

FADE IN:

THE NIGHT SKY, twinkling stars, the overwhelming presence of an unknown world just above our grounded heads.

MORDECHAI (O.S.)

I dunno, man.

EXT. BUS STOP - 1960 - NIGHT

Two black brothers sit at a bus bench. JACOB (28) looks up at the dark sky. MORDECHAI (24), sits with his long legs outstretched, a cigarette in his mouth.

MORDECHAI

I've been sitting on this the past couple days-

JACOB

(grinning)

You finally found that stick up your ass?

Mordechai rolls his eyes.

MORDECHAI

Nah, just this foot I'm about to shove up yours.

J smirks. Mordechai stares ahead.

MORDECHAI (CONT'D)

I've just been feeling funny. Like I forgot to do something.

JACOB

You alright?

MORDECHAI

(shrugging)

It's probably nothing.

JACOB frowns. Mordechai takes a long drag off his cigarette. The sounds of the city resonate in the brothers' silence. Mordechai breaks it with a small laugh.

MORDECHAI (CONT'D)

I had this crazy idea the other day. We should start a comic strip about the first Negroes in space. I was thinking we could call it, "Moon Coons."

JACOB

Oh my God, wherever this bus is, it needs to get off its ass and come get you-

MORDECHAI

I'm serious!

JACOB

(chuckling)

I am not helping you make a comic called "Moon Coons".

MORDECHAI

I thought "Negroes in Space" would be too obvious.

JACOB shakes his head.

MORDECHAI sighs and slaps his thighs as he stands up.

MORDECHAI

Wow. You're no fun. Where the hell is the goddamn bus.

He begins to pace in front of the bench.

MORDECHAI (CONT'D)

I'll swim to Brooklyn if it's not here in two minutes.

JACOB

Your dense ass ain't swimming nowhere.

MORDECHAI

You're right- I'll walk. You could go with me. Then we can talk about it, there and back!

JACOB

I've got work in the morning.

MORDECHAI

Ah, c'mon- Whatever Essie wants probably won't take long. I bet I forgot to let down the toilet seat again, and she's trying to make a point by making me come all the way over there. Nothing a little sweet talk can't fix.

JACOB

I'm not hauling my ass all the way to  
Brooklyn to watch you suck face.

MORDECHAI

Essie doesn't suck face, she  
savours-cause you know, I'm so sweet.  
Nice and slow and sweet...

JACOB

Christ...

MORDECHAI

But anyway-

JACOB

Here's your goddamn bus, Mordechai.

MORDECHAI looks up to see the bus meandering down the street.

MORDECHAI

Well, it's a goddamn miracle!

He watches as the bus slowly approaches, drops his cigarette on  
the ground and squashes it with his shoe.

MORDECHAI (CON'T)

You sure you don't wanna come?

JACOB

I think I need to sit on what  
you just tried to sell me.

MORDECHAI nods, the bus grunts to a stop in front of the bench. He  
climbs up the stairs, looks back at his brother.

MORDECHAI

Take care, man. Abyssinia.

JACOB

See you.

MORDECHAI grins. He pays the driver and salutes his brother.

JACOB waves back. We remain on him as the bus rumbles and  
continues down the road. Once the bright lights of the bus have  
left his eyes, we're left with Jacob standing alone on the curb.

JACOB walks out of frame.

We see JACOB'S face as he walks, content with where and who he is  
in this world, at this moment.

INT. JACOB'S BEDROOM - DAY

A ceiling fan whirring choppily.

CLOSE UP - Jacob'S FACE, staring up at the ceiling- blank, the exhaustion of grief evident in his eyes.

Jacob has remained in bed for a day and a half.

He closes his eyes.

INT. BUS - NIGHT - JACOB'S IMAGINATION

MORDECHAI on the bus. In the window across from him we see a truck barreling out of control, fast approaching the bus. A warning horn blares loudly - MORDECHAI turns, confused-

BACK TO SCENE

INT. JACOB'S BEDROOM - DAY

JACOB buries his face into a pillow.

The phone rings. He doesn't move.

INT. THE JOHNSONS' LIVING ROOM - DAY

On the other side of this call is a young black woman with frizzy hair and large glasses. This is ESTHER (23).

JACOB AND MORDECHAI'S FATHER, MR. JOHNSON, sits on the couch, trying to decide between two suits. MRS. JOHNSON sits at the dining room table, numb.

MR. JOHNSON

(softly)

Which one do you like, Alberta?

MRS. JOHNSON doesn't answer.

MR. JOHNSON

I have to bring one to the funeral home tomorrow. I think he'd look nicer in this one. Alberta?

MRS. JOHNSON doesn't respond. MR. JOHNSON lifts up a suit. A small slip of paper falls out of the pocket. He picks it up. It's a movie ticket, from just last week. He holds it carefully.

ESTHER dials again.

INT. JACOB'S BEDROOM - DAY

The phone rings again. JACOB has disappeared from the bed.

INT. JACOB'S APARTMENT - DAY

A letter lies just in front of his door, he picks it up, tosses it on the table.

He pushes a pile of plates into the sink.

He paces, unsure of what to do with his pent-up emotions.

He walks over to a window, leans out of it, and screams.

PASTOR (V.O)

And in our hearts we know that  
our Mordechai, our beloved son,  
brother and friend, is not gone,  
but is enjoying his new life in  
heaven.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

JACOB sits solemnly in a black suit. HIS MOTHER weeps on HIS FATHER'S shoulder. ESTHER holds MRS. JOHNSON'S hand. A PASTOR preaches before the congregation filling the pews.

Several "Amens" arise from the crowd.

PASTOR (CON'T)

Surely you see, Mordechai- all  
these people who came here for  
you. Who love you, and miss you,  
and know that this is not only  
an occasion for sorrow, but to  
celebrate your life, and your  
impact on ours. And to cherish  
the fact that one day, we will  
see you again. So until then,  
"Ah-bee-seein-ya."

The crowd laughs.

THE CHOIR stands. They begin to sing "Soon and Very Soon."

We see the awkward space between ESTHER and JACOB as she looks up at him. He doesn't acknowledge her.

INT. CHURCH RECEPTION - EVENING

JACOB sits at a table. He's excused himself mentally from the muffled conversations of people coming to express their sympathy.

MARCUS (O.S.)

Jacob?

JACOB looks up to see MARCUS (24), weedy, black, glasses.

MARCUS (CON'T)

We haven't met- I'm Marcus. I worked with Moe down at the office. He talked about you a lot. How you feeling?

JACOB

I'm alright.

MARCUS

Moe was a great guy, he was always making everybody laugh. Sometimes I think he's gonna walk into the room and say "April Fools," you know? Something he would do.

He notices JACOB'S far-off gaze.

MARCUS (CON'T)

I'm sorry.

He pats JACOB'S shoulder awkwardly, clears his throat.

MARCUS (CON'T)

Hey, Esther.

ESTHER looks up, smiles.

ESTHER

Hey Marcus.

MARCUS

How are you?

Their conversation muffles as JACOB'S eyes drift shut to block out the activity around him.

ESTHER (O.S)

Jacob? You okay?

JACOB opens his eyes, sees ESTHER looking at him, concerned.

MORDECHAI (V.O.)

Whatever Essie wants probably won't take long-

She smiles weakly.

He doesn't see her. He sees the reason why his brother got on that bus.

He stands to leave. ESTHER's smile fades. A woman comes up to her.

WOMAN

Hey, Esther.

INT. JACOB'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The curtains are drawn, a lamplight hovers over JACOB'S workspace.

JACOB sits at his desk. He's written "Moon Coons" at the top of a sheet of paper. He's straining for his brother's ideas.

He writes "By Jacob and"- but stops himself. This was supposed to be a group project. He crumples it, tosses it in the bin.

He turns his chair to face his window. The stars are twinkling, just as they were the last time he saw his brother alive.

EXT. JACOB'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

JACOB rests his arms on the windowsill. Something within him can't help being in love with the mystery of the universe, that he exists at the same time that it does. He watches the night in awe.

MORDECHAI (V.O.)

You ever wonder why we're here?

EXT. JACOB'S APARTMENT - DAY (FLASHBACK)

MORDECHAI sits on the windowsill. JACOB draws an ad at his desk.

MORDECHAI

I mean if we're really here for a reason- cause we were just as likely to end up in a tissue or a dirty sock-

JACOB

Ugh, stop. That's foul, man.

MORDECHAI

And yet here we are.

JACOB

Here we are.

MORDECHAI  
(grinning)

I love you, man.

JACOB

Are you on something?

MORDECHAI

No, I'm onto something! Think about it! Whatever random force decided to poof Lena Horne's sexy ass into existence is the same one that decided it needed one of me, too. And you! It's amazing. Kinda makes you wanna go everywhere, do everything, take chances, you know?

BACK TO SCENE

INT. JACOB'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

JACOB opens his eyes.

He pulls away from the window, goes back to his desk, picks up a pencil and drums it against the paper. He begins to draw, slowly, and then gains speed as he becomes sure of himself.

The room fades into white.

INT. HEAVEN - DAY? NIGHT?

A CARTOON VERSION OF MORDECHAI lies on a white floor. Groaning, he stands shakily from the ground. His back is killing him, a headache pulses. His throbbing eyes adjust.

Before him are gleaming pearly gates, a chorus of angelic voices accompany the strumming of golden harps.

He stares. Realization. His shoulders slump.

MORDECHAI

Shit.

NOTE: All of the "heaven" scenes are animated like a 1960s comic.

INT. JACOB'S APARTMENT - NIGHT



CLOSE UP ON THE DRAWN VERSION OF MORDECHAI'S FACE frozen in realization, a speech bubble with "Shit." hovering above him.

JACOB looks at his creation. The panels show the former scene.

A smile peeks from behind his uncertainty.

He continues to draw.

INT. COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER OFFICE - DAY

MR. JOHNSON sits behind a desk, tie loose, hands covered in black ink. He holds the fresh morning paper in one hand, a cup of coffee in the other.

The door bursts open- MR. JOHNSON almost spills his coffee all over himself. In the doorway is JACOB.

MR. JOHNSON

Boy, what the hell?

JACOB

(out of breath)

Morning, pop.

MR. JOHNSON

What the hell are you doing here?

JACOB nods and pulls an envelope out of his jacket.

JACOB

Mordechai suggested I try making comic strips, so I did. They're about him getting used to heaven.

He places the envelope on his father's desk.

JACOB (CONT'D)

Maybe you could look at them, tell me what you think.

MR. JOHNSON

They're about Moe?

JACOB

Yeah.

MR. JOHNSON considers it.

MR. JOHNSON

I'll look at them. But take your ass home. Did you walk?

JACOB

I ran.

MR. JOHNSON

Walk back, and watch the sidewalk-I think you  
dropped your common sense on the way here.

(muttering)

Busting in here like the devil's  
on your ass, almost made me spill  
coffee all over my damn self..

JACOB smirks and turns to leave the office.

JACOB

Bye, Pop.

MR. JOHNSON watches him leave, then glances at the envelope on his  
desk. He picks it up and opens it.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

JACOB walks down the street, a new spring in his step.

MONTAGE - VARIOUS

CLOSE UP - A NEWSPAPER as it plops on a desk, open to its new comics  
section, however the only strip on it is Last Stop.

EXT. STREET - People who knew Mordechai are buying newspapers, flipping  
over to the newest edition of funnies in the paper.

INT. OFFICE - MARCUS in the office with a copy, laughing with his  
co-workers.

INT. JOHNSONS' APARTMENT - MRS. JOHNSON, reading a paper over  
breakfast.

INT. ESTHER'S APARTMENT - ESTHER smiles as she reads the latest  
edition.

Laughter, smiles, sighs of reminiscence.

INT. JACOB'S APARTMENT - JACOB draws up a storm, gulping back a  
cup of coffee.

END OF MONTAGE

EXT. CLOUD 9 BAR - HEAVEN - DAY? NIGHT?

MORDECHAI plops onto a barstool, overwhelmed.

MORDECHAI

I need a drink.

Across the bar is a chipper bartender cleaning a glass. He has a name tag that says PETER.

PETER

Of course. We have a fine assortment of wine, the best in the cosmos.

MORDECHAI

I said I need a *drink*.

PETER

We have the Messiah's selection from the Last Supper. Very popular choice.

MORDECHAI

I don't think you're understanding me. I need straight alcohol. Raw. Hangover-hazard raw. Kill-my-liver raw! I need to wake up wishing I was even more dead.

DAREDEVIL (O.S.)

HA!

MORDECHAI sees a 40-year old man wearing a daredevil costume and a drunken grin, goblets cluttered around him. He snickers.

DAREDEVIL

Young buck. What are you in here for?

MORDECHAI

Good behavior, I guess.

DAREDEVIL

I mean how'd your story end, kid?

MORDECHAI

Bus crash. You?

DAREDEVIL

I jumped out of a hot air balloon for a stunt, forgot my parachute at home.

MORDECHAI

Oh, shit.

DAREDEVIL

Woke up here with a sore ass, haven't had a decent drink since. Most you're gonna get outta this place is this godforsaken grape juice and a bendy straw. And good ol' Peter here. Forever and ever and ever...

MORDECHAI'S eyes widen.

DAREDEVIL (CONT'D)

(drunkenly giggling)

Say, you weren't *driving*, were you-

He turns to find an empty seat next to him.

INT. JOHNSONS' DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Another empty chair, this time at the dinner table. JACOB sets a pan of cornbread at the center of the table.

MRS. JOHNSON

Thank you, baby.

He takes his seat.

THE JOHNSONS and ESTHER are sitting at their first dinner since the funeral. MR. JOHNSON reads the newspaper. MRS. JOHNSON doesn't like the new quiet.

MRS. JOHNSON

You know I was thinking earlier today, something you could put in your comic. You remember that game you and Moe made up... what was it called?

ESTHER looks at JACOB attentively, but he doesn't look her way.

JACOB

Negroes in Space?

MRS. JOHNSON

Yes, that's the one! They were obsessed with it when they were little- you know they dumped out a pot full of collard greens once because they needed it for a helmet. You remember, Charlie?

MR. JOHNSON

(distant)

Mm-hm.

MRS. JOHNSON

Ooh, I was so mad. Jacob, tell Esther what y'all used to do with the cardboard boxes, and all my good foil!

JACOB

Mordechai probably told her that story a thousand times already, Momma.

MRS. JOHNSON frowns.

ESTHER

That's okay. It really was one of his favorite ones to tell, Mrs. Johnson.

MRS. JOHNSON

Well. A thousand and one times wouldn't have hurt, Jacob.

Scraping of silverware against plates. MR. JOHNSON doesn't touch his food. JACOB picks at his. It's too quiet without Mordechai.

MR. JOHNSON stands from his seat.

MR. JOHNSON

Excuse me.

MRS. JOHNSON

Where you rushing off to?

MR. JOHNSON

I've got work in the morning.

MRS. JOHNSON

Empty your plate and put in the sink, I'll get it.

He kisses her cheek and leaves the dining room.

ESTHER looks across the table at JACOB. He's picking at the food on his plate.

INT. THE JOHNSONS' KITCHEN - LATER THAT NIGHT

ESTHER and MRS. JOHNSON are tidying up the kitchen- JACOB gives his plate to his mother.

JACOB

Thanks for dinner, momma.

MRS. JOHNSON  
Mm-hm.

He kisses her cheek.

JACOB  
I'll see you later.

MRS. JOHNSON  
Mm-hm.

ESTHER  
(friendly)  
Bye, Jacob!

JACOB nods, and leaves the kitchen-

INT. THE JOHNSONS' APARTMENT - HALLWAY

JACOB walks down the hallway, and notices an open bedroom door.

INT. MORDECHAI'S OLD ROOM

MR. JOHNSON is walking around, looking at pictures, certificates, baseballs, clothes, absorbing MORDECHAI'S essence. He sits on the bed, head down, hands folded, thinking.

JACOB can't think of anything to say. He leaves.

EXT. HEAVEN - DAY? NIGHT?

GOD, or what we can see of Him, appears as a big foot in a sandal.

MORDECHAI walks up, taps Him on the back of His heel.

MORDECHAI  
Hey, Big Guy.

GOD slowly turns around, voice bellowing.

GOD  
Yes?

MORDECHAI  
Yeah, listen... I can't stay here.

GOD  
Why's that?

MORDECHAI

Well, first off, there's no  
decent booze-

Something's not right. Mordechai frowns.

INT. JACOB'S ROOM - DAY

An exhausted JACOB erases frantically at the sentence, brushes  
away the residue of the eraser. His eyes are red - he's been up  
since last night. He continues to write-

MORDECHAI (V.O.)

Nobody here knows how to play  
poker-

He erases again, brushes it off. Forces something out of himself.

MORDECHAI (V.O.)

Everyone's smiling like they've  
all got gas-

JACOB looks down at the paper, sighs. He erases it again. Taps his  
pencil against the desk. He begins to write again.

EXT. HEAVEN - DAY? NIGHT?

MORDECHAI is looking up the Redwood-sized shins of God.

MORDECHAI

Listen- I can't stay here. The  
world's not right without me. I  
mean, I know I always said I  
wanted to get outta New York, but  
this isn't exactly what I meant,  
you know?

MORDECHAI stares forward.

MORDECHAI (CONT'D)

I know You don't make mistakes or  
whatever, but I think I came here  
too soon.

INT. JACOB'S APARTMENT - DAY

CLOSE UP - THE DRAWN VERSION OF THE EXACT SCENE BEFORE,  
MORDECHAI'S forlorn face, a text bubble with his speech hovering  
over his head. JACOB'S pencil lingers over the paper.

EXT. HEAVEN - DAY? NIGHT?

Mordechai is still staring at the big toe of God.

The giant above him towers, an unspoken decision hangs in the air.

Suddenly the giant crouches down, its hand slowly reaching downward as if to scoop up or just outright smite Mordechai.

INT. JACOB'S APARTMENT - DAY

Sharp knocking raps at the apartment door.

JACOB turns from his desk, staring at the door. Something in his eyes flashes hopeful, his logic dismisses it.

JACOB stands and walks over to the door. He opens it.

It's ESTHER. Her smile falters a bit at JACOB's sleepless eyes, but she smiles nonetheless.

ESTHER

Hey. I... was in the neighborhood  
and I was wondering if you wanted  
to grab lunch or something.

JACOB

I'm busy.

ESTHER

With your comic strip?

JACOB

Yeah.

ESTHER

Oh.

An awkward silence follows, JACOB moves to close the door.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

You know I save every one that comes  
out. The cartoon really does feel like  
all the things he would say and do. Moe  
would love it.

She's hopeful he'll catch the hint. He avoids her eyes.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Your momma said you haven't been down  
there since the funeral. Maybe we could  
put one of your comics on his-



JACOB  
(snapping)  
What's the point in that?

ESTHER bites her lip, looks down at her shoes.

JACOB (CONT'D)  
Look, I'm real busy. This next  
one's due soon.

ESTHER  
Okay.

As JACOB moves to close the door-

ESTHER (CONT'D)  
(smiling weakly)  
Abyssinia, then?

He stops. Something has snapped within him.

JACOB  
(cold)  
You know, I've been wondering,  
Esther...

Her smile wavers as she notices his change in tone.

JACOB (CONT'D)  
What was it? What was so goddamn  
important it couldn't have waited  
until the next day, or been over  
the phone, or hell, why couldn't  
you have come to his apartment?  
What couldn't have waited- was it  
life or death?

He stares at her. She realizes he's waiting for an answer.

ESTHER  
No.

JACOB  
Then what? Oh, don't tell me-  
was it the goddamn toilet seat?  
I swear to God- I swear to God if  
you called my brother just to  
bitch about some stupid fucking  
toilet seat-

ESTHER  
(softly)  
I'm pregnant.

JACOB

What?

ESTHER

I'm pregnant. I wanted to tell him in person.

A silence rings between them.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

I know you hate me, Jacob. He was on that bus for me. I get it. You think if I'd known that would happen I wouldn't have just waited? Or just called, or, written a letter, or...

She's staring at the floor, words lost.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

I get it, really. I won't bother you anymore. I'm sorry.

JACOB stands silent, stunned. ESTHER leaves, goes down the stairs, doesn't look back.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

ESTHER walks down the sidewalk, holding a bouquet of flowers, blending in with the bustle commuting alongside the street.

We watch her face as she revels in her memory of that night.

MORDECHAI (V.O.)

You know what I did when I first saw you at that coffee shop?

ESTHER (V.O.)

What did you do?

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. JACOB'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

JACOB shrugs on his coat. MORDECHAI charms ESTHER over the phone.

MORDECHAI

I asked God to give me a sign. You had your nose stuck in that Black Boy book. I figured that was it - since you were so into the paperback you'd definitely enjoy

the hard cover. So I came over and said, "Excuse me, miss- I see you're reading Richard Wright's autobiography. Since you have such amazing taste, I was wondering if you'd like to help me write my own." And you saw how full of shit I was and said, "How am I supposed to do that?" And I said, "Well, I'd like you to be the first chapter." You remember?

INT. ESTHER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

ESTHER blushes and smiles to herself.

ESTHER

Yeah, Moe, I was there. Why are you telling me this?

INTERCUT BETWEEN ESTHER AND MORDECHAI

MORDECHAI

I'm just letting you know why you shouldn't be mad at me.

ESTHER

I'm not mad, I just have to tell you something. In person. It's not bad.

MORDECHAI

Okay- well I'm at my brother's, so I'll have to leave now if I'm gonna catch the bus. Abyssinia, baby, in about an hour.

ESTHER

Abyssinia, sugar. I love you.

MORDECHAI

I love you, too.

BACK TO PRESENT

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

ESTHER closes her eyes, replaying the last words he said to her.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

MORDECHAI'S grave. ESTHER has already set down a bundle of flowers.

ESTHER

We had our first checkup the other day.  
Everything's fine.

JACOB stands a few meters back, watching. He walks towards ESTHER and stops behind her.

JACOB

I'm sorry.

ESTHER turns. JACOB stares blankly at a space between ESTHER and MORDECHAI'S grave.

He sees his baby brother's name. And all at once, it's all too real. He falls to his knees, clutches the gravestone and begins to weep with a shuddering cry.

ESTHER watches, unsure of what to say or do.

JACOB clings to the grave.

EXT. CEMETERY - EVENING - LATER

JACOB and ESTHER sit beside the grave, a fair amount of space between them.

JACOB

You know what's kinda funny?

ESTHER looks up, listening.

JACOB (CONT'D)

When we were kids Moe used to say we'd be the first Negroes in space, because they can't tell you where to sit on a rocket. It was mostly a joke to him, but... jeez, I sound like such a nerd... I used to stay up at night and watch the stars and feel this swell in my chest Like 'wow, I can't believe I exist in the same universe as all these amazing things.' And I wanna believe I exist at the same time he does- that he's really just somewhere else. But no matter how much I try to bridge that gap- with the comics I can try to keep him close, but- that's it. He's gone.

ESTHER doesn't want him to lock himself away again. She chooses her words carefully.

ESTHER

I don't think he's really gone, Jacob. Someone like Mordechai couldn't just disappear. He's somewhere else, but he's here too. In your comic. In everyone's memories. And in me.

JACOB

What do you think he's really doing, wherever he is?

ESTHER

Probably laughing at how sad we look right now.

(snickers)

Or maybe he found a blanket and he's trying to float his way down.

JACOB

Moe told you about that?

ESTHER

How he tried to jump out of the apartment window with a blanket for a parachute? Yeah.

JACOB

Pop beat his ass so bad... I dunno what the hell made him think he'd just float down- he was dense in more ways than one.

ESTHER

I don't believe you! Skinny as he was?

JACOB

He used to be a ball of lard until he grew into himself. Pop used to call him Moe, so I would call him Moelasses cause he was slow, brown and sticky.

They laugh together, in the middle of the graveyard.

A comfortable silence.

He stands, helps ESTHER to her feet.

JACOB puts a hand on the grave.

JACOB (CONT'D)

(quietly)

Abyssinia, Moe.

For a moment we can feel Mordechai's grin, from wherever he is.

JACOB walks closely to ESTHER as they head out of the cemetery.

FADE OUT