

COLUMNISTA! THE STORY OF AN OP-ED

Screenplay by

Megan Garber

Unrevised sixth draft

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FADE IN:

INT. AN OFFICE IN THE NEW YORK TIMES BUILDING – in the middle of the day in the middle of Manhattan.

MAUREEN DOWD, a chic redhead, is pacing and frantically thumbing her BlackBerry. She is a top columnist at *The New York Times*. She is nervous. She has an op-ed due tomorrow, and has no fresh ideas for it.

MAUREEN

(sighing, melodramatically)

Ohhhhh...what am I going to do?

DAVID SHIPLEY, her editor, sits slumped in a chair next to her, dejectedly checking his BlackBerry messages.

DAVID

How the heck should I know? We go through this every week, Maureen. Are you really out of ideas?

MAUREEN

Yeah, D, I am. And I'm really freaking out this time. You know how I am about message discipline, about keeping all my writing quirky and unexpected. I mean, how do you do better than a column *half-written in Latin*? You don't, that's how! It doesn't get any better than that! I've got enough on my plate being quirky, but to keep it unexpected, too? To keep my readers all surprised and entertained and everything?
It's...just...so...

DAVID

I know, I know. Well, hey: What if you write a straight column this week? I'd love that. You know, Bob may not write his columns in Latin, or anything, but I know readers appreciate his stuff...Frank, too...

(He leans forward in his chair, watching her face closely for reaction.)

MAUREEN

Yeah, okay. I guess I could do that. That sounds like a valuable service to our readers in this final week of the campaign.

(She crosses her fingers behind her back.)

Or--oooh!--what if I write a series of haikus about the campaign? I could call it "MoDo-etry"! Or--oh, even better!--a Mad Libs game about the campaign! That would be so cheeky and unexpected!

DAVID

Um, sure, Maureen, those could work. Or: maybe you could write something straightforward, thoughtful, with a point to it--

MAUREEN

--I can call them "Rad Libs," 'cuz they'd be so rad! Or maybe "Mad-Lib(erals)"! You know, with parentheses and everything! And it could be about the Democrats! Oh, I can see it now!

(David stares glumly at his shoes. Her BlackBerry rings to the tune of "Oops! I Did It Again.")

(She listens and then hangs up.)

DAVID

(sardonically)

Was that God calling with a column idea for you?

MAUREEN

Actually, kind of.

DAVID

(shocked)

Huh?

MAUREEN

It was Aaron Sorkin. Aaron thinks John McCain's fed up with Palin getting bigger crowds and contradicting his message. And with her interrupting him on TV interviews and taking them over. Aaron thinks McCain's fed up with her drilling him on drilling. And with never being able to discuss anything with her, like the latest violence in the Congo.

DAVID

Really? He said all that?

MAUREEN

(distractedly)

Mm--hmm.

DAVID

So, then, what's your idea? Sorkin-libs, or something like that?

MAUREEN

(Her eyes suddenly light up.)

A screenplay! The kind Aaron writes, but about McCain! It can be a conversation between McCain and Joe Lieberman about how Mac should have chosen Joe for his Veep—or something like that, I haven't totally figured it out!—and it'll be completely unexpected! And so witty!! And—bonus!—it'll give me one last chance to make a "Maverick" reference!

DAVID

I don't know, Maureen. I mean, it sounds creative, and everything, but also kind of silly. I mean, what's the point? Will it actually have an argument somewhere in it? And, I mean, McCain and Lieberman are so overexposed at this point...

MAUREEN

(twirling her hair)

Come on, David...don't be a Davie Downer...

DAVID

(smiles, then sighs)

Well...how about...ugh, I don't know what else to do. Okay, fine, but what if the conversation's between Nicolle Wallace and Tracey Schmitt? At least they're more unexpected...

MAUREEN

Dirty pool, David. You know I can't say no to a chance to write about sorority girls in pearls!

DAVID

(smiling smugly)

I do.

(settling back in his chair, sighing)

Okay. So what, exactly, will you say in this column, then?

MAUREEN

I don't really know! But I'll figure it out! And it almost doesn't matter what I say, though, right? Because *how* I say it is going to be so clever!

DAVID

Well, Maureen, you still have to make some kind of point here. This is still *The New York*—

MAUREEN

We can even write it out in Courier font, just like a real screenplay! Oh, this is going to be classic!

DAVID

(sighing)

Okay, whatever you want, Maureen. You're the columnist, I guess...

MAUREEN

That's "columnista" to you!