

# *SHOWTIME*

Episode I: "The Magic Buss"

Written by

Max Borenstein

Story by

Max Borenstein & Jim Hecht

Based on "Showtime"  
by Jeff Pearlman

REVISED FIRST DRAFT  
January 25, 2019

FROM BLACK...

WHAM!

A CHYRON fills the screen -- a big, brash '80S FONT you might call garish if this wasn't such a chichi HBO production:

**BEVERLY HILLS, CALIFORNIA - 1991**

**INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - WAITING ROOM - DAY**

A Cedars Sinai waiting room.

You've been to these places. Maybe you're reading this script in one right now. Now picture it in pastel colors (all the latest, all the rage). Picture the MEN in Polo shirts and gelled hair, the WOMEN in shoulder-pads like linebackers.

They're all reading MAGAZINES with notables like Saddam Hussein, Princess Diana, and Luke Perry on the covers. So they're not noticing what we do: subtle, in the background, like a ripple through the OFFICE STAFF behind the counter --

Something's brewing. TWO NURSES whisper in urgent tones:

HEAD NURSE

He still in there?

YOUNG NURSE

Room twelve.

They scan the people in the waiting area -- fixing on a 10-YEAR-OLD BOY playing a Game Boy; wearing a gold and purple L.A. LAKERS T-SHIRT. For some reason, this means something.

HEAD NURSE

They want to let him out the back.  
For privacy.

And whoever "he" is they're talking about, for a place like this where movie stars must come and go to get their colonoscopies, he's damn sure someone very fucking special.

**INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - PATIENT ROOM - DAY/SAME**

FROM BEHIND. A tall black man, 33, sits on the high examination table like it's just a normal chair. Feet touching the floor. Tan sport-jacket, collar open, no tie.

This is EARVIN JOHNSON, JR. But not the way you know him; if you even know him by his given name and not the other one.

His eyes are glazed. Dazed. They slowly flit around the room:

A ticking CLOCK... his GUCCI WATCH... a speaker playing MUZAK... a LEROY NEIMAN PAINTING of Joe Namath on the wall...

His gaze lands on a STACK OF MAGAZINES. The top one: *EBONY*, November 1991. MICHAEL JORDAN and HIS WIFE are on the cover.

The biggest headline reads: "MICHAEL AND JUANITA JORDAN ON MARRIAGE, LOVE AND LIFE AFTER BASKETBALL"

And then the other headlines:

"30 YOUNG LEADERS OF THE FUTURE"

"THE 10 MOST SERIOUS HEALTH PROBLEMS THREATENING BLACKS"

"NEW CARS FOR 1992"

Earvin stares at all this, blankly and without emotion. He doesn't hear the door click open. He doesn't turn to see --

LON ROSEN, 34, white, and usually you'd call him slick, but right now he's in rolled sleeves, looking bloodshot, worn.

LON

Nurses are ready.

(no reaction)

Earvin?

EARVIN

We should do something like this.

(re: *Ebony*)

Cookie and me. A cover like this.

Now that -- y'know, with the wedding and all. Be nice.

Lon stares at him. A little flat-footed. Treads carefully.

LON

Yeah. For sure.

Lon's not sure what else to say, so he says nothing.

The young nurse appears behind him. Seems star-struck.

YOUNG NURSE

Um. When you're ready?

Long beat. Then Earvin looks up with an inhale and forces a broad smile. Not false, just practiced. He's a pro at this.

EARVIN

Right. Right on. Thank you.

**INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - BACK OFFICE AREA - DAY/MOMENTS LATER**

The nurse leads Earvin and Lon through the inner offices. A few INTERNISTS peer over clipboards, ogling. A YOUNGER FEMALE NURSE is trying not to stare. Not trying hard enough, though.

Earvin makes eye contact with her and she stiffens.

But he smiles. Even bigger smile this time. Comforting. He's the kind of star who makes things easy, not intimidating.

EARVIN  
Merry Christmas.

**EXT. BMW COUPE - BEVERLY HILLS STREET/DRIVING - DAY**

Lon stares ahead as he drives, still in a daze.

Earvin is staring out the window. His forehead tilted up against his own reflection in the glass. He's staring at the PALM TREES as they glide past. Like palm trees on parade...

Then we hear it. A MUFFLED SOB. From Lon. He's crying.

LON  
(trying to stifle it)  
Sorry. Sorry, Earvin. Sorry.

EARVIN  
It's cool.

A beat of quiet. But then Lon sobs again. Much louder, this time. Blubbering behind the wheel, the flood unleashed...

Earvin stares at his reflection in the window as the palm trees blur by faster, one-by-one -- WIPING TO REVEAL NEW CHYRONS in the same big garish font, filling up the screen:

**THIS SHIT IS REAL**  
**IN CASE YOU WERE WONDERING**  
**JUST WAIT**  
**IT'S TOO DAMN CRAZY TO MAKE UP**

But right now, to be fair, it's just two grown men in a Beemer. One bawling like a baby -- as our TITLE SLAMS ON TOP OF THIS TABLEAU, bright yellow-gold with purple shading:

***SHOWTIME***

INT. SOMPLACE WITH A TELEVISION - SOMETIME IN THE RECENT PAST

We're ECU on a CATHODE RAY TUBE TELEVISION showing a RACE AT SANTA ANITA: horse-hooves galloping on packed dirt. Jockeys jockeying. The frantic patter of a RACE-CALLER at LOW VOLUME.

Over this, a VOICE begins to speak. A laconic, ever-amused Wyoming twang we'll come to know as that of JERRY BUSS.

JERRY BUSS (O.C.)

I knew an inveterate gambler once  
who said horse racing was 'the  
sport of kings.' Other people say  
there's poetry in baseball.

Plastic pieces CLICK somewhere -- and the channel changes: we're still ECU, but we're now watching a BASEBALL GAME...

JERRY BUSS (O.C.)

Football, that's a game of inches.

Another CLICK -- the channel changing: FOOTBALL this time, two teams clashing on the gridiron.

JERRY BUSS (O.C.)

Trench-war, masculinity...

CLICK: HOCKEY PLAYERS skidding back and forth over the ice.

JERRY BUSS (O.C.)

Hockey? To be honest, I could never  
really give a shit.

(beat)

People tell me I should get into  
golf and tennis 'cuz I'm rich, but  
I don't have the fucking patience.

More CLICKS: a TENNIS MATCH (McEnroe and Connors, maybe); a GOLF MATCH (Nicklaus); a SAILING THING (who the fuck sails?).

JERRY BUSS (O.C.)

And soccer? Shit, if I wanted to  
waste two hours on a game where  
both sides scream and neither  
scores, I'd still be married.

CLICK: a dozen crazed men on the SOCCER PITCH. ANNOUNCER going nuts at some incomprehensible excitement. Score: 0-0.

JERRY BUSS (O.C.)

But this...

CLICK: SNEAKERS squeak on hardwood. And at last, we're watching BASKETBALL. 1970s-era basketball. Short shorts.

Afros. A scattering of big dumb white dudes who can't shoot. We HEAR the voluble play-by-play of CHICK HEARN, calling every muscle-twitch and nuance of a rollicking FAST BREAK...

A drive. A kick. An alley-oop. A dunk! Then CHEERS.

JERRY BUSS (O.C.)  
If anything makes me believe in  
god, it's tits and basketball.

A LAST CLICK: MUTING THE TV -- as we WIDEN and REVEAL:

**INT. PLAYBOY MANSION - BEDROOM - BEFORE DAWN/SAME**

The TV, a hulking Zenith, is sitting on a polished armoire in a bedroom, bathing the whole space in its cozy flicker.

Watching from the silk sheets of a plush ROUND WATERBED is our narrator: JERRY BUSS, 46, a virile multi-millionaire and bon-vivant; thick mustache, mop of blondish hair; flipping through the channels with a large BAKELITE REMOTE CONTROL.

His monologue this whole time was actually a conversation with a girlfriend: DEBBIE, 19. But Buss now sees she's fallen asleep. Dozed off amid the ample forest of his chest hair.

JERRY BUSS  
Deb? Are you--?

DEBBIE  
(mumbling)  
I'm asleep.

JERRY BUSS  
I was saying tits and basketball--

DEBBIE  
You like 'em?

She rolls slightly to expose her breasts, still half-asleep.

JERRY BUSS  
Not yours.

DEBBIE  
They're new.

JERRY BUSS  
They're great. But I was telling  
you about the team I'm gonna buy.

DEBBIE  
I have class in the morning.

She completes the roll onto her pillow, leaving Buss alone.

After a beat, he shrugs, amused, then settles back. Staring up at his reflection in the MIRRORED CEILING...

FROM ABOVE. He's looking straight INTO THE CAMERA. For this:

JERRY BUSS  
(to CAMERA; wry)  
We'll show her. We'll show 'em all.

He winks at us. Then rolls out of bed, buck naked.

QUICK CUTS as he gets dressed: pulling on his jockey shorts. His Levis. A white sport jacket over an open shirt. Tufting out his chest hair in the mirror with a pocket comb. Sharp.

A CHYRON fills the screen -- a sleek, slanted 70S FONT:

**PLAYBOY MANSION, LOS ANGELES - 1979**

**INT./EXT. PLAYBOY MANSION - BEFORE DAWN**

It's early morning and the Mansion is asleep.

But Buss is wide awake and chipper, striding through the mansion and its grounds IN ONE LONG STEADY-CAM SHOT: past PLAYMATES and GUESTS in all states of undress, sleeping off the last night's bacchanal. A wondrous, hedonist tableau.

He steps over a GIANT BOWL OF COCAINE -- and emerges POOLSIDE, moving past a row of NAKED PEOPLE passed out on the lounges, waiting to greet their rising god, the sun.

JERRY BUSS  
(to CAMERA)  
Fair weather. Great for tans and  
shit for fans.

**EXT. PLAYBOY MANSION - DRIVEWAY ROUNDABOUT - DAWN**

Buss reaches the iconic driveway, where his BLACK PORSCHE 911 awaits. Top down. Gleaming in the SUNRISE. Engine purring.

The uniformed VALET flips him the keys.

VALET  
You're up early, Dr. Buss.

JERRY BUSS  
I'm going to buy the Lakers.

VALET

(flat)

No shit. Tell 'em to win a  
championship one'a these days.

JERRY BUSS

See what I can do.

He peels off a FIFTY for a tip and hops behind the wheel.

**EXT. PORSCHE 911 - SUNSET STRIP/DRIVING - DAY**

The Sunset Strip in 1979. Shit like that was better then.  
Buss drives with the top down, giving a big smile TO CAMERA.

**EXT. PORSCHE 911 - INGLEWOOD OIL FIELD/DRIVING - DAY**

The Porsche whips south on La Cienega, past pumping oil  
derricks. The SMOG-BLANKETED SPRAWL OF L.A. in its wake.

**EXT. THE FORUM - INGLEWOOD - DAY**

The Porsche pulls up outside THE FABULOUS FORUM, a kitsch  
Roman-style sports arena standing at the center of a vast,  
empty parking lot. The pure distilled quintessence of L.A.

Buss regards it like he's witnessing Valhalla. There's a  
twinkle in his eyes. He fucking loves this place.

He TURNS TO CAMERA with a Cheshire grin:

JERRY BUSS

I fucking love this place.

**INT. FORUM OFFICES - CLAIRE'S OFFICE - DAY**

A DOT-MATRIX PRINTOUT of attendance numbers hits a desk.

CLAIRE

These are the latest? These are  
accurate?

WIDER to REVEAL --

CLAIRE ROTHMAN, 50, fast and loud, and on her game. Imagine  
Holly Hunter was in charge of booking and operations for a  
major market sports arena. (Y'know what? Cast Holly Hunter.)

She's talking to LON ROSEN. Remember him? The crying guy?  
He's younger here, 19, still in his USC Trojans sweatshirt.



LON

There were some babies, but I had the ushers count 'em all as paying customers. Just like you said.

CLAIRE

What about my new idea -- the, the folding chairs?

LON

Floor seats. "Thirty dollars for a close-up view of giants." We gave some to the studios. Apparently a stray ball clipped Doris Day.

CLAIRE

(grimaces)

Where?

LON

Head. But it's okay, I think the perm deflected it.

Claire falls back in her chair, exhales.

CLAIRE

Run another stub promotion.

LON

Half-off a hamburger at Norm's when the team wins? It would help a little if we did that sometimes.

CLAIRE

Don't be a smart-ass, you're an intern.

LON

I was an intern last year. Now you're just not paying me.

CLAIRE

Good. You deserve it.

She glances at some FRAMED ITEMS on the wall: a NEWS CLIPPING from the *LA Times* reads, "CAN A WOMAN REALLY RULE THE FORUM?"

A LOUD VOICE hollers from another room:

JACK KENT COOKE (O.C.)

Mrs. Rothman! Get in here!

Claire shuts her eyes. Then gathers the attendance printout. Moving to the door, but pausing there. Looks back.

CLAIRE

Hey Lon.

(he looks at her)

If this sale goes through and the new guy fires me, just promise me you'll spit into his coffee.

LON

Deal.

She nods her gratitude and walks out.

**INT. FORUM OFFICES - OWNER'S SUITE - DAY**

The burl wood office suite of JACK KENT COOKE, 65, a mega-rich patrician of another age; white hair, white cardigan, just white. He looks on sourly as a team of white-shoe LAWYERS pore over a thick bound document, the TERMS OF SALE.

COOKE LEAD COUNSEL

So... Buss came up to 67 million.  
Cash. Plus land swaps from his  
holdings for the rest.

The LEAD COUNSEL flips open a big THREE-RING BINDER labeled "MARIANI-BUSS ASSOCIATES PROPERTIES." Paging through stat-sheets and pictures of literally thousands of properties.

COOKE COUNSEL 2

Is that the Chrysler Building?

You bet your ass it is. Lead counsel's not impressed.

COOKE LEAD COUNSEL

Guy picks buildings like a toddler  
at a toy store. Whatever's  
shiniest.

The other lawyers snigger; we get the sense they think this is a sucker deal, and they're all on the winning side.

But Cooke is glowering. Not happy in the least.

JACK KENT COOKE

Just get it done so I can give the  
cunt her fucking money.

Claire enters on that cue. The men look up to see her.

She looks discreetly TO THE CAMERA for a quick aside:

CLAIRE  
 (to CAMERA)  
 Oh. I'm not the "cunt" he means.  
 That would be his new ex-wife.

JACK KENT COOKE  
 You have those attendance numbers,  
 Mrs. Rothman? Say it's good news.

Claire offers him the folder.

CLAIRE  
 Fell a little since the last  
 negotiation.

The lawyers murmur anxiously:

COOKE LEAD COUNSEL  
 Shit.

COOKE COUNSEL 2  
 We're gonna have to disclose that--

JACK KENT COOKE  
 (cutting them off; to  
 Claire)  
 You show him, Mrs. Rothman.

He slaps the folder back to her. Gestures to her blouse.

JACK KENT COOKE  
 Just undo some of those buttons,  
 will ya? Maybe he won't notice.

This catches Claire off-guard. The male lawyers stare.

Claire glances AT THE CAMERA, but this time says nothing.

JACK KENT COOKE  
 Go on.

A thing we learn about Claire in this moment: she's an accomplished woman in the workplace, so she's grown used to assholes. She swallows her pride and takes the folder.

**INT. FORUM OFFICES - DAY/MOMENTS LATER**

Claire emerges in the outer office area and takes a beat. A breath. LINDA ZAFRANI, 24, her young assistant, hurries over.

LINDA  
 (whispering breathlessly)  
 He's wearing Levis.

CLAIRE

Who?

LINDA

Buss. He's worth a hundred million  
and he's wearing blue jeans. He  
looks like the Marlboro Man.

She nods ahead toward the window of a CONFERENCE ROOM: the  
BODIES OF MEN are visible behind venetian blinds.

Linda hikes her skirt a little as she wheels out a BAR CART.

CLAIRE

Is that for him?

LINDA

(shrugs)  
He likes what he sees, maybe he'll  
keep us on.

Claire frowns. But can't deny the logic.

CLAIRE

Pull your skirt down. I'll take it.

Claire sets her folder on the bar cart. Wheeling it on.

**INT. FORUM OFFICES - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY/SAME**

Buss sits surrounded by ATTORNEYS. Feet up. Ready to get on  
with this. He's amusing himself by riffling a DECK OF PLAYING  
CARDS (he does this a lot). His attorneys fret and moan.

BUSS ATTORNEY 1

Jerry. Just take a night to think  
about it. You're trading in an  
empire of real estate for what --  
twelve tall guys in tennis shoes?

JERRY WEST

Not an empire, Bernie. My empire.

**INT. FORUM OFFICES - CONFERENCE ROOM VESTIBULE - DAY/SAME**

Claire stops outside the closed door with the bar cart. She  
hesitates a beat. Then undoes two buttons of her shirt.

She LOOKS AT THE CAMERA. A little bit embarrassed.

CLAIRE

What.

INT. FORUM OFFICES - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY/MOMENTS LATER

The attorneys look up from the table as Claire enters.

BUSS ATTORNEY 1  
I'll take G and T, hun.

JERRY BUSS  
Get it yourself, Bernie.

Buss taps his deck of cards and stands up, smiling.

JERRY BUSS  
Ms. Rothman, isn't it?

Claire's taken aback. He holds out his hand. She shakes it.

CLAIRE  
Claire.

JERRY BUSS  
Gentlemen, you're looking at the gal who started booking rock and roll acts into sports arenas.  
(to Claire, enthusing)  
I know Chick Hearn takes credit, but I heard it was your idea to call this joint the "Fabulous" Forum? God, I love that.

Claire is floored. Flattered.

JERRY BUSS  
I sure hope you're planning to stay on, Ms. -- Claire?

JACK KENT COOKE  
(from the door)  
Mrs. Rothman's contract is with me.

Cooke enters with a plastered smile, followed by his lawyers.

JACK KENT COOKE  
But maybe I can throw her in.

He and Buss shake hands. Affably enough. But we can feel the tension; Cooke just loathes this up-jumped, new-rich bastard.

BUSS ATTORNEY 1  
We do have a concern here.  
(heads turn)  
The league's rules require all new owners to be approved by a vote of the owner's committee.

JACK KENT COOKE  
 Just a formality.  
 (with a wave of his hand)  
 I'll vouch, it'll be fine.

Buss's lawyers gather in around Buss for a whispered powwow:

BUSS ATTORNEY 1  
 That vote's not for a month.  
 Suppose he changes his mind. Or the  
 other owners don't support you.  
 You'd be out the whole deposit.  
 That's fifteen mil.  
 (beat)  
 You're taking a big chance, Jerry.

Buss looks at him. Then looks at Cooke. The way a poker player looks at an opponent. Reading him. Then looks back at his deck of playing cards. And spreads that rakish smile.

JERRY BUSS  
 Chance of a lifetime.  
 (to room)  
 Gimme a pen.

**EXT. PACIFIC PALISADES - LATE DAY**

A CHAMBER OF COMMERCE CROWD looks on as MISS PALISADES, a smiling teenager with feathered bleach-blonde hair, poses at a ribbon-cutting ceremony. The new GREAT WESTERN BANK.

MEN ogle. WOMEN exchange jealous glares.

Miss Palisades shows off her earnest smile as CAMERAS CLICK.

AT THE CURB, Buss's black Porsche hums up. He spots the BANK MANAGER, 40s, a pasty fellow with the kind of bad toupee that won't go out of fashion until Bruce Willis makes bald cool.

BANK MANAGER  
 (sotto but excitedly)  
 Jer, check out the piece of ass the  
 Chamber sent to cut our ribbon.

Buss peers past the bank manager to take in Miss Palisades --

Miss Palisades sees him and brightens. Hurrying his way.

Buss hops out of the Porsche to greet her: his daughter, JEANIE BUSS, 17, a So-Cal Charlie's Angel on the outside, daddy's little girl within. They kiss cheeks and hug.

JEANIE

Hi daddy.

JERRY BUSS

Baby, you look beautiful.

The bank manager goes pale.

Buss (not easily offended) gives him a forgiving wink.

JERRY BUSS

I made this piece of ass, Charles.

**INT. PALISADES PENTHOUSE - NIGHT**

A MONOPOLY BOARD is set up on the coffee table. The game well underway. Jeanie mans the pieces as Buss moves about in the adjoining kitchen, serving bowls of chili from a crock pot.

Jeanie rolls the dice and calls the outcome.

JEANIE

Double fours.

JERRY BUSS

Eight?

(doing the math)

That's St. James Place. "Hotel Jeanie," huh?

Buss plays Monopoly like grandmasters play chess, announcing moves without having to lay eyes on the board.

JEANIE

Be there or be square, old man.  
Pay up!

Jeanie moves Buss's silver shoe onto the square.

Buss tosses her his SILVER MONEY CLIP. She peels off bills. They're playing with real money. At least daddy is.

JEANIE

You're short.

JERRY BUSS

How about free tickets next time  
Rod Stewart plays the Forum?

Jeanie looks at him.

Buss grins impishly.

JEANIE  
You signed the deal?

JERRY BUSS  
Hell, you can sit right up onstage.

Buss sets Jeanie's bowl of chili on the coffee table and plops to the in satisfaction, digging in.

JEANIE  
Daddy, that's amazing.

JERRY BUSS  
(mouth full)  
Still gotta get the owners to approve me. But we'll get there.

JEANIE  
I want to help! I want to work for you. I know the music side of things -- the booking stuff. And I've been studying the basketball.

JERRY BUSS  
(amused)  
You're also about to go to college. For which, I might remind you, I am also paying. Handsomely.

JEANIE  
I can defer! You did.

JERRY BUSS  
And I'm a reprobate! Ask anybody. Ask your mother.

JEANIE  
I did!

Buss looks up from his chili now.

JEANIE  
I already asked her. She says she'll support it. If you let me intern for the team.

She leaps off the sofa and continues shouting as she runs off down a hall into another room --

JEANIE  
I'll do anything! PR, marketing...

-- now coming back. Holding a stuffed PEE-CHEE FOLDER.



JEANIE

But what you really ought to use me  
for is personnel.

She slaps the folder to his lap. Winded from the run.

JERRY BUSS

What's this?

JEANIE

Research.

Buss opens it: it's filled with detailed notes and clippings.  
Articles on players. Columns of basketball statistics.

JEANIE

Your first big decision is the  
draft-pick. Thanks to a trade last  
year, the Lakers should get number  
one or number two -- depending on a  
coin toss. Those are your best  
options, ranked. By me.

Buss glances through the contents of the folder, chuckling.

JEANIE

What?

JERRY BUSS

I'm just trying to picture the  
front office boys taking their  
orders from Miss Palisades.

He means this as a joke, but it feels more like a cut.

Jeanie sets her jaw.

JEANIE

Tell them to take it from Miss  
Buss. This is the family business  
now, isn't it? I'm the family.

Buss stares at her. Surprised. And proud.

JERRY BUSS

Okay, Miss Buss. Shoot.

Jeanie quickly grabs the Pee-Chee, flipping to a page.

JEANIE

Well, the safest bet is this guy,  
Sidney Moncrief. He plays two guard  
which is where the bench is thin.

JERRY BUSS  
 (nods, impressed; but)  
 Does the "safe bet" sound like me?

Jeanie smiles knowingly. Expected this.

JEANIE  
 No. In that case, turn the page.

He does: a NEWSPAPER CLIPPING shows a photo of a handsome player in a Spartans jersey with a pearl-white, toothy grin.

We recognize him. 12 years younger than we met him in our teaser. In that doctor's office. Whatever the hell that was.

JEANIE  
 Earvin Johnson Jr., 6'9" point guard out of Michigan State. Led them to the NCAA title last year.  
 (beat)  
 But most people use his nickname...

HARD CUT --

**EXT. JOHNSON HOME - LANSING, MICHIGAN - NIGHT**

Snow is falling on a modest YELLOW-FRAME HOUSE. This is not the suburbs, but it's not the ghetto either. Lights glow within. The SILHOUETTES OF BODIES. Lots and lots of bodies.

A WOMAN'S BOOMING VOICE bellows from within:

CHRISTINE JOHNSON (O.C.)  
 DO NOT USE THAT NICKNAME IN THIS HOUSE!

**INT. JOHNSON HOME - NIGHT/SAME**

The voice belongs to CHRISTINE JOHNSON, 40s, an amply Afro-ed matriarch. She's in her kitchen, cooking up a soul food feast for her prodigiously large family.

7 CHILDREN, 3 STEP-CHILDREN, and assorted RELATIVES are gathering excitedly in the adjoining living room.

Two older sons (QUINCY and LARRY), 20s, roll their eyes and cackle as they pass and wave a copy of *Sports Illustrated*.

QUINCY  
 Mama, it's right here in black and white!

CHRISTINE JOHNSON  
 I don't care if it's in  
 Technicolor. His name Earvin. And  
 his talents come from God.

On cue, bounding down the stairs three-at-a-time --

The same man we met at Cedars. But here, he is at 19. With  
 acne and a scraggly beard. And a bigger, less forced, ever-  
 present smile. Oh fuck it. Use the nickname: MAGIC JOHNSON.

MAGIC  
 You heard the woman, God almighty  
 taught me how to hoop.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON  
 Don't blaspheme, Junior.

Magic pecks her on the cheek and tries to steal a just-fried  
 chicken drumstick, but Christine smacks his hand away.

Magic SPEAKS TO CAMERA as he strides into the living room:

MAGIC  
 (to CAMERA)  
 Mama a Seventh Day Adventist, so  
 she say "magic" the devil's work.

He grabs the *Sports Illustrated* and shows it to us. The cover  
 shot is Magic in a top hat and tuxedo, grinning as he leaps  
 to lay a basketball into a hoop: "MICHIGAN STATE'S MAGIC MAN"

MAGIC  
 (to CAMERA)  
 Got a nice ring, though, don't it?

The other siblings are all gathered on the couch and floor  
 around a hulking ROTARY PHONE. They're waiting for a call.

Magic sees the big worn easy chair is empty.

MAGIC  
 What time is it, where's dad?

His twin sisters (EVELYN and YVONNE, 13) shake their heads.

QUINCY  
 City wouldn't let him off his  
 double.

Magic deflates a little. But covers with a smile.

He plops into the easy chair himself.

MAGIC

Guess I get the big chair, then.  
 (calls to Christine)  
 'Mon in mama, be any minute!

**EXT. LANSING STREET - NIGHT**

A CITY GARBAGE TRUCK spits black exhaust as it groans to a stop. Snow whips the empty city street. It's bitter cold.

A BUNDLED MAN, African-American, breath pluming, dismounts the cab and trudges to retrieve a trashcan. Hoisting and emptying it into the truck.

Then returning it. Retrieving another...

Coming from the cab, we HEAR a RADIO:

RADIO VOICE (V.O.)

(filtered)

In sports news, with the NBA college draft just weeks away, the holder of the first pick was determined moments ago in a coin toss between the Los Angeles Lakers and the Chicago Bulls...

Hearing this, the garbage man hurries back toward the cab, hopping up onto the running board to listen. And now we see his face for the first time: Magic's father, EARVIN, SR., 45.

RADIO VOICE (V.O.)

...with a call of 'tails' the pick went to Los Angeles, which gives them first dibs on an impressive crop of youngsters, including local Spartan boy and Michigander, Earvin Johnson, Jr.

Earvin Sr. registers the news in silence. He's not the sort to be demonstrative with his emotions. But right now, out here in the cold, we see the water freezing in his eyes.

HONK! A CAR is trying to get past.

Snapped from his reverie, Earvin Sr. waves and climbs back in behind the wheel. Shifting into gear and groaning off.

**INT. JOHNSON HOME - NIGHT**

The Johnson clan is celebrating. A FUNK RECORD spins on the turntable (Magic's choice). Younger siblings get down on the shag rug. Others try futilely to watch the NEWS on the TV.

QUINCY

Hush, hush, this is it!

ON TV: a LOCAL REPORTER in the studio.

LOCAL REPORTER (ON TV)

...Johnson, known to local fans as "Magic," is now expected to go first in the pro draft next month. Assuming he's the right fit in L.A.

Siblings whoop and cheer.

Christine frets by herself.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON

They have churches in Los Angeles?

MAGIC

Sure they got 'em, mama! Big ones. With pews and everything!

CHRISTINE JOHNSON

Don't you get smart with Jesus.

Magic grins as he moves past. Seeing someone through the window on the porch outside: a GIRL. Their eyes meet.

**EXT. JOHNSON HOME - PORCH - NIGHT/MOMENTS LATER**

Magic wraps his Michigan State letterman jacket over the shoulders of EARLETHA "COOKIE" KELLY, 19, sitting on the porch steps. Staring at the falling snow and looking glum.

Magic takes a seat beside her.

MAGIC

Guess you heard.

COOKIE

Whole city heard.

MAGIC

You were pulling for Chicago?

COOKIE

Least it's a train and not a plane.

MAGIC

But they got nobody. I'd rather  
spend another year in college.

Cookie looks at him.

COOKIE

That such a bad thing?

MAGIC

Hey, that ain't what I mean.  
(he pulls her close)  
I'll be back every summer still, to  
finish my degree.

COOKIE

I'm not your mama, EJ, you don't  
have to shine me on.

MAGIC

I mean it. This is home.  
(beat)  
Just now I can carry my own weight,  
is all. That's why I pled hardship,  
put up for the early draft. So pop  
won't have to work three jobs no  
more. And mama can stop cleaning  
other people's toilets -- have that  
tub she always wanted for herself.  
The big white one with--

COOKIE

(she's heard it before)  
The little feet, like from the soap  
commercials on TV. I know.  
(beat)  
And me?

MAGIC

Cookie.

COOKIE

I know your life is basketball for  
now. But least here, that's the  
only thing. Out there in Cali...  
there are more distractions.

MAGIC

You and mama. All worked up.  
(shakes his head)  
May all be for nuthin, anyways.  
L.A. just got first pick. They may  
not even want me.

Cookie stares at him like he's naive. And to be fair, he is. But he's not that naive. She sinks into his arms.

COOKIE  
Everybody always wants you, Earvin.  
That's what I'm afraid of.

Well. Maybe not everybody:

WEST (PRE-LAP)  
We don't fucking want him!

**EXT. BEL AIR COUNTRY CLUB - DAY**

A dewy morning on the golf course.

Buss is on the 18th green with Lakers G.M. BILL SHARMAN, 53, an affable ex-player; and JERRY WEST, 41, also an ex-player, but whatever's opposite of affable. Just now he's on a tear.

BILL SHARMAN  
(to Buss)  
Pardon his French.

WEST  
Don't fucking pardon me, Bill!

BILL SHARMAN  
He's a talent, Jerry! You saw that title game, the whole damn country did. He's the most exciting point guard in a -- since you!

West glowers at him. That crossed a line.

WEST  
According to who?

BILL SHARMAN  
Who? Me. Everybody.

WEST  
Okay then. Hire them. I quit!

BILL SHARMAN  
Jerry--

But West is already tromping off.

BILL SHARMAN  
Jerry!  
(to Buss)  
He does this all the time.  
(MORE)

BILL SHARMAN (CONT'D)  
 (he chases West)  
 JERRY!

Buss finds himself alone, in semi-shock. Also a bit amused. He never even got a word in. While West and Sharman argue loudly in the background, he turns and TALKS TO CAMERA:

JERRY BUSS  
 (to CAMERA)  
 Jerry West. Pretty good player in his day.

ACTUAL CLIPS: the 1960s Lakers. There's West (FACE REPLACE), a decade younger, Number 44. He's grace personified.

JERRY BUSS (V.O.)  
 Led his team to face the Celtics in the Finals. Six years in a row.

ACTUAL CLIPS: HIGHLIGHTS of the Lakers/Celtics rivalry. From B&W to color. Brutal, brilliant games... All ending the same way: with Boston celebrating victory. The Lakers in defeat.

JERRY BUSS (V.O.)  
 In '62, they lost a tough one. But in '63, they lost again. Then '65, '66, '68, '69... loss, loss, loss, loss. That last year, West played so great they gave him series MVP.

QUICK FLASH: West after the series. Trashing his locker stall with a gold trophy of a basketball, his FINALS MVP AWARD.

JERRY BUSS (V.O.)  
 Still lost though.

QUICK CUT: West's BASKETBALL CARD.

JERRY BUSS (V.O.)  
 After he retired, they made his silhouette the logo of the league.

QUICK CUT: THE NBA LOGO. The same silhouette. It's West.

THE ANIMATED LOGO comes to life and SCREAMS AT CAMERA:

NBA LOGO/WEST  
 YOU THINK THAT MADE ME FUCKING HAPPY?!

BACK TO SCENE. Buss watching West and Sharman going at it.

BILL SHARMAN  
 Just have a conversation, Jerry!



WEST

You want a conversation?!  
 (spins to Buss)  
 You're about to own this shit-  
 streak of a team, you wanna know  
 what's wrong with Johnson?

JERRY BUSS

Lay it on me.

WEST

One thing? He's too tall.

For Buss, this is a new one.

JERRY BUSS

That's not a good thing?

WEST

For a five, sure, not a ball-  
 handler. They'll pick his pocket.

BILL SHARMAN

He made smooth passes in that title  
 game 'verse Indiana State.

WEST

Not smooth. Flashy. Too flashy to  
 play second-fiddle to Kareem. And  
 even if he wasn't, we don't need  
 him -- we already got an All-Star  
 point guard on the fucking roster!

(to Buss)

That's reason two and three.

JERRY BUSS

(now he's just curious)  
 Is there a fourth?

WEST

He smiles too much.  
 (beat)  
 This is a man's league and he's  
 soft.

Buss stares. Can't help poking the bear.

JERRY BUSS

Looks good on a billboard.

It's a joke. But it ignites West like a powder-keg.

WEST  
Billboards don't play basketball,  
goddammit!

He SNAPS HIS PUTTER on his knee and rages off.

Tossing down the broken putter pieces at the PRO-SHOP --  
where a LATINO CADDY is already waiting. Used to this.

WEST  
Fucking shaft busted again, Pedro!

BACK ON THE GREEN, Buss watching all this. Shakes his head,  
delighted by the human comedy. Sharman steps up next to him.

JERRY BUSS  
Hell of a guy.

BILL SHARMAN  
Pro-shop has him on a tab. He'll  
come around. But if you're serious  
about inviting Johnson for a  
tryout, Jerry's not the guy we'll  
have to worry about.

Buss looks at him.

JERRY BUSS  
The big fella?

BILL SHARMAN  
The little one.

And OFF that dubious prelude --

**INT. BEAUTY SALON - LADERA HEIGHTS - DAY**

Meet NORM NIXON, 24, the Lakers' All-Star point guard (yep,  
same position Magic plays). Having his nails done. Norm is  
handsome and he knows it, with a foppish flair for fashion.

And this is usually his happy place... But right now the  
BEAUTY PARLOR WOMEN are all hounding him relentlessly.

BEAUTY PARLOR WOMAN 1  
I hear they bringin' in that Magic  
man. Mmm, he a handsome devil.  
Don't he play what you do, Norman?

BEAUTY PARLOR WOMAN 2  
 Better get yo'self one them donut  
 cushions for the bench, or you be  
 getting piles from all that  
 sitting!

Laughter erupts among the women as Norm steams.

NORM NIXON  
 He ain't drafted yet, it's just a  
 meeting.

BEAUTY PARLOR WOMAN 3  
 My auntie has relations in Detroit.  
 Say it's a done deal.

NORM NIXON  
 Your auntie ain't know shit about  
 the game of basketball, Athena!  
 He's a flash-in-the-pan rookie. I'm  
 an All-Star. You think I'm worried?

The women stare at Norm. A few "mmhm."

NORM NIXON  
 It's my motherfucking team,  
 goddammit!

He storms out in his flip-flops.

**INT. HOLLYWOOD SOUND STAGE - DAY**

The production of a major motion picture underway.

It's the cockpit set of *Airplane*. KAREEM ABDUL-JABBAR, 32, a  
 taciturn tower of a man (the Lakers' 5-time MVP center) is  
 way out of his comfort-zone. Performing in the costume of the  
 airplane's co-pilot opposite an enthusiastic CHILD ACTOR, 10.

CHILD ACTOR  
 Wait a minute! I know you. You're  
 Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. You play  
 center for the Los Angeles Lakers.

KAREEM  
 (acting badly, halting)  
 I'm sorry son, but you must have me  
 confused with someone else. My name  
 is Roger Murdock. I'm the co-pilot.

CHILD ACTOR  
 You are Kareem! I've seen you play.  
 My dad's got season tickets.

(MORE)

## CHILD ACTOR (CONT'D)

I think you're the greatest, but my dad says you don't work hard enough on defense. And he says that lots of times you don't even run down the court. And that you don't really try... except during the playoffs.

## KAREEM ABDUL-JABBAR

The hell I don't!

Kareem GRABS the child fiercely by the collar; this may be scripted but the dialogue has clearly hit a nerve.

## KAREEM ABDUJ-JABBAR

Listen kid! I've been hearing that crap ever since I was at UCLA. I'm out here busting my buns every night. Tell your old man to drag Walton and Lanier up and down the court for 48 minutes.

The kid seems genuinely thrown. It's kinda great.

The director, JERRY ZUCKER, hollers "Cut!" They got it. LAUGHTER breaks out on set. Everybody in good spirits.

Except Kareem, whose last smile came before he changed his name from Lou Alcindor. He tromps past Zucker, over to --

His girlfriend, CHERYL PISTONO, 23, white, at craft services. And here with her, a little sheepish, his guard comes down.

## KAREEM

(whispering)

How was I?

## CHERYL

Great, babe. Killer.

## KAREEM

I've been doing what you told me.  
Trying to project my inner warmth.

Which coming from a 7'2" human icicle, sounds funny.

But whatever Cheryl sees in him is clearly something deeper, something more. She reaches up (and up!) to hold his face.

## CHERYL

It's beautiful.

## CHILD ACTOR (O.S.)

Mr. Abdul-Jabbar?

Kareem looks up to see the child actor with his STAGE MOM.

CHILD ACTOR

I really do think you're the  
greatest. You think we could maybe  
take a picture?

KAREEM

Fuck off, kid.

Just like that, without skipping a beat.

Kareem tromps past the stunned kid toward the STAGE EXIT.  
Pausing to LOOK DIRECTLY INTO CAMERA:

KAREEM

(to CAMERA)

You want some, too?

He slams through the door into the sunlight.

**EXT. HOLLYWOOD LOT - DAY/SAME**

WHIP PAN to FIND Norm Nixon barreling across the busy lot  
with his jaw set. Repeating these words to himself:

NORM NIXON

It's my team, it's my team...

He storms up to a CAST TRAILER and knocks loudly.

**INT. KAREEM'S TRAILER - DAY/MOMENTS LATER**

A little while later. Kareem is splayed with his long legs  
hanging off the sofa, listening to a Charles Mingus record on  
his headphones as Norm rambles anxiously.

We HEAR what Kareem does: Mingus, with Norm faint in the B.G.

NORM NIXON

This is your team, Cap! Your team, not some honkey  
rich dude with a hard-on -- but they ain't even  
consulting you! This rook's a big ol' showboat's  
what he is. All fast break, run-and-gun shit -- no  
feed the big man! Muthafucka starve a big man! And  
the paper's saying he'll demand the biggest rookie  
contract of all time -- you believe that?!

Kareem looks up wearily at Norm, exhausted by the chatter.

KAREEM

You know what I'm about to tell  
you, don't you, Norman?

Beat.

NORM NIXON

Fuck off?

KAREEM

Please.

Kareem shuts his eyes and lays back, listening to his jazz. The portrait of a man who long ago has ceased to give a shit.

**EXT. TWA 747 - NIGHT SKY**

A double-decker JUMBO JET soars somewhere high above America.

**INT. TWA 747 - FIRST CLASS COCKTAIL LOUNGE - NIGHT**

A cocktail lounge at 30,000 feet. An elegant PIANIST with a white bouffant plays standards at a baby Wurlitzer. Well-heeled PASSENGERS sit in club chairs, sipping cocktails and smoking cigarettes. Welcome to the heyday of air travel.

FIND Magic sitting opposite his father, Earvin Sr., who looks queasy; this is his first time flying.

A bit of mild turbulence rolls the cabin.

EARVIN SR.

It ain't natural. If god wanted pianos in the air he woulda gave them wings.

Magic is staring at a plate of escargot, perplexed.

MAGIC

What ain't natural is eating bugs.

He pushes it away and reaches for a bag of peanuts. Pausing as he notices a cluster of attractive mini-skirted STEWARDESSES across the lounge. They're ogling him.

MAGIC

These foxes on the other hand.

Magic spreads that toothy smile. They smile back.

MAGIC

'Scuse me, pop.

Magic gets up and heads over to the stewardesses. To work his magic. Forget 30,000 feet, this Lansing boy's in heaven.

MAGIC  
 You fine ladies like the game of  
 basketball? I'm Magic...

Giggles and titters as we JUMP CUT to --

**EXT. THE FORUM - FORUM CLUB MAIN ENTRANCE - DAY**

A TABLEAU of intimidating whiteness: Cooke, in his double-breasted suit, under the red awning of "THE FORUM CLUB."

JACK KENT COOKE  
 (expansive, playing host)  
 Young man. Welcome to the Forum.

WIDER. Cooke grips hands with Magic and Earvin Sr., who wears his best (and only) church suit. Feeling out of place.

A contrast to Cooke, Buss wears bluejeans and an easy smile.

JACK KENT COOKE  
 This is my associate, Dr. Buss.

JERRY BUSS  
 Jerry.

MAGIC  
 You're the dude buying the team.

Excited, Magic slaps Buss's hand in an elaborate shake. Buss gamely following along as they slap, grip, dap, etc. until --

Cooke grabs Magic by the arm to cut it short.

JACK KENT COOKE  
 Until he's approved --  
 (beat)  
 League rules stipulate all  
 personnel decisions need to be  
 approved by me.

Cooke pins Buss with a look. The pissing contest palpable. Albeit one-sided. Buss lets it wash off with a smile.

But Magic notices.

JACK KENT COOKE  
 This way, son.

INT. FORUM CLUB - TROPHY ROOM - DAY/LATER

Cooke settles in at the head of an elegant table in the private trophy room of the Forum Club, his throwback ode to a patrician gentlemen's club. White-gloved WAITERS hover.

Framed photos of THOROUGHBRED HORSES line on the walls.

JACK KENT COOKE

You know what they say about a thoroughbred, son. You can judge one by its appetite.

(to Magic, amused)

I hope you brought yours. Our chef prepared his specialty.

Magic's smile falters at the horse comparison, but Earvin Sr. shoots his son a look, as if to say 'be cool.'

Buss catches the exchange.

The waiters set down PLATES OF FOOD before them: several limp, pale medallions of fish in grayish butter sauce.

Magic is instantly repulsed. Earvin Sr. picks at some politely. Cooke tucks in with relish, holding court.

JACK KENT COOKE

(to Earvin Sr.)

I'm told you're a city employee, Mr. Johnson.

EARVIN SR.

Yes, sir. Saturdays and Sundays. Weekdays I'm on the Chrysler line.

JACK KENT COOKE

Chrysler?! Ha! How about that. Small world! Buss here is selling me the Chrysler Building.

Cooke beams obliviously.

Earvin Sr. blushes with embarrassment. Buss jumps in.

JERRY BUSS

I worked a mill line in Wyoming. Never ate so good or slept so well.

Earvin Sr. looks at him and nods. Appreciative.

EARVIN SR.

Heard that.



Magic clocks the interaction.

Cooke does, too. Now sensing he's the odd man out.

JACK KENT COOKE

What a country, eh.

(to Magic)

Play your cards right, son, maybe you'll be buying buildings, too.

MAGIC

How much you offering?

Cooke looks at him, a little flustered by the impudence.

JACK KENT COOKE

We haven't settled on a pick yet.

MAGIC

Me neither.

(off Cooke)

I haven't settled on a team.

JACK KENT COOKE

(bemused)

Young man, this is a draft. Not a free agency. The choice is ours. You go where you're told.

MAGIC

Or I go back to Michigan State. Turn pro next year. For a different team.

(casual)

I'm thinking six hundred thousand.

Cooke chokes on his fish.

Buss ERUPTS in an explosive cackle.

JERRY BUSS

Sounds like a negotiation, Jack.

JACK KENT COOKE

Son, Jabbar is this league's biggest star -- he makes six-fifty!

MAGIC

That's why six feels cool. For now. Plus tuition in the summertimes, so I can finish my degree.

(beat)

Make mama happy.

Magic pops a bite of fish into his mouth. To punctuate.

MAGIC  
(surprised)  
Y'know, this ain't bad?

He tucks into his plate, devouring more, as Cooke looks on.

JACK KENT COOKE  
(appalled)  
Four! And that's a final offer! And  
you can work yourself through  
school, young man -- like I did.

MAGIC  
(mouth full)  
Way I see it, Mr. Cooke, my work is  
basketball. And I'm worth six.

Finished with his fish, Magic wipes his mouth and stands.

MAGIC  
C'mon, pop, let's see some movie  
stars.

JACK KENT COOKE  
Look here, son--

JERRY BUSS  
(cutting him off)  
We'll think it over.

Cooke shoots Buss an icy glare. Magic looks between them.

Then takes Buss's outstretched hand and shakes it.

MAGIC  
Kool and the gang.

**EXT. THE FORUM - PARKING LOT - DAY/LATER**

Buss escorts Magic and his father to a waiting TOWN CAR.  
Seeing them off, gregariously.

Behind them, from the awning, Cooke stews. Glowering.

SPLIT SCREEN TO FIND --

**INT. FORUM OFFICES - WEST'S OFFICE - DAY/SAME**

West is glowering down at the same scene from his upstairs  
office window. Seeing Buss with Magic. Feeling the same way:

JACK KENT COOKE  
 (he means Earvin)  
 Arrogant little shit.

JERRY WEST  
 (he means Buss)  
 Arrogant little shit.

**INT. FORUM OFFICES - DAY**

Elsewhere in the Forum offices. A door slams open.

Claire is charging through the offices with Lon and Linda.

CLAIRE  
 What do you mean he sent a blonde?

LON  
 A blonde. Nineteen maybe.

LINDA  
 One of his bimbos.

Linda holds out a typed C.V.

LINDA  
 Jean Marie Mueller. Buss called to  
 ask for the appointment,  
 personally. Said he'd be grateful  
 if you found a place for her.

CLAIRE  
 You're fucking kidding me.

They're not. They reach her office door.

LON  
 She's waiting for you.

**INT. FORUM OFFICES - CLAIRE'S OFFICE - DAY/MOMENTS LATER**

Claire glares across her desk at a SVELTE BLONDE (seen only from behind for now). She eyeballs the C.V. Dripping disdain.

CLAIRE  
 I'll be frank with you. Miss  
 Mueller. Setting aside whatever  
 personal liaison brought you here --  
 the fact you are, I guess, at least  
 means you have aspirations.

(beat)  
 But. That doesn't mean I'm giving  
 you a job. I worked twice as hard  
 for half as much for forty years to  
 sit behind this desk. Like every  
 other woman with ambition.

(MORE)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

And I'll be damned if I give you a leg up just for sleeping with the owner.

REVEAL the blonde for the first time: it's Jeanie Buss.

JEANIE

Well. We haven't really slept together since I was in diapers.

Beat. Claire looks at the C.V. Now realizing her mistake.

CLAIRE

Mueller...

JEANIE

My mom's name. I told my dad I'd rather get the job on merit than by using his. He still called the office anyway.

CLAIRE

(dips a toe)

Says here you're starting at S.C.?

JEANIE

Majoring in business.

(launching in)

But what I really want is on the job experience. I've been digging through the books a little. Off-season venue sales are down. Which I don't think is your fault -- your division. I think it's because L.A. is a big city. Top music acts have half-a-dozen venues they can choose from. All with superior acoustics. Just architecturally. And sure, the Forum could invest in a new sound-system -- I know you've been seeing bids. But I think that would miss the point. If people only cared about the sound, they'd listen to the record on their headphones.

Claire stares at Jeanie. Still skeptical. But now intrigued.

CLAIRE

And what exactly do they care about? In the opinion of Miss Buss.

JEANIE

"Ms." And that's easy. This is Hollywood.

(MORE)

JEANIE (CONT'D)

We don't need to make the Forum  
sound good.

(beat)

We just need to make it cool.

OFF Claire. Processing. Despite herself. Impressed.

**INT. HOTEL SUITE - LATE DAY**

Magic is combing up his afro as he munches room service. Half-watching *Scooby Doo* on the TV. The picture of cool.

Earvin Sr. is another story. He's apprehensive.

EARVIN SR.

Pride comes before the fall, son.

MAGIC

I ain't being prideful, pop, just bargaining. It's business.

EARVIN SR.

Turns up his nose at four hundred thousand dollars. For doing something that he loves to do?! You realize that's more money than I made in my whole life, don't'cha?

MAGIC

So far.

(off Earvin Sr.)

You made me, pop. That means you made whatever I make, too. And I'm gonna make damn sure you and mama never have to work two jobs again. If that takes holding out another year and getting drafted by a different team, then bring it on.

Earvin Sr. stares at his son. Moved by this.

The PHONE RINGS loudly.

MAGIC

That'll be him.

**EXT. TOMMY'S HAMBURGERS - DUSK**

A STRETCH LIMO idles in the cramped lot of a kitschy burger stand in Inglewood. Buss and Magic are sitting on the trunk, feet dangling, chowing down on trays of chili burgers.

JERRY BUSS  
How's the chili?

MAGIC  
Man, this place is all right. I was worried we'd be eating fish again.

JERRY BUSS  
That's the biggest pain in the ass with getting rich. Everyone's afraid to order you a pizza.

Magic laughs.

MAGIC  
That's good. That's a good one. See, I know I liked you, Dr. Buss. What kinda doctor are you, anyway?

JERRY BUSS  
Physics. I made rockets for the government. Then I decided that I'd rather be remembered as a man who built something. Instead of knocked things down.

MAGIC  
Heavy, man. That's heavy.

JERRY BUSS  
You know why I asked you out here, Earvin? Can I call you Earvin?

MAGIC  
Friends back home call me EJ.

JERRY BUSS  
I'm gonna go ahead and call you Earvin 'til you tell me I'm your friend. And I hope that happens, too. Because that's what I want to do here with the Lakers. Build something. Special. And I want you to be a part of that. A major part.

Magic grins.

MAGIC  
That mean you gonna pay my price?

JERRY BUSS  
No.  
(this startles Magic)  
Cooke's an asshole, but he's right.  
(MORE)

JERRY BUSS (CONT'D)

Six hundred is too steep. Too close to Kareem. And this is still his team. Until you prove yourself. But come aboard and I bet we can find a number we're both happy with.

Magic stares at Buss. The candor short-circuits his bravado.

JERRY BUSS

(hops off the trunk)

C'mon, I wanna show you something.

**INT. THE HORN NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT**

Dark, smoky, classic Hollywood. FIND Buss and Magic at a red-leather corner booth, best table in the joint, looking out upon the wealthy and the beautiful. The very beautiful.

Magic has never seen so many gorgeous women in his life.

MAGIC

Is that Diana Ross?

JERRY BUSS

With Miss December. Wanna say hi?

The women smile and wave at Buss across the room.

For the first time, Magic seems a little shy.

MAGIC

You may be surprised to hear this, Dr. Buss, but I'm not really the world's expert picking up on women.

JERRY BUSS

Tell you a secret, Earvin...  
Neither am I.

Yet every woman in the place is eying him. Smiling at him. And Buss is smiling coolly back. Shuffling his deck of cards.

JERRY BUSS

You play cards, Earvin?

MAGIC

Little rummy now and then.

JERRY BUSS

Some people think the high in gambling comes from winning. Like there's a destination to it all.

(MORE)

JERRY BUSS (CONT'D)

And if you just do enough of it,  
eventually you'll get there.

(beat)

They think that about money, too.  
And fame. And getting laid.

He riffles the deck and looks off at the crowd.

JERRY BUSS

But what you realize -- all those  
things -- they matter less and  
less. The more you have 'em.

MAGIC

(not quite sure he's  
following the thread)

This you telling me to take the  
offer at four hundred?

Buss laughs.

JERRY BUSS

Nah. You go ahead and squeeze me  
for every dollar that you can. All  
I'm saying is one day -- when  
you're my age, god forbid -- you'll  
look in a mirror and you'll realize  
none of that shit really mattered.

(beat)

I'm not saying that it wasn't fun.  
But you'll want something else.

Magic looks at him.

MAGIC

What's that, Dr. Buss?

Buss meets his gaze, a beat. Then smiles. Shrugs his head.

JERRY BUSS

No fucking clue, kid.

(beat)

But that's what I wanna figure out.  
And I'll tell you one thing. When I  
shut my eyes at night. And picture  
you. Out on that floor. On my team.  
Playing basketball... Well I dunno.  
I feel like I'm getting warmer.

Magic stares at him. The glimmer in his eyes. Infectious.

As the LIGHTS BEGIN TO DIM...



JERRY BUSS  
 (gestures giddily)  
 Ooh, ooh, I love this part!

The club falls to an expectant hush as SPOTLIGHTS hit PERFORMERS placed among the crowd at several tables.

In unison, they harmonize:

PERFORMERS  
 It's SHOOOOWTIIIIIMMMME!

And as the MUSICAL STAGE SHOW kicks in, we HOLD on Buss: flushed red, like a kid at a circus, eyes sparking.

And Magic. There beside him. Feeling it. Sharing the vision.

**INT. FORUM OFFICES - DAY**

A new day at the Forum offices. It's Jeanie's first day. She's standing at the giant XEROX BEHEMOTH, making copies.

A SHOUTED VOICE rings out from Cooke's office suite:

JACK KENT COOKE (O.S.)  
 Mrs. Rothman! Get in here!

Jeanie looks up, startled. But no one else appears to notice. This shit happens all the time.

**INT. FORUM OFFICES - OWNER'S SUITE - MOMENTS LATER**

Cooke is seated at his desk with the blinds drawn and the lights out. Sunlight streaking in like it's a film noir.

More light spills from the doorway as Claire enters.

JACK KENT COOKE  
 (without looking at her)  
 Feel this.

He's hunched in his desk chair, staring at a table setting: a PLATE OF SIRLOIN from the kitchen with some mashed potatoes.

There's an open newspaper. And an open bottle of gin.

JACK KENT COOKE  
 C'mon, Mrs. Rothman, poke it! With your finger.

He shoves the plate across the desk, toward her.

JACK KENT COOKE  
Does that feel medium to you?

Claire has experienced a great deal of bullshit at this job. Yet this is still a first. She struggles to maintain.

CLAIRE  
I'm... not really a cook. Mr. Cooke.

JACK KENT COOKE  
Are you being funny?

Cooke looks up at her. Glowering.

CLAIRE  
No.

JACK KENT COOKE  
Repeat after me, Mrs. Rothman. I...

CLAIRE  
(hesitating)  
I.

JACK KENT COOKE  
Will not...

CLAIRE  
Will not.

Cooke opens his mouth to continue this. But just exhales. A vacant look now entering his eyes. He's lost the train.

JACK KENT COOKE  
What was I saying?

His eyes wander the desk before him. He's very, very drunk.

CLAIRE  
I'll take this to the kitchen--

But as she reaches for the plate --

Cooke grabs her wrist. It startles her a little.

JACK KENT COOKE  
You see this, Mrs. Rothman?

He slaps the folded newspaper to her palm. There's a photo of Cooke next to a HEADLINE: "MOGUL COOKE CITED FOR CRUEL AND INHUMAN TREATMENT IN LARGEST DIVORCE SETTLEMENT IN HISTORY"

JACK KENT COOKE

My fucking obituary. First line, I mean. Will be. After thirty years in this town. Joy to millions. Inspiration to the youth. An owner doesn't only own, y'know -- he leads. And this. This is my thanks.

Claire tries to pull her hand back, but he grips it tighter.

JACK KENT COOKE

I could find another way, you know? To pay the bitch. Say for instance I wasn't allowed to sell the team. For instance. After all. Then she'd be forced to let me keep it.

CLAIRE

(not following)

You've already signed the deal. Buss has agreed to buy.

JACK KENT COOKE

If they accept him. The other owners. Mr. First National Bank. Mr. Coors Beer. Men of integrity. Stability. Not Mr. Bunny-fucker.

Cooke yanks open his desk drawer and pulls out a MANILA ENVELOPE. Written in felt marker on cover: "BUSS"

He tosses it to Claire.

CLAIRE

What's this?

JACK KENT COOKE

Lawyers put the thing together. When we began negotiations. Shit to keep from getting out too wide. What with the "image problems" that the league is facing. Too many drugs. Too many blacks.

Claire opens the envelope. Glancing at the contents: clandestine photographs of Buss with women. Younger women.

JACK KENT COOKE

That one turned eighteen, apparently. A few days later.

(beat)

Course if I took this to the owner meeting. Before the vote. What with the league morals clause...

(MORE)

JACK KENT COOKE (CONT'D)  
 (gestures with his hands)  
 Poof. No more Mr. Bunny-fucker.

Cooke smiles to himself. Apparently quite satisfied with his fakakta plan. He grabs back his plate of rare steak, and starts digging in. But he's too drunk and his knife slips --

Shooting the steak right off the plate onto the envelope.

Cooke stares at the escaped meat for a long time. He's lost the train again. Just stares and stares and stares.

**INT. FORUM OFFICES - CLAIRE'S OFFICE - LATER**

Claire is sitting at her desk now. Lost in thought.

A KNOCK on the open door. It's Jeanie.

JEANIE  
 You wanted to see me?

CLAIRE  
 Come in.

Jeanie enters stiffly. Sensing something is amiss. Maybe the way Claire isn't looking up. Like something's on her mind.

CLAIRE  
 Good first day?

JEANIE  
 Good. Yeah. Xerox is a beast,  
 though.  
 (beat, awkward)  
 How was yours?

CLAIRE  
 Dondo Abrigado.

Long beat.

Huh?

JEANIE  
 Is that a code for something?

Claire glances up at her.

CLAIRE  
 A kid from grade school. First boy  
 whose prick I saw. Not by choice.  
 (MORE)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

He used to go around the lockers,  
flashing all the girls his private  
parts. He'd say, 'Take a good look.  
Remember this! Remember this!'

(beat)

The funny part is, for the life of  
me right now, I can't. Remember.

(beat)

After all that.

JEANIE

That is funny.

CLAIRE

Yeah.

(beat)

But I feel like I've been meeting  
him my whole life. Dondos. And I'm -  
- just tired, I guess.

Beat.

JEANIE

Is this about my dad?

Claire looks up at her.

CLAIRE

You think he's one of them?

Jeanie meets her gaze. She thinks about it for a long beat.

JEANIE

No.

(beat)

I mean, he's not for everyone. I  
know. I know he has a reputation.  
And I don't know what you've heard  
about him. It's probably true. But  
that's the thing about him. If you  
heard it, it's probably because he  
told someone himself. Because he's  
real. Honest. Not full of it. And  
he's kind. Even my mom would tell  
you that. He's not a Dondo, Mrs.  
Rothman. He's the best man I know.

CLAIRE

(after a beat)

Thank you, Ms. Mueller.

JEANIE

Ms. Buss.

**EXT. MALIBU MANSION - DUSK**

The long stretch limo pulls away, leaving Magic in the driveway of the biggest house he's ever seen: all white, overlooking the Pacific Ocean on a perfect summer evening.

Tiki torches light the entry path, where a white BUTLER in a white tux stops him.

BUTLER  
No colors, sir.

MAGIC  
(about to go HAM)  
Say what?

BUTLER  
No colors allowed.

The butler indicates a RACK OF WHITE LOANER JACKETS. Looking around, Magic sees that all the OTHER GUESTS wear white.

BUTLER  
Welcome to the White Party.

OFF Magic, half-wondering if that's just what they call a Klan rally in Southern California --

MAGIC  
Yeah. Solid.

**INT. MALIBU MANSION - DUSK/LATER**

FIND Magic wandering inside the sprawling indoor-outdoor mansion. BURT BACHARACH performs on a white grand piano. White people in white clothing mingle.

JERRY BUSS  
Earvin!

Buss beckons from a gaggle of attractive women.

JERRY BUSS  
C'mere, meet someone. This is the big swinging dick who owns this joint --

The women part, revealing DONALD STERLING, 45, like Buss's bush-league doppelgänger; a mogul-cum-inflated sack of wind who may (and should) remind you of a different 1980s "Don."

DONALD STERLING  
Donald Sterling.

He sizes Magic up like he's a side of beef.

DONALD STERLING

You weren't kidding about this one,  
Jerry. Real young buck!

(trying too hard)

Saw you in that title game last  
year, my man. You kicked that white  
boy's butt. Some great white hope!  
Want you to know I was pulling for  
you fellas the whole time.

Magic isn't quite sure what to do with that.

MAGIC

Cool. Yeah. Appreciate it.

**EXT. MALIBU MANSION - DUSK/MOMENTS LATER**

The magic hour. Buss leads Magic down an outdoor staircase.

JERRY BUSS

Donald's always threatening to buy  
a team himself, but he's too cheap.  
Throws a decent shindig, though.

The staircase opens out onto the beach.

Magic stops short. Eyes wide.

JERRY BUSS

Something wrong?

MAGIC

No, sir. It's just -- first time.  
Seeing it.

Sunset on the Pacific. It's pretty damn spectacular.

JERRY BUSS

Ha. How about that.

(beat)

You've seen one of those, though.

He gestures to a FULL BASKETBALL COURT built out on the sand.  
Lit by flood lights. Some CELEBRITIES are mingling.

They're watching two men playing H-O-R-S-E. A BLACK MAN IN A  
WHITE FUR COAT is polishing the floor with a white TV ACTOR.

JERRY BUSS

Hey Norm!

And now the black man turns: it's our friend, Norm Nixon.

Norm sees Buss and Magic. Plastering a big fake grin as he approaches, cradling the ball under his arm.

NORM NIXON

Dr. Buss, my main man!

He slaps Buss five a bit too ostentatiously. Maybe showing off a little ("look, new boss and me are buds!") to Magic.

NORM NIXON

You must be that magic man they all jiving about. Saw you on the tube, whupping that white boy. Great white hope my great black ass!  
(offering a dap)  
Norm Nixon.

MAGIC

(a little star-struck)  
Yeah, man. I dig your game.

NORM NIXON

Well shit. Look at us! Match made in hooping heaven.

Norm bounces him the basketball.

NORM NIXON

Whaddaya say, you wanna entertain these jokers with a friendly game?

Magic looks around. The crowd's already gathering excitedly.

MAGIC

Cool beans.

Norm nods and Magic dribbles out onto the court. (This is the first we've seen him with a basketball. And yeah. He's good.)

Norm tails him a few feet away, as Magic plans his shot.

NORM NIXON

So where you from again? Ohio?

MAGIC

Lansing. Michigan.

NORM NIXON

Big city boy.

Magic drives in toward the baseline with a quick crossover move, and sinks it with a stylish underhanded layup. Swish!



NORM NIXON  
Ooh. Big city boy can play.

Norm retrieves the ball and dribbles out to Magic's spot.

NORM NIXON  
How you liking Cali, so far?

MAGIC  
Wasn't sure at first, but it seems cool. Dr. Buss seems cool. Folks seem cool. Think I can dig it.

Norm drives in with the same move, sinking the same shot. Then bounces the ball to Magic. Slightly harder this time.

NORM NIXON  
Glad to hear that.

Translation: he isn't.

Magic lines up a trick shot from behind the hoop.

NORM NIXON  
Little advice, though? From a dude who's been there?

MAGIC  
What's that?

NORM NIXON  
(as Magic shoots--)  
Go back to college.

Magic takes the shot and CLANKS IT off the rim. A miss.

NORM NIXON  
(grabs the ball)  
Don't get me wrong, brother. Buss is one hep white cat.

He shoots the same shot. Swishing it.

NORM NIXON  
But he still white.

MAGIC  
What's that mean?

NORM NIXON  
Mean he's playing you. He say they'll start you at the point? Fat chance. What are you, 6'8"? 6'9"? They'll post you up at four spot.  
(MORE)

NORM NIXON (CONT'D)

Off the bench. And take a brother's word for it, this league ain't no place to figure out a new position. You be studying your post moves, while those grown men pick your pocket, Cincinnati.

Norm shoots an arm and STRIPS THE BALL away from Magic.

MAGIC

Michigan.

NORM NIXON

Who gives a shit.

(hard)

Look around you, fool. These honkeys'll blow smoke up your behind until you sign. But once they got you? You just be another thing they own.

Magic looks to scan the crowd that's gathered all around them now: mostly white faces, gawking at him like a circus freak.

NORM NIXON

(a cold-ass smile)

Welcome to the NBA.

Norm chucks the ball to Magic and walks off. Leaving Magic on the court alone. For once, no longer smiling.

**EXT. NEW YORK CITY - ESTABLISHING - DAY**

Steamy, sleazy NYC. Giuliani, fuck yourself. It's 1979.

The SOUND of a SQUEALING MICROPHONE takes us to --

**INT. PLAZA HOTEL - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY/SAME**

A haze of cigarette smoke clouds the air around a giant table where three dozen NBA OWNERS, mostly bald white men (some bald Jews too) in patterned period-specific suits hold court.

Buss is the only man in Levis. His day of reckoning at hand.

BOB MCDERMOTT, 60, a WASPY Texan military man, the owner of the Spurs and the committee chair, is at the microphone.

BOB MCDERMOTT

Before we vote, I'll open the floor to anyone who'd like'ta speak for or against our newest applicant.

His gaze lands on Cooke. Whose palm is resting on the steak-stained manila envelope we saw; his file of dirt on Buss.

It's almost like they planned this thing.

BOB MCDERMOTT  
(pointed)  
Jack?

If we were to ZOOM IN VERY CLOSELY (which, why not?) -- we'd see COOKE'S HAND IS TREMBLING a little bit over the envelope.

He's torn.

He looks to Buss. And stands.

JACK KENT COOKE  
Thank you, Bob. As you men know, I  
have a heavy heart today. For  
reasons outside my control, I'm  
being asked to sell a thing -- a  
thing I love. A thing I built.  
(beat)  
A legacy.

He looks at Buss again.

JACK KENT COOKE  
That's not an easy thing to give  
away. For any sum. So it's  
important to me to pass on the  
baton to someone worthy.

He looks back at the envelope.

Long beat.

JACK KENT COOKE  
I'm here to tell you Jerry Buss --  
Dr. Jerry Buss -- is such a man.

He looks back up at Buss again. Loathes every word of this:

JACK KENT COOKE  
I wish him luck.

Buss glances TO THE CAMERA. Just for a moment. A small smile.  
As if to say, "What, you were expecting something else?"

JERRY BUSS  
Thanks, Jack.

And as Buss spreads that winner's grin --

**INT. PLAZA HOTEL - CORRIDOR - LATER**

Buss emerges, grinning, into a SCRUM OF SPORTSWRITERS. All shouting questions, brandishing their chunky TAPE RECORDERS.

SPORTSWRITER 1  
Congratulations, Dr. Buss!

SPORTSWRITER 2  
Is it true you that you've already  
picked a player for the draft?!

Buss's smile grows coy.

JERRY BUSS  
Call me Jerry, pal.  
(to sportswriter 2)  
And we may have someone in mind.

SPORTSWRITER 2  
So why Moncrief instead of Johnson?

Buss stops short.

The sportswriter is holding up a NEWSPAPER. The sports page of the *LA Times*: "SOURCE: LAKERS TO DRAFT MONCRIEF NUMBER 1"

Buss grabs the paper from his hand and --

**INT. FORUM OFFICES - WEST'S OFFICE - DAY**

Buss slaps the paper on the desk across from West.

JERRY BUSS  
It says here this comes from a --  
quote -- "front-office source."

WEST  
Who? Me?  
(offended)  
No fucking way! No. Fuck you.

QUICK FLASH: West is at a DIVE BAR. More than two sheets to the wind and talking animatedly to the LA TIMES REPORTER:

WEST  
Johnson? No. No fucking way! Fuck  
you. Moncrief is our pick!

BACK TO SCENE. Buss stares at West. Evaluating him.

JERRY BUSS

Forget it. Fine. It doesn't matter who they heard it from. What matters is, it isn't true. We're drafting Johnson, is that clear?

West tries to bite his tongue. Fat chance of that.

WEST

It's a big mistake.

JERRY BUSS

Moncrief is a fine player--

WEST

He's an All-Star.

JERRY BUSS

And he's boring!

West sets his jaw.

JERRY BUSS

I saw the film. Kid's dull as watching paint dry on the growing grass. Shit, Jerry. You see that.

WEST

I see fundamentals.

JERRY BUSS

Everyone's got fundamentals! Fundamentals can be practiced. What Johnson's got, though -- it's the reason -- watching him's the reason I love basketball. It's why I bought the fucking team. And it's the thing that's gonna bring the crowds. They call him magic for a reason -- he's exciting to watch.

WEST

(exploding)  
SO WAS I!

West slams his fists down on the desk.

WEST

Goddammit. Boston was boring. Every fucking year -- they'd bore you right to tears. And win. I was the showman. Me -- here -- look! I'm the logo of the fucking league.

(MORE)

WEST (CONT'D)

And you know what I won for that?!  
Jack shit and this fucking booby  
prize!

He yanks his FINALS MVP TROPHY off a shelf and brandishes it.

And we can see, all bluster aside: this goes deep for him.

WEST

Take it from a guy who knows it,  
pal. There is no second place.  
There's winning and there's fucking  
purgatory. I been there. I know.

Buss regards him for a thoughtful beat.

Pulls out his deck of playing cards. Taps it on the desk.

JERRY BUSS

Tell you what.

West looks at him, as Buss starts riffling the deck.

JERRY BUSS

Starting here. Today. I want you as  
my G.M. We'll ease Bill into  
retirement. He's tired anyway. And  
you'll have final say -- full say --  
on every personnel decision.

WEST

(waiting for the catch)  
Except this one?

JERRY BUSS

Nope. This, too. If you think  
Johnson hasn't got the chops,  
forget him. Draft Moncrief if you  
want. Hell, draft your sister.

(beat)

Just promise me it's not because  
you're too damn scared to lose.

Buss looks up from his cards at West to hold his stare.

JERRY BUSS

I know when a player antes up  
because he means it, Mr. West. And  
I know when a fella's just afraid.  
But Jerry -- one Jerry to another --  
if it's the risk that keeps you up,  
then you're in hell already.

Buss pockets his playing cards and stands. Walks out.

Leaving West. Staring at his booby prize, the MVP award. His face, a distorted reflection on the shiny golden basketball.

**EXT. PUBLIC PARK - LANSING - NIGHT/FLASHBACK**

FROM HIGH ABOVE, an asphalt basketball court. A stark black rectangle, neatly bordered on all sides by pure white snow.

It's the dead of winter. Empty. Except one TINY FIGURE. Dribbling a basketball below us. Crisscrossing the court through yellow pools of sodium vapor light. Leaving puffs of hot breath like a contrail in the freezing cold.

Faintly, since we're high above this stark tableau, we HEAR his small, lone voice. Announcing the imaginary play-by-play:

8-YEAR-OLD EARVIN JR.  
 Dave Bing fakes left, goes right,  
 there's the finger roll -- it's in!  
 (hissing cheers)  
 Yah! Cobo going wild!

A CITY GARBAGE TRUCK squeals up alongside the park's fence.

An OLDER VOICE calls from its cab. We recognize it.

EARVIN SR. (O.C.)  
 Junior!

**EXT. LANSING STREET - NIGHT/FLASHBACK**

The garbage truck idles on an empty street.

Earvin Sr. (35, less gray in his beard) hefts sacks of trash into the truck as 8-YEAR-OLD EARVIN JR. dribbles around him, weaving between the trash cans, playing his imaginary game.

A pick-and-roll around a lamppost... a give-and-go against a wall... a high-arcing hook shot past a defending dumpster...

EARVIN SR.  
 Alright boy, here's one. You get it  
 on the break against Milwaukee.

8-YEAR-OLD EARVIN JR.  
 Go iso.

EARVIN SR.  
 Versus the Big O?  
 (laughing)  
 You crazy, boy?

Earvin Sr. climbs into the truck and shifts it into gear, as Earvin Jr. hops up onto the rear running board to ride along.

The truck drives slowly up the street, as Earvin Jr. grips the rail with one hand. Still dribbling with the other.

8-YEAR-OLD EARVIN JR.  
 (loud, to Earvin Sr.)  
 Okay, I go paint against Alcindor.

EARVIN SR.  
 (shaking his head)  
 He's 7'2". You drive and kick! You pass! You wanna play point means you gotta help the team, son, not yo'self. You gotta do the work.

He pulls up at the next cluster of garbage cans.

EARVIN SR.  
 Go on, then.

Earvin Jr. hops down and starts to drag a heavy metal can back to the truck. Hoists it. Empties it. Doing the work...

**INT. GARBAGE TRUCK - DRIVING - NIGHT/FLASHBACK**

Later. Earvin Sr. drives another street on his long route. Earvin Jr. is beside him. Fast asleep. His head bobs gently on his father's shoulder. The basketball still in his arms.

**INT. HOTEL SUITE - DAY/PRESENT**

The TV is on, but playing softly. *Gilligan's Island*.

Magic is awake, but curled up like a fetus on the bed. Depressed. The curtains are all drawn. It's day, but dark.

Magic shields his eyes as sunlight spills into the room and Earvin Sr. enters. He regards his son, concerned.

EARVIN SR.  
 Turn that box off, Junior.

Magic continues staring vacantly at the TV.

EARVIN SR.  
 This all about that headline?

Magic shakes his head.



MAGIC

Nah. Dr. Buss called. Said that's sorted out now.

(zero enthusiasm)

Said they want me.

EARVIN SR.

(news to him)

That's good then! Ain't it?

MAGIC

I don't know, pop.

(off Earvin Sr.)

What if Nixon right 'bout how he dogged me? What if it ain't my time yet? For the big time. I ain't ready. And I don't play no good. Or blow out my knee or -- I dunno. Then they get the next hot dog and I'm just -- that just it for me. Just Lansing's tallest garbage man.

Earvin Sr. looks at him.

MAGIC

I didn't mean--

EARVIN SR.

(understanding)

I know.

MAGIC

I just--

(trails off; beat)

What I got, if I lose this? Mess it up. I'm scared, pop.

Beat.

Earvin Sr. sits down on the bed beside him.

EARVIN SR.

When you were still inside your mama, we'd stay up some nights. Dreaming. 'Bout you. What you could be. One night it be Doctor Johnson. Next, maybe Judge. Or why not Chairman of the Board?

(he smiles at the memory)

And pro ball, man? Oo-ee. That, I didn't even dare to dream.

(beat)

We were so damn young.

(beat)

(MORE)

EARVIN SR. (CONT'D)

Then one day at work, foreman pulls me off the line. Say mama fainted in the street. She okay. But they ain't sure about the baby.

(beat)

Well. I took off, man. Ran right out the factory. Ran home the whole six miles. Ran. Just couldn't bear to wait on any bus. Like if I stopped, it'd be nightmares running through my head instead. Forget doctor. Chairman. Nah -- fear show you your bottom line, real quick. I made my bargain with the Lord right then. While I was running. Give my boy a mouth and lungs so he can breath. A heart to beat. That's all I prayed for. All I need.

He looks at Magic. The purest kind of love in this.

EARVIN SR.

If you ain't ready yet, go back to school. If you ain't ready ever, I don't care. Hear me? My bottom line ain't changed, son. Never will.

OFF Magic --

No, not "Magic." Earvin Jr. Just looking at his dad.

**EXT. THE FORUM - PARKING LOT - DAY**

A TAXI idles in the mostly empty lot outside the huge arena. Earvin Sr. is sitting in the back seat. Waiting.

**INT. FORUM OFFICES - DAY**

The offices are silent. Everyone knows something's up.

Jeanie, Lon and Linda are all gathered near the shut door of the owner suite. Claire approaches them, confused.

CLAIRE

What's up, somebody die?

JEANIE

(she's pale)

Worse.

**INT. FORUM OFFICES - OWNER'S SUITE - DAY/SAME**

Cooke's furniture is gone. The walls are bare.

Buss is sitting on some boxes by the window. Fanning out his deck of cards and staring off.

Magic stands behind him, near the door. The mood is glum.

JERRY BUSS  
(after a beat)  
Well shit.

MAGIC  
The office girl said she could get  
us on the first flight home.

JERRY BUSS  
Sure.

MAGIC  
I'm sorry, Dr. Buss. Just--

He trails off. Wavering a moment.

Buss looks up from his cards and clocks the hesitation.

MAGIC  
Just timing, I guess.

But Buss is staring at him now. The way we've seen him do to people a few times before. Like a poker player. Reading him.

And we sense maybe he's picked up on something: Magic's torn.

Magic flinches under Buss's scrutiny.

MAGIC  
Just think I need another year.  
Is all.

JERRY BUSS  
Yeah. You know your heart, son.  
(smiles)  
Gimme a sec, I wanna walk you out.

Buss rises and heads calmly for the door.

**INT. FORUM OFFICES - CONTINUOUS**

The gathered office workers scatter off, as Buss emerges. Seeing they've been eavesdropping. He doesn't care.

He beckons furtively to Claire and Jeanie.

JERRY BUSS  
 (whispering)  
 You two, c'mere!

**INT. FORUM - TUNNELS - LATER**

The white brick walls of a deserted labyrinth.

Magic follows Buss through the winding arena tunnels. Posters line the walls of Laker greats all through the years.

Magic can't help himself. He marvels at the images. These titans that he's worshipped all his life.

Buss notices. Of course he does. That's why they're here.

JERRY BUSS  
 Well crap. I think I got us lost.  
 (to Magic)  
 Hang on.

Buss heads back the way they came. Around a corner --

Leaving Magic on his own.

He sees an open doorway just ahead: the LAKERS LOCKER ROOM.

**INT. FORUM - LAKERS LOCKER ROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

Magic steps into the empty locker room and wanders slowly.

He takes in the space. NAMEPLATES on the stalls. Each one, a god he idolizes: "ABDUL-JABBAR"... "WILKES"... "NIXON"...

Then he suddenly stops short.

Written in felt pen above the last stall is his own name:

"JOHNSON"

Magic steps up slowly.

There's a gold Lakers jersey hanging from the hook inside:

"32"

OFF Magic as he stares at it. The gold reflected in his eyes.

**INT. FORUM - ARENA FLOOR - MOMENTS LATER**

The vast stadium is empty, its lights out.

FOOTSTEPS echo in the silence as Magic emerges from the tunnel, walking out onto the hardwood floor.

He sees a RACK OF BASKETBALLS along the sideline.

Magic picks one up.

Starts dribbling... and soon he's moving slowly up the court. Then faster. Makes a move. And scores!

Then gets the rebound, breaking back the other way.

MAGIC  
(announcing now)  
Here comes Bing, streaking up the  
right side, at the buzzer -- yes!

The shot drops, and he quickly collects the ball. Going back the other way again. Continuing the solo game, as we --

**INT. FORUM - UPPER STANDS - DAY/SAME**

FIND Claire and Jeanie watching from the upper balcony.

Buss steps up to join them. Grinning ear-to-ear.

They all look on. Watching Magic streaking up and down the floor below. Just like a kid again. Just playing basketball.

**INT. FORUM CLUB - DAY**

A press conference. Magic holds his Lakers jersey up as CAMERAS FLASH. SPORTSWRITERS are barking questions.

SPORTSWRITER 3  
Are you excited to be in Hollywood?

SPORTSWRITER 4  
What should the fans expect? Can  
this team make a title run?

Magic clears his throat. Still new to this.

But all traces of doubt and fear in him are gone.

MAGIC  
(leans to the podium)  
Well.

(MORE)

MAGIC (CONT'D)

Tell 'em -- if they like  
basketball, you tell 'em to come  
out. The Lakers a great team. They  
already be winnin' without me.

He shows those teeth.

MAGIC

Now we gonna be exciting!

The press swoons. Buss swoons.

Jerry West looks grim.

**INT. FORUM OFFICES - WEST'S OFFICE - DAY**

West steps in and shuts his door. He regards the trophy case  
behind his desk. A whole career of accolades. And there:

That golden basketball: "JERRY WEST - 1969 NBA FINALS MVP"

Then the outcome of the series: "BOSTON 4 - LAKERS 3"

A loss. Another of his many, many losses. A long beat.

**INT. FORUM OFFICES - DAY/SAME**

OUTSIDE WEST'S OFFICE DOOR. The silver trophy CRASHES through  
the FROSTED PLATE GLASS WINDOW, shattering it to shards!

The trophy rolling to a stop.

**INT. TRAINING GYM - PRESS ROOM - DAY**

A PHOTOGRAPHER is taking promo stills of LAKERS PLAYERS, one  
at a time. QUICK CUTS between them (men we'll come to know):

-- JAMAAL WILKES, 26, the stately pro.

-- SPENCER HAYWOOD, 30, the flashy veteran.

-- Kareem... well, you know him already. Surly and glowering,  
despite the photographer's best efforts to cajole a smile:

TEAM PHOTOGRAPHER

Smile Kareem! Smile Kareem!

KAREEM

I am smiling.

He's not.

-- And finally, Magic. That magnetic grin. Those pearly whites. The photographer snap-snapping away, elated.

TEAM PHOTOGRAPHER  
Yes! Yes! Amazing!

NORM NIXON  
(after a while; snide)  
Sure you got it?

Magic turns to --

FIND Norm Nixon. Just arriving for his turn, next in line.

NORM NIXON  
May be a pose you didn't try.

Magic is no fool. He feels the jealousy. But doesn't bite.

MAGIC  
You playing in the game today?

NORM NIXON  
That exhibition shit? Naw, son.  
Just here to show my pretty face.  
Pre-season's rookie bullshit. Best  
enjoy the start, though. Gonna be  
your last one for awhile.

Norm steals the PROP-BALL out of Magic's grip for emphasis.

NORM NIXON  
Study up those post moves, boy.

**INT. TRAINING GYM - TUNNEL - LATER**

SLOW-MOTION, LOW-ANGLE HERO SHOT: Magic and a motley PRE-SEASON TEAM of rookies and unsigned amateurs walk through the tunnel in their jerseys and short shorts. RESUMING SPEED as --

MICHAEL COOPER, 23, a gritty beanpole sidles next to Magic.

COOP  
Yo, what's up, Michael Cooper.

MAGIC  
Earvin.

They give dap.

COOP

Hope you ain't expecting much out of these summer games. Be lucky if they fill a couple rows.

MAGIC

You done this before?

COOP

Yeah. Repeating the first grade. Went third round last year, sixty overall, then blew my knee out start of training camp. Never even got to play.

MAGIC

No shit.

COOP

D.L. exemption is the only reason they ain't cut my ass. But I been working on my jumper and my D, man. Gonna make the team this year or drop dead, trying.

Magic smiles at his confidence. He likes this guy.

They walk out of the tunnel into --

**INT. TRAINING GYM - ARENA FLOOR - CONTINUOUS**

The CAL STATE LA GYM is absolutely packed. 3,600 FANS jammed into a place that seats, uncomfortably, 3,000.

The fans go nuts, as they lay eyes on Magic. ROARING.

Coop and the other rookies are all stunned.

But Magic spots Buss, nearby. Approaching with a grin.

MAGIC

Maybe we should renegotiate.

JERRY BUSS

Make a couple baskets first.

TIME CUT --

ON THE COURT. Minutes later. The two pre-season teams, the Lakers and the DETROIT PISTONS, circle for the jump.

There's already a chant on in the crowd: "Ma-gic! Ma-gic!"



The opposing point guard, ROY HAMILTON, 22, 10th pick, no slouch, just glares at Magic as he tries to give him dap.

Magic weathers it: "Okay. That's how it's gonna be then."

They take positions. Ball goes up! Tip goes to Magic!

The CROWD CHEERS as he secures it. Dribbles up the court...

He's an electric sight, hammering the ball into the hardwood.

Looking, grinning, looking...

Then he fakes and makes his move past Hamilton --

But suddenly, he's dribbling the air. The ball is gone!

Magic spins back to see that Hamilton has picked him clean. He's blurring to the basket for an uncontested dunk. SLAM!

The massive crowd goes SILENT.

But somewhere, somebody is CHUCKLING...

FIND Norm. Watching from the tunnel. "Welcome to the NBA."

#### **INT. PALISADES PENTHOUSE - NIGHT**

Jeanie has fallen asleep beside Buss on the sofa. Their ongoing Monopoly game is still set up on the coffee table.

Gently, Buss kisses Jeanie on the head and extricates himself to stand without awaking her. He tucks her in under a throw.

#### **EXT. INGLEWOOD LIQUOR STORE - NIGHT**

Stark light. Muzak. Buss is paying for a fifth of whiskey at the counter. He collects his change and walks out --

Giving the change to a HOMELESS VIETNAM VET on his way out.

#### **INT. FORUM - ARENA FLOOR - NIGHT**

Darkness.

CLANK! A spotlight shines down from the scoreboard, illuminating center court.

Buss walks out and looks around.

The place is empty. But as he turns... and turns... you'd swear you HEAR A CROWD in his mind's eye. Cheering. Roaring. Going wild.

Buss sits down on the hardwood, sipping from his fifth.

Then lays down onto his back. Under that light. One arm bent behind his neck. Just another day-dreaming, star-gazing kid.

And this occurs to him, almost suddenly:

JERRY BUSS

I own this...

His big laugh reverberates through the arena as he shouts. Maybe to camera. Maybe just into the void:

JERRY BUSS

I fucking own this!

SLAM TO CREDITS.

**"SHOWTIME" WILL RETURN FOR EPISODE II: "FAST BREAKS"...**