

EXCELSIOR!

By

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OVER BLACK

The opening chords of "A BEGINNING" by The Beatles.

Fluttering strings, soft before --

EILEEN (V.O.)
What did you want?

INT. BOARD ROOM - DAY

TITLE CARD READS: 2005

STAN LEE, 83, sits behind a table. His gray hair, at least what's left of it, is SLICKED BACK.

His half moon brown eyes are hidden behind his iconic SHADED GLASSES, tinted like the windows of a sports car.

The table sits in a beautiful board room. Wide windows look out over the shimmering New York skyline. Middle aged men and women in pressed suits fill the other seats.

The place reeks of fuck you money and six figure retainers.

Directly across from Stan is EILEEN, 40's, the arbitrator. She has long red hair and block glasses.

STAN LEE
What did I want? I wanted to write
the Great American Novel.

EILEEN
And what happened?

STAN LEE
I lost track of time.

EILEEN
Mr. Lieber, Let's talk about Kirby.

STAN LEE
My name is Stan Lee.

EILEEN
Excuse me?

STAN LEE
My name isn't Stanley Lieber. It's
Stan Lee.

EILEEN
(looking back at the
documents)
It says here --

STAN LEE
My name was legally changed last
month.

EILEEN
I apologize for the confusion Mr...
(catches herself)
Lee. So, Kirby.

STAN LEE
I haven't seen Jack Kirby in twenty
years. What would I have to say?

EILEEN
Many would argue that you knew him
better than anyone else.

STAN LEE
That's not true. He had a family.

EILEEN
His wife is the one who told me
that.

Stan gives a thin smile. *Defeated.*

STAN LEE
Where do you want me to start?

EILEEN
How about at the beginning?

STAN LEE
The beginning...

Close on Stan's eyes as they drift off, like the start of a
dream --

INT. MAGAZINE MANAGEMENT - DAY

We breeze past A PAIR OF MOVERS carrying a large couch out of
the office.

Drift into...

INT. MAGAZINE MANAGEMENT - STAN'S CORNER - DAY

A CLAUSTROPHOBIC CORNER. Two large rows of FILING CABINETS line the walls. Squeezed between them is...

STAN LEE. But, it's not the Stan Lee we know. Not yet. Right now, he's....

MARTIN GOODMAN (O.S.)
LIEBER!!! Get in here!!

STANLEY LIEBER: publisher of a dying line of comic books.

He gets up, BUMPING one of the cabinets. FOLDERS AND PAPERS fall everywhere, littering the floor.

STAN LEE
God dammit.

No time to worry about it. *Not now.* He dashes across the office, criss-crossing cubicles, a cacophony of type writer keys scoring his journey.

A SECRETARY, 50's, motions for him.

SECRETARY
Mr. Lieber, Mr. Romita wanted to talk to you.

STAN LEE
Not now.

MARTIN GOODMAN (O.S.)
Lieber!!!

It never ends.

As he continues across the office, he's joined by SOL BRODSKY, 28, pale, bulky glasses, forever the second banana AKA assistant editor.

SOL BRODSKY
We need the Frankenstein pages in half an hour if we want the book to press by next week.

STAN LEE
You'll have them in twenty-nine minutes.

MARTIN GOODMAN (O.S.)
Lieb --

INT. MAGAZINE MANAGEMENT - GOODMAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Stan rockets through the open door before MARTIN GOODMAN, 53, slight but imposing in a trim suit, can finish.

STAN LEE

Yes, sir. Did last month's numbers come in?

MARTIN GOODMAN

I just came from the golf course with Leibowitz. Have you seen this?

Goodman SLAMS a comic onto the desk. Stan peers over to see --

JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA #1. The iconic cover with the DC HEROES fighting Starro, who is, quite literally, a giant star fish.

MARTIN GOODMAN (CONT'D)

All of their heroes in one comic. He said it's selling like crazy. How did we not think of this?

STAN LEE

Interesting.

(thumbing through the comic)

So you want to steal their idea?

MARTIN GOODMAN

Exactly. Take all of our heroes and put them in one book. Captain America. Human Torch. Mariner.

STAN LEE

Did last month's numbers come in?

GOODMAN'S SECRETARY

(calling from just outside the office)

Mr. Goodman, Mr. Hart is on line one.

MARTIN GOODMAN

No.

GOODMAN'S SECRETARY

Your wife is on line two.

MARTIN GOODMAN
Absolutely not. Hold all my calls.
(finally has to answer
Stan)
They did.

STAN LEE
What?

MARTIN GOODMAN
The numbers came in.

STAN LEE
And?

MARTIN GOODMAN
Shut the door.

Uh oh. Stan does. The mood of the room changing with it.

MARTIN GOODMAN (CONT'D)
We have to make some changes. No
more artists in the office.

STAN LEE
They weren't good.

MARTIN GOODMAN
Perhaps you noticed the movers? You
thought I was selling half our
furniture for the fuck of it? To do
some redecorating? It was the worst
month in company history, Lieber.

He tosses a comic across his desk. The title reads: MILLIE
THE MODEL.

MARTIN GOODMAN (CONT'D)
What is this?

STAN LEE
Well, it's--

MARTIN GOODMAN
That was a rhetorical question.
It's quite obviously shit.

STAN LEE
You asked me to write a romance
book and--

MARTIN GOODMAN
I asked you to write a book that
would sell.

He slides the SALES NUMBERS across the desk.

MARTIN GOODMAN (CONT'D)
Would you say you were successful
in that task?

STAN LEE
Martin, if we keep changing our
plan based on last month's numbers
we're going to continue going in
circles.
(Stan realizes what
Goodman is implying)
I mean I don't... I don't have
anything to worry about, do I?

Goodman doesn't say anything. He clearly does.

MARTIN GOODMAN
I like you, Lieber. I do. You're a
hard worker. Never miss a deadline.
But... there's only so long this
can go on. There's not time for us
to keep throwing your ideas up
against the wall.
(trying to help)
How old are you now?

STAN LEE
Thirty-nine.

MARTIN GOODMAN
(older than he thought)
This is a young man's game. Listen,
just man to man... Maybe you're not
in the right business. Have you
thought about sales?

STAN LEE
No. I'm a writer.

MARTIN GOODMAN
Then you need to write something
good.

A gut punch to Stan. But he can't argue it.

MARTIN GOODMAN (CONT'D)
Just get me something good, Lieber.
I don't care how you do it. Or who
you do it with.

Close on Stan. His wheels spinning.

EXT. KIRBY RESIDENCE - EVENING

Forest Hills. A street lined with suburban houses. A power plant of nuclear families. Stan walks up to the front door of one of them. Rings the doorbell.

No answer. He knocks. Waits...

Still nothing. He looks through the window. No one.

He tries the front door. *It's open.* He steps in...

INT. KIRBY RESIDENCE - FOYER - EVENING

STAN LEE

Hello? Jack?

He hears a VOICE. It's coming from the basement. Muffled. *What the hell?*

He continues down the hall. And that's when we realize what the voice is...

YANKEES ANNOUNCER

(from a radio)

Berra steps in. Yanks still down 3-2, two outs in the 8th.

Stan smiles. Shakes his head.

He opens the basement door and stares down a looooong rickety staircase.

INT. KIRBY RESIDENCE - BASEMENT - EVENING

The Yankee game is BLARING from the radio.

YANKEES ANNOUNCER

Berra takes the 1-2 pitch.

Low, ball 2.

Stan turns a corner and wafts through the SMOKE that clouds from the cigar of --

STAN LEE

(coughing loudly)

Jack.

JACK KIRBY. 42. Stocky, squared hands and jaw. He resembles his drawings: blocky, kinetic, and alive. (He's always smoking a cigar unless otherwise noted.)

JACK KIRBY
Stanley. Let yourself in I see?

STAN LEE
(talking over the Yankees)
You can't hear anything down here.
What if there was a fire?

JACK KIRBY
Then I'd burn.

Water DRIPS onto Stan's head from the pipes above.

YANKEES ANNOUNCER
And, it's in there - strike 3.

JACK KIRBY
They're playing like shit.

STAN LEE
Did you see this?

He tosses Jack the same comic Goodman showed him: JUSTICE LEAGUE. Jack begins to thumb through it.

JACK KIRBY
All their heroes in one book.
Interesting.

STAN LEE
That's what I said. And it got me thinking...

JACK KIRBY
Stan, don't even--

STAN LEE
Just hear me out. Goodman--

JACK KIRBY
Goodman is a crook. I'm not working for him again.

STAN LEE
Martin's changed. Even Ditko would say so.

JACK KIRBY
You're referring to the same Goodman who demanded that I stay up for a week straight to finish an issue of Captain America because he was worried Hitler was going to die before the pages went to press?
(MORE)

JACK KIRBY (CONT'D)
That Martin Goodman? Who then proceeded to stiff me on the royalties?

STAN LEE
(starting to dig in)
I really need you on this, Jack.
What are you working on?

Stan goes through the pages on Jack's desk. He's drawing ads. For shaving cream. A man's smiling face - half covered in white foam. "It's Barbasol for me!"

STAN LEE (CONT'D)
Barbasol? Come on, Jack. You're better than this.

JACK KIRBY
Ads pay the bills.

STAN LEE
Do they?

JACK KIRBY
Almost. We're a little behind.

STAN LEE
We are too.
(he sighs)
Listen, Jack, I know we've had some duds--

JACK KIRBY
Some???

STAN LEE
If this isn't good, I'll never ask you to pencil another book for me. Super heroes. We can get back to our roots.

JACK KIRBY
Why me?

STAN LEE
You're the only one who can do it. No one can draw like you. I know that's true. You know that's true.

JACK KIRBY
What did Goodman say?

STAN LEE

Don't worry about Goodman. He said
he wants us to try something
different. No pressure at all.

Jack's still not breaking. Stan presses on. *No other choice.*

STAN LEE (CONT'D)

You're the man who created Captain
America... you shouldn't be stuck
in a basement drawing ads.

(takes a breath)

I'm really in a corner here, Jack.
I need your help.

Kirby takes a long puff of his cigar. The leak from the
ceiling starts again -- **Drip. Drip.** Jack bites his lip.
Thinks.

STAN LEE (CONT'D)

Come by the office tomorrow night.
6pm. We'll have the place to
ourselves. We can hash everything
out.

JACK KIRBY

I don't know, Stanley.

STAN LEE

Take the night to think about it.
If you're interested, I'll see you
at six tomorrow. If not... well,
we'll catch a Yankee game down the
road and you can keep drawing
shaving cream ads. No sweat.

(checking his watch)

Shit. I'm late.

JACK KIRBY

To what?

STAN LEE

I'll tell you about it tomorrow.

Stan gives him a smile and heads up the creaky stairs. Kirby
takes a long puff of his cigar.

Close on the shaving cream ad. The man's smiling face.

INT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - NIGHT

A gorgeous home. Summer in the suburbs. Paradise for some,
hell for those who don't have it. America in a nutshell.

JOAN LIEBER, former British hat model, always trying to make an impression. And it's not helping that her husband is--

STAN. Who's late. Very late.

JOAN LIEBER
You're late. Very late.

STAN LEE
I know. Traffic was crazy. I had--

JOAN LIEBER
Let's go! Diane and Todd have been waiting all night. Todd might have a job opportunity for you.

STAN LEE
Joan, I...

They walk through the long foyer and out to--

EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - BACKYARD - NIGHT

A sprawling back yard. String lights. Barbecue going... it's a suburban fantasy.

STAN LEE
Wow.

JOAN LIEBER
(putting on her nice voice)
Everyone, Stan made it!

STAN LEE
Sorry about that! I haven't seen a rush out of the city like that since the Dodgers left in '57!

Mild laughter. Everyone over the excuse. Back to their own conversations.

TODD, 35, clad in a loud Hawaiian shirt and pastel shorts, saunters over.

TODD
Stan, the man of mystery!

STAN LEE
This is amazing. You own this place?

TODD

Ink dried on the mortgage three
months ago. Hell of a process.

STAN LEE

(looking around)

It's beautiful.

TODD

Well, thanks, That's awfully nice
of you to say...

(leans in)

And if the S&P keeps up, we'll have
a pool installed by next summer.

He laughs. Rich guy banker asshole laugh.

TODD (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Say, what do you do again, Stan?
Joan said you might be looking for
some work?

STAN LEE

Me? No, I... I'm a writer.

TODD

You don't say! What sort of novels
do you write?

STAN LEE

Oh uh... not novels exactly. I'm
actually planning to start one soon
though. I write...

(thinking)

Various magazines.

TODD

Hit me with some titles! I fancy
myself a reader, I'm sure I've
heard of them.

STAN LEE

Well... I don't know about that.
They're mostly for children.

TOM

Like... comic books?

STAN LEE

(swallowing)

No, not comics. They're more
magazine style.

Awkward. Can kind of tell that Stan's lying.

TOM

Oh, ok. Well, that's swell. Sorry I said anything about the job, there must have been some miscommunication.

STAN LEE

No. It's fine. I... yeah... I... You might like them.

TODD

Write one I can read and I will.

(looking around)

Well... I'm going to see about these deviled eggs. Can I get you one?

STAN LEE

I'm alright, thank you.

Stan takes a long sip of wine before he's BUMPED by a passing guest. The wine SPILLS all over his shirt.

OVERLAP: A CRYING baby.

INT. LIEBER APARTMENT - NIGHT

Claustrophobic walls. You thought Stan's office was cramped? Take a look at his apartment. He and Joan getting home. A BABYSITTER holds their crying child, JOAN CELIA LEE or "JC".

JOAN LIEBER

How was she?

BABYSITTER

Great. I don't know why she's crying now... she was so good all night.

JOAN LIEBER

Must be her parents.

Nervous and awkward laughter. Money exchanged with the sitter. Joan takes the baby.

JOAN LIEBER (CONT'D)

Have a good night.

She turns to Stan. Rocking the baby. Stan begins to remove his wine-soaked shirt.

JOAN LIEBER (CONT'D)

It seemed like you and Todd really

hit it off. Did you get his card?

(starting to pick through
the mail)

Did last month's numbers come in?

STAN LEE

Not yet.

JOAN LIEBER

It's the 16th.

STAN LEE

Things have been hectic.

Flipping through BILLS on the table. Overdue. *Overdue*. And...
Overdue.

JOAN LIEBER

So your royalties won't be here
until next week? We need the money,
Stan.

STAN LEE

I know. Joan I want to--

JOAN LIEBER

We're not young anymore... how long
can we live in a one bedroom?

STAN LEE

I think I'm close to--

JOAN LIEBER

I'm afraid to invite people over.
They live in houses! You saw Diane
and Todd's place. They have
backyards, and neighbors, and
barbecues. We have... this.

Crooked pictures on the wall. Everything second-rate.

STAN LEE

I know. Joanie... we're close. I
talked to Jack today. We...

JOAN LIEBER

Write what you want to write. Do
something different. Something you
can put your real name on. What's
the worst thing that could happen?

STAN LEE

I know.

JOAN LIEBER

Why don't you write about what
people care about?

(off Stan's glance)

People. I mean... Super heroes can
be people too, right?

Close on Stan. Holy shit.

INT. STAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Stan at his desk. The blank page in front of him. The boulder
at the foot of the mountain.

Stares at the pictures of his family. His wedding photo with
Joan. His mom and dad. People.

He starts typing.

INT. MAGAZINE MANAGEMENT - OFFICE - EVENING

The office is emptying out, everyone heading home for the
night.

Stan sits in his corner. He checks the clock: 5:58pm.

The last person he wants to see is...

SOL BRODSKY

Say, want to grab a drink, Stan?

STAN LEE

No, I can't.

SOL BRODSKY

Are you waiting for someone?
Something I can help with?

STAN LEE

No. No. Just have some more work to
get done.

SOL BRODSKY

Alright, then. See you in the
morning.

Stan continues typing. Once he's sure that everyone is gone,
he reaches into his bag. Removes a single sheet of paper.

He is waiting. Anxiously.

He watches the clock. 6:03pm. No Kirby. Shit.

He begins to pack his things. Downtrodden. And then--

A puff of smoke. From around the corner -- KIRBY. Disheveled, always tripping over himself.

JACK KIRBY
Traffic was shit. I hate this fucking city.

STAN LEE
(trying to hide an enormous smile)
Jack.

INT. MAGAZINE MANAGEMENT - CONFERENCE ROOM - EVENING

A conference room that's turned into a makeshift storage unit. Boxes piled up everywhere. Random stacks of comics on the table. Safe to say it hasn't been used in a while.

STAN LEE
I read Justice League.

JACK KIRBY
Me too.

STAN LEE
I liked it.

JACK KIRBY
But...?

STAN LEE
But... something's missing. The characters don't have relationships. Well, they do... but they're all the same...they're all friends. It's all smiles and happy endings. What if it was more complicated than that? What if they felt like... a family?
(off Jack)
Why don't adults read Super-Man?

JACK KIRBY
Because he wears red underwear.

STAN LEE
No, that's not it.

JACK KIRBY

Because comics are for children.

STAN LEE

But why do they have to be?

JACK KIRBY

Because they're comics.

STAN LEE

It's because we don't care about
Clark Kent.

JACK KIRBY

You want to write the Amazing
Adventures of Clark Kent?

STAN LEE

What's your biggest problem? Right
now.

JACK KIRBY

I'm fat.

STAN LEE

Perfect. What else?

JACK KIRBY

I have to sneak my last drink of
the night in the basement so Roz
doesn't see.

STAN LEE

Good. Keep going.

JACK KIRBY

The Russians could nuke us at any
moment.

STAN LEE

Atomic fear. And...

JACK KIRBY

Stop. What about you?

Stan does stop. Looks at the stack of comics on the table.
Millie the Model. Then back at Jack.

STAN LEE

Not being the person I wanted to
be.

JACK KIRBY

So you want to make a super-hero book about someone who is fat, has problems with their wife, is afraid that the Russians are going nuke him, and has failed aspirations?

STAN LEE

Remember what I said about Justice League? What was it missing?

JACK KIRBY

A family.

STAN LEE

Bingo. Real people with real problems. What if Super-Man and Lois Lane couldn't stand each other?

(a beat)

What do you think?

JACK KIRBY

I think you're absolutely insane.

STAN LEE

Luckily, we don't have time to reconsider. You draw it, I'll add the dialogue after.

Slides a SINGLE PIECE OF PAPER across the table. Take note of this piece of paper. It's going to be very, very, important.

JACK KIRBY

That's it?

STAN LEE

It's how we're working these days. One page summaries. You do the blocking and I'll add the dialogue after.

JACK KIRBY

(skeptical, but...)

OK. Ditko works like this too?

STAN LEE

Yeah. Take a look. I even have a title.

SLAM TO:

FANTASTIC FOUR #1

MARTIN GOODMAN
What the fuck is this?

The now famous cover. A giant monster crashing through the street pavement. The Fantastic Four trapped in its clutches. None of them are wearing costumes, they're in street clothes.

Goodman flipping through the pages of the first issue. His eyebrow is raised. Clearly skeptical. Uh-oh.

MARTIN GOODMAN (CONT'D)
I asked for a super hero book.

STAN LEE
It *is* a super hero book.

MARTIN GOODMAN
Then where are the superheroes?
Where are the costumes?

STAN LEE
There aren't any costumes.

MARTIN GOODMAN
There. aren't. any. costumes...

STAN LEE
It's not about that.

MARTIN GOODMAN
And what is it about, Lieber.
Marital issues?

STAN LEE
Yes, actually.

MARTIN GOODMAN
Oh, good god.
(face in his hands)
It's entertainment, Lieber. People
read these things so they don't
have to think about the real world.
They don't want to read about their
problems, they want to forget them.

STAN LEE
We'll see.

MARTIN GOODMAN
Comics are for two types of people:
children and illiterate adults.

STAN LEE
I think you're wrong.

MARTIN GOODMAN
Excuse me?

STAN LEE
I said you're wrong.

MARTIN GOODMAN
I would advise you to start packing
your things.

STAN LEE
Martin... I don't have anything el--

MARTIN GOODMAN
When Jan and I honeymooned in
Europe, we had plans to return to
the states on a beautiful blimp. I
went to get the tickets, and they
were sold out. Jan was crushed.
Complained the whole way home. I
never thought I'd hear the end of
it. You know what the name of the
blimp was?

(off Stan's silence)
The Hindenburg.

STAN LEE
Jesus.

MARTIN GOODMAN
What I'm trying to say is -- life
isn't so bad. You never know when
it could get worse. You'll figure
it out, Lieber. It just won't be
here.

Stan gets up and slumps through the door. KIRBY is waiting
anxiously.

JACK KIRBY
What'd he think?

Stan says nothing. But that says everything.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREET - DAY

Stan and Jack pace down the street, heads hung.

The kinetic energy of the city all around them. This is one of the worst days of their life, but everything else keeps going. That's how the world works. It doesn't rain only when you need it to.

JACK KIRBY
What is Joan going to say?

STAN LEE
I don't want to go home. I don't think I can.

JACK KIRBY
I'm backed up on ads. This set me back a week. At least.

STAN LEE
Maybe this is the sign I needed. I wanted to start my novel anyway.

They stop. Look at each other, like they had the same idea at the same time.

JACK KIRBY
Should we just catch a movie?

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - DAY

Close on the poster for THE HUSTLER.

"It delves without compromise into the hungers that lie deep within us all!"

INT. MOVIE THEATER - DAY

Stan and Jack watching THE HUSTLER. Sharing a large bag of popcorn. *Escaping*. The world can go fuck itself sometimes.

FAST EDDIE
(from the theater audio)
Maybe I'm not such a high-class piece of property right now. But a 25% slice of something big is better than a 100% slice of nothing.

JACK KIRBY
(leaning over, whispering,
popcorn in his mouth)
Stan... what we made... it was
good. I know it was. I don't care what Goodman says.

Stan leans back. *Not so sure.*

JACK KIRBY (CONT'D)
We don't want to be caught up in
their business anyway. Why don't we
make our own books? Forget about
them. Publish independent.

STAN LEE
I don't know, I--

SHHHHHH!

STAN LEE (CONT'D)
(even quieter)
I'll need to pick up another gig.
Maybe an Ads job.
(thinking)
But I do have some ideas. For some
other heroes. You're right...
(smiling)
We don't need them.

The light from the screen bathing them. Everything ahead.

INT. LIEBER RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Stan trudges through the door.

JOAN LIEBER
Stanley, where in god's name have
you been? Is everything ok?

STAN LEE
Joan, I'm sorry I...

JOAN LIEBER
(waiting to hear he's been
fired)
What is it??

STAN LEE
Goodman loved it. He thinks we have
a hit.

JOAN LIEBER
Oh my god!

STAN LEE
Jack and I have been out
celebrating.

JC starts crying. Joan hugs him.

JOAN LIEBER

I can't believe it. I mean, I can.
I didn't mean it like...

STAN LEE

I know.

He brings Joan close.

STAN LEE (CONT'D)

Everything's going to be ok. I
promise.

INT. LIEBER RESIDENCE - MORNING

Joan sits at the kitchen table, spooning the baby food. Stan walks out of the bedroom...

HE'S DRESSED FOR WORK. A full suit, his hair gelled back.

Joan leans in, gives him a peck on the cheek.

JOAN LIEBER

We're so proud of you.

EXT./INT. NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY - DAY

Stan walks up the long wind of stairs leading to...

The Library. He's incredibly over dressed. Catching glances as he paces through the lobby in his suit.

He sits in the type writer room. Sets down his briefcase. Breathes in. Looks around. And from around the corner...

KIRBY. Cigar in mouth, art supplies tucked under his arm. He stands over Stan.

JACK KIRBY

You wore a suit?

Everyone in the room looking at them.

LIBRARIAN

Sir... you can't smoke in here!

INT. NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY - EVENING

Hours later. Paper spread out all over the table. Stan's notes, Jack's sketches. No sign of stopping.

STAN LEE

What about a teenager who's
bullied? Or a Jekyll and Hyde. A
blind man. What else?

JACK KIRBY

They need day jobs. A photographer.
A lawyer. A scientist.

STAN LEE

A scientist. Who can't control when
the monster takes over.

JACK KIRBY

The Hulk.

STAN LEE

The Hulk...

(as he chews it over)

I was thinking... if our heroes
have normal lives, normal jobs...
then they should live in New York.
No Metropolis, No Gotham City.

JACK KIRBY

Perfect for crossovers. The books
can intersect.

STAN LEE

Exactly. A whole universe.

(taking a breath)

How are the ads going?

JACK KIRBY

I'm going to be up late.

STAN LEE

I applied to some classified ads
myself. Just copy work. But I
really think we're...

LIBRARIAN

Gentlemen... we're closing.

They look around. *The only ones left in the library.*

JACK KIRBY

Jesus, what time is it?

Stan smiles. A glimmer in his eye. They're at the end of the
line. But, *this feels right*. Sitting in the library with
Jack. Creating. *It feels right.*

INT. LIEBER APARTMENT - NIGHT

Stan comes in from his day at "work". Joan walks to give him a kiss. The baby in a high chair.

JOAN LIEBER
You smell different.

STAN LEE
What do you mean?

JOAN LIEBER
I mean you smell different than
normal.

STAN LEE
Huh. Well, they've been moving
furniture out of the office. Had
some meetings today. I don't...

The phone rings. Joan reaches for it.

JOAN LIEBER
Hello?
(holding her hand over the
receiver)
Are you applying to jobs? This is
an ad firm?

STAN LEE
What? No... I...

He's struggling for an excuse. But...

JOAN LIEBER
If you want to poach my husband,
the offer better be good. And don't
you dare call our home after 6pm.

Stan smiles. *Phew.*

INT. KIRBY RESIDENCE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

Pipes still rattling. Jack sits at his board, working on
another ad, this one for cigarettes.

ROZ, his wife, comes into the room to kiss him goodnight. She
motions for him to come upstairs with her. He can't.

ROZ KIRBY
Don't you have time to work on
these during the day?

JACK KIRBY
Picked up an extra few gigs.

She shakes her head as she heads back up the stairs.

He reaches under his board for... *his last glass of whiskey.*

INT. PRINTING PRESS - DAY

The PRINTING MACHINES grind and whir. Copies of FANTASTIC FOUR #1 stack up. The cover glowing in brilliant technicolor.

The garage door at the rear of the warehouse opens up. Boxes of comics are stacked and loaded into the back of a TRUCK.

Dawn breaks over the sleeping streets of Manhattan. The truck sputters to life and glides away.

Everything is about to change.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREET - NEWS STAND - DAY

August 8th, 1961. Stan approaches a news stand. Various headlines read: "EAST GERMANY BEGINS WORK ON WALL".

He looks up to the NEWS STAND EMPLOYEE, 65, grumpy.

STAN LEE
Do you have a copy of the new
Magazine Management book? Fantastic
Four?

NEWS STAND EMPLOYEE
You look a little old to be reading
comics.

STAN LEE
You don't have it?

NEWS STAND EMPLOYEE
No.

STAN LEE
You get all their books.

NEWS STAND EMPLOYEE
Don't know what to tell you, buddy.
We carry Playboy. Why don't you
take a look at that? Might see some
things you've never seen before.

Stan walks away, shaking his head.

INT. LIEBER APARTMENT - NIGHT

Stan walks in. Joan holding the baby at the counter. She's on the phone, just wrapping a conversation.

JOAN LEE
How was your day?

STAN LEE
Productive. I...

The phone rings. Joan reaches for it, but Stan answers just before.

STAN LEE (CONT'D)
Hello?

MARTIN GOODMAN
Lieber. It's Goodman.

Stan looks around, in shock. He walks around the corner, the cord on the phone streeeetching.

JOAN LIEBER
Stan...?

He covers the phone, almost in a whisper.

STAN LEE
Martin... what's going on?

MARTIN GOODMAN
I want you to come in tomorrow.

STAN LEE
Did I leave something in the office?

MARTIN GOODMAN
Not quite.

STAN LEE
Our news stand didn't even have Fantastic Four.

MARTIN GOODMAN
That's probably because it sold out.

Close on Stan as the realization hits. *Holy shit.*

STAN LEE
I thought you didn't need me?

MARTIN GOODMAN
We don't need you. We need
Fantastic Four #2.

Off Stan's wide smile--

INT. BOARD ROOM - DAY

EILEEN
Did you and Mr. Kirby have direct
communication regarding the book's
success?

STAN LEE
Well, we kept on going. Issue #2
was due the next month. That's how
it works. There's never time to
dwell on the current issue.

EILEEN
And despite what you told Mr.
Kirby, you did not move to full
scripts?

STAN LEE
That's correct. But... We did all
our books that way. Jack knew that.

EILEEN
And the rest of the company?

STAN LEE
Well, to put it simply: everyone
wanted in.

INT. MAGAZINE MANAGEMENT - GOODMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Stan sits across from Martin.

MARTIN GOODMAN
Well? You want to gloat? Say I told
you so?

STAN LEE
No. Our royalties will suffice.

MARTIN GOODMAN
Let's not forget it was my idea to
put multiple heroes in one book.
(off Stan's smile)
Well, you've done it once. Now, you
need to do it ten more times.

STAN LEE
How about twice?

MARTIN GOODMAN
All or nothing, Lieber. You have carte blanche with these characters. There's only one thing I'm requiring: they need to have costumes. I'm not having heroes dressed in slacks. If you want to write about the IRS, go do it at DC.

STAN LEE
Normal people, Martin. That's the whole idea.

MARTIN GOODMAN
Normal people wear costumes, too. For God's Sake. And I lied... there is one more thing: I want a new name for this line. Something fresh. We need to distance ourselves from the shit you did before.

STAN LEE
I'll take that as a compliment.

MARTIN GOODMAN
Any ideas?

STAN LEE
(beginning to get up)
Let me think on it.

MARTIN GOODMAN
(yelling at him as he exits)
Costumes!

STAN LEE
I got it.

INT. MAGAZINE MANAGEMENT - STAN'S CORNER - DAY

Stan sits in his corner, working. STEVE DITKO. 33, skinny as a rail, bespectacled, angular, a walking isosceles triangle, approaches from behind.

STEVE DITKO
Stan. You have a minute?

STAN LEE

(startled)

Jesus, Ditko, you scared me. I
didn't know you were in the office
today. Have a seat. You want a
drink?

STEVE DITKO

I don't drink.

STAN LEE

A smoke?

STEVE DITKO

I thought you didn't smoke?

STAN LEE

I don't.

STEVE DITKO

Then why did you ask?

STAN LEE

I...

STEVE DITKO

Conformity. It's a disease.

STAN LEE

You should come into the office
more.

STEVE DITKO

Well, I'd love to, Stan. The only
thing is I hate it here. Small
talk. Cubicles. We're supposedly
making art, but we're still under
the shadow of the corporation. But
I digress.

(finally getting to his
point)

I read Fantastic Four.

STAN LEE

What'd you think?

STEVE DITKO

I loved it. It was different.
Colorful. Off-beat. Frankly, I
didn't think you had that in you.
And you know what I loved the most?
No costumes. They're humans.

STAN LEE

Well... we're adding costumes.

STEVE DITKO

I should have known.

STAN LEE

What do you want, Ditko?

STEVE DITKO

I want a superhero book too. Plain and simple. I'm through with horror comics.

STAN LEE

We all are. But Kirby's handling superheroes right now.

STEVE DITKO

I can bring something different.

STAN LEE

What are you interested in?

STEVE DITKO

Have you read any Ayn Rand?

STAN LEE

Who?

STEVE DITKO

Never mind. You and Kirby are pushing boundaries. I want to join you. I think you're on the verge of a revolution, Stan. Keep me in mind.

STAN LEE

Come into the office more and I'll think about it.

STEVE DITKO

I believe the two to be mutually exclusive.

STAN LEE

Out of sight, out of mind.

STEVE DITKO

I believe in the opposite. Alas, I don't have time for this. I'm using my lunch break to talk to you. Let me have a superhero book.

(MORE)

STEVE DITKO (CONT'D)
That's all. I'm going to smoke
three cigarettes.

He shakes his head as Ditko leaves. Stretches his legs and finds, waiting at his feet - a bag of mail. *Fan mail.*

A couple dozen letters maybe. But a start. He looks to Sol.

STAN LEE
Let's reserve a page at the end of
each book.

SOL BRODSKY
For what?

Stan's picking through the bag of letters.

STAN LEE
I want to publish some of these.

SOL BRODSKY
Are you serious?

Close on Stan as he continues reading through the letters.

INT. MAGAZINE MANAGEMENT - CONFERENCE ROOM - EVENING

Stan and Jack back at it after hours. The same conference room. They're mid-brainstorm.

STAN LEE
We'll do the Hulk next.

JACK KIRBY
You... don't want to save the Hulk?
For our own line?

STAN LEE
This is our own line. "Carte blanche". That's what he said, Jack, "carte blanche".

JACK KIRBY
Fair. I just thought... We can still do this on our own. We could have ownership.

STAN LEE
We have to be realistic. We have everything we need here. The capital, editorial backing... we just... we don't have the resources to do this on our own.

(MORE)

STAN LEE (CONT'D)
Not at this scale. I think we got a little ahead of ourselves. Don't get me wrong, it was exciting, the idea of it. It's just...

JACK KIRBY
You need the money.

STAN LEE
(kind of laughing)
Yeah. We really do.

JACK KIRBY
I get it. We do too.

STAN LEE
There's nothing wrong with a steady check.

JACK KIRBY
No, you're right. Something my parents never had.

STAN LEE
Me either. My dad was always unemployed. Bounced factory job to factory job. I slept in our living room. He and my mother fought. They all did. I'm not any different, I suppose. What I remember... is we had no view. Our window looked right into the brick wall of the building next to us. Just a red brick wall.

(remembering the brick wall)
What about you?

JACK KIRBY
Ah, we didn't have money to do much. Once my Mom told me we were going on vacation and just took me out to the fire escape. I loved it. Didn't know the difference. It felt like another world out there. First time I left New York was with the army.

(a beat)
You served, right?

STAN LEE
Uh... yeah. I did.

JACK KIRBY
What do you mean?

STAN LEE
I mean... I was a reserve. Worked
the radio. Wrote the copy for
manuals, correspondences.

JACK KIRBY
All the same.

They're caught in their own thoughts. Stan slides a piece of paper across the table.

STAN LEE
Issue three of FF. One thing - we
need to give them costumes.

JACK KIRBY
What?? The whole idea was-- I
thought we had "carte blanche?"

STAN LEE
Well... almost.

Jack's looking the issue summary over. *Again, just one page.*

JACK KIRBY
Stan... I... I'm not going to be
able to work like this on every
issue. I can't block the entire
story. I need more than a one-
pager. I need a script. Ditko might
be OK with this on horror books,
but it's a lot of work turning one
page of summary into twenty-two
pages of comic.

STAN LEE
I know. It won't be like this
forever. I just need to get ahead a
little more. Can a few issues ahead
of time.

JACK KIRBY
OK. I get it. You work too hard,
man.

STAN LEE
For not enough.

JACK KIRBY
Ain't that the truth. Hey, listen,
don't worry about it.
(MORE)

JACK KIRBY (CONT'D)

These will sell. We're in this
together. We make decisions
together. Independent or not.

Stan smiles.

STAN LEE

We're onto something, Jack.

JACK KIRBY

I think so too.

STAN LEE

Hang onto your hat, true believer.

BEGIN MONTAGE

OVER "NORWEGIAN WOOD" by The Beatles.

Kirby sketches a page of the INCREDIBLE HULK.

The same page now on Stan's desk. He types the dialogue.

And finally, the finished page. Scroll across the panel --

"The world seems to stand still, trembling on the brink of infinity, as his ear-splitting screams fill the air."

The printing presses are HUMMING. Pumping out pages.

Joan sits at the table with the baby. Alone.

Time lapse as Marvel books fly off the news stand.

Close on the technicolor pages. The art. The kinetic energy of Kirby's panels. *There's nothing else like it.*

"Written by Smilin' Stan Lee, Art by Jack "King" Kirby.

More fan letters pouring in. Hundreds now.

Jack gets another one pager from Stan. Doesn't say anything. But his eyebrow is raised.

The Hulk. Thor. Daredevil. The X-Men. Stan and Jack create more iconic, enduring characters in a shorter time than anyone before or since.

Close on the cover of Fantastic Four #3 to reveal --

The name of the publisher in the top right corner now reads:
MARVEL COMICS.

END MONTAGE

INT. MAGAZINE MANAGEMENT/MARVEL COMICS - DAY

Two construction workers are putting the finishing touches on a matching sign outside the office: **MARVEL COMICS**.

THE MARVEL LETTERS PAGE

A caricature of Stan at the top. Every Letters Page begins with Stan's Soapbox.

"Face front, True Believer...."

INT. MAGAZINE MANAGEMENT - MAILROOM - DAY

The mailroom in the depths of the building.

MAIL MAN

Here you go.

MAIL ATTENDANT

This is all for us?

MAIL MAN

Yup. And hang tight, I have three more bags.

MAIL ATTENDANT

Oh my god.

It's working...

INT. MARVEL COMICS - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Goodman stands on top of a table -- surrounded by what little staff is in the office. JACK and SOL together in the back.

MARTIN GOODMAN

Folks, we have a hit. And you all know that there's nothing I love more than a hit. Welcome to...

Marvel Comics.

He POPS a champagne bottle. It ricochets off a light, and SMASHES it. Glass rains to the floor.

MARTIN GOODMAN (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Lieber, that's coming out of your next paycheck.

Stan shakes his head. Goodman takes a deep gulp from the bottle. The office cheers.

MARTIN GOODMAN (CONT'D)
(stepping down)
Lieber. Get over here.

STAN LEE
Congratulations, Mr. Goodman.

Goodman wraps his arm around Stan, bringing him close.

MARTIN GOODMAN
I want more super-hero books. We're not doubling production, we're tripling it. Joan isn't going to see you until Christmas.

Stan smiles. A glimmer in his eye.

Jack stands in the corner. *Watching*.

INT. BOARD ROOM - DAY

Eileen stares across the table at Stan.

EILEEN
Tell us more about the "Marvel Method".

STAN LEE
I think I've been more than clear.

EILEEN
You're suing your own company for ten million dollars, Mr. Lee. It's like Colonel Sanders suing Kentucky Fried Chicken. If there's any time to be descriptive... it's now.

STAN LEE
We had too many books running for me to write every word of every script. So, just like I did for the first issue of Fantastic Four, I opted for a summary instead of a full script. I would either give this summary to the artist, or work on it with them, then they would go off and draw the book, filling in the details panel by panel. After the pages were finished, I would add the dialogue.

EILEEN

So, you weren't actually writing
the books?

STAN LEE

No. I was. But the artists did the
physical plotting. On the page.
(he looks across the
table)
To my understanding, Marvel still
uses this method.

INT. MARVEL COMICS - MARTIN'S OFFICE - DAY

MARTIN GOODMAN

How many books are you writing a
month now?

STAN LEE

Seven or eight. Depends.

MARTIN GOODMAN

Unbelievable. I've never seen so
many ad requests. I'm thinking we
can add a page or two. Maybe cut
something for an Ad. How about the
letters page?

STAN LEE

No - we need that.

MARTIN GOODMAN

Why?

STAN LEE

Because the fans feel engaged. They
feel like they're a part of
something. A community.

MARTIN GOODMAN

And are they?

STAN LEE

Martin.

MARTIN GOODMAN

(laughing)

How about a drink?

Martin fixes two glasses. Drops in ice.

MARTIN GOODMAN (CONT'D)

So what's next?

STAN LEE

I'm thinking we need a book about a younger person. A high schooler.

MARTIN GOODMAN

You know, I always thought about a super hero book about an athlete.

STAN LEE

No, not a jock. The opposite. The guy who's bullied.

Goodman goes to hand Stan the drink. Stan doesn't notice...

We follow his distracted gaze up the wall, where he's watching....

A SPIDER.

MARTIN GOODMAN

Lieber...?

Goodman picks up a pile of comics on the desk, rolls them up, and SLAPS the spider dead.

MARTIN GOODMAN (CONT'D)

Disgusting little creatures. And no one wants to read a book about a loser, Lieber.

STAN LEE

(snapping back into it)

Sorry.

MARTIN GOODMAN

Is there something you want to talk about?

STAN LEE

I'm just busy. I'm barely on top of everything. I need some help.

MARTIN GOODMAN

Then do what I do when I need help.

STAN LEE

Which is?

MARTIN GOODMAN

Hire a secretary.

INT. MARVEL COMICS - STAN'S CORNER - DAY

Stan and Sol sit across from --

FLO STEINBERG. 24. She's wearing a pink pant suit and crisp white gloves. You can tell she's always the smartest person in the room. Star and moon earrings dangling from her ears.

STAN LEE

I'm looking for someone that can take my calls, keep everyone on schedule, answer the fan mail for me. We produce our books in a very unique style. There will be some dictation work when I'm plotting.

FLO STEINBERG

That sounds like something I can help with.

STAN LEE

We live crisis to crisis around here, Ms. Steinberg. I think that's the best way to put it.

FLO STEINBERG

I live in a two bedroom apartment with three twenty-four year old girls, Mr. Lee. I'm not sure what your definition of a crisis is, but I assure you I've grown equipped with each and every variety.

STAN LEE

And what would you say sets you apart from the other girls I'll be speaking to?

FLO STEINBERG

Well, I'm observant. For example, I've been doing a lot of interviews this week, and I noticed there have always been at least three other girls waiting outside at the other ones. Here...?

They both turn. No one there.

FLO STEINBERG (CONT'D)

I don't think you have time for dozens of interviews, Mr. Lee. And, frankly, if you do, you're doing something wrong.

STAN LEE
That's presumptuous of you.

FLO STEINBERG
Well, if you hire me maybe you will
have time. Until then, your desk
will continue to look like it's
recovering from a hurricane.

We see his desk. She's not exaggerating. In fact, she's
probably underselling it.

STAN LEE
Can you start Monday?

FLO STEINBERG
I was planning on it, Mr. Lee.

Stan smiling. She's no bullshit.

STAN LEE
See you then.

Sol gets up with her.

STAN LEE (CONT'D)
Sol, can you stick around for a
second?

SOL BRODSKY
What's up?

STAN LEE
I was thinking about a new addition
to the letter pages. I want you to
draw everyone in the office. All at
the same time, working together.
Make it look crowded.

SOL BRODSKY
But none of the artists come into
the office.

STAN LEE
Kirby does. A few days a week. And
the others do... to drop off the
pages. I want our readers to
identify with us. We should be
characters too.

SOL BRODSKY
I get it. I just... it's a lie.

Stan bites his lip. *Lies are only wishes.*

STAN LEE

It's not a lie. It's a staff photo.
Think of it like that. And add a
title at the top...

(he takes a pause for
dramatic effect)

The House of Ideas.

Smiling. Proud of himself.

SOL BRODSKY

OK. By the way, we're been getting
a lot of letters about corrections.
Readers noticing typos. Or
continuity errors. I, mean, that
could be the problem with setting
everything in New York... fans
start looking for inconsistencies.

STAN LEE

No. No. This is perfect.

SOL BRODSKY

It is?

STAN LEE

Start saving those letters.

SOL BRODSKY

Why?

STAN LEE

Because I want to give them a
prize.

**"Congratulations! This envelope contains a genuine Marvel
Comics NO-PRIZE which you have just won!"**

A BRIGHTLY COLORED ENVELOPE.

INT. MARVEL COMICS - STAN'S CORNER - DAY

Stan flips it over. Then back again.

STAN LEE

Beautiful.

Stan's gaze drifts out to the bullpen as he sees...

STAN LEE (CONT'D)

Ditko!

Ditko slides through the door. He picks up the NO-PRIZE.

STEVE DITKO
The hell is this?

STAN LEE
We're sending them to fans who
notice errors in the books.

STEVE DITKO
(shaking his head)
Like moths to the flame.

STAN LEE
I've been thinking about our
conversation.

STEVE DITKO
And?

STAN LEE
And I have something for you.

THE COVER OF AMAZING FANTASY #15

SPIIDER-MAN swings across the cover, a criminal stashed under
his arm.

The issue sells like crazy. Leading to...

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #1. A crossover with the Fantastic Four.
Stan's idea is paying off...

The issues of Spider-Man pile up. #2, #3, #4....

Ditko reads over Stan's one-pager for the next issue. HE
CRUMPLES IT UP and begins drawing on his own.

Stan gets the pages back. Confused. But he looks at the
clock. *No time.* He begins adding dialogue.

INT. MARVEL COMICS - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Stan and Jack back at it. Plotting.

STAN LEE
FF #8. I've been thinking, the
Thing has enough trouble as is with
his appearance. What if he had a
love interest?

JACK KIRBY
OK.

STAN LEE

But... she's blind. She doesn't
know how deformed he is.

JACK KIRBY

I like it.

Stan takes stock. Can tell Jack is low energy. He looks tired.

STAN LEE

Is everything ok?

JACK KIRBY

I... no. I guess that's the answer:
no. Roz is pregnant.

STAN LEE

I mean, Jack, that's great.

JACK KIRBY

No, it is. It is. But... I can't
keep coming in to the office. Roz
needs me at home. Commute adds two
hours to my day. At least.

STAN LEE

No, I get it.

(thinking)

Why don't you get a place in the
city?

JACK KIRBY

Roz likes the neighborhood. She
wants to raise a family there. The
city isn't for us. It's not bad
having a backyard, you know? And
not paying rent. I'll still come in
to turn in pages. And after she
gives birth... it will be easier.

STAN LEE

Don't worry about it.

JACK KIRBY

I have been. I just... I worry
about the plotting.

STAN LEE

We have the phone.

Jack is clearly worried about this. Knows he's losing
something.

STAN LEE (CONT'D)
Hey, what'd you say? We make
decisions together.

INT. RADIO STATION - DAY

Stan sits across from two RADIO HOSTS, they all wear bulky headphones.

INTERVIEWER
Now, Stan, tell us about the
office. The Merry Marvel Bullpen.
The House of Ideas.

STAN LEE
Well, it's my pride and joy. You
wouldn't know what the hell is
going on if you just walked in. It
would be like entering the eye of
the storm. But there's a method to
the madness. You can bet on that.

INTERVIEWER
It must be wonderful. The
collaboration...

INT. KIRBY RESIDENCE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

Jack sits alone in the basement. The pipes still DRIPPING.

STAN LEE (V.O.)
There's really nothing like it.

INT. DITKO'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ditko alone at his drawing board. The apartment small. So
lonely it hurts.

INTERVIEWER
Just you, joltin' Jack, smilin'
Steve and fabulous Flo Steinberg. I
can only imagine what those
conversations are like.

INT. RADIO STATION - DAY

We're back to the radio station. Stan turns to the
interviewers. *Looks them right in the eye. Smiles.*

STAN LEE
It's really quite magical.

INT. MARVEL COMICS - STAN'S CORNER - DAY

STAN LEE
Ditko, I need you in the office.

Turn to REVEAL: Stan's talking to KIRBY and DITKO. All crammed into Stan's corner.

STEVE DITKO
To do what? We can draw anywhere.

STAN LEE
Jack needs to spend more time at home. And readers are responding to us as a group. And to be honest, Steve, it couldn't hurt creatively. Your pages have been going off plan.

STEVE DITKO
So your lie has sparked with fans and now you want to bring truth to said lie. So we can all pretend it was never a lie in the first place.
(picking up a coming and flipping to the back)
Like this?

He holds up the Marvel Letters Page. The image Stan asked Sol for is in the corner: **THE MERRY MARVEL BULLPEN!**

In the drawing, Stan looks over Jack and Steve as they work on pages, in the middle of pitching an idea. Flo and Sol carry stacks of paper. Everyone smiling. A happy office.

EXT. MADISON AVENUE - DAY

Flo, Sol, and Romita walk the street, returning from lunch.

JOHN ROMITA
How did Ditko get Spider-Man?

SOL BRODSKY
Because it's about a bullied teenager. Ditko is a loon.

FLO STEINBERG
I like Steve.

SOL BRODSKY
You like everyone.

FLO STEINBERG
I do not.

ROY THOMAS
Do you see that?

SOL BRODSKY
Who do you not like?

FLO STEINBERG
Well, it's not as easy as...

ROY THOMAS
Guys.

They stop. Look up the street -- Cars are stopped in place.
Doors open, radios on. HORNS HONK.

INT. MARVEL COMICS - STAN'S CORNER - DAY

STAN LEE
On that front, We're putting
together a record. To send to the
fans.

STEVE DITKO
A record? Of what?

STAN LEE
Of all of us. Everyone in the
office. We're going to record it
next week.

STEVE DITKO
I'm not doing it.

STAN LEE
Steve, come on. It will take an
hour.

STEVE DITKO
It's not about the time, it's about
the principle. We're not trained
circus animals... we're artists.

STAN LEE
Yes, and commercial art requires
commercial commitments. Like
connecting with fans. They love
you, Steve.

STEVE DITKO
I didn't get into this for love.
No, love's a fool's errand.

Stan rolls his eyes.

STAN LEE
Jack, can I count on you to be
there?

STEVE DITKO
Don't do it, Kirby. Have some
dignity.

Close on JACK. Looking back and forth between Stan and Ditko.
Just as he opens his mouth to say something...

Flo, Sol, and Romita rush back into the office.

SOL BRODSKY
JFK! He's been shot!

JACK KIRBY
Holy shit.

The entire office scrambles around a RADIO.

REPORTER
(from the radio)
Details are still coming in, but
the President is in critical
condition.

SOL BRODSKY
Let's go to the bar. They'll have a
TV.

Everyone starts to gather their things... except for Stan.

FLO STEINBERG
Are you coming?

STAN LEE
No... need to keep working. And
could you bring the radio in?

FLO STEINBERG
(in semi-disbelief)
OK.

The other staffers look at each other. Can't believe it. The
TAK-TAK of the type writer keys are audible as they exit.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

Stan, Sol, Roy Thomas, and Romita are all crammed into a recording booth. Mildly drunk. Making the record.

Kirby stands outside the booth, watching. Ditko isn't there.

Stan waves Jack in. Jack shakes his head.

Stan motions, *come on!*

STAN LEE

(into the mic)

Hey, out there in Marvel Land! Face front, this is Stan Lee speaking! You've probably never heard a record like this before. Anything is liable to happen! Well, well, it's Jolly Jack Kirby! Say a few words to the fans, Jack!

Jack shakes his head, stepping in.

JACK KIRBY

OK... a few words.

STAN LEE

Hey, what's all that commotion out there, Sol?

SOL BRODSKY

Why, it's shy Steve Ditko! He heard you're making a record and he's got mic fright! Whoops! There he goes!

STAN LEE

Out the window again? You know, I'm beginning to think he is Spider-Man.

They all laugh, except for Kirby who bites his lip.

MARTIN GOODMAN (V.O.)

Take a look --

INT. MARVEL COMICS - STAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Goodman open an oak door to....

A REAL OFFICE. Glass windows looking over the towering skyscrapers and city street below. Shag rug spread across the center of the room. Ties the place together.

STAN LEE

Wow.

MARTIN GOODMAN

Numbers are up, Lieber.

STAN LEE

Listen, I know there have been some preliminary talks about a Fantastic Four cartoon, which I think is great, but I was thinking why not take it further?

MARTIN GOODMAN

Further?

STAN LEE

Hollywood, Martin. We could take exactly what we're doing here and adapt it. You've seen the latest special effects... the Godzilla movies... Cleopatra.

MARTIN GOODMAN

Lieber... we've been publishing super heroes for two years and you already want out.

STAN LEE

I don't want out, I want more. We could at least take some meetings in Hollywood.

MARTIN GOODMAN

Let's focus on what we have first. See how the Fantastic Four cartoon does. Focus on what you have.

They look around. It's really fucking nice. The city shining in front of them. Yet, Stan

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Stan and Joan wander through a beautiful apartment by any standards. A nice view of the skyline. Spacious.

REALTOR

So, what do you think?

JOAN LIEBER

Oh my god! The ceilings are so high... and the counters...

But...

REALTOR
Mr. Lieber?

Stan is staring out one of the back windows--

The view is of a brick wall.

STAN LEE
No. Not this one.

JOAN LIEBER
Stan, this is perfect.

STAN LEE
Not this one.

Close on the brick wall.

INT. BOARD ROOM - DAY

Eileen stares across the table at Stan.

EILEEN
1965. Marvel has gone from a
floundering company to the best-
selling line of comics. With you as
the face.

STAN LEE
Things were good.

EILEEN
But you knew the artists were
discontent?

STAN LEE
I knew Ditko was. But I had Jack. I
knew I could count on Jack.

EILEEN
You could count on Jack.

STAN LEE
Well... I could. At that time.

EILEEN
And when did that change?

STAN LEE
I guess it started with the
reporter.

Off Stan's gaze --

INT. MARVEL COMICS - STAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Stan's in a frenzy. Reorganizing his office.

STAN LEE
I need Jack to come in this
Wednesday.

SOL BRODSKY
Jack doesn't come in on Wednesdays.

STAN LEE
Yes, thank you, that's why I'm
asking you to make a one time
exception so that he does.
Wednesdays are the same as all
other days. There's nothing special
about them.

SOL BRODSKY
It seems like you and Jack are
mostly plotting on the phone now--

STAN LEE
Sol, thank you. Thank you for your
input. Do you need me to ask Jack?
I have to get to this convention, I
don't have time to--

SOL BRODSKY
What's going on?

STAN LEE
We have a reporter coming in next
week.

(raising his voice to
reach outside)
Flo! This office is a mess!

SOL BRODSKY
A reporter?

STAN LEE
Yes, a serious reporter writing a
serious article. *About us.*

INT. GYMNASIUM - DAY

A dimly lit gymnasium. Fold-up tables are set up around the perimeter of the room. It looks like a middle school science fair, only missing the baking soda volcanoes --

It's the first official comic book convention. We're privy to this information thanks to the paper banner hanging over the door. Title hand-painted on. A far cry from San Diego.

Stan's table is mobbed. He's smiling, posing for photos.

We turn to face Ditko, who sits behind one of the tables. He does not smile. A thin line of FANS waiting to meet him.

KID

Mr. Ditko! Can I get an autograph?

Ditko signs an issue of Spider-Man without a word.

KID (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Who was your favorite artist
growing up?

STEVE DITKO

Cezanne.

KID

What book does he draw?

STEVE DITKO

Go to a museum.

KID #2

Mr. Ditko, what should I do if I
want to be an artist?

STEVE DITKO

Draw.

MAN #1

Do you have any advice for breaking
into the industry?

STEVE DITKO

Don't.

Ditko looks across the aisle - Stan posing with kids. Telling emotive stories, acting out. He knows how to put it on.

INT. MARVEL COMICS - STAN'S OFFICE - DAY

NAT FREELAND, a spectacled reporter, knocks on the door.

STAN LEE

Oh, Mr. Freeland! Please, come in.
I was just finishing up an issue.

NAT FREELAND

Oh, well, I'm happy to wait if--

STAN LEE

No, no, please.

NAT FREELAND

So, tell me a little bit about your
famed collaborations. Let's use
Spider-Man as an example.

STAN LEE

Well, the same way we do all of our
books. We call it the Marvel
Method. I write the plot, a brief
description of what's going to
happen in the book. Then the artist
draws it, breaks it down panel by
panel, and then I add all the
dialogue when I get the pages back.

NAT FREELAND

So you don't write a script?

STAN LEE

Well... I do. It's a little out of
order, but... speaking of, Ditko
was supposed to be here today,
but...

He phones Flo.

STAN LEE (CONT'D)

Is Ditko coming in?

FLO STEINBERG

I'm not sure. Let me...

Kirby appears at the door.

STAN LEE

Jack! Come in. This is Nat
Freeland. One of the most respected
reporters over at the Herald.

NAT FREELAND

Well, I wouldn't say that...

STAN LEE

Please, he's being modest. Anyway, like we had talked about, I thought it would be nice for Mr. Freeland to sit in on one of our infamous brain storming sessions.

JACK KIRBY

Well, I'm not sure that there's anything to see.

STAN LEE

(giving Jack a glare)

Oh, come on Jack. I really just want to show him what a genius you are. Mr. Freeland, you'll see that I'm hardly doing any of the work around here.

Freeland flips to a fresh page on his note pad. Motioning for them to begin.

STAN LEE (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Fantastic Four #55. I'm thinking we bring the Silver Surfer back.

JACK KIRBY

I thought that wasn't going to happen until next year?

STAN LEE

He's been somewhere out in space since he helped the FF stop Galactus from destroying earth. This is the perfect time to bring him back.

JACK KIRBY

Umm....

STAN LEE

Suppose Alicia, the Thing's blind girlfriend, is in some kind of trouble. And the Surfer comes to help her.

JACK KIRBY

I see.

Stan HOPS UP ON HIS DESK. Begins to act everything out. Freeland is eating this up. Vigorously writing.

STAN LEE

The Thing sees them together and misunderstands. So he starts a big fight with Silver Surfer. Meanwhile the Fantastic Four is in lots of trouble. Doctor Doom is back and they need the Thing's help.

JACK KIRBY

OK...

Stan starts THROWING AIR PUNCHES.

JACK KIRBY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Stanley, you know that the Surfer is exiled to earth. He hasn't been up in space. We talked about this.

STAN LEE

Oh, come on. Those are stupid rules you and I made up on the fly.

JACK KIRBY

It's in the book...

STAN LEE

So, we'll send a No-Prize to anyone who notices. Anyway, the Thing finally beats the Surfer. But then Alicia makes him realize he's made a terrible mistake. And this is what The Thing has always feared, that he would lose control and really CLOBBER somebody!

NAT FREELAND

Mr. Kirby... what do you think?

JACK KIRBY

I think it's swell. Just swell.

Freeland watches Kirby in the corner, as if he's waiting for Jack to say something more. He doesn't.

EXT. NEWS STAND - DAY

Roz and Jack wait for the news stand to open. The front panel finally slides open. Roz first in line.

ROZ KIRBY

Herald?

The KID working the stand exchanges The Herald for a nickel.

Roz finds the article. Begins to read it. Suddenly the smile on her face dissolves to a look of disgust.

ROZ KIRBY (CONT'D)
Jack, what did you say to this guy?

JACK KIRBY
Nothing, really.

ROZ KIRBY
Jack, look at this!
(reading from the article)
"Kirby, a middle-aged man with
baggy eyes and a baggy suit. He is
sucking a huge green cigar and if
you stood next to him on the subway
you would peg him for the assistant
foreman in a griddle factory."

JACK KIRBY
Let me see that.

He grabs the paper from Roz. Begins to read over the article.
Shaking his head.

INT. MARVEL COMICS - STAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Stan sits behind his desk, reviewing penciled pages for Spider-Man.

STAN LEE
What the hell is this? Sol! Get in
here.

SOL BRODSKY
(entering the room)
Yes?

STAN LEE
Did you talk to Ditko about the
latest Spider-Man?

SOL BRODSKY
No, why?

STAN LEE
He didn't follow my summary at all.
This is almost all Peter Parker.
Spider-Man is on one page.

SOL BRODSKY
Perhaps he's trying to explore the
character.

STAN LEE
There's a way to do that without
alienating. Flo, get me Ditko.

They wait.

FLO STEINBERG
He didn't answer.

STAN LEE
Can you try again?

She does.

FLO STEINBERG
Still no answer.

Sol looks around the office. Knows that Ditko is on thin ice.

INT. DITKO'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ditko holds a folded newspaper. Reading the article. His phone ringing in the background.

STEVE DITKO
"The assistant foreman in a griddle
factory."

He shakes his head as he puts the paper down, ignoring the phone.

INT. MARVEL COMICS - DAY

Flo sits at her desk, typing away. Ditko approaches from down the hall.

STEVE DITKO
Here are this month's Spider-Man
pages, Ms. Steinberg.

FLO STEINBERG
Great, thanks Steve. Anything else
you need?

STEVE DITKO
Yes, please let Stan know that this
will be my last issue on Spider-Man
and at Marvel. Consider this my two
week notice.

FLO STEINBERG
What?

STEVE DITKO
I'm leaving Marvel.

FLO STEINBERG
Hang on, hang on. Let me get Stan.

STEVE DITKO
That's quite alright. I don't need
to speak to him.

Ditko turns around. Begins to head out of the office. Flo runs into Stan's office.

Stan comes rushing out of his office.

STAN LEE
Steve! What's going on?

STEVE DITKO
I gave Ms. Steinberg all the
relevant information. I'm leaving.

The rest of the office starts to stir. Looking around.

STAN LEE
Steve, don't do this. Let's talk.

STEVE DITKO
We've done enough of that. Perhaps
you could call your journalist
friend and he could join us.

STAN LEE
Steve. I've been asking you to come
into the office for years. It's not
my fault they write about the
people who are here.

STEVE DITKO
Nothing happens in the damn office!
Kirby may not have the spine to
stand up for himself, but I do.
Don't blame us for a culture you've
created for the press and the sheep
who write into your letter pages. I
haven't followed one of your
simpleton single-page plots in
years. And you know it.

STAN LEE
And what do you want me to do about
it?

STEVE DITKO

I want you to give credit to the people that deserve the credit. Remember when I told you I didn't think you had the Fantastic Four in you? I was right... it was Kirby. You're a fool. A carnival barker disguised as an artist. To be honest, it disgusts me.

(looks around to the rest of the office)

And if all of you can't see it, then you're the true fools.

And with that, he's out the door. The rest of the office sits in stunned silence. Stan lingers in his doorway.

INT. KIRBY RESIDENCE - BASEMENT

ROZ KIRBY

(handing Jack an envelope)

You got some mail, honey.

He tries to open it gently, but his blocky hands tear some of the paper inside --

A letter. He begins to read.

STEVE DITKO (V.O.)

Jack, by the time you're reading this I will have left Marvel. Having just read the article in the Herald, I've decided that I've had enough. I believe that we're being controlled by a larger corporate entity that cares more for the bottom line than the creative forces that drive its sales. Jack, I urge you to join me. I believe we are capable of even more than we are currently being asked. When I first read Fantastic Four #1, I couldn't believe that the publishing house that once delivered half hearted horror and romance comics was on the verge of a revolution. But now I know, Jack. *It was you. It wasn't Stan. It was you.*

ROZ KIRBY

Who's it from?

JACK KIRBY
Just a fan.

INT. MARVEL COMICS - OFFICE - DAY

Stan stands on the conference room table, the rest of the staff gathered around him. Eager. Anxious.

STAN LEE
I wanted to call this meeting because of... speculation, I guess you could say. As you all know by now, we lost Ditko. I want to make it clear that he has been nothing but integral to how far Marvel has come in just a few short years. It hurts me deeply to see him go.

Everyone biting their lips. It's not quite landing.

STAN LEE (CONT'D)
More importantly, we're making books we can be proud of. Three years ago, I was at a dinner party with my wife, and when people asked what I did for a living, I had to lie. If I told them I was writing comics, they would have laughed. No one's laughing anymore.

JOHN ROMITA
Where's Jack?

STAN LEE
Jack's at home. Working. Like he does every Wednesday. He's not coming into the office as much any more. You've all noticed that. It's normal. The man is working on four books a month. He doesn't have the time to come in and make small talk. It doesn't mean he's leaving. Our relationship has never been better. I've been unfair. I'm willing to admit that. But things are going to change.

Quiet. Everyone looks around, waiting for someone to speak.

STAN LEE (CONT'D)
I promise.

INT. KIRBY RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Kirby sits on his couch, watching television. Turn to reveal...

It's a Fantastic Four cartoon.

ROZ KIRBY

I didn't know they were doing a cartoon.

JACK KIRBY

(neither did he)

Yeah.

ROZ KIRBY

Are we getting royalties from this?

JACK KIRBY

(he's not)

Yeah.

ROZ KIRBY

How much?

JACK KIRBY

I'd have to check.

Roz walks out of the room. Kirby remains on the couch. Close on the animated Fantastic Four, riding the Fantastic-Car through the sky. Smiling.

INT. BARD COLLEGE AUDITORIUM - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Stan paces back and forth backstage. He's clad in a full tux. We can hear the gentle roar of a waiting audience.

STAN LEE

No one has an iron?

FLO STEINBERG

You look great, Mr. Lee.

STAN LEE

It's wrinkled.

HOST

(on stage)

And now, we're pleased to welcome the man behind Marvel Comics... Stan Lee!

The crowd cheers. Stan walks from backstage to --

INT. BARD COLLEGE AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Over "REVOLUTION 1" by The Beatles.

The audience is a sea of tie dye, faded jeans, and headbands. It looks like Woodstock.

Stan can't believe it. His tuxedo sticks out like a sore thumb.

This is his audience.

INT. MARVEL COMICS - EVENING

Jack walks into the office. Just a few people left. Of course one of them is... SOL.

JACK KIRBY

Hey, Sol. Is Stan here?

SOL BRODSKY

Jack! Good to see you. No, he's at another publicity gig. Some college speaking event. Bard, I think.

JACK KIRBY

He's been doing a lot of those lately.

SOL BRODSKY

Yeah. Did you need something from him?

JACK KIRBY

No... just wanted to talk to him about something. It can wait.

(looking over Sol's shoulder)

What are you working on?

SOL BRODSKY

Oh, Stan's been so busy with these events. He's letting me do a little work. Just touching up some dialogue.

JACK KIRBY

But, that's the Fantastic Four.

SOL BRODSKY

Yeah, awesome - isn't it?

Kirby looks on. Wary. His art staring back as Sol adds another line of dialogue.

INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - NIGHT

Title card reads: Christmas, 1967.

The holiday party. The room is done up in lavish decorations. We're at the height of 60's fashion.

Stan is tossed around the party. Starting with --

MARTIN GOODMAN

Stan, I want you to meet Martin Ackerman. President and CEO of the Perfect Film Chemical Corporation.

MARTIN ACKERMAN. He's all of 5'8, but demands the presence of someone much larger. Stan shakes his hand. The grip is tight.

MARTIN ACKERMAN

So this is the mastermind!

STAN LEE

Oh, well I wouldn't say that. It takes an army.

MARTIN ACKERMAN

Is the artist here? What's his name? Cubit?

STAN LEE

Kirby. Jack Kirby. He's right over there.

Kirby stands in the corner with Roz.

MARTIN ACKERMAN

Looks like a real stick in the mud.

STAN LEE

Jack? No, you'll have to meet him.

Martin pulls Ackerman away to meet another group.

JOAN LIEBER

Who was that?

STAN LEE

Some corporate muckety-muck.

JOAN LIEBER

He seemed quite interested in you.

STAN LEE
I'm sure his kid reads Spider-Man.

Close on Jack and Roz.

ROZ KIRBY
This is nice, isn't it?

JACK KIRBY
I wish Ditko was here.

ROZ KIRBY
Is everything OK, with you and
Stan?

Jack doesn't say anything. Looks out to Stan in the middle of the crowd. Shaking hands. Smiling.

JACK KIRBY
You want some more wine?

Stan climbs atop a table, CLINKING his glass.

STAN LEE
Thank you all for coming. What a wonderful turn out. I just want to say... we couldn't do it without each and every one of you. When I was in the army... they had this saying.

Close on Jack as Stan talks about his time in the army.

STAN LEE (CONT'D)
They would say: every day's a holiday, every meal's a feast. Well, Martin and I just got the annual numbers in, and... This whole year has been a feast. 1967 was officially the best year in company history.

(cheers from the crowd)
We've officially passed DC as the leading comics publisher in the world.

(even louder cheers)
So, with that said... I want to make a toast. A toast to you! And a toast to Marvel!

He JUMPS UP, attempting to click his heels. A broad smile on his face before --

He comes CRASHING TO THE GROUND. His ankle TWISTS.

STAN LEE (CONT'D)
(in terrible pain)
AHHH.

SMASH TO BLACK

The opening chords of "DEAR PRUDENCE" by The Beatles.

INT./EXT. SUBWAY CAR - DAY

Jack's crammed into the subway, his stocky frame pushing against other riders.

The person next to him is reading FANTASTIC FOUR. Jack gives a slight grin, shifts his head to get a better look.

They flip to the opening page: "Written by Stan Lee"

Close on Jack. He looks out the window. The world flying by.

INT. MARVEL COMICS - STAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Jack walks up to Stan's office. Stan's on crutches.

FLO STEINBERG
Jack! Good to see you. Let me see
if Stan's free.

JACK KIRBY
No need.

Jack walks right into the office.

STAN LEE
Jack! I thought you weren't
bringing in pages until next week?

JACK KIRBY
Stanley, I want to talk to you
about that Fantastic Four cartoon
on CBS.

STAN LEE
Have you been watching? They really
did a number on Doctor Doom.

JACK KIRBY
Yes, I have been watching as a
matter of fact.

STAN LEE
Those are our characters, Jack.

JACK KIRBY
Are you getting royalties for that
cartoon? Are you getting paid?

This takes Stan aback. He gets up from his desk, walks across
the office, and SHUTS the door.

STAN LEE
No. No, I mean... not directly.

JACK KIRBY
What does that mean?

STAN LEE
The company is getting royalties.
The company is getting paid. You
and I are both employees of the
company.

JACK KIRBY
But you get an extra check for the
show.

STAN LEE
I...
(recomposes himself)
I get an extra check every month
for editing.

JACK KIRBY
And you edit the show?

STAN LEE
Well, yes. I get the scripts ahead
of time.

JACK KIRBY
Have you ever changed anything?

STAN LEE
They do a good job over there. A
real fine job.

JACK KIRBY
Why don't I get to look at the
scripts?

STAN LEE
Because you're the artist, not the
writer.

Jack's angry. Takes a moment before responding.

JACK KIRBY

I thought they were our characters.
Isn't that what you just said?

STAN LEE

Jack, come on. You know what I
meant.

JACK KIRBY

I thought I did. It's not fair,
Stan. It's not fair. You know that.

STAN LEE

Jack, I don't make these decisions.

JACK KIRBY

Oh, stop it, Stanley. We said we
were in this together. That we'd
make decisions together. So why are
you the only one benefitting? I
didn't say anything after that
article --

STAN LEE

Jack, the article was--

JACK KIRBY

That's not how we plot stories! You
hung me out to dry!

STAN LEE

But, it's how people think we do
it. It's important that we--

JACK KIRBY

Then tell the truth! Tell them we
do it on the phone. Tell them you
give me one god damn piece of paper-

STAN LEE

I did!

JACK KIRBY

Then where was that in the
article??

STAN LEE

I don't choose what they print!

JACK KIRBY

You're perpetuating a lie! It's
exactly what Ditko said--

STAN LEE
It sells!

JACK KIRBY
Who cares??

STAN LEE
You should! Because it's keeping
you employed! You want to go back
to the basement? Back to drawing
Barbasol ads? No? Then you damn
well better care about how it
sells.

JACK KIRBY
You've changed, Stanley.

STAN LEE
Stop calling me Stanley!

JACK KIRBY
It's your name.

Jack doesn't look back as he walks out the door.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

TITLE CARD READS: 1968

A beautiful restaurant in the lobby of a five star hotel.
ACKERMAN and Goodman dine together, both in loud suits.

MARTIN GOODMAN
I want you to know that this wasn't
an easy thing to do. I'm proud of
this company. I built it from the
ground up. From nothing.

MARTIN ACKERMAN
Nothing has changed on the
financials. 15 million. Cash. But,
before we finalize everything, we
have another term that we'd like to
ensure is locked in place. We need
to ensure that Stan Lee will stay
on as well.

MARTIN GOODMAN
Lieber?

MARTIN ACKERMAN
Who?

MARTIN GOODMAN
That's his name. Stanley Lieber.

MARTIN ACKERMAN
So, what will it take? I'm willing
to sweeten the contract however we
can.

MARTIN GOODMAN
Contract? No. He's never worked on
a contract. He's still freelance
technically.

MARTIN ACKERMAN
He doesn't have any ownership in
these characters?

MARTIN GOODMAN
No.

MARTIN ACKERMAN
Incredible. How is that possible?

MARTIN GOODMAN
Our writers and artists are
freelancers, Marty. That's how
we've always worked.

MARTIN ACKERMAN
I'm not concerned about the
artists, but we need Lee in place.

MARTIN GOODMAN
Lieber. His real name is Lieber.

MARTIN ACKERMAN
Frankly, I don't give a shit.

Chomps down on his cigar. Raises a flaming match up to it.

INT. LIEBER RESIDENCE - BATHROOM - DAY

Stan gazes at himself in the mirror. He's wearing a TOUPEE.
He positions it with his hands, shaping the hair with a comb.

Flashes himself a signature Stan smile --

STAN LEE
Stay tuned, True Believer.

INT. MARVEL COMICS - OFFICE - DAY

Stan walks into the office. Flo sees his hair, immediately looks HORRIFIED. She rushes him into --

INT. MARVEL COMICS - STAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

FLO STEINBERG
(almost whispering)
Are you wearing a toupee?

STAN LEE
Yes. How does it look?

FLO STEINBERG
Terrible!

STAN LEE
Really?

FLO STEINBERG
Yes!

Tries to take it off. *Oh god it looks even worse.*

FLO STEINBERG (CONT'D)
No! Don't do that.

STAN LEE
Ok. Ok.

He fixes it. Better.

STAN LEE (CONT'D)
What would I do with you, Flo?

FLO STEINBERG
Well... this is awkward now, but,
can we talk?

STAN LEE
What's up?

FLO STEINBERG
I've been trying to find the right
way to ask this but... I need a
raise. It's been two years.

STAN LEE
(sighs)
Flo, this is a tough time. I'm not
saying you don't deserve it.
(MORE)

STAN LEE (CONT'D)
You and I both know that you do.
But.. There's a lot going on right
now.

FLO STEINBERG
Remember what you told me the day
you hired me? There's always a lot
going on. I've never used that as
an excuse. All I'm asking is that
you do the same. I don't know if
you've noticed... but morale is
down. I want to be here to help.
But I can't on minimum wage
forever.

STAN LEE
Of course. We'll get it worked out,
Flo. I promise.

She nods. Unconvinced.

BEGIN MONTAGE

ALL SHOT ON HOME VIDEO - TECHNICOLOR, GRAINY SUPER 8

Over "BLACKBIRD" by The Beatles.

THE TITLE PAGE OF FANTASTIC FOUR.

It now reads "By Stan Lee and Jack Kirby"

Stan and Joan finally moving into their dream apartment. A stunning view over the city. Their daughter, JC, is now 12.

Jack working in the basement, waves to the camera. Roz's hand comes into the frame to put out his cigar.

Stan watches civil rights protests on the News.

BLACK PANTHER on the cover of Fantastic Four #55.

Sol Brodsky's wedding. Stan and Joan dancing.

JC's first day of high school. All dressed up. Stan handing her a packed lunch. Kiss on the cheek.

Jack and Roz at the Brooklyn Zoo. Jack watching the animals.

END MONTAGE

INT. MARVEL COMICS - OFFICE - DAY

TITLE CARD READS: 1970

Stan notices Jack from outside his office.

STAN LEE
Jack.... it's good to see you. It's
been... gosh, it's been too long.

JACK KIRBY
I had an appointment downtown.
Thought I'd come by to drop my
pages off.

STAN LEE
How about the rest of the
afternoon? You have plans?

JACK KIRBY
I need to head home.

STAN LEE
Come on. Let's go for a walk.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - DAY

Stan and Jack sit in a near-empty theater. EASY RIDER plays.

STAN LEE
Listen, the cartoon. I'm sorry.

JACK KIRBY
I know. I overreacted. I just..

STAN LEE
No. No, you didn't. It's unfair.
You're right. But... I've been
thinking, Jack... I'm growing tired
of the office politics. Of all the
oversight.

JACK KIRBY
You sound like Ditko.

STAN LEE
What's he up to these days?

JACK KIRBY
Oh, who knows. Probably cooped up
in his apartment plotting out a
revolution.
(a beat)
I miss him.

STAN LEE
I do too.

They sit in silence, watching more of the movie.

SHHHHHH!

STAN LEE (CONT'D)

(whispering)

I'm just saying, Jack... You were right... Everything we're done... none of it belongs to us. Now I figure, for the first time, at my age, it's time we started thinking of other things. I know some producers- trying to do a movie scenario. The only problem is, as long as I'm here I don't have the time to write them. And if I leave I don't get the income, which I need to keep living.

JACK KIRBY

You remember what you told me the day we first met?

(off Stan)

That you were getting out of the business soon. You told me you were getting ready to start your novel. If you want to write a novel or a movie, or whatever it is, so badly, then just do it. No one is stopping you.

STAN LEE

I'm going to quit. And I want you to do the same. Enough. We'll start our own imprint. We'll have total control.

JACK KIRBY

Are you serious?

STAN LEE

You were on to it from the very beginning. From the library. We should have kept Hulk for ourselves. Now's our chance.

Jack nods. Close on both their faces, the reflection of the screen coloring the room.

INT. MARVEL COMICS - GOODMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Stan sits across from Goodman, who's already smiling.

STAN LEE

Martin... we need to talk. I don't--

MARTIN GOODMAN

You're right, Lieber. We do need to talk. The time has come.

STAN LEE

It... it has? I mean, yes. How did you...

MARTIN GOODMAN

You already know? Who told you?

STAN LEE

Told me what?

MARTIN GOODMAN

About Ackerman?

STAN LEE

Who's Ackerman?

Both of them confused as hell.

MARTIN GOODMAN

Martin Ackerman. You met him at the Christmas Party. OK, so you didn't know.

STAN LEE

Know what? Martin, you introduce me to hundreds of people at those things.

MARTIN GOODMAN

Believe me, he's not someone you forget. He's purchasing the company. He will become the majority owner of Marvel Comics in two weeks.

STAN LEE

Martin... what? This is your baby.

MARTIN GOODMAN

Well, I'll be staying on as Publisher, of course. That won't change. But the deal is done. It's time, Stan. I've built this empire as high as one man can take it. Now it's time for the real business. Take a look at this...

(MORE)

MARTIN GOODMAN (CONT'D)
(tosses a packet of papers
on the desk)

We're offering you your first long-term contract with the company. You're essential to what we're doing here, Stan.

The first time he's called him Stan.

MARTIN GOODMAN (CONT'D)
Ackerman wanted to keep everyone on freelance, but I said no. Everyone can stay the way they are, but not Stan. He deserves more. He's a pillar.

STAN LEE
I... I can't believe it. Thank you, Martin.

MARTIN GOODMAN
Once this goes through, you and Joanie will never have to want for anything as long as you live. I'll get you set up with a financial advisor. You're going to need a good one. So what was it you wanted to talk about?

(looking at Stan)
You accept, I assume?

STAN LEE
(still in a daze)
Oh... yes... I... yes. It was nothing.
(then realizing)
Wait, what about Jack?

MARTIN GOODMAN
Do you think it's necessary?

STAN LEE
Yes. *Of course.* Jack's just as essential as I am.

MARTIN GOODMAN
Hmm. I don't know if Ackerman will go for it.

STAN LEE
Martin - for god's sake.

MARTIN GOODMAN
I'll work on him.

He begins to flip through the contract again...

INT. KIRBY RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Jack on the phone with Stan.

JACK KIRBY

What'd Goodman say? God, I wish I could have seen the look on his face.

STAN LEE

Jack... I'm not...
(correcting himself)
We're not leaving.

JACK KIRBY

What??

STAN LEE

You're not going to believe what happened.

Close on Jack's wide eyes.

INT. MARVEL COMICS OFFICE - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Those same eyes now watching...

The whole staff gathered. They huddle around the table, with Goodman and Ackerman at the head.

MARTIN GOODMAN

Everyone... I'd like you to meet the new owner of Marvel Comics:
Martin Ackerman.

Ackerman climbs up onto the table. Lights his cigar.

MARTIN ACKERMAN

Thank you, Martin. The pleasure is all mine.

Stan glances to the rest of the staff. Flo gives him a look: "What the hell?". Sol looks around. Suspicious.

MARTIN ACKERMAN (CONT'D)

In my mind, the highest priority here is to leave everything exactly as it is. Each and every one of you is essential. What you've created here is special.

(MORE)

MARTIN ACKERMAN (CONT'D)
I couldn't live with myself if we
changed that. And there's an easy
solution to that: we won't.

Off the staff's looks. *Phew*.

INT. MARVEL COMICS - STAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Stan begins to pour a drink. Looks at Flo, offering her one as well. She shakes her head.

STAN LEE
What do you think?

FLO STEINBERG
I mean, Stan, he's an ass hole. You
don't need me to tell you that.

STAN LEE
It sounds good doesn't it? Not
changing anything.

FLO STEINBERG
You don't actually believe that do
you? If nothing is changing, he
wouldn't be here.

STAN LEE
Do you need something?

FLO STEINBERG
Remember the conversation we had?

STAN LEE
Flo, I'm trying. The company was
just sold.

FLO STEINBERG
I mean... Stan, I'm going to leave
if I can't get a raise.

STAN LEE
Flo, please.

FLO STEINBERG
I'm almost 30, and I'm still making
the same rate as when I started.
It's not like I want to spend my
whole life answering calls. I can
edit, you know? Maybe do some
writing.

STAN LEE
Flo...

A KNOCK ON THE DOOR. They both turn to see --
ACKERMAN. He gives them a wave.

ACKERMAN
I'm not interrupting anything, am
I?

FLO STEINBERG
No, I was just leaving actually.

She blows past Ackerman, her head down.

ACKERMAN
(smiling)
Was it something I said?

STAN LEE
Just office politics. You know how
it is.

ACKERMAN
Of course.
(he shuts the door)
Were you listening in there?

STAN LEE
In there? Of course. I thought --

ACKERMAN
Forget everything I said. It was
all bull shit. None of those people
matter. It's you, Stan. It's you.

STAN LEE
Martin, I...

ACKERMAN
Don't let any of these people get
in your way. All I'm going to say
is that a lot is going to happen
over the next few years. But there
will be two constants. You and me.
I know you haven't been treated the
way you deserve. But you will be.
You remind me of myself, Stan. And
I like people that remind me of
myself.

Stan stares back. Blank faced. *He's scared.*

INT. KIRBY RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The phone RINGS. Jack continues drawing. The phone RINGS again.

JACK KIRBY
Roz?

No answer. RING. Jack gets up, hurries up the stairs -- TRIPS. Catches himself. RING. RING. Jack rushes into the kitchen. Reaches for the phone. RI--

JACK KIRBY (CONT'D)
Hello?

CARMINE INFANTINO
(through the phone)
Mr. Kirby? Jack? This is Carmine Infantino. From over at DC comics.

JACK KIRBY
(catching his breath)
Oh... hello.

CARMINE INFANTINO
I was hoping you might have a moment to talk. Is this a good time?
(a beat)
Jack?

JACK KIRBY
Yes. Yes it is.

He shuts the door with a slow THUD.

INT. MARVEL COMICS - GOODMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

MARTIN GOODMAN
We're giving Kirby two years.

STAN LEE
It needs to be longer - two years... that's not a long time.

MARTIN GOODMAN
Ackerman said two years, that's what we're doing.

STAN LEE

Ackerman said nothing around here was going to change. What happened to that?

MARTIN GOODMAN

You've all worked as free lancers for a decade. Now we're giving you contracts. That's changing things. Kirby should be thankful.

STAN LEE

This might as well be a free lance contract. This is an insult to him. We could lose him, Martin.

MARTIN GOODMAN

He's lucky to have us. Not the other way around. Remember that.

STAN LEE

He said nothing was going to change.

MARTIN GOODMAN

How old are you, Lieber? Did you believe Daddy when he said that he loved Mommy? We're doing what's best for the company, not what's best for Jack Kirby.

STAN LEE

There's one more thing.

MARTIN GOODMAN

What now?

STAN LEE

My secretary. Florence. I want to give her a raise.

MARTIN GOODMAN

You have to be kidding me. How many raises are you going to ask me for? It's hard to find quality artists, but we can find a quality secretary on the street anytime.

STAN LEE

She's been here since the beginning.

MARTIN GOODMAN

So have we! You don't see me coming into your office begging for a raise. Who do you want to keep? Kirby or her?

STAN LEE

Martin, don't make me do this.

MARTIN GOODMAN

Welcome to the world of business Stan, it's not all rainbows and butterflies like it is down in comics. There's a bottom line. Why do you think The Beatles are breaking up?

STAN LEE

The Beatles aren't breaking up.

MARTIN GOODMAN

Tell your secretary to stop getting her panties in a bunch. If she wants a better rate she can go get a degree like the rest of us.

STAN LEE

You don't have a degree.

MARTIN GOODMAN

You know what I mean. Now...

ACKERMAN knocks on the door.

MARTIN ACKERMAN

I'm not interrupting anything, am I? Stan, how's that contract looking to you?

STAN LEE

Very generous, Mr. Ackerman, but Martin and I were just discussing... we'd like to go longer for Kirby. He...

MARTIN GOODMAN

Not we.

STAN LEE

He deserves four years. Jack's been here since the beginning.

MARTIN ACKERMAN

Fair enough. Fair enough. But if he deserves to be here so badly...
then where the hell is he? Why are you the one telling me this?

STAN LEE

Listen, Jack... he's not keen on the business side of things. He doesn't like being in the office. He... he's an artist.

MARTIN ACKERMAN

If Jack Kirby wants to be here, he can come into this office, look me in the eye and tell me why he deserves four years.

STAN LEE

Done.

OVER BLACK

The opening lines of "TWO OF US" by The Beatles --

JOHN LENNON (V.O.)

I Dig a Pygmy by Charles Hawtrey and the Deaf-Aids! Phase One in which Doris gets her oats.

INT. MARVEL COMICS - DAY

Close on a SPINNING RECORD. "TWO OF US" continues.

Colorful slacks, bell bottoms, go-go skirts, and head bands, It's the 70's.

Sol sits on a table, holding up the record sleeve of LET IT BE for Romita. The famous cover.

SOL BRODSKY

Just released this morning. I lined up at 4am to get it.

JOHN ROMITA

You're insane.

SOL BRODSKY

Are you kidding me? This is going to be worth a mint. First pressing!

JOHN ROMITA

I heard this is the last album.

SOL BRODSKY

No way.

JOHN ROMITA

They ended Abbey Road with a song
called The End.

Stan walks in.

SOL BRODSKY

Stan, new Beatles!

He blows by them. Approaches his office, in a rush--

STAN LEE

Where's Kirby?

FLO STEINBERG

He's not here yet.

STAN LEE

For the love of--

But from around the corner... KIRBY.

INT. MARVEL COMICS - STAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Jack steps into Stan's office. Calm and reserved.

He's not smoking a cigar.

STAN LEE

Jack. You're late. Let's get up to
Ackerman. Did you get the contract?

JACK KIRBY

Yes, I did.

STAN LEE

OK, good. Four years. Not bad,
right? I think --

JACK KIRBY

I'm not signing it, Stanley.

STAN LEE

Jack... we can work this out.

JACK KIRBY

Stan... you're not yourself
anymore. You don't write scripts,
for god's sake, you don't even
write much dialogue anymore.

(MORE)

JACK KIRBY (CONT'D)
I mean for God's sake, Sol is
working on some Fantastic Four.

STAN LEE
Where are you going? Freelance?
Some big ad company? I mean if....

JACK KIRBY
I'm going to DC.

Stan's face absolutely drops. Like a dagger in the heart.

STAN LEE
Jack... No...

JACK KIRBY
What do you want me to do? They're
offering me a great rate. Full
creative control. Something you
know well.

STAN LEE
Jack, we can work this out.

JACK KIRBY
It's been worked out. You're a
people pleaser. You tell whoever is
in front of you whatever they want
to hear. You were supposed to quit!
And your offer was shit.

STAN LEE
It wasn't my offer! God dammit!

He sweeps his hand across his desk, sending the contents
CRASHING to the floor.

JACK KIRBY
I'm sorry, Stanley. I wish it
wasn't like this. But you can't
blame me.

STAN LEE
Jack, give me a day. We'll get you
a better offer. It's ok. We can
break the DC contract. Nothing is
binding. We...

JACK KIRBY
You don't get it. I want to go to
DC. I signed the contract this
morning. It's done. We're moving to
California.

Stan in complete shock.

JACK KIRBY (CONT'D)
It's not about the contract. It's not about the money. It's about you. We didn't get into this for the promotional tours or the money or... we did it because we wanted to. And we had a good run. But nothing lasts forever.

STAN LEE
Jack, don't do this. You know, when I was in the army, I--

JACK KIRBY
You weren't in the army! Stop saying that. OK? Stop! I was in the army. I stormed the beaches at Normandy. You wrote manuals. It's not the same. You didn't see the same things I did.

Stan, for once in his life, is speechless. Jack gets up. Begins to walk out.

JACK KIRBY (CONT'D)
Good luck, Stanley. I hope you find peace. Write your novel.

ACKERMAN comes walking down the hall.

MARTIN ACKERMAN
Ah, the great Jack Kirby! We had a meeting scheduled in my office --

JACK KIRBY
Hello, Mr. Ackerman. Thank you for the opportunity, but I have to be going. Stanley can fill you in.

Jack walks away. As he nears the door, he takes one last look back at the bullpen. And with that... he's gone.

Stan tries to stay calm. Still in shock. Takes a deep breath. Looks to Flo, who stands in the door with Ackerman.

FLO STEINBERG
Is everything OK?

STAN LEE
Everything is fine. Thank you, Flo.

She looks at Stan's empty desk, everything that used to be on it SCATTERED across the floor. The guitar solo on LET IT BE blasts.

INT. MARVEL COMICS - OFFICE - DAY

TITLE CARD READS: 1972

Over "FEARLESS" by Pink Floyd

Close on a CHUNK OF CIGAR. It's fixed to plaque that reads: **KIRBY WAS HERE.**

We sweep across the Marvel office/bullpen. Almost every desk is occupied by a new face.

AGNES (O.S.)

Mr. Lee?

INT. MARVEL COMICS OFFICE - STAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Stan looks up from his desk. His toupee looks worse than ever. AGNES, his new secretary, 60's, is in the doorway.

STAN LEE

Yes, Agnes?

AGNES

Sol would like to see you.

STAN LEE

Great, let him in.

Sol paces into the room, holding a comic.

SOL BRODSKY

Did you see this?

He slaps a copy of MISTER MIRACLE #6 on Stan's desk. Clearly Kirby's work. A comic from his line at DC.

A character named FUNKY FLASHMAN adorns the cover. It looks exactly like Stan. A mockery.

His dialogue reads: *"All the great words and quotations and cliches ever written are at my beck and call! Even if I say them sideways, the little people will listen! - in wonder! In awe!"*

He has a slave: *"Master funky! My leader!"*

SOL BRODSKY (CONT'D)
That's me.

STAN LEE
It appears so.

MARTIN GOODMAN (O.S.)
Can we talk?

Stan looks up. Goodman stands in his doorway.

STAN LEE
It's really not a good time.

MARTIN GOODMAN
Then I'll make this very simple. We
got last month's numbers -- Horror
is back in, Stan. Cancel a
superhero book or two.

Stan can't believe it. It's 1961 all over again.

Two GIANT POSTERS behind him: The Fantastic Four by Jack Kirby and Spider-Man by Steve Ditko. They tower over him.

INT. LIEBER RESIDENCE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Stan stares into the mirror. He holds the copy of Mister Miracle. Funky Flashman staring right back at him.

He covers his face in shaving cream. Removes a razor and SHAVES OFF all of his thick beard. The sink **clogged** with facial hair.

JOAN (O.S.)
Stan! Phone for you.

STAN LEE
(picking up the phone in
his room)
Hello?

MARTIN ACKERMAN
Stan. It's Marty Ackerman. Do you
have any time for a drink later
this afternoon?

INT. FOUR SEASONS - DAY

Stan enters to find Ackerman already seated at a table in the restaurant. He cradles a glass of whiskey, and nods to another full glass on the opposite side of the table.

MARTIN ACKERMAN

I ordered for both of us. I hope
you don't mind.

STAN LEE

Of course not.

(coughing as he takes a
sip)

That's strong.

MARTIN ACKERMAN

I don't drink anything unless it's
at least a decade old. Now, as I'm
sure you've guessed, this was not
strictly a social drink. I'm sorry
to drag you away on a Saturday, I'm
sure you're busy on the latest
scripts.

STAN LEE

Well, I'm not writing as much now.

MARTIN ACKERMAN

Modest as always. One of your
strongest qualities.

(off Stan)

You know that when we bought this
company our number one priority was
that you were locked up long term.

STAN LEE

Yes, and I can't thank you enough.

MARTIN ACKERMAN

And, as of today, I'm removing you
from that position.

(off Stan's puzzled look)

Congratulations. You're the new
publisher at Marvel Comics.

STAN LEE

What? What about Goodman?

MARTIN ACKERMAN

Goodman wants his son to take over
as publisher. There's not a rat's
chance in hell that I'd let his son
run this company. Nepotism can get
you many things, but it won't get
you past Marty Ackerman.

STAN LEE

I can't... thank you enough, Mr.
Ackerman.

MARTIN ACKERMAN

Goodman could have rewarded you at any time. He didn't. Now, it's your time to be in charge.

Off Stan. It feels dirty. But Ackerman is right.

MARTIN ACKERMAN (CONT'D)

You worry about the comics, I'll worry about Goodman. Martin won't be a problem. Now, time for cigars.

STAN LEE

I don't smoke.

As Ackerman sparks his lighter....

MARTIN ACKERMAN

You do now.

INT. MARVEL COMICS - ACKERMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Martin knock on Ackerman's door. Enters.

MARTIN ACKERMAN

Good morning, Martin. Please, have a seat. How are things?

MARTIN GOODMAN

You wanted to talk?

MARTIN ACKERMAN

Yes. Let's. I'll make this very simple for you. Do you want to be fired or do you want to quit?

INT. MARVEL COMICS - MARTIN GOODMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

OVER "YOU NEVER GIVE ME YOUR MONEY" by The Beatles.

The opening piano chords guiding us as Goodman fumes out of his office, through the cubicles, and all the way down the hall to --

INT. MARVEL COMICS - STAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

PAUL McCARTNEY

You never give me your money... you only give me your funny paper...

He paces through the door. Stan's on the phone. He gives Martin a wave as he walks in. "One minute".

STAN LEE
(into the phone)
No, no, let's save that for next
month's issue. I--

Martin WIPES EVERYTHING off Stan's desk with one fell SWOOP. The phone disconnects. The typewriter CRASHING to the floor.

STAN LEE (CONT'D)
What the hell???

MARTIN GOODMAN
You fucking rat!! You fucking back
stabbing piece of shit!

STAN LEE
Martin!

MARTIN GOODMAN
I dropped out of 5th grade. I
worked construction every day for
ten years. I built a publishing
empire from the ground up. I didn't
do that to be put out by a
backstabbing copy rat like
yourself, Lieber. I built --

STAN LEE
No Martin, you didn't. I built
this. On a freelance contract. And
you did nothing to help me.

MARTIN GOODMAN
I hired you! I paid you a salary!

STAN LEE
I could have been making ten times
that salary.

MARTIN GOODMAN
Then you should have left! You
should have gotten up and walked
out! You should have gone
independent. Don't blame me for a
business decision. It's my fucking
job.

STAN LEE
How long did you think you could
keep taking advantage of us?

MARTIN GOODMAN

Us?? Kirby is gone. Ditko is gone.
You're a glorified ad man! You
don't even write anymore.

STAN LEE

I manage the writers. Just like you
manage the company.

MARTIN GOODMAN

They wanted to get rid of you
Lieber. Said your salary was too
high, that anyone could do your
job. I fought for you.

STAN LEE

No, Martin. You didn't. After all
these years you think you can
blatantly lie to my face. I know
you. I'm not the child you hired
thirty years ago. I grew up,
Martin. You didn't. *Did you believe*
Daddy when he said he loved Mommy?

Martin bites his lip. His own words.

MARTIN GOODMAN

Goodbye, Lieber. Congratulations.

Martin walks out. SLAMMING the door behind him.

Stan is alone in the office. He places his hand on the cold
window. Fixes himself a lone drink. He sits down on the
couch. Takes a long drink as snow falls outside.

INT. DC COMICS OFFICE - DAY

The sun soaked backlots of Burbank, and the office of DC
Comics.

Jack sits in CARMINE INFANTINO's office - Editor in Chief of
DC Comics.

CARMINE INFANTINO

You know it's snowing in New York
right now? You can't miss that.

JACK KIRBY

Well, I wish we could get Yankee
games out here.

CARMINE INFANTINO

We have the Dodgers!

JACK KIRBY

I hate the Dodgers.

CARMINE INFANTINO

Well, listen Jack. We love what
you've been doing. Newest Mister
Miracle was a hoot.

JACK KIRBY

What is it?

CARMINE INFANTINO

We think you need a writer.

Like a dagger through Jack's chest. He takes a deep breath.

INT. MARVEL COMICS - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

TITLE CARD READS: 1980

Stan is in the midst of holding a staff meeting. His toupee is GONE, his remaining hair slicked back, his shirt more colorful, his iconic glasses even darker.

He's in charge.

STAN LEE

This morning I received a call from a top dog at Hasbro, yelling at me because we put webs in Spider-Man's arm pits. All character changes need to be run by me. I'm tired of opening up new issues and seeing different costumes. Spider-Man has webs under his arms again, Captain America has wing tips on his mask. We have multi-million toy deals that are being affected by this.

Reveal the staff. We hardly recognize anyone.

STAN LEE (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Is that understood?

(a chorus of yes's and
head nods)

Good. If you have any pressing
questions, Roy can answer them.
I'll see you all next week when I
return from my trip.

A FULL PAGE AD IN VARIETY. A HEAD SHOT OF SPIDER-MAN

"Spider-man is but one of over 100 exciting Marvel Characters ready to star in your next motion picture. All Marvel Characters have their own personal story and the potential for stardom."

EXT. LAX TARMAC - DAY

Stan and Joan get off the plane. The sun shines brightly in Stan's eyes. He raises his arm to shield the light.

SQUINTING.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

THE HULK rises from the water. SCREAMING.

LOU FERRIGNO
AHHHHH.

The HULK (LOU FERRIGNO) wrestles with a BROWN BEAR in a creek. He fights the bear off, wrestling it underwater.

DIRECTOR
CUT! Cut.

We're on the SET of the INCREDIBLE HULK TV show. Stan sits in video village with the DIRECTOR, a total douche.

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)
Alright, great work everyone. Kyle, get out of that costume, let's prepare the bear doll.

BEAR/KYLE
OK, sounds good.

DIRECTOR
Five minute break everyone. What do you think, Mr. Lee?

STAN LEE
It's fantastic. Just like the books.

DIRECTOR
Lou! Get over here!

Ferrigno walks over, still in his HULK makeup.

DIRECTOR (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Do you know who this is?

LOU FERRIGNO
No.

DIRECTOR
Of course you don't. It's Stan Lee.
He created the Hulk. You wouldn't
be here if it weren't for him.

The BEAR walks over. His mask is now off to reveal KYLE, a
nerdy stunt man.

BEAR/KYLE
I'm actually a huge fan, Mr. Lee.
It's an honor to meet you.

STAN LEE
Thanks.

INT. KIRBY RESIDENCE - CALIFORNIA - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Kirby sits across from WILL EISNER, a legendary cartoonist,
who is conducting an interview.

WILL EISNER
Thank you for sitting down with me,
Jack.

JACK KIRBY
Of course, Mr. Eisner. You know I'm
a fan of your work.

WILL EISNER
And I yours. I think it's important
that the world knows your side of
the story. Let's start with 1961.

JACK KIRBY
Well, they were going to close
everything up. Things were in a bad
way. I remember telling Stanley I
had some ideas... So we began to
build a new line of superheroes.

WILL EISNER
And how did you and Lee
collaborate?

JACK KIRBY
Stan Lee was not writing. I was
doing the writing.
(MORE)

JACK KIRBY (CONT'D)

Stan added dialogue... to a story I had already turned in. Most of the writing at Marvel is done by the artist of that script. That's the way it's always been. "The Marvel Method".

WILL EISNER

And the Fantastic Four?

JACK KIRBY

I'm not saying that Stan had nothing to do with it. Of course he did. We talked things out. As things went on, I began to work at home and I no longer came into the office. I developed all the stuff at home and just sent it in.

WILL EISNER

Do you keep up with Marvel?

JACK KIRBY

Here and there. Have you seen this one?

He holds up an issue of Spider-Man.

Flips to the middle and displays an AD: Stan standing with his arms crossed. "When you create super-heroes, people expect you to look like one. I wear Hathaway shirts!"

JACK KIRBY (CONT'D)

That's Stanley for you.

INT./EXT. STAN LEE'S CAR - LOS ANGELES - DAY

Stan cruises down Sunset Blvd. in his convertible. Bright red, reflecting the low Los Angeles sunset. He's wearing a Hathaway shirt.

INT. MARVEL PRODUCTION OFFICES - DAY

TOM SELLECK sits across from Stan.

STAN LEE

So, Mr. Selleck, what do you know about Doctor Strange?

Selleck shrugs his shoulders.

TOM SELLECK

You want to go grab a drink? I know some girls we could call.

STAN LEE

That sounds wonderful, Mr. Selleck. I'm married though.

TOM SELLECK

How long have you been in Hollywood, Stan?

STAN LEE

A few months now.

TOM SELLECK

Yeah. You'll get adjusted. Send me some books and I'll have my intern read them.

He gets up to leave. Agnes comes into the office.

STAN LEE

Agnes, can you make sure we get some Doctor Strange comics to Mr. Selleck? And we need to get James Cameron on the phone. The script he turned in is about a man who turns into a giant spider, not Spider-Man.

AGNES

Of course, Mr. Lee. Mail.

She dumps a pile of magazines and bills on Stan's desk. The cover of COMICS JOURNAL catches his eye.

"JACK KIRBY TELLS ALL." Stan does a double take. Immediately flips to the center of the magazine. A full page photograph of Jack. He begins to read the interview.

INT. NEW YORK STOCK EXCHANGE - FLOOR - DAY

TITLE CARD READS: 1987

Stan and Ackerman walk through a THRON OF REPORTERS.

REPORTER

Mr. Lee, how does it feel to finally take Marvel Comics public?

STAN LEE

Fantastic. Just swell.

They walk up the stairs, towards the bell. There's a COSTUMED SPIDER-MAN dancing around them.

MARTIN ACKERMAN
Isn't he great? Hired him out of
the paper.

They both turn as the Spider-Man actor does a strange combination of interpretive dance and web-shooting.

MARTIN ACKERMAN (CONT'D)
Come on, Stan, smile. You're rich.

Stan and Ackerman are joined by Spider-Man. They all smile for the BRIGHT FLASH of the cameras.

INT. RADIO STATION - DAY

Two radio hosts, WARREN REECE and MAX SCHMID sit in studio. Kirby is on the phone.

WARREN REECE
Welcome back to Earth-watch on WBAI! We are honored to be joined by the legendary Jack Kirby on his 70th birthday. So, Jack... take us back to those days of the Merry Marvel Bullpen. What was it like?

JACK KIRBY
Well, Warren, I didn't consider it merry. In those days, it was a professional type thing, you turned in your ideas and you got your wages. It's nothing that should be glamorized. I would be in the office maybe once a week.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREET - DAY

Stan is driving a rental car back from the stock exchange. He listens to the radio. Tunes it and hears --

Jack's voice.

INT. RADIO STATION - DAY

WARREN REECE

But, Jack, what about those legendary story conferences with you and Stan, acting the stories out? When it was just you and Stan and fabulous Flo Steinberg livening up the office?

JACK KIRBY

I... uh... I'd have to disagree with that. It wasn't like that at all. It may have been like that after I went home.

The phone lines are ringing with callers. An INTERN picks up one of the phones.

INTERN

WBAI, what's your topic?
(he listens)
Wait, what?

He mutes the phone and turns to the producer. Warren taps his ear. Listening in. Can't believe what he's about to say.

WARREN REECE

Now what a surprise... we have a special surprise guest for tonight's program. It's Stan Lee!

A crackle. An expectant silence before Stan's voice comes alive on the other line.

STAN LEE

I just... I want to wish Jack a happy birthday. This is a hell of a coincidence. I'm in New York and I was tuning in the radio. And there I hear him talking about Marvel and figured I might as well call and say happy returns, Jack.

JACK KIRBY

Well, Stanley. I want to thank you for calling. And I hope you're in good health.

STAN LEE

And you too, Jack. Nobody could ever draw a hero like you could.

(MORE)

STAN LEE (CONT'D)

One of the marks of a truly great artists is having a style, and that's certainly true of you Jack.

JACK KIRBY

I'm certain that whatever we did together, we got sales for Marvel.

STAN LEE

Well, I think it was more than that. We certainly got the sales, but whatever we did together, and no matter who did what... and I guess that will be something argued forever... it was more than the sum of its parts. Like some sort of magic.

JACK KIRBY

Well, I was never sorry for it, Stanley.

WARREN REECE

I would also like to put to you gentlemen, that what made your work so tremendous... it doesn't matter who did what. Although it would be interesting to know if Galactus' exit speech in FF #50 was an example of Jack's dialogue or Stan's, but...

STAN LEE

Well, I'll say this: every word of dialogue in those scripts was mine.

(awkward laughter from the hosts)

Every story.

WARREN REECE

Now, I don't want to get into controversy, but I want to stress that the whole equals more than the sum of its parts that's how groups like the Beatles...

JACK KIRBY

I can tell you that I wrote a few lines myself above every panel.

STAN LEE

They weren't printed in the book!

WARREN REECE

Alright, look...

STAN LEE

Jack isn't wrong in his own rights,
but....

JACK KIRBY

I wasn't allowed to write!

STAN LEE

Did you ever read one of the
stories after they were finished? I
don't think you did! You were busy
working on the next issue.

JACK KIRBY

You used my own dialogue. Whatever
was written in them was
insignificant.

WARREN REECE

Well, ego is the fuel of
creativity, and uh... well, I'm
very proud to have had both Jack
Kirby and Stan Lee live on earth-
watch. And as we close this
program, I'd like each of you to
make a concluding statement.

STAN LEE

Well, I just want to say that Jack
has, I think, made a tremendous
mark on American culture, if not
world culture. He should be
incredibly proud. I want to wish
him all the best, him and his wife,
Roz, and I hope ten years from now
I'll be in some town listening to a
tribute to his 80th birthday.
Jack... I love ya.

JACK KIRBY

Well, same here Stan. But... uh....
uh... yeah. Thank you very much
Stan.

(a moment of silence)

Warren? Are you there?

WARREN REECE

Yes, I am. We're all here.

JACK KIRBY

Listen... uh... you can understand now how things really were. And of course, I want to thank you for inviting me on your show.

INT. MARVEL COMICS - ACKERMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Stan sits across from Ackerman. There are stacks of comics on his desk. Stan flips through them.

They're all copies of X-Men: Apocalypse. The same issue, but with ten different covers.

ACKERMAN

Everyone's talking about you and Kirby.

STAN LEE

That was a nice surprise.

ACKERMAN

He's a loon. Clearly jealous of the credit and success you're receiving.

STAN LEE

I understand why he's upset. I just wish --

ACKERMAN

Wish he would shut his mouth.

STAN LEE

No. Jack's a friend.

ACKERMAN

Tell me about Howard the Duck. The dailies look amazing.

STAN LEE

It's... I was hoping we'd find another property to develop first. But, I think it's coming together.

ACKERMAN

It's going to be huge, Stan. Absolutely huge.

Stan flips through the X-Men comic. It's like he doesn't recognize it.

STAN LEE

I think we need to cut back on all these variant covers.

ACKERMAN

Are you kidding me? These things are a cash cow.

STAN LEE

It doesn't seem... Dishonest?

ACKERMAN

Dishonest? The market favors the collectors now. They want a copy of everything, so why not multiply everything by three or four?

STAN LEE

I just worry that it's a bubble. These things aren't going to be worth anything if there are millions of them.

ACKERMAN

We'll let time decide that.

STAN LEE

The issues from the 60's are valuable only because there's a limited quantity. You know... The thing that set Marvel apart from the beginning was that we did things differently. The stories were original. We didn't create this just so we could print ten different covers for every issue.

ACKERMAN

I have a news flash for you, Stan. We're not in the 60's anymore.

(Stan doesn't respond)

Are you ready for 60 minutes? It's going to be pretty exciting to meet Larry King, huh?

STAN LEE

Yes. I'm actually taking a quick trip down to Florida first.

ACKERMAN

Florida? What's in Florida?

STAN LEE

An old friend.

INT. MARTIN GOODMAN'S CONDO - FLORIDA - DAY

Floral wallpaper. A stale breeze. Florida.

Stan enters the condo. Martin sits out on the deck.

STAN LEE

Isn't Florida supposed to be warm?

MARTIN GOODMAN

You've grown weak in the California sun. 58 degrees in January and you're complaining. Take a seat.

STAN LEE

It's good to see you, Martin.

MARTIN GOODMAN

Let's stop with the pleasantries. I didn't ask you to come down so you could blow smoke up my ass.

STAN LEE

Then why did you call me?

MARTIN GOODMAN

Because you don't always get to choose when you say goodbye. So I thought I would.

STAN LEE

Martin.

MARTIN GOODMAN

You know I went to the news stand the other day. Just to see what was selling. It's amazing how things have changed. Ten covers for every issue. Holograms. I see the company went public. That must make you and your wallet happy.

STAN LEE

It's been good, Martin. We're good. But...

MARTIN GOODMAN

But?

STAN LEE

I'm worried that we're on the verge of trouble. It feels like we're standing on the cliff. This bubble is going to burst.

MARTIN GOODMAN
And Hollywood?

STAN LEE
Hollywood is... it's not coming
together exactly as I hoped. But --

MARTIN GOODMAN
Making movies isn't easy, Stan. You
always acted like you could just
snap your fingers and turn these
things into successful films. If it
was that simple, everyone would be
doing it.

STAN LEE
We'll figure it out. It's just
taking longer than I hoped. More
money too.

MARTIN GOODMAN
How's your writing? What have you
been working on?

STAN LEE
This and that. This and that. I'm
going to start my novel soon.

MARTIN GOODMAN
Ah, yes.

STAN LEE
I'm sorry, Martin. For how it all
turned out.

MARTIN GOODMAN
I don't blame you. I'm sure I would
have done the same had I been in
your position.

STAN LEE
I didn't mean to... It wasn't my
idea, you know. I set out to do
something unique, you set out to
make money. We ended up with
something that was the perfect
balance of both.

MARTIN GOODMAN
Maybe that was the problem.

Stan says nothing as the wind picks up, the breeze off the
ocean blowing their hair back. Stan shields his eyes with his
hand. The waves breaking back and forth.

INT. SIXTY MINUTES SET - NIGHT

LARRY KING brings them in from commercial break.

LARRY KING

Welcome back to 60 Minutes. We continue our conversation with the man still behind Marvel comics after all these years: Stan Lee. Let's take a look at a clip from his latest work. The feature film: Howard the Duck.

The clip plays. HOWARD THE DUCK is in a woman's bedroom. He wears a red robe, the girl in just her underwear.

HOWARD THE DUCK

I have to get back to my own kind.
Although....

He watches the girl climb on the bed.

HOWARD THE DUCK (CONT'D)

(raising his eyebrow
seductively)

I have developed a greater
appreciation for the *human* anatomy.

Howard laughs. However ducks laugh. The clip ends. It sucks.

LARRY KING

I have to say, and please pardon the pun, that looks like a real marvel! Thanks again for joining us, Stan.

STAN LEE

My pleasure, Larry.

LARRY KING

Stan, more and more we're seeing an industry that's driven towards collectors. Comics used to be sold on the news stand with newspapers, on spinner racks at the drug store. Now we have stores that sell nothing but comics and the merchandise associated with them.

(looking to Stan)

Are you worried that Marvel is pushing more than the market can bear?

STAN LEE
 No, that's a negative way to put it. All we're doing is giving the public more of what they want.

SMASH TO:

TITLE CARD READS: The 90's.

Clips from late night news.

NEWS ANCHOR #1
 Eight artists executed a late night exit from Marvel Comics to form their new imprint. Marvel's stock has dropped more than eleven dollars a share since the news...

CLIP from CAPTAIN AMERICA (1990)

Captain America is tied to a rocket. The Red Skull stands in front of him, delivering his master plan. Everything looks incredibly fake.

ROGER EBERT, on At The Movies. He turns to the camera.

ROGER EBERT
 It's one of the worst movies I've ever seen.

The iconic black of cover of Superman's death, his "S" drawn out in blood.

NEWS ANCHOR #3
 ...A whopping ten variant covers available for the event.

Shots of comic book stores with tents outside.

NEWS ANCHOR #3 (CONT'D)
 Lines wrapped around the block...

CLIP from FANTASTIC FOUR (1994)

If you haven't seen this movie, it's hard to accurately describe just how bad it looks.

ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT ANCHOR
 Marvel has they announced that Fantastic Four will go directly to VHS...

Close on a newspaper review: "Fantastic Flop". 1/2 star.

CLIP from NICK FURY: AGENT OF SHIELD (1996)

DAVID HASSELHOFF as Nick Fury. He does a barrel roll around a corner. Dodges bullets. Hops up. Shoots.

NEWS ANCHOR

Folks, the bubble has finally burst on the comic book industry as the legendary imprint, Marvel Comics filed for bankruptcy early this morning.

END MONTAGE

EXT./INT. LIEBER RESIDENCE - WEST COAST - DAY

TITLE CARD READS: 1998

A beautiful home in the Brentwood Hills.

Stan stands with a BLOCK CELL PHONE to his ear. Joan, in full 90's mom jeans and loud shirt, listens on the couch.

STAN LEE

How is this going to affect the Hollywood office? That's all I'm concerned about.

(listening)

I know. I know. We're close on Spider-Man. Relatively close.

(listening)

Yes, I'll have my lawyers review the paperwork.

He walks back inside. Puts the phone down. It's massive.

JOAN

What's going on?

STAN LEE

Everything is fine. Some contracts are being voided.

JOAN

Which ones?

STAN LEE

I don't have all the names but --

JOAN

But, we're --

STAN LEE

Honey, I have a lifetime contract.
You can't void a lifetime contract.

JOAN

Are you sure?

STAN LEE

Of course.

INT. BOARD ROOM - EVENING

EILEEN

But it was voided.

STAN LEE

Yes. My contract was voided about a week later. When I arrived in New York, I was greeted with a new contract that would pay me 50% less per year.

EILEEN

And you agreed to this?

STAN LEE

I agreed to an amended contract that would pay me less, with one stipulation added.

EILEEN

A stipulation?

STAN LEE

Yes.

INT. MARTIN ACKERMAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Ackerman's on the phone with Stan.

ACKERMAN

It's unfortunate Stan, but I'm glad we can work this out.

STAN LEE

Have you given thought to the rest of the proposal?

ACKERMAN

Of course. Of course.

He covers the receiver. Looks at the other men in the room.

ACKERMAN (CONT'D)
What the fuck is he talking about?

MARVEL EXECUTIVE
He asked for 10% of all future film
and television profits.

ACKERMAN
Do we have anything in production?
(they all shake their
heads)
It's a deal. We'll have the papers
faxed over tomorrow.

INT. BOARD ROOM - EVENING

EILEEN
10% of all profits made on Marvel
properties adapted to film and
television.

STAN LEE
Correct.

EILEEN
And you have not received a payment
yet?

STAN LEE
No. Not a cent.

EILEEN
Have you been given an explanation
to why that is?

STAN LEE
My understanding is that in the
wake of the bankruptcy, there were
multiple financial "reshuffling"
that resulted in contracts being
voided not once, but twice.

EILEEN
Ackerman was fired. And what of
you?

INT. SAN DIEGO CONVENTION CENTER- DAY

San Diego Comic Con. It's not the Comic Con we know today.
Hollywood has no presence there. There's no Hall H. No
trailer drops. It's pure, closer to that gym in Brooklyn than
today's behemoth.

Stan is walking down the aisles of booths, taking in the array of art, promotions, costumes, and weirdos. Something catches his attention out of the corner of his eye --

He turns toward it, making sure he read the sign correctly. He did. KIRBY sits in front of him.

STAN LEE
Jack?

JACK KIRBY
(surprised but composed)
Stanley.

STAN LEE
I didn't know you'd be here.

JACK KIRBY
Everyone's in San Diego. You here
with Marvel?

STAN LEE
No - promoting the new company.
POW. We're launching soon.

JACK KIRBY
I hadn't heard. Congratulations.

STAN LEE
We'll have to get you in the office
next time you're in LA. I think
you'd like it, Jack. It reminds me
of the good old days.

JACK KIRBY
Sure.

STAN LEE
(sitting down across from
him)
Listen, I... I'm glad I ran into
you. I wanted to apologize for that
stuff on the radio. It was... it
was stupid. I shouldn't have called
in. That was your show.

JACK KIRBY
It's OK, Stanley. I got worked up.

STAN LEE
You remember that first evening?
When we dreamed up Fantastic Four?

JACK KIRBY
Of course.

STAN LEE
We had a good thing, Jack.

JACK KIRBY
Yeah, we did. Those were good
books. Real good.

STAN LEE
I know things didn't turn out the
way we were expecting.

JACK KIRBY
I don't know about that. I think
everyone could see it coming.
Everyone but you.

STAN LEE
You know the only other person who
calls me Stanley is my wife.

JACK KIRBY
Well, it's your name. I think you
forget that sometimes.

STAN LEE
Maybe I do.

JACK KIRBY
I have to get to a panel.

STAN LEE
Of course, of course. Maybe we
could get dinner tonight? See a
movie? You know the restaurant from
Top Gun is right down the street?

JACK KIRBY
I fly out at eight.

STAN LEE
Oh. Too bad.

JACK KIRBY
Yes.

STAN LEE
Well, let's... let's get together
soon. I know Joan would love to see
Roz. And... I don't know, maybe we
could work on something. Like the
old days.

JACK KIRBY

The old days.

STAN LEE

Yeah. Who knows, we might still have some of that magic.

JACK KIRBY

Goodbye, Stanley. Have you started that novel?

STAN LEE

Not yet. Soon.

JACK KIRBY

Did you ever think... All your talk about your novel... maybe Fantastic Four, maybe Marvel... maybe that was the Great American Novel. It was right under your nose the whole time. And you couldn't wait to get away to chase the very thing you were already doing.

(off Stan's stunned silence)

We got everything we wanted, Stanley. We just couldn't hold onto it.

STAN LEE

There's still time.

Jack just smiles. *Remember, you don't always get to choose when you say goodbye.*

INT. BOARD ROOM - EVENING

EILEEN

How did you find out?

STAN LEE

Sol called. Roz called Sol and told him to tell me.

EILEEN

You didn't know about his heart?

STAN LEE

No. I had no idea.

EILEEN

You went to the funeral?

STAN LEE
Yeah. It was good to see everyone.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Church bells RINGING. Kirby's funeral.

Stan is in the back of the church. Stands against the wall. People look back, giving him glances.

No one's talking to Stan.

INT. LOS ANGELES COURT HOUSE - DAY

Stan waits for a JUDGE.

JUDGE
Reason for name change?

STAN LEE
I...

The judge STAMPS the sheet.

JUDGE
You're all set, Mr. Lee.

He slides the sheet back to Stan. We get a look at it:
"CERTIFICATION OF CHANGE OF NAME"

It's official. Stanley Lieber is now Stan Lee.

INT. BOARD ROOM - NIGHT

The sun has set. The board room dark.

EILEEN
And here we are. Spider-Man earned over 500 million dollars and you're looking for your cut.

STAN LEE
I'm just asking for what is fair.

EILEEN
Fair?

STAN LEE
Yes.

EILEEN

5:02. Any more questions for the day?

(No.)

Then we'll resume tomorrow.

The group surrounding the table gathers their things. Papers shuffling. Folders closing. Bags zipping.

Stan sits alone in the room as everyone else leaves. JIM, 50's, a member of the panel, lingers.

JIM

Mr. Lee. I wanted to ask you... would you mind signing this?

He pulls an envelope out from the bottom of his stack of papers. Dusts it off.

It's a NO-PRIZE. "Congratulations! This envelope contains a genuine Marvel Comics NO-PRIZE which you have just won!"

JIM (CONT'D)

I wrote in to the letter pages as a kid. Found a typo.

He opens the envelope. Tips it over.

There's nothing inside.

JIM (CONT'D)

What was it like? The first day on set?

INT. SET OF SPIDER-MAN - STAN'S TRAILER - DAY

Stan sits in his trailer, MAKE UP ARTISTS working on his face. AVI ARAD stands next to him.

AVI ARAD

What do you think, Stan, is this the one?

STAN LEE

At this point I'm not optimistic. I mean, this thing is only going to go so far. They're not going to make a Guardians of the Galaxy movie.

Avi nods. He can't disagree. A KNOCK at the door. A young P.A. sneaks his head into the trailer.

P.A.
Mr. Lee? They're ready for you.

STAN LEE
Call me Stan.

EXT. SET OF SPIDER-MAN - DAY

The P.A. guides Stan through the chaos of the set. Extras everywhere. They snake through video village.

Three different SPIDER-MAN's all stand together.

SAM RAIMI
Alright, Stan. You ready?

Stan turns. Gives his patented smile and a THUMBS UP.

SAM RAIMI (CONT'D)
Ready.... And... ACTION!

CUT TO BLACK

The first few strings of "GOOD NIGHT" by the Beatles before we fade up to...

INT. MAGAZINE MANAGEMENT - DAY

KIRBY works at a desk. But he's thinner, healthier, despite the fact that he's still chomping on a cigar.

It's 1941. Jack's only 24.

MARTIN GOODMAN
Kirby, did you read the paper this morning? I'm worried about Hitler.

JACK KIRBY
You're worried about... Hitler?

MARTIN GOODMAN
I'm worried that he's going to blow his brains out. We'd have to completely re-do this week's issue.

STAN LEE (O.S.)
Mr. Goodman!

Goodman rolls his eyes as...

MARTIN GOODMAN

Jack... meet Stanley Lieber. He's
my wife's cousin's... how are we
related again?

It's STAN. Just 20. All dressed up for work.

STAN LEE

My wife is your wife's cousin.

MARTIN GOODMAN

Right. Anyhow. We've hired him to
come aboard as an assistant editor.
Perhaps you can you find something
for him to do?

STAN LEE

Can I empty your ash tray for you,
Mr. Kirby?

JACK KIRBY

That's alright, I don't need you to
do that. What have you been working
on so far?

STAN LEE

Mr. Simon gave me my first
assignment. Take a look.

Jack flips through it. An issue of Captain America.

JACK KIRBY

Why's it say Stan Lee? I thought
your name was Lieber?

STAN LEE

I didn't use my real name. I don't
want to derail my future career.

JACK KIRBY

Future career as what?

STAN LEE

As a serious writer. I'd like to
write a novel.

JACK KIRBY

Oh yeah? What type of novel?

STAN LEE

The Great American novel.

JACK KIRBY

So you want to write a novel, but you don't know what it's going to be about?

STAN LEE

The way I see it, that's not the important part. I'll figure out exactly what folks want to read, and that's what I'll write.

JACK KIRBY

Well, I think people should be who they are. No shame in hiding it. So, what the hell are you doing here then?

STAN LEE

Just passing the time. I'm recently married - need to pay the bills. But I won't be here for long.

JACK KIRBY

Well, I wish you luck, Stanley. For your sake, I hope you're not here for long either.

Stan smiles.

JACK KIRBY (CONT'D)

And I'll keep an eye out for your name. In the book store. Stanley Lieber. That's quite a name.

BLACK

TITLE CARDS READ:

Stan Lee and Marvel Comics settled in 2005 for a one-time payment of 10 million dollars with an annual salary of one million dollars in perpetuity.

Steve Ditko died in 2018. He had not given an interview since 1968.

In 2010, Jack Kirby's children sued Marvel for control of the characters Kirby had helped create. The court ruled in the favor of Marvel before a settlement was reached.

To date, Marvel films have made over 22.5 Billion Dollars worldwide. If Lee's original contract was honored, he would be owed over two billion dollars.

Stan Lee died in 2018 at the age of 95. He never finished his novel.

The title card for the Marvel films still reads: Created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby.

END ON:

A BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPH OF STAN AND JACK.

Together at a table. Smiling. *The future ahead.*

