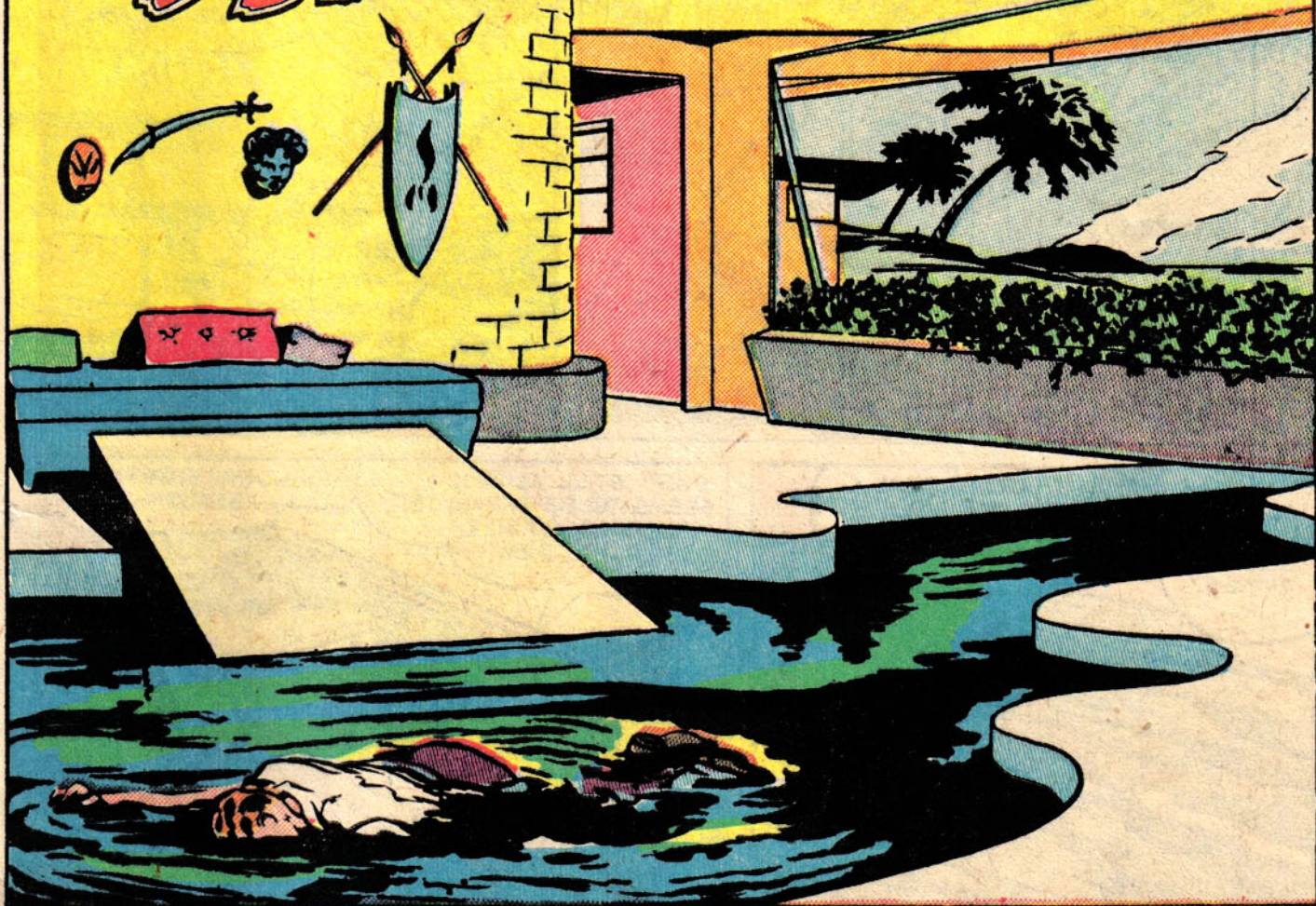


The DEVIL FROM THE DEEP



ROBERT STRANGEWAY WAS DEAD! THAT MUCH WAS CLEAR! BUT THE EVENTS LEADING UP TO HIS INCREDIBLE DEMISE ARE KNOWN TO NO ONE BUT ME! AND I'VE KEPT THEM SECRET FOR FIFTEEN YEARS! YOU WILL SAY THIS STORY IS FICTION, OR THE GRUESOME FANTASY OF DOCTOR JOHN WALDEN'S DISEASED MIND! BUT, THEN, YOU NEVER MET...
THE DEVIL FROM THE DEEP!

AFTER A LIFE OF EXOTIC TRAVELS AND ADVENTURES, MY LIFE-LONG FRIEND, ROBERT STRANGEWAY, FINALLY SETTLED DOWN IN SECLUSION ON A LONELY ISLAND OFF THE FLORIDA KEYS! I JOINED HIM THERE THAT SUMMER, ANTICIPATING OUR ANNUAL FISHING EXPEDITION...

I HOPE YOU'VE BROUGHT LUCK WITH YOU, JOHN! THE FISHING HAS BEEN ROTTEN THIS SEASON! SOMETHING SEEMS TO HAVE FRIGHTENED THE FISH FROM THIS AREA!

ACTUALLY, I DON'T CARE WHETHER I CATCH ANYTHING OR NOT, BOB! THE SEA AIR IS COMPENSATION ENOUGH FOR THE TRIP!

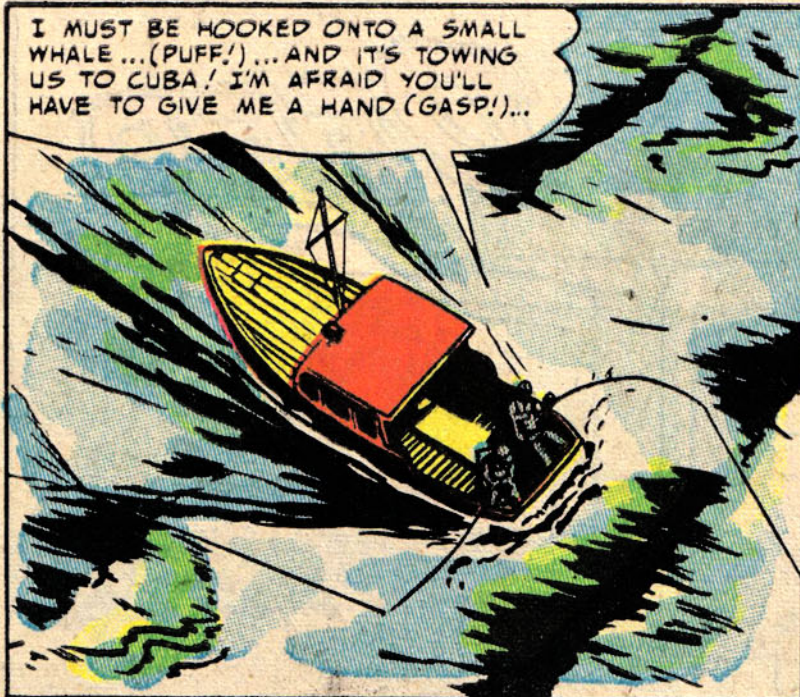


THE SKY WAS A DULL, BLOOD-RED... LOW... OPPRESSIVE! NO BREEZE STIRRED THE STILL, OILY SURFACE OF THE OCEAN. IT WAS AS THOUGH THE WORLD WERE HOLDING ITSELF IN LEASH WITH SOME PENT-UP FURY. WE ENCOUNTERED NO LIVING THING IN THE WATER ALL DAY! THEN SUDDENLY...

A STRIKE! AND WHAT A STRIKE!



I MUST BE HOOKED ONTO A SMALL WHALE...(PUFF!)...AND IT'S TOWING US TO CUBA! I'M AFRAID YOU'LL HAVE TO GIVE ME A HAND (GASP!)...



WE BATTLED OUR CATCH FOR THREE HOURS!

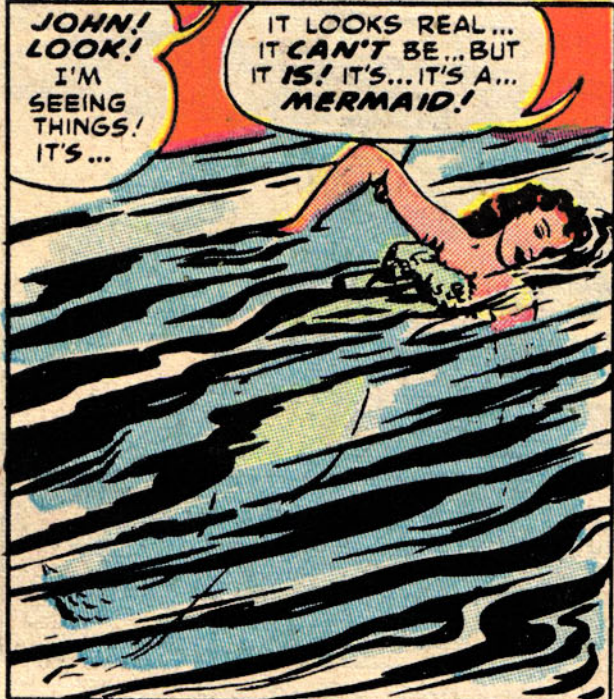
I'VE NEVER HOOKED SUCH A CUNNING BEAST IN MY LIFE...(GASP!) IT ACTUALLY SEEMS TO BE OUT-THINKING US! I'M ALL IN...(GASP!) WE'LL HAVE TO CUT THE LINE!

I GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT.. (PUFF!) IT'S TOO MUCH FOR BOTH OF US... NO! WAIT! THE LINE'S SLACKING! REEL IT IN!



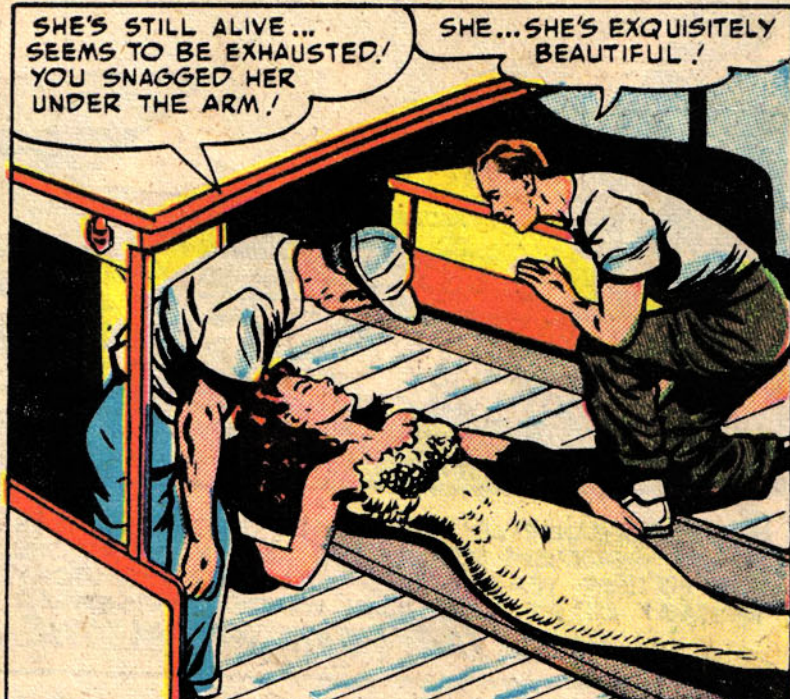
JOHN! LOOK! I'M SEEING THINGS! IT'S...

IT LOOKS REAL... IT CAN'T BE...BUT IT IS! IT'S...IT'S A... MERMAID!



SHE'S STILL ALIVE... SEEMS TO BE EXHAUSTED! YOU SNAGGED HER UNDER THE ARM!

SHE...SHE'S EXQUISITELY BEAUTIFUL!



IT TOOK A FEW SECONDS FOR THE TONE IN ROBERT'S VOICE TO CUT THROUGH MY EXCITED SCIENTIFIC CURIOSITY! I LOOKED AT HIM DUMBFOUNDED! THERE WAS AN AWESOME, ENTRANCED LOOK ON HIS FACE WHICH MADE MY HACKLES RISE!



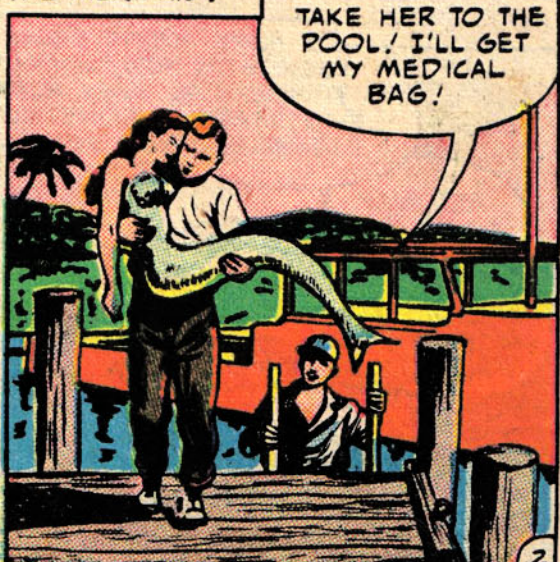
BOB! BOB! SNAP OUT OF IT! WE'VE GOT TO GET BACK TO SHORE QUICKLY IF SHE'S TO BE KEPT ALIVE! WHAT'S EATING YOU?

EH? OH... NOTHING! I...I'LL START BACK IMMEDIATELY!



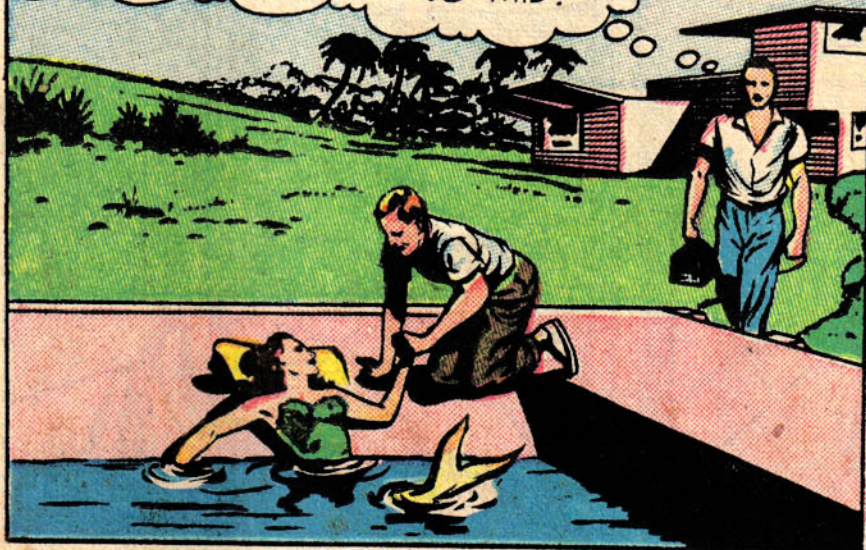
THE RETURN TRIP SHOULD HAVE WARNED ME! I WATCHED ROBERT IN HIS WEIRD TRANCE, AND HE DID NOT TAKE HIS INTENSE BLAZING EYES OFF THE MERMAID!

TAKE HER TO THE POOL! I'LL GET MY MEDICAL BAG!



SHE WAS CONSCIOUS WHEN I REACHED THE POOL!

I DON'T LIKE IT! BOB'S LOOKING AT HER AS THOUGH HE'S HYPNOTIZED! WHAT SORT OF STRANGE UNEARTHLY CREATURE IS THIS?



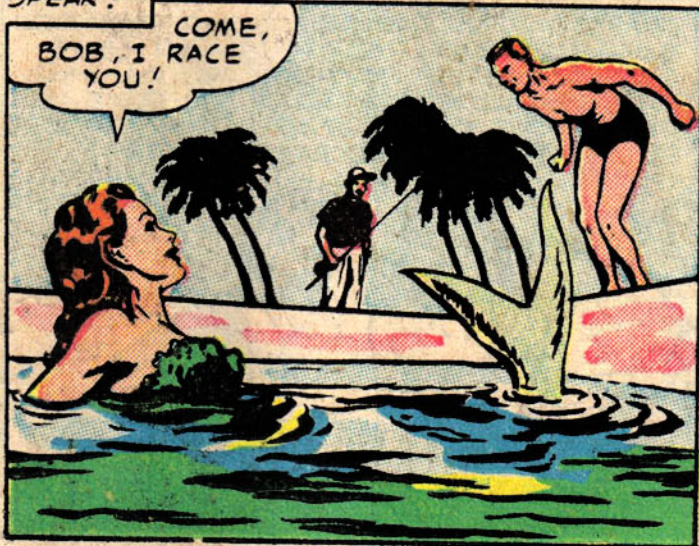
HOW IS SHE, BOB?

MAGNIFICENT! I'VE NAMED HER DIANA ... GODDESS OF THE HUNT!

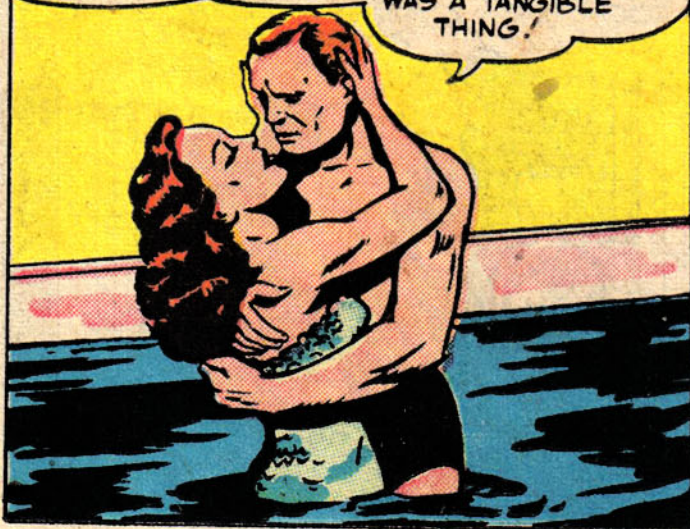


I TOOK MY FISHING TRIPS ALONE AFTER THAT! ROBERT WAS UNDER SOME DIABOLICAL SPELL, MAKING IT QUESTIONABLE AS TO WHICH ONE WAS THE CAPTOR AND WHICH THE CAPTIVE! IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS, HE TAUGHT HER TO SPEAK!

COME, BOB, I RACE YOU!



DIANA ... YOU'VE KNOWN IT SINCE THAT FIRST DAY... I LOVE YOU... **WE'VE LOVED EACH OTHER** SINCE THE BEGINNING OF TIME, WHEN MAN FIRST CRAWLED OUT OF THE SEA! AND EVEN BEFORE THAT, OUR LOVE WAS A TANGIBLE THING!



BOB MUST BE LOSING HIS MIND! HE SEEMS TO HAVE LOST SIGHT, COMPLETELY, OF THE NATURE OF THIS BIOLOGICAL CURIOSITY THAT HE LOVES! I CAN'T JUST STAND BY AND DO NOTHING!



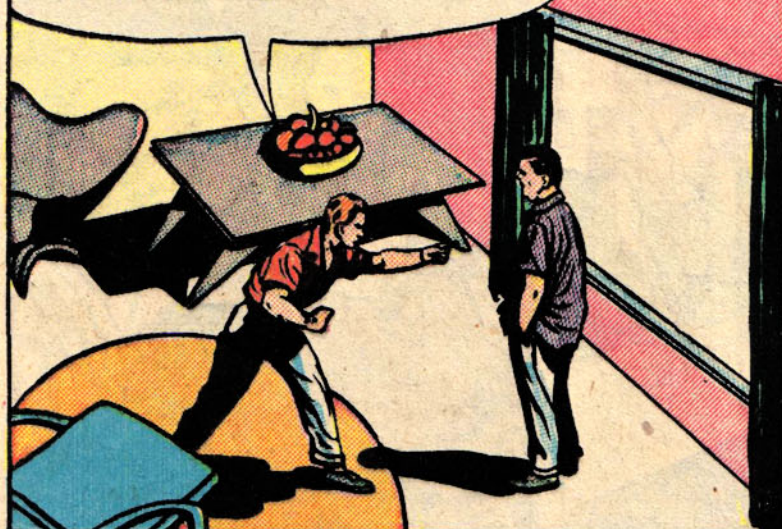
THAT NIGHT I TRIED TO JOLT ROBERT BACK TO HIS SENSES!

BOB, I'M TRYING TO BE OBJECTIVE AND TO IGNORE THIS AFTERNOON... WHICH WAS LOATHSOME TO ME! YOU SEEM TO HAVE LOST ALL REASON! DON'T YOU SEE THAT YOU'RE GETTING INVOLVED IN SOMETHING INCREDIBLY DANGEROUS?

DON'T BE A CHILD, JOHN!



IT MIGHT INTEREST YOU TO KNOW THAT WHILE YOU'VE BEEN SWILLING COCKTAILS IN THE PENT-HOUSES OF YOUR PARK AVENUE PATIENTS, I HAVE HAD EXPERIENCES CALCULATED TO TERRIFY A PIGEON-HEARTED PHILISTINE LIKE YOU!

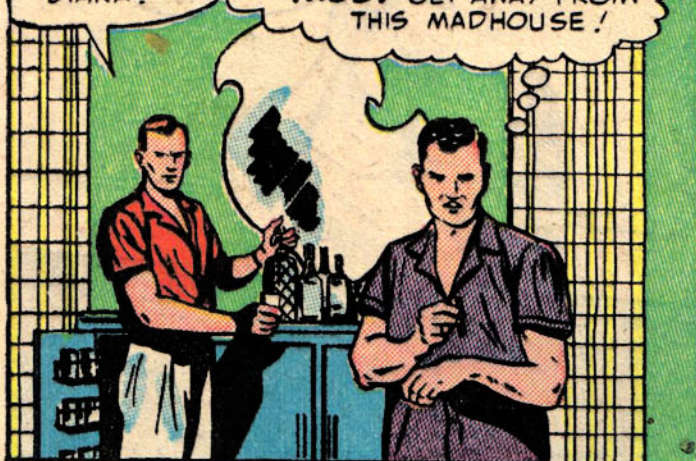


YOU ARE MY GUEST HERE, AND WELCOME! BUT BELIEVE ME, JOHN, I LOVE DIANA TO MY VERY MARROW, AND IF YOU MAKE A MOVE TO INTERFERE, I'LL **SQUASH** YOU... AS I WOULD... AN ANT!



AND NOW THAT WE'VE SETTLED THAT, HOW ABOUT A DRINK? INCIDENTALLY, TOMORROW I'M SENDING MY MAN-SERVANT, NIKKI, TO THE MAINLAND FOR BUILDING MATERIALS! I'M RE-DESIGNING THE LIVING ROOM FOR DIANA!

AND I'M GOING TO THE MAINLAND **WITH** HIM! I **MUST** GET AWAY FROM THIS MADHOUSE!



BUT I DIDN'T GO! SOMEHOW I KEPT CLING-ING TO THE REMOTE HOPE THAT I COULD PULL ROBERT OUT OF DIANA'S SEEMINGLY HYPNOTIC INFLUENCE! SOME WEEKS LATER WE CELEBRATED THE FINISHED WORK ON THE LIVING ROOM!

IT **IS** BEAUTIFUL, DARLING! BUT... **USELESS**... FOR IF I DO NOT RETURN TO THE **SEA**, I SHALL STARVE TO DEATH! YOUR KITCHEN IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR THE OCEAN FLOOR!

NO, DIANA! YOU **CAN'T** LEAVE ME! I'LL FIND YOU SOME PROPER FOOD! PLEASE, DARLING... PATIENCE!



I'VE NOTICED THAT YOU'VE NOT BEEN EATING THE FISH AND PLANT LIFE WE'VE GIVEN YOU... SO I HAD NIKKI PREPARE SOMETHING **NEW** FOR YOU TO TRY! IT'S CALLED... MEAT!



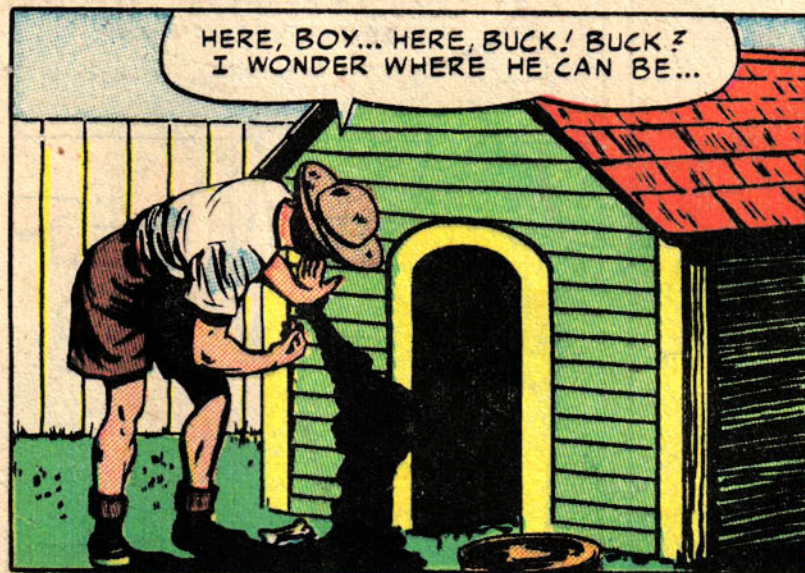
I WATCHED ENTRANCED AS DIANA'S SHARP LITTLE TEETH TORE INTO THE STEAK! HER PRISTINE BEAUTY COULD NOT HIDE THE PRIMEVAL SAVAGERY IN HER EYES!

MEAT IS **GOOD!** VERY GOOD! LET ME HAVE MORE!



I TRIED TO FORGET THE SICKENING IMPRESSION THAT MEAL HAD MADE ON ME! BUT NEXT MORNING, WHEN I WENT TO TAKE BUCK, ROBERT'S HANDSOME GREAT DANE, FOR OUR MORNING WALK...

AFTER AN EXHAUSTIVE SEARCH I FINALLY FOUND BUCK... OR WHAT WAS LEFT OF HIM!



HERE, BOY... HERE, BUCK! BUCK?
I WONDER WHERE HE CAN BE...



GOOD LORD! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?



I WAS HUNGRY FOR MEAT! IT **WAS** MEAT, IS IT NOT SO?



WHAT'S THE MATTER, JOHN?

WHAT'S THE MATTER? THIS... GHOUL... HAS JUST **DEVOURED** YOUR DOG! I FEEL LIKE RETCHING!
YOU'VE GOT TO GET **RID** OF HER! SEND HER BACK WHERE YOU FOUND HER!

THAT'S UNFORTUNATE, BUT YOU MUST REALIZE THAT DIANA DOESN'T AS YET UNDERSTAND MANY THINGS ABOUT OUR SO-CALLED CIVILIZATION! SHE'LL LEARN!

YOU... YOU... YOU'RE GOING INSANE, BOB!

THIS... THIS MONSTROUS FREAK... THIS WATER-WITCH... H-HAS COMPLETELY DERANGED YOU! I'VE HAD ENOUGH! I'M LEAVING!



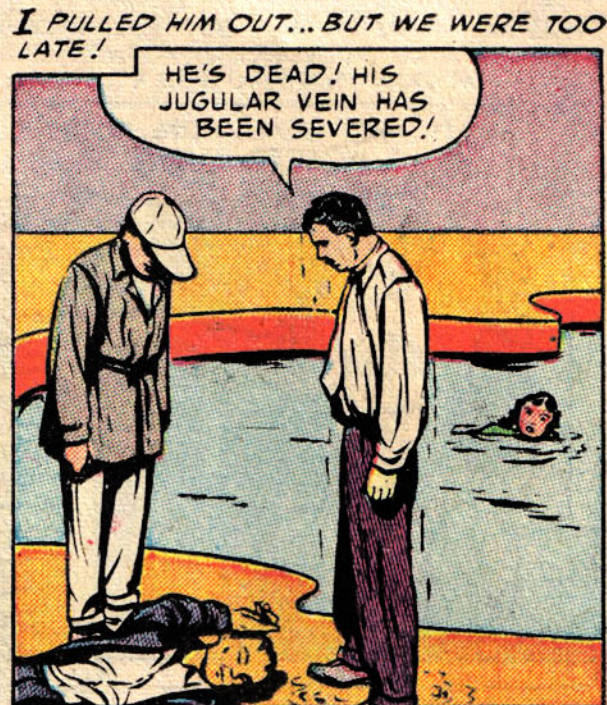
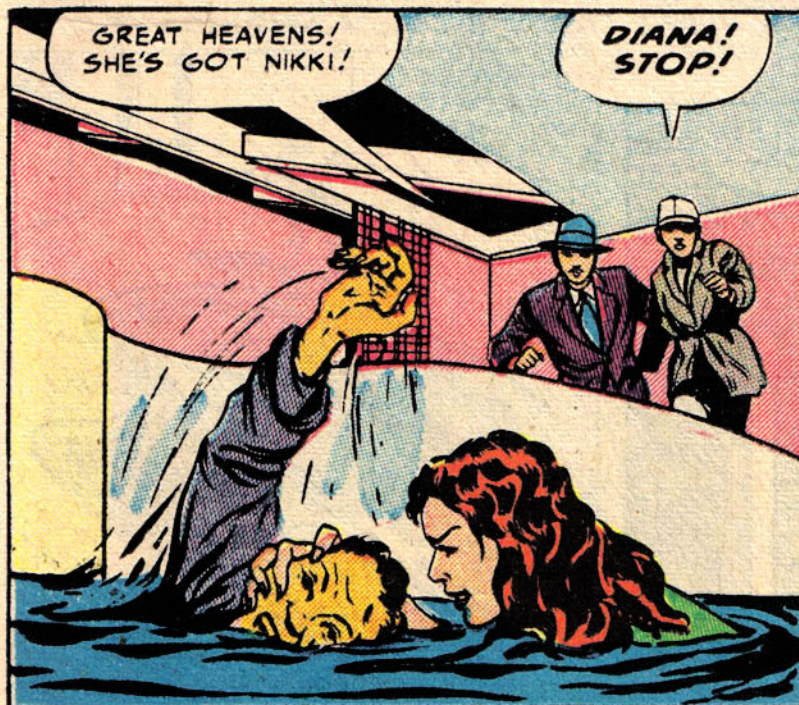
GET OFF THIS ISLAND BEFORE I TEAR YOU TO SHREDS WITH MY BARE HANDS! THE BOAT WILL BE READY TO LEAVE IN TEN MINUTES! SEE THAT **YOU** ARE, TOO!

IN SPITE OF MY CONTINUING FEELING OF DESPAIR FOR MY OLD FRIEND, THERE WAS NOTHING TO DO BUT LEAVE! I MADE IT TO THE BOAT IN **EIGHT** MINUTES, BUT JUST AS I WAS ABOUT TO SHOVE OFF...



HELP! EEEYOWWW!

IT'S NIKKI!



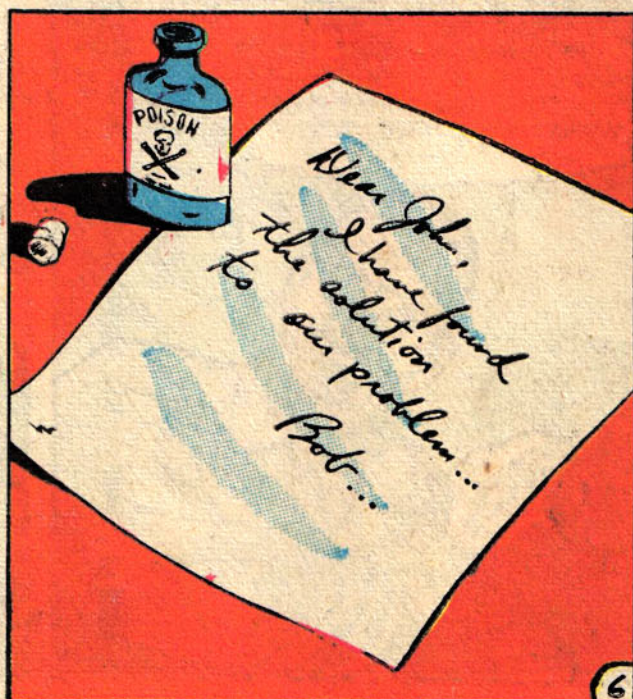
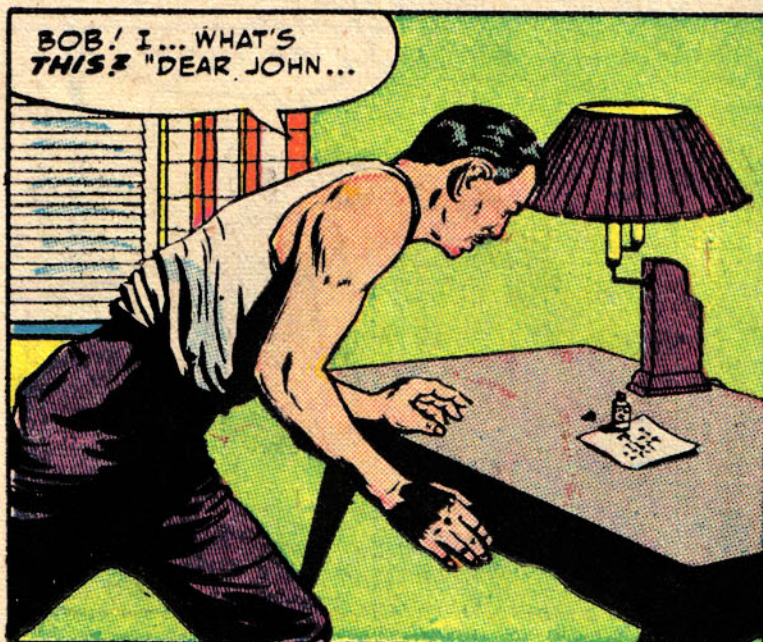
AFTER BURYING NIKKI, I FOLLOWED ROBERT TO HIS ROOM!



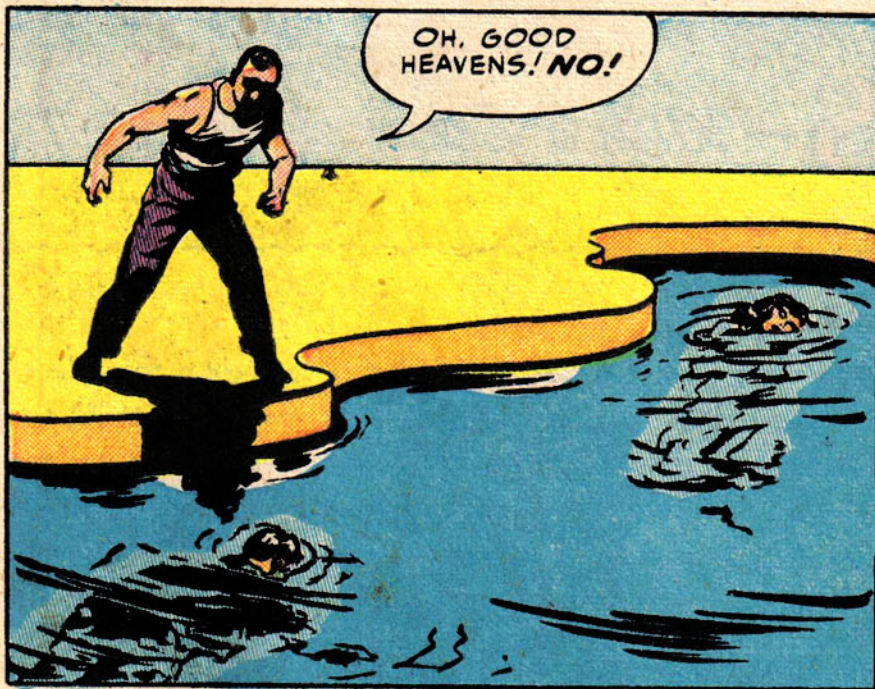
I LAY AWAKE FOR HOURS LISTENING TO ROBERT'S PACING NEXT DOOR! I FINALLY LAPSED INTO A NIGHTMARISH DOZE! I WAS SHOCKED AWAKE BY A SIXTH SENSE...A PREMONITION OF DOOM!



I RUSHED TO ROBERT'S ROOM! HE WAS GONE... BUT A NOTE WAS ON HIS DESK!

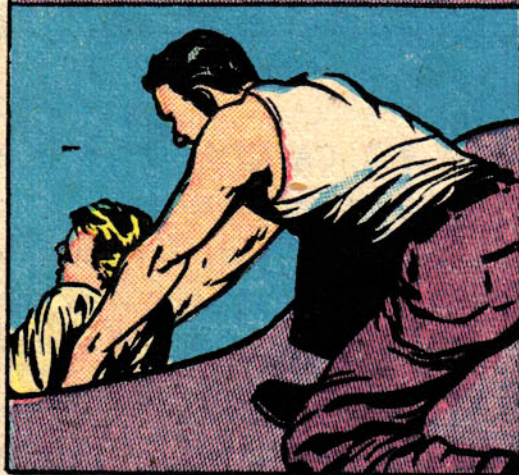


PANIC-STRICKEN, I RACED TO DIANA'S POOL!

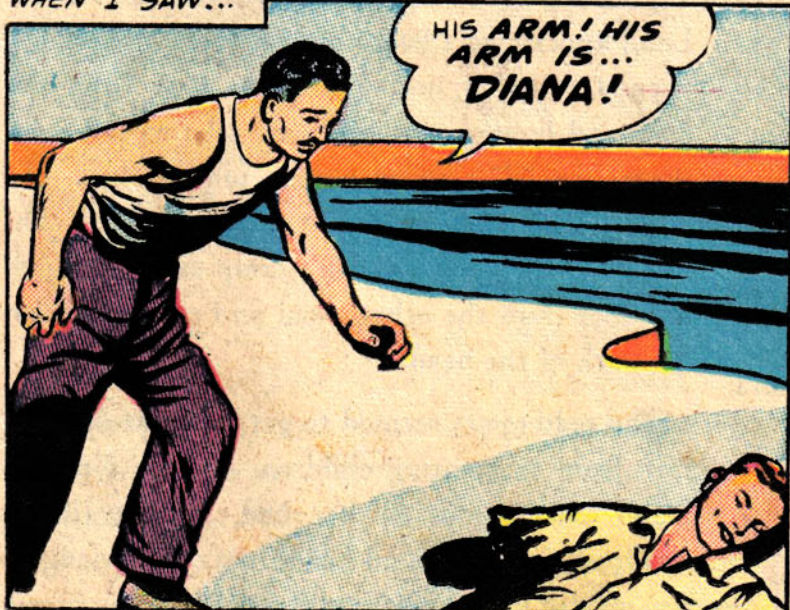


OH, GOOD HEAVENS! **NO!**

I'M TOO LATE... TOO LATE! THE POISON HAS SPREAD THROUGH HIS SYSTEM! HE'S DEAD... **BOB IS DEAD!**



I CRIED SHAMELESSLY AT THIS WANTON LOSS OF MY OLD FRIEND! BUT ANGUISH TURNED TO RAGE WHEN I SAW...



HIS ARM! HIS ARM IS... **DIANA!**

I WENT MAD! I REMEMBER, BLINDLY, TEARING A KRIS FROM THE WALL!

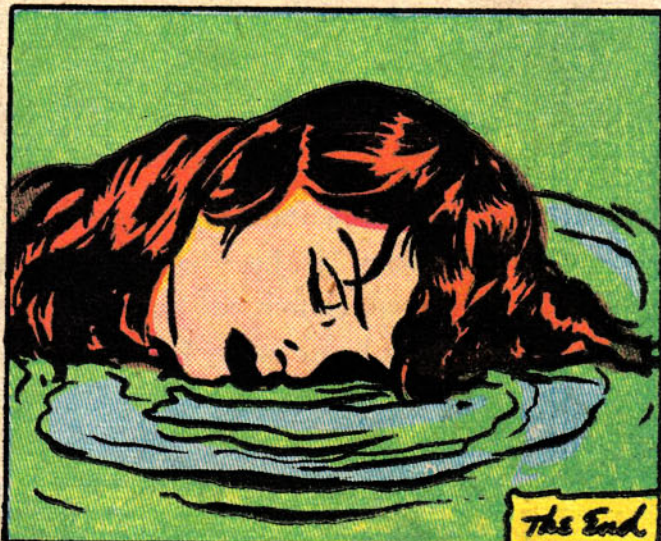


YOU BUTCHERING DEVIL! YOU HIDEOUS MONSTER! YOU'VE KILLED FOR THE **LAST TIME!**



I'M COMING AFTER YOU, DIANA! I'M GOING TO PUT THIS KNIFE THROUGH YOUR VAMPIRE'S HEART! **ARE YOU READY, DIANA? ARE YOU READY?**

BUT I NEVER STRUCK THAT BLOW, FOR ROBERT HAD ACCOMPLISHED, IN DEATH, WHAT HE COULD NOT BRING HIMSELF TO DO, IN LIFE! HIS POISONED FLESH HAD KILLED HER JUST AS SURELY AS THE VIAL OF POISON, ITSELF, WOULD HAVE DONE!



The End