

MEANWHILE: Love is a Warm Drain

By S.R. Ayers

PAGE ONE (6 panels)

Panel 1. Young buck detective Johnny Hutch, the all-American, clean cut, blonde Boy Scout, has come to the station early today. He's looking for his newly assigned mentor & partner, detective Hudson Brody. Nobody's seen him. The chief, Captain Jennings, is directing him to Brody's office with a thumb over her shoulder.

JOHNNY HUTCH: Hey chief, um, is detective Brody here?

CAPTAIN JENNINGS: You're on your own today rook, go fish a day's work out of his office.

The season in Sanguine is autumn, chilly and rain to be expected at any moment. Johnny is wearing comfortable, business-casual clothes. Over it all he wears a mid-length jacket. The style and hipness is up to you.

Panel 2. Hutch has opened the door and is peering in with an expectant, almost childlike look on his face.

Panel 3. Now we're seeing the office from Hutch's POV. Hutch has opened the door to an empty office. Empty in the sense that Hudson's not there. What is there are the standard furnishings of a salty dog detective's workspace. Desk, chair, bookshelf, file cabinet, maps, phone, etc. etc. All of which is well worn and buried in either papers, tokens from previous or ongoing cases, or dust. Of course, these descriptors are just to set the atmosphere for you. Whatever camera angle you take to best show Hutes quest for acceptance in this office is fine, this is just an itinerary of what's in the room. Also, Hudson is no neat freak. In fact he feels like he's missed some detail if there's a bare patch of furniture. All negative space is meant to be filled with information in his opinion.

Panel 4. Closer on the filing cabinet, which is packed well beyond maximum capacity.

Panel 5. We're looking up at Hutch, at the back of the folder he's withdrawn from a drawer labeled "MEANWHILE. On the outside of the folder is the title of the story "Love is a Warm Drain". The artist, writer and publisher credits can go here as well.

Panel 6. Hutch is holding the file in one hand, and pointing to a spot on the wall map of Sanguine with the other to find the exact location of the case.

PAGE TWO (5 panels)

Johnny is pulling up to an obviously very old suburban house. The make & model of Johnny's car is up to you. He would more than likely have something relatively efficient and simple, a vehicle he would've had for a long time, like an old Jeep Renegade or J5. Not necessarily efficient in a modern sense, but to keep this old thing and fix when need be rather than get a new car is Johnny's meaning of the word. In the foreground is a "SOLD" sign planted in the yard.

Panel 2. Johnny is at the front door, showing his badge, introducing himself. The couple inside are holding each other as newlyweds would.

JOHNNY HUTCH: Hi, my name is detective Hutch. I'm here to follow up on your recent report of a, uh, voice in the basement?

Panel 3. The newlyweds are leading Johnny through the house. Everything is still in large boxes. Only wedding present type items are out and about through the house.

NEWLYWIFE: Thank. God. You're here.

Panel 4. All three stand before the door leading to the basement. Johnny is all professional curiosity, the newlyweds are coiled rabbits ready to leap away.

Panel 5. Looking up from the bottom of the basement stairs Johnny comes down toward us. The newlyweds stay upstairs, peeking timidly after Johnny.

PAGE THREE (4 panels)

Panel 1. High angle wide shot of the basement, taking almost half the page if you want, with Panel 2 inset near the bottom of this panel. Johnny is pulling the thin chain to turn on the bare light bulb in the foreground. It's a standard basement. Rather sparse, lots of room, not many posts or walls. Boxes stacked in the corners, one column of boxes has been toppled over (left to fall and remain fallen when whichever newlywed heard 'the sound in the drain' and wilted like a daisy). Squat windows set head-level in two of the walls, grown over with weeds and debris, allowing the faintest of dirt colored light to leak in. A bank of old, sturdy work benches line these two walls as well, cleared of whatever work they hosted in the past. The tops of these counters still show scars of determined experimentation with chemicals, tools and flammable materials.

And the drain in the very center of the floor. A standard affair, old and wide, obviously made for taking heavy overflow from household flooding, malfunctioning washing machines and plumbing mishaps. Not a skinny little covered pipe as new homes are built with. The grate on this drain is made of metal, but brown with corrosion and waste.

Again, I list everything I see in the basement, but what can feasibly be seen from your camera angle is up to you.

Panel 2. A small panel, inset near the bottom of Panel 1. It's focus is the drain cover. Almost completely caked over with rust and grime.

Panel 3. Closer on the drain. This panel is to be slightly larger than Panel 2.

Panel 4. Even closer on the drain. This panel is slightly larger than Panel 3. Johnny has come over and is kneeling down over the drain, scratching at it with his pen.

THE DRAIN (small): Hello?

PAGE FOUR (4 panels)

Panel 1. Worm's eye view, looking up. Johnny is jumping back as if god just snatched him up by the collar.

Panel 2. W.E.V. still. Johnny is sitting on the concrete floor, legs sprawled, hands behind him, elbows locked, complete disbelief planted firmly on his face.

THE DRAIN (small): Is somebody there?

Panel 3. W.E.V. again. Johnny is inching closer to the drain, pistol drawn, but no intention of actually shooting the drain unless something pops out of it.

Panel 4. Once more, W.E.V. Looking across the drain, Johnny's face directly on the other side from us.

THE DRAIN (small): I'm so hungry.

PAGE FIVE (5 panels)

Panel 1. Johnny's up on his knees, his pockets turned out. In his hands are his keys, a container of Tic-Tacs, and a pocket knife. He's tucked his gun under his arm. He's inventorying what he has to feed the drain and coming up with nothing.

JOHNNY HUTCH: Um, I'm sorry, I don't...uh...who are you?

THE DRAIN: I'm sooo hungry! Please!

Panel 2. We're looking up through the disgusting crowded holes in the drain cover at Johnny. He's twisting his head around like a bird, scanning the basement for food.

JOHNNY HUTCH: Wouldn't you rather I help you out of there?

THE DRAIN: I need to eat first, please. You're a very nice man.

JOHNNY HUTCH: Yeah, no problem. So, uh...how'd you...

Panel 3. Bird's eye view looking down at Johnny, hunched over the drain, listening to the drain while he continues to peer around for edibles. He has set his pistol down on the floor next to him, and dropped the items he took out of his pockets.

THE DRAIN: I can't eat your food. I need...softer things. Personal things to live. It's a very large request, I know, but it has been so long since she...came to see me.

Panel 4. Close on the drain and Johnny's hands. His fingers are unfolding the blade on his pocket knife as he leans in very close to listen to the drain.

JOHNNY HUTCH: Since who came to see you, and what is it exactly that you need?

THE DRAIN: My master, she has never punished me with her absence for this long. I fear that I have finally broken her heart and she has left me forever.

Panel 5. Close on Johnny's face, full of total confusion.

JOHNNY HUTCH: Do you mean Dr. Seward? She was your master? I'm afraid, um-

PAGE SIX (3 panels)

Panel 1. A thin panel across the top of the page. Extreme close-up of Johnny's pocket knife being wedged under the edge of the drain cover.

JOHNNY HUTCH: I'm sorry, but she passed away three weeks ago. The house belonged to her, yes?

THE DRAIN: Yes, oh yes. (ung) And so did I. (sob) Oh dear.

Panel 2. Again, a thin panel just under Panel 1, so as to make plenty of space for Panel 3, the glory shot of the page, if not the entire story. Here the drain cover is popping off, flecks of rust and coagulated slime being sent in all directions. You can take either a bird's eye view of this, or a worm's eye view, just so long as we don't see into the drain until the next panel.

THE DRAIN: Only she knew how to love me, how to feed me, how to keep me alive, to teach me what love is.

Panel 3. This panel takes the lion's share of the page. We are looking down at the drain from Johnny's POV. A few inches down inside the pipe is a crushed and deformed, swollen and broken face with large eyes set in two tiny pools of tears. The gender of the face is rather indiscernible, but it leans to the feminine side slightly more than the masculine.

THE DRAIN: I'm not fit to take another breath without that love.

PAGE SEVEN (7 panels)

Panel 1. Johnny turns around sharp to vomit.

Panel 2. He peeks back over his shoulder at the drain.

Panel 3. Turns and vomits whatever didn't come up the first time.

Panel 4. The vomit slowly begins to creep with the contour of the concrete floor-- toward the drain.

Panel 5. Johnny is stricken with shock as he sees the impending predicament.

JOHNNY HUTCH: Oh no, no no no! I'm sorry. Damn!

Panel 6. Johnny tosses aside his reservations and tries to block the vomit's path with his bare hands, nothing else being available or within reach that he could grab before the bile slips into the drain. Alas, regardless of valor and determination, the vomit is seeping past his hands.

THE FACE IN THE DRAIN: Oh you sweet, sweet man. Thank you.

Panel 7. Extreme close-up on the vomit rolling over the edge of the drain.

THE FACE IN THE DRAIN: Mistress Seward only fed me this well on special occasions. Did you know my master?

PAGE EIGHT (6 panels)

Panel 1. Johnny is beginning to weep as he uselessly tries to stem the flow of his waste to the drain.

THE FACE IN THE DRAIN: Thank you. Thank you.

Panel 2. Johnny is wiping his tears away with his sleeve, looking down at the drain, his shoulders slumped, giving in to the futility of his actions and the desire of the face in the drain.

JOHNNY HUTCH: I'm sorry. This, this is no way...Dr. Seward is gone, and I can't...you have to understand...

Panel 3. Close on the Face's eyes. The tears make a moat around the discolored, heavily speckled (as in unhealthy) irises.

THE FACE IN THE DRAIN: Yes...I know. You, you did your best, but nobody can replace Mistress Seward.

Panel 4. High angle, from up near the light bulb, looking down on Johnny and the Face in the drain. The face itself may not be in any amount of detail from this distance, and with this size panel, but it's Johnny's body language that speaks loudest in this image. He's deflated, sitting on his heels, head bowed, he looks absolutely defeated. In front of him the drain, and the Face of a person he has no chance of saving in any form he can relate to when he thinks of the word 'saving'.

THE FACE IN THE DRAIN: I think I need to go to her this time. May I double my debt, and ask for your help once more?

Panel 5. Small panel, close on Johnny's pained face.

JOHNNY HUTCH: What can do?

THE FACE IN THE DRAIN: Just...help me up.

Panel 6. The Face has opened her mouth as wide as possible, a strange effect for such a tiny space. Her mouth is just big enough for a man's hand to fit inside. The eyes, though

squinting, show no malice, only pleading. The teeth have long since rotted away, and only a trench-mouthed grooved set of gums and slim, lean tongue remain in her maw.

PAGE NINE (6 panels)

Panel 1. Looking up at Johnny from the Face's POV. Johnny, with tears in his eyes and a quivering chin, has squared his shoulders and is preparing to do what needs to be done.

Panel 2. Still from the Face's POV. Johnny's hand is coming toward us.

Panel 3. Extreme close-up of Johnny's fingers slipping into the Face's mouth.

Panel 4. Same as Panel 3, but now Johnny's hand is in the mouth up to the wrist.

Panel 5. Looking up at Johnny as he pulls back with his whole body. We don't see the body of the face in the drain yet, just Johnny's effort.

Panel 6. The largest panel of the page. This is broken up into many tiny images showing the procession of the Face's body as it comes out of the drain. The face, the brain, the spine, the stomach, the intestines, however you want to run it and shape it is completely up to you. I trust that you'll make it flow.

PAGE TEN (4 panels)

Panel 1. This panel has the lion's share of this page with Johnny sitting on the floor, exhausted, surrounded by the organ parade he's pulled from the drain pipe.

Panel 2. Close on the Face, lying on its side, barely alive, like a fish long out of water. Death on her lips, but gratitude in her eyes.



THE FACE OUT OF THE DRAIN (small and weak): Thank you, you sweet, sweet man.

Panel 3. Same as Panel 2. The Face is dead.

Panel 4. Johnny lets his head fall back and his chest sink between his shoulders, he is completely drained (no pun intended...honestly).

PAGE ELEVEN (5 panels)

Panel 1. Johnny is up on his feet. He's standing by the boxes in the corner, dumping the contents of a large canvas bag out on the floor.

Panel 2. Johnny is upstairs walking past the newlyweds. In one hand he carries the canvas bag, full and heavy and already showing signs of seepage. In his other hand he carries his jacket. His clothes are covered in wet, dark stains and he moves with a sureness of step. He doesn't speak to the couple as he passes, regardless of the questioning expressions on their faces.

Panel 3. Johnny has driven to the wharfs, his car parked haphazardly at the beginning of the dock. Johnny stands out at the end, alone, nobody else out today on this chilly gray day. His arm is in mid-motion, as he has hurled the canvas bag out over the sea. There is a large spout of water from its landing far ahead of him.

Panel 4. Johnny has gone home for the day, a hard day's work accomplished in his book. He is still exhausted and confused and uncertain of the world around him as he takes off his jacket, drops his keys and makes his way to the shower in his tiny downtown apartment.

Panel 5. Johnny is in the shower crying. He's packed himself into the corner, and stares at the little drain in the center of the tiles, his fingers barely touching the edge as one might reach out to wipe a tear away.

Fin.