

MAGIC AND BIRD

by
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FIRST DRAFT
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FADE IN:

On the ROAR OF A CROWD. It's screaming inside --

INT. RUPP ARENA - NIGHT

Home of the Kentucky Wildcats. A PACKED HOUSE watching a BASKETBALL GAME in full swing. The (predominantly white) USA JUNIOR NATIONAL TEAM running circles around RUSSIA as --

A TITLE CARD READS: WORLD INTERNATIONAL TOURNAMENT
LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY - 1978

The best college players on the planet are in this gym only -- they aren't on the court. They are riding the bench.

MAGIC

You believe this shit, man.

Seated on the bench, watching the game pass them by, are:
LARRY BIRD (21) and EARVIN "MAGIC" JOHNSON (19).

Larry, of course, is the tall, white, bowl cut, acne-scarred, porn stashed, backwoods, "Hick from French Lick" and --

Magic, obviously, is the black, 6'9", megawatt supernova with a Hollywood smile and talent and charisma to burn.

Quite a pair. Both disgruntled, unused to riding the pin.

MAGIC (CONT'D)

Every time coach takes us out,
these cats start coming back. What
the fuck is he doing?

LARRY

He don't care about us. Just wants
to work out his guys. Couldn't pay
me to play for Coach Hall at UK.

MAGIC

Yeah? What'd he do to you?

LARRY

Told my high school coach I was too
slow to play big time college ball.

MAGIC

That was four years ago? -- Remind
me not to get on your bad side.

LARRY

I mean just look what he's running.

They watch the game on the court. It's not quite 1950's, set-shot, white ball, but it's not too far off.

LARRY (CONT'D)

He wouldn't know an ace player if one punched him in the face.

That gets a laugh out of Magic when --

COACH HALL

Come on! Bird. Johnson. Get in.

COACH JOHN B. HALL (40's), the asshole is question, waves our two heroes in. Magic turns to Larry at the scorer's table.

MAGIC

Wanna show this fool something?

Magic flashes a smile as they're buzzed into the game and what happens next is the stuff of basketball legend. The black and white game suddenly jumps into color.

They are on defense at first and when a Russian shot bricks, Larry snags the rebound one handed, firing on an overhand bullet all the way down to court that hits Magic in stride for a break-away dunk that gets the crowd on their feet.

Magic's chance next. He pushes the pace on the break, drawing three defenders at once, tripping all over each other when --

Magic fires a no-look missile to Larry cutting down for a layup that leaves the Ruskie's on skates and --

When they run the break together, it's lightning in a bottle.

Magic drives past three defenders, flying down the left block, dropping a no-look dime over his shoulder to --

Larry, cutting hard down the lane. It's only on his hands for an instant, drawing the last two defenders before --

He dishes it no-look back to Magic for a wide open lay-up and the CROWD goes berserk. So does Magic. Pure joy. He gives Bird a high-five. A taste of what could have been. But the moment is fleeting and --

A SHORT WHILE LATER

It's over. The US has won. The teams shaking hands as the MEDIA descends, trying to wrangle the stars.

REPORTER

Hey Magic. Great game. Can you talk for a minute?

MAGIC

Yeah. Let's get Larry. Hold on.
(looking over crowds)
Where the hell did he go?

Because Larry's already leaving, slipping off the court, out of the glare of the spotlights. Magic can't comprehend.

MAGIC (CONT'D)

Well, I guess it's just me.

Magic turns back to the cameras, lights up his smile as -

We end on Larry, dipping out on the celebration, disappearing alone into the dark of tunnel as we --

FADE TO BLACK.

A TITLE CARD READS: THREE YEARS EARLIER

FADE BACK IN ON:

EXT. FRENCH LICK STREETS - MORNING

A GARBAGE TRUCK rumbling down an impoverished dirt road in a poor, rural farming town of 8,000 people that makes Hoosiers look like it was shot in Manhattan.

TITLE CARD READS: FRENCH LICK, INDIANA

We follow the truck, rumbling past abandoned farms and two room clapboard houses. A worker hanging on the back.

It's Larry Bird (19), wearing a STREET DEPT. UNIFORM like *Martin Sheen in Badlands*. When the truck stops at a house --

Larry hops off and heaves trash into the back of the truck with his friend, KEVIN KEARNS (20). Hard, backbreaking work that Larry doesn't mind. Once they've dumped all the cans --

Larry jumps back on as the truck pulls off again and --

EXT. OTHER FRENCH LICK STREETS - DAY (VARIOUS SHOTS)

Larry and Kearns haul trash through their entire poor, little town until they reach the final house.

After the last bag is tossed, Larry spots a CAN on the ground and he shoots it like a three into the back of the truck and -

EXT. BARN, FRENCH LICK - AFTERNOON

Now that the trash work is done, Larry and Kearn put up BALES OF HAY in a barn. Another back-breaking job that tears your arms up to shreds.

Larry puts up a thousand in the heat of the sun and --

EXT. STREET DEPT. WAREHOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

The work day's finally done. The truck parked in the warehouse, Larry heads out the door.

KEARNS

Hey Birdie, you want a beer?

Kearns hands him a CHAMPAGNE VELVET BEER (*Indiana local piss-cheap beer*) from the back of his CAR and they cheers.

KEARNS (CONT'D)

You want a ride to your grandma's?

LARRY

That's ok, gonna walk. See you later tonight.

KEARNS

Hope you ain't too tired to play.

Larry flips him the bird, walking off with his beer toward --

EXT. LIZZIE KERN'S HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

A tiny, though well kept, one-story clapboard house beside a railroad track where --

Larry's approaching, having walked for a mile. He takes his last sip of beer, tossing it shattering across the tines of tracks and then heads through the door into --

INT. LIZZIE KERNS' HOUSE. THAT MOMENT

Larry's grandmother's house. His sports trophies everywhere, alongside family photos Larry's FOUR BROTHERS and SISTER.

Larry enters to find his grandmother, LIZZIE KEARNS, opening mail in the kitchen. Lizzie's 60. Loving. A straight shooter.

LIZZIE

How was work? You want something for dinner?

LIZZIE (CONT'D)
You want something for dinner?

LARRY
No thanks. Gotta game. Just came by
for my things.

LIZZIE
Know who's going to be there
tonight, don't ya?

She produces a letter. The return address reads: INDIANA
STATE UNIVERSITY.

LARRY
(sarcastic)
Wonder how he found me?

LIZZIE
(cuts him a look)
Your mother's just trying to help.
I don't want to get in the middle,
but at least talk to her, Larry.

LARRY
What do you want me to say? I told
her before, I ain't going back to
school. I'm too happy right here.
That way I get to see you.

Larry gives her a kiss, heading into his stark, fastidiously
clean bedroom to retrieve his basketball gear when --

He pauses for a moment, noticing a PHOTOGRAPH IN THE ROOM:

A buzzed-cut young Larry posing proudly with his father, JOE
BIRD. A Johnny Cash look-alike, only taller and tougher.

Larry regards it for a moment, until A CAR HONKS outside,
breaking his reverie. He heads back out the door.

LIZZIE
Don't come home, you don't win.

He laughs as he goes, leaving Lizzie shaking her head and ---

INT. MARK'S '64 CHEVY - EVENING (A FEW MOMENTS LATER)

MARK BIRD (Larry's brother, 22) is at the wheel while Larry
changes into his uniform beside him. Silence. Larry knows.

LARRY

Don't start in on me too. You came back home for college, same as me.

MARK

Yeah, only difference, I finished. I don't know if you heard, but it takes more than 10 days.

LARRY

That true? I'll be damned. Why didn't somebody tell me?

The brothers laugh. Always bullshitting.

LARRY (CONT'D)

'Sides, I go back, you won't have any friends so just shut up and drive. I don't wanna be late.

MARK

You asked for it. Fine.

And Marks steps on the gas, kicking up dirt on the road and --

EXT. WEST BADEN HIGH SCHOOL GYM - NIGHT

Mark's car finally arrives in a lot packed with pick-ups and Chevy's for an AAU Game. The biggest show in a small town.

Before Mark's even parked, Larry runs for the doors into -

INT. WEST BADEN HIGH SCHOOL GYM - THAT MOMENT

A packed gym. Right out of Hoosiers. On court, a local AAU TEAM getting their asses smacked by an INDIANA ALL-STAR TEAM.

CROWD

Goddamn it! C'mon!

The whole town is here. EIGHT HUNDRED WORKING CLASS LOCALS, fed-up with their team. The only hint of outsiders --

TWO SHARP DRESSERS IN SUITS sitting apart in the stands. In a beat, we'll learn they're:

INDIANA STATE HEAD COACH, BOB KING and more importantly, his assistant, BILL HODGES (35, kind, and plain spoken.)

BOB KING

This is a waste of my time. Where the hell is this kid?

BILL HODGES

His mom said he would be here. Just
hold on. Here he comes!

The whole crowd starts to buzz as Larry enters the gym,
hurrying over to his bench and his coach.

LARRY

Sorry I'm late. Had to wait for a
ride.

AAU COACH

Do you need to warm up or...?

LARRY

No. I'm ready. Let's go.

Larry heads to the scorers table, wiping the bottom of his
shoes with the palms of his hands in a ritual of his.

BOB KING

That's your white knight? Kid looks
like a scarecrow. No wonder he did
not last two weeks with Bob Knight.
Can he even get off the floor?

BILL HODGES

Just wait and you'll see.

He won't have to wait long, because as soon as Larry checks
in the game, King's skepticism is vanquished.

On the very first play, Larry picks the shifty POINT GUARD'S
pocket and takes it in for a left handed lay-up.

Hodges gives his head coach a look as --

OVER THE NEXT TWO AND A HALF QUARTERS:

Larry puts on a display that leaves jaws on the floor.

He runs power-point, dropping behind the back dimes. He
crashes the boards with a stunning sixth sense. He dives
after loose balls and shit talks bigger players and --

Of course, Larry drops j's from such ingenious angles that --

Bob King is left gawking. Watching a savant playing chess
when everyone else's playing checkers. He turns to Hodges.

BOB KING

Why isn't this kid in college?
We need to get him to Terre Haute.

EXT. POOL HALL, WEST BADEN - LATER THAT NIGHT

Larry and Kearns play pool in a grim little joint that looks out of THE LAST PICTURE SHOW. Mark is there too, all drinking beers, watching Larry line up a tough shot on the eight ball.

LARRY

I'll bet you five bucks I'm gonna pocket this.

Surprising to no one, Larry's competitive as all hell.

KEARNS

Five bucks? Let me see it.

LARRY

Well, I don't got it on me. But Shorty still owes me for sweeping last week. Hey Shorty, you got me?

Larry calls out to the owner, SHORTY READER (50's) a little person. Under five feet. A great guy but he shakes his head.

KEARNS

Bet's off. There you go.

BILL HODGES (O.S.)

I can spot you five bucks.

They all turn, surprised, to see Bill Hodges in the door.

BILL HODGES (CONT'D)

You play like you did tonight, don't see how I could lose. And you weren't tired, or nothing.

LARRY

Why'd I be tired against them?

BILL HODGES

Saw those scrapes on your arm. You been putting up hay?

Larry looks at his arms, surprised at Hodges' insight.

KEARNS

We been at it all day. Put up twelve hundred bales. What do you know about that?

BILL HODGES

I told Larry before. I grew up in a place just like this. My whole family are farmers.

LARRY

Yeah, well I thought I told you,
you should stop wasting your time.
Don't know what my mom told you,
but I'm done playing college ball.
You need a player up there, why
don't you talk to Kearns. He'd have
been a great player, ever gotten
the chance.

BILL HODGES

They say the same thing about you.
(that slows Larry a bit)
I don't know what happened in
Bloomington, son, but Indiana
State's a small school. Only 3000
kids. You'd fit in there just fine.
(beat)
You all three should come up. Play
some ball with the team. Take a
look at Terre Haute.

MARK

You actually gotta team there? You
ever even been to the tournament?

Larry and the boys laughs. Hodges takes it in stride.

HODGES

Not yet, but we will. It just takes
the right players.
(of Larry's reluctance)
How 'bout I make you a deal? You
hit that shot and I'll walk out the
door. Never see me again. But you
miss, you owe me a trip to Terre
Haute. What do you think? How's
that sound?

LARRY

I never see you again?
(off Hodges nod)
All right. I'll take that bet.

Larry picks up the cue and lines up his shot.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Don't say I didn't warn you.

CRACK! Hodges watches crestfallen as Larry pockets the ball.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Least you still got the five bucks.

Larry and his friends head off laughing when --

BILL HODGES
Hold on Larry, wait up.

Hodges catches him at the door.

BILL HODGES (CONT'D)
I know why you're scared. I heard
what happened with your dad, but --

LARRY
(stops him immediately)
That got nothing to do with it.
That's just something that
happened.

BILL HODGES
All right. My apologies. Let me
just say one thing... ISU. Indiana.
I don't care. But don't let that
hurt swallow the rest of your life.
Don't be the best player that no
one ever heard of.

With that Hodges goes, leaving Larry, deep in thought as we --

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. SPRING VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL GYM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK - 1975)

THREE YEARS AGO. A packed house. Edge of their seats as --

YOUNG LARRY, a junior for Spring Valley, shoots free throws.
Game on the line. Team down by one. No time on the clock.

Larry drains both. Ice in his 16-year-old veins. The CROWD
goes through the roof. No one more excited than --

Larry's father, Joe Bird, clapping wildly in the stands and --

INT. BIRD FAMILY HOUSE - DAY (FLASHBACK - 1975)

Joe Bird now sits beside his son in the kitchen of their very
humble house getting the hard sell from INDIANA UNIVERSITY
HEAD COACH -- BOBBY KNIGHT (30. Famously hard-ass. The
spitting image of a young Charles Grodin.)

BOBBY KNIGHT
When I recruit a player, Larry, for
the University of Indiana, I expect
them to earn it.
(MORE)

BOBBY KNIGHT (CONT'D)
 To work hard, go to class, to
 graduate, and win, and from what I
 can tell, you got a hell of a
 drive. We'd love for you to come be
 a Hoosier.

Larry shakes Bob's hand, sealing it as his father looks on.

EXT. KIMBALL PIANO FACTORY - DAY (FLASHBACK - 1975)

At grand piano factory, the biggest employer in French Lick --

JOE BIRD (PRELAP)
 -- these experts in Europe, they
 can tell where a piano comes from
 just from the look of the lacquer.

INT. KIMBALL PIANO FACTORY - DAY (FLASHBACK - 1975)

Joe Bird's in the spray booth of a sprawling organ factory,
 lacquering the cabinet of a grand piano. Fine, custom work.
 Larry looks on with pride and --

JOE BIRD (PRELAP)
 One over there could be at Carnegie
 Hall. One piano I painted was gonna
 be on TV. Supposed to at least...

A FEW MOMENTS LATER

Larry follows his father through the main floor of the
 factory, filled with gleaming black pianos. They look like
 coffins.

JOE BIRD (CONT'D)
 Point I'm making I guess, when you
 work on something special -- you
 see it all the way through. From
 the very beginning when it's just
 an idea, all the way to the end,
 and the finishing touches. That's
 something you can be proud of.
 That's what you're going to do.

Larry takes this to heart. And when Joe, a hard living man
 cut right from a Steinbeck novel, puts his hand on Larry's
 shoulder, in what passes for affection, Larry is whole and --

EXT. BIRD FAMILY HOUSE - DAY (FLASHBACK 1975)

A few months later, Larry's leaving for college. He hugs his mom, siblings, and Granny before saying goodbye to his dad.

JOE BIRD

It's a first rate program up there.
It's sure going to be something.
Call us when you're settled.

Joe Bird is not going. They do not have a car. Instead, Larry's uncle, AMOS KEARNS, is going to give him a lift. Larry tosses his ONE BAG in the back and gets in the car.

MARK

Give 'em hell.

Then he's gone, looking back at his Father, waving proudly behind as we DISSOLVE BACK TO:

EXT. FRENCH LICK GRAVEYARD - DAY (1976)

Where 19-year-old Larry stands in a cemetery, Caterpillar hat in hand, looking over a simple grave. His father's. JOE BIRD.

You'll never catch Larry crying, but off his obvious pain --

INT. FLICK'S DINNER, FRENCH LICK - DAY

We finally meet Larry's mother, GEORGIA BIRD, working a waitressing shift at a French Lick greasy spoon.

A hard-working, 45-year-old mother of six with zero self pity and even less patience for fools, she yells at a COOK with her arms full of dishes.

GEORGIA

Where the heck is that burger? I got two tickets waiting already.

COOK

It's coming. Hold on, unless you want it still bleeding.

GEORGIA

I don't care if it's moo-ing. What I don't want to hear's any moaning and groaning when I'm out here busting my hump and you're screwing up tips. Only works, we're a team.

Oh, and she's demanding as well. It runs in the family.
Georgia heads off steaming when ANOTHER WAITRESS approaches.

ANOTHER WAITRESS

Table three just sat down. Think
you might wanna take it.

Georgia's surprised to find Larry, at a table alone and --

A FEW MOMENTS LATER

Georgia sits in the booth with her son. The silence is icy.

GEORGIA

Heard you were working for the
Street Department.

LARRY

Yeah. A few months. Guys are great.
It's not bad.

GEORGIA

And you're staying with Granny?
(Larry nods)
Know she likes having you there.
When you were boys, always did.

A long silence again. Finally, Larry speaks up --

LARRY

You know, I talked to Bill Hodges.

GEORGIA

Ok. Is that right?

LARRY

You didn't tell him where I was?

GEORGIA

I slammed the door in his face.
That's what you said to do right?

It is and she's done it, but her displeasure is clear.

LARRY

I know you're mad that I left but --

GEORGIA

I don't care. It's your choice. You
want to be a bum, fine.

Larry takes a long beat --

LARRY

If I stayed at Indiana, think
things with dad've been different?

That changes the mood. Georgia's armor comes down.

GEORGIA

Your dad quit on us, Larry. That's
not your fault. It's his. It's ok
to be mad.

LARRY

I'm not mad. I'm just asking. You
think if I'd stayed in...?

GEORGIA

Nothing at all would be different.
Some people can't stand things, I
guess.

(beat)

Honey, I miss him too, but if you
stay here and do nothing, you're
gonna end up just like him. It's
time to move on with your life.

Off Larry, considering, cut right to the bone and --

EXT. INDIANA STATE UNIVERSITY - DAY

It's a beautiful day at Indiana State University when Mark's
car arrives at the sleepy campus in Terre Haute, Indiana.

Larry, sitting shotgun, takes in the sights out his windows.
A far cry from the sprawling, crowded quads in Bloomington.

Larry's not immediately repulsed and --

INT. INDIANA STATE UNIVERSITY GYM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Larry, Mark, and Kevin Kearns, all in sneakers and jeans,
enter the gym where a (very skeptical) ISU TEAM practices.
Bill Hodges bounds over, excited to greet them.

BILL HODGES

Glad you changed your mind. Wanna
run for a bit?

LARRY

That's why drove up.

BILL HODGES

All right. Go get changed. We got some shorts and shoes in the locker room, you guys are welcome to use.

LARRY

We'll play in these. It's ok.
That's how we do it at home.

Larry picks up a ball and steps onto the court, still wearing his jeans. The ISU PLAYERS laugh. Must be some kind of joke --

DISMISSIVE PLAYER

This kid's got some fucking balls.

LARRY

I got bigger than you.

And just to go prove his point, Larry puts up a 25 footer that hits nothing by net. Off the ISU TEAM'S eye-roll ---

WE MONTAGE THROUGH A SCRIMMAGE

Where Larry, Mark, and Kevin humiliate the ISU STARTING FIVE.

They pick them apart with back-doors. Defend like a swarm. Hit bombs from so deep the starters throw up their hands and -

Once Larry's last 20-footer drops in their faces, bringing the game to an end, the dismissive player shakes his hand.

DISMISSIVE PLAYER

Hate to see how you play in shorts.

LARRY

Just get a better look at my balls.

Larry and the player both laugh as Hodges approaches.

BILL HODGES

I told you we could use you.

(beat)

It's not Bloomington, Larry. We got a small town feel here. You can just come and play ball. Maybe do something special. What do you say? Wanna get back in the game?

Off Larry, who for the first time, is considering and --

EXT. FLICK'S DINNER, FRENCH LICK - NIGHT

It's dark at the dinner where Georgia Bird's hauling trash to the dumpster at the end of a shift when she sees Larry, standing by her car in the lot. A long beat.

LARRY

Want a hand?

She tosses the bag in the dumpster herself. Tough as nails.

GEORGIA

Heard you went up to Terre Haute.
Mark said you guys played. Are
those boys any good?

LARRY

Not right now, they ain't, no --
(Larry takes a long beat)
But when I get there they will be.

Hold on Georgia a beat, realizing what he's saying.

GEORGIA

You gonna graduate this time?

LARRY

I'll do better than that. I'm gonna
bring home a championship.

That's a pretty tall order. Off Larry's extreme confidence --

CUT TO:

EXT. INDIANA STATE UNIVERSITY - AFTERNOON

A TITLE CARD READS: **TWO YEARS LATER**

-- and a whole lot has changed. The formerly, sleepy little campus is buzzing as STUDENTS hurry across the quad toward --

THE HULMAN CENTER GYM where lines snake out the door for the hottest ticket in town.

ANOUNCER #1 (PRELAP)

Before Larry Bird arrived, the
Indiana State Sycamores had never
so much as even reached the NCAA
tournament but now...

INT. HULMAN CENTER - GYM - AFTERNOON

A packed crowd fills the seats watching Larry (21) and the undefeated ISU SYCAMORES grinding through a tough game against ILLINOIS STATE.

ANOUNCER #1

In his senior year, Larry Bird's team is number one in the nation. With an undefeated record of 18-0, Bird leads college basketball in nearly every statistical category, it's hard to see what stands behind him and an NCAA Championship.

And Larry proves it on the court where with ONE MINUTE LEFT IN THE FOURTH, ISU's down 67-68, Larry's got the ball deep in the corner. DEFENDER painted all over him until --

In a savage move he's made famous, Larry fakes a pass over the defender's head, turning the poor kid around like a dog playing fetch only --

Larry's still got the ball and before the defender even knows it, Larry drains a deep jumper, giving his team the lead.

ANOUNCER #1 (V.O.)

And Bird does it again! Keeping their undefeated season alive.

The CROWD ROARS. Many, ATTRACTIVE YOUNG CO-EDS wearing "I'M A BIRD WATCHER" T-shirt. Larry's face on their chest.

The game should be all over only on the ensuing possession, LEROY (one of Larry's teammates) reaches over the line, bone-headedly fouling the INBOUNDER.

ANOUNCER #1

Oh! Big mistake. That's put Illinois on the line, with a chance to take the lead.

Larry's look could kill. Leroy can't even look at him. And when the ISU INBOUNDER sinks both free-throws, giving his team the lead with just two seconds left --

Leroy knows he's dead-meat. Bill Hodges calls time-out and Larry heads to the bench, steaming with anger.

The Sycamores huddle. Coach draws up a play. Larry's not listening. Eyes burning through Leroy when --

The REF blows the whistle and the team takes the court. Larry whispers to his inbounder, CARL NICKS.

LARRY

Just get me the damn ball.

Nicks knows better than to argue. With two seconds left, he takes the ball out of bounds. Everyone knows where it's going.

At the top of the key, Larry's draped with defenders, but Nicks throws him the ball -- *the CLOCK drops to ONE as --*

Larry spins back, letting loose a long fadeaway over the outstretched fingers of the entire ILLINOIS STATE TEAM that --

BANG! Falls straight through the net as time runs off the clock. Everyone jumps on Larry, who still stares down Leroy.

A REPORTER APPROACHES.

REPORTER

Amazing shot at the end. Larry,
how'd you pull this one off?

LARRY

You watched the game. You just saw.
Why don't you write it yourself?

The Reporter is dumbfounded as Larry storms off into the tunnel, with other things on his mind and --

INT. SYCAMORES LOCKER ROOM, HULMAN CENTER - THAT MOMENT

Barreling into the locker room, Larry beelines for Leroy.

LARRY

Are you happy now, Leroy?

LEROY

Get the fuck out of my face.

It quickly could come to blows. Carl jumps in to defuse.

CARL

C'mon, Larry. We won. It was just a
mistake.

LARRY

We can't make no mistakes. We wanna
finish this run, we gotta fucking
be perfect. You don't want to be
out here, you can get the hell out.

Leroy is furious. Mumbles under breath --

LARRY (CONT'D)
You got something to say?

LEROY
If I did, what's the point? Not
like you let any of us talk, you
fucking Goober.

Leroy heads off to the showers, leaving Larry burning up.

CARL
Just cut him some slack. I know you
want to win, but it's hard on the
guys. You get all the attention.
Makes some fellas feel jealous.

LARRY
Hell, I'm the one should be
jealous.

CARL
Oh yeah. Really? Why's that?

LARRY
'Cause I never got to play beside a
player like Larry Bird.

Off Carl's laugh, knowing Larry is serious. But he's earned
those kind of balls because --

INT. GYM, HOLMEN CENTER - HOURS LATER

When the fans are long gone and the other players have left,
a JANITOR sweeps the dark, empty stands watching --

Larry, shooting free throws in the dark. Again and again.

JANITOR
Larry! Game's over. Why you still
out here shooting 500 free throws?

LARRY
'Cause there's somebody somewhere
shooting five hundred and one.

JANITOR
He don't have a life either?

That gets a laugh out of Larry, who puts up one more and --

DINAH (PRELAP)
Excuse me. Aren't you Larry Bird?

INT. THE BALLYHO - NIGHT

Larry is drinking a beer at his local college bar (*his favorite place outside of the gym*) when a funny, beautiful, down to earth co-ed approaches. DINAH.

DINAH

I don't have one of those t-shirts
but would you sign my magazine?

She places a SPORTS ILLUSTRATED on the bar. A pretty amazing artifact. THE 1977 COLLEGE BASKETBALL PREVIEW. ON THE COVER:

Larry's in his powder blue uniform. TWO COMELY CHEERLEADERS beside him, fingers raised to their lips. The headline reads:

"COLLEGE BASKETBALL'S SECRET WEAPON"

Larry can hardly even look at it. It's goofy as hell.

LARRY

You're not a reporter are you? I
swear to god, I didn't lay a hand
on those girls.

DINAH

You better not, cause I'd kill you.

Then Dinah kisses Larry and we understand, they're a couple.

DINAH (CONT'D)

You wanna get out of here, or you
still putting in work?

She means his beer. Larry downs the rest of it and --

INT. LARRY'S DORM ROOM - LATER

Larry lies with Dinah in bed. Both breathless and flushed. They're not quite smoking cigarettes but you get the point. Larry looks at his feet, hanging over the foot of the bed.

LARRY

They gotta make these beds bigger.

DINAH

Could say the same about you.

Larry elbows her, laughs. She rolls into his arm.

DINAH (CONT'D)

Can I ask you a question? The Sports Illustrated cover, why didn't you give them an interview?

LARRY

Just don't like those reporters. They don't care about basketball. They just wanna know personal stuff. Where you're from? What's your brother's name? What are you doing tomorrow?

Dinah laughs. Assuming Larry is kidding. He's not.

LARRY (CONT'D)

You gotta be careful 'cause a lot of them want to find out what goes on inside you. The private you. They don't even want to talk about basketball. They're interested in knowing who your girlfriend is or why you worked on a garbage truck.

DINAH

And what's so bad about that?

LARRY

It's just nobody's business.

DINAH

Not even mine?

Larry takes a beat, thinking and --

LARRY

You know what I love about playing? Sometimes, you get in a game and just everything's working. You can see all the angles. You can make any shot and when you get in that zone -- like we've been playing on season -- everything else fades away. There's no past. There's no problems. It's just like nothing else matters. Beautifullest thing in the world. Not to think about nothing. That's what I'm trying to do. Finish something. Perfect.

Dinah is wise and knows he's talking about much more.

DINAH

Well, you're 33-0. Who do you think's going to stop you?

LARRY

He's trying. I know.

Larry reaches over to his desk and produces another SPORTS ILLUSTRATED ISSUE. On the cover of this one: MAGIC JOHNSON. Floating to the rim in a top hat and tails.

DINAH

Top hat? Are you kidding? Magic Johnson can't touch you. But... I bet he did give an interview.

Larry manages a laugh, his eyes not leaving Magic as we hear:

ANNOUNCER (PRELAP)

Welcome back to Salt Lake where the Quakers need a new spell if want to stop Magic.

EXT. SALT LAKE CITY - NIGHT (ESTABLISHING)

Outside the SPECIAL EVENTS CENTER in Downtown SALT LAKE CITY, a huge MARQUEE READS:

**1979 NCAA FINAL FOUR - SEMIFINAL
MICHIGAN STATE VS. UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA.**

INT. SPECIAL EVENTS CENTER, SALT LAKE CITY - NIGHT

From high in the stands, Larry and the ISU TEAM (many in cowboy hats and boots) watch Michigan State put a historic hurting on the poor UPENN team.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

And Magic hits another and that's four in a row and the Spartan's just look unstoppable / And Kelser connects again and it's 30-6 and we may just be seeing the best team in Basketball.

From Larry's eagle-eyed P.O.V, we see Magic tear the UPENN team apart. 50-17 at the half and Magic's putting on a show.

He runs a two-on-one break, dishing no-look to a cutting TERRY DONNELLY. Hits a sky-hook in the lane in a move he'll make famous. Nails a 17-foot bank from the wing, shutting up doubters who think he can't shoot as --

Larry watches it all with the eyes of a sniper trying to crosshair his prey, realizing he might be outmatched until --

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
And the ball game is over and it's
not even close. 101-67 and they'll
head to the finals for the first
time in Michigan State History!

The MSU team celebrates. MSU fans in the stands cheering --

MSU FANS
WE WANT BIRD! WE WANT BIRD!

CARL
You're gonna get him all right!

But Larry listens, unmoving, still laser focused on Magic.

CARL (CONT'D)
Come on, Birdie. Let's beat it.
Let's catch a movie or something.
We'll see these suckers on Monday.

Off Larry, considering, as the chants echo out --

MSU FANS
WE WANT BIRD! WE WANT BIRD!

INT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

JOHN HURT is on screen, eating dinner on the Nostromo.

JOHN HURT (ON MOVIE SCREEN)
*The first thing I'm gonna do when I
get back is eat some decent food.*

The whole ISU team watches ALIEN in the dark. Cowboy boots propped up on the seats. Larry watches, distracted as --

YAPHET KOTTO (ON MOVIE SCREEN)
*Listen, I'd rather be eating
something else but, right now I'll
stick to food.*

THEATERS GOERS in front of him CACKLE loudly at the screen.

THEATER GO-ER (O.C.)
Oh-no! Watch out here it comes.

LARRY
(under his breath)
Why don't you shut up down there?

And then the whole audience *SCREAMS!* when the creature bursts out of John Hurt's chest and scatters away on the table.

THEATER GO-ER #2 (O.C.)
Look at him go. Magic, that looked
like you on the break!

The theater go-er's crack up as Larry dawns with realization at who's seated with him in the dark in this theater and --

CARL (PRELAP)
I'll say, that chick was bad-ass.

INT. MOVIE THEATER LOBBY - LATER

The movie is over. Larry and his cowboy attired teammates file into the lobby, still scared out of their gourds when --

The doors swing open behind them and the entire MSU basketball team exits. Magic brings up the rear.

A long silence. The two teams facing off, until --

MSU PLAYER
Howdy pardners. Giddy-up.

The MSU players crack-up at the ISU team standing there in their ten gallon hats.

ISU PLAYER
Go ahead. Laugh all you want. We'll
be riding your ass tomorrow.

MSU PLAYER
Oh yeah, is that what you think?

ISU PLAYER
Man, you better believe it. We
haven't lost all damn year.

MSU PLAYER
Gonna make it sad when you do.

As they go on talking shit -- Magic sidles up next to Bird.

MAGIC
Hey Larry. Good to see ya. What'd
ya think of the movie?

Magic, all smiles, happy to see an old friend only --

LARRY
Don't fucking talk to me, man.

Larry moves off, pulling his teammates out with him, leaving Magic just stunned. Larry already has his game face on as --

BRYANT GUMBLE (V.O.)
 Welcome Ladies and Gentleman to the
 NCAA Championship. It's Indiana
 State against Michigan State. I'm
 Bryant Gumble and the fans here are
 going bananas.

EXT. SPECIAL EVENTS CENTER, SALT LAKE CITY - NIGHT

Crowds pour inside for the most anticipated final in College Basketball History.

TITLE CARD READS: **NCAA CHAMPIONSHIP GAME**
 INDIANA STATE VS. MICHIGAN STATE
 MARCH 25, 1979

BRYANT GUMBLE (V.O.)
 It's the Bird against Magic. All
 the superlatives have been used and
 believe me, they have been
 warranted.

INT. TRAINING ROOM, SPECIAL EVENTS CENTER - NIGHT

Larry, more stone faced than ever, sits on the training table in his uniform getting a bad left thumb taped up.

TRAINER
 How's that feel tonight, Larry?

LARRY
 I don't care. Yeah, that's fine. I
 just wanna get out there.

Larry's focus is frightening. A fighter waiting for the bell as the roar of crowd crescendos through the walls and --

INT. COURT - SPECIAL EVENTS CENTER - NIGHT

The crowd's just going nuts when the teams take the court.

Larry and Magic shake hands. There is no smiling now. It's just war. They both position off the tip and --

Here we go. The Ref tosses the ball and Michigan gets it first, feeding to Magic at the line.

He makes a quick move to the basket, blowing by his defender, but trips on the way and the Ref blows him for traveling.

Larry helps Magic up, shoving him briskly away, running off down the court. Magic knows now, that's how it will be and --

MUSIC CUE KICKS IN AS WE MONTAGE THROUGH THE GAME

Larry's double-teamed on the block, dishing it off to his POINT GUARD at the key who neatly buries a jumper and --

Magic takes a rebound coast to coast, gliding in for a lay-up, exploding in a high-five as the ref calls a foul and --

Larry cuts along the baseline, catching a pass in the corner, draining at 20-foot in two defenders' faces and --

Magic answers right back with a hook of his own which has Georgia Bird, screaming mad in stands and --

Larry hopes to answer right back but Heaton (his center) misses a wide open jumper and --

Leroy (his point guard) dribbles the ball off his foot and --

We get the sense that Larry knows, no matter how much he wants it, it's going to be a long haul because --

The MSU team is just way too athletic. With Magic pushing the break, they hit shot after shot and --

On defense, Larry is swarmed at all times by two and three spartan defenders, forced to give up the ball, leaving --

Larry shaking his head as the clock ticks out at half-time with the Spartan's leading 37-28 at the break and --

INT. ISU LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Larry paces the room as Coach address the exhausted team.

COACH HODGES

You gotta dig in. I know they're fast, but you gotta get back. Don't let them run on the break. We haven't lost the whole season. You wanna fucking start now?

Larry's studying the faces of his rattled teammates, knowing if they're going to come back, it will be on his back so --

INT. COURT - SPECIAL EVENTS CENTER - NIGHT

-- when the second half starts, Larry is on the offensive --

He forces up a tough shot over three MSU defenders, but it catches the iron and --

When he posts up down low with three defenders all over him, his teammates throw it away, leaving Larry just fuming and --

When Larry shoots free throws at the line, trying to will his team back, the greatest shooter in NCAA history misses and --

Larry hangs his head, hope starting to wain as --

Magic and Kesler continue to tear the defense apart with a half-court alley-oop that's rips out Bird's heart.

Even Terry Donnelly is knocking down jumpers and before Larry can blink the scoreboard tells us his team's down 16 and --

He looks to the stands where Dinah and his mom feel his pain, knowing what this all means, willing him to continue so --

Larry digs in a last time, knowing this is his chance. On the next defensive possession, he snags a tough rebound, taking a foul from Greg Kesler that sends the MSU star to the bench --

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

That's four fouls on Kesler and
he'll have to sit down. There may
be life in this yet.

And Larry makes sure to squeeze it, hitting Nicks for a lay-up with a behind the back dagger and --

A few seconds later, Larry hits a tough turn around that cuts the lead to just nine and on the ensuing possession --

Nicks steals a pass! Feeds it Bird on the block who hits another turn around J narrowing the lead to just six and --

MSU COACH HEATHCOAT's livid and Georgia Bird and the ISU FANS all explode, tasting a little new life but --

THAT'S AS CLOSE AS THEY'LL GET. A few seconds later --

Kelser checks back in the game and on the very next play, he hits Magic back door, soaring right down the lane for a one-handed slam that posterizes three ISU Defenders as --

Larry watches, just helpless as the ball drops through nylon, taking the last of his hope right out the door with it.

Magic walks to the line, eyeing Larry as he goes, saying -- this game is over and --

Larry's aware that it is as Magic sinks his foul shot and saunters back on D, flashing that smile as --

Larry's shoulders drop, knowing there's no coming back and --

A FEW MINUTES LATER

It's over. Magic heaves a full court pass to a wide-open Kelser who windmills it in as the final horn blows and --

Just like that, the dream's gone. Jubilation for the Spartans. Agony for Larry and the Sycamores.

For a moment, as the confetti falls and the fans storm the court and the press all descend --

Magic and Larry pass each other in the crowd but this time neither star stops or looks the other man the eye --

They just lightly brush by as Bird exits the court with his heart in his throat, only this time -- WE DO NOT GO WITH HIM.

We stay focused on Magic, swarmed by reporters. With his victorious arm draped around a YOUNG BRYANT GUMBLE.

YOUNG BRYANT GUMBLE

Magic, not only were you a leader on offense, but I thought you did a great job on Larry Bird, in the zone, denying him the ball --

MAGIC

Yes - uh - coach uh - gave us a good game plan to go against Larry Bird and all we had to do was go out and do it. That's what we done.

YOUNG BRYANT GUMBLE

Well congratulations. Super ball game.

MAGIC

Thank you!

Magic heads off to celebrate, catching a last look at --

Larry, in grief on the bench, crying into a towel with a new mission in life. Defeat the man who just killed his dreams.

But that needs to wait because this time belongs to Magic. As he's lifted up onto his teammates' shoulders and cuts down the nets, we're aware in this moment --

The world's his for the taking. We're along for the ride as --

WHITE NEWS REPORTER (PRELAP)
*The National Basketball Association
 in its 33rd season is troubled...*

CUT TO:

A MONTAGE OF ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE:

A WHITE REPORTER BROADCASTS ON THE NIGHTLY NEWS.

WHITE NEWS REPORTER (ON TV)
*...by diminishing crowds and
 declining ratings. Signs that fan
 interest might be waining...*

STOCK FOOTAGE OF EMPTY SEATED ARENAS. OF TAPED-DELAYED GAMES.

CUT TO:

WALTER KRONKITE'S EVENING SHOW COVERING THE VERY SAME NEWS.

WALTER KRONKITE (V.O.)
*Difficulty some say is compounded
 by a question of black and white.*

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE OF A COUNTRY AT WAR. RACE RIOTS IN WATTS.
 WHITE BUSSING RIOTS IN BOSTON. CITIES TORN AT THE SEAMS.

WALT FRAZIER (PRELAP)
*"It's a known fact that you need
 your white superstars, uh --"*

SIDE-BURNED, COOL AS FUCK WALT FRAZIER interviewed on court.

WALT FRAZIER (ON TV) (CONT'D)
*"You just need more white ball
 players on the team for white fans
 to identify with."*

A PUBLICITY STILL OF THE ALL BLACK 1979 NEW YORK KNICKS

WHITE NEW YORK FAN (PRELAP)
 This team? Forget about it.

A RACIST WHITE FAN INTERVIEWED OUTSIDE MADISON SQUARE GARDEN.

WHITE NEW YORK FAN (ON TV) (CONT'D)
 You want me to spend my money
 watching the fucking New York
 Niggerbockers? Fuck off.

AT THE BOSTON GARDEN, A WHITE CELTICS FAN SHARES HIS OPINION.

WHITE BOSTON FAN (PRELAP)
*It's turning off a lot a white
 costumers from coming to the game,
 you know?*

FEMALE REPORTER (O.C.)
 Why?

WHITE BOSTON FAN (PRELAP)
*I think there's still a -- there's
 a conflict between the white and
 the black and uh -- I don't enjoy
 going to the basketball and seeing
 all black players. They're only out
 for themselves.*

SWEET ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE SHOWS A PRIMARILY BLACK, HIGH-FLYING
 THOUGH OCCASIONALLY HOT-DOGGING, QUICK TO BRAWL GAME.

DARYL DAWKINS shatters the backboard on a tomahawk drunk.
 "TINY" NATE ARCHIBALD pinballs through the court. MAURICE
 LUCAS "THE ENFORCER" exchanges blows with DAWKINS in the
 middle of center court in an infamous brawl. The ICEMAN
 GEORGE GERVIN and skywalking DR. J finger-roll in high-style.

ANOTHER WHITE REPORTER (V.O.)
 And those are just the issues on
 the court. It was not a good week
 for the National Basketball
 Association...

ANOTHER WHITE REPORTER BROADCAST FROM BEHIND HIS NEWS DESK.

ANOTHER WHITE REPORTER (ON TV)
 ...facing allegations that cocaine
 use was common among its players.

A FLURRY OF NEWSPAPER HEADLINES ALL ASK: "IS DRUG USE
 RAMPANT IN THE NBA?" A BARRAGE OF RACIST IMAGERY OF LATE
 70'S BLACK EXPLORATION. PIMPS, DRUG DEALERS, and HOODLUMS.

ANOTHER WHITE REPORTER (V.O.)
 Desperate to rehabilitate both its
 reputation and its profits, the NBA
 turns its last hope to two college
 stars. One, bound for Boston...

ARCHIVAL IMAGE SHOWS LARRY, holding up his new Celtic's jersey beside RED AUERBACH, the legendary, grinning, cigar-chewing, Rodney Dangerfield-esque Boston GM.

ANOTHER WHITE REPORTER (V.O.)
 ...and the other, the presumptive
 number one pick, who's fate and
 perhaps the fate of the league,
 will be sealed tomorrow by a coin
 toss determining which city will
 earn the privilege of drafting the
 heralded phenom from East Lansing.

END OUR MONTAGE on this scene as we hear:

LARRY OBRIEN (PRELAP)
 Who's going to call it? Chicago?

CUT TO:

A SPLIT SCREEN. IN ONE FRAME:

INT. NBA COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE - DAY

LARRY O'BRIEN, NBA Commissioner (*and future namesake of the Championship Trophy*) waits coin in hand, at his desk on the speaker phone with --

INT. CHICAGO BULLS FRONT OFFICE - DAY

ROD THORN and the Bulls Front office in our second screen.

ROD THORN (BULLS GM)
 Yeah, we'd love to. We call heads.

That fateful call is heard in our third screen by:

INT. LOS ANGELES FORUM - DAY

JERRY BUSS (*who will meet much later in earnest*) smoking a cigarette on the speaker phone in the infamous FORUM CLUB. (*More on that coming too!*)

LARRY OBRIEN
 Ok, gentleman. Here we go.

They all wait, edge of their seats, as the coin leaps off his finger, flipping forever in slow-mo until finally it falls --

LARRY OBRIEN (CONT'D)
 Tails. L.A., the pick's yours.

ROD THORN
Jesus Friggin' Christ!

Crushing despair in Chicago. Jubilation at the Forum. Jerry Buss pumps his fist as we hear --

COOKIE (PRELAP)
L.A.'s a long flight away. What are we going to do?

INT. COOKIE'S DORM ROOM, MICHIGAN STATE - NIGHT

EARVIN "MAGIC" JOHNSON (19) lays on a dorm room floor with his college sweetheart, EARLEATHA "COOKIE" Kelly (19).

MAGIC
Whatchu mean? We'll be fine. You don't need be worried.

Magic tries to kiss his way out of it. Cookie's unswayed. Ambitious and grounded, she's head-over-heels about Earvin.

COOKIE
I don't need to be worried? You, out in Hollywood, meeting groupies and movie stars...

MAGIC
You think that's what I want?

She cuts him a look.

COOKIE
Maybe not Earvin, but Magic.

MAGIC
You said Magic? Who's that?

They laugh. Some more kisses. But she is clearly concerned.

COOKIE
It's a lot. I'm just worried. They put so much on your shoulders to come save this whole league and --

MAGIC
Baby, I've been there before. When I was in high school and there was a fight, the principal would say "*Magic! Come and talk to these kids.*" This won't be any different.

COOKIE

This isn't a fight in the school cafeteria. These are grown men you'll be working with.

MAGIC

You so worried, then come? Gonna have my own place. Go to the beach everyday. You look nice on a towel.

COOKIE

Oh yeah, and what about school? I got another year till I'm done. I'm not living off you.

(beat)

Earvin, I just want to know. Are we together or not?

MAGIC

Of course we are... sort of.

Cookie is hurt, only Magic is laughing.

MAGIC (CONT'D)

I'm just playing. Come on. Baby, you know you're my girl. You got nothing to worry about.

Magic reassures her with a kiss and --

EXT. EAST LANSING, MICHIGAN - A FEW DAYS LATER

In a gritty, industrial city of smoke stacks and factories --

EXT. EARVIN'S CHILDHOOD HOME - DAY

Earvin says goodbye to Cookie and his family at their modest home. Very tight quarters for TEN BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

A taxi waits outside at Magic gives hugs and jokes to them all, finally arriving at his father, EARVIN SR. An incredibly hard working man wearing Dickies.

EARVIN SR.

Wish I could take you myself. Got another shift in an hour.

MAGIC

That's all right, dad. The Laker's are paying.

They hug. Very close. Very proud.

EARVIN SR.

You stay humble out there.

Magic nods, arriving lastly at his mother, CHRISTINE JOHNSON. She hands him a book. THE BIBLE.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON

You're a unifier, June Bug. Be that for your team. And you be good to that girl. (*Cookie.*)

BROTHER

You go slay 'em, Magic!

CHRISTINE JOHNSON

(hates this name)

I did not name you that. Remember who you are, Earvin. Do not lose yourself there.

MAGIC

Me, ma? Never.

And Magic flashes his smile and then gets in the car as his family all wave, leaving the old, cold world behind for --

EXT. LOS ANGELES - DAY

A postcard Los Angeles sky. Palm Trees. Bentleys. The California Dream. It's viewed out the windows of --

I/E. LIMOUSINE - DAY

A WHITE STRETCH LIMO cruising through Beverly Hills with Magic in back. Like he's driving through heaven.

FEMALE DRIVER (O.C.)

Pretty here, isn't it?

MAGIC

Yeah. It's pretty all right.

The driver he's smiling at is -- A PLAYBOY BUNNY, wearing a chauffeur's cap on her head and hardly anything else.

MAGIC (CONT'D)

I thought most limo drivers were fat white cats in suits?

FEMALE DRIVER

Dr. Buss made a request. Said stars like you deserved only the best.

MAGIC
Dr. Buss said that, huh?

Magic considers, appreciative when --

MAGIC (CONT'D)
Slow down. Pull over a minute.

-- out the window he spots TREES BENDING WITH ORANGES. The Driver does as instructed and --

EXT. BEVERLY HILLS - STREET

Magic steps from the Limo and walks up to a lawn outside a shimmering mansion and plucks an ORANGE from a tree. He hardly believes this is real and --

EXT. THE LOS ANGELES FORUM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

The limo arrives at the VIP ENTRANCE to the L.A. Forum. "*The finest arena since the Roman Colosseum.*" Magic admires it.

FEMALE DRIVER
You need a ride home... or maybe
just a friend for a drink, why
don't you give me call.

She hands him her number. It just gets better and better.

INT. THE FORUM - DAY

Magic enters his new home court, shaking hands and chatting up every STAFFER in the joint.

MAGIC
Nice to meet ya. Magic Johnson.
Nice to meet ya! Great hat.

They are utterly perplexed by this young Rookie's sparkle because when Magic reaches --

INT. LOCKER ROOM, FORUM - DAY

He finds a funeral atmosphere. THE LOS ANGELES LAKERS of 1979 are not a team of charisma. At least, they aren't yet.

Bright eyed and bushy tailed, Magic goes around the room introducing himself to his grown-ass new teammates.

TO MICHAEL COOPER, the high flying, hard partying forward --

MAGIC

Hey Coop. Nice to meet ya. Can't wait to hit you with those lobs. We could call it a COOP-A-LOOP!

TO JAMAL WILKES, the rangy spot-up, deep threat.

MAGIC (CONT'D)

Hey Wilkes, you the man. Keep your hands up. Be ready. I'm gonna find you those threes.

TO VETERAN POINT GUARD NORM NIXON, who's not happy at all.

MAGIC (CONT'D)

Hey Norm! Great to me you. Proud to be on the same team as the silkiest handle in the league!

Nixon hates him immediately. In fact, no one knows what to make of this kid. They wait eagerly to see what happens when -

Magic finally approaches the captain, KAREEM ABDUL JABAR, who's reading the NEW YORK TIMES by his locker.

MAGIC (CONT'D)

Hey Cap, nice to meet you. It's an honor to be here and be part of your team.

Magic sticks out his hand. Kareem looks at it a beat and walks straight out of the room, leaving Magic just hanging.

MICHAEL COOPER

Welcome the NBA "Magic." Hope you ready to save the league!

Off Magic, crestfallen as his new teammates laugh and --

EXT. MAGIC'S CULVER CITY APARTMENT - EVENING

A bag of groceries under his arm, Magic heads into his new L.A. pad. A sunbaked apartment complex built around a pool. On MELROSE PLACE, this set-up's inviting. In reality, kinda sad. Magic passes through toward door and --

INT. MAGIC'S CULVER CITY APARTMENT - EVENING

He keys into his pre-furnished apartment, setting his groceries in the kitchen, and takes in the space. Empty. Impersonal. For a twenty-year-old kid, it feels a long way from home. Off the sound of a RINGING PHONE --

MAGIC (PRELAP)
...and did Mom make the chicken?

INT. MAGIC'S CULVER CITY APARTMENT - A FEW HOURS LATER

(*The original*) PERRY MASON on tv. Magic on the phone with his family back home. Microwave dinner on his lap. Pretty bleak.

PEARL (FILTERED)
No. Dad made some ribs. They were overcooked, but still good. How's it going out there?

MAGIC
Oh, you know, it's great. Really getting along. The team is real nice. And L.A. is just great.

Magic lies through his teeth as we INTERCUT WITH:

INT. MAGIC'S CHILDHOOD HOME, EAST LANGSING - NIGHT

Magic's sister, PEARL, on the phone in their very missed little home. Loving, family chaos around her.

MAGIC
How's Cookie doing? You see her?

PEARL
She checks in now and then. Busy working at school. Got a job at Alliance in the clothing department.

MAGIC
Yeah, she told me. That's great. And how's mom and dad doing --

PEARL
They're good. You know -- Earvin. Sorry. I gotta run. Dad's just about to head out and I gotta make up his lunch. Call you later, ok.

MAGIC
Yeah, call me later. I'm --

But she's hung up the phone as we end on: Magic, with the vacant receiver. In the empty apartment. Microwave tray on his lap. He pushes it away, feeling sorry for himself when --

THE PHONE RINGS again. Magic answers immediately.

MAGIC (CONT'D)

Yeah, you better call back. Hanging up on you brother like -- oh!

(he sits up on the sofa)

No, I'm sorry. Dr. Buss? I thought you were my sister. We were just on the... do I like Donuts? You bet... Yeah, I think I can find it. Let me just grab a pen.

Magic fumbles for a pen, scribbling down an address and --

INT. LOS ANGELES DONUT SHOP - MORNING

A few days later, Magic sits in a greasy Donut Shop, sharing a box of chocolate donuts with his boss, the Lakers owner --

DR. JERRY BUSS. A Burt Reynolds-handsome, 50-year-old playboy with a porn star mustache and western denim shirt unbuttoned mid-chest. A true American original.

BUSS

...and how are you liking the apartment?

MAGIC

Oh, it's terrific. Thanks a lot.

BUSS

I thought it would be a good base to get acclimated in town. Close to the practice facilities and all but...

(chewing over donut)

I own all kinds of property. Places all over town so if there's something else that you'd like, don't hesitate to just ask.

MAGIC

Thank you so much. It's great.

BUSS

Well, it's the least I can do. And how do you like the donuts? The chocolate ones are my favorite.

Magic smiles at Buss. Not your typical owner.

BUSS (CONT'D)

I know how it is, being in a new place is tough.

(MORE)

BUSS (CONT'D)

I just bought the team too, so it's my first year as well. We'll get through it together because I've got a plan.

(then)

Do you like football at all, Magic?
Something I want you to see.

INT. DARK TUNNEL - DAY

And then Dr. Buss is leading Magic through a dark, noisy tunnel. Like Henry Hill at the Copa.

BUSS

See, what the league doesn't get -- they think the problem is race, but they're wrong. It's the product. It's stale. I've got a dream for the Lakers. I want to put on a show. Basketball's not just a game, it should be entertainment. The hottest ticket in town and Magic, that's why you're here.

Magic must squint as they emerge from the tunnel into the blazing hot sun, blaring down above --

EXT. ROSE BOWL STADIUM - DAY

-- where Magic and Buss emerge directly onto the field of a USC Football Game. The energy and scale are just seismic.

Buss lights a cigar, pointing Magic toward the band.

BUSS

See the spectacle, Magic? With the band and the dancers. That's what brings out a crowd.

Magic takes in the moment. The roar of the stadium. The legs of the cheerleaders.

BUSS (CONT'D)

I used to go to a classy club in Santa Monica called The Horn. Beautiful dancers. The works. And before they would come out, they would dim all the lights, get everyone all excited assing "Showtime!" And everyone would go nuts. That's what I'm bringing to the Lakers. The best food.

(MORE)

BUSS (CONT'D)

The best seats. The prettiest women in town, dancing right on the court. This is Hollywood, Magic, and we have to give them a show.

MAGIC

That sounds great, Dr. Buss, but these older guys, I don't know -- they don't play like I play --

BUSS

That's exactly why I got you. Kareem's a great player but he doesn't have *IT*. He's a philosophizing, black Muslim who even hates his own fans.

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. FORUM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Kareem in a Dashiki approached by an adoring YOUNG WHITE FAN.

YOUNG WHITE FAN

Hey Kareem! You're my favorite. Could I please get an autograph?

KAREEM

Go fuck yourself, kid.

The kid starts to cry. Kareem never looks back.

BUSS (PRE-LAP)

That's doesn't exactly put the butts in the seats.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. ROSE BOWL STADIUM - AS BEFORE

Magic, listening on the sidelines to Buss.

BUSS

But you, Magic? You got *IT* come out of your ears. Don't believe me? Just listen.

Because right at this moment, the crowd has discovered Magic and Buss on the field and a chant's begun to ring out --

CROWD

Magic! Magic! Magic! Magic!

BUSS
Go on, wave your hand.

Magic waves to the crowd, sending them into a frenzy.

BUSS (CONT'D)
This is Hollywood, Magic, and we
need a star. You can't run from the
spotlight. I want you to grab it.

Magic soaks up the applause. Hard to say no to that and --

EXT. MALIBU - NIGHT

Waves crash in the moonlight as Magic's date continues at --

I/E. DONALD STERLING'S MALIBU MANSION - NIGHT

-- where a glamorous beach party rages. Dr. Buss weaves Magic through an audacious home full of STARLETS and CELEBRITIES --

BUSS
Hello Jamie. Hey there Connie.
Looking special tonight.

LEGGY WOMEN kiss Dr. Buss. He seems to run this whole town.
Magic is absolutely enthralled as Buss continues his sermon.

BUSS (CONT'D)
All the glitz you see here, I want
that flash on the court. When
people think of New York, what do
they think of? The Yankees. The
Lakers will be that for L.A. and
you're gonna be our Babe Ruth. And
all this comes with that.

He waves his hand over the party. The money. The women.
Handing Magic a glass of Champagne.

MAGIC
Oh, no thanks. I don't drink.

BUSS
That's alright. No, that's great.
There's plenty of ways to get high.

Magic watches Buss down his own drink and then --

INT. HOLLYWOOD NIGHTCLUB - VERY LATE AT NIGHT

Many hours later, Magic sits VIP with a very drunk Buss watching a parade of beautiful women dance at the club.

BUSS

That's Janet White. Isn't she
gorgeous? I bought her that dress.

He's not talking about the dance floor. He is flipping through a PHOTO ALBUM he's brought. Inside, page after page of polaroid pics of Dr. Buss and YOUNG WOMEN.

BUSS (CONT'D)

This is the premiere of Saturday
Night Fever. That's Kiki DuCette,
she was one of the backup
dancers... This is Angela Tarpetti,
she's a really sweet girl, I
actually knew her back in Wyoming.
But she didn't look like this then.

Magic's jaw on the floor. As creepy as this sounds, Buss is actually sweet. A sex addict, but sweet.

MAGIC

Are all owners like you? Cause Dr.
Buss - I don't know. All these
ladies in here, you must have a
jump shot I don't know about.

JERRY BUSS

No, son. My talent's up here.
(points to his brain)
Got scholarships to good schools.
Tried the straight life for a
while, but it wasn't for me. Went
into the real estate business. Had
to give Jack Kemp the Chrysler
Building to buy the Lakers, but you
know, Magic, it was worth it.

MAGIC

Dr. Buss! You owned the Chrysler
Building?

Buss nods, eyes dreaming. Waxing very nostalgic.

BUSS

Soon as the deals were all signed,
I got the keys to the Forum. Bought
a bottle of Jack. Went in the
middle of the night.

INT. LOS ANGELES FORUM - (FLASHBACK)

A SINGLE SPOTLIGHT SPARKS ON in the empty arena illuminating Dr. Buss. Giddy. Drunk. Standing center court, said bottle of whiskey bottle in hand.

BUSS (V.O.)
I stood and took it all in.
Screamed at the top of my lungs --

BUSS
I FUCKING OWN THIS PLACE MAN!

Buss's voice echoes out. Followed by his laughter as we --

RETURN TO:

INT. NIGHT CLUB - AS BEFORE

Jerry and Magic, as before in the club. Deep in his reverie.

BUSS
I wanted that my whole life. And
now I've fucking got it. Magic, I
want that for you.

He puts his arm around Magic. Fatherly. Drunkenly. Earnestly.

BUSS (CONT'D)
You gotta make this team yours.
These old guys take it for granted,
but you can't sleep walk through
life. Don't ever let anybody tell
you not to be who you are or live
how you want. What's all this for
if you don't?

Off Magic, who's found his shaman in life as we end on:

INT. LOS ANGELES FORUM - (FLASHBACK)

This image. Jerry Buss, laying snow angel, center court.
Empty bottle in hand. Crying tears of pure joy and --

INT. SAN DIEGO SPORTS ARENA - NIGHT

A few months later, Magic stands courtside in his LAKER'S
WARM-UPS as the ANNOUNCER calls out the starting line-ups.

TITLE CARD READS: **OCTOBER 12, 1979**

CLIPPERS ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 ...and starting tonight in his
 first professional appearance, a
 6'9" Guard out of Michigan State,
 Earvin Johnson.

Magic takes the court, ripping off his warm-up only -- his
 foot gets caught in the pant leg and he falls to the ground.

The CLIPPERS CROWD jeers. Not the start Magic hoped for and --

ONCE WE'RE INTO THE GAME

...it doesn't get too much better. Trying too hard, Magic
 forces up a bad shot. He turns over the ball attempting a too
 flashy pass. He's beat badly on defense and can't find his
 rhythm until --

COACH PAUL WESTHEAD finally pulls him out of the game and
 Magic, deflated, takes a seat on the bench as WE DISSOLVE TO:

10 SECONDS LEFT IN THE GAME

...it looks like Magic and Showtime's debut will be spoiled.

BRENT MUSBERGER (V.O.)
 The Clippers are leading by one
 with 10 seconds left in the game.
 Just need to run out the clock and -
 - HOLY COW! I don't believe it.

A Clippers player, FREEMAN WILLIAMS, dribbles the ball of his
 foot and it rolls out of bounds.

BRENT MUSBURGER (V.O.)
 Freeman Williams has given the
 Lakers new life!

The crowd's apoplectic. Westhead calls a time out with THREE
 SECONDS left and The Lakers gather as he draws up the play.

PAUL WESTHEAD
 Magic, cut to the basket. Kareem'll
 be open at the line. We got one
 shot. Get it done.

The Lakers retake the floor. DON FORD inbounding the ball.
 The REF'S WHISTLE BLOWS and Magic cuts to the basket,
 clearing out his defender, leaving --

Kareem open at the foul line. Ford inbounds him the ball and
 he immediately soars for a SKY HOOK that's --

BRENT MUSBURGER (V.O.)
Good! Lakers win. Score it!

And the Lakers go nuts. Well, at least Magic does, rushing Kareem, jumping into his arms like he's just saved the world.

BRENT MUSBURGER (V.O.)
And Magic Johnson is out there celebrating like they just won the NCAA championship.

Magic's jumping up and down. Hugging Kareem's neck. Kareem's extremely uncomfortable.

KAREEM
What the fuck are you doing? We've got 81 more of these.

MAGIC
You keeping hitting that shot, I'll hug you 81 more times.

Kareem doesn't know what to say. It's the first game of the season but it's already clear, there's Magic in the air as --

WE MONTAGE THROUGH THE 1979 LAKERS SEASON

And Showtime is on. At the first home game at the Forum, Dr. Buss paces nervously on the baseline as --

CHUCK HEARN (V.O.)
Ladies and Gentleman, making their debut today at the Forum, please welcome -- The Laker Girls!

And FOUR USC and FOUR UCLA dancers, all young, taut, and painfully hot, dance into the arena. The CROWD goes berserk. Buss' smile, ear to ear as --

- During a game against Phoenix, Magic shake and bakes on the break, hitting a streaking Jamal Wilkes for a slam and --

- On another fast break, Magic goes behind the back, no-look to Michael Cooper who throws down a dunk as --

- THE STARS sitting courtside jump out of their seats. JACK NICHOLSON and STALLONE. BO DEREK and FRANK SINATRA. It's the hottest party in town and Magic's the number one star --

- We see photographs of Magic, smiling to reporters in the Locker room. In the ice bath. On the court being interviewed:

MAGIC (ON TV)
I just want everyone to have fun.

- It continues at night when Magic dances with Dr. Buss at PIP'S NIGHTCLUB in BEVERLY HILLS, alongside PRINCE and MICHAEL DOUGLASS and the hottest women on earth and --

- ON MOVIE NIGHT AT THE PLAYBOY MANSION, Magic sits with Buss in Hef's pool having a hard time paying attention to STAR WARS on an outdoor screen while PLAYMATES lick his ears and --

- It's just as glitzy on the court. Even Kareem has a laugh after hitting a skyhook off a Magic no-look. His energy's just infectious and --

- It peaks on court in the WESTERN CONFERENCE FINALS when Kareem hugs Magic, lifting his finger up to the rafters after defeating the SEATTLE SUPERSONICS 4-1 and --

BRENT MUSBURGER (V.O.)
LA's headed back to the NBA FINALS.
Get ready for Showtime, America!

- As Magic cruises with Buss in the back of a limo through the neon-lit Sunset Strip, WOMEN draped all around him, it feels like the ride will glide to a championship until --

WE END MONTAGE AT:

INT. FORUM - NIGHT

A TITLE CARD READS: **GAME 5 - THE 1980 NBA FINALS.**
LAKERS VS. SIXERS
THE SERIES IS TIED 2-2

And Magic's Lakers are up in a tight game. Kareem can't be stopped. He's already got 24 when --

He gets the ball at the right post, pivoting into the lane, for a sweet finger roll that drops through the net only --

When Kareem lands, his ankle rolls badly and he nearly falls to the ground, limping off to the sidelines.

BRENT MUSBERGER (V.O.)
Kareem's hurt! Kareem's hurt.
There's no question about it.

Magic and the Lakers' fans watch in stunned silence as Kareem is carried into the tunnel.

BRENT MUSBERGER (V.O.)
They would be in more than serious trouble without him. I don't think they can beat this club.

JACK NICHOLSON slams his hat to the ground as Magic watches Kareem disappear, his ride careening to a halt and --

INT. LOCKER ROOM, FORUM - LATER

Immediately after the game (which the Lakers have squeaked out) Magic enters to the locker room to find --

Kareem in a cast, burgundy turtleneck, and crutches.

MAGIC

What's the word? You'll be good?
We're gonna need you tomorrow.

KAREEM

They think it's a broken fibula
probably. Still waiting on the x-
rays. I can't travel to Philly.

Off Magic, taking that news like a shot in the gut and --

PAUL WESTHEAD (PRELAP)

I know now's not the time, but I've
got another piece of news.

INT. LAX TERMINAL, WAITING AREA - NIGHT

The mood is real bleak as the Lakers wait to board their flight out to Philly. Norm Nixon looks sunk. Jamal Wilkes, wrung out. Michael Cooper is stunned. While a few seats away -

PAUL WESTHEAD

Rookie of the year voting came out.
They'll announce it later today.

Coach Westhead sits with Magic, having a intense one on one.

MAGIC

Ok. Well who won?

PAUL WESTHEAD

Larry.

MAGIC

(he's crushed)
Was it close?

Coach hands Magic a note with the numbers.

MAGIC (CONT'D)

63-3?! That a joke?

PAUL WESTHEAD

Go out tomorrow, prove 'em wrong.
We're going to need you, to win.

(then)

*"If it were done when 'tis done,
then 'twere well. It were done
quickly."*

(off Magic's blank stare)

MacBeth. Do you get it?

MAGIC

You want me to kill these
motherfuckers?

PAUL WESTHEAD

Right on. Yes, I do. We need some
Magic tomorrow.

Off Earvin, inspired. Ready to seize the call and --

INT. COMMERCIAL PLANE - NIGHT

The Lakers, boarding their flight. (*Teams flew commercial
back then. Starters, First Class. Bums, back in coach.*)

Nixon and Wilkes in First Class, looking up when they hear --

SINGING VOICE (O.S.)

*People let me tell you / There's a
time in your life when you find out
who you are... That's the golden
time of day!*

They shake their heads when a SUITCASE lands on Kareem's
front row seat. It's Magic. So is the voice. Singing MAZE.

NIXON

Buck, what the fuck are you doing?
That's Cap's seat.

MAGIC

Not tonight. I'm playing center.
Have no fear motherfuckers! Magic
Johnson is here!

A long beat of silence until Michael Cooper laughs.

MICHAEL COOPER

I think we might actually win.

Magic does too. Game face already on for --

INT. SPECTRUM, PHILADELPHIA - NIGHT

A packed house in Philly. The Lakers and Sixers shaking hands, lining up for the tip as --

A TITLE CARD READS: NBA FINALS - GAME 6 - LAKERS VS. SIXERS

-- and Magic (a 20-year-old rookie remember) steps into the circle to take the opening tip against a seven foot center.

BRENT MUSBURGER (V.O.)
 Magic, playing Center in the place
 of Kareem, will come in and jump --

BAM! The ref tosses the ball. Magic leaps up to get it and --

THIS GAME IS HISTORIC AND NEVER REALLY EVEN CLOSE

Playing POINT / CENTER, Magic puts on a show for the ages.

He takes a feed in the post and dunks over three men. He drives to his left and floats skyhook through the rim. He challenges DAWKINS at the rim, hanging in mid-air for lay-up.

While on D, he steals an entry pass in the post and immediately turns on the gas, dropping a nasty dime to Wilkes for a dunk on the break.

He drives again and again, scoring time after time, with a creative arsenal of shots that the Sixers can't stop and --

When all's said and done and the final horn blows, Dr. Buss is in tears sitting courtside with a MODEL as --

Westhead and assistant Coach PAT RILEY (*more on him down the road*) hug in amazement on the bench and --

Magic hugs Michael Cooper, throwing his hands to the sky.

BRENT MUSBURGER (V.O.)
 There it is. It's all over. And the
 most valuable player is Magic
 Johnson. He starts at Center. Plays
 Forward and Guard and leads the
 Lakers to the World Championship.

Magic has done the impossible and --

INT. LOCKER ROOM, PHILADELPHIA - NIGHT

The celebration spills into the room as the Lakers pour in. Champagne raining down. Everyone going apeshit. Musberger's there with the microphone. Sweating all over Magic's jock.

MUSBERGER

Let me read you these stats. 42 points. 15 rebounds. And 7 assists. This is your first year and you're here. How many more of these would you like to get under your belt?

MAGIC

About twenty.

They all laugh. No one has ever been higher than Magic in this moment. He finds Dr. Buss and the two close friends hug.

DR. BUSS

You've earned yourself a big fucking reward, son.

We can only guess what this means as Cooper yells out --

COOPER

Hey Buck! You got a call! It's some baby named Cookie! Whatchu want me to say?

Magic considers a moment. But for only a moment --

MAGIC

I'll call her later, all right? I ain't ready for that.

-- and he turns back to Buss, leaving Cookie (*and Earvin*) in the past, as he showers his owner's head in Champagne. Two men about to embark on a victory lap that would make Mick Jagger-blush. Their jubilant faces frozen on --

INT. CHELSEA'S BAR, BOSTON - NIGHT

-- where a TV BROADCASTS THE GAME in a waterfront Sports Bar where -- Larry Bird -- watches glumly and drunk as his long hated rival celebrates a title again.

DRUNK PATRON

God. What a phony. Just look at this fucking clown.

BARTENDER

I don't know, buddy. Nobody was stopping Magic tonight.

DRUNK PATRON

Larry'll get him. Ain't that right? You're the balls! You're gonna beat his ass, right?

Larry wants no part of it. Starts paying his tab.

DRUNK PATRON (CONT'D)
What? You're not scared of him are
you? He's just dumb spook.

That gets Larry's blood boiling. Turns to the bartender.

LARRY
Ever heard of cutting him off?

BARTENDER
Paid his tab, same as you.

Larry rolls his eyes, heads for the door only --

EXT. CHELSEA'S BAR, BOSTON - NIGHT

When Larry gets on the street, he hears laughter behind him.
The DRUNK PATRON following him out singing --

DRUNK PATRON
*Bye Bye Birdie! I'm going to miss
you so! / Bye Bye Birdie! Why'd you
have to go?!*

The drunk howls in laughter as Larry walks off.

DRUNK PATRON (CONT'D)
That's right. Walk away. I always
heard you're a quitter.

Larry pauses at that.

DRUNK PATRON (CONT'D)
You're gonna just let this dumb
monkey go and beat you again? Man,
Larry Bird isn't shit.

The drunk put his finger in Larry's back and that's the last
straw and the last time he's on his feet because --

WHAM! -- Larry cold cocks the DRUNK, knocking him down. (*But,
Larry also breaks two of his fingers in the process.*)

LARRY
God damn it!

Hearing the commotion, the Bartender comes out the door.

BARTENDER
Jesus. C'mon. Larry, better get you
the hell outta here.

Larry looks down at the drunk holding his face on the street.

DRUNK PATRON
I think you broke damn jaw.

LARRY
Maybe now you'll think about
shutting it.

And the Bartender shepherds Larry away, who's still fuming mad. Shaking his hand. TWO FINGERS bent out of place and --

RED AUERBACH (PRE-LAP)
How's our boy doing there, Dinah?

EXT. THE BOSTON GARDEN - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

The Historic, crumbling, Boston arena where --

INT. RED AUERBACH OFFICE, BOSTON GARDEN - DAY

RED AUERBACH's on the phone, chewing a cigar in a PLAID MADRAS SUIT. More Edward G. Robinson than playboy Dr. Buss.

RED AUERBACH
I know how he's feels about Magic.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. LARRY BIRD'S BROOKLINE BOSTON HOME - DAY

Dinah (Larry's college girlfriend) on the phone in their humble, one story ranch in a suburb of Boston.

DINAH
You know how he is. Had a pretty long night, but he's back at work now. Got up and went for a run.

RED AUERBACH
It's the summer. What's he doing? He needs to take some time off.

DINAH
Larry? Time off? You'll need to tell him yourself.

Red mauls his cigar, knowing Dinah is right so --

EXT. LARRY BIRD'S BROOKLINE BOSTON HOME - A FEW DAYS LATER

Red's CAR pulls up to Larry's simple home where a DOZENS OF CELTICS FANS camp out across the street watching:

Millionaire superstar Larry Bird mow his own lawn in some very, short shorts. Beer in bandaged hand. Red approaches.

RED AUERBACH

You can pay someone to do that.

LARRY

Not if you want it done right.
Dinah said you checked in.

RED AUERBACH

Wanted to see how you're doing.
(Larry shrugs, fine)
That's about how I thought. Need to
take your mind off of things. You
play tennis with that thing?

Larry considers his hand, takes a swig of his beer.

LARRY

You gonna cheat like before?

RED AUERBACH

I have no idea what you mean.

That pulls a laugh out of Larry and --

EXT. RED CLAY TENNIS COURT - LATER

Larry and Red play a set on a red clay court. Red (a surprisingly solid player) has Larry on the run, shanking a forehand into the net, conceding the set.

A little pissed off, Larry tosses his racket into the fence.

RED AUERBACH

In a game, you get fined for that.

LARRY

Look like I care about money?

RED AUERBACH

I'll remember that next time we're
negotiating your contract.
(Bird cuts him a look)
Come on, Larry. What is it?

LARRY

You brought me here to win. We didn't do it. That simple.

RED AUERBACH

You led the greatest turn around in NBA History. Won 61 games. Didn't win half that last year.

LARRY

(sarcastic)

You mean without the Great White Hope? I don't remember that in my contract.

RED AUERBACH

So you start picking fights? Boston's a tough place. That's my fault now, too?

As Larry considers this, we --

SMASH CUT TO:

ARCHIVAL NEWS FOOTAGES: BOSTON - 1970'S. A POWDER KEG.

Poor blue collar whites. Disenfranchised blacks. A NEWS REPORTER BROADCASTS:

REPORTER (V.O.)

Tensions continue to rise along racial lines as the city enforced Judge W. Arthur Garrity's decision to integrate Boston's schools by forced busing.

White people riot. Black school kids are escorted off the bus into schools through ugly white picket lines as POLICEMEN stand guard and SNIPERS wait on the rooftops.

A YOUNG WHITE KATHY BATES-LOOKING WOMAN speaks to the camera.

WHITE WOMAN

Every single one of these kids that dropped out of school last couple years woulda graduated right now if it wasn't cause of this busing and if it wasn't cause these niggers.

WHITE CROWDS PROTEST OUTSIDE CITY HALL. The racism, naked. The lasting image, indelible:

STANLEY FORMAN'S famous photograph of a WHITE CHARLESTOWN YOUTH spearing a BLACK LAWYER with the point on an AMERICAN FLAG like it's a bayonet.

ML CARR (PRE-LAP)
This city here is fucked-up. Cord
of wood, are you serious?

CUT TO:

INT. BOSTON GARDEN - ESTABLISHING

The empty arena. CREWS prepare for a game. Laying the famous PARQUET FLOOR on the court while --

INT. LOCKER ROOM, BOSTON GARDEN - DAY

Larry gets dressed for a game when M.L. CARR (an affable, towel waving, shit talking, black guard) comes in very hot.

ML CARR
I oughta get a lawyer on their ass.

SUPERIMPOSE TITLE: **M.L. CARR #34**

Unpacking his bag, Larry watches M.L. remove a REVOLVER from his waistband and place it in his locker.

ROBERT PARISH
What are you talking about now?

ML CARR
Cops came by last night, accused me
of stealing some wood.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. M.L. CARR'S TONY SUBURBAN HOUSE - DAY

M.L. opens the door of his beautiful home. COPS ON HIS PORCH.

BOSTON COP 1
That wood you have there -- are you
sure that it's yours?

Angle on: A neatly stack cord of wood on M.L.'s porch.

BOSTON COP 1 (CONT'D)
Some of the neighbors, they said it
looked just like theirs.

M.L. CARR
They said this wood looked like
theirs? What, were they counting
the rings?

BOSTON COP 1
Sir, just answer the question. Are
you sure that's your wood?

M.L. CARR
You sure you want to ask me again?

The Cops are pretty sure that they don't as we --

SMASH BACK TO:

INT. LOCKER ROOM, BOSTON GARDEN - AS BEFORE

Larry, listening intently as M.L. wraps his story up.

ML CARR
Who goes around stealing wood?
That's some white people shit.

ROBERT PARISH
M.L., man. That ain't nothing.

Larry's attention now turns to --

SUPERIMPOSE TITLES: **ROBERT PARISH #35**

The seven foot black center, nicknamed *THE CHIEF* after the
stoic, nearly mute Chief in *ONE FLEW OVER THE COOKOO'S NEST*.

ROBERT PARISH (CONT'D)
First year in Boston, I got pulled
over 10 times for suspicious
activity.

LARRY
What's that mean -- suspicious?

ROBERT PARISH
Means a black guy driving a nice
car in white neighborhood.

CEDRID MAXWELL
Maybe you drove a different car,
you wouldn't look so suspicious.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. BOSTON HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Seven foot Robert Parish, at the wheel of WHITE ROLLS ROYCE, pulled over on the highway. It would almost be funny, except for the CRUISER behind him and the WHITE COP at his door.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. LOCKER ROOM, BOSTON GARDEN - AS BEFORE

Larry listening, shaking his head.

ML CARR

That's what I'm saying. This city
is racist. Good thing we got their
GREAT WHITE HOPE!

The black players are laughing. Larry is not. Doesn't like that monicker one bit and --

INT. BOSTON GARDEN - NIGHT

We see his displeasure when Larry waits court-side before a game as legendary Celtics announce JOHNNY MOST calls him out.

JOHNNY MOST (V.O.)

At 6'10", a forward from Indiana
State. Number 33. Larry Bird.

-- and Bird takes the court to thunderous applause when --

A WHITE MASS-HOLE FAN opens a brown paper bag and releases a WHITE DOVE that flutters up to the rafters.

Off Larry's displeasure we CUT BACK TO:

EXT. RED CLAY TENNIS COURT - AS BEFORE

Larry and Red, getting into it on the court.

LARRY

This city -- they all want me to be
something but I don't give a shit
about race. I don't have a problem
anyone that goes out there to win.

RED AUERBACH

Larry, and that's why they love
you. You're the most competitive
person I've ever seen in my life.

(MORE)

RED AUERBACH (CONT'D)
But you have to take a break now
and then. Take a day or two off.

LARRY
You get paid for a job, you better
show up for work.

RED AUERBACH
You're playing 43 minutes a game --

LARRY
You pay me for 48.

RED AUERBACH
Jesus Christ, Larry. Where the hell
do you get this shit?

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. LARRY'S CHILDHOOD HOME - MORNING (FLASHBACK)

7-YEAR-OLD LARRY watches his father, JOE BIRD, squeeze a
swollen, broken, black and blue foot into a work boot and
head limping out the door for a shift as we --

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. RED CLAY TENNIS COURT - AS BEFORE

Larry, remembering.

RED AUERBACH
Is it true you've been sleeping at
the Garden?

Off Larry, who can't lie --

CUT TO:

INT. CELTICS' LOCKER ROOM, BOSTON GARDEN - MORNING

A JANITOR vacuums the empty, Celtic's locker-room, surprised
to find its star player, asleep in his warm-ups on the floor.

Larry's awakened by the whirl of the machine and --

INT. BOSTON GARDEN - DAY

While the ARENA CREW lays the parquet and sets up the seats --

Larry runs laps around the empty rafters of the stadium before any other player's even here.

Finally, on the court, M.L. arrives in street clothes, with KEVIN McHALE at his side. (6'10". Whiter than death. Shoulders so wide it looks like he forgot to remove the coat hanger from his shirt. Super laid back.)

They look up at Larry, jogging around in the stands.

M.L. CARR

Hey Kevin, you're white. Why aren't you working like that?

MCHALE

Hey, man. I've got a life.

They both laugh at that as Larry keeps running --

RED AUERBACH (V.O.)

You don't slow down now and then,
and you're going to get hurt.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. RED CLAY TENNIS COURT - AS BEFORE

Red, still laying into Larry, who walks back onto the court.

LARRY

We come to play tennis or what?

RED AUERBACH

I'm trying to look out for you,
son. Careers are short in the
league. You need to take care of
your body.

LARRY

You don't worry about that, Red. My
body's just fine.

Off Red's incredulity, we --

SMASH CUT TO:

BOOM! Larry flying into the stands, diving after a ball and --

BAM! Larry's catching a wicked elbow in the face in a game
against Milwaukee that shatters his eye socket.

CUT TO:

INT. CELTIC'S LOCKER ROOM - LATER

Larry entering the locker room, blood all over his jersey, to the high fives of his team.

MCHALE

Hell of a game tonight, Birdie.
Can't believe you stayed in.

LARRY

Couldn't leave it to you guys. I
actually wanted to win.

McHale laughs. Larry sneezes, popping his eye literally out of his socket. It's incredibly gross.

MCHALE

Might want to get that checked out.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. RED CLAY TENNIS COURT - DAY

Larry and Red, as before.

RED AUERBACH

You want to win, you need to be
able to walk. And maybe see out of
both eyes. You got everything,
Larry. Maybe try to enjoy it.

LARRY

Me and Dinah, we're good.
I'm enjoying it. See.

RED AUERBACH

That's not what the other guys say.

Larry tries to shrug that off as we --

CUT TO:

INT. OUT OF TOWN LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Post game and in street clothes, the Celtics drink canned beer from a cooler, stocked by the home team.

MCHALE

Hey Larry, you coming? Danny knows
some girls at the bar.

LARRY

Nah you guys good ahead. I'm gonna
hit the hotel.

McHale watches Larry loading a PILLOWCASE full of beer.

MCHALE

You know, we're supposed to leave
those for the next team?

LARRY

Fuck the next team. We won.

McHale heads out with a laugh. Larry packs up more beer and --

INT. OUT OF TOWN HOTEL - A FEW HOURS LATER

Larry sits in his hotel, having crushed most of the beers,
obsessively reading the SPORTS PAGE which is all about --

Magic. His box scores. His triumphs. His flamboyant personal
life. Larry drinks and consumes it as --

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. RED CLAY TENNIS COURT - AS BEFORE

Red and Larry, wrapping up their heart to heart.

RED AUERBACH

The thing about competition, Larry
is, it can push you. It can drive
you to accomplish incredible things
but it can also destroy you and
blind you. You need to live your
life, son, because believe me,
Magic -- he's out there living his.

AND WE END SEQUENCE ON:

INT. OUT OF TOWN LOCKER ROOM - THAT NIGHT FROM BEFORE

Larry, the beers all run out, littering his hotel room. The
TV flickering on screen, playing Magic's highlights.
Graceful. Joyous. Alive. Off, Larry's contempt --

CUT TO:

EXT. MAGIC'S NEW BEL AIR MANSION - DAY

A ROLLS ROYCE pulling through the gates of a sprawling Bel Air Estate where --

Magic waits at the door as Dr. Buss (and DATE) exit the car.

MAGIC

What do you think? Not Pickfair,
but not bad.

(Dr. Buss is impressed)
C'mon. I'll give you a tour.

INT. MAGIC'S NEW BEL AIR MANSION - DAY

Like Dirk Diggler in Boogie Nights, Magic tours Buss through his palatial five bedroom, five bath, Tudor-style home where -

A lavish, debaucherous HOUSE PARTY rages. Beautiful, scantily clad young women mingling with NBA PLAYERS and MOVIE STARS.

Magic walks Buss through THE LIVING ROOM.

MAGIC

This is the parlor. All this
fabric's from Turin. That's Italy.

IN THE MUSIC ROOM

Magic shows Buss a wood paneled, in wall, custom stereo system Rick Rubin would envy.

MAGIC (CONT'D)

I had the Jackson Five in here
yesterday. Said it sounds better
than the studio.

Magic cranks up the speakers blasting BILLIE JEAN. Prophetic.

"People always told me, be careful who you love..."

IN A SPACIOUS BEDROOM

MAGIC (CONT'D)

It's got five bedrooms total. One
is just for my mother, but this one
I call the Isaiah room. He's even
got his own key.

Right on cue, ISAIAH THOMAS (*the NBA'S RESIDENT ASSHOLE and paradoxically, Magic's best friend*) steps out in his bathing suit, arm draped around a YOUNG WOMAN.

ISAIAH

How's it going, Dr. Buss? When you gonna get me out to The Lakers?

DR. BUSS

I've got a point guard already.

He gestures, displeased, to the COKE MUSTACHE Isaiah's sporting. Off Isaiah, embarrassed, wiping his nose and --

FINALLY, AT THE POOL

-- Magic leads Buss around a kidney shaped pool swimming with starlets. People fuck right out in the open. Doing blow off the bar. It's a hedonist's paradise.

Buss puts his arm around Magic.

DR. BUSS (CONT'D)

I had a feeling that money was going to a good cause.

MAGIC

Not everyone feels that way. Lotta the guys, they're not happy. Don't think me and you should be friends.

CUT TO:

INT. LAKERS' LOCKER ROOM, FORUM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Magic dresses at his locker, getting an earful from his team.

KAREEM

He's your owner. Not your brother. And he's no more a doctor, than fucking Dr. J is a surgeon.

MAGIC

He's got a PHD in something.

COOPER

Yeah. Pussy.

They all laugh.

KAREEM

You gotta watch out for him man. These white folks, like him, will use you like a museum exhibit. "Look at the big black freak." Unless you're on their side.

(MORE)

KAREEM (CONT'D)
Cause sometimes I don't know. Are
you a player or management?

Kareem heads out, leaving Magic confused.

MAGIC
I don't know what that means.

COOPER
25 Million for 25 years? Sounds
like ownership money to me.

NIXON
Plus you making decisions, like
you're in the front office. Magic
wants Westhead gone -- poof! The
coach disappears.

FLASH CUT TO:

A VERY AWKWARD PRESS CONFERENCE IN THE FORUM CLUB. (*We'll be here for another one of these in a few years.*) Dr. Buss, at the podium with JERRY WEST and PAT RILEY (The suave, slick-haired, Gordon Gekko of the NBA.)

DR. BUSS
We thank Paul Westhead for his
great work but we have appointed
Jerry West as offensive Coach for
the Lakers. Pat Riley will stay on
as Coach.

SMASH BACK TO:

INT. LAKERS' LOCKER ROOM, FORUM - AS BEFORE

Magic, defending his actions.

MAGIC
Everyone wanted him gone. I love
Paul, same as you, but he was
slowing us down. I stuck my neck
out to put Coach Riley in charge
and not one of y'all got my back.

NIXON
You don't need us. You got Buss.

MAGIC (V.O.)
The truth of it was, someone on the
team had a big mouth, but it just
wasn't me.

Off Magic, a bit hurt --

CUT BACK TO:

INT. MAGIC'S BEL AIR MANSION - NIGHT

Magic and Buss, as before at the party. Now in Magic's personal DISCO. PARTIERS shaking ass on the dance floor.

BUSS

I love Norm, but he's jealous.
Since the day you arrived.

MAGIC

It's more than just that. Some of
the guys, worried too, I'm gonna
rat on 'em to you. After what
happened with Landsberger.

BUSS

What happened with Mark?

Magic rolling his eyes.

MAGIC

Man, the kid has got to be the
dumbest motherfucker in the history
of basketball.

INT. LOCKER ROOM, FORUM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

MARK LANDSBERGER. A white. 6'8". 230lb, sack of potatoes in a Spalding jersey. Mark sits tying his shoes, only to get up and trip. Discovering he's tied both of his shoes together.

MAGIC (V.O.)

He likes to party, like everyone.

For a prime example, we CUT TO:

INT. STRIP CLUB - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

A huge line of COKE. Landsberger takes it down like a Dyson. Pull out to reveal half of dozen Lakers player enjoying Landsberger's drugs in --

The Champagne room of a STRIP CLUB where Landsberger gets a lap dance from a very large BLACK STRIPPER.

MAGIC (V.O.)
 The real problem was, he tells his
 wife fucking everything.

INT. MARK LANDSBERGER'S HOUSE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Marks sits on the sofa with HIS MIDWESTERN WIFE who eats ice cream for the tub while he gives her a foot rub, telling tales of his conquests.

MAGIC (V.O.)
 Who we fucked. Who he fucked.
 Everything that goes down on the
 road.

Push in on HIS WIFE, soaking the gossip up with her desert.

MAGIC (V.O.)
 Needless to say, the guys ain't
 happy with that.

CUT TO:

INT. OUT OF TOWN HOTEL - DAY (FLASHBACK)

The *THAT* in question. The Lakers step off their bus for an out of town game to find --

A chorus line of SCANTILY CLAD WOMEN handing out their phone numbers on HANDWRITTEN NOTES decorated with lipstick kisses. Magic, getting more than he can handle and --

INT. MAGIC'S OUT OF TOWN HOTEL ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Magic keys into his hotel suite to find THREE OTHER BEAUTIFUL WOMEN already waiting, half-undressed on the bed.

They start to unbutton his clothes as --

MAGIC (V.O.)
 Man, he even told her about the
 Forum club.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. MAGIC'S BEL AIR MANSION - NIGHT

Magic and Buss as before, this time in the hot tub. Buss is as hot as the water.

BUSS
He told his wife about what?!

INT. MARK LANDSBERGER'S HOUSE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Mark does a big line of blow, keeps on spilling to the wife.

MARK LANDSBERG
It's the hottest party in town.
Don't even have to leave the Arena.
It's right in the damn building and
Dr. Buss is the mayor.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE LOS ANGELES FORUM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Limos line the VIP entrance to the Forum where Dr. Buss greets the arriving celebrities like the showman he is.

Armed draped around a MOVIE STAR, we follow them into --

INT. THE FORUM CLUB - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

The hottest of hot spots that maybe ever existed. A small, intimate, red leather banqueted bar in the most exclusive reaches of the Forum.

MARK LANDSBERGER (V.O.)
You can even get in without Dr.
Buss's personal permission.

Dr. Buss works the room of Celebrities, Groupies, Playmates, and Opposing Players. He's the club's owner and its biggest fan.

MARK LANDSBERGER (V.O.)
When teams come to L.A., they're
practically throwing the games to
get up to the Forum Club, to get
first pick of the women, cause Dr.
had the best.

We see what he means. A who's who of L.A. most beautiful ladies occupying the club --

MARK LANDSBERGER (V.O.)
He fucking hired a scout to find
the hottest chicks at the game.

INT. STANDS, LOS ANGELES FORUM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

While the Lakers play ball, we zoom in on THE STANDS where we find MIGUEL. A HANDSOME, HALF BLACK, HALF DOMINICAN, ASPIRING ACTOR (19) standing in the aisle with Dr. Buss.

MARK LANDSBERGER (V.O.)
Dr. Buss met him somewhere. He'd
been in one of those horror movies.

SMASH CUT TO:

A CLIP FROM: FRIDAY THE 13TH - V - A NEW BEGINNING (1985)

Miguel (dressed like BAD era Michael Jackson), screaming in an outhouse. His girlfriend's throat slit on the ground. Before Miguel can escape --

WHAM! He's impaled through the shit-house walls by JASON with a big metal spike. As the blood gargles out, we --

CUT BACK TO:

INT. STANDS, LOS ANGELES FORUM - AS BEFORE (FLASHBACK)

Miguel, alive and well, standing with Dr. Buss in the Forum. Miguel points out an ATTRACTIVE GROUP OF WOMEN to Buss, who gives Miguel a thumbs up and then --

Miguel approaches the group, unbelievably smooth, giving them the golden ticket. POST-GAME PASSES TO THE CLUB as --

WE HOLD ON BUSS, lording over his domain while --

INT. MARK LANDSBERGER'S HOUSE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Mark Landsberger, rubbing his ice cream-eating wife's feet, wraps up his tale.

MARK LANDSBERGER
You can't get laid at the Forum
Club and you just can't get laid.

EXT. MAGIC'S BEL AIR MANSION - NIGHT

Back at the party, Buss is boiling in the hot tub.

DR. BUSS
He's told his frickin' wife that?

Magic nods in disbelief as --

INT. FANCY RESTAURANT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

The team's enjoying the THE LAKERS FAMILY TEAM DINNER. THE PLAYERS' WIVES in attendance. All seated together as --

Mark Landsberger's wine drunk wife regales all that's she's learned to all the other PLAYERS' WIVES.

WIFE #1

Fine. Let him screw around. It's
just one less night I have to suck
that man's dick.

A few women laugh. Not everyone thinks it's so funny. Namely, WANDA COOPER (Coop's wife) who eyes her husband with fury.

Coop smiles back, unaware but --

INT. FORUM CLUB - ANOTHER NIGHT

-- when Coop's partying at the Forum a couple nights later, a LAKERS GIRL on each arm, he looks up from his drink to see --

WANDA (his wife) walking in past Dr. Buss, who's unable to stop her. Steam coming out of her ears and --

MAGIC (V.O.)

Man, Cap was even pissed.

INT. LOCKER ROOM, FORUM - ANOTHER NIGHT

Kareem lays into a very scared, very dumb Mark Landsberger.

KAREEM

You told your fucking wife?! Man,
you are dumber than I thought and I
already thought you were fucking
dumber than shit.

Landsberger nearly pissing his warm-up pants but --

MAGIC (PRE-LAP)

I understand why they're mad but --

EXT. MAGIC'S BEL AIR MANSION - NIGHT

Magic and Buss in hot tub as before --

MAGIC

Why do they need to hide? Just own
up to your life.

DR. BUSS

Is that what you say to Cookie?
How's the wedding planning coming?

MAGIC

I called it off. Couldn't do it.

Off Dr. Buss' surprise --

INT. COOKIE'S PARENTS' HOUSE - TOLEDO - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Cookie is on the phone in her parents' house in Toledo where she lives. The floor just dropped out from beneath her.

COOKIE

You what?!

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. MAGIC'S NEW BEL AIR MANSION - DAY

Magic, at the pool, on the phone in the sun while Isaiah Thomas reclines on a float in the water.

MAGIC

I'm sorry. I just can't do it. I
cannot do it.

COOKIE

I want you to say it. Do what?

MAGIC

Get married. I can't.

COOKIE

Earvin, I don't understand.

Cookie's in disbelief. Understandably. Her kitchen is covered in plans for their wedding. CARD STOCK and FONT SAMPLES and SWATCHES OF FABRICS for the bridesmaids' dresses.

MAGIC

I'm not trying to hurt you. I just
can't do it. I'm sorry.

COOKIE

We were just talking five minutes
ago about choosing the church.

MAGIC

I know. That's my bad. It just hit me right now. Making decisions and stuff -- it's just not what I want. I can't live being controlled.

Cookie's started to cry.

COOKIE

Who is she? Do you love her?

MAGIC

It's not like that. Come on. I'm really sorry. I am. I just can't be tied down. Not on the court. Not like this. Wish I had a better explanation for you, baby, but --

COOKIE

Do not dare call me baby. Do you know what it's like, what everyone's says behind my back. To my face. It's humiliating.

MAGIC

I never wanted to hurt you. I just don't want to get married.

COOKIE

Maybe Magic doesn't. But Earvin did.

MAGIC

Cookie, Earvin is gone.

Gathering herself, Cookie wipes off her tears.

COOKIE

You need to know, this is it. You hang up that phone, do you ever call back. You sure that's what you want?

Hold on Magic, just silent and Cookie shaking with tears as --

MAGIC (PRE-LAP)

I never wanted to hurt her but she just don't understand. There's no more room for Earvin.

EXT. MAGIC'S BEL AIR MANSION - NIGHT

End this sequence at the party. Magic and Buss by the pool.

MAGIC

It's like you said, Dr. Buss.
Showtime, this thing, it's not just
how you play the game. It's the way
you live your life. On the break.
Every time. You don't ever slow
down and you don't stop for
nothing. Why would I live or play
ball any other way?

Buss raises his glass to the bacchanal they've built.

DR. BUSS

Magic, my son, I hope nobody stops
you.

Off the clink of their glasses -- CUT TO:

INT. BOSTON GARDEN - NIGHT

Larry grinding on defense before a raucous CELTICS CROWD as --

A TITLE CARD READS: MAY 23, 1984
 EASTERN CONFERENCE FINALS
 GAME 5

A shot goes up. Larry snaring the rebound, throwing a full
court touchdown pass to M.L. Carr for a lay-up as --

The horns sounds. The game ends. Celtics win. 115-108.

BRENT MUSBERGER (V.O.)

And that will do it. Larry Bird and
the Celtics are on their way back
to the NBA Finals for a match-up
the whole country is waiting for.

Larry stands center court, letting the chants of the Garden
crowd ring out around him --

GARDEN CROWD

BEAT L.A.! BEAT L.A.!

Larry soaks it all in as --

DINAH (PRE-LAP)

You're finally going to get him.

INT. LARRY BIRD'S BROOKLINE BOSTON HOME - NIGHT

Larry lays in bed with Dinah. He's restless.

DINAH
Don't let him get away again.

LARRY
Not a chance.

Dinah looks at her partner. His determination is frightening.

BRENT MUSBERGER (PRE-LAP)
Welcome to the Boston Garden and
the start to the NBA WORLD
CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES.

EXT. BOSTON - ESTABLISHING

A commercial plane soars above the smoky Boston Skyline as
BLUE COLLAR FANS pour into the Boston Garden where --

INT. BOSTON GARDEN - DAY

Musberger broadcasts to the world from high over the court.

BRENT MUSBERGER (V.O.)
I'm Brent Musberger and in each of
the last four NBA Championship
Series, either Magic or Bird has
competed. But this is the first
time the two have gone head to head
for the title. A dream match-up for
fans and a league, revived by the
bitter rivalry between the two
stars finally competing tonight.

The chants start again, drowning Musberger out.

CELTICS FANS
Beat L.A.! Beat L.A.!

The roar can be heard inside --

INT. CELTICS'S LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Where Larry readies for a match-up, five years in the making.

DANNY AINGE
You hear 'em? They want blood.

LARRY
It'll be ours, we don't win.

Larry, with his game face on. It has never come off and --

INT. BOSTON GARDEN - NIGHT

It's about to go down. Larry and Magic, stand face to face, center court as the REFS lay-out the rules.

MAGIC

Remember Salt Lake? Nothing personal, Larry, but I'm gonna take your ass back to school.

LARRY

Oh, it's personal, asshole. I'm gonna make sure you feel it.

Magic just gives him a smile as --

A TITLE CARD READS: **GAME ONE**

(And we're in for a long sequence here. Imagine a title fight in a Rocky Film. These games will be paced out like rounds.)

The teams set up for the tip. The ref tosses the ball and to Larry's chagrin, The Lakers hits the ground running.

Magic leads a four-on-two fast break -- dumps to Kurt Rambis -- who gives-and-goes back to Magic who lays it in for two.

Off a missed-Larry jumper, Magic runs it coast to coast for a score. And when Larry forces a jump pass, Magic picks it off and hits a wide open Worthy for a wide open jam and --

Just like back in college, Magic's team is too fast.

BRENT MUSBERGER (V.O.)

And the Lakers steal the first game in Boston. There are just too much for the Celtics.

A TITLE CARD READS: **FINAL**
LAKERS 115 - CELTIC 109

Off Larry on the bench, his head hanging in anger --

A TITLE CARD READS: **GAME TWO**

INT. BOSTON GARDEN - NIGHT (GAME 2)

-- and we're right into the game. This one is hard fought. Both team's playing well. Larry comes out shooting well --

He hits a jumper at the line. A tough drive against Kareem.

But L.A. is hot too. Kareem feeds a cutting Worthy with a nifty little dime for a slam over three Celtics. Worthy dunks again over Bird, sending Larry to the floor and --

With the 20 seconds left in the 4th, Lakers leading by two, Kevin McHale's fouled on his way to the rim. He misses the shot, but will head to the line. The Celtics' crowd roars.

BRENT MUSBERGER (V.O.)
McHale will shoot two. He needs to
make both to tie the ball game.

McHale steps to the line, looking nervous as shit. Knees knocking together, aware of what's on the line as --

JOHNNY MOST, the gravel-voiced Boston announcer lays it out.

JOHNN MOST (V.O.)
And McHale's ready. And the shot
is...no good!

McHale misses the first shot. Sets up for the second and --

JOHNNY MOST (V.O.)
Dips. Shoots and...does not get it!

He bricks the second, missing *TWO FUCKING FREE THROWS* with the game on the line. Magic coming down with rebound and...

The Lakers bench starts celebrating. Nicholson in the crowd makes the CHOKE sign to Kevin. Red stews in his seat.

BRENT MUSBERGER (V.O.)
So the Lakers do not have to take a
shot. They have it with 20 seconds
to go and lead the Celtics 113-111.

ON THE CELTICS BENCH. Desperate times. Desperate measures.

M.L.
We gotta come up with something.
Somebody's gotta make a play.

There's nothing more to be said. They take the court.

BRENT MUSBERGER (V.O.)
As Yoga Bera once, said, "it is
getting late early." The Lakers
trying to make it 2-0 and go home
to L.A. with a big cushion.

Worthy takes the ball out near the Lakers' own basket. All they have to do is run out the clock.

He inbounds to Magic. Immediately double teamed. Gives it back to Worthy who passes cross court to Bryon Scott only --

Gerald Henderson picks it off! Stealing the pass out of nowhere, taking it in for a lay-up that ties up the game!

JOHNNY MOST (V.O.)

A great play by Henderson! The Leperchaun at work here at the Garden! A steal right when you need it! It's bedlam in Boston.

The Celtics go nuts. The Lakers can't believe it. Pat Riley screams for timeout, dragging his stunned team to the bench.

PAT RILEY

All right. Shake it off. We got the ball. It's not over. Get it into Kareem and put these fuckers down.

Riley draws up a play. With 13 seconds left, the game tied --

The Lakers inbound again. This time at half court. Magic gets it with 10. Starts to dribble... and dribble... trying to get it into Kareem only --

He loses track of the time. And before Magic realizes what's happened, there's just one second left and --

JOHNNY MOST (V.O.)

He's going to have to shoot it and he doesn't get it off! He doesn't get it off!

The Lakers don't even get up a shot. Magic has blown it and he can not believe it.

JOHNNY MOST (V.O.)

He lost track of the time and now we're headed to overtime.

The Lakers take the bench. Magic, gutted while in the Celtics' huddle, Larry knows they just got a new life.

LARRY

We got 'em by the balls. Don't let go to get a better grip. Just keep squeezing.

And when overtime starts, the Celtics go for the kill. They play hard and sharp, matching each basket until finally, they have a chance to take the lead and --

They swing the ball around the key to McHale - for a chance at redemption - and he buries an arching twelve footer --

JOHNNY MOST (V.O.)
-- it's good! And Boston leads. 122
to 121!

And GAME TWO is a wrap. The Lakers, deflated. Larry passes Magic heading into the tunnel and points to the scoreboard.

LARRY
Next time you need it, the clock's
right up there. See ya back in L.A.

He leaves Magic just burning and --

EXT. FORUM - DAY

Palm trees and sunshine. We couldn't be further from Boston. CELEBRITY CROWDS arrive like a fucking red carpet. Dr. Buss in the middle. The Wizard behind the curtain as --

A TITLE CARD READS: **GAME THREE**

INT. FORUM - DAY

The place is ready to pop. MOVIE STARS, court side. DANCING BARRY in his tux. The LAKERS GIRLS shaking ass.

ON THE LAKERS BENCH, Riley pumps up his troops.

PAT RILEY
Don't take your foot off the gas.
Push it fast. Run them the fuck out
of town.

Magic takes those words to heart and -- *BAM!*

We're into the game and it's a lighting fast pace. Maxwell tries to drive on Kareem only --

BOOM! Kareem swats it out of the sky. The ball lands with Magic. He pushes the break. A dizzying four-on-one that ends with a KURT RAMBIS dunk at the Forum crowd screaming.

And the whole game is like that. When Larry misses a three --

WHAM! The Lakers turn on the jets. Kareem outlets to Magic -- to Coop then to Worthy who stuffs it in for the jam!

On a timeout on the BOSTON BENCH, DANNY AINGE hangs his head.

DANNY AINGE

Only way we win this is if they
pass out, have to forfeit the game.

Larry seethes, just stewing as he watches Magic and Worthy
slapping five. The Lakers fans going crazy as --

CHUCK HEARN (LAKERS ANNOUNCER V.O.)

This has to be one of the most
decisive routs in Championship game
history. The Lakers 137. The
Celtics 104.

We follow Larry off the court, boiling over with anger and --

INT. VISITING TEAM LOCKER ROOM, FORUM - MOMENTS LATER

When Larry enters the locker room, he goes off on his team.

LARRY

That was disgusting. Y'all played
like a bunch of fucking pussies.
I'm not watching Magic celebrate in
front of me again.

He slams his a water bottle against the wall, scattering
teammates, and takes a seat at his locker.

A REPORTER APPROACHES.

REPORTER

Tough night, Larry. They set the
pace from the start. What do you
have to do different tomorrow if
you want to win?

Larry takes a moment to consider, knowing his teammates are
listening and Larry makes a decision.

LARRY

It's embarrassing. There's no doubt
about it. We've got some great
players on this team, but we don't
have the players with the heart
sometimes we need and uh today,
when you see Magic, slapping high
fives and guys going behind their
back and shooting lay-ups on us all
day long, it seems like someone
would try and put a stop to it but
until we get our hearts where we
belong, we're in trouble. We played
like sissies.

Larry teammates have heard. McHale turns to Ainge.

MCHALE

We can't just let them dunk us all night. Gotta take some hard fouls.

DANNY AINGE

Me?! I get booed in every stadium we're in. I'm grabbing Magic, pulling jerseys! Why don't you fucking lay someone out for once!

Off Kevin, who doesn't like being called out and --

INT. FORUM - NIGHT

Kevin stands on the court, listening the Nation Anthem before the start of Game 4, Larry right in his ear.

LARRY

No. More. Lay-ups.

Mchale hears him, loud and clear as --

TITLE CARD READS: GAME FOUR

And midway through the third, McHale takes his shot. When the Lakers push the break and Kurt Rambis soars for a dunk --

BOOM! (in one of the dirtiest plays in NBA History) - Kevin McHale clotheslines Rambis clean out of the air, smashing him hard to the ground like a bodyslam and --

All hell just breaks lose. Rambis gets to his feet charging fists first at McHale. Both benches clear fast.

JOHNNY MOST (V.O.)

Rambis was really decked by McHale and he didn't like it at all!

The powder keg bursts. Pat Riley's in flames. Even Kareem's on the hunt, rushing into the scrum until --

The Ref breaks them up, sending Rambis to the line. (*Note: If this was 2020, McHale would be locked up in jail. He didn't even get teched-up!*)

But notice is served. If this was ROCKY 4, we know this moment exactly. Drago's been cut. The fight just turned and *THE REST OF THIS GAME IS A BRAWL. And no one is sparred.*

Worthy's knocked to the ground, flailing after a loose ball.

Cooper's thrown three rows into the stands by Larry when he takes out the ball and --

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Bird backs up Michael Cooper into
the photographer's lane!

Magic's shit-talked so bad by a bench-warming, towel waving M.L., he's about to start swinging.

M.L.
Come on, Tragic. Just do it. Take
one step across that line and I'll
knock your ass out.

Magic has to be held back until a REF intervenes to M.L.

REF
Sit down and shut up or I'll throw
you out of this game?

M.L. CARR
What do I care? Go ahead. Man, I'm
not even playing.

Pat Riley's livid, yelling. Even Kareem loses it. After missing a skyhook from the post, he battles Larry for a rebound when - *POW!* - Kareem throws an elbow at Larry's jaw and Larry jumps in his face!

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Kareem swings the elbow and now
he's yelling at Larry Bird.

KAREEM
White boy! I will kick your ass.

LARRY
I'm standing right here. Come on!
Let's see it, Kareem.

He's gotten under Kareem's skin and that's just how Larry wants it. The benches clear again. Magic pulling Kareem away, aware this is a street fight. Not Showtime.

With the Lakers on their heels, Larry walks right up to Coop.

LARRY (CONT'D)
I'm about to wear your ass out.

Larry gets the ball at the top of the key, pumps Coop out of his pants, driving clean by and knocking down a sweet J.

LARRY (CONT'D)
Told ya watch out.

Larry high-fives his team before a stunned L.A. crowd and --

A FEW MOMENTS LATER

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
35 seconds remain. Tied at 123.

Magic is at the line, shooting two for the lead. He puts up the first shot and -- CLANK! He bricks it off the back iron.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
He misses the first.

Magic stews silently. The Celtics bench roars. M.L. Carr waves a towel, screaming out loudly --

M.L. CARR
Tragic Johnson! Tragic Johnson!

Larry, on the floor, can see Magic is rattled and --

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Big free throw coming up.

Magic lines up the ball, puts up his shot and -- WOW!

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Johnson misses them both! Bird with the rebound and the Celtics want a time out and a despondent Magic Johnson goes to the bench.

Magic can't believe it. He heads to the bench, shaking his head while Larry takes a seat as K.C. lines up a play.

K.C. JONES
I want to get it inside. Get Rambis to switch and we'll get the mismatch down low.

Larry has other plans.

LARRY
Just get me the damn ball.

K.C.'s a bright guy so he wisely reconsiders.

K.C. JONES
You heard what he said. Just get Larry the ball.

The horn sounds. The huddle breaks. Larry retakes the court. Wiping the soles of his shoes with hands as --

Larry lines up at the top of the key as they inbound the ball to Maxwell, immediately looking for Bird who --

Shakes his defender and catches the ball at the wing forcing Magic to rotate over and guard him. It's a fantasy moment. Larry, one on one, with his rival. He swings the ball to the corner, posting Magic down low and --

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Bird goes right into the pivot. DJ
in the corner. And Bird wants the
ball. They go back into Bird.

He gets position in the post with Magic right on his back. Catches the feed, spinning back for a fade-away and --

WHOOSH! Larry swishes the game winner. It drops over Magic.

JOHNNY MOST (V.O.)
It's good! Boston's taken the lead.
125-123 and they'll head back to
Boston with the series tied up and
with home court advantage!

The moment is magical. Revenge for Larry. Agony for Magic and we get the sense now, this series will go to the wire as --

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
There's a heat wave in Boston. It's
nearly 100 degrees and the idea of
air conditioning in the Garden is
to open the doors and have the
ushers blow hard.

INT. BOSTON GARDEN - NIGHT

Sweat pours off Magic, sucking wind on the bench as --

A TITLE CARD READS: GAME 5

It's a sauna in the Garden and the Lakers are all out of gas. They slip on fastbreaks. Butter-finger the ball. It's so hot they can't breath and while --

Kareem spends most of the game wearing an OXYGEN MASKS on the bench, wilting in 105 degree heat and Pat Riley Gucci suit's drenched. Even a REF nearly faints only --

The Celtics just love it. The sweltering crowd never quits and Larry has a game for the ages.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 The Boston Celtics, playing in the
 same humidity, look fresh, while
 the Lakers look exhausted.

Guarded by Worthy, Larry pumps fakes and drive past him,
 taking it right down the lane, diving into the stands.

He rips a defensive rebound, splitting through two defenders,
 dishing give-and-go on the break, ending the run with dunk as
 M.L. CARR waves A PAPER FAN over Larry like a Sultan and --

A TITLE CARD READS: **FINAL SCORE**
 CELTICS 121 - LAKERS 103

Magic watches from the bench, exhausted and furious and --

RILEY (PRE-LAP)
 You're letting them push you
 around! You wanted to crawl home
 last night. You gonna do it again?

INT. LAKERS LOCKER ROOM, FORUM - NIGHT (GAME 6)

Riley reams out his team when there's a knock on the door.

M.L. CARR (V.O.)
 Come on out here! Don't hide! Take
 your beating like a man!

They hear M.L. and Maxwell laugh, running down the tunnel.

RILEY
 You hear that?! They don't respect
 you. They come knock on your door!
 You going to take that or what?

Magic looks say, no way as --

A TITLE CARD READS: **GAME SIX**

INT. FORUM - NIGHT (GAME 6)

And right off from the jump, the Lakers punch back. The
 Celtic running a two-on-one break.

Henderson dropping it behind the back to a dashing Cedric
 Maxwell who's skying up for the slam when --

WHAM! Payback time. Worthy comes out of nowhere, shoving him
 hard in the back, sending him soaring dangerously into the
 stands. The benches clear again!

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 And now the Lakers are giving the
 Celtics a dose of their own
 medicine.

Magic's fired up. He takes it hard into the lane, shouldering
 past three defenders as the Lakers run away with Game Six.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 The Lakers are making a statement
 to Boston. We're back in it and you
 better get ready in Beantown.

The nail in the coffin comes when Kareem throws a full court
 touchdown pass to a wide open Byron Scott, who jams it home.

Jack Nicholson loves it. He wears a Lakers-yellow sports coat
 and gives Larry the choke sign as --

A TITLE CARD READS: **FINAL SCORE**
 LAKERS 119 - CELTICS 108

INT. AIRPLANE - (MOVING) NIGHT

Boston flies home on a red-eye. His teammates asleep, Larry's
 awake with a beer, staring out the window at the darkness.

RED AUERBACH (O.C.)
 You know, the Celtics have never
 lost a Championship final at the
 Garden?

Larry looks over to see Red now sitting beside him.

RED AUERBACH (CONT'D)
 You need a "win one for the Gipper
 speech" or you ready to put this to
 bed?

LARRY
 I've been waiting for this game for
 5 years. I ain't losing tomorrow.

EXT. BOSTON GARDEN - THE NEXT NIGHT (GAME 7)

It all comes down to this. Fans streaming into the Garden for
 the final showdown of the series where --

BRENT MUSBERGER (PRE-LAP)

BRENT MUSBERGER (PRE-LAP) (CONT'D)
 If you could bottle all the emotion
 released in a basketball game,
 you'd have enough hatred to start a
 war, and enough joy to prevent one.

INT. BOSTON GARDEN - NIGHT

Brent Musberger's back on his perch, high above the court in the rafter, broadcasting pregame.

BRENT MUSBERGER
 And tonight, in the ancient Boston
 Garden, we'll run the entire gamut.

Down on the court, Larry feels them all, lining up for the jump. Face to face with Magic. Both waiting for the tip as --

A TITLE CARD READS: GAME SEVEN

The ref throws the ball and we're off and we stay this whole game ON LARRY. CLOSE ON HIS FACE as those emotions play out.

He scores. He misses. He dives into the stands after a loose ball. He gets pummeled on D and knocked to the ground. He fumes on the bench. He focuses at the line. He bodies up Magic. He dishes to Parish.

He's determined and fearful and worn out but when the final horn sounds --

LARRY IS ELATED as the GARDEN FANS storm the court when --

JOHNNY MOST (V.O.)
 The ball game is over and we've got
 a sea of humanity out there! A wild
 maylay as Boston wins! Boston wins!

A tsunami of Bostonian's surround Bird who for a moment sees:

Magic, head down in the crowd, escaping into the tunnels, defeated as we stay with --

Larry. A hero. A savior. Swarmed by his fans and --

INT. CELTICS' LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

We follow Larry into a locker room already gauzy with the mist of Champagne. A bottle is handed to Larry as we find --

Red, with THE TROPHY. Musberger there with his mic.

MUSBERGER

Red, how does number 15 make you feel?

RED

It feels great! Whatever happened to the Los Angeles dynasty? You want to talk about a dynasty! Here it is.

(he holds up the trophy)
Here's your dynasty now!

The Celtics explode. Musberger makes his way to Larry, who's now drenched in Champagne. A beer in his hand.

MUSBERGER

Larry! Does this get you even with Magic for what happened between Michigan State, Indiana State all those many years ago?

LARRY

Oh, I don't worry about that. We're professionals now but --
(can't help himself)
This one's for Terre Haute!

Larry smiles ear to ear. The importance of this victory, clear. He finally finds Red in the crowd and they hug.

LARRY (CONT'D)

I got him, Red. I finally fucking got him.

Hold on Larry, embracing Red, letting it all finally go as --

INT. LAKERS' LOCKER ROOM, BOSTON GARDEN - SAME TIME

Magic sits on the shower floor. The water pouring down over him. Coach Riley arrives and stares at his fallen star.

RILEY

All the water in the world's not gonna wash this one away. Gotta get back on the horse.

But Magic can't hear him. He's just drowning in pain as we --

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GEORGIA BIRD'S NEW FRENCH LICK HOME - DAY

A pristine sun-kissed farm. A new brick house in the drive.
And cut into the hayfields, like some Field of Dreams shit --

There's a glass back-boarded, pro length basketball court.

A TITLE CARD READS: TWO YEARS LATER

And Larry's out on the court. Not practicing his shot, but
shoveling gravel for a drainage ditch on the side.

Hard, backbreaking work which we know Larry loves. But, after
the thousandth shovel load is pitched --

LARRY

Jesus fuck!

Larry bolts over in pain. He just threw out his back.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Goddamn it, you idiot.

GEORGIA BIRD (O.S.)

What are you hollering about now?

Larry looks back to see his mother, Georgia, in the door.

GEORGIA BIRD (CONT'D)

Your agent's on the phone. Wants to
know about that commercial.

LARRY

How the hell he find me here?

INT. GEORGIA BIRD'S NEW FRENCH LICK HOME - DAY

Holding the small of his back, Larry's on the phone with his
agent, BOB WOOLF.

BOB WOOLF (FILTERED)

Converse wants an answer.

LARRY

Well I already told ya. I'm trying
to enjoy my summer. Drink some
beer. Get some fishing. You know,
just relax.... Ooh god!

Larry's back seizes up and he groans in discomfort.

BOB WOOLF (FILTERED)
 You sound pretty relaxed. Look,
 they're serious, Larry. It's whole
 lot of money. They want you guys
 together. "Choose your weapon."
 That's the title.

LARRY
 I don't care. I'm not spending my
 summer slapping ass with the enemy.

BOB WOOLF (FILTERED)
 Magic said yes.

LARRY
 Get the hell out of here. Really?

BOB WOOLF (FILTERED)
 Even said he'd come to you.

LARRY
 Magic - come here?
 (Larry laughs, disbelief)
 All right. Tell 'em, fine. If Magic
 wants to come here, but that ain't
 never gonna happen.

EXT. FRENCH LICK STREETS - DAY (A COUPLE WEEKS LATER)

A BLACK LIMO drives through the country roads of French Lick.

INT. LIMOUSINE - DAY (SAME)

Magic looks out the windows at the poor, rural surroundings.
 Farms spreading wide. The one stop light in town.

MAGIC
 This is where Larry Bird hatched?
 I thought Lansing was small.

Magic almost seems smitten as --

INT. GEORGIA BIRD'S NEW FRENCH LICK HOME - DAY

The limo pulls down Georgie Bird's drive where Larry, his
 mother, grandmother, and brother Mark, all wait.

GEORGIA BIRD
 Guess you were wrong, son. Again.

LARRY
Don't you look so excited.

Mark laughs as Magic steps out of the limo, looking breezy and cool.

MAGIC
Isn't this some kind of place?

LARRY
How's it going there, Earvin? Ready to get this thing over with?

MAGIC
This is beautiful, Larry.
(they shake hands)
This is your family? Who we got?

LARRY
My mother, Georgia Bird. My granny, Lizzie Kearns. My brother, Mark. Couple others. Don't need to worry 'bout them.

Magic shakes all their hands warmly and beaming.

MAGIC
It's a pleasure to meet you. Thanks for having me to your home.

Larry, rolling his eyes. His family, practically swooning.

EXT. OUTDOOR BASKETBALL COURT, GEORGIA'S HOUSE - LATER

The group has moved to Larry's outdoor court where a COMMERCIAL CREW is setting up. A HOLLYWOOD DIRECTOR (*ideally Jonathan*) walks his stars through the scene.

DIRECTOR
Larry, you'll be on the court here when Magic pulls up in the limo. Rolls down his window and says...

MAGIC
(easy as pie)
"I heard converse made a pair of shoes for last year's MVP."

The director smiles. Waits for Larry's response. Never comes.

DIRECTOR
Ok. Larry -- your line.

LARRY
Now? All right. "Yep."

He's incredibly wooden.

DIRECTOR
Ok. Ok. Great.
(he means terrible)
Now Magic gets out of the car and --

MAGIC
*"Well they made a pair of Magic
shoes for this year's MVP."*

DIRECTOR
Wonderful. Then you'll rip off your
warm up pants and Larry you'll toss
him the ball as you say --

LARRY
Sorry. I forgot. Hold on. Yeah --
"Ok. Magic. Show me what you got."

DIRECTOR
Nice. Ok. We'll keep working on
that. Then you throw him the ball
and you'll play one on one.

They both freeze.

MAGIC
Oh. Ok. So you want us to play?

DIRECTOR
Well, sure, yeah, I thought --

The director proposes this innocently. What he does not
understand, these two men are enemies. Their armor always on.

LARRY
Want us to play, fine by me.
Bring that weak shit to the hole,
I'll send it back to L.A.

MAGIC
Oh, you think you can guard me?

LARRY
Man, I don't even have to. I'll
just leave you alone, you'll
probably dribble out the clock.

Watching from the sidelines, Mark Bird guffaws at that one.

MAGIC

All right, Larry. Let's go. You're not gonna have Gerald Henderson to save your ass now.

They both gear up for battle. It's about to get ugly until --

DIRECTOR

Whoa whoa guys, hold on. You're not actually playing. It's just for fun. It's pretend.

LARRY

Just a fun game? That's all?

MAGIC

All right. I can do that.

Relief falls over both.

DIRECTOR

The crew's going to set up. Why don't you guys take a seat. This is going to be great.

(but as he walks away)

Jesus Christ. Kill me now.

While the crew sets up the shot, Larry and Magic take a seat on the bench. Letting their guards down a bit.

MAGIC

I'm glad we don't have to play. I wasn't trying to go hard right now.

LARRY

Yeah, me neither. My back.

MAGIC

Oh yeah. What's going on? Didn't look bad playing us... for a white guy, I mean.

LARRY

C'mon, man. Not you too?

Magic starts laughing.

MAGIC

I'm just kidding, Larry. You know Isaiah's an idiot.

LARRY

An idiot who's your best friend.

MAGIC

Don't mean, I agree what he said.

SMASH CUT TO:

THE IDIOT IN ACTION: *ISAIAH THOMAS' INFAMOUS 1985 POST-DEFEAT LOCKER ROOM INTERVIEW. HE'S SPECTACULARLY PETTY.*

ISAIAH (ON TV)

I think Larry is a very, very good basketball player. I think he's an exceptional talent, but I'd have to agree with Rodman. If he was black, he'd be just another good guy.

CUT BACK TO:

AS BEFORE, LARRY AND MAGIC ON THE BENCH

Larry's non-plussed.

MAGIC

He was just sore you beat him that series and stole that damn pass.

LARRY

Yeah, I bet that that stung.
(they both enjoy that)
Honestly, I don't care. Just pissed me off I had to talk to the press and not focus on you.

Magic respects Larry largess. Takes a new stock of him now.

MAGIC

So what's up with your back? Did you hurt it "not" jumping?

LARRY

Actually hurt it out here. Digging the ditch for the drain.

MAGIC

Wait. I'm sorry. Hold on. Larry Bird's out here digging a ditch?

Magic considers this curiously. Notices a TRACTOR nearby.

MAGIC (CONT'D)

You don't ride that thing do you?

LARRY
'Course. I cut that field everyday.

MAGIC
Come on. Get the hell out?

Both men finally laugh.

MAGIC (CONT'D)
It's a pretty nice spread. This is
really where you play?

LARRY
If it's not too rainy or windy,
this is where I do all my work.
Where you do yours? The Playboy
Mansion?

Magic laughs. So does a Bird.

MAGIC
You're a straight shooter. I like
that. Just like on the court.

And they sit there together. A little thaw in the ice and --

EXT. OUTDOOR BASKETBALL COURT, GEORGIA'S HOUSE - LATER

AS WE MONTAGE THROUGH THE COMMERCIAL SHOOT: We see the start
of a friendship begin between the two men.

They laugh when Larry fumbles his lines and when MAGIC RIPS
OFF HIS WARM-UPS in an iconic shot of the spot. Slap five
when Larry hits a tough jumper and generally, just shoot the
shit, walking together through the fields on their breaks.

In the short time together, they are growing a bond and --

THE MONTAGE ENDS WHEN:

FIRST A.D.
All right, guys. That's lunch.

The crew starts to break. Magic heads off toward his trailer.

LARRY
Where you going? This way.

MAGIC
To my trailer, for lunch.

LARRY

Uh uh. Come on. My mom fixed lunch
at the house.

Off Magic's surprise. Mark Bird points to the limos.

MARK

We can give you a lift. Don't think
you can get there in those.

Larry and Mark share a mischievous grin and --

EXT. GEORGIA BIRD'S NEW FRENCH LICK HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Magic's holding on for dear life on the back of a 4-WHEELER
as Mark and Larry drive him through the farm.

LARRY

You all right back there, Earvin?

MAGIC

I guess this is what passes for a
convertible here.

The Bird boys both laugh as they arrive at their mom's house
where Georgia waits in an apron. No hugs or kisses, just --

GEORGIA BIRD

Get on in. Wash your hands. Lunch
is out on the porch.

But when it's Magic's turn to enter, she gives him a big hug.

GEORGIA BIRD (CONT'D)

We're so glad to have you. You're
my number one favorite player.

Larry rolls his eyes. Knew this was coming.

LARRY

She said the same thing to Isaiah.
'Fore she knew he was an asshole.

And Magic's busting a gut, as he follows Larry off toward --

EXT. PORCH, GEORGIA BIRD'S HOME - MOMENTS LATER

-- where the whole gang enjoys a fried chicken lunch.
Everyone busting balls. Mark is telling a story.

MARK

...and then Larry come home, after playing in that tournament, saying, Mark -- I just played with the best guy I've ever seen.

Larry is cringing.

MAGIC

Larry said that about me?

LARRY

That's not how I remember it.

MAGIC

What I remember's you dipping out the backdoor when the reporters came in.

LARRY

Can show you how to do that sometime. You know it's possible, actually, to not talk to a camera.

MAGIC

(laughs)

I'll leave that to you. Magic doesn't go out the side door.

(to Mark)

I didn't mean to interrupt. What else he said about me?

MARK

(loves rubbing it in)

He said you were great. Just had the whole frickin' game. Naturally, I didn't believe it. But then you beat him in college and he took it real hard and I sat there as he cried and said -- *Larry, you're right. He's a lot better than you.*

The table dies laughing. Larry's red in the face.

LARRY

See with family like this, playing The Lakers ain't nothing.

GEORGIA

Could I get you more, Earvin?

MAGIC

Yes, ma'am. It's terrific. Haven't eaten like this since was home with my folks. Think y'all'd get along.

Georgia serves Magic a plate as he absorbs the surreal scene.

MAGIC (CONT'D)

It's just crazy, isn't it? Did you ever imagine that your son would become so rich and famous?

GEORGIA

I'm just happy he graduated.

LARRY

We gotta do this again?

MAGIC

You know, I talked to Coach Knight. You had stayed at Indiana, we might both of been there. Wouldn't that of been something. Why'd you leave so quick anyway?

Larry cuts his mom a look --

GEORGIA

Don't look at me? Earvin asked?

LARRY

There's nothing really to tell. 30,000 people wasn't my idea of school. More like a country, to me.

CUT TO:

INT. UNIVERSITY OF INDIANA - DAY (FLASHBACK 1976)

18-year-old Larry, with the one bag of shit he took with him in the car, stands on the quad of the sprawling campus, watching hundreds of WORLDLY STUDENTS stream by around him --

LARRY (V.O.)

I roomed with this player, nice guy named Jim Wisman, but we were from different worlds...

INT. LARRY'S UNIVERSITY OF INDIANA DORM ROOM - DAY (1976)

Larry's in his new college dorm room, unpacking his one bag of shit. Two jeans. Two shirts. Two pair of shoes while --

His *SCHOOL TIES* roommate, JIM WISMAN, unpacks a menagerie of SPORTS COATS, SLACKS and SHOES from a steamer trunk.

LARRY (V.O.)
He had different outfit for
different meals. Man, I didn't have
nothing.

INT. COLLEGE RESTAURANT - DAY (1976)

Larry sits alone. A bowl of soup and the check. Counting out some coins from his pocket while --

COLLEGE KIDS all around him eat carefree with their friends.

LARRY (V.O.)
Didn't take a week and a half 'fore
I knew it wouldn't work.

INT. BASKETBALL FACILITY, UNIVERSITY OF INDIANA - DAY (1976)

The HOOSIERS warm up on the court. BOBBY KNIGHT at the helm, aware someone is missing.

BOB KNIGHT
Where the hell's Bird?

EXT. HIGHWAY 37, BLOOMINGTON - DAY (1976)

Larry on the shoulder of the highway, with that same shitty bag, thumbing it for a ride out of town.

A TRUCK finally pulls over and Larry jumps in and it pulls off down the road and that's the end of that --

EXT. GEORGIA BIRD'S HOME - AFTER LUNCH (PRESENT 1986)

Larry's story continues after lunch is complete, walking with Magic through the fields.

LARRY
Didn't even tell Coach I was
leaving.

MAGIC
How'd that go around here?

Larry's look says -- not well.

MAGIC (CONT'D)
You didn't wanna go back?

LARRY
We hit some hard times for awhile.
You know, my dad passed away.

MAGIC
I didn't know, Larry. I'm sorry.

LARRY
That's all right. I'm OK. It's just
something that happened. He'd been
through a lot in his life and he
just did what he had to.

Magic is floored.

MAGIC
Were you guys pretty close?

LARRY
Oh, yeah. We were best friends. We
did everything together.

Off Larry remembering, a FLASH OF IMAGES appears:

YOUNG JOE and YOUNG LARRY, fishing together at the lake.
YOUNG JOE and YOUNG LARRY, shooting hoops till it's dark --

CUT BACK TO:

Larry, remembering. Stoic.

LARRY (CONT'D)
He and mom got divorced. Fell
behind on his payments. Police came
to his parents' house where he
lived, going to take him away...

INT. LARRY'S GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE - DAY (1977)

Joe Bird (50) talks with a SMALL TOWN POLICEMAN. They go back
a million years. Everyone's friend around here.

JOE BIRD
Can I have a couple hours to get my
things straightened out?

Joe watches the policeman depart, his mind already made up.

LARRY (V.O.)
He went to the bar. Ordered a beer.

INT. LOCAL BAR, FRENCH LICK - DAY (1977)

Joe leans up to the bar of his local town haunt.

JOE BIRD
Can I get a half pint of Velvet?

The BARTENDER pours Joe the beer. Joe takes a sip like it's gold, then walks out with the glass --

BARTENDER
Hey Joe! The glass! Where you going?

INT. LARRY'S GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE - DAY

The half pint still in hand, Joe Bird walks in the door, sits down and picks up the phone.

LARRY (V.O.)
He called my mother at home. Told her that he loved her and what he planned to do and... that was that.

Joe hangs up the phone beside the sweating glass of beer which we pan past to see -- A SHOTGUN at his side. Joe Bird considers it and --

EXT. LARRY'S GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE - DUSK

BOOM! A gunshot echoes out, scattering birds into the sky as -

EXT. GEORGIA BIRD'S HOME - AFTER LUNCH (PRESENT 1986)

Magic listens, just stunned. The shotgun blast echoing out across the Indiana sky where Larry wraps up the story.

LARRY
He kinda quit on us so -- took some time before school.

MAGIC
Jesus, Larry. I'm sorry.

LARRY
It's ok. Like I said, it's just something that happened. Took me out of the game for awhile but I hardly think about it now.
(then)
I'm gonna go get up some shots.

And then Larry walks off to the court, leaving Magic just speechless. Watching Larry shoot in the distance and --

EXT. GEORGIA BIRD'S NEW FRENCH LICK HOME - NIGHT

The shoot's finally wrapped. Magic says goodbye to Larry's family, hugging his mother. Finally meets up with Larry.

MAGIC

I'm glad we did this. Nice to meet
the real Larry Bird.

LARRY

Nice to finally meet Earvin, too.
Don't forget that he's in there.

Larry sticks out his hand. Fuck that. Magic gives him a hug.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Don't try that when we play. I'm
not Isaiah. Don't kiss me.

MAGIC

(laughs)

Take it easy, Larry. Give that back
of yours a break.

LARRY

I'll slow down when you do. Don't
leave your best work in sheets.

Magic laughs, driving off in his limo, not quite ready to heed that advice and --

INT. FORUM - DAY (A FEW MONTHS LATER)

Magic walks on the court for first day of preseason, greeting everyone joyously. COOP and BYRON SCOTT greet him, giggling.

MAGIC

What up fellas? How's your summer?

COOP

(mimicking Bird)

"Okay Magic. Show me what you got?"

Scott rips off his warm-ups, mimicking Magic's performance.

SCOTT

Choose your weapon!

They both bust up laughing.

MAGIC

All right. Very funny. When y'all get a commercial, you can make fun of my acting. Until then, shut up.

They're still rolling in stitches when Pat Riley approaches.

MAGIC (CONT'D)

Everyone's a critic now, huh?

RILEY

You shouldn't have done it. You set the examples for this team and that makes it look like we're soft. I hope you left that grab-assing shit in French Lick.

Riley heads off. Magic, a bit stunned. Dr. Buss arrives next.

DR. BUSS

Don't worry about Pat. Guy wins a few rings, starts to think he's a genius. Come over here. I want you to meet someone new.

Buss leads Magic over toward a strapping, bright eyed, jheri curled, choir-boy ROOKIE.

DR. BUSS (CONT'D)

Magic -- A.C. Green. He's the new kid from Oregon.

MAGIC

Nice to meet ya. You ready to work?

A.C. GREEN

Yes, sir. Born ready. *"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."*

AC smiles, sprints off running laps. Magic cuts Buss a look.

DR. BUSS

Virgin.

Magic's jaw hits the hardwood and --

I/E. LAKERS' BUS - (MOVING) NIGHT (A FEW WEEKS LATER)

The Lakers ride late at night. Most of the team is asleep. But A.C. is up, studying the bible by his seat light when --

MAGIC (O.S.)
I got a question for you.

Magic takes the empty seat beside him. A.C. is surprised.

MAGIC (CONT'D)
Is it true in college, you
boycotted the school bookstore
cause they're selling Playboy?
(A.C. nods)
You never been with a women?

A.C. GREEN
Premarital sex is a sin.

MAGIC
Is that right? I'm gonna make you a
bet... two months. That's how long
I give you before you're a sinner
like us. Cause once you see all
these ladies, the only book you're
going to boycott is that.

He points to the Bible, giving A.C. a wicked smile and --

EXT. NEW YORK HOTEL - NIGHT

When A.C. departs the bus at their New York Hotel, his knees
already shake seeing the line-up of KNOCKOUTS waiting outside
the door. Magic walks by, with a "told you so" laugh and --

INT. A.C.'S HOTEL ROOM - A FEW HOURS LATER

Like he's warding off evil spirits, A.C. paces the room with
his bible, SINGING HYMNS at the top of his lungs trying to
drown out -- the chorus of WOMEN KNOCKING ON HIS DOOR.

WOMEN (O.S.)
Come on, baby! Let us in. We won't
bite. Unless you ask.

A.C. belts his prayers louder as --

INT. OUTSIDE A.C.'S ROOM, HOTEL - NIGHT

Magic listens to his songs, standing with THREE WOMEN, trying
in vain to tempt A.C. out. It's not going to happen.

WOMEN
His loss.

MAGIC

Got a pretty good voice, though.

The ladies agree, leading Magic off to his room, where he follows them inside, shutting us out with the door as --

WE MONTAGE THROUGH SOME PRETTY DEBAUCHEROUS YEARS WHERE:

Magic doinks two women in the Forum Club bathroom and --

He bones ANOTHER WOMAN at a Pool Party at his house and --

He balls ANOTHER WOMAN BACKSTAGE at a JACKSON FIVE SHOW and --

At the Playboy Mansion and Donald Sterling's Malibu house and nn New York. And Detroit. And Miami. Magic is in so much tail, he can't come up for air as we hear --

COOP (PRE-LAP)

Nah. There isn't a problem.

I/E. MAGIC'S MERCEDES - DAY

Coop is on the CAR PHONE in Magic's MERCEDES CONVERTIBLE, cruising down RODEO DRIVE. Talking to --

PAT RILEY (FILTERED)

I'm worried that he's distracted.
Magic's gotta slow down.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. PAT RILEY'S OFFICE, FORUM CLUB - DAY

Riley, in his office overlooking the court, combing his hair.

PAT RILEY

We can't have him burn out.

COOP

He's the MVP of the league and we just won back to back titles. You want Magic to slow down?

PAT RILEY

There's plenty of ways to burn out.
I love Dr. Buss but --

COOP

I'm not getting in the middle of that. Coach, I hear your concern but -- Magic is fine.

(MORE)

COOP (CONT'D)

The guy is a prince. My car's in the shop, he lent me his for a month. I'm driving it right now. I wouldn't change him one bit.

PAT RILEY

Nobody's talking about change, I'm just saying be careful. You run an engine too hot, eventually they explode. He's not actually Magic.

COOP

Are you sure of that, Pat?

Coop hangs up the phone and we end with him driving, enjoying the Beverly Hills air when --

BOOM! Out of nowhere, the hood of the car explodes in flames. Coop, understandably panics, trying to get the car off the road before he burns up inside it and --

INT. MAGIC JOHNSON'S NEW BEL AIR MANSION - MOMENTS LATER

Magic's on the phone in his bathroom in a robe.

COOP

Man, I don't know what happened. It just burst into flames.

MAGIC

Oh my god! Coop, that's terrible.

(beat)

We're you able to save the phone numbers I had in the glove box?

INTERCUT NOW WITH:

EXT. RODEO DRIVE - DAY

Coop, standing on a sidewalk, flocked with WASPY onlookers, carphone case in his hand, talking with Magic as FIRE FIGHTERS spray down Magic's smoking Mercedes.

COOP

The numbers? Did you hear me? Your hundred thousand dollar car just blew up on the street -- I'm ok, by the way.

MAGIC

Yeah, I heard you. It's cool. But can you go grab those numbers from the box? I got a girl I need to call. Coop, I can't lose that number.

Coop stares off at the smoldering carcass of the car --

COOP

I'll let you know where they take it. But Earvin, think you might need some help.

Coop hangs up the phone as this time we end on:

Magic in his bedroom which we now see is occupied by SIX WOMEN, passed out on his bed. The sounds of a party, heard raging in the home all around him.

Hold on Magic in this moment, maybe beginning to agree while -

EXT. BOSTON GARDEN - NIGHT

Back in Boston, Larry's facing some hard truths as well. His back in a brace, he shuffles into the Garden beside M.L.

ML CARR

When they going to do one of me?

LARRY

Maybe when you get a jump shot.

M.L.'s referring to the famous WOODEN STATUE OF LARRY on exhibit outside the arena.

ML CARR

Motherfucker. At least I can jump. That thing moves better than you. They need to add a few pounds, they wanna make it more accurate.

Larry can't argue with that and --

INT. BOSTON GARDEN - A FEW HOURS LATER

Larry battles MICHAEL JORDAN and the Bulls in the Garden, having a pretty bad night. Jordan, younger, ascendant, a different caliber of athlete, puts on a show while --

Larry, back breaking in pain, watches large stretches of the game from the bench. Well actually --

From the floor by the bench where he lays on his stomach, trying to soothe his bad spine. And when he gets in the game -

CLANK! Larry puts up a brick, cursing his broken fingers, still mangled from that long ago bar brawl.

JORDAN

Thought you shot better than that.

Jordan takes the ball down and hits a J in Larry's face.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

Take that, All-Star.

LARRY

Come on, you little bitch. Bring it back here.

Summoning his resolve, Bird runs down the wing and drains a THREE in Jordan's face. Jordan shakes his head.

JORDAN

Man, you're the biggest prima donna I've ever seen.

BIRD

What the hell's a prima donna?

Bird runs off past him, bumping Jordan's shoulder, only we can see Larry's hurting. He's still got the talent and drive, but his body is failing. He can barely stand up.

DAN DYREK (PRE-LAP)

You need surgery, Larry. It's not gonna get better.

INT. DAN DYREK'S OFFICE - DAY

Larry sits in DAN DYREK'S PHYSICAL THERAPIST'S OFFICE. X-RAYS of his back on the screen. Red looks on at his side.

DAN DYREK

You've lost the structural stability in your spine so when you run. When you jump, it slips out of position and compresses your nerves. That's like slamming your finger in a door, and somebody keeps shutting it harder.

LARRY

Well, good thing I can't jump.

RED AUERBACH
Larry, this isn't a joke.

DAN DYREK
Now there is therapy we can try to
strengthen the supporting muscles,
try and lock it in place, but it
won't last forever.

RED AUERBACH
How long you wanna go like this?
You already did two Achilles.

FLASH CUT TO:

INT. BOSTON GARDEN - NIGHT

Larry finishes a lay-up against the Pistons but crumples like
a ragdoll when he lands, clutching his ankles in pain and --

INT. BOSTON GARDEN TRAINING FACILITY - DAY

Larry, ornery and suffering, rides a stationary bike in his
practice uniform, with TWO BOOT CASTS on his feet.

RED AUERBACH (V.O.)
You're already in the hospital
between games.

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Larry lays on a hospital bed, trying to catch some sleep
between games. *HIS BACK IN TRACTION* and --

CUT BACK TO:

INT. DAN DYREK'S OFFICE - DAY

As before. Red tries to talk sense to Larry.

RED AUERBACH
I told you before, if you don't
start to slow down -- you won't
walk out of this game on your own.

LARRY
And I told you -- I get paid for a
job, I'm going to show up to work.

RED AUERBACH
Jesus, you're stubborn.

LARRY
I'll do the therapy, fine, but I'm not getting no surgery. I do that, it's over. You go under the knife, you don't come back the same.

RED AUERBACH
Everything ends eventually. What the hell's left to prove?

Off Larry, who doesn't quite have that answer and --

INT. LARRY'S BROOKLINE HOME - DAY

Larry lies on the floor, just like in the games, nursing his back while his NEW BABY BOY swats at a ball in his nursery.

From the door, Dinah watches. Her heart, very full to see Larry, a father. But she knows he's in pain and --

INT. CELTIC'S BUS - NIGHT

Larry's still contemplative on the bus to a game, seated in the back beside Robert Parish, who's got a smile on his face.

LARRY
What's so funny there, Chief?

ROBERT PARISH
Nothing. Just thinking. You believe we get to do this? Get paid to play basketball? Sometimes, I just --

Robert trails off, grateful and wistful. Larry considers him, weigh his future as THE ROAR OF A CROWD takes us into --

INT. BOSTON GARDEN - NIGHT

TITLE CARD READS: 1991 EASTERN CONFERENCE GAME 5.
CELTICS VS PACERS. SERIES TIED 2 - 2

A tight, do or die battle. Larry is hurting, but going shot for shot with Pacers stars, skinny REGGIE MILLER and thick cut CHUCK PERSON. A heated shit talking battle when --

Larry, with the ball at the top of the key -- has it knocked away by a defender. A mad scramble for the ball!

Larry dives to the ground after it and -- BANG!

His head hits the floor hard, face smashing off the parquet with a sickened CRACK that takes the air from the Garden.

The play continues around him but Larry lies on the floor, unmoving. Unconscious. The crowd silent in shock and --

A FEW BREATHLESS MINUTES LATER

Dinah and the fans are in tears when Larry finally rises, staggering into the tunnel, knocked out for the count and --

DOCTOR (PRELAP)
Definitely have a concussion.

INT. CELTICS' LOCKER ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Inside the room, Larry's on the training table. Doctors blinding lights in his eyes. His face already bruised black.

DOCTOR
You were out for three minutes. And your cheek's broken too. You need to get to the hospital.

LARRY
All right. After we win.

DOCTOR
You can't go back in the game! You get hit the face, you could do permanent damage.

Larry cuts Red a look. An understanding between them and --

INT. BOSTON GARDEN - A FEW MOMENTS

Dinah and the Celtics fans just explode when Larry Legend runs out of the tunnel, unbuttoning his warm ups.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
And here comes Larry Bird! And not a moment too soon, with Indiana leading by two.

The moment is iconic. The Boston fans roar as Larry takes a knee in front of the bench, itching to get back in the game.

The standing ovation washes over him. The emotion is incredible. Even Larry can feel it.

He retakes the court, walks right up to Chuck Person.

LARRY
I'm gonna fucking put you in the
ground.

Person is speechless, but there's no doubt that he'll do it.
We don't even need to see the game because --

INT. CELTICS' LOCKER ROOM - AN HOUR LATER

It's over. The Celtics celebrating an unbelievable comeback victory in the locker room, slapping Larry on the back.

He makes his way over to Red, absolutely exhausted. In agony.

RED AUERBACH
You had 17 points in the fourth. If
there was any debate about the best
I've ever seen -- kid, you're it.

LARRY
Woulda had twenty, hadn't missed
that one three.

RED AUERBACH
Son, that's how you finish
something. Remember this one.

Larry's emotional at the words.

LARRY
When the season's over, I'll do it.
Tell Doc to set up the surgery.

Both men know what this means. They take a long moment and then Larry Bird finally sits down as --

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
And there he goes again. Kevin
Johnson goes right by Bryon Scott.

INT. PHOENIX SUNS ARENA - NIGHT

Tiny, flat-topped, KEVIN JOHNSON takes Bryon to the hole. The Phoenix crowd's on their feet. Pat Riley's apoplectic as --

A TITLE CARD READS: WESTERN CONFERENCE SEMIFINALS
GAME 4 - PHOENIX LEADS L.A. 2 - 1

And it goes on like this. Magic tries to will his team to victory with a procession of sky hooks but each time he does -

KJ answers back, dicing through the soft Lakers D.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Kevin Johnson, again penetrating.
Puts a jumper off the glass!

He drives by Byron again. He feeds TOM CHAMBERS for jumpers. He knocks down three after three and then finally -- KJ steals a bounce pass from Magic, hits a streaking DAN MARLEY for a slam that puts the nail in the coffin and --

Magic meets eyes with Riley, both of them ready to snap and --

PAT RILEY (PRE-LAP)
Kevin-fucking-Johnson!

INT. VISITORS' LOCKER ROOM - PHOENIX ARENA - LATER

The mood's dark. The Lakers sit glumly, changing out of their uniforms while Riley tears into their asses.

PAT RILEY
You let Kevin-fucking-midget-ass-Johnson walk down the lane like he's the Dali-fucking-Lama. You didn't play any defense!

No one even reacts. Which makes Riley even madder.

PAT RILEY (CONT'D)
What? You don't care? Worthy, you're fucking forcing up everything. Thompson, I don't know what to say. You're just a goddamn loser who belongs on a fucking loser team. You played like pussies. You don't have any balls! Do you!? Do you? Cause you need 'em? I got 'em. Buck's got 'em! I've seen 'em but the rest of you pussies -- the only guy who did anything on this whole sorry team is Buck, and we wasted 43 points and you guys don't even care!

Despite all his theatrics, it appears that they don't. Just continuing to pack up, never acknowledging the tirade and --

Riley knows what this means. He's lost them. He heads off to bathroom, considering his hair in the mirror in a moment of anguish and then --

WHAM! He punches the glass, shattering his reflection into a thousand fragmented pieces, ripping open his hand.

Magic turns at the sound, seeing Riley, bleeding badly all over his custom-made sharkskin suit. He storms out the door. Magic watches him go. No one saying a word and --

EXT. LAKERS' TEAM BUS - LATER (MOVING)

As the team rides on the bus to the airport, the silence continues. Riley sits alone in the front. Bandaged hand. Broken ego. With the acute feeling, it's over so --

INT. MAGIC'S BEL AIR MANSION - DAY (MONTHS LATER)

It should come as no surprise when Magic opens his door to find Riley outside, tears already pooling his eyes.

RILEY (PRELAP)
I just lost 'em. I'm sorry.

EXT. MAGIC'S BEL AIR MANSION - A FEW MOMENTS LATER

Riley sits with Magic by the pool. Nakedly emotional.

RILEY
When you can't get them to listen,
when that happens, it's over.

MAGIC
Did you talk to Dr. Buss?

RILEY
There will be a press conference
tomorrow. Dunleavy's taking over.

MAGIC
Man, coach, I'm sorry.

RILEY
I'll land on my feet. I'm ok.
We sure had a good run.

MAGIC
Yeah. We ran the shit out.

And they sit there, nostalgic. The sun beginning to set as --

DOCTOR (PRE-LAP)
Scalpel please, Doctor.

INT. BOSTON HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Larry is out. Face down on the operating table with both ACHILLES TENDONS under the knife simultaneously as --

TWO SURGEONS work in tandem, chiseling bones spurs out of Larry's peeled open heels and --

INT. ANOTHER BOSTON HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Larry's face down on another operating table as another TEAM OF SURGEONS remove an entire DISC from his spine.

SURGEON

Good thing he's so tall. Least it's easier to see in here.

The surgeons laugh as they work, exhuming the bloody disc, dropping into a silver bowl just like --

EXT. THE POOL, MAGIC'S BEL AIR MANSION - DAWN

Ice rattling in a highball glass as Dr. Buss pours himself a rum and Coke and joins Magic in the hot tub.

DR. BUSS

Hell of ride.

Around them -- a bleak scene. Literally the end of the party. The place trashed. A few people passed out. A few others stagger off toward their cars in the twilight.

Magic and Dr. Buss, the last people awake.

DR. BUSS (CONT'D)

That was one for the books. What do you wanna do now?

MAGIC

I don't know, man. I'm beat. Don't know who half of these people were.

DR. BUSS

It's a new crowd. I know.

MAGIC

I mean, all this running. Makes me wonder if I left Earvin somewhere back there on the road?

DR. BUSS

I know what you mean. You're so right. This is stale.

(beat)

Let's drive to Tijuana. Catch a bullfight. Eat some tacos.

MAGIC

(not what he's getting at)

You want to go to Mexico now?

DR. BUSS

Yeah, man. Let's go. I know a great place for breakfast. We can be there before seven.

MAGIC

You can't eat tacos at a bullfight? You know where the meat comes from don't you?

DR. BUSS

Why you never stop running. Ole!

Dr. Buss raises his glass. Magic toasts him, but he's aware they are riding the fumes of a party that's already over.

INT. MAGIC'S MANSION - MORNING

A few hours later, as the CLEANERS sweep up the mess from last night, Magic dials the phone. Placing a call to --

MAGIC

Hey baby, it's Earvin... yeah, it's been a long time, but I've been missing my Cookie. If you got any time, maybe we oughta talk.

Magic is wistful, smiling at her response as ROBERTA FLACK and DONNY HATHAWAY sing: "THE CLOSER I GET TO YOU" inside --

INT. UNION MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

-- where Cookie, resplendent in her wedding dress, walks down the aisle on the arm of her father toward --

Earvin, handsome in a white tux, waiting at the alter to receive her and --

EXT. UNION MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

The newlyweds descends the steps of the small church in East Lansing, cheered on by a small collection of their close family and friends. Nothing SHOWTIME about it and --

INT. KELLOGG CENTER, MSU CAMPUS - DAY (A FEW HOURS LATER)

Cookie and Earvin dance at their reception on the campus where they first met 14 years earlier.

MAGIC

You happy now, baby?

COOKIE

Yeah. I'm happy now, Earvin. Good things do come to those who wait.

Earvin and Cookie kiss as the dance. For the first time, in a long time, Earvin's at peace. IT DOESN'T LAST LONG.

COOKIE (PRE-LAP) (CONT'D)

Where do you think this should go?

INT. MAGIC JOHNSON'S NEW BEL AIR MANSION - A FEW MONTHS LATER

Cookie (two months pregnant) sets up a nursery in one of the bedrooms. Magic helps with the crib.

COOKIE

Put it here. Think that's good.

Magic sets down the crib, breathing hard for a moment.

COOKIE (CONT'D)

It's a preseason game. If you're tired, tell Coach you can't go.

MAGIC

I already tried to get out of it, but it's not fair to the fans. I'll be back in two days. You change anymore bedrooms, Isaiah'll be sad.

He kisses her as she laughs and --

EXT. SALT LAKE CITY - ESTABLISHING

The sun glistens off the Mormon kingdom where --

INT. UTAH JAZZ, PRACTICE FACILITY - DAY

Magic is practicing with the Lakers in the UTAH ARENA.

A TITLE CARD READS: OCTOBER 25, 1991

The team's in town for an exhibition game against the Jazz. A lot of new faces. Among them, MIKE DUNLEVAY - THE COACH.

Magic's still in fine form, running fast breaks with the team but at the end of the break, Magic doesn't sprint back. He pulls up, gassed. Sucking wind. Worthy slows up beside him.

WORTHY

Hey Buck, you all right?

MAGIC

Yeah. All good, man. I'm fine. Too much wedding cake, maybe.

Worthy laughs, running off. Magic mans up and joins him but --

INT. LOCKER ROOM, UTAH - LATER

-- after practice, Magic's still tired and is bending the ear of GARY VITTI, the LAKERS ATHLETIC TRAINER.

MAGIC

I don't know. Just feel heavy. Probably just need a day off.

GARY VITTI

I'll talk to the Coach. You'll be fine. Get some rest. Welcome to married life, Magic.

Magic smiles, but belies a hint of concern and --

INT. SALT LAKE HILTON HOTEL - LATER

Taking Vitti's advice, Magic's napping pre-game in his room when the bedside phone rings. It's 2:15 pm. Magic answers.

MAGIC

Hello?

DR. MELLMAN (FILTERED)

Hey Earvin. Dr. Mellman. In L.A.

MAGIC

Oh. How's it going there, doc?

DR. MELLMAN (FILTERED)
Actually not very good. Something important's come up. I need you to get on a plane back here now.

MAGIC
Oh. Ok well -- I got a game in an bit. I can be there tomorrow.

DR. MELLMAN (FILTERED)
No. You need to come now. There's a flight in an hour. We'll talk when you're here.

Magic hangs up the phone, realizing something is wrong and --

INT. WAITING ROOM, DR. MELLMAN'S OFFICE, L.A. - HOURS LATER

Magic's sitting beside Dr. Buss in the empty waiting room, looking at a copy of EBONY on the table. On the cover:

MICHAEL JORDAN and his wife JUANITA.

Magic considers NBA'S biggest star when the door to the Doctor's office opens and DR. MELLMAN (Magic's personal physician) appears. His face, Ashen. Off Magic's concern --

DR. MELLMAN (PRELAP)
It showed up on the blood test they took for your life insurance. We've been trying to get answers.

INT. DR. MELLMAN'S OFFICE, LOS ANGELES - EVENING

Magic listens in shock as Dr. Mellman delivers the blow.

DR. MELLMAN
Now, being H-I-V positive is different from having AIDS. There is big difference there and we will figure out a regimen.

Magic, completely numb. Hasn't processed.

MAGIC
Ok. All right. How long you think I need to sit out from the team?

Dr. Mellman and Buss share a look. Who's going to tell him?

DR. BUSS

Earvin -- I'm sorry. You can't play basketball anymore.

Magic, just speechless.

DR. MELLMAN

Everyone ounce of strength you have needs to go to fighting this virus.

MAGIC

You mean, I have to retire?

DR. MELLMAN

There's more to life than just basketball.

A very long beat.

MAGIC

How long you think I have?

DR. MELLMAN

You're in a fight. We don't know. Given your lifestyle, the nature of this virus, it could have been lurking in your body for years.

(beat)

Now of course, Cookie will have to get tested right away.

That threatens to bring Magic to his knees.

MAGIC

What's that mean for the baby? She's two months pregnant.

DR. MELLMAN

We don't have all the answers yet. You just need to have faith. We will find a way through.

Off Magic, miraculously holding it together until --

EXT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

He exits the office with Buss and completely falls apart.

MAGIC

I'm going to fucking die.

DR. BUSS

No you're not. You're a champ. If anyone can beat this, it's you. You have me. You have Cookie. You're gonna fight this like a game.

But Magic can't hear him now. He is crying, afraid.

MAGIC

How am I supposed to tell her?

But Magic must know, no one can help him with that and --

INT. MAGIC'S BEL AIR MANSION - LATER THAT NIGHT

Magic waits in his empty house for Cookie, who arrives home from dinner, surprised to find him in L.A.

COOKIE

Well that's a surprise? Thought you weren't getting home till tomorrow.

MAGIC

I took an early flight back.
Cookie, we need to talk.

Off Cookie, steadying herself for the blow of her life and --

A FEW HOURS LATER

The couple sits in the den. All wrung out of emotion.

MAGIC (CONT'D)

I don't know what else to say. If you want to leave me, I get it. I wouldn't blame you at all.

COOKIE

Think I waited this long to just run out right now? Earvin, I'm not going anywhere. We'll get through it together.

Incredible humbled, Earvin buries his head in her and cries.

MAGIC

(after a very long beat)
There's still one other thing. I gotta start making calls. Dr. said it's important I let people know -- you know, that I may have infected.
(silence)
You understand what I'm saying?

COOKIE
 You mean call other women?
 (off Magic's nod)
 All right. So go do it. Gonna take
 you awhile.

Off Magic's shame, we hear the RING OF THE PHONE INSIDE --

INT. MAGIC'S BEL AIR MANSION - NIGHT

-- where Cookie sits beside a locked office door. Tissues in hand. Bible in lap. Listening to her husband on the phone --

MAGIC (O.S.)
 I know. I'm so sorry, just make
 sure you get tested. I will, Linda.
 You too.

She hears him hang up. Dial again. This will go on for hours.

MAGIC (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Hey Monica, it's Magic. Yeah, been
 awhile I know. No, I can't. Sorry.
 Listen. There's something I need to
 tell you. You might wanna sit down.

Cookie listens to them all, like she's paying penance herself until finally... WE HEAR ANOTHER PHONE RINGING INSIDE --

INT. LARRY BIRD'S BROOKLINE HOME - DAY

-- where Larry, still rehabbing from back surgery, sleeps on the ground in a FIBERGLASS BRACE. Dinah (with their baby in her arms) answers the phone.

DINAH
 Hello? It's Dinah. Larry's taking a
 nap. Can he call you back later?
 (her face falls)
 Ok. Hang on. One sec.

Appropriately worried, Dinah goes to rouse Larry.

DINAH (CONT'D)
 Hey, honey. Wake up. Think you need
 to get up. It's your agent.

Slowly, Larry rises. The pain he's in is tremendous.

LARRY
 I hate this damn thing. Makes me
 feel like a mummy.

They share a sweet kiss as Larry hobbles to the phone.

LARRY (CONT'D)

This better be good. You woke me up from a nap. They want another commercial?

BOB WOLF (FILTERED)

No, Larry, they don't. This isn't going to be easy so I'm just going to tell you cause we don't have much time.

(beat)

Magic's retiring today. He's got HIV. There's going to be an announcement. He wanted you to know before the word hit the news.

Larry -- just staggered. Dinah watches him, scared.

LARRY

What I can I do? What's he need?

BOB WOLF (FILTERED)

He's ok. Just hang tight. He'll call in a few days.

LARRY

(just panicked)

No. I need to talk him now. It can't wait a few days.

BOB WOLF (FILTERED)

I don't know if you can. He's got a press conference in an hour, but you can try him at home.

Larry hangs up the phone, immediately dialing again.

DINAH

Larry, hey - what's going on?

But he can't find the words, frantically dialing the phone as-

WE INTERCUT WITH:

INT. MAGIC'S BEL AIR MANSION - SAME

Magic, in his palatial closet, trying to find a suit to wear to the worst moment of his career when Cookie arrives.

COOKIE

(of the suits)

What do you think of this blue? I was thinking something optimistic, you know. Show people I'm fine.

COOKIE (CONT'D)

Earvin, Larry just called. Want me to tell him, talk later?

Magic's surprised. Even touched a little bit and --

A FEW SECONDS LATER

He picks up the phone, trying to put on a smile.

MAGIC

Hey Larry, what's cooking?

LARRY

Magic, man, I'm so sorry. Just tell me what I can do.

MAGIC

You don't have to do anything. It's all going to be fine. We just got Cookie tested. She's healthy so there's really no worry. What I want to know is how you feeling, Larry? Seen you wearing that corset. You look like an old man.

LARRY

Yeah, I feel like one too.

In spite of the circumstances, Larry and Magic both laugh. But then they fall into silence. Larry's getting choked up.

LARRY (CONT'D)

You don't quit on me, Earvin.

MAGIC

Don't have much of a choice. Docs say I gotta retire --

LARRY

I'm not talking about that. Just don't quit on me, got it?

Magic understands Larry's fear.

MAGIC

I gotta run. Thanks for calling. But don't you worry. I don't quit.

Magic hangs up, quite moved, as we end on:

Larry, setting down the receiver. Dinah waits for the news.

LARRY

You believe this guy? He's trying
to cheer me up.

DINAH

Maybe it means he can beat it.

LARRY

You heard of someone who has?

Dinah's got no response and Larry's clearly terrified as --

INT. LIMOUSINE - NIGHT

Magic, in his suit, rides with Cookie to the Forum. They may as well be in a hearse. Magic's understandably heavy as --

Like many years before, L.A.'s sights shine out the window. Magic views them, nostalgic, passing a bright row of ORANGE TREES on a Beverly Hills Lawn. He considers them, sadly. His beginning. Now his end as --

INT. FORUM - NIGHT

Cookie waits alone in a hallway outside the locker room in her "optimistic" white suit. Putting on a brave face as --

The LAKERS all file out -- having just heard the news. Grown men just in tears who can't meet Cookie's eyes.

She waits for the long, funeral procession to end until Earvin finally appears in the door. Cookie takes him by the hand and they now make their way to --

INT. FORUM CLUB - NIGHT

The holy of holies. Magic enters the club, not for a party, but a press conference. The famously private, no cameras allowed, club is now jammed with REPORTERS and CAMERA CREWS and NBA ROYALTY while --

INT. LARRY BIRD'S BROOKLINE HOME - SAME

Larry and Dinah watch on TV as Magic takes his place at the podium. Cookie's beside him. Dr. Buss, weeping openly.

DAVID STERN, JERRY WEST, DR. Mellman, Coop and Kareem take seats on both sides. It looks like The Last Supper.

Magic waits at the mic. A long beat of silence. Putting on a big smile as the cameras keep flashing. Finally --

MAGIC (ON TV)

"First of all, let me say good after -- good after late afternoon. Because of the uh -- the HIV virus that I have attained, I will have to retire from the Lakers today."

The words take Larry's wind and --

INT. FORUM CLUB - SAME

Magic adjusts the mic as the news hits the room.

MAGIC

"I just want to make clear, first of all, that I do not have the AIDS disease -- 'cause I know a lot of you are -- want to know that -- but the HIV virus. My wife is fine. She's negative, so there's no problem with her. I plan on going on, living for a long time, bugging you guys, like I've have so -- you'll see me around. Obviously, I'm going to miss playing, but I will now become a spokesman for the HIV virus because I want people -- young people to realize that they can practice safe sex. And you know sometimes you're a little naive about it and you think it could never happen to you. You only thought it could happen to, you know, other people and so on and all but... I'm going to deal with it and my life will go on. And I will be here, enjoying the Laker games, and all the other NBA games around the country. So, life is going to go on for me, and I'm going to be a happy man."

The effort to hope is gut-wrenching. The room is dead silent.

MAGIC (CONT'D)

"I want to thank everybody up here, as well as my teammates, because they've been behind me all the way. I want to thank Kareem for coming out, him and "Coop" who -- who stood side by side and won a lot of battles. I want to thank also Jerry West for all he's done. Dr. Kerr. Dr. Mellman -- he will tell you who my other doctors are that have helped me through this -- as well as, like I said, my father, in a sense, Dr. Jerry Buss, for just drafting me and me being here."

Dr. Buss almost faints. Cookie gives him a hand.

MAGIC (CONT'D)

"Now, of course, I will miss the battles and the wars, and I will miss you guys. But life goes on... This is not like my life is over, cause it's not. I'm gonna live on. This is another challenge. It's another chapter in my life. It's like being -- like your back's against the wall but I think you just have to come out swinging. And I'm swinging so -- I am going to go on. I'm gonna beat it so uhm, thank you again. And I'll see you soon."

And with that, while reporters bomb questions, Magic hands over the mic, stepping away from the podium as --

INT. LARRY BIRD'S BROOKLINE HOME - SAME

Larry watches through tears the unbelievable -- and here before never seen -- sight of Magic vacating the stage though a black curtain behind it. Walking away from the spotlight.

Larry watches, just gutted. He can't even move and --

INT. BOSTON GARDEN - (THE VERY NEXT) NIGHT

Before a game against the HAWKS, Larry's still overcome. He stands for the ANTHEM, unable to contain his emotions and --

For just the second time in his life, Larry does not want to play ball. We see this during the game as --

A FEW MINUTES LATER

Larry runs on the court, but he plays in a fog. No passion. No love. Like he's underwater and can't come up for air, but -

In one moment of grace, with back broken and all, Larry pushes the ball on the break, approaching mid court when --

From out of nowhere, he throws a fifty foot, behind the back dime to a streaking REGGIE LEWIS who throws it down a dunk and for a moment we --

FLASH CUT TO:

YOUNG MAGIC -- in his prime on a break, splitting the defense in style, throwing the same behind the back dime as we --

CUT BACK TO:

LARRY, hobbling back on defense, understanding this was a tribute to Magic. It's incredibly painful and --

EXT. LOCKER ROOM, BOSTON GARDEN - AFTER THE GAME

Larry (in a bad Cosby sweater) is mobbed by reporters at his locker. He is very subdued.

MUSBERGER

How did you feel out there, Larry?
We know how your back's been, but
tonight it seem like you were
playing with heavy heart?

LARRY

"No doubt about it. I was. Probably
the two toughest days I've had
since my father passed away and --
I've been very depressed and sort
of been out of it. You know, just
out of the blue, something like
that happening, it's just -- I've
never, other than one other
instance, and I was hoping I'd
never see that again cause I
remember how I felt, weeks after
that and yesterday was just a -- a
sad day."

We linger on Larry, trying to hold in his pain, but for once, he's unable to and --

INT. LARRY BIRD'S BROOKLINE BOSTON HOME - NIGHT

When he gets home to Dinah, he goes immediately for a beer.

LARRY

All these years, me and him, we've been linked. It's like I knew he was out there -- working hard, getting better. I had to get better too. But if Magic ain't there --
(beat)
This competition is just --

DINAH

It's not all about competition. He's your friend and you're scared.

Larry sits downs. Still fighting.

LARRY

After my dad died, I put it all into winning - but every time, there was Magic. I figured I could beat him then, I could maybe move on, put all that in the past but -- if he's not there anymore, I don't know how to do it.

DINAH

Maybe you don't have to fight him. Maybe you just let him in. Just be there as a friend.

LARRY

And what about if he's gone?

Dinah puts her hand on his back as Larry Bird finally cries.

DAMON WAYANS (PRELAP)

No, I love living in L.A. It's the best place in the world.

INT. COMEDY STORE - NIGHT

Trying to enjoy a night out, Magic sits with Cookie VIP at the comedy club, watching DAMON WAYANS performing on stage.

WAYANS

Basketball season is back. They say Magic might come back to help out the Lakers. That'd be nice right?

Magic smiles. Cookie tenses. Damon doesn't know they're here.

WAYANS (CONT'D)
 You know what Magic stands for
 don't you? "My - Ass - Got -
 Infected - Coach."

On Magic. Trying to laugh the joke off. It gets worse.

WAYANS (CONT'D)
 I wonder if a lot of the players
 don't wanna play with Magic now.
 He's all sweaty and shit, they
 gotta body him up in fucking Hazmat
 suits and shit. Be like --
 (let's a player drive by)
 Oop, damn. Couldn't get that Magic.
 Right by me, man. Damn. Hey coach,
 that's Magic. I can't check Magic.

The crowd laughs. Cookie can see Magic's hurt. She tries to
 get him to leave, but Magic won't move. He endures it.

WAYANS (CONT'D)
 You see the All Star game. The only
 person in the league wanna d-Magic
 up is Dennis Rodman and he's up on
 his ass like --
 (bodies him up hard)
 Boom! Knocks him to the ground. Be
 like "Look? I'm not scared of
 Magic. I'm fucking everybody. I
 don't know what the fuck I got.
 Y'all oughta be scared of me!

The crowd is in stitches. Cookie fights tears. Magic puts on
 a good face, but he's cut to the bone and --

INT. MAGIC'S BEL AIR MANSION - DAY

The next day, Cookie's surprised when she comes into the
 bedroom to find Magic lacing his sneakers.

COOKIE
 Where you going?

MAGIC
 To the gym. Wanna say hey to the
 guys. Shoot around for a bit. I'll
 take it easy. Don't worry.

That's not Cookie's concern. He kisses her as he goes and --

EXT. FORUM - DAY

Just like the old times, A MARQUEE ANNOUNCES TONIGHT'S GAME: LAKERS VS. PISTONS.

FANS wait at the players' gate clamoring for autographs when Magic steps out of his Mercedes, thrilled to be back in his element. He puts on a big smile, ready to greet all his fans -

But, to Magic's dismay, the crowd parts when he enters. They don't beg for his autographs or clamor for pictures. They back away like he's toxic and won't meet his eyes.

Magic heads through them, destroyed and --

INT. FORUM - DAY

-- when he enters his old home, saying HI to the PRESS, giving high fives to the STAFF, this time, the mood's grave.

A REPORTER reluctantly takes a high-five. Then wipes his hand on his pants as Magic passes along. It's devastating to see.

A dead man walking.

INT. COURT, FORUM - MOMENTS LATER

It's even worse on the court. Magic's former teammates warm-up in the empty arena when Magic, in practice gear, steps onto the court. The record scratches. A long beat.

COACH DUNLEAVY
How's it going there, Magic?

MAGIC
Yeah, it's going real good. Just wanted come and work out. See if you needed a hand. I could pretend to be Isaiah.

Magic does an Isaiah impersonation. A few awkward laughs. But he doesn't get any takers.

MAGIC (CONT'D)
Hey James, how about you? Wanna run one-on-one?

JAMES WORTHY
Uh -- maybe later. That cool? I wanna work on my free throws.

MAGIC

Ok. Go ahead. A.C. How bout you?

A.C.

Just about to go get taped up.

MAGIC

OK. Cool. Anybody wants a game,
I'll be right over here. 'Less
y'all just don't wanna get beat.

Magic, keeping his head high, dribbles to another basket and begins hoisting up shots. The few players there take their balls and move to another rim, leaving Magic alone.

It's a very sad sight, but Magic tries to shoot through it. Finally, Bryon Scott comes over, shaking his head in disappointment with his teammates' behavior.

BYRON SCOTT

You want someone to rebound?

MAGIC

(appreciating the gesture)
What's going on with the guys?

BYRON SCOTT

Man, they're just scared. A lot of the guys, they don't know what to say. And a lot of the others, just afraid that they'll catch it.

MAGIC

You know it don't work like that right?

BYRON SCOTT

Of course man, I know. But half of 'em just went out and got tested themselves. They'll come around. Give 'em time. They just don't want to die.

(beat. He feels terrible)

Man, that's not what I meant.

MAGIC

I'm not going to die. I feel fine.

Byron wants to believe that, but it sounds like blind hope.

BYRON SCOTT

Just give the brothers some time. It's a lot to take in. Plus, with what Isiah's being say --

MAGIC

What do you mean? What'd he say?

BYRON SCOTT

Oh shit. You haven't heard?

Off Magic, he hasn't. But he's about to find out and --

INT. VISITOR'S LOCKER ROOM - FORUM - LATER

Isaiah Thomas is buttoning up his warm-ups, joking around with his teammates as they exit the tunnel when Magic appears. Still wearing in his warm-ups.

ISAIAH

Hey Magic. Uh-oh. You making comeback already?

MAGIC

You been calling my agent?

ISAIAH

I been calling who what?

MAGIC

You call Lou Rosen, I said? Say you heard I was gay?

ISAIAH

Did I what? Are you crazy? C'mon. I got a game.

He tries laughing this off, but Magic won't let it pass.

MAGIC

I heard you been going around, asking what's going on. You saying, that isn't true?

Isaiah finally stops, caught. He lets down his pretense.

MAGIC (CONT'D)

What the fuck, bro? I thought we were boys. You know me better than anyone. We vacation together. You had a key to my house.

ISAIAH

I don't know what you do out here in Hollywood when I'm not around. You out with Dr. Buss and Arsenio. I don't know what you get into.

MAGIC

You really think that I'm gay?
 (Isaiah is silent)
 Your friend gets this news and
 that's where you go first? Not, is
 he ok? Not, let me call Earvin? No.
 Instead you go around, telling the
 world that I'm gay.
 (Isaiah doesn't deny it)
 You're only worried about you. You
 afraid what they'll say cause we
 used to kiss before games.

Isaiah doesn't deny it. He shows no emotion.

ISAIAH

I didn't live your life, Magic.
 Whatever you did, whoever you did
 it with, guess you gotta live with
 it now. I'm sorry. I am.
 (beat)
 I gotta run. Got a game. You give
 my love to Cookie.

MAGIC

Hope you break a leg asshole.

ISAIAH

You reap what you sew.

Isaiah walks off with smirk, leaving Magic in the tunnel.
 Backstage and alone. Listening the roar of the crowd. The
 spotlight shinning without him and --

INT. MAGIC'S BEL AIR MANSION - LATER THAT NIGHT

Magic's awake in the dark, watching a VHS on his TV.

The tape's of a game he's returned to many times in his life.
 1980. Game 6. The NBA Finals when a 20 year-old Magic played
 the game of his life and cemented his stardom.

Magic watches, bittersweet. 40 points. 15 boards. 7 assists.
 Twelve years ago. Much as changed since then. But what has
 not is Magic's drive to win. To excel. To survive. We see it
 in his face and --

MARK BIRD (PRELAP)

He really asked you to come?

EXT. LAKE, FRENCH LICK - DAY

Larry is fishing on a boat with Mark. It's peaceful, but a tough gig for Larry, still wearing the fucking BACK-BRACE.

MARK BIRD

Can you fly with your back?

LARRY

I'll be sitting on a plane. I don't have flap there myself.

MARK BIRD

Way you're fishing, might need to. You couldn't catch a flight.

LARRY

Ain't seen you catch anything either.

MARK BIRD

Didn't wanna make you feel bad. Just wait, cause it's coming.

They could do this all day. Two brothers, talking shit.

MARK BIRD (CONT'D)

Well I'm proud that you're going. Sure it means a lot. Not a lot of people in his corner right now.

LARRY

I know he'd do it for me.

MARK BIRD

Bet he would. They ever retire your jersey, they'll have to hang that thing too. It did half the work.

He's talking about the back brace.

LARRY

When I'm done this, I'm gonna blow it half. Can't run anymore, but I can still fucking shoot.

Larry mimes a shotgun. Off the Bird brothers' laugh...

EXT. FORUM - NIGHT (ESTABLISHING)

Another sparkling night. Showtime in L.A. where --

INT. FORUM - THAT MOMENT

Larry (in a suit) walks through the now familiar tunnels, catching some heckles from the good natured staff.

STAFF

Hey Larry, Boston sucks!

LARRY

You guys aren't real good either.

The staff laughs. So does Larry. Dr. Buss warmly approaches.

DR. BUSS

Thanks for coming. Means the world.
Know it's hard to travel right now.

LARRY

That's all right. Wouldn't miss it.

DR. BUSS

Well, come on. Earvin's waiting.
Wanted to talk with you before.

Dr. Buss doesn't say about what. Just leads Larry off into --

INT. FORUM CLUB - NIGHT

The once raucous club. Now eerily silent. Larry enters to see Magic sitting alone in a booth in a chocolate brown suit. The two men take a moment, both clearly torn up.

MAGIC

Thanks for coming.

LARRY

Are you kidding? Get to see you
retire? I've been waiting 12 years.
Wish I was playing tonight. Think
I'd probably drop sixty.

MAGIC

Yeah. Bet you could. Bet you would.

Magic gets up and they hug. A long time. Emotional.

LARRY

Don't get all sentimental on me.
You still look pretty good too.
Could probably get twenty at least.

MAGIC

You really think? Well, that's good. Cause that's actually what I wanted to talk to you about.

Larry drops the embrace, wary of Magic's sly smile and --

A FEW MINUTES LATER

They are sitting in the booth. Magic's laid out his plan.

MAGIC (CONT'D)

You gotta come, Larry. I need this. Michael's going to play. I talked to Charles and Patrick.

LARRY

Didn't talk to Laimbeer, did you? I'd hate to see him on the bus, saying "Hi Larry," and me have to say, "Fuck you, Bill."

Magic laughs.

MAGIC

It's called The Dream Team, Larry. It's the greatest team ever. We didn't call Bill Laimbeer. We need you, Larry Bird.

LARRY

Earvin, my back is so broke, I can hardly get out of bed. I can't run with you guys.

MAGIC

I don't need you to run. I need you there as a friend.

(beat)

I need to prove I still got it. But I can't do it without you. With no Bird, there's no Magic.

Larry is silent. And moved. He takes a long beat.

MAGIC (CONT'D)

If it makes a difference, I'll ask, but I don't think they'll move the Olympics to French Lick.

LARRY

Is Isaiah gonna be there?

Magic shakes his head, gleefully.

MAGIC

You reap what you sew.
 (enjoys that for a beat)
 So what's it going to be, Larry?
 You ready to be on my team?

Off Larry, regarding his friend as --

CHUCK HEARN (PRELAP)

Our next speaker has been linked
 with Magic Johnson ever since they
 met in the NCAA Tournament
 Championship back in 1979 --

INT. FORUM - A FEW HOURS LATER

The arena is dark. Magic stands on the court in the beam of a spotlight for a very somber ceremony. A funeral with the deceased in attendance. Chuck Hearn's at the podium.

CHUCK HEARN

Their spirited rivalry peaked of
 course in their three meetings in
 the NBA finals.

Reveal Larry, sitting on the Lakers court, waiting to rise --

CHUCK HEARN (CONT'D)

Representing the Boston Celtics. A
 guy who came out here under great
 duress. 12 hours in an airplane
 with a bad back is not fun. Please
 join me in giving a tremendous Los
 Angeles welcome to Larry Bird.

Larry rises as the Lakers fans, in a moment of tremendous class -- give him a long standing ovation. Larry's touched.

LARRY

Thank you. Thank you.
 (the applause keeps going)
 Hey, come on. Thanks a lot but I'm
 not the one retiring here.

SCREAMING LAKERS FAN (O.S.)

WHEN ARE YOU?

LARRY

Very soon.

The crowd laughs. Larry regroups, reading a prepared speech.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Earvin "Magic" Johnson. The respect you have earned through out the NBA for your outstanding and unique play was never more evident than between the intense rivalry between the Lakers and The Celtics.

(Larry holds a gift)

This piece of Boston Garden Parquet symbolizes your place in the hearts and minds of Celtics fans everywhere. You never wore the green and white, but you'll always be a part of our family. Magic...

Larry hands Magic the commemorative gift and the two rivals hug. And outside of the reach of the microphones --

MAGIC

(whispers)

Thank you.

Larry's moved so he takes the mic back, returns to the crowd.

LARRY

And he's not done yet because we're going to go to Barcelona and bring back the gold for everyone here in the United States.

That brings the crowd to their feet and a smile to Magic. The friends shake hands. United. Applause washes over them as --

A MUSIC CUE STARTS, taking us through --

A VICTORY LAP OF A MONTAGE: THE DREAM TEAM

For the first time in 14 years, Larry and Magic are on the same team. They sit next to each other on the bus, taking in the historic sights of Barcelona.

- They take pictures with FANS in TOURIST SIGHTS in the city.
- They practice together in their USA JERSEYS along with Jordan and Ewing. Clyde and Malone. Magic running the show. Larry (and his broken back) shooting threes on the sidelines.
- They laugh side by side at the dias during pressers and goof in the locker-room, looking at Larry's mangled fingers, still crooked from the bar fight.
- They drink beers, talking shit, smoking cigars, betting games of pool in the hotel with Jordan and of course...

- At the games, they sit side by side on the bench. No longer eager young studs waiting for their chance to compete, but basketball legends here for the love of the game and --

- On the court, Magic shows the world that he still has the goods. On a flashy fast break, Magic jukes a CANADIAN PLAYER out of his jock, dancing in for a lay-up and --

- While Larry's back keep him laying down on the sidelines during most of the games, he talks shit while he does it, cracking up Magic, Jordan, and Ewing until finally --

- CHUCK DALEY (the Coach) signals Larry into the game. He peels himself off the floor. Checking in next to Magic.

MAGIC

Wanna show these fools something?

Larry laughs at the call back and when they get in the game, Magic seeks Larry out, trying to get him his shots.

MAGIC (CONT'D)

Larry!

Magic feeds him for a three, which Larry buries and...

- One another possession, Magic drives down the lane, dishing over his shoulder to Larry at the wing for a three that he nails and the teammates high five and for a moment we --

FLASHBACK TO:

1978: THE JUNIOR USA TEAM. Young Larry and YOUNG MAGIC on the break. Magic dropping a no-look dime over his shoulder to Larry, who dishes it no-look back to Magic for a wide open lay-up and the young bucks high five and we --

CUT BACK TO:

THE GAME IN BARCELONA. As before. Old Magic and Larry jogging back on D. Slapping five. Teammates as we END MONTAGE AT:

INT. BARCELONA LOCKER ROOM - DAY

The game's complete. Larry and Magic hang their jerseys, dressing in street clothes. Larry's a little nostalgic.

MAGIC

So is this really it?

LARRY

Oh yeah. This is it. How 'bout you?
You look sharp.

MAGIC

Yeah. I feel pretty good. Still got a some gas in the tank. Maybe I'll run it all back. Can't let Michael have all the fun.

LARRY

Who the hell's out here for fun?

They laugh. Larry grabs Magic's jersey. Hands him a marker.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Wanna sign this thing for me?

MAGIC

You gonna sign one for me?

Larry signs his. The two old rivals exchange jerseys and --

INT. BARCELONA ARENA - A FEW MOMENTS LATER

Larry and Magic step off the elevator, heading toward the lobby to exit the arena.

In the distance, they can see a CROWD OF FANS and REPORTERS outside by the TEAM BUS, waiting for a glimpse of the stars.

Larry slows up. Starts to turn.

LARRY

You know, I talked to this guy. There's a side door over here. You don't have to mess with all that. We can slip out the back.

Magic gives him a smile.

MAGIC

Thought I told you before. I don't go out the side door.

Some things never change. He and Larry slap hands. A final goodbye. And then Larry is gone, disappearing out a quiet backdoor. Into the sunset, alone as --

Magic watches him go, grateful and moved, before he turns to the entrance, lights up his bright smile, and steps through the doors into the arms of his fans as we --

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END