

I CANNOT REMEMBER THE MORNING ANYMORE-- BUT I KNOW THE EVENING WELL! I BELONG TO IT NOW--AND IT CARES FOR ME IN RETURN-- SHELTERING ME-- NURTURING ME, HOLDING ME CLOSE WITHIN ITS VELVET EMBRACE...



THE MOON IS RISING NOW, CLAWING ITS WAY INTO THE SKY-- A GLOWING, AMBER EYE THAT CASTS ITS DISDAINFUL GAZE ON THE MURKY OOZE BELOW-- THE SWAMP THAT IS MY HOME...

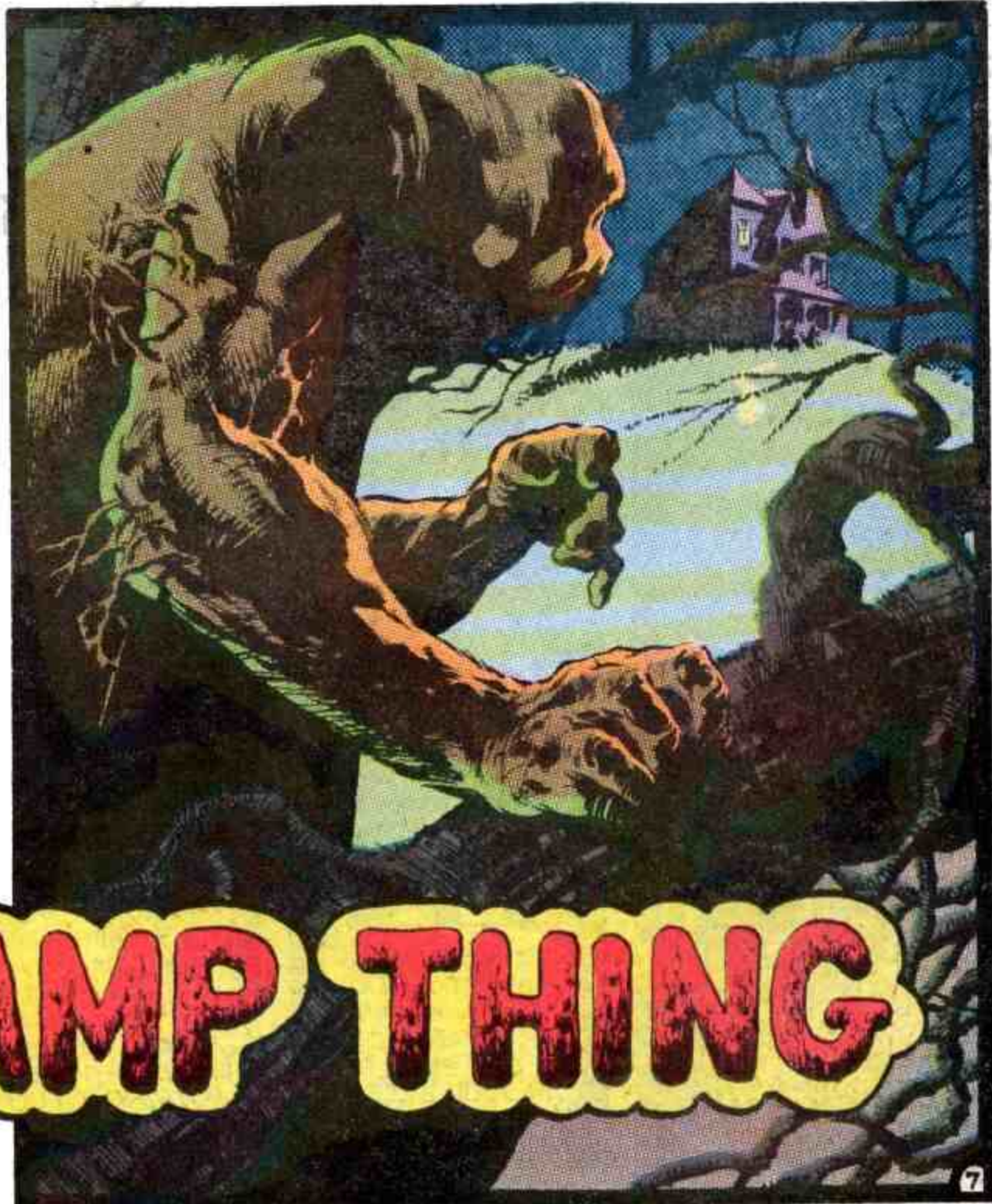


I MOVE SLOWLY THROUGH THE MOSS-DRAPED MIRE--TREADING A PATH THAT IS WORN SMOOTH FROM MY CONSTANT PASSING--ON BEYOND THE SHADOWS AND THE DARK TREES' TWISTING TENDRILS TO MY INEVITABLE DESTINATION...



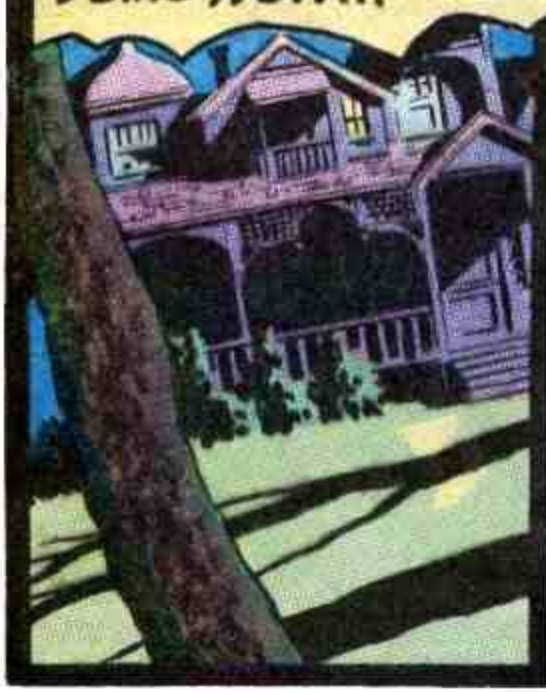
THE EDGE OF THE SWAMP--AND THE MIST-WET OLD MANSION THAT RISES LIKE AN AGING APPARITION INTO A COLD EXPANSE OF SKY-- A STately SANCTUARY FULL OF BRIGHT LIGHTS AND PROMISES-- AND MEMORIES THAT BRING ONLY PAIN...

STORY: LEN WEIN
ART: BERNI WRIGHTSON



SWAMP THING

I HAVE STOOD WATCHING THAT OLD GRAY EDIFICE FOR MORE LONELY NIGHTS THAN I WANT TO RECALL-- DREAMING ENDLESSLY OF THE SOFT GOLDEN LADY WHO LIVES WITHIN-- KNOWING I CAN NEVER HAVE HER -- WONDERING WHAT SHE'S DOING NOW...



YOU SMILE BECAUSE HE EXPECTS YOU TO-- BUT IN THE SHADOWED CORRIDORS OF YOUR HEART THERE IS NO REAL JOY-- THERE NEVER CAN BE...

YOUR NAME IS LINDA OLSEN RIDGE-- AND YOUR MIND IS A RAGING RIVER THIS NIGHT-- CARRYING YOUR THOUGHTS ALONG A SURGING STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS-- SENDING MEMORIES CRASHING LIKE WAVES UPON SOME DISTANT SHORE...

I'M SORRY, DAMIAN-- IT'S JUST THAT HE'S STILL SO REAL TO ME!

NEVER-- FOR TO FORGET ALEX OLSEN IS TO DENY A PART OF YOURSELF-- A GOOD PART-- FILLED WITH HAPPY SUMMER DAYS AND STAR-DAPPLED NIGHTS-- MIST COVERS YOUR EYES-- AND MEMORIES FALL WITH THE TEARS...

A TOAST, MY DARLING-- TO US! TODAY IS SIX MONTHS SINCE WE WERE WED!

YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT ALEX AGAIN, AREN'T YOU, DARLING? I CAN SEE IT IN YOUR EYES!

LINDA, ALEX OLSEN IS DEAD -- AND YOU ARE MY WIFE NOW! EVENTUALLY, YOU WILL HAVE TO REALIZE THAT FACT! ALEX IS GONE, DARLING-- THERE IS NOTHING TO DO BUT FORGET HIM!



WHAT IS A MEMORY? IT IS RIBBONS... CANDLES... A PARTY! YOU HAVE BEEN ALEX'S WIFE FOR TWELVE SHORT MONTHS... IT SEEMS LIKE ONLY YESTERDAY...

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY TO MY TWO DEAREST FRIENDS! I REALLY ENVY YOU, ALEX! YOU GOT YOURSELF QUITE A PRIZE IN LINDA!

AND DON'T THINK I DON'T KNOW IT!

AN ANNIVERSARY GIFT, DARLING -- FOR YOU! A SYMBOL OF MY FEELING FOR YOU!

WHAT IS A MEMORY? IT IS THE FEELING OF PRIDE YOU HAVE BEING MARRIED TO A FAST-RISING YOUNG SCIENTIST WITH THE WORLD AT HIS DOORSTEP...

A GOLDEN BRACELET! LINDA, I... I'LL NEVER TAKE IT OFF AS LONG AS I LIVE! I PROMISE YOU THAT!

WE MAKE A FINE TEAM, DAMIAN-- I DON'T KNOW WHERE I'D BE WITHOUT YOUR HELP!

IF THIS PROJECT SUCCEEDS, ALEX-- THAT WILL BE ALL THE THANKS I NEED!

WHAT IS A MEMORY? IT IS THE SEARING SOUND OF DEVASTATION-- AS YOU WATCH YOUR WORLD GO UP IN FLAMES BEFORE YOU...

OH, DEAR GOD-- NO! ALEX'S LAB...

WARAROOOM!

WHAT IS A MEMORY? IT IS THE GAPING WOUND THAT ONCE HAD BEEN YOUR HEART-- WHEN YOU LEARN YOU ARE ALONE...

DON'T GO IN THERE! THERE'S NOTHING LEFT TO SEE, LINDA! ALEX IS DEAD!

OH, DAMIAN, NO... NO... NO... NO... NO...

WHAT IS A MEMORY? IT IS A FLEETING FANTASY FAR TOO PAINFUL TO LONG REMAIN--THAT CARRIES YOU BACK THROUGH THE PORTAL OF THE PAST TO THE HARSH REALITY OF NOW...



LINDA, YOU HAVEN'T HEARD A WORD I'VE SAID!

I'M SORRY, DARLING--MY MIND WAS WANDERING--FORGIVE ME!

A HOLLOW RAIN HAS BEGUN TO FALL -- AS COLD AND EMPTY AS THE ACHING DEEP WITHIN ME -- I CAN BEAR IT NO LONGER -- THE GRIM, GRAY MANOR STANDS STARK AGAINST THE NIGHT, MOCKING ME -- I BEGIN TO MOVE...



THE NIGHT HAS GROWN COLDER NOW -- YOU CAN FEEL IT CROUCHED IN THE DARKNESS--WAITING FOR YOU...

IS SOMETHING WRONG, LINDA? YOU DON'T SEEM WELL!

ONLY THE CHILL NIGHT AIR, DARLING--IT WILL PASS!

YOU LOOK INTO YOUR HUSBAND'S EYES--AND YOU SEE ONLY SHADOWS--DARK, VEILED THINGS THAT WHISPER TO THE SURFACE--AND QUICKLY FADE AWAY --AND YOU WONDER WHAT IS GOING THROUGH HIS MIND...




DEAR, SWEET LINDA--HOW TRULY LOVELY YOU REALLY ARE!


"I NEVER REALLY FORGAVE ALEX FOR MARRYING YOU WHEN HE KNEW HOW MUCH I LOVED YOU--YOU'LL NEVER KNOW HOW HARD IT WAS FOR ME TO KEEP UP THE FACADE OF THE 'ETERNAL FRIEND'..."




HAPPY ANNIVERSARY TO MY TWO DEAREST FRIENDS!




"TO SEE YOU EVERY DAY--SO CLOSE AND YET SO IMPOSSIBLY DISTANT--NEVER TO KNOW YOUR TOUCH OR THE FRAGRANCE OF YOUR HAIR--IT WAS MORE THAN I COULD BEAR..."




"IT WAS I WHO ARRANGED THE EXPLOSION--ALONE AT NIGHT IN ALEX'S DARKENED LABORATORY--QUIETLY ALTERING THE VITAL COMPONENTS--TO RID MYSELF OF THE ONLY OBSTACLE IN MY WAY--MY BEST FRIEND..."




"YOU'LL NEVER KNOW THAT ALEX WASN'T KILLED IN THE EXPLOSION--THAT I CARRIED HIS BATTERED AND BLOODY FORM OUT INTO THE FETID INTERIOR OF THE SWAMP BEYOND--AND BURIED IT THERE..."



I WAS EVERY BIT THE *BEREAVED* FRIEND AT THE FUNERAL--ALWAYS THE COMFORTING SHOULDER--THE TENDER WORD--IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME UNTIL YOU TURNED TO ME FOR COMFORT--OUR MARRIAGE WAS *INEVITABLE!*



FORGIVE ME, DARLING--BUT THE CHILL HAS GROWN WORSE! PERHAPS I OUGHT TO RETIRE TO MY ROOM!



OF COURSE, LINDA--HOW THOUGHTLESS OF ME! GO AHEAD... I'LL JOIN YOU SHORTLY!

YOU WALK QUIETLY DOWN THE CORRIDOR TO THE SHELTER OF YOUR ROOM-- AND YOU CAN FEEL DAMIAN'S GAZE FOLLOWING YOU-- SEARING TREMORS INTO THE SMALL OF YOUR BACK...



SHE CAN'T BEAR MY TOUCH ANYMORE-- THAT'S THE **FIRST** SIGN! ALL THE **LITTLE** SCRAPS OF INFORMATION SHE'S BEEN GATHERING ARE **COMING TOGETHER** AT LAST!

IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE SHE REALIZES THAT I KILLED ALEX--AND THAT WILL MEAN MY END! HOWEVER MUCH I CARE FOR LINDA, MY **OWN** NECK COMES **FIRST**... **LINDA MUST DIE!**



THE CANDLES THAT LIGHT YOUR ROOM PROVIDE THE ONLY **REAL** WARMTH YOU'VE FELT THIS NIGHT--BUT EVEN THROUGH THAT MELLOW GLOW, THE CHILL RETURNS ONCE MORE...



DAMIAN IS HALF-WAY ACROSS THE HOUSE... WHY CAN'T I SHAKE THE FEELING THAT SOMEONE IS **WATCHING** ME?

MY HEART BEATS SOFTLY ONCE AGAIN--FOR THE SPARKLE IN HER EYES FILLS MY SOUL WITH A JOY I CANNOT DESERVE--LINDA--HER NAME RINGS LIKE FINE CRYSTAL--HER HAIR SHINES LIKE GOLD...



LINDA? ARE YOU FEELING **BETTER**, DARLING?

A **LITTLE** BETTER, I SUPPOSE, DAMIAN... BUT DON'T **WORRY** YOURSELF-- IT REALLY IS **NOTHING!**



NONSENSE! COME-- I'LL **MESSAGE** YOUR NECK--**THAT** SHOULD WORK OUT THE CHILL!

I WATCH DAMIAN RIDGE WALK SOFTLY ACROSS THE RUG AND SOMETHING GLITTERS IN HIS HAND-- A **HYPODERMIC NEEDLE!**

HE STANDS SILENTLY BEHIND HER, THE NEEDLE POISED TO STRIKE -- TO END THE LIFE OF THE ONLY THING IN THIS WORLD THAT MAKES MY EXISTENCE BEARABLE -- THE ONLY REASON I LIVE -- FURY FILLS THE SPACES BEHIND MY EYES -- AND I WALK INTO THE ROOM ...



WITH A SPEED I HAVE NEVER KNOWN BEFORE, I MOVE THE FETID BULK THAT IS MY BODY ACROSS THE SPAN OF FEET -- AND THE CLAW THAT IS MY HAND CLOSES UPON DAMIAN'S WRIST -- CRUSHING IT ...



SLOWLY -- CERTAINLY -- I FORCE THE LIFE FROM DAMIAN'S BLACK-HEARTED BODY -- A LIFE HE DOES NOT DESERVE ...



FOR SEVERAL SHORT MINUTES, DAMIAN RIDGE STRUGGLES FOR HIS UNWORTHY LIFE -- TEARING, CLAWING, RIPPING DECAYING SHREDS FROM WHAT ONCE HAD BEEN MY FLESH -- UNTIL, AT LAST, HE LIES STILL -- FOREVER ...



... AND MY BRIGHT, GOLDEN LADY STANDS SCREAMING BEHIND ME ...

THE LOATHSOME MONSTROSITY TURNS FROM THE BODY OF YOUR HUSBAND AND REACHES FOR YOU WITH ARMS DRIPPING FILTH--FEAR WELLS UP WITHIN YOU LIKE A FLOOD--AND THE SOUND OF YOUR OWN SCREAMING RINGS IN YOUR EARS...



I STRETCH OUT MY ARMS TO HER--TO CALM HER--TO COMFORT HER--I OPEN MY MOUTH TO TELL HER HOW MUCH I CARE -- BUT WHAT ONCE HAD BEEN MY VOCAL CORDS HAVE BEEN SILENT TOO LONG -- I CANNOT MAKE A SOUND.



THE TORTURED, SHATTERED LOOK IN HER ONCE-SPARKLING EYES IS MORE THAN I CAN ENDURE -- I TURN MY FACE AWAY FROM HER--AND I START TO GO HOME...



ONLY THE SWAMP IS KIND TO ME NOW--IT IS ONLY THE SWAMP THAT CARES -- I LOOK DOWN AT MY WRIST -- AT THE BARREN PLACE WHERE ONCE THERE WAS A GOLDEN BRACELET --AND I WONDER WHERE IT IS...



--IF TEARS COULD COME -- THEY WOULD!