

YOU AND ME BOTH WITH HILLARY CLINTON, S. 2 E. 4
POLITICS ON TV (WITH SAMANTHA BEE, KERRY WASHINGTON AND ALEC
BALDWIN)

You and Me Both is a production of iHeart Radio.

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: I'm Hillary Clinton and this is You and Me Both. American politics has long served as inspiration for movies, plays and especially television, from shows like *The West Wing*, *Madam Secretary* or *Veep*, all of which I really enjoyed, to late night comedy shows. And for a lot of people, shows like those have become a major source of information when it comes to our government, our political system and even the state of the world. You know, in fact, when I was Secretary of State and I was visiting Myanmar, formerly Burma, and I went to their first gathering of people who were part of their Parliament Congress, I was told that a lot of them had learned about politics, you know, not from reading books, but watching *The West Wing*.

So this has a big impact on how people think about politics and government. And that's why I wanted to explore all of it on today's show. So I'll be talking to three people known for playing politics on TV because they have played politicians or talked about politicians, and it's clear their influence extends well beyond their audience. We'll hear from Kerry Washington, who is every bit as much of a political powerhouse as her fictional character, Olivia Pope on *Scandal*. And I'll be talking to Alec Baldwin, who has finally been able to retire from playing Donald Trump on *Saturday Night Live*.

But first, I am so delighted to be speaking with Samantha Bee. Like a lot of people, I first started watching Samantha Bee during her time as a correspondent on *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart. And in twenty sixteen, she started her own show, *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* on TBS. I really like her biting, hilarious interviews and commentaries on topics that don't get nearly enough coverage in the usual news cycle—you know, ones like voting rights, or women's health, or the importance of reining in big tech. These days Samantha, her husband, and her three kids are waiting out the pandemic in New York City. And I am so happy to have her on this podcast.

Hello!

SAMANTHA BEE: Hi, Hello.

HRC: Oh, Samantha, I'm so happy to see you.

BEE: I am thrilled.

HRC: How are you and your family holding up under the pandemic?

BEE: Well, thank you for asking. I don't know. [HRC: Laughs.] Well, let's talk about it two years from now and see where we are mentally. I mean, I'm very grateful nobody in our immediate circle was ill. I think we're all emotionally in the same place everyone else is in.

HRC: We're so ready for this to be over and try to get back to something resembling, quote, normal life.

BEE: My kids are in the New York City public school system and they have not been in school for so long.

HRC: Oh, boy.

BEE: You know, my eldest daughter occasionally will go for a very socially distant cold weather masked walk with her friends. But all of my young son's friends are immunocompromised in some way or they live with an elderly relative. So he hasn't seen another boy his age since March of last year. I mean, it's crazy.

HRC: Oh, that is so hard. I think you're right on point in saying that we're not going to know for a couple of years what all of the costs are. We obviously know now more than 500,000 people have died.

BEE: I know. Which is not to even mention the probably hundreds of thousands more people who died and was never attributed to covid. And the millions of millions and millions and millions of people who got so ill and disrupted their lives and their work and their everything. It's so— it's devastating. And it's one of those I'm incandescently angry about.

HRC: Yeah, well, you're good at incandescent anger-

BEE: Oh thank you! [Laughs.]

HRC: -and I know throughout the pandemic you've continued to, you know, try to do the show. I guess you were off for a while, but then you came back?

BEE: Yes. Well, we didn't actually take that much time off. We took only really one show off of the calendar-

HRC: Wow.

BEE: -because, well, I was born in Canada and I was raised there. And I am, if nothing else, very pragmatic. Like I have a staff of about 65 to 70 people. And I- for that reason my husband and I really wanted to get the show back on the air as fast as possible just to put like a point of focus on our own week, but also on the weeks of all the people who work at *Full Frontal*. Just to have one thing to do, to have one thing to be able to say, like "I have a mission this week" I thought would be really critical. So we worked so hard to get the show up and in action as quickly as possible.

HRC: You know, it's such a typical hard working woman's commitment to say, "I'm going back, I'll multitask. I'll be there!" [Laughs.]

BEE: Very much so. Yeah, very much like doing this podcast. You know, we took a little break. We started a little later. I'm like, great, I'm going to go do the dishes.

HRC: [Laughing.] Yeah, exactly!

BEE: You're always, there's never really a moment where you just sit and stare into space.

HRC: You know your show, it's- it's almost hard to believe now started during the 2016 election cycle. I remember it well. And honestly, I don't know how someone with your intelligence and point of view really got through the last four years because you had to cope with this, you know, phenomenon: Donald Trump.

BEE: I don't know how any of us really made it through, to be perfectly honest, yourself especially. I don't know how we did it. (Laughs.) I don't know. I don't think that we ever got used to it. It wasn't what we wanted. I definitely- you know, I deflected this question a lot, which was like, "but aren't you secretly happy because it gives you so much to talk about on your show," and I was like, trust me, there's lots to talk about other than this person. And so, you know, now that we're trying to build the show without the looming specter of that person and that administration lurching behind us, the way that he lurched behind you on this stage, you know, we have a full slate of stories that we're doing. There's lots to cover. There's so many stones to overturn. And- and we're approaching it really joyfully.

HRC: Oh, that's good. Clearly, a lot of people get their news from all kinds of sources. But one of the sources is comedy shows like yours, and you regularly, unlike some, tackle serious issues that you clearly feel a sense of urgency about. You tackle family separation, you know, #MeToo, equal pay and lots more. And how do you balance that, I think, difficult role of being both a source of comedy and a source of information?

BEE: First of all, I have an incredible team and a lot of bona fide journalists on my team and a really strong adherence to research, a commitment to getting the story straight. Actually, I have a brain that doesn't remember names like if you ask me who my biggest influences are, I can never remember the right person. And then two hours later I go, "Oh my God, it was her the whole time!" I never- I'm so bad at that.

But I actually was really trying to pin it down the other day and I was like, right. it's like my show was like this weird intersection of like *60 Minutes* segments that I really love. And also Jon Stewart, you know, and my years at *The Daily Show*, but also Howard Stern—like those three influences have combined. I have a love of news and a real love of great journalism from my early childhood, honestly. And I also love comedy. And so the intersection of those worlds, it's just the sweet spot where I like to live.

HRC: Tell me about one of the episodes you're most proud of.

BEE: Well, as I've stated, I can't ever remember anything that I've ever really done. I would say that one of the episodes I'm most proud of relates to you. I think I'm very proud that we made an episode the day after the 2016 election. And believe me, it took a lot because we were destroyed, shocked, appalled. I mean, like, who am I talking to right now? [HRC: Laughs.] But it was obviously was an earthquake. And then we were expected to go and make jokes. And we had this balloon drop plans. And we had Lizzo was on a private jet to the studio to sing an awesome song about feeling great. [Both laugh.] We were all in tears and retreating into our turtlenecks and people on staff with family members in Iran were like I'm never going to see my family again, like.

So I'm really proud that we dusted it off and did a show. I'm proud of our show about family separation, multiple shows. I'm proud of our coverage of the #MeToo movement. I'm really proud of the people that I work with. They're just great.

HRC: Well, but it also, I think, added to this whole sense of protecting democracy, protecting the vulnerable and the marginalized, standing up to all these forces that came out from under all the rocks that right were kicked over.

BEE: And perhaps on a more shallow note, it is also nice—well, OK, on a not shallow note, I'm happy to have planted a flag in history and said like “I'm on this side. This is where we stand and we think this is an abomination and we're just going to park it right here and we're just going to keep saying that until it's over.” And this is the shallow part. I'm really happy to be on the correct side of Ted Cruz.

HRC: Yes.

BEE: We've gone hard on Ted Cruz over the years on the show, and it feels great to be so right. [HRC laughs.] Sometimes, you just have to have faith in that golden glow.

HRC: Yeah, you've earned a place there.

BEE: Thank you.

HRC: And you should just keep under that bright light of vindication.

BEE: Yeah.

HRC: But the other thing you've done, which, of course, I pay particular attention to, is you've been quite brave in stepping up and saying, wait a minute, it's not just what the politicians are doing, it's the way the media covers what they're doing. But when you go after the media, of which you are a part, how does that work out?

BEE: You actually have to be very thoughtful about it. We're a part of the media ecosystem.

HRC: Right.

BEE: And we can't make everyone in the media mad at us or they won't cover our show! So that's a really serious part of our internal conversations. It's like, how do we talk about Facebook when we're promoting our show on Facebook? And ultimately we have taken really, I think we've taken really big swings and I'm proud that we stick to our guns. I definitely experienced- you know, I can't believe I'm bringing it up because I don't often choose to bring it up. But when I had my biggest controversy, when I used a slur against Ivanka Trump, I really had a moment where I just- I felt like I walked through fire. I felt like I walked over hot coals and came out on the other side with a deep understanding of how a big story can just be totally obfuscated by a small media moment of a lady calling another lady a bad thing, when what we were really talking about was family separation.

HRC: Exactly.

BEE: Like the story became what I had said versus the story that I was trying to cover. And for about a week, the story in the media was “what a shame that, you know, the use of the slur took away from that story about family separation. What a shame.” And I was like, you're the media.

HRC: That's right.

BEE: You're supposed to cover the other thing. That's not my- I'm a comedy lady. Like, I don't want to talk about this! It's not comedic where our hearts are broken right now. It's your job to go “oh, that was a thing, but what was she really talking about? Oh, right. We should be focusing on family separation 24/7 until it's remedied.”

HRC: But you know, what happened to you, as you just described, shows part of a much bigger pattern, which is how easy it is to deflect the so-called mainstream media away from underlying stories. They're so easily distracted. We see it all the time.

BEE: And there is a public appetite, too, for that kind of distraction.

HRC: Absolutely.

BEE: I mean, I do worry that we all maybe have the attention span of a goldfish. It's really, really hard work-

HRC: It is.

BEE: -to stay focused on stories that no one wants to talk about.

HRC: Well, is there some story, looking back now, four years ago that you thought is the most important, untold or undertold story from the Trump era?

BEE: Yes, I mean, the answer is yes times 10,000. His international business dealings is just a story that did not grip people. You know, Adam Davidson was doing, like, incredible reporting at *The New Yorker* about his business ties in Azerbaijan and internationally that are fascinating and just a ball of tangled wire to unfurl. His tax dealings, his relationships to known money launderers. Like all of those stories, just nothing stuck!

HRC: I agree with you. But when thinking about these last four years, as you've chronicled them, I think it's important to ask: How close do you think we came to really losing our democracy? To, you know, seeing changes that were almost becoming irreversible?

BEE: I think we came much too close to another Trump victory. Honestly, when, as I say it out loud, as we're talking about it, I did start to sweat. There is an enormous number of people who said "yes" to more of that, and that I find so scary and so daunting. So I think we came really close and I think we are still close. Listen, I think people are generally, and I still say this after five years of doing the show, but I think people are generally good. We're a nation of really great people! We can do it, [HRC laughs] but it takes so much work and so-

HRC: It does.

BEE: -and so I do worry a little bit that we're going to kind of come out of the pandemic into the Roaring Twenties again and be really loose and wear bright colors and puffy sleeves and start partying and kind of forget about the underlying meat on the bone of keeping this work going.

HRC: I think you're so right to point that out, because that's what happened after the so-called Spanish flu. We went into the 1920s, the Roaring 1920s. And I mean, I want people to roar again-

BEE: Oh yeah, roar!

HRC: -I want the economy to roar again. But I do want people, as you rightly say, Samantha, to think about what we went through. I can't thank you enough for what you do all the time. You really try to help us all understand better what we're going through.

BEE: Well, the feeling is very mutual, my friend.

HRC: I hope your kids get to have a playdate sometime. I hope they get to go back to school some time.

BEE: The same for your grandkids. I hope they get to meet other kids one day.

HRC: (Laughing) Wouldn't that be novel. They're all like a bunch of little, you know, martian aliens coming together for the first time.

BEE: You know, they're just going to play the mirror game. Like, what are you?

HRC: What are you? Where have you been? Oh, Samantha, thank you so much. And please keep going. We need you.

BEE: Thank you.

HRC: You can catch Samantha Wednesday nights on TBS and you can also hear from her on her podcast, Full Release with Samantha Bee.

Now I'm getting to talk to Kerry Washington. She's an actor, producer, director, she runs her own production company called Simpson Street. I first became aware of her certainly on *Scandal*, literally couldn't take my eyes off of her because of her grace and her power on the screen. And in real life, she's a dedicated advocate on behalf of racial justice, voting rights, democracy, and so much more. So welcome, I'm so happy you're with us Kerry!

KERRY WASHINGTON: Oh thank you. Thank you so much for having me.

HRC: I want to talk about your amazing career and the fabulous roles you've played. But I want to start on the activism side because I think you and I share a sense of urgency. Last year, you joined the Black Voices for Black Justice Fund as a co-chair and you ended up helping to distribute over one and a half million dollars to Black leaders fighting for a more fair, equitable, anti-racist America. What does that work mean to you?

WASHINGTON: I'm really proud to be a co-chair for the fund because one of my superpowers, because of how lucky I've been in my career, is that people pay attention to the things I'm doing or saying, whether I like it or not. (Laughing.) Whether, you know, whether it's like paparazzi following me around when I'm pregnant or whatever it is. For some reason, I have eyeballs on me at times. And so to be able to shift those eyeballs and resources to activists on the ground who are doing the day to day work of ending racism, working toward equity, working toward liberation for all people, I'm so passionate about that.

HRC: I wanted to talk to you not only because of the great roles you've played and your success, but because you feel so deeply that this work is critical to your life, the lives of your children and to our country.

WASHINGTON: Yeah, we produced a project this year at Simpson Street called "The Fight." It's a documentary about the ACLU. I think this film is the thing I'm most proud of in my career to date, which is so funny because it's the one project where I'm not on camera. Right.[HRC: Laughs.] But it's, I love this film so much because we had unprecedented access into the ACLU. And I don't have to tell you, the ACLU has sued every administration in the last one hundred years. Democrat, Republican, doesn't matter. They are invested in defending the human rights of all people. And so we got to be in the trenches with these lawyers and get to know them for the superheroes that they are, defending justice.

But also we got to go home with them. So we got to see them trying to keep their kids quiet while they're on a Zoom call and, you know, being afraid that they're not going to be able to hear the Supreme Court decision because they can't find their charger for their cell phone. [HRC: Laughs] Right. Like we got to just see them as everyday people.

And one of the things that we really like to do at the company is figure out how to upend otherness. Right? Like there is this paradigm in culture that a certain kind of person is the hero of the story, the hero of—of our legends, our sort of shared cultural stories, and that there are other people who get to play supporting roles and characters. And traditionally, women have been in the supporting role and people of color have been in the supporting role—the wife, the best friend—and that the heroes have been straight, white, cisgender men. And so we really like the idea of upending that idea that each of us is at the center of our own story in real life and in our shared narratives.

HRC: Well, you really upended a lot of those preconceptions with *Scandal*, where you played Olivia Pope—everyone knows that alter ego, [Washington: Laughs] a powerful Black woman with a prominent position in Washington. And I think you really helped to change the entertainment world and the discussion about whose story is worth telling. And although this was a fictional character, it was still something that gripped the imagination of millions of people. And looking back on that, how do you feel about Olivia Pope and *Scandal* now?

WASHINGTON: You know, I think a lot about the history of *Scandal* now that I'm out of it. I think when I was in it, it was such a whirlwind; you know, it's hard to have perspective about these big historic moments while they're unfolding. But, you know, when—when our show first aired, people talked about how much of a quote unquote risk it was for the network to center a Black woman as the lead of a network drama. And it hadn't happened in, I think, 38 years at the time, almost 40 years. And I was in my early 30s. So in my lifetime, I hadn't seen it. And I just remember the pressure, the pressure, the expectations of like, you have to succeed. I felt like if our show didn't make it, it would be another 40 years before a woman of color—

HRC: You carried that burden, didn't you?

WASHINGTON: Yeah, I felt it. But what was thrilling was not because we were so great. We worked really hard on that show, but because audiences showed up. Audiences turned on their televisions, they recorded us on their DVR, they talked about us on social media. We became a success which allowed for other women of color—Priyanka Chopra had a show, Viola Davis had a show and made history winning the Emmy like, you know, *Empire*—all of these other shows that centered Black women because suddenly it wasn't a risk. Suddenly we were a proven deal.

HRC: Exactly.

WASHINGTON: It changed the landscape of who we believe deserves to be at the center of stories on network television.

HRC: Well, when you're talking about how long it had been, I couldn't help but think about Cicely Tyson, who we just recently lost. And she was someone who I admired from a distance. I remember *Souder*. I remember *Miss Jane Pittman*. And *Miss Jane Pittman* was a one hour long-

WASHINGTON: TV movie, I think.

HRC: Yeah, exactly. And I remember when I saw it all those years ago, probably before you were born, I was so struck by how what should have been a breakthrough back then, you know, kind of went silent, and then it had to be done all over again. And one of the challenges will be making sure it doesn't revert back.

WASHINGTON: That's right. I just love her. I won't even say loved. I love her so, so, so much. I have all these connections to her. She was at my baby shower for my Isabelle. She and Diahann Carroll and Jane Fonda—all my life, kind of like Hollywood goddess mentors. But I was born on the night of the last episode of *Roots*.

HRC: Oh my gosh!

WASHINGTON: Isn't that funny? And I know that because my dad was not in the delivery room. He was in the- the waiting room with the nurses watching the final episode. And my mother was like, where is everybody? It's a very famous story in our family.

HRC: We're taking a quick break. Stay with us.

<ad break>

HRC: You have taken on so many roles, but one very moving performance was when you played Anita Hill in the movie *Confirmation* about her incredibly brave testimony during Clarence Thomas's confirmation hearings in 1991. Did you meet her when you were making the movie?

WASHINGTON: I did.

HRC: Tell me about that.

WASHINGTON: She was so generous with sharing her experience with me, and I'll be forever grateful because it's a real responsibility. I mean, it's funny, Cicely Tyson talked about this a lot, the responsibility of sort of playing characters with dignity.

HRC: Yes.

WASHINGTON: And with Anita Hill, there's no way not to. She's such a person of grace and elegance. And even her fierce courage came cloaked in her elegant dignity at all times. So I really- I loved having the opportunity to play her. But I also really loved producing that material.

Right, because it allowed me to have a real voice at the table about what her experience was like as a Black woman to make sure that there was authenticity there.

And also, she and I had a great laugh because when I shot that scene of the Senate hearing, I got to experience what she felt of being this Black woman facing a sea of powerful white men sitting above her, looking down on her, just like attacking her with questions at times. The twist from what she did and what I did 30 years later, was that now, all of those white men were actually working for me. [Both laugh.] And so I got to sort of live in the emotional tumult that she experienced. But when we called cut, I was in charge and we really sort of laughed about how wonderful that was that I could honor her in that way.

HRC: Well, you're so right about that elegant dignity. She withstood such a brutal, consistent attack on her character and her veracity. And, you know, it did trigger a reaction. You know, the women of the house marched over to the Senate. Changes were made, women were elected.

But I could not help thinking about her during the Brett Kavanaugh confirmation hearings because I thought about how controlled and careful she had been when she was being attacked. And then we saw Christine Blasey Ford feeling, you know, very pained because they wouldn't believe her. And I thought, you know, these two women, decades apart, telling their truth in their own way and they're both being disrespected. I really thought a lot about Anita Hill, Professor Hill, in that moment, too, because the attack on her, just like the attack on Christine Blasey Ford, was concocted so that Clarence Thomas, who I went to law school with, I have known a very long time-

WASHINGTON: Wow!

HRC: And the reactions that he and Kavanaugh both had were deliberately-

WASHINGTON: Absolutely,

HRC: -intended to spark indignation and outrage. I mean, the whole thing was just, you know, heartbreaking to me because, you know, you'd hoped that things would have changed more than they did, given how brave, you know, those women were to come forward, to do what they thought of as their duty.

WASHINGTON: Yeah, I spoke to Anita a lot in that period. I remember calling her and checking on her. And one of the things that I thought a lot about was these are the moments that invite us to realize that we don't get to check out. These are the moments that pull us back in. We don't get to act like this is ancient history-

HRC: Exactly.

WASHINGTON: -that misogyny is ancient history. And also these moments provide us with an opportunity to see that there are systems in place, that this is not about personalities, this is not

about individuals. This is systematic. I just think it's so important for us to hold that and to somehow- to somehow keep working for change. Right. To somehow keep saying yes.

HRC: Well, I also think there has to be a way of using storytelling, which is what you're an expert at, in helping us craft a new story that welcomes everybody in, but people have to be willing to ask hard questions of themselves and, you know, of their own view of reality. And, of course, that's become infinitely harder because of social media, which traps people in these very divided, you know, faux realities.

WASHINGTON: Mm hmm.

HRC: How would you even think about that? Because you're a storyteller. You're a producer of stories. How would we try to think of a broader basis for such an effort?

WASHINGTON: I think a big part of it is, again, inviting people to understand that they are the hero of their story. Because I think we get involved, even in politics, maybe especially in politics, in this hero worship, where we place the power for change in the hand of this person that we have idolized. And we expect other people to fix our problems. And so our stories get corrupted by the idea that we don't have agency, that people that look like us, walk like us, talk like us, are in fact us, that we can't make the change. I mean, I remember waking up the morning after the election in 2016 and my social media was flooded with "Olivia Pope! You have to fix this!" "Olivia Pope, save the day!"

HRC: (Laughs) I wish you could have.

WASHINGTON: Yeah, me too at the time. Olivia Pope, save the day. And I remember thinking, like, oh, this is actually part of the problem, right? Because so many people sat out, because somebody else was supposed to do the work. Somebody else was going to vote, somebody else was going to knock on doors. Somebody else was going to make it better. And I remember thinking, like, OK, how do I- and it really sort of galvanized my activism- how do I get people to understand that Olivia Pope is not a real person. That that you, each person, each one of you that just tweeted that, you have infinitely more power than Olivia Pope because you can vote, you can volunteer, you can fill out your census, you can actually make a difference in your community.

And so getting our stories to be rooted in the idea of our power as people to impact our communities positively, I think that is really important. And yes, we need great leaders, but I think our greatest leaders are the ones who look back to us and say, I'm here to represent you. The power is yours. I am your voice—just that constant willingness to center the people and to make the people the solution instead of those small number of heroes.

HRC: I agree with that completely. You know, for months after that election, I had a steady stream of people, mostly young women, coming up and apologizing, often bursting into tears. "I

didn't know you needed my vote.” “I didn't know you needed my help.” I felt like I was I was supposed to be giving absolution. It was the strangest experience. But out of that, at least we saw first in 2018 and then we saw again in 2020, I think the number of people who understood that they did have not only an opportunity but a responsibility.

WASHINGTON: For me really in the advocacy and activism space it so much is about centering other heroes. Right. Like centering, not centering myself like even on the campaign trail, not saying like you should vote for Biden-Harris because I'm Kerry Washington and I tell you to. No!

HRC: Exactly.

WASHINGTON: Like it's not about that. It's like you have the power as a community to transform your community. Look at these candidates and look at how much better they'll be for you. It has nothing to do with me. I'm here to be a conduit to and for you to understand your power, for you to know that you're so much more powerful than Olivia Pope. That's what I'm here to share with you. I know, because I was her. And she does not have your power. She really doesn't.

HRC: Kerry Washington, I am just so grateful to know you. And you've got so much more to do ahead of you. It's very exciting for me to have this chance to talk with you. Thank you so much.

WASHINGTON: Thank you so much. What an honor and delight.

HRC: You can keep up with Kerry's acting and her activism on social media, and I highly recommend the documentary she produced called *The Fight*, which is streaming online in lots of places. Go to Fightthefilm.com to check it out.

I can't talk about politics on TV without talking about what it's like to see myself portrayed on *Saturday Night Live*. I can't say that I've enjoyed every part of it, but I certainly have admired the extraordinary abilities of the actors who have portrayed me—most recently, the terrific Kate McKinnon. And opposite her, of course, was my next guest, Alec Baldwin, masterfully playing a role he never imagined he'd be stuck with for four years. And for this, he blames *SNL*'s legendary producer Lorne Michaels. But he also played another Republican character, Jack Donaghy, opposite Tina Fey on *30 Rock*. In real life, he's a proud Democrat. He's lent his voice and his energy and talents to countless political causes and candidates over the years.

How are you doing, Alec? Are you holding up?

ALEC BALDWIN: I'm good, but I'm intimidated, as always, because what could I possibly talk to you about politics? What could I possibly say to you? This is like Joe Namath throwing a football with a four year old.

HRC: Maybe the four year old was, I don't know, Tom Brady, who knows, right? (Laughs.)

BALDWIN: The future, a budding star.

HRC: Well, first of all, you have a lot to say about a lot of things. I know that because we've had the chance to talk before. But it's so interesting for me to hear your perspective about where we are today versus where we were a year or two years, three years ago.

BALDWIN: Right.

HRC: Because, you know, you gave voice, gave life, to a couple of different characters whose politics you don't agree with at all. And it's not just Trump. It's, you know, Jack Donaghy. And, you know, how did this become your specialty?

BALDWIN: Oh, God! I needed a job and they paid me! I'll play anything. You want me to play Idi Amin? I mean, I'll find a way. But when I think about the Trump thing on *SNL*, and it's so ironic to talk to you of all people, that you know, Lorne said to me, oh, it's only going to be two shows.

HRC: Yes, right. (Laughs.)

BALDWIN: Well, you know who's going to win? And it's only going to be two shows. And I thought, OK, I can bite the bullet and endure this for two shows. So it's election night, 2016, and my wife and I are watching the TV, and finally we go to bed. We just can't take it and we fall asleep. And three o'clock in the morning rolls around I wake up and I go, "He won." And my wife rolled over and goes, "Oh god, no!" and then she rolled over, went back to bed. And I sat there and I went, "Now, I got to play this character for the next four years," knowing Lorne.

HRC: Knowing Lorne. Yeah exactly.

BALDWIN: Knowing Lorne he'd be like, come on, come on.

HRC: Was he your first call at like four o'clock in the morning? (Laughs.)

BALDWIN: Right, right, right. No, he's he's he's going to bed at four o'clock in the morning with his schedule. But I think the point that I always think about is that people say to me, you know, "what was the point in your mind? Like, why did you do this?" Because it wasn't about money or anything. I said that it's one thing if people have reversals, they make mistakes and you attack them. There are Republican candidates that I have admired in some sense. Romney was a successful businessman. I might not agree with some of his policies. McCain was somebody I could agree with. I mean, there are Republicans that if they won, I could have lived with.

HRC: Exactly.

BALDWIN: But when this guy came and you're a New Yorker and you knew what he was and wasn't, what I thought was, there's people who you'll never change their mind. There's people who you don't ever need to change their mind. And that group in the middle, we thought if we

kept doing it, or at least in my mind, I thought if I kept doing it, one year goes by, two years goes by and they go, well, I thought he would change, and adapt and become better at the job. And what we reminded them of was, he's not changing. He's not growing. Every human being, as you know better than I'll ever know, every man (thus far) who's in that job, what a journey of growth.

HRC: Exactly.

BALDWIN: To be the President of the United States, I mean, talk about what you see and learn! So when he came along and we kept giving it to him, it was to remind people that he isn't changing. There's a benefit of the doubt we gave him and he's already gone past the statute of limitations on that.

HRC: But given what a rabid, obsessive TV watcher he is, I thought also, you know, maybe there was a tiny sliver of self recognition, but no, there is not a smidgen of self awareness I don't think.

BALDWIN: People would send me framed cartoons, you know, not not many, but a handful of them. And my favorite one was one of them where the guy and the woman are watching Trump and they go, "boy that Alec Baldwin is amazing." And the other person goes, "that's Trump."

HRC: [Laughs]

BALDWIN: You know, it's funny that someone told me that some of the things you might want to cover are the representation of the presidency in the media. And for me, and I date myself, I am rounding the corner here towards 63 years old-

HRC: Oh yeah, keep going.

BALDWIN: -and, but the representation of the presidency as- and I'll pick two examples of somewhat overwhelmed, beleaguered, exhausted, and yet still maintaining that core of integrity and ethical primacy that that role demands. I always think of Fredric March and "Seven Days in May," and he played the president as this so exhausted and enervated by the job and all these bad things were happening around him and that he maintained his dignity. And I also think of it in a much more almost sci fi esque, surreal tableau was Henry Fonda in "Fail Safe."

HRC: Oh, sure.

BALDWIN: And now he had to maintain his cool in that chamber. He's the president. People are counting on you to not act the way other average men might act, or women, if you were baited in this way. So whenever the presidency is portrayed as someone with a preternatural emotional steel and will and faith.

HRC: But, you know, it's so interesting you mention that, Alec, because, you know, as a woman running for President, I grew up with the same movies. I grew up with the same images of real Presidents who had to withstand tremendous pressure, whether it was Kennedy in the Cuban

Missile Crisis or, you know, looking at what Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford went through all the way up into, you know, modern times with George W. Bush after 9/11. And, you know, my understanding of the presidency is exactly as you describe it. And I write in my book, *What Happened*, when, you know, Trump is baiting me and leering at me in the second debate and I'm sitting there thinking, okay do I turn around and really take him out or do I maintain that calm and that dignity? Because that's what Presidents do. But in today's world, the entertainment factor, the so-called, you know, authenticity, which often to me is really a mis- you know -nomer, because what you're seeing are meltdowns and nastiness and mean spiritedness if we look at, you know, somebody like Trump. How do you maintain it?

BALDWIN: You know, the presidency (laughs) obviously has a very unique place in your life, to say the least. I remember a woman I spoke to who shall remain nameless, who was adjacent to the Biden campaign, we spoke on the phone about something and I took the opportunity, I lunged for the opportunity, to say to her, "Can I tell you what I think he should do? Can I offer you my unsolicited advice?" And she was very kind, she said, "Go for it, please." And I and I said, "Just tell him just, you know, it's his to lose. Don't take the bait. Let Trump be Trump. And I really mean this. I want to say, be more like her" in the debate where you did maintain, you were standing there, like you said, Tom Brady in the pocket. I'm going to throw this ball into the end zone. You didn't let him get to you. That's always the better choice.

HRC: I want to loop back with what we were talking about earlier, because I want to ask you something about comedy and about *SNL* in particular. I appreciated your depiction of Trump. Do you think, actually doing what you did and what *SNL* does, making terrible people sort of more palatable to the general public, kind of helps them in a way?

BALDWIN: I've heard that many times, many times. That what we did only softened the impact of how bad they were. But, you know, Lorne Michaels is someone who has steered a show, they're rounding the corner now toward 50 years of being on the air-

HRC: Isn't that astonishing?

BALDWIN: -now, the show, they found a way with all of the digital and online platforms and everything to bring the show to an audience that's almost larger than ever. There was a larger audience at the heyday, the *Friends* and *Seinfeld* era of TV watching. And then it went down. And now it's back up to where, you know, when I was doing the debates and McKinnon played you, right?

HRC: Oh, yeah. And did a really good job by the way.

BALDWIN: And they played the *Jaws* music and I was coming up behind her. The *Jaws* music is playing during the debate. One of my favorites, one of the funniest things I've ever seen! We're doing that. And, you know, but Lorne is someone who knows that he has two constituents to serve the people that own the company and his audience. And his staff and writers. And there

are lines that he is asked to cross all the time that he will not cross. There are things people pitch. I've pitched things which he'd sit there and said to me, maybe not because he doesn't want the show to become just outrageous or a bully pulpit. It's an entertainment program.

And the one thing that we were criticized for, but I was nonetheless the most satisfied with and I took the greatest pleasure from, which is 90 percent of what we said were verbatim transcripts of what he had said.

HRC: Exactly.

BALDWIN: You couldn't criticize us and say we imagined, or it was a fantasy. He said it.

HRC: That's right.

BALDWIN: He did it. And we would just do that. And I forever am grateful for that because we didn't cross really any bounds. Everything was in the realm of reality. But you're right, there are some people who- we rallied the troops on the other side, we rallied our opposition, they will sit there and they were like, you know, "If I was dying in the desert and Alec Baldwin gave me a canteen, I'd rather die than drink from Alec Baldwin's canteen." [HRC: Laughs.] There is that group.

HRC: Yeah, let's talk for a second about 30 Rock and about the character you played, Jack Donaghy, which you were brilliant at, and, you know, the boss to the Tina Fey character, Liz Lemon. And the way you portrayed Donaghy is that, you know, you are a Reagan Republican who was going to Reagan when you died.

BALDWIN: Well, I viewed Donaghy as what we used to call when I was younger, a Rockefeller Republican, which it really wasn't about social issues. Men can go ahead and marry each other. And I don't have any opinions about other social issues, like a woman's right to choose and so forth. He's a Rockefeller Republican, which means there's no problem you can have in this life that can't be solved by making more money. [HRC: Laughs.] And I would really appreciate it if the government in any way just got out of the way of me. I want lower taxes and less regulations on my business, and I'm fine.

HRC: Yup.

BALDWIN: There was a scene. I'm on a balcony. I'm on a terrace with Tina. And of course, the Donaghy character was all Robert Carlock and Tina. I didn't write it. They're the geniuses here. And I'm on a balcony with a glass of wine. And Tina says, I'm working so hard and I don't know what is going to happen in my life, she goes, I'm getting older now. Pretty soon no one's going to want to even see me naked. And I don't flinch. And I have a drink in my hand and I go, "Well, you make enough money, you pay someone to see you." [HRC laughs.] And that is Donaghy's philosophy. As long as we're making a lot of money, what do you care? Money solves everything.

HRC: But that description of that scene and and his philosophy, I ran across that in this last election. I mean, you did too. You know, you grew up with people on Long Island who said to you, right, “look, I can't stand the guy, you know, I think he's over the top,” et cetera, et cetera. “But, hey, I'm doing well. You know, the business is doing well. I got my taxes. I don't care what else he does.” Right? That that is a real person.

BALDWIN: But but, you know, both of you and your husband know more about this than anybody. You're out here where there are some obviously a lot of privileged people. I guess from time to time. Their attitude was, “I'm not voting for Trump. I just can't vote for Biden.”

HRC: Yes, I know.

BALDWIN: They just wouldn't vote for it. “You're going to raise my taxes. You're going to raise my capital gains. I can't stand Trump. I'm going to hold my nose. But I'll never vote for a Dem-never, never.

HRC: We'll be right back.

<ad break>

HRC: We do have to keep laughing. I mean, part of what I worry about is that the stuff that's happening in the country right now is deadly serious, and we know how divided we are. And it's a kind of contradiction. And I'd love your insight into this and what role comedy and theater and and your work as an actor could bring in, you know, trying to shine a light on some common ground. Is there a way for people to begin talking to each other again in a useful way?

BALDWIN: I think now that Trump is gone, yes. Because Trump was something we could not set that aside.

HRC: No.

BALDWIN: There are people that, had they won, I had profound differences of opinion with them, but I could have bitten the bullet. And a few months goes by and you accept. And you also know that we get back to that idea of that person growing in the job. George W. Bush grew in the job.

HRC: Right.

BALDWIN: Who would have thought? Especially if you're in there two terms?

HRC: Exactly.

BALDWIN: What an arc to be able to change and expand your mind and your humanity? And with Trump, none of that. So we had no choice. It was truly our civic duty to resist him and to

underline what he was doing. Now that he's gone, we might not solve every problem, but we have a chance. With Biden and Harris, we have a chance.

HRC: Is there anybody currently on the political scene that you would want to, you know, play or in some way convey an image of?

BALDWIN: I want to get away from the comedy thing now. I really want to kind of scrape that coat of paint off me.

HRC: Yeah.

BALDWIN: And go do- I've got some dramatic things lined up.

HRC: Good.

BALDWIN: I think right now where I'm kind of setting, my, the lane I'm getting back into is working with the United Nations, the Environmental Programme, because, you know, there's institutions that you sit there and you want to criticize them. The post office is a good example. I used to say to myself, why don't FedEx and UPS just buy the post office? And then you thought to yourself, oh god, if we made the post office a business, how many people would get hurt?

HRC: Yeah.

BALDWIN: So I got off that idea. I have a sense of some institutions and if I'm critical of them, I realize to some degree I don't fully understand how they really work and their importance. And one of those that I have abundant faith in, I've always been so honored to be invited to the party, is the United Nations.

HRC: Good for you.

BALDWIN: I'm really going to go full-bore now into my UNEP work. We're going off to Norway. We're going off to Scotland for the global conference. My wife and I are really going to commit to showing up for these events to support the work of the United Nations Environmental Programme.

HRC: Good for you, Alec.

BALDWIN: Environmentalism is my new big thing. I'm going back to more of that. Yeah.

HRC: Ok.

BALDWIN: Let me just say to you, as we close.

HRC: Yes, dear.

BALDWIN: And that is, and you and you hear this from your friends and you hear this from your supporters and fans all the time, Democrat in the White House, Republican in the White House, Covid, no Covid. We need to hear your voice giving your measured opinion of all these things. Please don't stop doing these shows. Okay?

HRC: I won't. And let's keep the conversation going.

BALDWIN: Thank you.

HRC: You can hear more from Alec on his podcast Here's the Thing.

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