What worried me much more than the Romneys or Huckabee disapproving of me personally—I could deal with that—was how moderates like me would ever fit into their idea of what a Republican was, or should be. With these exclusionary attitudes, in ten or twenty years there would be no party left.

But it was too soon to go down this road. We'd given up a shot at Joe Lieberman, and had more likely moved on to Mitt Romney. This would bring changes to our Pirate Ship, as our campaign was lovingly called. We'd have to clean up our act a little bit. Not that I really drank much, or ever took drugs. And I was celibate as a nun. But I suspected my days of swearing like a sailor and dancing on the bus aisles were over.

The future was full of unknowns. But I had learned a few things on the campaign already, and

The future was full of unknowns. But I had learned a few things on the campaign already, and I knew that change always brought complications and chaos—and sometimes a little entertainment. Drama was inevitable on a campaign and created almost out of thin air. Tempers were always flying and feelings were always being hurt. There was no question that a running mate would add to the confusion and upset. There would be less time for fun. But I couldn't have predicted just how serious it was going to get.

Chapter 2

The Suspense Wasn't Killing Me

I was dead asleep when I heard the television click on in the next room. Shannon and Heather were in their twin beds, and I remember waking up with a jolt and yelling out, “Is Romney on TV yet?”

Silence.

I heard the voice of Dana Bash, the correspondent on CNN, giving a report. But the exact words were garbled.

The suspense should have killed me, but it hadn't—not yet, anyway. I do remember having extreme anxiety as soon as I woke up and feeling, suddenly, very angry that I still had no idea who my father's running mate was. It was mystifying how unplugged-in I was. It was galling, and seemed a little crazy, that I, the candidate's daughter and a campaign blogger, had no idea whether I would be campaigning tomorrow with Romney, Pawlenty, or some random politician I'd never met.

“Is it Romney?” I called out louder.

They didn't know, they said. It wasn't part of the broadcast.

“*How can that be possible?*”

Why didn't Dana Bash know? Dana always knew—always—what was going on. She was the CNN correspondent on the campaign and a very classy one, actually one of the very few journalists I always enjoyed being around because she respected the concept of “off the record.”

Still in bed, and in my pajamas, I grabbed my cell phone from the nightstand and called my mother.

“Mom, who is it?”

She paused.

“Mom, *do you know?*”

“I'm not going to tell you,” she said.

“What!?”

“We don't want anyone to know.”

Now, let me say my mother and I have a very open relationship. She has stuck by me, defended me, nurtured and supported me. Aside from some dorky outfits she used to put on me when I was little, she has never tried to meld me into her clone. Ever since I can remember, she has been my biggest, most loyal cheerleader. We've had our ups and downs, like any mother and daughter, but we've worked through things by talking. Communication was essential. But that morning, she let me down.

To make matters worse, my dad clearly had a hand in the decision to cut me out too.

I clicked off the phone and immediately started crying. Crying became bawling, which evolved quickly into uncontrollable sobbing. I am sensitive, way too sensitive for politics probably, and really emotional by nature. I can't fight it and I don't want to. I'd rather have big feelings than shut down and become dead inside. I've seen what that way of dealing with life does to people, how it plays a direct hand in the disconnection between politics and people.

Shannon and Heather surrounded me. You couldn't ask for better friends. They tried to console me and at the same time, make me get in the shower because I was going to have to be onstage that day, just a few hours, and stand alongside my father and mother and the new, wrongfully secret, vice-presidential running mate.

Shannon tried to keep things light. “You need to bathe!”

Shannon tried to keep things light. You need to bathe!

I kept sobbing.

“You’ve got to pull it together!”

I was still overcome.

“People are going to be watching you, girl.”

It was hard to fathom why my parents would let me down so much.

“Get showered, get serious, and get some mascara on!”

Eventually, I ended up getting in the shower, but couldn’t find the will—or whatever it takes—to wash my hair. I know in the scheme of things it doesn’t matter, and it won’t say on my tombstone, *DIRTY HAIR WHEN SHE MET SARAH PALIN*, but girls, you know those mornings, and you know the feeling. What was I thinking? Why didn’t I take the time to shampoo? Not to mention that part of my job—daughter-of and political prop—is to have clean hair, but I’d already failed at that.

Next, I had to decide what to wear, just as my bags were being taken away.

I should explain. Presidential campaigns have something called “bag call.” We had to pack and leave our suitcases outside our hotel rooms ninety minutes before departing for the day’s events. It sounds so organized and tidy. But in reality, it’s a giant pain in the ass. There were often things that I needed to get ready in the morning—my cosmetics and toiletries, to start with. If I didn’t get showered and dressed well ahead of schedule, I would have to pull out everything I thought I’d need that day before surrendering my suitcase. The result was that I, like most of the women on the campaign, lugged around a giant purse or tote bag with my pajamas and toiletries in it, or whatever I hadn’t made it into my suitcase by the time the advance team took them away.

That morning, knowing that bag call was imminent, I rushed to my suitcase and began pulling out things that would look good onstage. I rummaged and rummaged—sometimes it was just a challenge to find anything that was clean—and eventually pulled out a black cotton Theory dress. I’m not sure why I picked it, except that it was black and, since I was dealing with campaign weight gain, it fit.

I put on the Theory dress, pulled my hair back into a ponytail, and I started sliding toward another emotional crash, thinking about how I still didn’t know who the running mate was and that, on a day so important, I was going to look like a hot mess.

Shannon and Heather were glued to CNN, waiting for the announcement. As soon as I emerged from the bathroom, Shannon shot me a look. “Don’t you have anything *else* to wear?”

“I thought there was a rule about cotton and linen,” Heather said.

It’s true. There *is* an unwritten rule, which I had always dangerously ignored. I have been told that you shouldn’t wear silk or linen or cotton onstage at a political rally. It’s better to stick with knits. I never understood it, or even wanted to. But knits can withstand the heat of the stage lights and there’s virtually no possibility of undergarments showing through in pictures. So the threat of embarrassments, like bra or thong exposure, is almost nil. Looking back, it explained why political women of both parties seemed to gravitate to the St. John knits uniform.

And yet, there I was, in black cotton.

It was a short dress too, and well above my knee.

Strung out, sleep deprived, and now panicked that I had made a tragic wardrobe mistake, I ran out into the hotel hallway to find another dress to wear. Tears began welling up in my eyes and rolling down my cheeks as I bent over my bulging suitcase and unzipped it. The contents spilled out onto the floor, underwear included.

At that very moment, two campaign staffers, Mr. Burns and Blond Amazon, walked by, carefully stepping away from me and my stuff. I despised both of them, which made this entire incident so much worse, and also is why I am not using their real names and will be sticking to nicknames for

much worse, and also is why I am not using their real names and will be sticking to nicknames I now.

I called one of them Mr. Burns due to his uncanny resemblance to the bald and very mean character on *The Simpsons*. But this only expresses a fraction of the contempt and disregard that I had for him. Mr. Burns was, and always will be, my least favorite person on the campaign. I know I will later claim that Steve Schmidt was my least favorite person on the campaign, but I really do mean about Mr. Burns. My father loves him, so a protective cloud swirls around Mr. Burns. But I must say he is truly one of the most unpleasant people I have ever met.

An investment banker who joined the campaign temporarily and then never left, Mr. Burns was obsessed with control and access and took great pride in being on the inside. He kept a very tight grip on his various power centers, but his main concern seemed to be the seating arrangements for the passenger vans and the three campaign buses—aka the Straight Talk Express.

Mr. Burns expressed his feelings about you by your placement on a particular bus. The first bus where my mom and dad rode, was the nicest by far—luxurious leather seats, clean and comfortable, stocked with potato chips and Diet Cokes, and driven by the amazing Jay Frye, who leaned down from his height of six foot five to give me a huge hug every time he saw me. The second bus was loaded with important media and plugged-in staffers. The air was heavy, the talk intelligent, the atmosphere was urgent and intense, no-nonsense and only occasionally outrageous. And then there was the third bus, which was old and rank-smelling, populated by hair and makeup people, insignificant media out-of-favor ones, campaign surrogates that nobody wanted to deal with, and an assortment of other disenfranchised types who seemed lonely and forgotten. It was like the Island of Misfit Toys.

I'll confess, I always tried to get along with Mr. Burns, hoping for a better place on the bus, hoping that he'd let me bring Shannon and Heather into the first bus so we could ride with my parents. I was loyal to my friends and refused to sit on the first bus without them—something that kept me from riding in official motorcades and caused me to get left behind at quite a few places. But increasingly it was hard to be fake-nice to Mr. Burns. To me, he had become a cartoon.

Blond Amazon was my nickname for the other staffer who was walking down the corridor that morning, a super-tall and aggressively blond woman, as you might suspect, who exuded a one-of-these-guys toughness on a daily basis during the campaign. I have a very good relationship with her now—I adore her, essentially, and she has become more supportive of me—but during the campaign, probably due to the stressed-out environment that made me feel threatened and negative all the time, I loathed her passionately, dreaded seeing her, and sometimes referred to my clashes with her as “Another Attack of the Fifty-Foot Woman.”

Making matters worse, Secret Service agents would sometimes confuse me with Blond Amazon at rallies, which I found more annoying than I can say—particularly since she is a foot taller than I am. What kind of recruitment and training is going on, anyway, when a Secret Service agent can't distinguish two blond women who are a foot apart in height?

And there she was, the invincible Amazon, striding down the corridor with Mr. Burns.

I was crouching on the floor. My clothes and unmentionables were strewn about, and I had my hands on several dresses—still worrying about what to wear that day.

“Do you know *who it is*?” I blurted out.

Blurting might be the wrong word. It might have been somewhat louder. I could have been screaming.

Advance guys were swarming around the halls by then, picking up the suitcases and dealing with the bag call. I started to gather up my clothes and stuff them back into my suitcase.

Blond Amazon and Mr. Burns kept walking, like I was a phantom or an essence from a nearby

Blood Amazon and Mr. Burns kept walking, like I was a phantom or an escapee from a mental ward, which, at that point, I probably looked like.

“Do you know?” I insisted, a bit louder.

I don’t remember the exact answer, if there was one. My actual memory is that they just walked on, neither of them truly acknowledging me, like I was roadkill that you drive by without braking for a better look.

Mr. Burns signaled to me, finally, that he knew who the running mate was. He nodded, or winked. He might have made a hand gesture. More than anything, he communicated that he was enjoying the fact that he knew and I didn’t.

Overcome with fury, I yelled out, “Screw you both!!” then grabbed a black knit dress and fled inside my hotel room. With the door safely closed, I lost it—to the point of wailing. My own behavior made me feel worse, as it always did. There was no escaping the reality of my incredibly rude and inappropriate screaming in the hallway, as witnessed by more people than I care to think about, particularly two people whom I disliked with unimaginable intensity. *Screw you both!*

All I wanted in life was to be important enough, and trusted enough, to know who my father’s running mate was.

Was that too much to ask?

Had I been so untrustworthy, so spoiled and difficult?

The fact that my nemesis, Mr. Burns, the Bus Roster Nazi, was more inside and trusted, and more important . . . well, that really was the last kicker.

Chapter 3

Meeting Sarah

Suddenly on the TV screen, there was an alert about a private plane from Alaska that had flown in Ohio that morning and for the first time ever, I saw Sarah Palin's face. It flashed across the screen along with the news that she was the likely choice of running mate. You remember the picture, the one of her in the red jacket with the big smile? The pundits on television were pronouncing her name wrong—saying “Pah-len” instead of “Pay-lin.”

At that very moment, my mom appeared in my hotel room.

“Is that it? *Is she Dad's choice?*” I yelled.

My mom nodded. “Yes,” she said, then told me to get ready as soon as possible. “I love you. It's going to be fine. I'll explain everything later.”

I wanted to ask more questions, but a closer study of my mother's face told me that she was as frustrated as I was. Grabbing my purse and giant bag with my UGG boots and pajamas—my hotel room uniform—as well as the knit dress that I had decided to change into later, and all my toiletries and makeup, I headed to the parking lot with Shannon and Heather.

The bus roster for the day said it all: Mr. Burns had assigned me, Shannon, and Heather to the third bus, the one with the smallest bathroom and a smell so foul you kept wanting to open the window except there weren't any.

There was no fight left in me. We just got on, joined by random staffers I had barely met and my mother's hair and makeup people. I spoke to no one, just squeezed into the awful bathroom with my massive tote bag and, while the bus was rocking and weaving to our next destination, an Ohio high school where my father would present his running mate to the world, I tried to change dresses and get my hair into a tighter ponytail.

When a zipper became stuck on my bra, I kicked open the bathroom door, stood in the back of the bus in my bra, and called out to my friends. Modesty was an extravagance at that point, but I did try to turn away, allowing everybody on the bus to see the back of my bra. More than anything, I wanted to stop crying. I did deep breathing exercises, and focused on the next few hours to come—the TV cameras, the crowded auditorium, the faces to meet and greet, the commotion and excitement.

This nomination was meant to stir things up, rejuvenate support, throw the world a curveball, and sweep us to victory. The running mate announcement was the biggest turning point of any presidential campaign. I kept saying to myself, “Pull your shit together. Pull your shit together. You're about to meet Sarah Palin—*does it rhyme with Allen?*—and her family. This is an important moment in your life.”

By the time I got off the bus, I was able to put on the fake smile that I was so good at, and followed my mom and all the staffers and advisers, our entire campaign entourage, as it paraded through the back door of a high school gym, and into its locker room, where a makeshift greenroom had been set up, with folding chairs and tables.

Blond Amazon motioned me to follow her. Behind a blue curtain were Sarah and Todd Palin, as well as Bristol, Willow, Piper, and Trig. My father came over and introduced us. I remember how cheerily I said, “Hi, I'm Meghan, such an honor to meet you! We're about to go on a great adventure together!”

“What an honor and privilege it is to be here,” Sarah said, her words to that effect. She thanked me

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