

**THE PROSPECT**

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Based on true events

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**EXT. NORTH CAROLINA BACKYARD - SUNSET**

The last vestiges of sunlight shine towards us, blocked only by a powerful, sturdy MAN holding a BASEBALL BAT in one hand a GLOVE in the other, nearly silhouetted by the setting sun.

*MICHAEL JORDAN (V.O.)*

*When I was a kid, my father seemed like a giant.*

This man is JAMES JORDAN (38, black, stern and masculine). As he walks into his vast rural backyard we PULL OUT TO REVEAL:

YOUNG MICHAEL JORDAN (12, skinny, all limbs) and his brother YOUNG LARRY (13, shorter with broader shoulders) locked in a fierce game of basketball. Young Michael's tongue wags.

YOUNG LARRY

Your tongue's sticking out. You look like a retarded puppy.

Young Michael absorbs the taunt then scores on Larry.

**SUPER: Wilmington, NC - 1975**

JAMES JORDAN

Boys!

They stop playing basketball. Young Michael looks up to see his father approaching with the bat and ball, grinning.

JAMES JORDAN (CONT'D)

Put that down.

**A SHORT TIME LATER:**

Young Michael holds the bat, waiting for pitches from James, who stands some forty feet away.

*MICHAEL JORDAN (V.O.)*

*Pops'd give you these looks - a change in his brow could build you up or break you down in an instant.*

Young Michael's eyes focus in concentration as the pitch comes. Young Michael swings with all his might... and misses.

YOUNG LARRY

You need Pops to put it on a tee for you?

YOUNG MICHAEL

Man, shut your dumb face!

JAMES JORDAN  
Michael! Focus!

Michael turns back to face James. Gets in a batter's stance.

JAMES JORDAN (CONT'D)  
Eye on the ball. You ready?

YOUNG MICHAEL  
Yes, Sir. I'm ready.

James winds up and throws. Michael winds up and CRACKS IT.  
James beams at Young Michael. Young Michael beams right back,  
then gazes up into the sky, WATCHING HIS BALL SAIL AWAY as we

SMASH TO:

**EXT. WOODED AREA OFF MAIN ROAD - DAY**

Two UNIFORMED COPS walk from the side of the road towards an object we can't yet fully see. It's eerily quiet, with only vaguely swampy sounds audible.

**SUPER: Fayetteville, NC - August 5, 1993**

As they get closer, we can identify the object: a stripped red Lexus. The back window is smashed. The cops peer inside. There's blood on the seats.

FIRST COP  
Speakers are gone.

SECOND COP  
So are the plates. Tires, too.

As one of them reaches for a radio, we GO TO:

**EXT. JORDAN MANSION - NIGHT**

PUSH IN to an extravagant mansion; the home of a superstar.

**SUPER: Highland Park, IL**

**INT. JORDAN MANSION OFFICE - NIGHT**

Memorabilia highlights the career of **Michael Jordan, NBA legend.** MVP trophies; Nike, Gatorade and McDonald's endorsement posters; NBA championship rings. There's a framed photo of #23 in the Bulls red and black uniform, holding a championship trophy, hugging James Jordan, now in his 50s.

*MICHAEL JORDAN (V.O.)  
Pops didn't give out praise easy -  
with him, you had to earn it.*

**INT. JORDAN MANSION GYMNASIUM - NIGHT**

MICHAEL JORDAN (30, Chicago Bull, three-time NBA champion) is in a fierce game of one-on-one with his baby-faced Bulls teammate B.J. ARMSTRONG (26, black, droll and philosophical) in his lavish private gym.

**SUPER: Highland Park, IL**

Michael pulls a fadeaway jumper and scores on B.J. His legendarily competitive nature in full effect.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
You hit puberty, you'll catch up.

B. J. shakes his head and mutters something. Michael flashes his world-famous smile - cocky as hell - and dunks over B.J.

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)  
See that, B.J.? That's the '91  
title right there.

B.J. ARMSTRONG  
C'mon, man, we're just shooting  
around. This is a friendly game.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
No such thing.

B.J. grits his teeth and drives towards the basket, then pulls up for a shot but Michael stuffs him.

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)  
Whoop! That's '92...

B.J. rolls his eyes as Michael takes the ball back to the top of the key. He hits a long-three pointer.

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)  
And there's '93. Three titles,  
three rings, baby!

B.J. ARMSTRONG  
Fuck off, I have those same rings.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Got the MVPs to go with 'em? They a  
matching set?

Out of breath, B.J. scoffs at Michael's trash-talking.

B.J. ARMSTRONG  
All right, that's game.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Oh, we're not done...

Before B.J. can respond with another quip, he notices something behind Michael. Sensing this, Michael turns to see his wife, JUANITA JORDAN (34, mixed Latina and black, dignified) standing in the entrance to the gym. She has tears in her eyes.

MICHAEL JORDAN (V.O.)  
*But when he was tough, he was tough  
for our own good. To prepare us for  
life.*

Horror slowly dawns on Michael's face...

#### **I/E. SEDAN - DAY**

Michael and his family - Juanita, JEFFREY (5), MARCUS (3), and one-year-old baby JASMINE - are all dressed in funeral clothes. They're driven by Michael's driver GEORGE KOEHLER (30s, white).

**SUPER: Wilmington, NC - August 15, 1993**

JEFFREY  
We're gonna see Grandma at church?

JUANITA JORDAN  
Yes.

MARCUS  
And Grandpa!

JUANITA JORDAN  
... Grandpa's gone, baby.

The car pulls up to Rockfish Church. SCORES OF MOURNERS enter.

MICHAEL JORDAN (V.O.)  
*Because even if he had all the  
answers, he knew he wouldn't always  
be around to tell me what they were.*

#### **INT. ROCKFISH CHURCH - DAY**

Two hundred MOURNERS are packed into the pews. Michael, Juanita and the kids, sit with his brother LARRY JORDAN (now 32, muscular, still shorter than Michael).

They're with their sister SIS JORDAN (34, ragged, teary), mother DELORIS JORDAN (53), oldest brother RONNIE JORDAN (37, military officer) and baby sister ROSLYN JORDAN (29).

Michael speaks at the lectern. His voice now chokes with emotion. We've been hearing his eulogy:

MICHAEL JORDAN

... He was five eleven. I'm six six now, but no matter how tall I get... He still seems taller.

**EXT. CEMETERY - DAY**

Michael and his brothers carry their father's casket. Michael looks up to notice PAPARAZZI taking photos. For a moment, the grief on his face turns to rage, before the photographers are ushered away by other guests.

**INT. DELORIS JORDAN'S LIVING ROOM - DAY**

A smaller gathering of more intimate mourners – mostly family and a few other guests – are splayed across couches and chairs. Michael and Juanita are approached by B.J. Armstrong and his agent DAVID FALK (44, white, bald, described once by the *New York Times* as resembling "a very determined bird").

B.J. ARMSTRONG

How you holding up? Got any sleep?

MICHAEL JORDAN

We haven't stopped since the cops found his car.

B.J. ARMSTRONG

You'll be able to stop soon. But that's what you gotta watch out for.

Michael flashes Juanita a worried look as his older sibling Sis Jordan wanders over, almost in a fog.

MICHAEL JORDAN

B.J., David, this is Sis.

DAVID FALK

I'm sorry for your loss. Unthinkable.

SIS JORDAN

But here we are, thinking it.

An awkward moment. David tries to smooth things over.

DAVID FALK  
That was a nice speech, Michael.

B.J. ARMSTRONG  
It was great.

Sis snorts a laughter, tinged by tears. She turns to Michael:

SIS JORDAN  
What house did *you* grow up in?

David and B.J. make a discreet getaway.

JUANITA JORDAN  
Michael wasn't trying to -

SIS JORDAN  
I'm sorry, did I ask for this gold-digger to start lecturing me at my own father's funeral?

DELORIS JORDAN (O.S.)  
Sis - that's enough. You're embarrassing yourself.

They turn to see Michael's mother Deloris Jordan - every bit the tough, stoic matriarch - has approached. Sis seems to shrink at her mother's admonishment - then bursts out crying.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
(off Sis crying)  
You serious with this?

DELORIS JORDAN  
Michael, let her be. Go cool off.

Michael looks at Juanita, who nods her agreement with Deloris.

**INT. DELORIS JORDAN'S UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER**

Michael walks up the stairs, still incensed from his confrontation with Sis. Walking by family photos, he spots his older brothers Ronnie and Larry in an open bedroom - *his* old bedroom.

LARRY JORDAN  
What's going on down there?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Just Sis and her drama.

Larry and Ronnie exchange a look: not a shock.

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)  
 What's that?

RONNIE JORDAN  
 Your old trophies.

Indeed, they're looking at Michael's impressive childhood trophy collection. Michael looks at one that says "Mr. Baseball" given by the Dixie Association in 1975. HOLD ON MICHAEL'S FACE: something about this gnaws at him...

**INT. JORDAN MANSION LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

Michael is now alone, his eyes glued to a news report.

NEWSCASTER (ON TV)  
*... Speculation continues that James Jordan's murder was retaliation for Michael Jordan's gambling debts...*

Impetuously, Michael hurls the remote at the wall.

NEWSCASTER (ON TV) (CONT'D)  
*James Jordan's alleged killers have been apprehended and are awaiting trial. While there appears to be no evidence connecting their motives to Michael Jordan's gambling, rumors still persist...*

Trembling slightly, he keeps watching.

**INT. JORDAN MANSION BATHROOM - NIGHT**

Michael gives his young sons Jeffrey and Marcus a bath as he sits on the edge of the tub. He's distracted. Marcus splashes Jeffrey. Some of it gets on Michael.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
 Hey hey, stop splashing now!

Jeffrey splashes Marcus in retaliation. Michael snaps:

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)  
 Dammit, what'd I just say?

The kids look at Michael, scared at his outburst. Marcus starts tearing up. Juanita appears in the doorway, holding the baby. Michael looks at her, regret on his face.

JUANITA JORDAN  
 Michael, it's okay, I got it... Go  
 clear your head, all right?

**INT. JORDAN MANSION BASKETBALL COURT - NIGHT**

Michael cuts a solitary figure in the private, regulation-size basketball court where he played with B.J. before. He takes shots from around the key. INTERCUT WITH HIS SHOOTING, we FLASH TO:

- A news report with his father's picture on screen.
- His father's red Lexus, its windshield shattered.
- His father's coffin lowered into the ground.

**BACK IN THE GYM:** Michael shoots. The ball bangs off the rim. He watches it go, but doesn't chase after it. His mind is somewhere else. He's taking no comfort from this.

**INT. JORDAN MANSION PLAYROOM - DAY**

Michael watches the news, oblivious to Jeffrey and Marcus playing with a small basketball, dunking it through the tiny hoop. Juanita tickles baby Jasmine. Based on Michael's haunted, dazed expression, it is hard to tell how much time has passed.

NEWSCASTER (ON TV)  
*... Daniel Andre Green and Larry  
 Martin Demery, killers of James  
 Jordan, remain in police custody.*

JUANITA JORDAN  
 Michael...?

Michael is transfixed by the news, tuning her out.

NEWSCASTER  
*Demrey and Green shot James Jordan  
 before dumping his body in a swamp  
 across the South Carolina border...*

JUANITA JORDAN  
 Michael!  
 (points to the TV)  
 There's nothing new on there.

Michael is about to protest when he hears his kids playing:

JEFFREY  
 I'm Daddy!

MARCUS  
No, I'm Daddy!

JEFFREY  
I'm B.J. then!

CLOSE ON MICHAEL, his mind in decades past, watching his sons in the present. Then he notices something else in the playroom – a PLASTIC BASEBALL BAT AND WHIFFLE BALL. He grabs them.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Jeffrey! Marcus! Put that down.

The kids drop the basketball. Michael shows them how to grip the bat. As he begins tossing the baseball with his sons, a lightness washes over him. Juanita watches them play, a hopeful smile on her face.

**INT. JORDAN MANSION MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Juanita brushes her teeth in the adjacent **MASTER BATHROOM** as Michael sits up in bed, contemplative. Juanita clocks Michael's distraction, and tries to perk him up:

JUANITA JORDAN  
Y'know, I'm optimistic – soon you'll be back at training camp, back being the best in the world at something; how many people can say that?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I don't think I can go back.

JUANITA JORDAN  
... To what?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
The Bulls. The league. Any of it.

JUANITA JORDAN  
Why?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I've done everything I wanted to do. There's nowhere new to go.

JUANITA JORDAN  
What about a fourth championship?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I just can't keep doing the same things. Something's gotta change. I mean, I could die tomorrow.

She spits on the toothpaste and walks into the **BEDROOM**.

JUANITA JORDAN

People will say it was because of the gambling. That the NBA forced you out -

MICHAEL JORDAN

No one'll believe that. The league's making too much money off me.

JUANITA JORDAN

They'll say you're having a nervous breakdown -

MICHAEL JORDAN

Not wanting reporters following me around everywhere means I'm having a fucking breakdown?

JUANITA JORDAN

I didn't say that.

MICHAEL JORDAN

Can you get onboard with this?

Juanita takes a moment, then composes herself:

JUANITA JORDAN

Michael. I love you and I want you to be happy, and nothing makes you happier than playing basketball.

MICHAEL JORDAN

I don't think that's true anymore. I need something else. I need to reach for something else.

JUANITA JORDAN

Okay. So what is that?

Michael smiles but before he can explain we GO TO:

**EXT. COMISKEY PARK - NIGHT**

Michael - in jeans - walks out to throw out the ceremonial first pitch against the Toronto Blue Jays. A wave of FRENZIED APPLAUSE sweeps across the stands for their hometown hero.

**SUPER: American League Championship Series, Game 1: Chicago White Sox vs. Toronto Blue Jays - October 5, 1993**

As Michael makes it to the pitcher's mound, he smiles wide. WE HOLD ON HIM, gripping the baseball. Grinning, he winds up for the first pitch, and as he releases we GO TO:

**INT. JERRY REINSDORF'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

JERRY REINSDORF (57), a portly Jewish kid from Brooklyn turned accountant turned multiple-sports-franchise-owner, watches the Sox game unfolding below. Jerry's office is covered in memorabilia showcasing his two teams: the Chicago Bulls and the Chicago White Sox.

Michael enters, escorted by a TEAM OF SECURITY in gray White Sox jackets.

JERRY REINSDORF  
Nice arm down there.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I used to pitch.

JERRY REINSDORF  
Mm. Is that right?  
(to the Security detail)  
Thanks, guys. Give us a minute?

Security leaves. Michael and Jerry are alone. Jerry turns intense - or at least his version of intense:

JERRY REINSDORF (CONT'D)  
You're underpaid, yes, but not undervalued. When the next contract negotiation comes, I guarantee -

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Jerry, it's not about money. I want to be retired from basketball.

JERRY REINSDORF  
Then what the hell do you want to do?

Below, in the stadium, a White Sox player gets a hit. The crowd ROARS below. Michael tilts his head towards the field.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
That. I want to do that.

JERRY REINSDORF  
Go to ball games? You want to go White Sox games, believe me, I own the damn team, you can go to all the White Sox games you want.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I want to play baseball.

JERRY REINSDORF  
You were serious about the pitching thing? I was joshing!

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I wasn't. Threw a no-hitter once.

JERRY REINSDORF  
When?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
1975.

JERRY REINSDORF  
And when was the last time you played baseball in any kind of organized capacity?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
When I was sixteen.

JERRY REINSDORF  
And not since?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Well, I've been busy.

Jerry rubs his eyes: fair point. He looks out to the game below.

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)  
This can't be a total surprise.  
We've talked about baseball before.

JERRY REINSDORF  
You also talked about playing pro football or pro golf, but I don't own any of those franchises. I mean, Christ, *baseball*?

Michael shrugs. He gives Jerry his elusive grin.

JERRY REINSDORF (CONT'D)  
No, no. I am sorry, but I refuse to let a basketball player of your caliber try his hand at -

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I'm burnt out on basketball and I need a new challenge. All I'm asking for is a shot. And if you don't give it to me -

JERRY REINSDORF  
 - Twenty-seven other teams will.

Jerry mutters a curse under his breath.

JERRY REINSDORF (CONT'D)  
 Let's keep baseball between us for  
 now and get through the press  
 conference tomorrow. Then we can  
 talk about quietly getting you into  
 some cages and go from there. Okay?

Michael nods. Smiles. Good enough.

**INT. BERTO CENTER HALLWAY - DAY**

Michael - in a gray suit - and Juanita walk down the hallway.

JUANITA JORDAN  
 Last chance: you could still call  
 it off. Stay with your sport.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
 You with me here or what?

JUANITA JORDAN  
 ... I'm with you.

Juanita takes his hand as they walk.

**SUPER: Berto Center Practice Facility - October 6, 1993**

They round a corner to see driver George Koehler, Jerry Reinsdorf, agents David Falk and CURTIS POLK, and NBA commissioner DAVID STERN. Among Michael's teammates are B.J. Armstrong, SCOTTIE PIPPEN, and TONI KUKOC. Head Coach PHIL JACKSON (48, white, a 6'8" tower of a man, gravelly voice and bushy mustache) with a calm serenity to him, approaches.

PHIL JACKSON  
 Sure you won't consider a  
 sabbatical?

Michael laughs and embraces his now-former coach. As Phil chats with Juanita, B.J. looks at Michael with a knowing smirk:

B.J. ARMSTRONG  
 You'll be back.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
 I won't.

B.J. ARMSTRONG

Then you got the two scariest things  
imaginable: all the money in the  
world, and all the time in the world.

MICHAEL JORDAN

Who said I have all the time?

As B.J. looks at Michael slightly perplexed, Michael smiles at him: he's got a secret. But before B.J. can inquire further:

DAVID FALK

Michael. They're ready.

**INT. BERTO CENTER - DAY**

Michael walks with the throng of people out to the practice floor where HUNDREDS OF MEMBERS OF THE PRESS have gathered in a huge semi-circle. From Michael's perspective, dozens of flashes go off. WE HOLD ON MICHAEL, as he's vaguely aware of Jerry Reinsdorf speaking next to him to the assembled media:

JERRY REINSDORF

Good morning. I just have a few words  
to say, then we'll hear from Michael.

Jerked back to reality, Michael finds himself smiling.

**I/E. LIMO - DAY**

Michael and Juanita ride away from the Berto Center. On the TV limo TV, reporters recap footage of Michael's retirement. Juanita grips Michael's hand. After a quiet moment:

JUANITA JORDAN

... "Cut some grass?"

MICHAEL JORDAN

What?

JUANITA JORDAN

You said you were going to spend  
some time watching the grass grow  
and maybe cut it once in awhile.

MICHAEL JORDAN

Doesn't sound like me.

She playfully smacks his arm as she curls up to him.

JUANITA JORDAN  
So you're going to the Minor  
Leagues, huh?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
("who're you talking to?")  
*Minor Leagues?*

**INT. JORDAN MANSION GYMNASIUM - DAY**

Michael lies in a bench press in his expansive home gym, his personal trainer TIM GROVER (white, 30) spotting him.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I want a baseball body.

TIM GROVER  
Baseball body. Okay.

**EXT. COMISKEY PARK - EARLY MORNING**

Michael drives through the private entrance to Comiskey Park. He's waved through by SECURITY. He's smiling, almost giddy.

**INT. COMISKEY PARK INDOOR FACILITY - DAY**

Michael hits alone in the indoor cages underneath Comiskey Park. The Chicago winter is cold, but his mood is warm in here. Aside from a TRAINER, it's just him.

FROM MICHAEL'S POV: speeding off the pitching machine, the ball comes towards him. He swings and misses. No matter. But now, it comes again, and as he CRACKS IT -

- **And we're back in 1975**, as Young Michael smiles approvingly at his ball sailing into the pristine North Carolina sky...

**INT. DELORIS JORDAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Michael's mother Deloris Jordan folds up her late husband's clothes and places them into boxes as she hears a news report:

NEWSCASTER (ON TV)  
*Wipe that smirk off your face, he's  
not kidding: Michael Jordan is  
going to give baseball a shot.*

As Deloris looks up, stunned, we GO TO:

**INT. LARRY JORDAN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

Larry Jordan and his FAMILY watch TV in their solidly upper-middle-class home. They watch a different report.

ANOTHER NEWSCASTER (ON TV)  
*- The basketball superstar has  
 secretly been taking batting  
 practice at Comiskey Park.*

Awed, Larry turns to his WIFE:

LARRY JORDAN  
 ... He's really doing it.

LARRY'S WIFE  
 What do you think?

LARRY JORDAN  
 He's lost his goddamn mind.

**INT. SIS JORDAN'S HOME - NIGHT**

FAVOR THE TV while in the background Sis Jordan argues with her husband, RICK.

SIS JORDAN  
 You telling me what I know is  
 happening *isn't* happening? Run  
 around on me, fine, but do me the  
 courtesy of not lying about it!

Sis is so consumed she isn't even watching the news report:

STILL ANOTHER NEWSCASTER (ON TV)  
*- Jordan has not formally been  
 invited to spring training in  
 Sarasota. White Sox General Manager  
 Ron Schueler has this to say:*

**ON SCREEN:** RON SCHUELER (45, white, slightly put-upon countenance) speaks to a gathered press conference, with a CHYRON reading: "Ron Schueler - White Sox General Manager."

RON SCHUELER (ON TV)  
*Michael's a remarkable athlete, but  
 he hasn't played baseball in  
 sixteen years. Even if he's invited  
 to spring training, the odds of him  
 making it to a Major League team  
 are about a million to one.*

Now we finally ARRIVE AT:

**INT. ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY GYM - DAY**

In contrast to the solitude of the batting cages, Michael now practices in front of a packed media house. For the first time, HE'S DRESSED IN A FULL WHITE SOX UNIFORM.

**SUPER: Illinois Institute of Technology - February 2, 1994**

As he fields ground balls, we hear his voice:

MICHAEL JORDAN (PRE-LAP)  
This is no gimmick. I was a baseball  
player before I was a basketball  
player. It was my first love.

**INT. ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY - LATER**

Still in uniform, Michael gives a press conference.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
My goal is to head to spring  
training and earn a spot on the  
White Sox roster.

**BACK TO MICHAEL PRACTICING:**

As he hits lobs in netted cages for the gathered media horde, we stay with TWO REPORTERS:

FIRST REPORTER  
Think the Sox'll invite him down?

SECOND REPORTER  
Well, they're a professional sports  
organization, so they hate publicity.

ANGLE ON MICHAEL: he catches the withering looks of the reporters as he misses an easy lob. A look of determination covers his face. As another pitch comes and Michael swings and connects, we MOVE TO:

**EXT. SARASOTA AIRPORT - DAY**

The wheels of a private plane touch down on the runway.

**SUPER: Sarasota, FL - February 15, 1994**

**MOMENTS LATER:** Michael gets out of the plane, his driver George Koehler holding his bag. His smile is a mile wide.

**I/E. LIMO - DAY**

George Koehler drives Michael towards Ed Smith Stadium.

GEORGE KOEHLER

Nervous?

MICHAEL JORDAN

Not my first time in a locker room.

GEORGE KOEHLER

First time in *their* locker room.

MICHAEL JORDAN

... Just drive the damn car, George.

George laughs as the car enters the training complex.

**INT. WHITE SOX CLUBHOUSE - DAY**

Michael walks through the clubhouse where the players dress. A few other WHITE SOX PLAYERS have arrived. He nods some greetings. Finally, he arrives at his locker. Inside, his pressed uniform on a hanger - NUMBER 45. He puts it on.

But as more players enter the clubhouse in sweats and T-shirts, and aren't changing, he realizes: he's the only player in the clubhouse wearing the full White Sox uniform. It's like some sort of grade school nightmare come to life. He hears SNICKERING. He looks around, over his shoulder, but can't spot the source. Then:

OZZIE GUILLEN

Yo MJ, can I have your autograph?

Michael turns to see shortstop OZZIE GUILLEN (30, Venezuelan, compact but sturdy build, heavy accent). Like all the other players, he's not wearing the full Sox uniform yet.

MICHAEL JORDAN

Ozzie, right? Got something to sign?

Ozzie grins and hands him a baseball and pen. Michael signs.

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)

Hey, uh, how come no one else is wearing their uniform?

OZZIE GUILLEN

We just work out first day. No one told you?

Michael shakes his head "no" as he hands him back the ball.

OZZIE GUILLEN (CONT'D)

All good. You eager to play. So why you wearing number 45? I thought you were all number 23 all the way.

MICHAEL JORDAN

45's my baseball number. From when I last played.

OZZIE GUILLEN

Yeah. Long time ago, right?

Ozzie smiles and him and winks as he leaves. While outwardly friendly, the exchange still feels foreboding...

**EXT. ED SMITH STADIUM - DAY**

The White Sox – Major Leaguers and prospects alike – take the field to find the ubiquitous media waiting. 55 cameras, over 300 print media and thirteen satellite trucks.

When Michael emerges from the clubhouse and trots onto the field – now in sweats like everyone else – the FANS lose their minds. There's signs. There's screaming. People hold out pictures and balls to autograph. People shout "I want to be like Mike!" There's crying. It's Elvis gyrating. It's a Beatles concert.

On Michael's face: "shit."

**INT. ED SMITH STADIUM - DAY - THE NEXT DAY**

Now in uniform, Michael is in the outfield, doing fielding drills with the rest of the team, watched by the RABID AND ADORING CROWD. A routine fly ball is hit towards him. Michael gets under it, extends his glove... Waits for it... And catches it.

The crowd goes BALLISTIC. NBA Finals ballistic. During a drill. Michael catches Ozzie Guillen's eye. Ozzie calls over:

OZZIE GUILLEN

You should take a shit on second base; they'll all be like "Look how amazing that shit is!"

A FEMALE FAN climbs over the wall and runs out to the field.

FEMALE FAN

*Michael I love you!!!*

Instinctively, Michael steps away from the crazed fan. SECURITY chases her. The rest of the Sox watch and laugh.

Finally, security catches her. They drag her off, screaming. Michael tries to ignore the spectacle, and spies General Manager Ron Schueler – now in the flesh – with Manager GENE LAMONT (48, white, Sox uniform like his players) watching him from near the dugout. But he can't hear them say:

RON SCHUELER

Gene, I want you to give him a lot of playing time.

GENE LAMONT

Why?

RON SCHUELER

So he can fail quickly and this charade can end.

Ron gives Michael a wave. Michael nods back – able to imagine what they've been saying – and recedes to right field, where he tosses a ball back and forth with the center fielder.

**A BIT LATER, BACK WITH MICHAEL:** doing drills like everyone else, he starts to brighten. Then he spots a figure marching towards him from the dugout: hitting coach WALT HRINIAK (white, Sox uniform, looks like he cuts his own hair, thirty seasons' worth of sun cracking his leathery face).

ON SCHUELER AND LAMONT: watching Walt stride towards Jordan.

RON SCHUELER (CONT'D)

Christ. Walt's got thoughts.

GENE LAMONT

Well, this should be entertaining.

**IN THE OUTFIELD:** Walt marches right up to Michael:

WALT HRINIAK

I'm Walt Hriniak. Batting coach. I don't know you from a hole in the wall, and I don't give a soggy fuck about basketball or Nike sneakers or Gatorade soda or any of that crap. Just one thing I gotta ask you: are you serious about this?

Michael looks around the field, at the players watching him, the fans cheering, the doubting Ron Schueler and Gene Lamont. Resolute, he looks Walt straight in the eyes.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
*Dead. Dead serious.*

Walt sizes him up. After a moment:

WALT HRINIAK  
 Got time for you at six AM before  
 practice. You're late, you don't  
 hit.

Walt marches off. Michael shakes his head: "what a kook."

**INT. SARASOTA BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING**

Michael's alarm goes off. 5 AM. He gets out of bed.

**INT. SARASOTA KITCHEN - MORNING**

Michael pours himself some cereal and grabs a few donuts. He looks outside at the Florida landscape. Hears the sounds of birds CHIRPING. The sun peeks out over the horizon.

**I/E. MICHAEL'S CORVETTE - MORNING**

Michael drives down the mostly empty road. It's lighter now, but his headlights are still on. He turns on the radio.

FIRST DJ (ON RADIO)  
*... 5:38 in the morning here in  
 Sarasota. Still a few weeks off  
 from him playing any exhibition  
 games, but what do you think of the  
 "Jord-gasm," Dave?*

SECOND DJ (ON RADIO)  
*It's crazy! He hasn't played this  
 sport in fifteen years! Why does  
 this guy think he can do it?*

Michael listens to the radio and smiles. They doubt him? Good. He pulls to a stop at a red light and catches something in the reflection of the window:

A double reflection of Michael. But for a split second, it looks like a reflection of Michael and his father James.

For a moment, he's overcome with emotion. The light goes green and Michael drives, choking it back. The double reflection disappears as he moves along the road.

**EXT. ED SMITH STADIUM BATTING CAGES - DAY**

Michael and Walt Hriniak are in the covered batting shed. Walt lobs balls to Michael from behind a protected cage:

WALT HRINIAK  
Why aren't you connecting?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I'm swinging underneath.

Walt throws again. Michael connects now, but barely.

WALT HRINIAK  
Your body wants your foot to go  
*that* way. Don't listen to it or  
you're fucked on the pitch.

Michael nods, still unsure if he's got it right.

WALT HRINIAK (CONT'D)  
How's it going with the other guys?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
... They'll be cool when my skills  
catch up.

Walt scoffs as he throws the ball again: he's not so sure.

**INT. GECKO'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT**

Michael sits in a window booth eating a BLT, SECURITY DETAIL nearby. He's studying the White Sox media guide to learn everyone's name. He puts the book down as he quizzes himself.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Robin Ventura, third base... Jack  
McDowell, pitcher...

REVEAL: People are lined up with their faces pressed to the glass. Some have cameras. Michael does his best to ignore them.

**INT. WHITE SOX CLUBHOUSE - DAY**

Michael walks through the clubhouse, greeting his potential teammates by name as he passes them:

MICHAEL JORDAN  
What up Julio?... How's it going,  
Lance?

He spots manager Gene Lamont tacking up the STARTING LINEUP FOR THE INTERSQUAD SCRIMMAGE. American League MVP FRANK THOMAS (26, black) and Ozzie Guillen walk by, not bothering to look, knowing their names are on it.

Michael nervously approaches the list. He scans it for his name. He doesn't see it. Swallows. This is new for him. He moves to approach Gene Lamont, but nearly runs into someone else looking at the list: Minor League prospect CHARLES POE (23, black, his impressive size offset by an innate vulnerability).

CHARLES POE

You're not starting either?

MICHAEL JORDAN

Guess not...

(trying to recollect the name)

... Charles Poe.

CHARLES POE

("OMG you know my name")

You can call me Charlie, everyone does. I mean, my friends do. So you can call me Charlie, if you want.

MICHAEL JORDAN

Okay, Charlie.

CHARLES POE

Figured they'd start you, 'cause you're, well, you. Me, I'm happy just to be here. Got my sights set on Double A ball in Birmingham.

MICHAEL JORDAN

You were in the Minors last season?

CHARLES POE

Yeah. Where we all start, right?

Michael shrugs, not willing to acknowledge that rule yet.

CHARLES POE (CONT'D)

When was the last time your name wasn't on one of those lists?

MICHAEL JORDAN

Sophomore year of high school. Didn't make my varsity basketball team.

CHARLES POE

Oh yeah, I know. I mean, everyone knows that story...

Michael pounds his glove, psyching himself up.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
And everyone remembers what  
happened next.

**EXT. ED SMITH STADIUM - DAY**

Michael has drawn a walk. He's on first base. As the pitcher throws, Michael hesitates before trying to steal second, but the catcher throws to Ozzie before Michael can make it.

Awkwardly, Michael tries to dart back to first, but he's uncertain and gangly, and Ozzie is waiting. Michael leaps into the air, trying to pivot his body, but Ozzie makes the tag easily as Michael's jump lands him in the dirt.

FIRST BASE UMPIRE  
Out!

Michael picks himself up and dusts off his uniform. As Ozzie throws the ball back to the pitcher, he can't resist:

OZZIE GUILLEN  
Yo, Air Jordan over here trying to  
jump over me like you a Nike logo!

Frank Thomas, at first base, shakes his head at Ozzie's antics. Used to trash-talk, Michael forces a grin. It's all in good fun... Right?

**INT. WHITE SOX CLUBHOUSE - SHOWERS - EVENING**

Michael washes up in the communal clubhouse showers, wincing as he removes bandages from his blistered hands. Ozzie enters. He sees Michael and starts laughing. He sticks out his tongue, emulates the Air Jordan symbol.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Enjoy this now, motherfucker. Next  
time I'll make it back safe.

OZZIE GUILLEN  
Step onto my diamond, see what  
happens. You not gonna be safe for  
a long time.

Michael eyes Ozzie: enough is enough.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
... All right, let's hear it.

OZZIE GUILLEN

What?

MICHAEL JORDAN

Your beef with me.

On Ozzie's face: "fuck it."

OZZIE GUILLEN

... Why the fuck you here, man?  
Baseball some sort of hobby to you?

MICHAEL JORDAN

I'm serious about this -

OZZIE GUILLEN

I've been serious about this my  
whole life. I work years - decades  
- to hit a baseball right. And you  
come in and think you can just do  
it like it's fucking fantasy camp  
for NBA superstars? You disrespect  
my game.

MICHAEL JORDAN

You know what I did for basketball?  
Drills. Practice. Conditioning.  
Same as here. I know what it takes  
to get to where I need to go.

Ozzie's anger turns to a condescending laughter.

OZZIE GUILLEN

You know how to win, huh? You gonna  
help the White Sox win?  
(off Michael's glare)  
Fans coming soon. We see if Air  
Jordan can still get off the ground.

Michael brushes by Ozzie, more unnerved than he wishes.

**EXT. ED SMITH STADIUM - DAY**

Tickets are being ripped as fans take their seats. It's the first full game for paying attendees. Nike products and Jordan gear are being sold in the stands. The ever-present media line the field. Everyone is there to watch Michael Jordan play his first game.

**SUPER: Ed Smith Stadium, Sarasota FL - March 3, 1994**

ANNOUNCER (OVER P.A.)  
 ... And now batting number 45,  
 Michael Jordan.

Michael emerges in uniform, two bats over his shoulder. Again, the crowd goes nuts. For a moment, he seems to get lost in the memories of his basketball days...

UMPIRE  
 45, you're up.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
 Thanks, Ref.

The CATCHER laughs at his flub. Michael notes a REPORTER scribbling notes in the stands. He tosses a bat aside and walks up to the plate. Readies his stance. The pitcher releases. Michael swings, and...

UMPIRE  
 Strike one!

Michael readies again. Fans shriek for him. The pitch comes.

UMPIRE (CONT'D)  
 Strike two!

Michael looks into the dugout, sees Ozzie's glare. He shakes it off. Mentally prepares. Eyes on the pitcher and nothing else. The ball comes at him, there for the taking, he swings and...

UMPIRE (CONT'D)  
 Strike three!

Michael walks towards the dugout. Struck out, but cheered anyway. As he sits down, he sees his teammates whispering with manager Gene Lamont, avoiding eye contact. They quiet down when Michael sits.

#### **EXT. ED SMITH STADIUM - LATER**

Michael is in right field. Fans scream for him. He watches the pitcher in the distance. The pitch comes -

CRACK! The batter connects and sends the ball sailing into right field, coming right towards him... Michael gets under it. Holds up his glove. Ready to make the catch and...

... He drops it, famous tongue sticking out. He fumbles with the ball. It takes an eternity. Endless cameras click. Finally, miraculously, he manages to throw it to the second.

JEFFREY (PRE-LAP)  
Daddy, it's you.

Michael tries to ignore the endless camera clicks as we GO TO:

**INT. SARASOTA KITCHEN - EVENING**

Michael and his family – down to Florida for a visit – eat takeout around the sparsely decorated rental.

JEFFREY  
Look!

Jeffrey holds the March 14, 1994 *Sports Illustrated* with Michael flailing at the plate. The text reads "Bag It Michael! Jordan and The White Sox Are Embarrassing Baseball." As Michael looks at the magazine, we HOLD ON HIS FACE –

– Then he snatches the magazine away from Jeffrey and angrily hurls it across the kitchen. The baby starts crying. His sons are terrified. Michael immediately regrets his outburst, but the apology lodges in his throat. He hurries outside.

**EXT. SARASOTA PORCH - MOMENTS LATER**

Michael stumbles outside, trembling slightly, heart racing. After a beat, Juanita joins him.

JUANITA JORDAN  
He is *five*. How old are you? And who are you so mad at?

Michael winces with unarticulated self-disgust.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I'll talk to him –

JUANITA JORDAN  
You stay. I'll put the boys down.

She goes back inside. Michael looks through his kitchen window as Juanita gathers up the kids. They're scared of him.

**INT. SARASOTA BATHROOM - NIGHT**

Michael is shirtless. Juanita shaves his head. Their routine.

JUANITA JORDAN  
When you come back to Chicago with the Sox, you'll be around the kids more. Get used to each other again.

MICHAEL JORDAN

I'm not gonna make the roster.

JUANITA JORDAN

But there's still a month of spring training left -

MICHAEL JORDAN

I haven't gotten a hit yet. Half those guys are watching me waiting to be amazed; other half's just waiting for me to quit.

She starts to respond sympathetically, but bursts out laughing.

JUANITA JORDAN

(imitates him earlier)

"*Minor Leagues?* I'm not playing in the Minor Leagues with the common folk."

Michael doesn't enjoy the razzing but takes it in stride. Her laughter trails off as she grows more contemplative.

JUANITA JORDAN (CONT'D)

Do you still feel like this is something you have to do? Baseball is still the challenge you need?

(off his nod "yes")

Then you can't back down just 'cause it's not like basketball yet.

MICHAEL JORDAN

If I go to the Minors... I wouldn't be based in Chicago. I'd be in Nashville, maybe Birmingham...

Not the news she wanted. She focuses on shaving his head.

JUANITA JORDAN

... Hold still.

MICHAEL JORDAN

No one cares about Minor League baseball. It's like it won't matter.

Juanita sighs. Swallows her own disappointment:

JUANITA JORDAN

It'll matter to you. Matters enough for you to uproot your life and disappoint millions of people, and test the understanding of your very patient wife. And it's just for the summer, right?

Michael looks up at her in the mirror. They share a smile.

MICHAEL JORDAN

You're a wise older woman.

JUANITA JORDAN

Four years! Four years older!

MICHAEL JORDAN

Just like talking to my mama.

JUANITA JORDAN

I'm holding a razor and I'll use it.

They laugh. He playfully grabs the razor away.

**INT. SARASOTA HOUSE - JEFFREY'S ROOM - NIGHT**

Michael enters the room. His son Jeffrey is curled up in bed, asleep. He sits on the bed and speaks quietly.

MICHAEL JORDAN

I'm sorry about before... I know you think I'm real strong, but I'm scared every day out there.

**INT. ED SMITH STADIUM BATTING CAGES - EARLY MORNING**

As the sun rises, Michael continues his work with Walt.

**INT. WHITE SOX CLUBHOUSE - DAY**

Michael changes out of uniform. Ron Schueler calls over:

RON SCHUELER

Hey Michael? Got a minute?

**EXT. ED SMITH STADIUM PARKING LOT - DAY**

Michael makes his way to his red Corvette. He throws his duffel bag in the back seat, where he sees Charles Poe, getting into his broken-down 1984 Ford.

CHARLES POE

Double A?

MICHAEL JORDAN

Yeah. Birmingham Barons.

CHARLES POE

Uh huh. What'd you hit last year?

(off Michael's confusion)

I hit .249 with eleven home runs in the Florida State League. Slated to move up to Birmingham this season. They're sending you instead. So I wanna know: what did you hit last year?

Michael pauses: shit. How to handle this?

MICHAEL JORDAN

Look Charlie, you and me? We're the same; we're both just trying to make it to the Majors.

CHARLES POE

You really believe that? You're just one of the guys? You don't make it, you still got a private plane. I don't make it, I'm working at Arby's.

MICHAEL JORDAN

... What can I say? It's business.

CHARLES POE

Business isn't fair. Life's not fair. Sports are supposed to be.

Charlie walks to his car. Before he gets in his car:

CHARLES POE (CONT'D)

You act like Double A is some kinda demotion. How do you think the guys in Birmingham will feel about that?

Michael watches Charlie drive off.

**A SHORT TIME LATER:**

Michael sits in his car, apprehensive. He opens up the White Sox media guide he was studying earlier to the page that says "**Double A Affiliate Birmingham Barons.**" There's a picture of the Barons' manager: **Terry Francona.** Now we GO TO MEET HIM:

**EXT. MIDDLE CLASS HOUSE - DAY**

We recognize TERRY "TITO" FRANCONA from the media guide. He's 35, white, humble and self-deprecating. South Dakotan accent, but really, he just sounds like "baseball." He's about to become very important to this story.

Right now he's in full Barons uniform, carrying a boxed birthday cake. He moves with obvious pain in his legs and back as he hustles into the house.

**INT. MIDDLE CLASS HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

Terry enters carrying the cake to find a living room full of seven-year-olds, rushing around, playing games. An array of presents are in a pile. His daughter ALYSSA (7) sprints to him.

ALYSSA

Daddy!

As Alyssa jumps up on him, Terry winces from the strain on his back. Still, he's genial as he picks her up.

TERRY FRANCONA

How's my birthday girl?

He spots his wife JACQUE FRANCONA (35, white, blonde, multitasker, not easily rattled), appearing from the kitchen holding a baby. She looks at him, a bit exasperated.

**INT. FRANCONA KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER**

With the sound of KIDS running around in the living room, Terry and Jacque huddle over the cake, putting in candles.

TERRY FRANCONA

Sorry I'm late - line at the bakery took forever, then I forgot to grab the candles and -

JACQUE FRANCONA

("not the first time")  
Practice went late.

Terry hesitates. Busted. The phone RINGS. He reaches for it, but she gently pushes his hand away. They light the candles.

TERRY FRANCONA

... It's my second season, I gotta deliver. Team's not looking strong.

JACQUE FRANCONA

It's Double A. Half your team disappears every year. No one'll hold a bad showing against you.

TERRY FRANCONA

Just worried I'm one lousy record away from selling real estate.

JACQUE FRANCONA

Whatever this season throws at you, you can handle it. Okay?

He nods, clearly not convinced. The phone RINGS again. He moves to answer it, but she stops him.

JACQUE FRANCONA (CONT'D)

Terry. Let it be. Go enjoy your daughter's birthday.

They peck on the lips. Terry carries the cake into the **LIVING ROOM**, turning the lights off when we hears the phone RING again and Jacque answering. But now all the kids have gathered, and they all start signing:

TERRY FRANCONA/KIDS

*Happy birthday to you / Happy birthday to you...*

But Terry trails off when he sees Jacque has entered, holding the receiver, her previously assured face now turned white. The rest of the kids keep singing as Terry looks at his wife, not yet knowing how his life is about to change...

#### **I/E. MICHAEL'S PORSCHE - DAY**

Michael drives his car through Birmingham. He passes a road sign that reads "Bible Outlet - 50% Off!"

#### **SUPER: Birmingham, AL - April 8, 1994**

Michael's car approaches the Barons' stadium, the Hoover Met. He sees the fans lined up around the block for tickets. LEGIONS OF PRESS wait as well, cameras snapping pictures of Michael in his car as he goes by.

#### **INT. BARONS CLUBHOUSE - DAY**

Michael walks into the Minor League clubhouse - while not quite a rinky dink high school team's locker room, it's a far cry from the Major League digs at Ed Smith Stadium.

The eyes on him are less the "you're an interloper" vibe he got in Sarasota, and more young men, some barely out of high school, staring at him with full on "Holy shit" expressions.

Michael greets outfielder KERRY VALRIE (26, black, stocky, a devoted athlete who just wants to play) and pitcher SCOTT TEDDER (27, white, first baseman, nerdy and wholesome).

MICHAEL JORDAN

How're y'all doing?

He extends his hand for a shake. Kerry takes it and tries to talk but can't. Scott just starts nervously giggling.

**INT. TERRY FRANCONA'S OFFICE - SAME TIME**

Down the hallway, we find Terry with Barons General Manager BILL HARDEKOPF (late 30s, white, clean-cut, currently nervous but trying not to show it). They talk quietly, looking surreptitiously at Michael meeting the Barons down the hall.

BILL HARDEKOPF

– And he can't bat ninth. That comes from the top.

TERRY FRANCONA

Uh huh.

Bill leans in, more than a hint of menace in his voice:

BILL HARDEKOPF

You had a good season last year, Tito. I want you to have a lot more of them. But that's *Michael Jordan*, so let's hope he has no complaints. You got me?

Terry nods again. Bill pats his back and heads out. Terry takes a deep breath.

**INT. BARONS CLUBHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER**

Back to Michael, with the stupefied Barons. Scott Tedder attempts small talk:

SCOTT TEDDER

You know, I, uh, I played basketball in college, too.

They are interrupted by the approach of Terry and his firm handshake.

TERRY FRANCONA  
Hey Michael, I'm Terry Francona.  
Welcome to Birmingham. Mind if we  
chat for a minute in my office?

**INT. TERRY FRANCONA'S OFFICE - DAY**

Michael and Terry enter his office. Michael notices Terry's  
wallet, stuffed with cash, sitting on the desk.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Ever worry someone'll take that?

TERRY FRANCONA  
Double A players earn \$850 a month.  
Someone needs a little help, they  
always put it back. Managers don't  
make much more, so it's mostly just  
ones in there. But, uh, if you need  
some cash...

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Yeah, man, I'm all right.

They take a seat. A moment goes by. Terry is nervous.

TERRY FRANCONA  
So, uh, you settling in all right?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Yeah. Family's moving down soon.

TERRY FRANCONA  
Great. Great. So, I, uh, I'm not  
gonna ask why you're here - I  
figure you're getting that question  
a lot and it's not my business -  
but I am gonna have to treat you  
like everyone else.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Good. That's what I want.

TERRY FRANCONA  
Okay. Any other questions for me?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
How do we travel?

TERRY FRANCONA  
From game to game?

MICHAEL JORDAN

I was looking at the schedule, some stadiums are six, seven hundred miles away. Do we fly?

TERRY FRANCONA

We take the bus.

MICHAEL JORDAN

... Is it a *nice* bus?

TERRY FRANCONA

Not really. Breaks down a lot. Whole thing kinda smells like the bathroom.

MICHAEL JORDAN

Hmm.

TERRY FRANCONA

Not what you're used to.

MICHAEL JORDAN

No, but... Maybe there's something we could do about that?

**EXT. HOOVER MET PARKING LOT - THE NEXT DAY**

Michael, Terry, and the other 25 BARONS watch as FOUR DIFFERENT LUXURY BUSES pull up into the parking lot. Most of the players remain starstruck around Michael.

**MOMENTS LATER:** Bus company owner JIM THRASHER shows off the buses. He points to the fanciest bus.

JIM THRASHER

This is the model the rock bands use.

Michael steps in and motions to Terry to join him **IN THE BUS**. Two luxurious seats in front, with another ten seats in back.

MICHAEL JORDAN

What do you think?  
(off Terry's raised eyebrow)  
Hey man, it's a *bus*, right?

TERRY FRANCONA

I know where you'd sit. Not sure if the rest of the team fits.

As Michael contemplates this concern, we GO TO:

**INT. BARONS BUS - DAY**

A nice but not extravagant bus. Enough seats for the whole team. Four TVs. Room to stretch out. A definite upgrade from usual Minor League travel. Michael and Terry stand in front.

MICHAEL JORDAN

How about this?

TERRY FRANCONA

Doesn't smell like shit, so yeah,  
checks all my boxes.

Michael chuckles. He likes this guy.

**I/E. BARONS BUS - DAY**

Michael sits in the bus playing poker with Kerry Valrie, Scott Tedder, and shortstop GLENN DISARCINA (23, white, ambitious, brother is a Major Leaguer), and pitcher BARRY JOHNSON (26, white, angular, chip on his shoulder). About \$20 in the pot.

GLENN DISARCINA

- My brother plays for the Angels  
and even *he's* jealous of this bus.

BARRY JOHNSON

I'll raise. Two bucks.

Barry throws some more money in. Michael doesn't hesitate.

MICHAEL JORDAN

Another four on top.

**IN FRONT OF THE BUSS:**

Terry sits next to hitting coach MIKE BARNETT (40, white, seasoned, earnest) as he counts out bills.

MIKE BARNETT

Looking to get in on that action?

TERRY FRANCONA

Ha. Per diems...

(eyes Michael)

Looks like he's fitting in okay...

MIKE BARNETT

Uh huh...

As Terry stands up to distribute the per diems, we

**RETURN TO MICHAEL AND THE CARD GAME:**

Michael shows his cards:

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Straight to the King.

Glenn and Kerry throw down their cards. Scott is sheepish.

SCOTT TEDDER  
Uh... I got a flush. Sorry?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Oh kiss my ass, motherfucker!

Scott isn't sure what to do, still nervous around Michael.

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)  
Well, go on! Fucking take it!

Scott collects the money. Terry walks by, distributing envelopes. He hands them to everyone, including Michael.

TERRY FRANCONA  
Your per diem. Sixteen bucks.

Terry continues on the bus, distributing the envelopes.

KERRY VALRIE  
Well, that cleans me out...

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Oh, we're not done.

BARRY JOHNSON  
(terse)  
He doesn't have any more money -

MICHAEL JORDAN  
(intensely competitive)  
*We're not done.* This bus ride's another five hours, and y'all need to give me a shot to win back my money.

BARRY JOHNSON  
Not if he doesn't want to.

Barry won't back down. Michael looks at him, surprised, a moment away from pissed. Glenn tries to make peace:

GLENN DISARCINA  
Let's keep playing. Kerry, I'll spot you.

Michael stares down Barry. Okay, so this is how it is.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I can spot him.

Michael reaches in his wallet – besides his per diem, all he has is hundreds; literally thousands in cash.

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)  
... Can anyone make change?

The other player's eyes bulge. Michael realizes his faux pas a moment too late.

**ANGLE ON TERRY:** he catches this moment. Mike Barnett noticed, too. Mike raises an eyebrow: "is *this* Michael fitting in?"

**EXT. LA QUINTA MOTEL - NIGHT**

The Barons Bus pulls up to the motel parking lot. The players get off, carrying their own bags, Michael among them. Some PRESS are already waiting, shoving a mic in Michael's face:

REPORTER  
Michael! How's staying in motels?

ANOTHER REPORTER  
Did you really buy the team the Jordan Cruiser? We hear that's what you're calling it.

Some of the Barons – including Barry – eye the press warily. Michael barely acknowledges them as he heads inside.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Just trying to get some sleep, fellas.

**INT. LA QUINTA MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT**

Michael walks into his motel room. Tosses his bag on the floor.

**IN THE BATHROOM:**

Michael gets in the shower. Turns it on. The water is freezing. Michael YELPS and nearly falls over.

**BACK IN THE ROOM:**

Michael lies back on the bed – at 6'6", his feet hang over the edge. He turns on a baseball game. Watches intently.

FANS (PRE-LAP)  
*We want Michael! We want Michael!*

**EXT. JOE ENGEL STADIUM - DAY**

The park is packed. FANS line the stands, as well as the omnipresent NEWS MEDIA. Michael takes the plate to CHEERING... And one HECKLER, who calls to him:

HECKLER

You betting on this game, Michael?

Michael ignores the taunt. He stares down the Lookouts' pitcher, JOHN COURTRIGHT (23, white). Flop-sweating like crazy. The pitch goes off course and nearly hits Michael and sends him sprawling to the dirt.

JOHN COURTRIGHT

Oh no! Oh no! I'm sorry!

Michael shakes it off, and prepares himself to hit again. Courtright throws again, Michael swings, and -

UMPIRE

Strike one!

The catcher throws back. Michael tries to block out the noise of the fans. Courtright comes in with a fastball and -

UMPIRE (CONT'D)

Strike two!

Michael looks into the dugout, sees his new manager Terry Francona. Terry gives him an encouraging nod.

The count is 1-2. Courtright throws again and -

CONTACT! A drive down the third base line. Michael runs to first base, beating the throw. He suppresses a smile, trying not to show his pride or relief amidst the CHEERS.

**IN THE DUGOUT:** One of the players, Barry Johnson watches the ecstatic reception Michael's getting and mutters to Terry:

BARRY JOHNSON

This is a circus. He's undermining -

TERRY FRANCONA

That's five dollars.

BARRY JOHNSON

What? C'mon, Tito -

Terry addresses the whole team:

TERRY FRANCONA

Anyone uses the word "circus" in regards to our right fielder owes me five dollars!

ON MICHAEL: Photos flash of him on base. But as he looks over at the dugout, he senses he's not beloved by his teammates...

**INT. MOTEL ROOM BATHROOM - NIGHT**

Michael folds his long legs in the tub as he talks on the phone.

MICHAEL JORDAN

Tell Marcus to wash his neck.

INTERCUT WITH:

**INT. JORDAN MANSION BATHROOM - NIGHT**

Juanita gives her sons a bath as she talks on the phone.

JUANITA JORDAN

Daddy says wash your neck.

MARCUS

Is Daddy washing his?

JUANITA JORDAN

He wants to make sure he's not alone.

MICHAEL JORDAN

Marcus! This is the sound of me setting a good example!

Separated by hundreds of miles, the family laughs together.

**MOMENTS LATER:**

Now the Jordans in both time zones have gotten out of the tub. Michael sits in a towel, while Juanita puts pajamas on the boys. Marcus holds up the phone as Michael talks:

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)

You hear about your Daddy's hitting streak? Seven games and counting.

MARCUS

We had bubbles in the tub!

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Yeah, but Marcus: .327, that's like  
getting a hit one every three at-  
bats, that's real hard to do.

MARCUS  
Jeffrey still has bubbles on him!

MICHAEL JORDAN  
(sighs)  
Put your big brother on.

Marcus passes the phone to Jeffrey.

JEFFREY  
We're going to the zoo tomorrow.  
Can you come?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Aw, Jeff, I got a game. But you guys  
will be coming down here and I'll  
take you to the zoo in Birmingham.

Jeffrey seems unsettled by this.

JEFFREY  
We're moving to Birmingham?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
You understand why, right?

JEFFREY  
... You gotta play baseball.

Watching Jeffrey struggle to be tough, Juanita's heart breaks.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Now, thing about my strike zone is -

JEFFREY  
- Here's Mom.

Jeffrey hands the phone back to his mother.

JUANITA JORDAN  
You sure they have a zoo in  
Birmingham?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
They couldn't get enough baseball  
when we were playing before.

JUANITA JORDAN  
Easier if you're in the same room.

An awkward silence as Juanita struggles to put the PJs on.

JUANITA JORDAN (CONT'D)  
So, uh, how's it going with the  
guys on the team?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
... Good. Real good.

We move from Michael's lie over to:

**INT. CAROLINA MUDCATS CLUBHOUSE - TERRY'S OFFICE - DAY**

Terry has the lineup and notes on the table, but his attention is focused on a tiny television:

NEWSCASTER (ON TV)  
*Reports are coming in that the Jordan  
Cruiser costs upwards of \$350,000.  
Many are asking: is this extravagant  
bus just another example of Jordan  
not being a fit for baseball?*

Terry spots Michael walking through the clubhouse, and sticks his head out:

TERRY FRANCONA  
Hey, 45? You missed the weight  
training session today.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Sorry. Had a call with Nike.

TERRY FRANCONA  
Yeah, I gotta fine you \$25.

Is Terry joking? He's not. Michael reaches for his wallet.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Anyone notice I wasn't there?

Terry hesitates. Michael winces, frustrated with himself.

TERRY FRANCONA  
Apologies if I'm overstepping,  
but... if you want to be a regular  
guy on the team, maybe buying a new  
bus and calling it the "Jordan  
Cruiser" isn't the way to go.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I didn't come up with that name, the  
papers did.

(MORE)

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)  
 And I don't want to be on some old  
 bus that breaks down by the side of  
 the road. In the South.

TERRY FRANCONA  
 I get that, I do, but... Half these  
 guys had posters of you in their  
 bedrooms growing up.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
 That doesn't matter here.

Terry looks at him: "of course it does."

TERRY FRANCONA  
 They're not just gonna forget who  
 you are. At least not right away.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
 So what am I supposed to do about it?

TERRY FRANCONA  
 Don't try to make 'em.

ON MICHAEL, absorbing Terry's sentiment.

**INT. CAROLINA MUDCATS CLUBHOUSE - NIGHT**

Their uniforms dirty, the Barons undress by their lockers as  
 Michael listens as catcher ROGELIO NUNEZ (23, Dominican,  
 broken English, worn-out cleats) describes the Barons' plight:

ROGELIO NUNEZ  
 He... throw curve... No hit...

MICHAEL JORDAN  
 You got a dictionary, Rogelio?

ROGELIO NUNEZ  
 ... Si?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
 Study up on baseball terms. Every  
 one you spell right, that's \$100.

Some of the player laugh. Rogelio's eyes light up.

ROGELIO NUNEZ  
 What word I learn spell money with?

KERRY VALRIE  
 How about "cleats?" Like, "Rogelio's  
 got some sorry-looking cleats."

Michael notices Rogelio's shoes – they do look worn.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
How 'bout "streak?" As in, "we're  
on a losing streak."

GLENN DISARCINA  
Or, "45's on a hitting streak."

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Tell that to *Sports Illustrated*. So  
we all chip in? \$100 per word?

Now the Barons look nervous. Barry's first to speak up:

BARRY JOHNSON  
\$100 is a lot of money to us.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I'm fucking with you all.

Relieved laughter from the Barons. Michael turns to Rogelio:

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)  
Streak. S-T-R-E-A-K.

ROGELIO NUNEZ  
S-T-R-E-A-K. "Streak."

Michael pats Rogelio's shoulder. As he walks away, he notices the worn-out cleats in Rogelio's locker. Gets an idea...

MICHAEL JORDAN (PRE-LAP)  
I need 26 pairs.

CUT TO:

**INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT**

A baseball game is on TV. Michael cradles the phone:

MICHAEL JORDAN  
All black Air Jordan cleats... Yeah,  
sent to Orlando. Thanks, Fred.

He hangs up. Smiles. Watches the baseball game. We MOVE TO:

**INT. ORLANDO CUBS CLUBHOUSE - NIGHT**

Michael, his uniform dirty from the game they just played, enters the clubhouse to find his teammates all trying on their new Air Jordans. All eyes go to Michael.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I've been saying, I'm just like all  
of you.

Looks of confusion. He points to his Air Jordan shoes.

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)  
Got the same kicks and everything.

A confused silence. No one knows what to say. Then:

BARRY JOHNSON  
I like my shoes just fine.

Barry stares down Michael, who looks away: was this a mistake?

KERRY VALRIE  
Well I think these are a fuck-ton  
nicer than *my* shitty shoes.

Scott Tedder starts laughing, but soon the rest of the  
players join in. Glenn DiSarcina laces up his shoes and heads  
back out towards the field.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Game's over... Where are you going?

KERRY VALRIE  
To try 'em out.

Glenn grabs his glove and gestures to the team – wearing  
their new cleats, THE WHOLE TEAM happily all run towards the  
exit, still wearing their dirty game uniforms. Barry Johnson  
lingers, then reluctantly follows.

#### **EXT. TINKER FIELD - NIGHT**

Michael watches as the entirety of the Birmingham Barons  
spills into the dark and nearly empty ballpark...

- A player practices a slide into second base, testing out  
the new cleats.

- A bat materializes in Kerry Valrie's hand as catcher  
Rogelio Nunez crouches behind home plate.

- Someone finds the lighting booth and turns on the  
floodlights, to cheers from the teammates.

- Players instinctively find their positions on the field. A  
scrimmage commences, almost out of nowhere.

At the sidelines, Michael turns to Terry:

MICHAEL JORDAN  
 Guess they really like those  
 cleats, huh?

TERRY FRANCONA  
 They just want an excuse to play.

Michael watches the younger players, awed and inspired.

TERRY FRANCONA (CONT'D)  
 ... Go ahead.

Michael smiles and runs to join his teammates on the field.

**I/E. BARONS BUS - EVENING**

The bus speeds down another long highway drive. Michael debates Glenn DiSarcina, Scott Tedder and Rogelio Nunez (who is excited to participate despite his limited vocabulary).

MICHAEL JORDAN  
 Larry Bird? Larry Bird is the greatest  
 basketball player of all time?

GLENN DISARCINA  
 Pound for pound Bird could play!

MICHAEL JORDAN  
 Yeah, I actually played him!

As Michael emphatically leaps up to make his point, his head blocks the TV (playing *Friends* or something else very 1994.)

KERRY VALRIE  
 (calls out)  
 Yo, move your big-ass head, rookie!  
 You're blocking the TV!

Jordan squats down and returns to the conversation.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
 No disrespect to Larry, but -

SCOTT TEDDER  
 I think 45's jealous 'cause Bird  
 and the Celtics beat him in '86.

ROGELIO NUNEZ  
 He beat you, yes!

Michael pops up again, passionately:

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I scored 63 points that game!

BARRY JOHNSON  
(calls out to Michael)  
- Yo, rookie! Sit the fuck down -

GLENN DISARCINA  
- You lost! 'Cause you didn't pass!

ROGELIO NUNEZ  
Eres el mejor jugador de baloncesto  
del mundo pero no recuerdas los  
fundamentos!

On the TV, the famously cheesy "Be Like Mike" Gatorade commercial starring Michael Jordan comes on.

*GATORADE COMMERCIAL (ON TV)*  
*Sometimes I dream / That he is me /*  
*You've got to see that's how I*  
*dream to be*

The already rowdy crowd EXPLODES WITH LAUGHTER. Michael is cracking up as he yells to no one in particular:

MICHAEL JORDAN  
All right, turn this shit off!

Through riotous giggles, Glenn and Larry chime in:

GLENN DISARCINA/SCOTT TEDDER  
*I dream I move, I dream I groove /*  
*Like Mike / If I could Be Like Mike*

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Ah fuuuuuuckk! Fuck all of you!!!

This commercial works great for a family-friendly image, but not as well for a horde of rowdy, beer-swilling ballplayers. ON TV, Michael joyously dribbles basketballs with kids. All the ruckus wakes Terry, who'd been napping in front of the bus:

TERRY FRANCONA  
... What? What's happening?

GLENN/SCOTT/KERRY VALRIE  
*I wanna be like Mike! Be like Mike!*  
*Be like Mike!*

ROGELIO NUNEZ  
*I want be like Mike!*

Crying with laughter, Michael pleads to Terry across the bus:

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Terry, man, c'mon!

WHOLE TEAM  
*Again I try / Just need to fly / For  
just one day if I could be that way*

But Terry grins and just sings with the rest of them.

TERRY FRANCONA & TEAM  
*I dream I move / I dream I groove /  
Like Mike / If I could be Like Mike!*

Finally beaten, Michael joins in, singing louder than anyone:

MICHAEL JORDAN & TEAM  
*I wanna be, I wanna be Like Mike!*

The rowdiness, already at a ten, goes to an eleven:

MICHAEL JORDAN & TEAM (CONT'D)  
*Like Mike, if I could be Like Mike*

Filled with happy laughter, the bus rides the empty highway.

#### **I/E. BARONS BUS - NIGHT**

Hours after the "Like Mike" sing-along, the bus is now quiet. Dark miles of empty roads ahead of them. Players sleep or listen to CD players. Michael and Terry play Yahtzee up front.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Why do they call you Tito?

TERRY FRANCONA  
That's my dad's name. He played in the Majors. When I came up, that's what everyone called me. I still introduce myself as Terry, but my friends call me Tito.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
You don't mind?

TERRY FRANCONA  
No. He's a great dad and was a hell of a ballplayer. It's an honor.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
My father played ball, too. Just a short time in semi-pro. Probably why he started me on baseball so young.

TERRY FRANCONA

He wanted you to follow in his footsteps, huh?

MICHAEL JORDAN

Oh yeah. Same with yours?

TERRY FRANCONA

No, he never pushed me. Taught me everything, though. He took me on the road when I was eleven. I met all kinds of folks; Ted Williams, Reggie Jackson. Best summer of my life. After that, pretty much all I ever wanted was to play baseball.

MICHAEL JORDAN

Were you any good?

TERRY FRANCONA

... Nothing to write home about. Hit .274, bounced around a few teams for a few years. Journeyman, really. Got sent down to Triple A, that was it. I was taking classes to sell real estate, but then thank God a few years ago the White Sox called saying they needed a hitting instructor for the Gulf Coast League. Now I'm about to be interviewed by Tom Brokaw on NBC next week.

MICHAEL JORDAN

So what's next? Manage in the Majors? Win a World Series?

TERRY FRANCONA

Uh... One thing at a time.

MICHAEL JORDAN

Well, Tito... I guess this is your shot.

TERRY FRANCONA

Yours too, Michael.

Michael nods. A nice moment. Then:

TERRY FRANCONA (CONT'D)

I'm gonna get some sleep.

Terry closes his eyes and leans on the window. Michael remains awake. He pulls out a crossword puzzle. He starts working on it, but then he LOOKS AGAIN AT TERRY AS WE

MATCH CUT TO:

**EXT. LITTLE LEAGUE BALLPARK - DAY - 1975**

JAMES JORDAN. He sits in the stands of a Little League stadium, the only black parent amongst a sea of white ones.

JAMES JORDAN

Which one is yours?

The White Parent, not eager to talk to James, points to one of the kids on the field.

Young Michael, in uniform, jogs over to James. James uses the opportunity to exit the non-conversation with his neighbor.

**SUPER: Little League World Series, Georgia - 1975**

YOUNG MICHAEL

They said anyone who hits a home run gets a steak.

JAMES JORDAN

You hit a home run, I'll buy you another one. Earn yourself two steaks.

Young Michael beams - he loves the approval from his father.

YOUNG MICHAEL

Yes, Sir!

**EXT. LITTLE LEAGUE BALLPARK - DAY - LATER - 1975**

The pitcher throws. Young Michael swings and:

UMPIRE

Strike two!

Young Michael steps back. Looks at his father in the stands. His father nods at him: "You can do this." Young Michael nods back. The pitcher winds up and throws and -

CRACK - the ball sails through the sky; going, going, gone!

Young Michael rounds the bases, the hero of his team, and sees his father beaming. James turns to the White Parent next to him:

JAMES JORDAN

That's my son!

The White Parent slaps James on the back. On the diamond, Young Michael happily points to his father in the stands as we hear the stately voice of NBC anchor TOM BROKAW:

TOM BROKAW (PRE-LAP)

Some people would say, Michael Jordan, given all that you've achieved, what you're doing now is just running away from responsibility, running away from the idea of growing up.

**EXT. HOOVER MET STADIUM - DAY**

Michael – wearing stylish-for-the-90s overalls – sits with NBC Now anchor Tom Brokaw in the middle of the field. Terry and some players linger, watching the spectacle.

TOM BROKAW

You're gonna always have to play a boy's game the rest of your life.

Michael glances over to his teammates watching him.

MICHAEL JORDAN

We're all kids within ourselves. I'm trying to fulfill the last kid thing I have inside of me. After this, I'm going to live through my kids as my father lived through me.

TOM BROKAW

You ever shoot hoops anymore?

As Michael contemplates his response, MOVE AHEAD IN TIME TO:

**INT. GREYSTONE HOUSE - NIGHT**

MICHAEL JORDAN (ON TV)

*I really don't get the urge to.*

Michael and Juanita – in town for a visit – watch the NBC interview on their couch. Terry – enjoying himself but slightly awed – sits on a chair. There are empty soul food containers. They all have beers.

JUANITA JORDAN

Aw, look at those overalls! You look just like a huge Marcus!

MICHAEL JORDAN  
You dissing my wardrobe?!

He tickles her affectionately.

JUANITA JORDAN  
Stop! You're gonna make me miss it!

MICHAEL JORDAN  
You see me on TV enough!

JUANITA JORDAN  
But I haven't seen Terry yet!

TERRY FRANCONA  
You wouldn't miss much, believe me.

Terry smiles, watching them. Juanita checks her watch.

JUANITA JORDAN  
Shoot, I'm gonna miss the plane.  
Terry, glad to meet you. You really  
put a dent in those greens.

TERRY FRANCONA  
My greatest talent...

Juanita and Terry shake hands, but Michael wraps his arms  
around her waist.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Your mom can take the kids another  
day...

JUANITA JORDAN  
Michael...

The playful mood dissipates.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Don't know why we're even arguing  
over a couple hours. You all  
should've moved out here by now.  
That's why I got this big house.

Terry and Juanita share a brief moment of eye contact.

TERRY FRANCONA  
I should get going, too...

MICHAEL JORDAN  
No one has to go anywhere.

JUANITA JORDAN  
Can we talk about this later?

Michael's face says no. Juanita pulls Michael aside.

JUANITA JORDAN (CONT'D)  
... I can't move the kids to Birmingham. My family's in Chicago. Our lives are there. This isn't like the NBA, where you're only gone for a night or two. You're on the road for weeks, on a bus twelve, fourteen hours a stretch.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
The other wives do it. They move here, take jobs at the mall.

She looks at him: "C'mon." He looks at Terry, who's now squirming. Michael grows embarrassed as he harshly whispers:

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)  
This is bullshit. I had this worked out -

JUANITA JORDAN  
You think the world will accommodate everything you want just 'cause you want it?

She leans over, kisses his forehead. He walks her to the door.

JUANITA JORDAN (CONT'D)  
I'll call when I'm back in Chicago.  
(louder)  
Bye, Terry. Nice meeting you.

TERRY FRANCONA  
You, too.

She kisses Michael goodbye. He takes her bags outside. Terry is still watching TV, which he hears coming from the other room:

*TOM BROKAW (ON TV)*  
*Although he is a big draw, not everyone is happy about Jordan's presence - including some of his teammates.*

He comes back to the TV: Barry Johnson in the locker room.

BARRY JOHNSON (ON TV)  
*I work my whole life for this, then a  
 guy can come right in and get the same  
 opportunities just 'cause he's famous?*

Michael's blood boils. Terry sighs and shakes his head.

BARRY JOHNSON (ON TV) (CONT'D)  
*His hits are weak, little dribbles  
 barely hits at all. The pitchers are  
 starstruck. What happens when  
 they're not anymore?*

**I/E. MICHAEL'S PORSCHE - DAY**

Michael, pissed, drives to the stadium. Storm clouds are gathering. The ubiquitous MEDIA are in raincoats and hold umbrellas at the ready.

**INT. BARONS CLUBHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER**

Michael enters the clubhouse. Rogelio approaches, excited:

ROGELIO NUNEZ  
 Streak. S-T-R-E-A-K. Streak.

Quiet, Michael hands Rogelio \$100 from his wallet. He spots Barry Johnson changing. Locks eyes with him. Michael marches over to Barry, angry as hell.

BARRY JOHNSON  
 Look, 45, I didn't -

Michael SLAMS Barry into a locker. Scott Tedder looks up:

SCOTT TEDDER  
 Whoa!

Barry charges back at Michael, and before long, the two are brawling in the locker room. Kerry Valrie, Glenn DiSarcina and Terry pull them apart, ad-libbing "stop," "don't," etc.

TERRY FRANCONA  
 Michael! My office.

**INT. TERRY FRANCONA'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER**

Michael is still shaking with anger. Terry is pissed, too.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
 You saw what he said about me!

TERRY FRANCONA

Press has been saying that for months! Barry Johnson's not the first! Who the hell you so mad at?

Michael simmers.

TERRY FRANCONA (CONT'D)

You're the biggest star in the world and you got reporters camped out every day waiting for you to give them a story. You can't be throwing punches in the clubhouse. Looks bad for you.

MICHAEL JORDAN

You mean bad for *you*.

TERRY FRANCONA

Damn right! You're not only one with something to lose, here! Someone writes this up, talks to the press, who you think is gonna answer for it with the Barons? The living legend or the washed-up ballplayer?

Outside the window, it's starting to rain. Terry softens.

TERRY FRANCONA (CONT'D)

Look, Barry's your teammate. He shouldn't be spewing that crap on TV. But you're on a thirteen-game hitting streak. Keep it up, prove 'em wrong.

Michael nods. The rain starts coming harder.

TERRY FRANCONA (CONT'D)

They're gonna call a rain delay. We'll be here awhile.

ON MICHAEL'S FACE: a sense of foreboding. Terry's words seem like an ominous harbinger...

**BEGIN SEQUENCE:**

**VARIOUS BALLPARKS:** Over a number of different games in different Minor League ballparks, wearing home and away uniforms, Michael strikes out. Again and again. Over and over. A bat goes flying after a bad swing. The repetitive nature of this sequence goes on longer than it should. Imagine how he feels.

**IN A DUGOUT:** Terry and batting coach Mike Barnett watch Michael strike out.

TERRY FRANCONA (CONT'D)

They figured out he can't hit a curveball.

**VARIOUS BALLPARKS:** Strikeouts. Errors in right field. Batting practice. Blistered hands and bloody bandages. Cow-milking contests between innings. MASCOTS in ragged outfits.

**VARIOUS MOTELS:** Shitty continental breakfasts. Dreary curtains. Gawking and double-takes from MOTEL STAFF. Saggy mattresses, cheap bed-frames. Showers without hot water.

**BARONS BUS:** Long nights. Michael more isolated from teammates. Watching the highway go by from bus windows.

**VARIOUS BALLPARKS:** More strikeouts. Over and over. In the stands, fewer and fewer fans turn out. More empty seats.

**IN ANOTHER DUGOUT:** Terry and Mike watch Michael at the plate.

MIKE BARNETT

Figured out he can't hit a breaking ball either.

**VARIOUS CLUBHOUSES:** Michael talks to the gathered PRESS as his teammates look on, more used to the everyday hoopla.

**YET ANOTHER DUGOUT:** Mike and Terry watch Michael struggling.

MIKE BARNETT (CONT'D)

Think it's Barry that rattled him?

TERRY FRANCONA

No, something else. Something deeper.

**VARIOUS BALLPARKS:** We watch more of Michael's strikeouts as we hear Terry and Mike discussing him:

MIKE BARNETT (V.O.)

He's in the cage every morning, then the curveball machine, then team BP, then cages again before and after the game. What more are we supposed to do for this guy?

TERRY FRANCONA (V.O.)

He needs something we can't give him.

**BACK TO TERRY AND MIKE IN THE DUGOUT:**

MIKE BARNETT

What's that?

TERRY FRANCONA

Time.

**ON MICHAEL:** He strikes out again. Throws his bat in frustration.

**END SEQUENCE**

**EXT. HOOVER MET STADIUM - EARLY MORNING**

Michael emerges from the dugout and walks towards the cages. From a distance, he spots a lone figure inside, decisively driving the balls into the net from the pitching machine:

It's TERRY. Michael approaches the cages, impressed by this display. Terry notices Michael approaching and exits the cage.

TERRY FRANCONA

You always get here early and I wanted to check in. Been kind of a slog lately.

Dour, Michael enters the cage with his bat.

TERRY FRANCONA (CONT'D)

I know they've kicked you around in the papers.

The balls start coming. Michael swings as he talks:

MICHAEL JORDAN

Someone's always saying I can't do something. Said I couldn't win championships because I didn't make my team better? Got us three rings. Said I was only offense? Made the All Defensive team six years straight. Someone says no, I make it yes. I may be a rookie but I still bet on me every time. You feel me?

TERRY FRANCONA

Yeah, yep, I feel you.

(mumbles)

... Didn't ask for one of your Nike commercials, but...

MICHAEL JORDAN

What was that?

TERRY FRANCONA

You started the season off pretty hot. If you got spooked, that happens sometimes -

MICHAEL JORDAN

You saying it's *mental*? I'm honing my mind/body connection. At first, when I saw a ball come off the bat, I spent too long – even a fraction of a second – deciding how to chase it. Now I know what to do. My batting average doesn't matter. I don't even know it anymore. My mental game's where I need it to be.

Michael swings again. He misses. Frustration bubbling...

TERRY FRANCONA

Just saying it'd be understandable. No other Minor Leaguer has ever faced this kind of pressure. I understand as much as anyone wanting to do right by your dad, but –

MICHAEL JORDAN

You talking about my father?

TERRY FRANCONA

I just meant –

MICHAEL JORDAN

I can handle pressure. Who are you, anyway? Some washed up ballplayer? Some Double A fucking manager?

TERRY FRANCONA

... Pretty much, yeah.

Michael returns to hitting, indicating that their "chat" is over. Terry hesitates uncomfortably before walking off.

MICHAEL JORDAN

Hey, Terry? I don't need your pity.

TERRY FRANCONA

You don't have it.

Michael watches him go, then goes back to hitting.

#### **INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT**

Michael soaks his sore elbow in ice. He looks at the clock: 4:13 AM. He can't sleep. Impetuously, he grabs his phone and dials as we CUT TO:

**INT. RITZ CARLTON HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT**

A snooty CONCIERGE answers the phone.

CONCIERGE

Ritz Carlton New York... I'm sorry,  
Sir, I cannot confirm that the  
Bulls or Mr. Armstrong are here...  
(slightly testy)  
And who would I say is calling?  
(his face goes white)  
... One moment, Mr. Jordan.

**INT. RITZ CARLTON HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT**

B.J. Armstrong, asleep in a luxury king bed, is groggy:

B.J. ARMSTRONG

... Hello?

INTERCUT WITH:

**INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT - LATER**

We notice the alarm clock now reads 5:03 AM. Michael and B.J. talk from their very different hotel rooms.

B.J. ARMSTRONG

... You playing Scottie's charity  
game in November?

MICHAEL JORDAN

You're just trying to get me to come  
back so you can prove me wrong.

B.J. ARMSTRONG

I said you'd come back to the *league*.  
I'm talking Chicago Stadium's last  
game before they tear it down.

MICHAEL JORDAN

United Center looks like a mall.

B.J. ARMSTRONG

Exactly. Gotta send your old haunt  
out in style. Remind yourself what  
winning big feels like.

Michael considers, tempted. Then:

MICHAEL JORDAN

I don't know what I'd get outta putting on basketball shorts again. Seriously, you should see these Minor League guys. Most of them won't make the Majors, they're just doing it for love of the game. Playing with them, I'm having the time of my life.

B.J. ARMSTRONG

So why you calling me at 4 AM when I got a playoff game the next day?

ON MICHAEL: he doesn't have a good answer.

**INT. MEMPHIS CHICKS CLUBHOUSE - NIGHT**

As Michael and the Barons get ready, they watch the Chicago Bulls in the playoffs with the New York Knicks. The distinct voice of NBC announcer Marv Albert blares from the TV:

*MARV ALBERT (ON TV)*

*... Pippen for three! No! Down to twenty seconds, with New York leading by ten...*

Michael winces, watching his former teammates lose.

*MARV ALBERT (ON TV) (CONT'D)*

*It has been a wonderful run for the Chicago Bulls franchise this season despite the loss of Michael Jordan...*

ON THE TV, Michael watches his friend B.J. Armstrong walk off the court. All eyes in the clubhouse are on him. Michael shakes his head, frustrated. Then he turns off the TV.

MICHAEL JORDAN

All right, y'all. Game time.

Off Michael's emboldened face, we GO TO:

**EXT. TIM MCCARVER STADIUM - NIGHT**

Michael swings and misses.

UMPIRE

Strike two!

**SUPER: Tim McCarver Stadium, Birmingham Barons vs. Memphis Chicks - May 22, 1994**

Michael checks his bat. Looks at the scoreboard. The Chicks are up by a run. From the stands near the plate, he hears an OLDER FEMALE FAN say to her COMPANION:

OLDER FEMALE FAN  
His skin is darker than I realized.

Michel ignores her. He waits for the pitch. Swings, and then —

UMPIRE  
Strike three!

Screams of "We love you Michael!" From the stands. Frustrated, Michael heads back to the **VISITOR'S DUGOUT**. He takes a seat next to Kerry Valrie. They listen in silence to the cheers. Michael does not look happy to hear them.

**EXT. TIM MCCARVER STADIUM - NIGHT - LATER**

This game is a knuckle-biter. The announcer describes:

ANNOUNCER (OVER P.A.)  
Bottom of the ninth, Chicks up by one. Two outs, with runners on first and third in scoring position... Next up, number 45, Michael Jordan.

**IN THE VISITOR'S DUGOUT:**

Michael stands and walks towards the plate. Terry stops him.

TERRY FRANCONA  
Hey, Michael...

Some discomfort lingers between them. Then:

TERRY FRANCONA (CONT'D)  
We just need a base hit.  
(off Michael's nod)  
It's mental. You know what to do.

Michael struts onto the field, out of earshot from the dugout. Terry watches, tense, when he hears Barry Johnson mutter:

BARRY JOHNSON  
Well, that's it. Game's done.  
(off Terry's glare)  
What? I didn't say "circus."

TERRY FRANCONA  
Don't fucking test me.

Terry shakes his head, and turns back to focus on:

**HOME PLATE:**

Michael waits for the pitch. Here it comes. He swings, and –

UMPIRE  
Strike one!

Michael looks back to Terry in the dugout. Terry nods, encouraging. The pitcher throws again. Michael swings, and:

UMPIRE (CONT'D)  
Strike two!

Michael closes his eyes. Opens them again, AND EVERYTHING SLOWS DOWN. Michael holds the bat in his hand. He looks at the players on first and third. He can do this. The ball sails towards him, big and fat, begging to be hit. He swings and –

UMPIRE (CONT'D)  
Strike three!

Game over. Michael stands at the plate. Above him, FIREWORKS GO OFF. He doesn't move.

**INT. CHICKS VISITING CLUBHOUSE - NIGHT**

The clubhouse mood is somber. The Barons dress in silence. Michael enters, seething. Impetuously picks up a ping pong paddle and SLAMS it into the table.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
*Fuck! Goddamn motherfucker!!!*

No one knows what to do, seeing such a raw moment from a celebrity. Michael keeps BASHING THE TABLE, pent-up anger and self-loathing coming out. His teammates watch, frozen.

Finally, Michael stops. Quietly, Terry approaches Mike Barnett.

TERRY FRANCONA  
How about you take everyone on the bus? I'll hang back here a minute.

Barnett leads the team out, leaving Michael and Terry alone. Michael tosses the broken paddle on the ground. After a beat:

TERRY FRANCONA (CONT'D)  
That was a tough out. You hate losing. I hate it, too. But you're doing good. You're focusing on your skills, not on the stats –

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I'm hitting .186.

TERRY FRANCONA  
I thought you didn't know.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Four hits in my last forty-four at-bats.  
(then)  
Charles Poe would've done better.

TERRY FRANCONA  
Who?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
This was his spot. I took it.

TERRY FRANCONA  
I don't know Charles Poe. But if a player's good enough to play in the Majors, he'll find a way to get there.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
What about me?

Terry tries to pick his words carefully - he's a Double-A manager talking to the world's greatest athlete, but right now, he's the one with power and knowledge.

TERRY FRANCONA  
... It's too soon to say.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I need you to tell me what to do.  
You say walk away, I'll walk away.

TERRY FRANCONA  
Michael... There's no substitute for experience, and you don't have any. You won't know in 300 at-bats if you'll get there. You want to find out, you gotta just keep going.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I'm thirty-one years old. How many more at-bats will I get?

TERRY FRANCONA  
Enough to get a better idea.

Michael nods. The clubhouse is quiet. Terry checks his watch.

TERRY FRANCONA (CONT'D)  
It's late and we got a long drive.

Michael looks at the ping pong table he broke.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I should get them a new table.

TERRY FRANCONA  
You can afford it.

**I/E. BARONS BUS - NIGHT**

Another late night bus ride. Almost everyone else is asleep. Michael listens to his teammates debate behind him.

KERRY VALRIE  
... I dunno. Striking seems drastic.

BARRY JOHNSON  
How do you think laborers got fair wages during the industrial revolution?

KERRY VALRIE  
What the hell you going on about with the industrial revolution? You're talking about overpaid owners putting salary caps on overpaid Major League players.

BARRY JOHNSON  
Same principle applies.

KERRY VALRIE  
I am too hungry for your bullshit right now. When we gonna eat?

Michael, lost in thought, looks out the window as we GO TO:

**INT. STEAKHOUSE - EVENING - 1975**

Young Michael and James sit in an upscale steakhouse. A WAITER serves their steaks. James takes a celebratory sip of bourbon. He's not drunk, but he's loose. Young Michael is distracted.

JAMES JORDAN  
What's the matter?

YOUNG MICHAEL  
We didn't win.

JAMES JORDAN

But you hit a home run. You're gonna play a lot more games, gonna get a lot more chances to win.

YOUNG MICHAEL

Yeah, in basketball, for sure; kinda like a home run in every game -

JAMES JORDAN

You don't have the height for basketball.

Young Michael looks quiet; holds back a thought.

JAMES JORDAN (CONT'D)

What is it?

YOUNG MICHAEL

All the other kids on the baseball team are white.

JAMES JORDAN

Listen to me: if you make it on a baseball team, you can make it anywhere. You excel at baseball, people will only pay attention to your skills, not your skin. And you, son, have the skills to make it to the Majors. More talent than I ever had.

Young Michael's face lights up. James gestures to the steak.

JAMES JORDAN (CONT'D)

Now dig in. You got a whole other steak to get through. Keep hitting those home runs, you should get used to fine dining.

Young Michael happily eats his steak as we CUT BACK TO:

**EXT. MCDONALD'S PARKING LOT - NIGHT**

The familiar Golden Arches. The Barons Bus pulls into a McDonald's parking lot somewhere in the middle of Alabama.

**INT. MCDONALD'S - NIGHT**

Michael and the Barons enter. Michael walks to the counter. He looks over and sees an advertisement of Michael Jordan on the wall, enjoying some McDonald's French fries.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Can I get a Big Mac?

MCDONALD'S WORKER  
(Holy shit this is happening)  
... Uh... One Big Mike.  
(off Michael's look)  
Sorry, Big Mike.  
(it's a tick)  
Big Mike.  
(oh God can he stop?)  
Big Mike.  
(Oh God, he *can't* stop)  
Big Mac...  
(he did it!)  
... One Big Mike.

The Barons crack up, but Michael is too weary to be amused.

**INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY**

Michael sits on the bed in yet another motel room. It's raining hard outside. A dreary day.

**IN THE BATHROOM:** He shaves his head alone.

**IN THE ROOM:** He's watching the last scene of *Field of Dreams* on TV. His eyes are streaked with tears.

KEVIN COSTNER (ON TV)  
*Hey Dad...? You wanna have a catch?*

As the music on TV swells, Michael cries like a baby, then laughs at himself for crying, then cries again.

**LATER:** He calls a number, TAKING US TO:

**INT. LARRY JORDAN'S LIVING ROOM - DAY**

The house is empty. We HOLD ON an answering machine.

LARRY JORDAN'S VOICE  
*You've reached Larry. No one is here to take your call, so -*

**INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY**

Michael hangs up. He dials another number and we MOVE TO:

**INT. DELORIS JORDAN'S LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Family photos of all the Jordan children. A phone RINGS. Then:

*DELORIS JORDAN'S VOICE*  
*This is Deloris. I'm not here so -*

**INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY**

Michael grows frustrated. He paces his room, then he pauses. Realizes there's someone else he can call. He sighs, then dials.

INTERCUT WITH:

**INT. SIS JORDAN'S HOME - DAY**

Sis sits at her kitchen table, a notebook in front of her. She's writing furiously when her phone RINGS. She answers.

SIS JORDAN  
Hello?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Hey, it's Michael.

Sis is clearly thrown - his calls are a rare occasion.

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)  
It's just a rainy day here in - I  
don't know where the hell I am  
right now - but I wanted to say hi.

SIS JORDAN  
Who else in the family did you call  
first?

Michael pauses; doesn't want the typical fight.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
.... Mom. Larry.

SIS JORDAN  
I'm the last resort, huh?

She chuckles. He joins in.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Guess so. How're things with you?

SIS JORDAN  
Okay. Getting some writing in.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
How's uh, how's...?

SIS JORDAN  
Rick? Rick is... indisposed.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
What does that mean?

SIS JORDAN  
It means... You're not the only one  
who finds me difficult.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Hey, I called you, didn't I?

SIS JORDAN  
You did. You did.  
(then)  
How's your baseball experiment going?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
You know... It's always good to  
come back to your first love...

SIS JORDAN  
Baseball? That was your first love?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
'Course it was.

SIS JORDAN  
You were always playing basketball.  
Daddy loved baseball.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
... And I loved it, too.

Sis starts laughing. Michael grows annoyed.

SIS JORDAN  
You know, people act like you're  
some kinda god, but in some ways you  
get by just like anyone else. We  
remember what we want to remember.  
We make ourselves forget the rest.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I remember everything. Just 'cause I  
took something different from you  
doesn't mean I forgot.

SIS JORDAN  
Okay. Whatever you say.

This feels loaded. Michael squirms, uncomfortable.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
We're about to head to practice, so -

SIS JORDAN  
Thought you said it was raining.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
But I'll see you at Christmas?  
Whole family is coming. Pops would  
want us all together.

SIS JORDAN  
Still gotta do what he wants, huh?

There's a derisive note in her tone. He pushes back his anger.

SIS JORDAN (CONT'D)  
I... I'll try to make it up.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
All right. Take care.

SIS JORDAN  
Bye, Michael.

He hangs up. Outside, it continues to rain. He doesn't move.

**EXT. HOOVER MET BATTING CAGES - EARLY MORNING**

Michael hits in the batting cages alone. Still at it.

**INT. TERRY FRANCONA'S OFFICE - DAY**

Terry sits at his desk, reading the *Chicago Tribune*. There's an article with James Jordan's picture with the headline: "The Ups and Downs of Michael Jordan: A Year After His Father's Death, He Moves On."

Michael knocks on the door and sticks his head in. Terry discreetly puts some player charts over his paper.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
What's this I hear about them  
broadcasting our games on TV?

TERRY FRANCONA  
Owners aren't budging on the salary  
cap. Looking like the Major Leaguers  
are really gonna strike.  
(MORE)

TERRY FRANCONA (CONT'D)  
 If that happens, baseball's gotta  
 show *something* on television.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
 Even me staying south of .200?

Terry waves him off. Michael turns to head out, when:

TERRY FRANCONA  
 So, the White Sox asked me to  
 manage you in the Arizona Fall  
 League for the Scottsdale  
 Scorpions. Wanted to run it by you,  
 make sure you're good with it.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
 Fall league's for top prospects.  
 I'm not taking someone else's spot.

TERRY FRANCONA  
 Most teams get six players. Sox'll  
 get seven. They made a special  
 exception in your case.

Michael winces at the words "special exception." He turns to  
 go, but Terry's words stop him.

TERRY FRANCONA (CONT'D)  
 Hey Michael. I saw it's been a year  
 since... Just wanted to say I'm sorry.

Michael eyes the newspaper.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
 You saw in there tomorrow would've  
 been his birthday?

Terry nods. Not much else to say.

TERRY FRANCONA  
 Get a hitter's count tonight. Make  
 them throw you fastballs.

Michael nods and starts to leave. Then:

MICHAEL JORDAN  
 Hey, Tito? I am good with it.

Michael goes. We hold on Terry for a moment, who contemplates  
 something, then picks up his phone. Dials.

TERRY FRANCONA  
 It's Terry. Can I make a song request?

**EXT. HOOVER MET STADIUM - NIGHT**

Michael walks up to the plate, gripping his bat.

**SUPER: Hoover Met, Birmingham Barons vs. Carolina Mudcats -  
July 30, 1994**

ANNOUNCER (OVER P.A.)  
Barons down by one, in the bottom  
of the sixth. Now batting, number  
45, Michael Jordan.

But as Michael steps up to the plate, he hears familiar music fill the stadium: it's the Alan Parson Project's song "Sirius." Confused, he looks at Terry in the dugout. Terry shrugs.

**IN THE DUGOUT:** The Barons get a sense something weird is happening with the music. Terry smiles to himself.

SCOTT TEDDER  
What is this...?

GLENN DISARCINA  
My brother and I saw him play at  
Chicago Stadium once. It's the intro  
music they use for Bulls games.

**BACK AT HOME PLATE:** The music washes over Michael. He looks at his arm: he's getting goosebumps. Time slows down...

Then he readies himself for the pitch. He doesn't swing. Ball one. The pitcher throws and TIME SLOWS AGAIN...

CRACK! The ball connects, rocketing further and further into left field, and Michael runs -

- The crowd is on their feet -

- Terry and the Barons are watching -

- Michael watches as it's going, going... Gone.

Michael's run slows to a jog. He rounds the bases, the magic of the moment surging through him, the crowd on their feet.

... As he comes home, he points to the sky.

He crosses home plate, the cheers echoing through the ballpark where his teammates - even Barry Johnson - embrace him.

Barry pats him on the back, their beef buried in this moment. Terry, all smiles, emerges from the dugout, joining them.

TERRY FRANCONA  
Now how'd that fucking feel?!

MICHAEL JORDAN  
... Just like I remembered.

CLOSE ON MICHAEL'S SMILE: it turns nostalgic as the cheers engulf him, the sound almost impossibly far away.

**EXT. DOWNTOWN CHICAGO - NIGHT**

Michael is driven through downtown Chicago. He gazes at the iconic skyline. The city seems to beckon.

**EXT. CHICAGO STADIUM - NIGHT**

Escorted by YELLOW-JACKETED COPS through Gate 3 1/2, Michael hears the screams of Bulls fans who have not forgotten him.

**SUPER: Chicago Stadium, Scottie Pippen All-Star Classic Charity Basketball Game - September 9, 1994**

**INT. CHICAGO STADIUM LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT**

Michael puts on the charity basketball uniform. He catches his reflection in the mirror, wearing a jersey and shorts. B.J. Armstrong is with him, changing as well.

B.J. ARMSTRONG  
Glad you found a reason to wear those.

Michael studies himself in the mirror as we GO TO:

**INT. CHICAGO STADIUM - NIGHT - SEQUENCE**

Michael Jordan plays basketball again. Streaked with sweat, he cuts through the opposing team, seeming more like a ballet dancer than basketball player, as he effortlessly glides and zig-zags across the court. It's a sanctuary.

Michael moves in SLOW MOTION, and we can practically hear "Ave Maria." Actually, maybe we *do* hear "Ave Maria," because judging from the expressions on the fans' faces, this is a religious experience. They are witnessing an athlete at the height of his powers, dominating other All-Stars with ease.

As Michael flies through the air, ball in hand, we GO TO:

**THE END OF THE GAME:** The crowd's on their feet. Michael looks at the scoreboard: he's scored 52 points. His team has won.

He's caked in sweat as he looks at the filled stadium, the jubilant crowd on their feet, along with Juanita and his kids.

It's like the home run, but easier. He waves to the crowd...

... Then he leans down and kisses the Bull logo on the floor goodbye. We HOLD ON THE CHICAGO BULL as Ave Maria or whatever finishes, and Michael disappears from the court.

**INT. BERTO CENTER - DAY**

Bulls Coach Phil Jackson shoots baskets in sweats as Michael comes to meet him before a team practice. Michael enters in a suit. He approaches Phil and hugs him as they talk.

PHIL JACKSON

Little one on one?

MICHAEL JORDAN

I'm not really dressed for it.

PHIL JACKSON

You seen the statue they're building outside the new stadium? They're calling it "The Spirit."

MICHAEL JORDAN

Makes it sound like I'm already dead. What, am I gonna haunt the United Center?

PHIL JACKSON

Or you could play in it. Your baseball season's over, right?

Phil passes Michael the ball. Michael shoots - *swish*.

MICHAEL JORDAN

Summer League's over. I'm going to the Scottsdale Scorpions. Arizona Fall League. For the top prospects.

PHIL JACKSON

You could come back after, play the second half of the season.

Michael's about to protest, but can't help himself:

MICHAEL JORDAN

... How many games is that?

Phil pauses before shooting; he doesn't want to seem too eager.

PHIL JACKSON  
If you come back in January? Maybe  
fifty?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
That's - that's too many.

PHIL JACKSON  
How about February?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I got spring training.

Phil passes the ball to Michael, who takes a shot.

PHIL JACKSON  
And then you make the Majors?  
(off Michael's silence)  
I will never coach a player of your  
abilities again. But this isn't  
about me - you're depriving  
millions of fans of a unique gift  
you very clearly still possess.  
(digging in)  
C'mon, Michael. You kissed the floor.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
(hardening)  
Kissed it goodbye.

Phil's look: "You sure about that?"

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)  
Don't try to get in my head, Phil.

PHIL JACKSON  
You're really gonna let them retire  
your number next month? Because if  
it goes up to the rafters, that's  
it. You're history.

Phil takes a shot. On Michael, reflecting on that sentiment...

**INT. UNITED CENTER - DAY**

A lavish ceremony at the pristine new United Center.

**SUPER: United Center, November 1, 1994**

Michael holds his daughter Jasmine on his lap. Juanita and Deloris are there as well. Michael, Jeffrey and Marcus pull the rope lifting the banner into the air. It reads:

**"Michael Jordan: 1984-1993"**

Michael looks up at the banner. There it is. History.

MICHAEL JORDAN (V.O.)  
I'm never coming back to basketball.

**EXT. UNITED CENTER - NIGHT**

Michael, his family, and gathered PRESS watch as Jerry Reinsdorf pulls the tarp off a covered statue: it's of Jordan ascending, ball in outstretched arm, resembling the iconic Nike logo, flying past an abstract opponent. On the base it reads:

***"The Best There Ever Was, The Best There Ever Will Be."***

More applause. Michael looks up at the statue, vaguely unsettled.

MICHAEL JORDAN (V.O.)  
I told the fans I'd be playing  
baseball in Arizona, and that's  
what I'm gonna do.

**LATER:** We catch up with Michael giving an interview with a REPORTER, with his family. He looks a little irritated.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I let them retire the number. What  
more do you all need to be convinced?

**I/E. LIMO - NIGHT**

George Koehler drives the Jordan family back to Highland Park. The kids are asleep. Michael and Juanita are quiet.

JUANITA JORDAN  
... I like the statue.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Do I look like a statue to you?

The edge in his voice is unmistakable. She doesn't reply.

**INT. JORDAN MANSION - NIGHT**

As the family enters, Michael carries a groggy Marcus inside.

MARCUS  
Daddy, can we go to the zoo  
tomorrow?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I'm sorry, little man, I -

JEFFREY  
(to Marcus)  
He can't go. He has to play baseball.

MARCUS  
No, I want you to come! I want you  
to come!

As Marcus melts down, Juanita takes him in her arms. Michael watches his son scream and cry. Then he looks at Jeffrey, resolving to be strong, internalizing Michael's absence.

**INT. JORDAN MANSION BATHROOM - NIGHT**

Michael splashes water on his face, preparing for bed. He looks in the mirror. Irritable. Weary. Juanita enters, spent.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Is he down?

Juanita nods, a bit icy. He picks up on it.

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)  
What?

JUANITA JORDAN  
I didn't say a word.

She starts brushing her teeth, quiet and avoiding eye contact.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Something you want to talk about?

JUANITA JORDAN  
It's a special night for you, and I don't want to spend it... Let's have a nice time before you leave.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I'm sorry I have to go to Arizona. That's where my job is right now.

JUANITA JORDAN  
Your family is here. You don't *have* to play Minor League baseball. That's your choice.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
You were the one who told me to go to the Minors!

JUANITA JORDAN

Yes, to *Birmingham*! 'Cause I wasn't going to stand in the way of what you wanted. But did I tell you to go to *Scottsdale* and leave me alone with three children for another two months? Did we even discuss it?

MICHAEL JORDAN

I think you're mad 'cause you didn't marry some Minor League country boy from North Carolina. You married *Michael Jordan*.

A beat. He's crossed a line, but is too hot to apologize.

JUANITA JORDAN

I knew I wasn't getting an equal partner. Not really. I signed up for it. I love our life and I won't apologize for that. But I wanted you on the *Chicago White Sox* because they are in *Chicago*. So I'm not gonna let you make me the bad guy in your story. I am not some fan. I am not the media. I am the mother of your children and you will treat me as such, even if you don't give leaving those children a second thought.

MICHAEL JORDAN

You don't think I miss them? You don't think this tears me up? I told you to move them down!

JUANITA JORDAN

But their life is here – our life is here.

(driving it home)

Just 'cause you lost your daddy means they have to lose theirs, too?

She walks out, leaving him alone with no response.

**EXT. SCOTTSDALE STADIUM - NIGHT**

Michael stands in right field, bundled up in the November chilliness in a uniform for his new team, the *SCOTTSDALE SCORPIONS*. He is still, lonely, maybe a little bored.

We hear the sound of RINGING, and then the phone conversation between Michael and his mother. He sounds weary.

DELORIS JORDAN (V.O.)  
Hello?

MICHAEL JORDAN (V.O.)  
Hey, Mama.

DELORIS JORDAN (V.O.)  
Michael! How is Arizona treating you?

MICHAEL JORDAN (V.O.)  
It's all right. Colder, though.

**I/E. BUS - NIGHT**

Still in uniform, Michael and the Scorpions ride the bus.

DELORIS JORDAN (V.O.)  
Still on that famous bus of yours?

MICHAEL JORDAN (V.O.)  
Nah. All the teams are in Arizona,  
so we only travel an hour or so. We  
ride the bus in our uniforms.

DELORIS JORDAN (V.O.)  
You know anyone on the new team?

**INT. SCOTTSDALE STADIUM DUGOUT - DAY**

Terry, in a Scottsdale uniform as well, chews gum, then spits.

MICHAEL JORDAN (V.O.)  
Terry's managing here too. And  
there's a few guys from Birmingham.  
Good guys, good players.

In the field, kids do a "Dizzy Bat Race." They place their foreheads on the knob, spinning around until it's time to race.

**INT. SCORPIONS CLUBHOUSE - DAY**

His teammates play poker. Michael plays solitaire in the corner.

DELORIS JORDAN (V.O.)  
How are you playing?

MICHAEL JORDAN (V.O.)  
I hit at .260 the last month in  
Birmingham. Doing about that here.

New Scorpions teammate NEAL DUSEDAL (24, white, nervous) approaches Michael. He holds up a magazine with the ad Michael did for the Barons bus. Michael relaxing on the Jordan Cruiser and grinning. He holds out a pen, expectantly.

NEAL DUSEDAL  
Would you mind?

Michael takes the pen and signs.

#### INT. DINER - NIGHT

Michael eats in a diner, flanked by SECURITY. People walk by on the street and freak out when they see him.

DELORIS JORDAN (V.O.)  
.260 is very respectable.

#### INT. ARIZONA BEDROOM - NIGHT

Michael watches TV in yet another rented house. He flips past a baseball game. Then he arrives on a Bulls game.

DELORIS JORDAN (V.O.)  
... You there, Michael?

MICHAEL JORDAN (V.O.)  
Yeah, sorry, just a little tired.

Michael watches his old teammates, eyes glued to the TV.

DELORIS JORDAN (V.O.)  
I know, baby. Christmas will be here before you know it.

#### I/E. BUS - NIGHT

Michael rides in uniform. He plays solitaire on his computer and sits next to NOMAR GARCIAPARRA (21, Latino, confident). The mood is rowdy, as a few rows down Terry tells a story:

TERRY FRANCONA  
- They had these healthy popsicles in the fridge. One night I had a bunch of 'em. Lost count of how many. Woke up 4 AM, just lay there for an hour thinking, "Don't throw up, don't throw up." Shoulda thrown up.

Nomar laughs at the story and nods his head towards Terry:

NOMAR GARCIAPARRA  
That goofball scares me every time I  
look at him.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Why?

NOMAR GARCIAPARRA  
He shoulda had a great career.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
(protective of Terry)  
He's not done. He could still  
manage in the Bigs.

NOMAR GARCIAPARRA  
No, I mean as a *player*.

Michael looks at Nomar, confused.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
He said he was a a journeyman.

NOMAR GARCIAPARRA  
Tito was the best player in college  
ball. If he hadn't got hurt, he'd  
have been a Boggs or a Ripken. Had  
his rookie card when I was a kid.  
Thought I was gonna be rich.

Michael watches Terry continue telling his silly anecdote:

TERRY FRANCONA  
... Then I woke up in the morning  
and I started counting the sticks.  
I ate seventeen. Guess I figured if  
one's healthy, seventeen's gotta be  
*real* healthy, you know?

Michael watches Terry as if seeing him for the first time.

**EXT. GOLF COURSE - DAY**

Michael, Terry and White Sox General Manager Ron Schueler are  
on the golf course. Ron drives the ball of the tee; watches  
his drive go off-course, and says:

RON SCHUELER  
Get it together, Ron.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Looks like old Ronny's gonna owe me  
another \$150 for this hole.

RON SCHUELER  
I'm done betting on golf with you.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
So why play at all? Tito, you're  
up.

Terry places his ball on the tee. Ron pipes up:

RON SCHUELER  
Terry - I hear Buddy Bell over at  
the Tigers is sniffing around you  
for a third base coach.

TERRY FRANCONA  
Buddy's considering a bunch of  
guys. It's not gonna happen.

Terry swings; a good drive. Michael watches Terry closely.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
You got all kinds of skills, huh?

Terry is a bit confused by Michael's statement, but lets it go.

TERRY FRANCONA  
Eh, just got lucky.  
(to Ron)  
So, Ron, how're your Arizona  
prospects looking?

RON SCHUELER  
Don't know if they're all ready for  
Major League baseball, but they may  
have to play it anyway.

Michael ignores this and places his golf ball on the tee.

RON SCHUELER (CONT'D)  
What do you think, Michael?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I think putting on a Major League  
uniform because the Major Leaguers  
are striking sounds like a shortcut.

Michael takes a swing.

RON SCHUELER  
There's gonna be replacement games  
next season. Someone's gonna play  
in 'em.

MICHAEL JORDAN

I'm a player's rep in another sport.  
I'm not crossing any picket lines.

TERRY FRANCONA

Michael, you're up. Next hole.

Michael leaves them behind, walking away from Ron. As he goes, we hear the pubescent voice of a kid named DAVID BRIDGERS:

DAVID BRIDGERS (PRE-LAP)

Hey Michael - what sport you  
playing right now?

CUT TO:

**EXT. TRASK MIDDLE SCHOOL LAWN - DAY - 1975**

Young Michael plays catch with his friend DAVID BRIDGERS (12, white) on the lawn of the school. But Young Michael is distracted watching a nearby pickup basketball game. One of the young players is leaving, making the teams uneven.

DAVID BRIDGERS

Michael!

YOUNG MICHAEL

Huh?

David throws Michael the baseball.

DAVID BRIDGERS

Just tag in, man.

YOUNG MICHAEL

Nah, I'm good here.

Young Michael throws David the ball. David turns and throws it over a fence, in the opposite direction from Michael.

DAVID BRIDGERS

Oops.

Michael grins and tosses his glove aside. He jogs over to the pickup game. His spirits perk up as he heads to the court.

YOUNG MICHAEL

Let me get next!

Young Michael gets the basketball. OFF HIS DRIBBLING, WE

MATCH CUT TO:

**INT. ARIZONA HOUSE - DAY**

A basketball game is on TV: an NBA player is dribbling. Michael watches it actively, bouncing around the living room while talking into his phone.

MICHAEL JORDAN

Now Grant Hill, is he living up to the hype? What's it like playing him?

INTERCUT WITH:

**INT. BERTO CENTER HALLWAY - DAY**

B.J. Armstrong talks on his cell to Michael, watching his teammates start practice with Phil Jackson.

B.J. ARMSTRONG

Michael, I gotta go -

MICHAEL JORDAN

And Shaq? Guy shoots free throws like he's trying to chip paint off the rim -

B.J. ARMSTRONG

Practice is starting -

MICHAEL JORDAN

How's Phil doing with the new guys?

B.J. ARMSTRONG

Wouldn't know, 'cause I'm talking to you instead of in there with them -

MICHAEL JORDAN

You gotta make them earn your respect, make them work for it -

B.J. hangs up on Michael.

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)

... Hello?... B.J.?

Alone in his room, Michael looks at his phone. He grumbles:

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)

Pre-pubescent-looking-motherfucker gonna hang up on me...

Michael realizes he's not talking to anyone. He returns his avid attention to the basketball game on TV.

**INT. SCORPIONS CLUBHOUSE - DAY**

Michael changes after a game. Terry emerges from his office.

TERRY FRANCONA  
Michael! Phone.

Michael enters **TERRY'S OFFICE**. Terry hands him the phone:

TERRY FRANCONA (CONT'D)  
It's Ron Schueler.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
(into phone)  
This is Michael.  
(listens, but doesn't react)  
... Okay. Thanks.

Michael hangs up.

TERRY FRANCONA  
What did he say?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I'm moving up to Triple A next  
season. Nashville Sounds.

TERRY FRANCONA  
Hey, how about that! Congrats!

Michael nods. He seems oddly unmoved.

TERRY FRANCONA (CONT'D)  
You've played well here. You earned  
it. You should celebrate.

A smile starts to form on Michael's face as we MOVE TO:

**EXT. BASKETBALL COURT - DAY**

Michael, Terry, and some other PLAYERS and STAFF play a pickup game outside an apartment complex. Among them we recognize Neal Dusedau, the Scorpion who asked for Michael's autograph.

Unlike the visual poetry of the Pippen charity game, when Michael plays here it's a predator toying with his prey; he'll dunk over two defender's heads; he'll unleash an array of moves that have thrilled crowds around the world.

As the game progresses, more ON-LOOKERS arrive. Video cameras are whipped out.

Terry is on Michael's team, and when Michael is being quadruple-teamed, he throws Terry a perfect pass under the hoop. Terry misses the catch and YELPS like he may have dislocated his finger.

**LATER:** After nearly an hour of play, Terry can barely move. He takes a heave from beyond the three-point line and then heads for the bench. Angry, Michael kicks the ball.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Hey! I always shoot last!

TERRY FRANCONA  
This isn't the goddamn NBA Finals!

MICHAEL JORDAN  
That's not the point! I always shoot last! You fucked it up!

TERRY FRANCONA  
Now you know how I feel watching you trying to hit a curveball!

Michael is about to yell back, but instead cracks up and falls to the floor. Terry joins him in laughing, until they notice Neal Dusedau is breathing way too heavily...

MICHAEL JORDAN  
... Is he having a heart attack?

AND WE GO TO:

**INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DAY**

Michael sits in the waiting room, getting all the looks from HOSPITAL STAFF and PATIENTS you'd expect. Terry sits down.

TERRY FRANCONA  
You don't have to wait here.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I want to know if I killed the guy.

Michael watches Terry, then broaches the subject:

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)  
What was your batting average in the show?

TERRY FRANCONA  
Thought I told you. .274.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
What'd you hit in college?

Terry hesitates. Caught.

TERRY FRANCONA  
.400 something or other.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
How about high school?

TERRY FRANCONA  
...769.

Michael can't believe it. That's preposterously good.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
So what happened when you got to  
the Big Leagues?

TERRY FRANCONA  
... I was hitting .321 my first  
season.

As Terry talks, we FLASHBACK TO:

**EXT. BUSCH STADIUM - DAY - 1982**

Terry, 22 and in a Montreal Expos uniform, follows a fly ball back towards the wall. It's the same SLOW-MO we've seen Michael experience when he played the charity game - the same sanctuary of an exceptional athlete knowing exactly what to do.

**SUPER: Busch Stadium, St. Louis, MO - 1982**

As Terry runs back, we hear his voice:

TERRY FRANCONA (V.O.)  
Julio Gonzalez hit a long drive to  
left field. I went back, past the  
warning track and jumped...

And right before the point of contact, we GO BACK TO:

**INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DAY**

TERRY FRANCONA  
Momentum took me into the base of  
the wall. Felt my knee explode.  
They had to peel me off like I was  
a cartoon character.  
(MORE)

TERRY FRANCONA (CONT'D)  
My wife says childbirth is bad, but  
she didn't leave half her knee on  
the Busch Stadium outfield.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
They couldn't fix it?

TERRY FRANCONA  
Nah. I've had more surgeries than  
you've had hits. Somehow hung  
around for nine years.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Was it worth it? What it did to  
your body?

TERRY FRANCONA  
(considers)  
... Yeeeeeah. I played every day I  
could, and maybe a few when I  
couldn't. My brain still knew what  
to do, but my body - my body  
wouldn't comply. You find something  
you love that much, hard to let go.

As Michael considers this, a very embarrassed Neal Dusedau  
being led into the room by a DOCTOR.

DOCTOR  
He's fine. Just a little over-excited.

Michael approaches Neal:

MICHAEL JORDAN  
You okay?

NEAL DUSED AU  
Yeah.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Good. Also, I'm never playing  
basketball with you again.

**EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY**

Michael and Terry walk towards the car. Terry is preoccupied.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
This thing with you and the Tigers  
- anything I can do to help?

TERRY FRANCONA  
I appreciate it, but that's a reach.

MICHAEL JORDAN

You shoulda made the Hall of Fame as a player. Okay, your knee's blown, you get in as a manager.

TERRY FRANCONA

Maybe... Maybe you only get to be great at one thing.

MICHAEL JORDAN

Bullshit! You love something, you work and push and you make it happen. Do you love being a manager?

Terry nods, almost vulnerable.

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)

Well, there you go.

Michael walks over to his car. Terry hesitates, preoccupied.

TERRY FRANCONA

Michael... Do you really love this? Being a baseball player?

MICHAEL JORDAN

Of course. It's my dream.

TERRY FRANCONA

Look, I'm not your manager anymore, so I'm saying this as your friend... You celebrated moving up to Triple A by playing another sport.

MICHAEL JORDAN

(simmering)

You gonna say this is about my father again?

TERRY FRANCONA

You say baseball is your dream. Maybe it's not. Maybe it's his.

MICHAEL JORDAN

When we first met, you said my reasons for playing were none of your business.

TERRY FRANCONA

Sure, but, I thought we'd kinda progressed beyond that point -

MICHAEL JORDAN

No, you're right: you're not my manager anymore. So we're done.

Michael stomps to his car. Terry's had it:

TERRY FRANCONA

Hey Michael: How many friends – real friends – do you have, that you can afford to push them away?

Michael hesitates, but then gets in his car and leaves.

**INT. JORDAN MANSION - DAY**

Michael and his immediate family – Juanita, Jeffrey, Marcus and Jasmine – are in Christmas garb. KIDS and COUSINS run around and decorate the massive tree. We recognize his mother Deloris, brothers Larry and Ronnie (with their FAMILIES), and sister Roslyn.

The DOORBELL RINGS. Michael answers: it's Sis, looking a little frayed. They hug, a bit uncomfortably.

SIS JORDAN

Merry Christmas. Sorry I'm late...

MICHAEL JORDAN

Merry Christmas... Where's Rick?

SIS JORDAN

He... couldn't make it.

(looking around)

Always forget how big this place is.

Juanita approaches, gracefully interrupting the awkward moment.

JUANITA JORDAN

Sis! Good to see you!

Juanita ushers Sis in. Michael lingers behind.

**INT. JORDAN MANSION - NIGHT**

Christmas dinner. Kids run around and play while the adults sit around the dining room table.

LARRY JORDAN

What's this I hear about them building a park for Pops in Birmingham?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
It's not happening now.

RONNIE JORDAN  
How come?

JUANITA JORDAN  
The Barons wanted to honor Michael's  
time in Birmingham and thought it'd  
be nice to fix up an old Little  
League field and name it after Pops.

Sis laughs. The bitterness of it does not go unnoticed.

JUANITA JORDAN (CONT'D)  
Some local folks got upset because  
he hadn't spent much time in  
Birmingham and...

But she is interrupted by Sis' laughter. Michael is annoyed:

MICHAEL JORDAN  
What is so damn funny?

SIS JORDAN  
Sorry, did Daddy spend *any* time in  
Birmingham, Alabama?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Anyway, we'll do something with the  
Boys and Girls Club here in Chicago,  
find something some other way for  
the Barons to honor him...

Sis laughs again; an angry laughter. Discomfort all around.

DELORIS JORDAN  
Sis, control yourself.

SIS JORDAN  
I'm not a child anymore, Mama.

DELORIS JORDAN  
So stop acting like one.

SIS JORDAN  
No one agrees this is all crazy?

JUANITA JORDAN  
- Did everyone get enough food -

SIS JORDAN

– Everyone's always trying to capitalize on Michael, now they're dragging Daddy into it, acting like he was some sorta saint just 'cause he's passed on –

MICHAEL JORDAN

Hey! Show some respect –

SIS JORDAN

You know how long he was missing before anyone noticed? Two weeks. We don't talk about how he hadn't paid anyone at his business in weeks. Or his paternity suit from that woman in Chicago.

Deloris is dangerously close to losing her customary cool:

DELORIS JORDAN

Sis, you are being hysterical –

SIS JORDAN

(to Deloris)

When we were kids you were fighting so bad you nearly crashed the car. We all thought you'd kill each other. Now that he's dead we gotta pretend like you didn't hate him?

Deloris SLAPS Sis across the face. No one speaks. Then Sis gets up and runs out. Michael follows her, apoplectic.

**INT. JORDAN MANSION BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Upset, Sis marches into her room and starts throwing clothes in her suitcase as Michael follows her in.

MICHAEL JORDAN

Just 'cause you got some sort of fucked up ax to grind with Pops, and you want to shit all over our childhood – that doesn't make you some kind of prophet. Just makes you a loser. A loser who never did anything with herself, loser who can't keep her man from leaving.

SIS JORDAN

See this – this is why I don't come here for Christmas.

(MORE)

SIS JORDAN (CONT'D)

Come to this castle to be lectured by my little brother who knows nothing about himself or his family but thinks he's God's gift because he happens to be real good at basketball.

MICHAEL JORDAN

You're jealous - that he and I were close, that I made him proud -

Michael and Sis don't notice Juanita silently entering the corner of the room, and watching, unsure of what to say.

SIS JORDAN

You made him proud? Only time he liked you was when you were playing baseball.

Michael grabs her suitcase and hurls it at the wall. This display is scary for her, but she doesn't back down.

SIS JORDAN (CONT'D)

But before that, before you became somebody doing a sport that wasn't his? What did he *really* think of you then?

MICHAEL JORDAN

He loved me! Everything he did he did because he loved me!

SIS JORDAN

Blowing up your life with this tribute, this apology, whatever it is - he doesn't deserve it. You know that. You *remember*.

MICHAEL JORDAN

(starting to crack)

Sis. Stop. Please.

He's almost like a boy, pleading. Sis looks up at her little brother, towering above her but seeming young once again.

SIS JORDAN

... All right, Michael. All right.

Juanita finally speaks up.

JUANITA JORDAN

... Sis? Michael? How about you both come back to dinner?

Michael doesn't move. Sis walks towards the doorway. She turns back and looks at Michael. HOLD ON SIS'S FACE AS WE

MATCH CUT TO:

**EXT. TRASK MIDDLE SCHOOL BASKETBALL COURT - EVENING - 1975**

YOUNG SIS JORDAN (16, already world-weary) stands with a crowd of kids watching the basketball game. She motions him over.

REVEAL: Young Michael, sweaty and joyous from the same basketball game we saw earlier, still going strong. He calls time and trots over to her.

YOUNG MICHAEL  
Sis! You see that shot?

YOUNG SIS  
You're late. Daddy'll want us home.

YOUNG MICHAEL  
We're tied up.

Young Sis looks nervous as Young Michael rejoins the game. As the game continues, James Jordan walks over to the crowd watching, a flask in his hand. He doesn't look pleased.

Young Michael does a fast break and scores. His team wins. As high-fives are exchanged, he spots his father standing next to his sister. James takes a swig from a flask.

**EXT. TRASK MIDDLE SCHOOL - NIGHT - 1975**

An excited Young Michael walks towards the family car with his father and sister. James looks stern, Young Sis nervous.

YOUNG MICHAEL  
You see that last shot? I was all  
fake left, fast break right -

He mimes his own move. James is conspicuously silent as they arrive at the car, out of view from other students.

YOUNG MICHAEL (CONT'D)  
Pops? Did you see it?

Angrily, James grabs Young Michael's arm.

JAMES JORDAN  
Do I look like I give a damn about  
your fast break?

YOUNG MICHAEL

Sorry, I -

JAMES JORDAN

We were supposed to work on your fielding at home.

YOUNG MICHAEL

I'm sorry - You're hurting my arm -

JAMES JORDAN

Your *left* arm. You throw right.

YOUNG SIS

He didn't mean -

JAMES JORDAN

(to Young Michael)

You've never been worth a damn except for one thing. *One. Thing.*

James twists Young Michael's arm. He cries out.

YOUNG SIS

Daddy, let him go -

Young Sis rushes to pull James off of her brother, but James throws her to the car. She CRIES OUT in pain. For a moment, all are too shocked by James's actions to say anything. Young Michael starts to tear up.

JAMES JORDAN

Here you go, crying like a girl.

Young Michael bites his lip, forcing the tears away. James looks regretful, but unable to apologize. All he says is:

JAMES JORDAN (CONT'D)

Both of you get in the car.

Trembling, Young Michael and Young Sis get in the car.

#### **I/E. JAMES JORDAN'S CAR - NIGHT**

James drives. Young Michael and Young Sis are silent. Young Michael looks out the window. His arm throbs. He looks out the window, at the night sky. We PAN OVER TO THE NIGHT SKY. After a moment, WE PAN BACK TO FIND WE'RE IN:

**INT. JORDAN MANSION BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Michael lies in bed, in the same position as nineteen years ago. He looks out the window, on the cusp of acknowledging something he doesn't want to acknowledge. Suddenly he starts breathing quickly - is he having a panic attack? Juanita stirs.

JUANITA JORDAN

You okay?

MICHAEL JORDAN

Yeah.

JUANITA JORDAN

Breathe.

Michael breathes. He calms down. After a moment:

JUANITA JORDAN (CONT'D)

I heard you and Sis.

Michael says nothing.

JUANITA JORDAN (CONT'D)

Maybe... Maybe that's enough? Maybe you can stop now?

HOLD ON MICHAEL, torn, before we

CUT TO:

**EXT. SARASOTA AIRPORT - DAY**

Like last year, the wheels of a private plane touch down.

**SUPER: Sarasota, FL - February 17, 1995**

**MOMENTS LATER:** Michael gets out of the plane, his driver George Koehler following with his bags. Whereas last year Michael's smile was a mile wide, now his expression is neutral. Resigned.

**I/E. MICHAEL'S CORVETTE - DAY**

George Koehler drives Michael towards the Ed Smith Stadium in Sarasota. The radio is on:

DJ (ON RADIO)

*... Baseball strike continues as potential replacement players begin spring training here in Sarasota...*

Like last year, the PRESS IS WAITING, shouting questions about whether Michael will play in the exhibition games. George drives the car into the training complex.

**INT. WHITE SOX CLUBHOUSE - DAY**

Michael walks through the clubhouse. This year he's in sweats like everyone else. A young PROSPECT is dressed in the full uniform, like Michael was last year. The Prospect looks around, embarrassed. Michael watches him, remembering. He looks worn out, and spring training's only on day one.

**INT. ED SMITH STADIUM BATTING CAGES - DAY**

Michael takes swings with Walt Hriniak, another year more grizzled. Walt observes Michael in the cage.

MICHAEL JORDAN

Kinda empty without everyone here.

WALT HRINIAK

Fucking strike'll kill this game.

Another pitch comes. Michael swings again.

WALT HRINIAK (CONT'D)

Swing looks better.

MICHAEL JORDAN

I've been keeping both hands on the bat during the release - trying to create more bat speed.

WALT HRINIAK

You're a good student. You honor our game with your effort.

(Michael is touched)

Another three, four years... You might make it up.

Michael's face falls. Three or four years is a long time.

**INT. ED SMITH STADIUM CLUBHOUSE - DAY**

Michael changes out of his uniform when he hears:

KERRY VALRIE (O.S.)

Hey, aren't you a basketball player?

Michael turns to see some familiar faces from the Barons: Kerry Valrie, Barry Johnson, and Glenn DiSarcina. He grins.

**INT. BAR - NIGHT**

Michael, Kerry, Glenn and Barry have a drink. They're in mid-conversation, reminiscing and laughing:

MICHAEL JORDAN  
- Two thousand dollars?

GLENN DISARCINA  
Yep.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I gave Rogelio Nunez two thousand dollars last summer? Were you all coaching him on the words?

BARRY JOHNSON  
Yeah, but he probably needed the money more than you.

KERRY VALRIE  
We *all* need it more than you.

The mood turns slightly more serious. Barry turns to Kerry:

BARRY JOHNSON  
Look: if we play those exhibition games, we're limiting our future revenues playing in the Bigs.

KERRY VALRIE  
Why are you always talking about shit like that? I want to play baseball. We're not even in the Major League union...

BARRY JOHNSON  
And we're never gonna be if we're scabs. The Sox charge fans for those games.

GLENN DISARCINA  
My brother said that if we play, union will have us pegged as scabs before we start.

KERRY VALRIE  
Man, everyone is sick of hearing about your damn brother -

BARRY JOHNSON  
If I get to the Majors, I want it to be because I earned it, not because I crossed the picket line.

KERRY VALRIE

No one's said that we'd be crossing  
the picket line if we play -

BARRY JOHNSON

They'll say it soon.

Michael has been quiet throughout this exchange.

KERRY VALRIE

What about you, 45?

MICHAEL JORDAN

Same thing I've always said: told  
them I won't play the games.

Kerry deflates, feeling the judgement coming from everyone.  
The previously jovial environment has now turned tense.

KERRY VALRIE

See you all at practice.

Kerry throws some cash on the table and starts to leave, when:

MICHAEL JORDAN

Kerry, I can't tell you what to do.  
I can't tell any of you what to do.  
I may ride the same buses as you,  
stay in the same motels, but I'm  
not the same.

BARRY JOHNSON

Yeah. You're a lot more visible.

Barry tosses him a program for exhibition games featuring  
replacement players: Michael's on the cover. His blood boils.

**EXT. ED SMITH STADIUM - DAY**

Michael - in Sox uniform - marches onto the field, holding  
the exhibition game replacement player program. He watches  
Ron talk to some GATHERED PRESS on the field before practice.

RON SCHUELER

... Guys, baseball's been around a  
hundred years, some contract  
negotiations aren't gonna kill it.

The Press immediately spot Michael and start in with him:

REPORTER

Michael! Will you play the games?

ANOTHER REPORTER

Are you getting special treatment  
not to play?

Michael ignores them and pulls Ron aside. Out of earshot from the reporters, but still visible. He holds up the program:

MICHAEL JORDAN

I thought I made myself clear in Arizona. I'm not here so you can sell tickets to exhibition games.

RON SCHUELER

(re: the press)  
Careful...

MICHAEL JORDAN

That's your problem.

Ron looks over at the press smiles. Then to Michael:

RON SCHUELER

You need as many at-bats as you can get if you still want to go to Triple A. You're 32 and your clock is ticking.

MICHAEL JORDAN

A year ago you couldn't get me out here fast enough.

RON SCHUELER

You wanna prove you're a baseball player? Play baseball.

A stare-down. Michael's frustration builds.

MICHAEL JORDAN

You better hope this strike ends soon.

Michael joins the other players as they start their drills.

**INT. SARASOTA KITCHEN - NIGHT**

Michael eats takeout while he watches TV in the kitchen.

NEWSCASTER (ON TV)

*... Players rep Don Fehr is now formally stating that anyone playing in an exhibition game is considered a strikebreaker. Fehr is dubbing it "The Jordan Rule."*

Michael quietly curses, the walls closing in on him...

**INT. WHITE SOX CLUBHOUSE - DAY**

Michael comes in while the rest of the players stand around pensively. Something is up. He turns to Kerry:

MICHAEL JORDAN  
What's happening?

KERRY VALRIE  
Barry's in there with Schueler. He  
won't play the games.

Michael looks down the hallway. After a moment, Ron's door opens, and Barry Johnson walks out, shaken but defiant. Ron goes the opposite way, but Barry joins his fellow players.

BARRY JOHNSON  
They're making an example out of  
me. Sending me home.

Barry turns to Michael.

BARRY JOHNSON (CONT'D)  
Everyone's gonna be looking to you.

Michael extends his hand towards Barry. Barry takes it.

**EXT. ED SMITH STADIUM BATTING CAGES - EVENING**

Michael works the cages alone after team practice. BAM – he sends one of the pitches out of the park. Then another.

ON MICHAEL'S FACE: he seems distracted. He's getting what he wants, but does he still want it? Then he's startled by a familiar voice behind him:

TERRY FRANCONA (O.S.)  
Pretty good for the cages...

Michael turns to see Terry approaching on the empty field. Given their last interaction, their dynamic is uncertain.

TERRY FRANCONA (CONT'D)  
How're you doing with live  
pitching?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
You're not a pitcher.

TERRY FRANCONA

I threw a few games when the bench was thin. "Journeyman," remember?

**EXT. ED SMITH STADIUM - NIGHT**

Michael stands at home plate. Terry stands on the pitcher's mound, a bucket of baseballs next to him. He throws a pitch. Michael sends it rocketing.

Terry grins and throws another. Again, Michael cracks it. We watch the ball go sailing into the outfield. We follow it to:

**LATER:**

The two sit in the outfield. Now Terry has a cooler of beers. They each have one and sit silently, looking at the field.

TERRY FRANCONA

I called Buddy Bell in Detroit. Told him I wanted the third base coach job.

MICHAEL JORDAN

They'd be lucky.

TERRY FRANCONA

We'll see. We'll see.  
(then)  
You've gotten better.

MICHAEL JORDAN

Didn't get there alone.  
(then)  
Tito, I... I'm not always so good at admitting when I'm wrong.

TERRY FRANCONA

Getting better at that, too.

They sip their beers. A moment of contemplative silence.

MICHAEL JORDAN

I hit a home run in the Little League Championships when I was twelve. My dad bought me two steaks. But then next year, when I was thirteen, I went to the Babe Ruth League for older kids.

**FLASH TO 1976:** Young Michael, at shortstop, throws a grounder to first base. The throw falls short. The runner scores.

MICHAEL JORDAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The diamond was bigger. All of a sudden I couldn't make the throws.

**FLASH TO 1976:** Young Michael sits on the bench. He looks into the stands. Sees his father James, with disappointment etched across his face. Something has changed between them. Young Michael looks away.

MICHAEL JORDAN (V.O.)

I started riding the bench. I started focusing on other things. My dad, he hated that...

**BACK TO THE PRESENT:**

MICHAEL JORDAN

Couple years ago, I think 1990, he saw Bo Jackson doing two sports; said there was no reason I couldn't do that too. I said I couldn't leave basketball - I hadn't won a championship yet. He brought it up after every season. Even with everything I accomplished, he still acted like he knew better.

Something almost like bitterness has crept into his voice. But it's replaced by a deep sadness:

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)

When he passed, I thought I could fix it. For him. Thought I could get there.

TERRY FRANCONA

Where was "there?"

MICHAEL JORDAN

Be the best baseball player of all time.

Terry chuckles.

TERRY FRANCONA

Why'd he focus so much on baseball?

MICHAEL JORDAN

It was just his game. His way.

Terry nods. They sip their beers.

TERRY FRANCONA

... When I was a freshman in college, there was this girl in my math class. Face like something from an art history book. I wanted to ask her out, but if all you know about is baseball, you're worthless with girls. So freshman year I don't do anything. Sophomore year, still nothing. But I was still thinking about her. Finally junior year comes and I work up the nerve. A year later we were engaged. Had our fourth kid last year.

MICHAEL JORDAN

I'm very happy for you.

TERRY FRANCONA

Point is, I couldn't get her out of my system. We can love a lot of things in life. Some are people. Some are children's games.

Michael soaks it in.

TERRY FRANCONA (CONT'D)

What I was trying to say before, back in Scottsdale is... You've come a long way as a ballplayer. You're a hell of a lot better now than during that early streak. Better at fielding, better at running the bases, better bat-speed, instincts, all of it. No one wants to see more than me how good you might get...

(looks him right in the eye)

But you'll never be... Look, I've seen you be super-human. Not just on TV - I'm talking banging up my hand with a pass too perfect to catch. And for you to go back to that perfection, for as long as you still can... Well, that's about the most human thing I can imagine.

MICHAEL JORDAN

... Still might get there, Tito.

They sip their beers in silence.

**EXT. ED SMITH STADIUM - DAY**

Team practice. Michael fields grounders and throws them back. Ron Schueler is on the sidelines and waves him over.

**SUPER: March 2, 1995**

RON SCHUELER

Michael. Can I have a minute?

Michael tosses the ball to his teammate and approaches Ron.

RON SCHUELER (CONT'D)

Minor Leaguers who won't play exhibition games can't park in our lot. And they go to the Minor League clubhouse.

MICHAEL JORDAN

I spent last summer on a bus. I can handle the fucking B-list clubhouse.

He starts to head back to the field.

RON SCHUELER

You're getting squeezed from both sides. I get it. But if this strike keeps up, baseball will be in irreparable trouble, and I'm doing everything I can not to let that happen. We need something to keep people interested and right now you're the best we got.

MICHAEL JORDAN

What happens if I play? What if the guys here follow my lead? Every Major Leaguer will know they were scabs.

Michael looks over at his teammates, doing their drills. Then back at Ron: a hitherto unseen vulnerability in the GM. Ron sighs and kind of shrugs: he doesn't have an answer.

RON SCHUELER

Shit, you love this sport, right? You really done with it?

Michael looks up at the perfect blue Sarasota sky, looks down at the glove on his hand... All goes quiet...

And he starts walking towards the clubhouse. Vaguely he's aware of Ron behind him, SHOUTING for him to come back. But now Michael's picking up speed as we MOVE TO:

**INT. JORDAN MANSION BEDROOM - NIGHT**

An exhausted Michael climbs into bed with Juanita.

JUANITA JORDAN  
Feel like cutting some grass?

He looks at her. They laugh.

**I/E. MICHAEL'S MINIVAN - DAY**

Michael, dressed in a suit, drives Jeffrey and Marcus to school. They're bundled up for the March Chicago weather.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
You got everything? Hats? Lunches?

JEFFREY  
Yeah...

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Have a good day. Daddy loves you.

MARCUS  
Bye!

He kisses his sons goodbye and watches as they run towards their school. After a moment, he takes out his phone and dials.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Hey. You want to get breakfast?

**INT. DINER - DAY**

Michael and B.J. Armstrong (in warm-up clothes) sit in back.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
You know what I really miss?  
Playing with those guys. No  
endorsements or contracts, just  
love for their game.

A WAITER brings their food and sets it down.

B.J. ARMSTRONG  
I think about quitting sometimes.  
When all the bullshit surrounding  
the sport outweighs the joy of  
playing it in the first place. But  
then I drive by a playground and  
watch these kids still going even  
when it's almost too dark to see.  
(MORE)

B.J. ARMSTRONG (CONT'D)  
They're just hoping to keep playing  
as long as possible. And then I  
show up to practice the next day.  
They remind me of something.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
What's that?

B.J. ARMSTRONG  
Innocence. Only way you can play.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
... You think that's why I left the  
NBA? That I "lost my innocence?"

B.J. ARMSTRONG  
Shit, I don't know, you figure I just  
spend all day thinking about you?

Michael chuckles. Then he grows contemplative as B.J. eats.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I'm not coming back to basketball.

B.J. ARMSTRONG  
Okay. So what are you gonna do now?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I don't know.

**EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY**

Michael and B.J. walk to their cars after breakfast.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
You got practice?

B.J. ARMSTRONG  
Yeah, in an hour.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
All right. Take care.

They hug goodbye. Michael watches B.J. go to his car. Then:

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)  
... You want to shoot around first?

B.J. ARMSTRONG  
Friendly game of H.O.R.S.E., huh?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
 Friendly game of H.O.R.S.E. That's  
 it.

B.J. smirks: he can see the writing on the wall.

B.J. ARMSTRONG  
 ... Yeah, all right.

**INT. BERTO CENTER - DAY**

Michael - still in his suit - shoots a jumper from three-point range. Doesn't go in. B.J. is in his practice gear.

B.J. ARMSTRONG  
 Someone lost the touch...

MICHAEL JORDAN  
 Oh, we're not done.

B.J. takes the same shot Michael missed. It goes in. Then B.J. goes to the side of the court and hits another shot. Michael goes to the same spot, and sinks it.

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)  
 Think you can still guard me?

B.J. ARMSTRONG  
 Think you can still guard *me*?

CUT TO:

**MOMENTS LATER:** Michael - still in his suit - plays B.J. one-on-one. Michael has the ball with B.J. on defense.

B.J. ARMSTRONG (CONT'D)  
 You know I was an All-Star last  
 year, right?

Michael fakes left, then twists around and goes right, scoring.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
 Wanna compare highlight reels?

B.J. starts dribbling towards the basket.

B.J. ARMSTRONG  
 You at least gonna get some shoes?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
 No, this is good. Don't stop.

**LATER:** Michael defends B.J. Now his suit jacket is off and his tie is loosened. They're now both covered in sweat, talking trash. B.J. goes up to score and BLAM – Michael blocks him.

B.J. ARMSTRONG

Foul!

MICHAEL JORDAN

What?

**LATER:** Now even sweatier, his sleeves rolled up, his loafers still on, Michael has the ball. He takes a drive towards the basket and soars in the air, putting in a perfect layup.

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)

That's game.

(laughs)

You still can't guard me.

They're both out of breath, Michael grinning.

B.J. ARMSTRONG

C'mon, 10-7, that's respectable –

MICHAEL JORDAN

– And I had loafers on.

They hear the CHATTER of teammates, and look up to see Phil Jackson and the Chicago Bulls, all in workout gear, arriving.

PHIL JACKSON

Hey, Michael.

MICHAEL JORDAN

Hey.

A moment where no one quite knows what to say.

PHIL JACKSON

So you gonna change or what?

Michael beams, almost giddy.

**INT. JORDAN MANSION GYMNASIUM - DAY**

Michael lies in a bench press in his expansive home gym, his personal trainer Tim Grover once again spotting him.

MICHAEL JORDAN

Basketball body.

TIM GROVER

Basketball body. Okay.

**INT. JORDAN MANSION - NIGHT**

Michael, sweaty from his workout, lets Tim out of the house.

TIM GROVER  
Same time tomorrow?

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Yeah, after practice.

Michael lets Tim out. He hears the TELEVISION on in the living room. He enters to find Juanita watching the news.

NEWSCASTER (ON TV)  
*... After attending Bulls practices over the past week, the entire country is waiting to see if Michael Jordan is returning to basketball.*

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I'm just messing around with the team. I'm not even sure what I'm gonna do.

JUANITA JORDAN  
Yeah, you are. You've known since Christmas. Maybe you're a little grateful for that baseball strike?

Michael looks at her about to protest, but then watches the TV: crowds have gathered outside the United Center statue.

NEWSCASTER (ON TV)  
*... Dozens of fans are camped out at the United Center by the Jordan statue in a week-long vigil...*

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I can't go back. They put up a statue. They retired the number.

JUANITA JORDAN  
So what? It's what you want to do.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
I'd be going back on everything I said.

JUANITA JORDAN  
You don't have to explain yourself to anyone. You can be proud. You know he loved you, right?

Michael grows quiet and vulnerable.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
 ... I'm not a baseball player. Why did  
 I think - why did I think I could -

JUANITA JORDAN  
 - You were a good son. This past  
 year a half? That was for him. But  
 this? This is for you.

Michael contemplates as the TV news about him continues.

**INT. JORDAN MANSION - DAY**

Michael opens the door to his home, revealing his agents David Falk and Curtis Polk. They look at him expectantly.

**SUPER: March 18, 1995**

**INT. JORDAN MANSION OFFICE - DAY**

Michael sits with David and Curtis. No one speaks for a beat.

DAVID FALK  
 ... Your legacy wasn't in danger  
 with baseball. But if you come  
 back, and you're not, well, Michael  
 Jordan...

Michael looks at the surrounding trophies and memorabilia.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
 They want legacy, they can have the  
 statue. I don't give a shit.

DAVID FALK  
 ... Well, I guess we can un-retire 23  
 and bring it down from the rafters.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
 No. Not 23.

CURTIS POLK  
 Then what?

David smiles, one second ahead of Curtis as we GO TO:

**INT. JERRY REINSDORF'S OFFICE - DAY**

Jerry Reinsdorf is on the phone with David and Curtis, although we only see his side of the conversation.

JERRY REINSDORF  
 (into phone)  
 He'll wear number 45?... Well, I'm  
 pleased, too... Okay, David. We'll  
 speak soon.

He hangs up the phone. Looks at his ASSISTANT.

JERRY REINSDORF (CONT'D)  
 You want to know one good thing to  
 come out of this fakakta strike?

**INT. JORDAN MANSION OFFICE - DAY - LATER**

David sits at the desk, pen in hand, as Curtis stands over  
 him. Michael paces off to the side. David reads from the page:

DAVID FALK  
 "Michael Jordan is announcing that  
 effective immediately he is  
 rejoining the Chicago Bulls. Michael  
 enjoyed his time in baseball  
 immensely, which has reawakened his  
 desire to play his favorite sport."

CURTIS POLK  
 I think the second one was stronger.  
 Maybe "chosen sport" sounds better?

Michael approaches the desk. Grabs a pen and paper.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
 We don't have to justify it. We're  
 giving everybody what they want.

Michael leans over and writes something on the piece of  
 paper. It doesn't take him long. We don't yet see the words.

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)  
 ... There you go.

David and Curtis look at Michael's unseen statement. They smile.

CUT TO:

A CLOSE-UP OF THE HEADLINE. It simply reads:

**"I'm back."**

AND WE REVEAL WE'RE IN:

**INT. TERRY FRANCONA'S KITCHEN - MORNING**

Terry sits at his breakfast table, in Barons uniform, his newspaper open to the picture of his friend Michael Jordan. His wife Jacque enters carrying their baby, hectic.

JACQUE FRANCONA  
Can you take the baby?

She hands Terry the baby. He looks at the headline, then back at her, a goofy, romantic, sentimental grin on his face.

TERRY FRANCONA  
Hey. I love you.

JACQUE FRANCONA  
Why are you being weird?

He keeps grinning at her. The baby laughs.

JACQUE FRANCONA (CONT'D)  
... I love you, too.

He pulls Jacque onto his lap. They look at the paper together. The phone RINGS. Jacque answers:

JACQUE FRANCONA (CONT'D)  
Hello?

Jacque's eyes widen. She covers the phone.

JACQUE FRANCONA (CONT'D)  
It's Buddy Bell in Detroit.

OFF TERRY, his life about to change once again, we GO TO:

**INT. JORDAN MANSION PLAYROOM - DAY**

Michael plays basketball with his sons Jeffrey and Marcus. He's on his knees as they both defend him.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
It's Bulls versus Pacers, first game back... Daddy's going for the basket... He shoots...

Michael shoots a hook shot into the small basket. The kids SHRIEK HAPPILY and chase the ball. Juanita enters.

JUANITA JORDAN  
George called from the car. He'll be in here five minutes.

Michael turns to his sons:

MICHAEL JORDAN  
Hey guys, I gotta go in a minute.

The kids stop playing. They look at Michael, worried.

MICHAEL JORDAN (CONT'D)  
... But I'll be back in a couple of  
days, all right?

The kids smile and return to playing. He watches them dribble the ball. And as we focus on the ball being shot, we GO TO:

**EXT. BACKYARD - DAY - 1976**

Young Michael shoots baskets alone. James comes out, carrying baseball gear. Michael eyes his father but keeps shooting.

JAMES JORDAN  
We got work to do. The Babe Ruth  
League's been rough, no question,  
but with some more focus on the  
fundamentals I think we can -

Young Michael shoots. *Swish.*

YOUNG MICHAEL  
I'm busy.

JAMES JORDAN  
Son, I'm sorry, but you don't have  
the height for basketball. No one  
in our family's over six feet.

YOUNG MICHAEL  
Then I'll make myself grow.

Young Michael shoots. The ball bounces to James, who grabs it.

YOUNG MICHAEL (CONT'D)  
Give me the ball.

JAMES JORDAN  
(stern)  
I'm your father. Show respect, now.

YOUNG MICHAEL  
Give me the ball. *Sir.*

JAMES JORDAN  
Michael, you can be mad at me your  
whole life, won't do you any good.

YOUNG MICHAEL  
It's not about you.

Prolonged eye-contact. And then James passes the ball back to his son. Defiantly, Young Michael shoots a basket. Defeated and resigned, James turns and leaves with the baseball gear.

Young Michael watches him go, debating whether to say anything. But then he turns back, begins dribbling towards the basket, and as he pulls up for a jumper, we GO TO:

**I/E. MICHAEL'S PRIVATE PLANE - DAY**

Michael sits alone on his private plane, lost in thought.

CAPTAIN (OVER P.A.)  
Mr. Jordan, we'll be landing in  
Indianapolis shortly.

As the plane descends, Michael looks out the window. He catches his own reflection – for a moment, it doubles, as though it's him and his father James; the way it had in the car when he was driving to baseball practice a year ago...

... But this time, Michael doesn't smile. He watches the double reflection as the plane lands. Impetuously, he punches the seat in front of him. Tears well up and pour down his face. He punches the seat over and over again.

Finally, he gathers himself and stops crying. Wipes the tears from his eyes. The plane has landed. A FLIGHT ATTENDANT enters.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT  
Mr. Jordan, we've arrived.

Michael is silent, almost disoriented.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT (CONT'D)  
Mr. Jordan... Are you ready?

Michael takes a moment. Recovers. Remembers where he is.

MICHAEL JORDAN  
... Yeah. I'm ready.

**INT. MARKET SQUARE ARENA VISITING LOCKER ROOM - DAY**

CLOSE ON: MICHAEL'S BARE TORSO, as he places the red visiting Bulls jersey, #45, on his back.

**SUPER: Market Square Arena, Indiana Pacers vs. Chicago Bulls  
– March 19, 1995**

REVEAL that Michael is one of many players and coaches in the locker room. We stay with Michael as he greets his teammates. We notice B.J. Armstrong, Toni Kukoc and Scottie Pippen.

Phil Jackson approaches Michael with a clipboard. As Phil explains a play, Michael pulls up his warm-up pants. As the team and coaches exit the locker room WE FOLLOW THEM INTO:

**INT. MARKET SQUARE ARENA TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS**

We STAY WITH MICHAEL as the Bulls head towards the arena.

**TITLE: Michael Jordan returned to number 23 on his 23rd game back in the NBA, five weeks after the end of the Major League baseball strike.**

Light from the arena entrance almost seems to glow.

**TITLE: The following season, he led the Chicago Bulls to the best record in NBA history and the first of three more consecutive titles. They won their first championship of Jordan's second NBA career on June 16, 1996; Father's Day.**

Michael and the team disappear through the entrance into:

**INT. MARKET SQUARE ARENA - CONTINUOUS**

Michael and the Bulls head to the visiting team section. They sit on the chairs in their warm-up gear.

**TITLE: Michael Jordan won the league MVP twice after his return, and the NBA Finals MVP three more times.**

The Bulls non-starters line up on the court in two lines preparing for the starters' introductions.

ANNOUNCER (OVER P.A.)

This is the starting lineup for  
today's visitors, the Chicago Bulls.

**TITLE: Terry Francona became the third base coach for the Detroit Tigers in 1996, then manager of the Philadelphia Phillies in 1997 following Jordan's call of recommendation. In 2004, Francona steered the Boston Red Sox to their first World Series win in 86 years, followed by a second title in 2007.**

ANNOUNCER (OVER P.A.) (CONT'D)

At one forward, six seven from  
Central Arkansas, number 33,  
Scottie Pippen...

Michael watches as Scottie Pippen stands up and runs between the two lines of teammates, slapping high fives with them.

**TITLE: Francona currently manages the Cleveland Indians, where he was named American League Manager of the Year in 2013. He took the Indians to the World Series in 2016.**

ANNOUNCER (OVER P.A.) (CONT'D)  
At the other forward, six eleven from  
Croatia, number seven, Toni Kukoc...

Toni Kukoc runs through the two lines of teammates.

**TITLE: Michael Jordan was inducted to the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame on September 11, 2009. He is currently the owner of the Charlotte Hornets.**

ANNOUNCER (OVER P.A.) (CONT'D)  
At center, seven feet from  
Vanderbilt, number 32, Will Perdue...

Michael watches Will Perdue runs through the two lines of teammates, slapping them high-fives.

**TITLE: Michael Jordan widely remains considered the greatest basketball player of all time.**

B.J. Armstrong runs through the lines, but we're CLOSE ON MICHAEL again, his face focused.

ANNOUNCER (OVER P.A.) (CONT'D)  
At one guard, six two from Iowa,  
number ten, B.J. Armstrong...

**TITLE: In 1994 he hit .202 with 3 home runs and 51 RBIs for the Birmingham Barons and .252 for the Scottsdale Scorpions.**

CLOSE ON MICHAEL'S FACE: He grows more determined, more concentrated. The cheers are so loud now we can barely hear:

ANNOUNCER (OVER P.A.) (CONT'D)  
At the other guard, six six from  
North Carolina, number 45, Michael  
Jordan.

Michael leaps up from the chair and into his future.

BLACK.