

(R – MONTANA)

a new play by
Kitt Lavoie

SAMPLE - FIRST TWO SCENES

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SYNOPSIS

After being credited with thwarting a terrorist attack on American soil, a Republican governor is courted by the Democratic Party to run on the presidential ticket – and is forced to find the balance between the father he wants to be, the husband he has promised to be, the public servant he has sworn to be, and the great man he knows he could become.

CHARACTERS

The Republicans

Richard Halverson – Governor of Montana, mid-50s

Amity Halverson, PhD – Halverson’s wife, Professor and Chair of the Department of Paleontology, University of Montana, mid-50s

Michael Halverson – Halverson's teenage son, 16

Greg Lubey – Halverson’s Chief of Staff, mid-40s

The Democrats

Brian Sharp – White House speechwriter, son of Halverson’s former Chief of Staff, late-20s

Walter Benson – Campaign Manager for the sitting President, mid-40s

Jack Delery – Campaign operative, son of former Democratic Presidential nominee, mid-30s

The Press

Voices of various anchors, analysts, and correspondents

SCENES

Act I

Scene 1 – News studio of a Helena, Montana network affiliate

Scene 2 – Halverson’s home office in the Governor’s Mansion – Helena, MT

Scene 3 – Halverson’s office at the State House

Scene 4 – Michael’s bedroom in the Governor’s Mansion

Scene 5 – Hotel suite in the Spokane Marriott

Scene 6 – Dining room in the Governor’s Mansion

Scene 7 – Living room of the Governor’s Mansion

Scene 8 – Hotel suite in the Philadelphia Marriott

Scene 9 – The same hotel suite in the Philadelphia Marriott

Act II

Scene 1 – Network news studio in Seattle’s Comcast Arena

Scene 2 – Hotel suite in the Fairmont Olympic Hotel – Seattle, WA

Scene 3 – Hotel suite in the Westin Cincinnati

Scene 4 – Conference room in the Hotel Palomar Chicago

Scene 5 – Holding room in the Omaha Civic Auditorium

Scene 6 – Bedroom in the Hilton Omaha

Scene 7 – Hotel suite in the Millennium Hotel – St. Louis, MO

Scene 8 – Hotel suite in the Jefferson Hotel – Washington, DC

Scene 9 – The United States Capitol

Scene 10 – Rotunda of the United States Capitol Building

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SCENE 1

Lights rise. Bright lights. Kleig lights. Television lights.

Alone in the center of the glare sits GOVERNOR RICHARD HALVERSON, R - Montana. Mid-fifties. An earpiece in his ear, he speaks via satellite to an unseen news anchor.

He struggles mightily to be the one authentic thing in the very artificial situation.

HALVERSON

Well, Don, that's the hope. We'll see how it turns out.

NEWS ANCHOR

But it's more than "how it turns out," isn't it, Governor Halverson? With the recent events in your state, the stakes have changed.

HALVERSON

The stakes have always been what the stakes are, Don. Governor Milton has been saying that for months. What happened last month was a reminder that we need to stay vigilant. We need to keep our eye on the ball. But what I also hope the events of last month prove is that we are prepared. Or we can be. And that that preparation doesn't necessarily come at the cost of, you know, building the life that is worth protecting in this country. In the past eight years, we have had unprecedented job growth in our state, reading and math scores have increased 6% among middle and high schoolers and 9% among K to six. We're learning how to live in this world now. And not just to stay alive, but to live.

NEWS ANCHOR

And if you had one message for the candidates?

HALVERSON

Keep your eye on the ball. And remember what the ball is.

NEWS ANCHOR

Your name has been mentioned, of course, on the short list of potential vice presidential nominees.

HALVERSON

(laughing)

Of course.

NEWS ANCHOR

You find that funny?

HALVERSON

I don't.

(together now)

I don't. I find it amazing.

NEWS ANCHOR

You've been rocketed onto the national scene--

HALVERSON

Exactly. Yes. And if nothing else, I hope it demonstrates that our country has a depth of very qualified, very dedicated public servants, many of whom most Americans have never heard of. Some of whom they hadn't heard of until last month.

NEWS ANCHOR

Can we assume Governor Milton's camp has been in touch?

HALVERSON

I'm sure they've been in touch with many people. But, uh, to be mentioned in the same field as Senator Millberg, Senator Marion, Congressman Thatch. It's an honor.

NEWS ANCHOR

And if you are asked?

HALVERSON

That's a bridge, Don. I'm sure Governor Milton will select someone who best complements him. A team mate. And he's got a lot of great people to choose from.

NEWS ANCHOR

Most of whom appeal to the same voter base he already has. Perhaps someone more moderate, like yourself--

HALVERSON

I don't know that I'd call myself a moderate. I'm a pragmatist.

NEWS ANCHOR

Meaning?

HALVERSON

I understand that not everyone agrees with me about everything.

NEWS ANCHOR

Will you be speaking at the convention next week?

HALVERSON

Tuesday night, yes.

NEWS ANCHOR

So it's official, then?

HALVERSON

As of an hour ago, yes.

NEWS ANCHOR

Well, thank you very much for your time, Governor.

HALVERSON

Thank you, Don.

NEWS ANCHOR

Governor Richard Halverson. Republican of Montana. And next, our Katie Mulrew will be speaking with Treasury Secretary William Brantridge and *Washington Post* reporter Allan Tuttle about the recent drop in the Dow and the impact that drop will likely have on the message we hear at the upcoming Republican convention...

Halverson continues to smile affably, watching for the red light on the camera to switch off.

Blackout.

SCENE 2

MICHAEL
(in darkness)

Bullshit. That was total, total bullshit.

Lights rise on Halverson's home office in the Governor's Mansion. He enters, followed by his 16 year old son, MICHAEL.

HALVERSON

Michael.

MICHAEL

Dad--

HALVERSON

It's America and its election season. What do you want?

MICHAEL

"I hope it demonstrates that our country has a depth of very qualified, very committed public servants."

HALVERSON

I hope it does.

MICHAEL

Like Renny Thatch?

HALVERSON

Yes.

MICHAEL

You called him a clown, Dad.

HALVERSON

A very qualified, committed clown, yes.

MICHAEL

You're going to make yourself look weak.

HALVERSON

Being gracious doesn't make you look weak.

MICHAEL

It does. You know it does.

HALVERSON

It shouldn't.

MICHAEL

But it does. And it's going to make it harder for Milton to pick you.

HALVERSON

There are plenty of other reasons that it'll be hard for Milton to pick me.

MICHAEL

How could he not? If you want it? You're the biggest rockstar in the party right now.

HALVERSON

And that's number one on the hit parade of reasons he's not gonna pick me. All I bring is a giant shadow, after fifteen years of him trying to get out from under his brother's.

MICHAEL

(ironically)

And don't forget three electoral votes.

HALVERSON

Yes, and three electoral votes that have gone to the Republican in ten of the last eleven elections.

A beat.

MICHAEL

Marion?

HALVERSON

Yeah. I think so. Chairman of Foreign Relations and seventeen fat electoral votes.

MICHAEL

In a swing.

HALVERSON

And one that's going to count this year.

A beat.

Really?

MICHAEL

I think so.

HALVERSON

Even after Billings? I mean, you never know.

MICHAEL

No, you don't.

HALVERSON

CNN says you.

MICHAEL

Yeah.

HALVERSON

Newsweek, too.

MICHAEL

Yes, they do.

HALVERSON

A beat.

Do you want it, Dad?

MICHAEL

Yes, I do.

HALVERSON

A beat.

Marion? Really?

MICHAEL

It's what I'd do.

HALVERSON

MICHAEL

So you kiss his ass and that's it?

HALVERSON

No, his ass and Milton's ass. Get Secretary of Education. See where we are in four years.

MICHAEL

Eight years.

HALVERSON

Sixteen.

A beat.

MICHAEL

You never know.

HALVERSON

You never do.

A knock on the door jamb. BRIAN SHARP, 30, stands in the doorway.

BRIAN

Mr. Halverson?

Halverson brightens seeing him.

HALVERSON

Brian!

BRIAN

Hi Mr. Halverson. Mike.

MICHAEL

Brian, hey.

(to his father)

I'm gonna go over to Becky's for a while.

HALVERSON

You've got school tomorrow, bud.

MICHAEL

To study.

HALVERSON

She doesn't go to your school, Mike.

MICHAEL

I know. I just think better near her.

HALVERSON

(shooting a knowing glance to Brian)

I bet. Her parents are home?

MICHAEL

Yes, Dad.

HALVERSON

Alright, be back by ten.

MICHAEL

Will do.

He heads for the door.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

Good to see you, Bri.

BRIAN

You, too, Mike.

MICHAEL

(with great humility, for his father's benefit)

Really. I'm "honored" to be seen by you. You are truly one of our many qualified and committed public servants.

Michael shakes Brian's hand formally, then is gone.

BRIAN

Becky?

HALVERSON

Girlfriend.

Ah...
BRIAN

Yeah.
HALVERSON

He's that age.
BRIAN

He is, he is. How are you, Brian?
HALVERSON

I'm doing well.
BRIAN

It's great to see you. I'm sorry I didn't make it back for dinner.
HALVERSON

That's okay. It was great to see Ryan and Mrs. Halverson. Spend some time.
BRIAN

I'm glad your trip and Ryan's intersected. You guys don't get to see enough of each other anymore.
HALVERSON

No.
BRIAN

How's Arlington treating you?
HALVERSON

It's treating me really well, actually. I'm adjusting.
BRIAN

And Washington?
HALVERSON

Well. Harder adjustment.
BRIAN

HALVERSON

You're doing well.

BRIAN

You know, for four years out of law school.

HALVERSON

It was a beautiful speech.

BRIAN

Well, it was a team effort.

HALVERSON

“We did not seek nor did we provoke an assault on our freedom. We did not expect nor did we invite a confrontation with evil.” That was you.

BRIAN

‘Come a long way from Student Congress.

HALVERSON

That you have.

BRIAN

Mr.--

HALVERSON

We're very proud of you.

BRIAN

Thank you.

HALVERSON

Your dad would have been very proud, too.

BRIAN

I know.

HALVERSON

Would've killed him you're on their side.

BRIAN

A wonder what a little teenage rebellion can turn into.

HALVERSON

It's great to see you, Bri. I should let you get back to Ryan.

BRIAN

Actually, sir. I came to see you.

HALVERSON

To dinner?

BRIAN

To Helena.

(a beat)

I told you I was here on business. I had a conversation with Walter Benson last night. I had an idea, and he said get on a plane this morning.

HALVERSON

I'm not sure that any idea that makes sense to Walter Benson is something I'm going to be terribly interested in.

BRIAN

Hear me out.

HALVERSON

I'm not speaking at the convention, Brian.

BRIAN

Why not?

HALVERSON

Bill Graves already approached me. It would be a coup. I know. For you.

BRIAN

I saw you this morning. On CBS. You can't be happy about Milton.

HALVERSON

I'm fine with Milton, Brian.

BRIAN

And you sure can't be happy with Marion.

HALVERSON

Well, *if* it's Marion--

BRIAN

It is. It's done.

A beat.

HALVERSON

You're sure.

BRIAN

This afternoon, yeah.

HALVERSON

Still--

BRIAN

They're not going to make you their Vice Presidential nominee.

HALVERSON

Well, a month ago they weren't going to ask me to speak at the convention, either.

BRIAN

But we want to make you ours.

A beat.

HALVERSON

Excuse me?

BRIAN

We want to make you. Ours.

HALVERSON

But what about the Vice President?

BRIAN

A story's going to break in the *Times* on Tuesday. The Vice President is no longer an option.

HALVERSON

What kind of story?

BRIAN

The kind of story that makes it possible for me to come to my father's best friend and ask him to be the Vice President of the United States.

HALVERSON

What kind of story?

BRIAN

He's just not an option anymore.

HALVERSON

Brian--

BRIAN

I can't. It's above my pay grade.

HALVERSON

But it's not above your pay grade to offer me a spot on the ticket?

BRIAN

I'm not offering. I'm just an old family friend over for dinner. Wondering.

HALVERSON

Walter Benson sent you here?

BRIAN

Yes.

A beat.

HALVERSON

I'm sorry.

BRIAN

Why?

HALVERSON

Because this isn't the way it works.

BRIAN

It could be.

HALVERSON

It can't. You know that. I know that. Walter Benson certainly knows that.

BRIAN

They should have picked you. They should have picked you three weeks ago.

HALVERSON

But they didn't. And they weren't wrong. Two governors doesn't work. Milton needs the balance. Someone with a legislative background.

BRIAN

Like someone, say, who served two terms in Congress from the Great State of Montana?

HALVERSON

Recent legislative experience.

BRIAN

If Billings had happened eight months ago, you would have been the nominee. You are the perfect storm of a candidate. And Milton is too scared of you and too stupid to see you are his best chance to win.

HALVERSON

Don't.

BRIAN

What?

HALVERSON

You can be a Democrat all you want. Your dad would get that. But don't become one of "them."

BRIAN

One of who?

HALVERSON

Jonathan Milton is not a stupid man. And don't embarrass yourself - or me - by pretending like you think he is. He's not scared of me. He's the presumptive Republican nominee for the presidency of the United States. I'm scared of him. And he's smart enough to know he's going to beat your guy with or without me.

BRIAN

All due respect, sir, but maybe that's because my guy's getting the fact that the Governor of Montana single-handedly thwarted a terrorist attack shoved up his ass right now. Which you know is not the case.

HALVERSON

I never said it was.

BRIAN

But you never said it wasn't.

A beat.

HALVERSON

And that right there is the reason this isn't the way it works. It's sweet of you to think of me, Brian. But... no.

A beat.

BRIAN

Can I tell you something?

HALVERSON

Sure.

BRIAN

If you were the nominee? I wouldn't vote for you. I think you'd make a great president. And I still wouldn't vote for you. And that sucks.

HALVERSON

It's not that it's not a noble idea.

BRIAN

It's your idea. Twelve years ago I sat at your dinner table, three hours, I heard you say it. "Wilmore should choose Dalton." That he would win and that it would change everything - if for no other reason than it would make the 84% of the electorate that don't, actually think about who they were voting for.

Halverson smiles.

HALVERSON

Yeah. But I also said it could never happen. The base would run for the hills. The pundits would call it a gimmick. And even if you do get elected, how do you govern if you've alienated the fifteen senators of your own party who thought *they* should have gotten the slot? It's impossible.

BRIAN

That's not what you said at the time.

HALVERSON

I wouldn't have been wrong.

BRIAN

You said it couldn't happen. But that's not why. You said the base would come back. And you said, all due respect, sir, but you said "fuck the pundits." And you said figuring out how to govern was the luxury of the poor bastard who managed to get himself elected.

HALVERSON

That sounds like something I might say.

BRIAN

You said Wilmore couldn't reach across to Dalton because he didn't know if Dalton would reach back. That if Dalton spurned him, it would humiliate him in the press and he would rattle the base just the same as if he had accepted. That our system doesn't forgive that kind of mistake.

HALVERSON

It doesn't.

BRIAN

I'm not naive. I know this isn't the way it works. But it also can't be the way it works that you go give a keynote at the RNC on Tuesday and say "Billings" thirty-seven times, and then don't speak at the DNC. It can't be the way it works that you, of all people, take five years of preparation and the lives of three state troopers and turn them into a political punchline. You are not a Republican right--

HALVERSON

I hate to disappoint....

BRIAN

People don't *think of you* as a Republican right now. They never did - they had no idea who you *were* five weeks ago. They think of you as Richard Halverson, "that governor from Montana." The man they saw on TV making us all feel better at a time when it would have been a lot easier - and a lot more politically attractive to a different kind of man - to make us all feel a lot more scared. They think of you as belonging to all of us. And you could. But not if you go do the monkey dance in Philadelphia.

HALVERSON

Well, the monkey dance in Philadelphia is what it's all about. It would be great if I could go do a goodwill tour to the RNC and the DNC and over to the Libertarians and the Centrists and the Socialist Workers Party. But things are going to change in the next four years. No one is going to remember, not in the way they need to, what happened this summer the next time around. The people at the RNC are the ones who are going to make sure I matter four years from now.

BRIAN

I am sorry, sir, but you are not going to matter four years from now. They're not gonna need you because your guy's gonna beat ours in a cakewalk. So Tuesday night you're cashing in all your political capital to boot a field goal in a game where your team is up by forty points. No one's gonna remember the kick.

HALVERSON

It's still a kick I have to take.

BRIAN

Why?

HALVERSON

Because that's the way it works.

BRIAN

It doesn't have to be.

HALVERSON

And yet it is.

BRIAN

You are different!

HALVERSON

I'm not, Brian.

BRIAN

You could be!

HALVERSON

You *cannot* be bipartisan in a vacuum, Brian! No matter who you are.

BRIAN

And I'm saying you don't have to be. The president is willing to reach, sir. I'm asking, are you willing to reach back.

(a beat)

You are absolutely right. Wilmore could never have chosen Dalton. But you're not Dalton. You're that special case that comes along for six weeks once in a generation. Don't squander it on the chance to keep your fingers crossed for a cabinet post. You won't matter enough by January for them to give it to you.

HALVERSON

So I don't use my political capital to gain the trust and respect and obligation of my party's leaders? Instead I use it to-- ?

BRIAN

Make them matter less. All of them. The leaders. The parties. We make a whole new ballfield.

HALVERSON

Walter Benson didn't send you here to remake the ballfield. It's his ballfield. And he isn't going to get on board for anything that even feels like it makes the DNC matter less.

BRIAN

We don't have to tell him that's the plan.

A beat.

BRIAN (cont'd)

You don't belong here, governor. You belong on the national stage. And you proved it these last few weeks. My father never understood why you came back to Montana.

HALVERSON

It seemed like the right thing to do at the time.

BRIAN

He swore he would get you back to Washington. If it was the last thing he did. And since he can't...

A beat.

HALVERSON

What happened to the Vice President?

BRIAN

I really can't. But Walt is in Delaware waiting for my call. If he gets it, and the answer is "yes," your phone will ring. He'll tell you everything you need to know.

HALVERSON

How do I know he's not in Delaware waiting for your call, waiting to leak the fact that I said I might consider betraying my party at this time of national need?

BRIAN

He's not.

HALVERSON

How do I know?

BRIAN

Because your guy is going to beat our guy. And we need you.

A beat.

HALVERSON

I am always glad to discuss the future of the nation, with anyone who wants to have the discussion.

BRIAN

Does that mean you'll reach back?

HALVERSON

It means if I don't, no one will know I was asked to.

BRIAN

Thank you, sir.

Brian turns and starts to leave.

HALVERSON

Brian?

Brian turns.

BRIAN

Yes?

HALVERSON

This isn't going to work. But your dad would be proud of you for trying.

BRIAN

We'll see, sir. In any case, he'd be proud of you for taking the call.

Brian turns and leaves. Halverson takes a breath. He goes to the window and looks out.

Brian hasn't been gone more than fifteen seconds. The phone rings. Once. Twice. Three times.

Blackout.

SCENE 3

GREG

(in darkness)

It's a Hail Mary, Rich.

Lights rise on Halverson's office, late that night. Halverson sits at his desk. GREG LUBEY, 40s, his Chief of Staff, sits in an armchair. AMITY HALVERSON, early-50s, Halverson's wife, sits on a couch nearby.

HALVERSON

I know.