

FANTASTIC FOUR

NOTE: WHAT FOLLOWS IS THE ORIGINAL TREATMENT WE WROTE, JUST BEFORE TYING THE STORY TO OUR CONTINUITY, HAVE A LOOK TO UNDERSTAND IT MORE CLEARLY. WE STILL HAVE TO MAKE THE CHANGES EXPLAINED ABOVE.

PAGE 1.

A NY panoramic to remind and remark the setting of our stories. A warm sun shining on the buildings. It's a placid vista, a non-ominous shot. Some landmarks, real ones and Marvelite: The Empire State, the Chrysler Building, The Daily Bugle. Colors should be calid too.

TEXT: Friday evening in New York.

TEXT: A tired, sleepy city prepares for the little pleasures of the weekend.

REED RICHARDS is driving his blue family car, (the car, as we'll reveal in later issues, is in reality a convertible: a car able to transform into a flying fantastical; times have changed and the FF have decided not to be too conspicuous, right?). Reed is dressed in a brown jacket with leather patches on his elbows, a turtleneck pullover, perhaps an old-fashioned but stylish hat (the classical idea of the scientist he is; think of it as an homage to Carl Sagan).

FRANKLIN is accompanying his father: the idea is that Reed has gone to pick him up at school.

TEXT: It's wonderful when you know your daddy is out there saving the world every day out.

TEXT: But it's even better when he finds time to come and pick you up from school. That's how you are sure he considers you as important as the universe as a whole.

Father and son talk to each other. Franklin jumps into the car, excited. Theirs is a male, old-fashioned relationship: the boy is still too young, Reed is still an inexpert father. Franklin doesn't have to call his dad "Sir", and Reed doesn't call him "Sport" ...but almost.

REED: Hold on, champ! NY traffic is especially dense at this hour.

In the apparent simplicity of the design we could glimpse something that implies it is no normal car either.

REED: And as we don't want to catch anyone's eye we'll have to keep to the ground.

FRANKLIN: Yeah, daddy. 'Cos we have to act....

TITLE AND CREDITS: **JUST THE WAY WE WERE**

PAGE 2

We see the blue car cruising some NY landmark, a toll in the bridge, or something like that. Perhaps a couple of panels to illustrate their course, the excitement of the boy because of the trip and so on.

REED AND FRANKLIN: Noooooormall!!!!

TEXT: Things are just as they should be.

TEXT: The men in the family get ready to have an afternoon on their own: a science exhibition and perhaps some pasta at the pizza parlor.

CUT TO FF HEADQUARTERS. A stabilising shot of Pier 4. A vertical panel.

TEXT: While Mom is back home. Keeping the fort.

TEXT: A chore that sometimes proves more difficult than saving Earth from all kinds of possible havok.

A big panel, to show SUSAN STORM, dressed or not in her FF costume, as you wish (if not, a smart Armani suit should do; the FF are glamorous, after all). Sue is talking to a cellular phone which floats around her. She seems nervous, even angry. Next to her, a male photographer and a female reporter. The photographer is still preparing his cameras: He is a tall, thin, not very clean-shaven spectacled man of about forty, dressed in jeans, a hippy jacket and a beret (that's to say, he should remember the character "Animal" from Lou Grant TV series). The reporter is a young girl in her early twenties, hispanic, small, pretty. She is sitting in a sofa while Susan speaks. Next to her, a couple of issues of the magazine she works for: the name COURAGE come to mind (the letter "O" of the title should then be the symbol of female sex). On a coffee table, a couple of cups, a coffee pot, some biscuits. The book Sue is reading at the moment: **BARBRA STREISAND: MEMORIES.**

TEXT: Her name is Susan Storm-Richards, A.K.A. The Invisible Woman.

TEXT: To many, now and ever, she is just the weakest link of the superhero group she belongs to, the Fantastic Four. These people insist on seeing her as her battlename seems to imply --invisible.

TEXT: To others, a few, she might be one of the most powerful superbeings ever. They are not mistaken.

TEXT: But, as it happens, Sue is mainly and above all a gentle soul.

TEXT: Though easy-going people also have their bad days.

SUE: No? What do you mean "no"?

SUE (join): And where in the Hell's Kitchen is Matt Murdock?

CLOSE SHOT on Sue's face. Her frown indicates she is not very happy with whatever is happening (a subplot which starts here and will be revealed next issue). Sue turns to the reporter.

SUE: Call me back in five minutes, Diandra. And don't tell me there's nothing you can do. Our business here is saving the world, for crying out loud, not selling them tortilla flats.

SUE: Excuse me, honey. What were we saying?

PAGE 3

Sue's phone clicks off, still floating in the air. We notice Sue is upset but tries to hide her frustration. The reporter girl looks at her, completely astonished. She's got a clipboard in her hands. Behind her, the photographer is still taking measurements of the light, the focus and so on.

TEXT: You don't learn these sorts of things at college.

TEXT: Sure, they tell you to be aggressive when you may. Even to try to be understanding with those people you interview if you feel they're being affected by your questions.

TEXT: They don't warn you against awe.

TEXT: Susan Storm-Richards has never become a rode model for young girls.

TEXT: And suddenly Carmina Colombo doesn't understand why.

CARMINA: Any problems, Mrs Richards? If this is a bad moment for our interview...

Sue tries to smile. She takes a cup of coffee, scratches her hair, some gesture to shake off the feeling. The phone is still floating.

SUE: No, no, the usual crap you meet when you're a part-time world-saver and have to manage the FF's trademarks and legal concerns at the same time.

SUE (join): There are always buzzards flyin' around.

SUE (Join): And, please, call me Sue.

Carmina looks round. We see the almost aseptic pristiness of the room they are in. Some Wakandan souvenirs in the furniture, a present from Wyatt Wingfoot, a piece of sculpture from Alicia Masters, whatever. The photographer seems to be changing lenses.

CARMINA: Well, there seems to be little carrion over here. That cellular of yours... floats?

CARMINA (join): Oh, I understand. One of your husband's gimmicks...

SUE turns to the floating phone and casually picks it up from the air. Now we may see the force field that is holding it up in the air.

SUE: Not exactly. A bit of force field here and... presto. Free hands.

CARMINA: So the phone floats 'cos you're --telekinetical?

SUE: Nope, that's Marvel Girl's lot. Providing you can consider she's still a girl, which I leave to doubt.

PAGE 4.

Now we see Sue reflected on the fisheye lense of the photographer.

SUE: For a while we wanted to use the term "psychokinesis" to describe this power of mine.

SUE (join): Too weird, I think. There's no Norman Bates playin' Momma around these quarters, if you know what I mean.

Medium shot. SUE and CARMINA. The photographer is buzzing around, ready to shoot.

SUE: So, we decided to dub it "force field". That was long before George Lucas, you know.

CARMINA: Mrs. Richards...

SUE: Sue...

CARMINA: Well, Sue. As the only female member of the Fantastic Four, don't you feel there's a glass ceiling operating here?

SUE's face, more charming than ever. She tilts her head and smiles. The idea is that she has been asked so many times the same old stupid question (and has endured so many times this sort of interview) that she has developed a natural sense of humor. She starts pulling the reporter's leg, who doesn't notice SUE is being kindly cynical.

The photographer takes his first photo.

SUE: A glass ceiling? Lady, in this group I'm the one who makes invisible barriers.

SUE (join): My force field again, of course.

FFXX (not very big, indicating the sound of the camera): TAC

Another shot of Sue's.

SUE: It's pretty useful when you're battling the Hulk.

SUE (join): And imagine the fortunes I've saved in bras.

FXX (still small): TAC TAC

SUE touches her hair. The young girl's face shows she doesn't know what to think of these revelations.

SUE: And my hair. Why do you think it's never out of place? Force Field. Pierce Brosnan isn't the only one to have his head sculptured.

Sue reacts to the girl's puzzlement and shows herself as she really is. They both laugh.

SUE: Just kiddin'. I understand it may seem strange, but we're normal people.

SUE: You know how men are. Never remember to use the flush, never mind where the laundry basket is supposed to be...

CARMINA: Never squeeze the end of the tooth-paste tube....

SUE: Yeah. Sometimes I feel like a schoolteacher, you know what I mean? A mother for three adult men and a little boy.

PAGE 5

SUE seems to be daydreaming for a split second, as considering missed opportunities. The photographer keeps on working.

SUE: Frustrating at times, but it also has its points.

SUE: I suppose I've done it all my life, since I had to take care of my baby-brother, Johnny.

FFXX (a little bigger): TAC TAC

Carmina has a look onto her notes.

CARMINA: Uh.... Mrs Richards... Sue.

CARMINA: According to my notes, it was just on a day like today when you all gained your powers...

SUE'S close shot, surprised, even anguished. The sound we have been hearing has grown in intensity.

SUE: Oh. Was it... today?

FFXX (big, intrusive): TAC TAC TAC TAC

CHANGE OF SCENE. Big panel. A modern bar, full of lights, stylish booths, lots of pictures of beautiful people on the walls. It is **BERNIE THE POET'S** bar, adapted to these times of design: Warhol pictures should be easy to identify. A TV set --or several-- on some strategic corners, in a high place over the bar: MTV is playing for the moment. In a corner, a group of two black girls and a guy are playing snookers: It's an important detail, as the sound of the ball and the stick (Tac tac tac) will trigger Johnny Storm's thoughts.

Sitting in a booth, a young, attractive, spectacled woman in his mid-twenties. She is **HAZEL PARKS**. Smartly dressed, sexy but without any estrambotic touches. Next to her, in the act of sitting, **JOHNNY STORM**, not dressed in his FF uniform.

TEXT: You can consider he is a winner: Impulsive, reckless, attractive.

TEXT: No financial clouds in his horizon. His heart --thanks godness-- is free.

TEXT: He's lost trace of the many times he's helped save the Universe.

TEXT: But Jonathan Storm is, more than anything, YOUNG.

TEXT: And sometimes he still feels disoriented.

HAZEL PARKS: Johnny Storm, long time no see.

JOHNNY: Hazel Parks, my old high-school flame.

HAZEL: Me? Well, I suppose it was well before you got a flame on your own, flattery boy. A literal one.

PAGE 6

A waitress comes and serves them their drinks. Johnny's is tomato juice. Hazel has already one or two empty glasses on the table, just to hint she has been drinking while she waited the Human Torch. Hazel smiles sadly when she speaks.

JOHNNY STORM: Take no offense, lady. You didn't even notice me at the time. You were all eyes for Ray Lupiani.

HAZEL: Yeah, I was all eyes. He was all hands...

HAZEL: We got married. Then divorced. He married again. Got the kid.

HAZEL: I started tumblin' around.

Johnny understand this is a field she doesn't want to touch and changes subject. Hazel turns his head slightly and see two figures coming towards them.

JOHNNY STORM: And here you are. A movie mogul.

HAZEL: No such big words, Johnny-O. I'm just an Indie exec-producer.

HAZEL: Things ain't bad. Could be worse. And could be better too. That's why I count on you.

HAZEL: Oh, here they are.

Two young and athletic men get to the booth and greet the young couple. Johnny stands up to shake their hands. One of them is **BOB DIAMOND**, the actor and ex-superhero, former member of the **SONS OF THE TIGER**. He is almost a mature version of Johnny Storm, gorgeous, blonde, attractive, self-conscious. A real movie star (think of a young Robert Redford)

With him, we introduce **LON ZELIG**, a tall man with receding hairline and a Cary Grant-like dimple on his chin. He is strong, but slim. His features are slightly Slavic. He is silent and impressive (in later issues we'll reveal his true identity).

HAZEL: Let me introduce you. Bob Diamond. Lon Zelig.

HAZEL: Lon is our main FF-XX tech and all-time stuntman. A natural. Bob is...

JOHNNY: Of course I know him. I got all your films on DVD.

BOB DIAMOND: How you doin', Torch?

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A change of POW to indicate that several minutes have passed. Perhaps we should center the panel on the people playing billiards, or on the drinks that have already been served: there are now four glasses on the table, some of them half full.

JOHNNY: Dunno, pals. True, I can't say I've gotten a life on my own since... well, since I can remember.

JOHNNY: But our experience in movie-making ain't exactly a pleasant memory. The Submariner once tricked us to film a feature just to terminate us.

JOHNNY: It's my sis who wanted to be a screen star, you know.
FFXX (small): Tac tac

Close shot on Hazel. We notice she has already finished his glass. Perhaps she is smoking. She is a hard woman, and she likes to remark this fact.

HAZEL: It ain't an FF movie, but a movie *with* Johnny Storm. Audiences demand young heroes today.

HAZEL: You know, di Caprio, the Phoenixes bros...

Another shot of the booth. Johnny is unsure. Bob is confident. The light reflected on Lon Zelig's face should have a greenish tone.

HAZEL: You got the face, you got the fame. Half the way is already walked.

JOHNNY: I can't act. I can't sing. And wouldn't wanna play on automatic. "Starring Cheetah as herself". No, that's not my bread.

The party of billiards keeps on playing.

FFXX (bigger, but ununtrussive): Tac Tac

PAGE 8

On the table, we center on Bob Diamond and Lon Zelig. The shot might include too the TV set.

BOB DIAMOND: Think of it, pal. It's a western. Horses, saloons, nice girls and sheriffs and rides to the sunset.

BOB DIAMOND (join): Our producer, Mr. Hawk, even considered Kevin Costner for the part.

LON ZELIG: Didn't you want to be John Wayne as a kid? Now it's the moment. And the script is fun-tastic.

TV "voice": They returned to Earth, forever changed...

FFXX (bigger): TAC TAC TAC

Close shot on Johnny. His face and pose should remind those of Susan's in page 5. The same impression as Spider-Man's when his spidersense is tingling.

JOHNNY (thinking): On that TV set.... A report on our... origin?

FFXX (big, important, intrusive): TAC TAC TAC

CHANGE OF SCENE. Big panel. Washington Square. Some people playing chess in the street, the usual scene, birds, couples. **BEN GRIMM**, in his usual hat and coat, is having a walk while watching how some people are playing the game. He feels lonely, but in peace with himself and the world.

TEXT: Washington Square.

TEXT: Someone said once that playing chess helps you develop your intelligence --to play chess.

TEXT: Benjamin J. Grimm knows the rules, though he's never won a single game (well, that time with little Franklin doesn't count anyway).

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A close shot on Ben's enormous size, his shoulder, his massive appearance. He is watching two chess players. One of them is a mature man, **Comrade SPORADNICK**, who now should look like a refugee from Mother Russia or one of those countries from the Iron Curtain. The other is a young spectacled blonde man, a sort of Woody Allenesque guy, the typical wise man in the clouds, who wears a T-Shirt with the character **CONCRETE**.

TEXT: The players consecrate their entire time to this model-scale war.

TEXT: Ben is used to fight real-size.

We center on the two players. The conversation should almost be a repetition of shots. One man is curious, the other doesn't care.

PLAYER 1: Look at the shoulders of this dude, Spornadnik!
SPORADNICK: Aha. Must be a superguy.

They move pieces. The **THING's** bulk is on them. The sound is now the pieces on the board or the clock they set to start counting time.

PLAYER 1: Boy, he's big! Who the hell is him? The Abomination?
SPORADNICK: Nope. That one is green.
FFXX (small): Tac

Another move.

PLAYER 1: The Hulk, then?
SPORADNICK: No. That one is green too.
FFXX (a little bigger): TAC

Player one smiles. Spornadnik is still serious, concentrated on the game. There is somewhere --under the board, perhaps-- an issue of **TIME MAGAZINE**, where we find the headlines **ONE 4 ALL**, and a picture of our four heroes.

PLAYER 1: Ah. I think I know who he is now. The Beast?
SPORADNICK: Most possibly. Checkmate.
FFXX: TAC TAC

Ben enjoys the peace of the place. Here, nobody seems to mind that he also goes by the name of THE THING.

Ben sees himself reflected onto the player's glasses.

FFXX: TAC TAC TAC
TEXT: And then memories rise.

We jump back to YANCY STREET. THE THING (the first and most horrible version of The Thing, burly and sullen) is watching his reflection on the window of a pub or Irish reminiscences (we should see the name O'MEARA somewhere, as this is a surname that will appear in a couple of issues). A pipe from a wall is dripping onto some cardboards or tins, and this is making the sound: TAC TAC TAC. A Will Eisner-like panel: take care to reinforce the dirt of the street, the rough of the woods, the hard of the cobblestones. A graffiti on the walls: **Killroy was here** (but Killroy has been changed for "Kirby").

Ben's body language is clearly definite: he is shy, in pain, doesn't like the reflection he sees on the window. The reflection could be even uglier than the original, as he sees himself even more monstrous as he really is (if this is possible!)

FFXX (the sound of the pipe dripping): TAC TAC TAC

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): Home. Home at last. Far from the stars. Far from the dreams.

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): Just the grim reality.

Suddenly, the window crashes. A brick has destroyed it. Ben's face is suddenly even more horrible.

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): Back ta the 'hood where I belong.

Ben turns and sees how the people of the neighborhood react to his presence on the street. The idea is to tell the scene as in a silent movie: the mob attacks the monster with sticks and stones, and the Thing escapes, because he is conscious he can't hit them. We see how they throw him dirt, stones, the lot. They are horrified (later on, as we know, this fear will turn into practical jokes, but this first time of his coming back to Yancy Street is serious, dramatic).

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): I wuz one of ya guys. Before the football. Before the big U. Before Reed Richards.

Close shot on Ben's face. The wet dirt that has hit him slips over his face, mixing with the rocky surface of his features.

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): I'm back. But we ain't the same anymore.

Shot on the mob; they are young boys and men an women alike. Ben tries to stand on a streetlight and it falls in.

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): I see disgust on their faces. Repulsion. Fear.

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): An' then it all turns ta hate.

Ben turns the street light it into a knot. He is supposedly crying his anger.

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): 'tis no place fer monsters.

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): An' admit it, Mr. Grimm, you're the scariest monster of them all.

Ben stars running, as the quarterback he once was.

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): Aye, outside the stadium there ain't no lights.

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): No applauses. Just scum.

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With no way to go, Ben pulls out a culvert from the floor.

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): Admit it, Grimm. Youse tried an experiment. And failed.

He jumps into the sewer.

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): This ain't yer neighborhood aymore.

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): You're a monster. And monsters can't stand light.

He falls into the black dirty waters of the sewers.

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): Darn, how lucky Suzie wuz ta turn invisible!

CHANGE OF SCENE. In three panels, we see a much younger Sue Storm facing her reflection on a mirror. It is a dressing room of sorts. She is a model and is preparing for a photo session. We can't see her full body for the moment, but she is dressed in a bikini and a sort of Hawaiian long silk shirt. For these three panels, we only see a medium shot of hers: she is watching her face on the mirror... and she gradually turns invisible (so, with the last text we can't see her anymore, not even in the dotted line style artists use to depict her invisibility)

On the dressing table, there is a clock or a vinyl doll of **Little Orphan Annie**. The sound of the clock is TAC TAC TAC. Marilyn Monroe and Doris Day posters on the walls.

FFXX: TAC TAC TAC

SUE'S VOICE (TEXT): I... can't.

SUE'S VOICE (TEXT): All my dreams of beauty and glamour will vanish... as my face. As my entire body vanishes.

She starts to vanish. The pencil of make-up seems to float in the air, before an inexistent face.

SUE'S VOICE (TEXT): Who's heard of an invisible TV star?

SUE'S VOICE (TEXT): Hurts so much. It's so easy to lose concentration.

SUE'S VOICE (TEXT): But I'm still here, aren't I?

FFXX (small, coming from the clock): TAC TAC TAC

She is nowhere to be seen. She is completely invisible. The pencil falls.

SUE'S VOICE (TEXT): Aren't I?

FFXX (smaller, this time coming from the pencil): TAC

A man enters the room and of course doesn't see her. It is a PR, lots of rings, a gold chain, side whiskers. His shirt is open to the middle of the chest, sunglasses. In a way, he should remind a cheap version of Hugh Hefner.

PR MAN: Suzie? Hey, doll, ready for the session?

PR MAN: Suzie, where the hell are you, gal?

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As the man is looking for her around the room, we see Sue in her invisible form. She is standing behind the man, going towards the door. She is anguished, as she is not sure if she is going to be able to return to visibility or become an spectre for the rest of her life.

PR MAN: First she dissapears for weeks. Gone to Central City, to visit that weird buddy-love of hers.

PR MAN: And then comes back sayin´ she´s not so sure anymore. Believe me, gal. Gotta contract that´ll launch you faster than a rocket, I assure you.

SUE touches the door and suddenly turns visible. The man turns and then sees her.

PR MAN: Oh, here you are. Didn´t hear you come in.

**SUE: --I-I... went out to take some fresh air.
SUE (JOIN) It´s so hot in here...**

CHANGE OF SCENE. Now we center on Johnny Storm´s past. We see him as a teenager, dressed in a plaid shirt and jeans. He is watching himself on the mirror of the toilet room of his High school. A faucet it dripping:
TAC TAC TAC

As Johnny watches his reflection, we see thru all this scene that he is --literally-- playing with fire. A wisp of his hair forms a flaming tupe and he is watching the effect of this on the mirror. He smiles: he is literally a boy with a wish come true.

JOHNNY´S VOICE (TEXT): Boy, talk of wishin´ upon a star.

JOHNNY´S VOICE (TEXT): So cool. So nice. So... exhilaratin´

JOHNNY´S VOICE (TEXT): Out of the pages of a comic book.

FFXX (small, coming from the faucet): Tac tac tac

With a finger, Johnny draws a big letter "Z" on the air.

JOHNNY´S VOICE (TEXT): I´m the lord of fire. Mine´s the power of a sun.

JOHNNY´S VOICE (TEXT): To fly. Oh, yeah, to be able fly. So wonderful.

Johnny´s body turns into flame. He is on a power trip and is enjoying the experience. Remember this takes place just a few days after he´s gained his powers, as all these flashbacks, and he is not yet a hero but a teen blessed by destiny.

JOHNNY´S VOICE (TEXT): Who could have bet poor Johnny Nothin´ Storm would become... a godlike creature?

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The mirror cracks, turned into a burned charcoal. The flames expand all over the toilet room. Johnny gets nervous.

JOHNNY'S VOICE (TEXT): My flame... out of control...

Johnny tries to suffocate the flames, to no avail. He turns half-human half-fire. All around, the doors are burning.

JOHNNY'S VOICE (TEXT): The doors... I can't... Fire alarm ringing...

FFXX: DRIIIIIIIIIIILL

From the interior of one of the cubicles, two voices. Johnny's heart sinks.

VOICES: Help! Please! We're locked in here!

VOICES: Can't go out...

JOHNNY'S VOICE (TEXT): Uh-oh, things are goin' to get tough.

CHANGE BACK TO SUE'S DAYDREAMING. She is now only dressed with a bikini, a photographer (not the same of the "present", of course, but a burly ugly type) is passing an arm over her shoulders, as to make her feel comfortable.

PHOTOGRAPHER: Easy, kid. Things are gonna be smooth.

PHOTOGRAPHER: Just relax, and smile. Boy, you're a real beauty. Yeah, perhaps it'll be late when we finish here.

The photographer has just pinched her. We only see her surprise.

PHOTOGRAPHER: But be confident I'll take ya home.

A big panel. Suddenly, out of nowhere, Sue's force field manifests for the first time ever (and it won't be recognized as such till later in the original series, as we know). She turns, angry, ashamed. And we see the photographer "flying", hurled against the wall. The reaction of Sue is so powerful that half the studio breaks by the action of the uncontrolled force field pressing against the walls.

SUE'S VOICE (TEXT): The reaction is instantaneous. I don't know how I do it. I don't even know if it's my deed.

SUE'S VOICE (TEXT): Jacko is pushed against the wall... as for an invisible hand. My hand?

SUE: Don't ever dare to touch me...

The photographer falls to the floor, semi-unconscious The camera breaks.

SUE'S VOICE (TEXT): I'm the owner of my destiny. I don't have to stand it anymore.

SUE'S VOICE (TEXT): The silliness of it all. The hypocressy.

SUE goes out. At the door, his ex-PR looks at her, astonished. She is trying to cover her body with her shirt.

SUE'S VOICE (TEXT): Now that I am invisible I can be myself. At long last.

She turns completely invisible and storms away. We only hear her footsteps now: Tac tac tac

SUE'S VOICE (TEXT): And there are better things to do will all this power than posing in a thong for a lousy calendar.

FFXX: TAC TAC TAC

Change back to the High School. Johnny is trying to open the door for the kids, and at the same time he tries to absorb the flames in the toilets. From the locked door where the kids are trapped, comes the sound this time: tac tac tac

FFXX: TAC TAC TAC

JOHNNY'S VOICE (TEXT): There must be somethin' I can do...

The flames are burning, but of course Johnny doesn't feel any pain. Still trying to control the fire, he gets to the closed door.

JOHNNY'S VOICE (TEXT): These fellas must have been smokin' in here.

JOHNNY: Stand back! Stand back! I'm gonna kick...

The door collapses, in part for the flames, in part for Johnny's kick.

FFXX: KRAA-AAK

Two kids the same age of Johnny get out, coughing, almost suffocated.

ONE OF THE KIDS: Johnny? What happened, man? Our cigarettes...?

JOHNNY: Most possibly. You know it's forbidden, for God's sake. Why don't you go to smoke outdoors?

Johnny breaks a window.

JOHNNY'S VOICE (TEXT): No time for confessions, now.

JOHNNY'S VOICE (TEXT): Gotta jump!

The three of them jump to the garden outside. The firemen have already arrived. Scenes of panic.

JOHNNY'S VOICE (TEXT): I almost set off a catastrophe here.

Outside the building, Johnny receives attention from a doctor, a teacher or whoever, as he has a scratch on his forehead. He is sullen, pensive, watching the almost extinguished fire. The sound comes from a hydrant this time.

JOHNNY'S VOICE (TEXT): Reed was right. As he always is.

JOHNNY'S VOICE (TEXT): This power of mine is no game. Have to learn to control myself. Have to learn to use it.

JOHNNY'S VOICE (TEXT): A great power, yes.

JOHNNY'S VOICE (TEXT): A greater responsibility.

FFXX: TAC TAC TAC

Big panel, dark. Inside the sewers. A hunched figure, squatted against a corner. It's the Thing. The water drips over his face. He is a monster in his dwell. Black water, like a long Alien-esque spittle, falls on him.

FFXX: TAC TAC TAC

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): Darkness. Silence. Solitude. An' that bloody stench.

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): Dunno how many hours've passed. How many days.

Other shadows move in the deeper shadows. They are vaguely human in aspect: hobos, vagabonds, misfits. But they don't get near Ben, and Ben doesn't get near them.

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): There're others like me down here. Some I see. Some I don't.

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): Hiddin' even from themselves. From ourselves.

From the shadows he is hiding among, Ben watches how a group of inhabitants of the sewers have a little celebration on their own: they are roasting an animal, possibly a dog. There's a touch of witch-meeting here. Ben feels disgust, horror.

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): My place at last?

Center on Ben's frown. His enormous blue eyes. Now it's him who's watching what horror really is.

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): With all my strength? With all the things I couldda with all my power?

Ben watches his deformed hand, now dirty.

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): Father Flanagan wouldn't like it.

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): Nossir. "Benjamin Grimm, you were created as a creature of light", he'd say.

PAGE 17

Ben fights to find his inner strength. Takes a decision.

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): No matter if you're big. No matter if you're ugly.

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): A creature of light!

Spectacularly, The Thing comes out from the sewers. He is all dirty and wet, dripping dark water, even more horrible than ever. But he has made up his mind.

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT): So be it!

The Thing stands in a dark and lonely street. It's night. There is a taylor's there (Big sizes, I suppose). He is defiant. He roars.

BEN: Now lissen ta me! I ain't no monster! I'm a man! Da ya hear me?

He crashes the window of the taylor shop and seizes a mannequin, as if it were a human being, one of those who attacked him during the day.

BEN: A man! Better than ya all! From now on sewers'll only be a short cut fer me, do ya understand? And I'll walk the streets face off...

Ben watches the hat he has taken off to the mannequin.

BEN: Face off...

Ben puts the hat on. He lifts the collar of his dirty coat.

BEN'S VOICE (TEXT) Some time.

Ben walks away in the shadows. Far away, dominating the city, we see the Baxter Building, a light on. On the forefront, the street light he destroyed before. And we see the name on it: YANCY STREET.

BEN'S VOICE: But not yet.

FFXX (BEN'S FOOTSTEPS): TAC TAC TAC

PAGE 20

The ship crashes. Seen from the ground, the moment it kisses Earth.

TEXT: They crashed.

TEXT: And suddenly it all ended.

TEXT: It all began.

Change of scene. We're back to Pier Four. The reporter girl is touching Sue's shoulder. Sue gets out from her daydreaming.

CARMINA: Mrs. Richards? Sue? For a moment you just disappeared and we thought you'd dissintegrated or somethin' like that.

SUE: Excuse me, Carmina. I lost concentration for a second.

A change of POW. The photographer checking his camera, Sue touching her forehead.

CARMINA: Lost concentration? You mean when you're not conciously bein' visible you turn...

SUE: Mm... I'm afraid this belongs to the summary. Forget it, please.

FFXX: Riiiiing!

Close shot on Sue's face. Now she is holding the cellular in her hand.

SUE: Yeah, Diandra? Good work, madam. No, don't Fed-Ex it. I'll be on my way right now.

CHANGE OF SCENE. The parallel shot, on Johnny's scene. Hazel leers, Johnny comes back from his memories. There is a red spot on Johnny's shirt, as Lon Zelig remarks.

HAZEL: Johnny? Houston calling here. Hey, kiddo, it's still early to have wet Oscar dreams.

JOHNNY: Oh... sorry, people. Was just...

LON ZELIG: There's a spot of tomato juice on your shirt, Jonathan.

Johnny touches the spot, which disappears.

JOHNNY: Mm? Don't worry for that. Unstable molecules. When you're saving the world you got no time to visit laundromats. See? Better than Wash-O-lite. **JOHNNY (join):**

Close shot on Johnny's face. He smiles.

JOHNNY: Regardin' your offer... Gimme a couple of days to sort things out, right?

PAGE 21

Back to WASHINGTON SQUARE. The Thing, smiling, goes away, whistling or eating an ice-cream. He has put his hat onto the blonde chess player's head (the hat is too big on him).

PLAYER 1: So he wasn't Doc Samson either?

SPORADNICK: Nope. Green hair on that one too.

BEN: Oh, fer my old aunt Petunia. How kin anyone not recognize I'm the Mad Hatter?

CHANGE OF SCENE. The three of them have returned home. They all are pensive, even saddened, not only for the memory of the way they were but for the clouds they'll have to face in the future: SUE is holding black leather clipboard a in her hands, with the seal of IRS; Johnny scratches his hair and thinks of his possible future as a movie star; Ben has just received a letter.

Reed Richards is working on a strange machine of his. He stretches to greet the trio.

TEXT: PIER FOUR, several hours later.

JOHNNY (thinking): Holy cow, imagine me in a Stetson, boy.

BEN (thinking): A letter... from her?

REED RICHARDS: Hi there, gang! Franklin's teeth are perfectly brushed and the kid's already sleeping, good boy.

REED RICHARDS: Hey? Why those faces? Have you seen the Red Ghost in the elevator or something?

SUE: No. My guess is we all've been thinking a little. Have you forgotten, then, my love?

Close on Reed's face. He is smiling, unsure.

REED: Let me think. Our wedding anniversary is in October. Franklin's is... Sue, darling, why that face?

Sue, her hands on her hips, upset about her husband's attitude.

SUE: Reed Richards, how can you always be so absent-minded? You didn't even notice! On a day like this the four of us...

SUE: Who do you think you are not to remember such a date? --Doctor Doom?

PAGE 22

A big panel. DOCTOR DOOM is sitting on a sort of throne, moody, impressive, menacing as ever. On the walls of this room of his castle, lots of newspapers, old and new, with pictures and info about the Fantastic Four's first travel and their exploits. He **does** have remembered.

Three small panels in the bottom, to center on his metallic gloved hand. Almost the same shot: Doom's fingers on the arm of his throne, drumming: TAC TAC TAC.

FFXX: TAC TAC TAC
FFXX: TAC TAC TAC
FFXX: TAC TAC TAC

End.