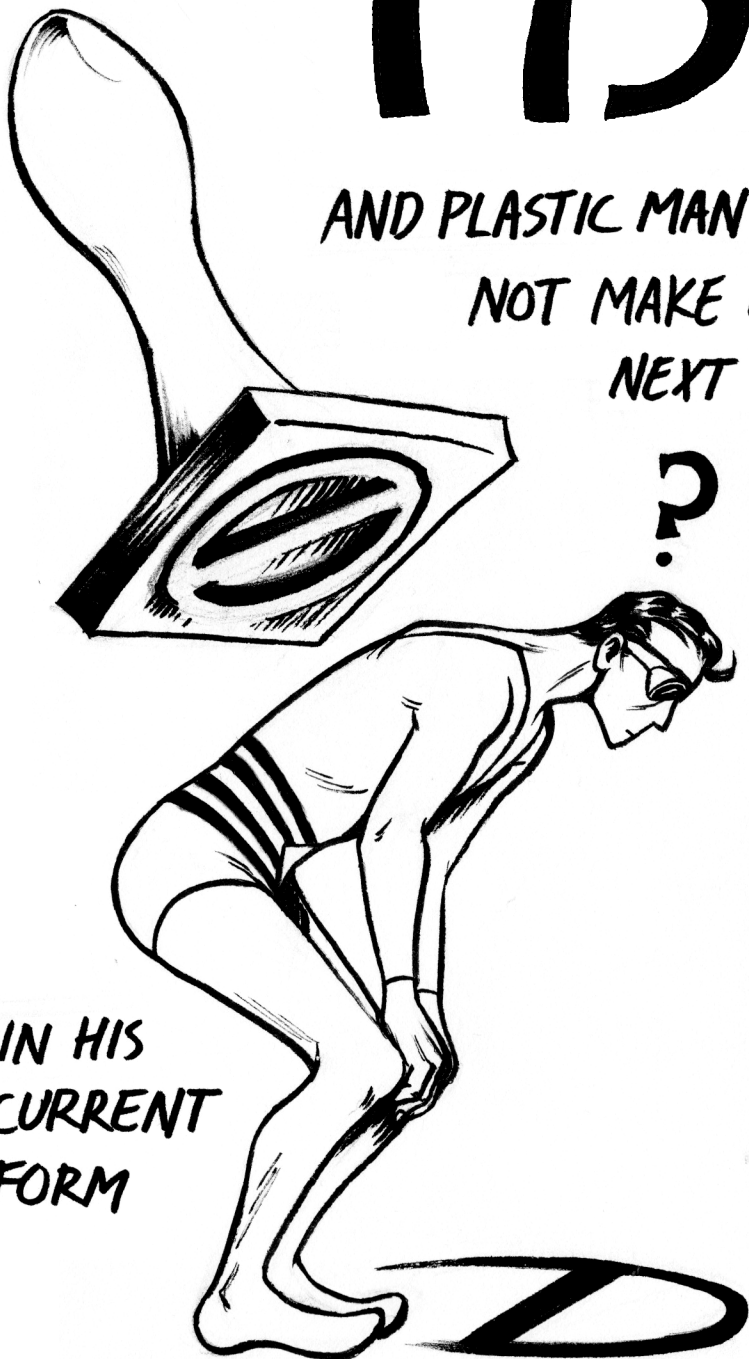


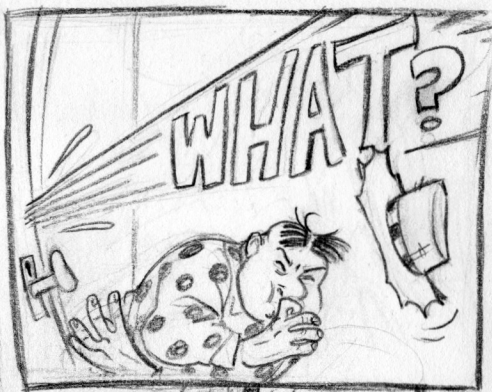
IT IS 1953

AND PLASTIC MAN WILL
NOT MAKE IT TO
NEXT YEAR

?

IN HIS
CURRENT
FORM







Plastic Man came in through the window and slapped the surface of the mahogany desk sharply. Chief Branner didn't even flinch. He was long since resigned to his premiere agent's unorthodox methods of entry.

"Now I know I'm not resigning, Chief," Plas announced. "Certainly not before I've had a chance to clear Woozy Winks' name."

Branner sighed and tactfully rearranged the pile of reports in front of him so that the file on Plas was no longer on top.

"I'm afraid your word may be more harm than help right now," he warned. "They're suspicious enough of you as it is."

"You gave me the chance to prove myself once, and I did," Plas implored, hanging off the back of his chair. "Have a heart again!"

The chief shot him a look. "Technically, we didn't *give* you that chance. You took it before we had any idea who you were."

Plas reached over with one foot and yanked a file drawer open, nearly spilling closed cases all across the floor. "But I earned my place. I've proven myself indispensable to the Bureau!"

"Plas--"

"If I have to lay low, I can go undercover," Plastic Man offered, his face and clothing suddenly the serious, chiseled lines of an ordinary G-man. "Way undercover," he added in a whisper, now looking for all the world like a little old lady, bent in two.

Branner leaned across his desk, exasperated. "You're not helping your case, Plastic Man," he said. "I'm putting my career on the line by stalling for you. I know you and I like you, but I'm certain the Bureau won't like what they turn up if this investigation goes forwards."

Plas reverted to his normal shape and stood there at a rare loss for words.

"I'm not a danger to kids," he finally said. So he *had* caught a look at that written report. "Chief. You know I'm not."

"I know," he said as gently as he could without losing his gruff supervisory air. "Those are just their excuses, you understand. The concern is that--fellows like you--are too easily blackmailed."

Plas scowled and crossed his arms like he was trying to wrap himself into a square knot. "Whether or not Hoover likes it, my oddities are already public knowledge. And when has that interfered with my work?"

"You've been trying to hatch a plan to free your friend Mr. Winks since you left my office yesterday. No matter the personal cost."

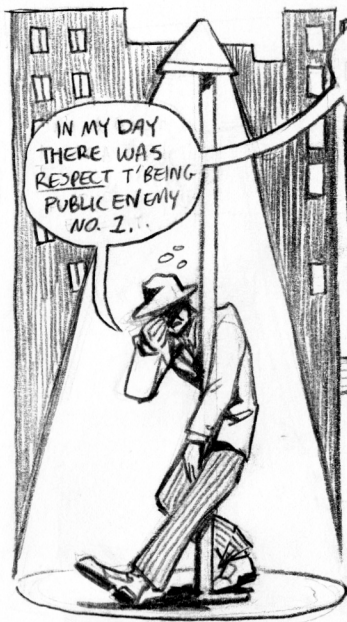
"You've had me under surveillance!" Plas accused, shrinking inwards on himself like a snail. He looked betrayed by the idea.

"No, Plas, I just know you. Everyone at the Bureau does."

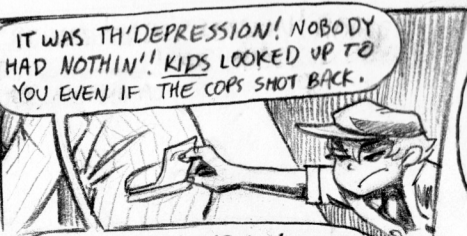
Plastic Man left his office the proper way, by door, just so that he could slam it behind him.







IN MY DAY
THERE WAS
RESPECT T'BEING
PUBLIC ENEMY
NO. 2.



IT WAS TH'DEPRESSION! NOBODY
HAD NOTHIN'! KIDS LOOKED UP TO
YOU EVEN IF THE COPS SHOT BACK.

FIGURES. I SPEND 10 YEARS ON
THE LAW'S SIDE JUST TO FEEL
LOWER 'AN WHEN I STARTED.



SPEAKING
OF WHICH-



DIDN'T YOU
HEAR ABOUT
THE POSTWAR
ECONOMIC BOOM,
Y'LL BE PUNK?
WHAT'RE YOU
DOING,
DUSTING
POCKETS?



YOU'LL NEVER
TAKE ME ALIVE!
NEVER!

COOL YOUR HEELS, KID.
NOBODY GOES TO SING-
SING OVER 5 DOLLARS.

5TH
AMEND-
MENT
RIGHTS!



A NICE MONK ONCE GAVE
ME A SECOND CHANCE, PR'VIDED
I STOPPED PUSHING OTHERS
AROUND. NOW, D'YA THINK
I LEARNED
MY LESSON?

HMMH -

I'M NOT SO
SURE EITHER.



SAY, WHY
ARE YOU
STEALING

WHEN THIS CRISP \$10
IS RIGHT BEHIND YOUR
LEFT EAR, HMM?

JUST DON'T SPEND
IT ALL IN ONE PLACE, NOW

THANKS, SIR!

DUMB DICK.



Plastic Man's front half squeezed back through the bars to rejoin the rest of him. "Yes?"

"It's not proper, going in a jailhouse window," a cross guardsman told him. "Besides only authorized visitors can talk to offenders."

"I'm not proper," Plas said as he kneaded out the divot the guard's truncheon had left in his back end. "I'm Plastic Man! And besides, as offensive as you may find Woozy, he's still innocent 'till proven guilty. It's things like that which separates us from the Reds."

The guard frowned. Keeping idiots from climbing the barbed wire fence was usually dull work and he didn't appreciate this hunk of red rubber with an attitude for changing that.

"A funny guy, hmm? Comedians have to sign in at the front desk just like everyone else."

He took him by the shoulder none too gently. "You're lucky I don't have you arrested just for poking your nose in there."

Plastic Man let his shoulder stretch but stayed stubbornly in place. "Now, that's no attitude to take with a G-man!" he warned.

"Aren't you under investigation for being a Commie?" the guard snapped back. "Watch it."

"For Pete's sake I'm not a Communist!" Plas shouted. He was fed up. "I'm a *sex deviate*. Why, couldn't you tell by looking at me?" He peered into the surprised man's face.

The guard stepped back. "A-are you going to deviate mine?"

"No," said Plas, truly hurt by the accusation. "That's not how it works anyways." He folded his arms and let the guard lead him away, despondent. "First you have to fall into a vat of chemicals ..."

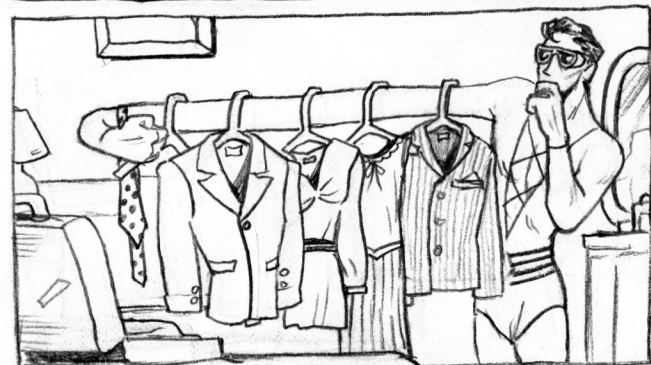
Dear Sir or Maam:

We regret to inform you that your visitation request was denied. Under new regulations, dissidents awaiting hearing may only be visited by their immediate family (parent, child, or legal spouse). Prior to this date...

"They can't put Woozy through a hearing!" Plas said as he read the letter. With his luck, he'd incriminate himself in the murder of an archduke before he'd even opened his mouth.

Plastic Man was many things. Patriotic, passionate, impulsive, idealistic. But he wasn't stupid. He'd signed the jail's logbook. They had it in his own handwriting that he'd spoken with a dissident--one who shared his home address.

Plas swore into the empty room.





Chief Branner didn't have to ask who the unfamiliar woman was. Aside from the obvious, the Bureau hadn't hired a female agent since the '20s.

He gingerly picked the paper up. To his relief, it was simply a neatly typed letter of resignation.

"Well," he said, standing and offering his hand to shake. "I'm sorry it had to end this way. I wish you the best of luck."

Plas didn't return the gesture.

"I suggest you resign too," he replied.

Branner sighed deeply. (He'd been doing that a lot recently.) "I think you're the last person I expected to hear that from."

"I'm saying it as your friend," Plas said. "Even if your reputation survives"--a gesture to the scarlet dress--"all this."

"I just hope you won't return to the old job."

Plas placed his hands on his (her?) hips, hair swishing defiantly. "Do I look like I'm about to go join the mob to you?"

The chief shrugged helplessly. "I never know with you. You're damned unpredictable."

"It's a gift," Plas said with a curtsey and hint of that old self-satisfied smile. "You might think I would have noticed there's more than two sides to choose from before now. Well, goodbye, Chief. See you never."



Chief Branner couldn't sleep that night. "See you never" sounded too much like a suicide note. Not that he could imagine how someone made of plasticine *could* kill themselves. But where there was a will, there was a way. He hoped there wasn't a will.

Mrs. Branner snored in bed beside him.

"I think I should quit my job," he told her.

"That's nice dear," she said without waking up.

The night guard on duty was too absorbed in his pulp paperback to notice the slithery thing darting by in the shadows. But then a metallic jingle caught his attention.

He looked up to see a strange, short figure in a fur hat holding the keyring which was supposed to be on his belt. His heart beat faster. A Russian spy, surely! As though they'd snuck off the page he'd been reading! He reached for the phone. Its cord had been cut. He reached for his gun. It wasn't in its holster.

The little spy gave him a disarmingly youthful gap-toothed grin and dangled the pickpocketed gun between thumb and forefinger. He heard a slithering sound directly above his head. For a terrified moment he understood the "spy" had only been a distraction. Then something horrid enveloped his face from behind and everything went black.

Six suspected Communists were surprised to be awoken at midnight by a very strangely-dressed kid unlocking their cell doors. (None more surprised than Reino Kozlov, who truly was a Russian spy--though not a very good one. He'd been caught so quickly he suspected his "comrades" had grown sick of him and snitched.)

Wary as they were, the group followed their mysterious rescuer through unlocked doors and past deserted guard stations into the chilly night. When the child continued down an alley and into the trees, they followed like sleep-walkers, unsure what else to do.

Finally one Mr. Lawson spoke up. "This was sure kind of you, but what now? Me and my wife, we can't go home. They'd take us in again come the morning."

"We're taking a train," the child replied. "Like real hoboes. My friend worked it all out."

"Then you're a communist too, dear?" Ms. Murphy asked hopefully.

"I'm a street prince," the kid corrected her.

"Is your friend a fellow traveler?"

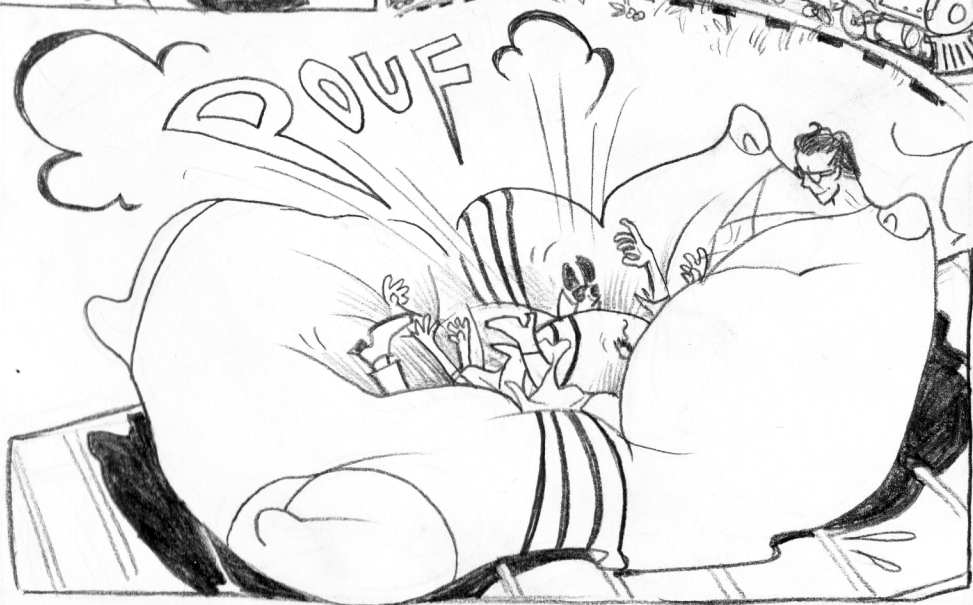
"Got no idea *what* he is." They turned a corner into a clearing by the tracks where a lovely blond woman sat by a crackling fire. "Here, ask her y'rself."

The lady smiled warmly as they approached.

"Murphy, Kozlov, and the Lawsons?" She lifted a pile of paper files from her lap and dumped them into the fire. "I don't think the FBI will be needing these anymore. Now would anyone like a sandwich?"







PLAS — PAT — SHOULD
I CALL YA PAT NOW?

IF YOU'D LIKE!
BUT I'M
FLEXIBLE.

JUS' WANTED TO SAY...
SORRY THAT I MESSED UP
TH' HERO THING FOR YOU.

THAT'S SWEET OF YOU, WOOLZY
BUT FOR ONCE I DON'T THINK
ANY OF THIS IS YOUR FAULT.

AND, SAY — MAYBE WE'LL BE
BETTER HEROES WITHOUT THE
FBI!

CHACHO,
AMTA.

ER — PADO
SWAKATOON?

BUT IT MIGHT
BE WISE TO LAY
LOW A BIT.

IT WOULD
BE NICE
TO SETTLE
DOWN AND
GROW
BROCCOLI.

BROCCOLI?

PLAS, Y'REALLY
ARE QUEER.

I'VE BEEN TOLD THAT BEFORE...

... AH.

WOOTY?

YEAH?

I FORGOT OUR
BAGS BACK THERE.

I DUNNO HOW YOU'D EVER
MAKE IT WITHOUT ME.



FIN.



A TIMELINE OF RELEVANT EVENTS

1938

April: Superman kicks off the Golden Age of comics.

1939

September: WWII begins in Europe.

1940

The FBI's attention starts turning from American gangs to Nazi spies.

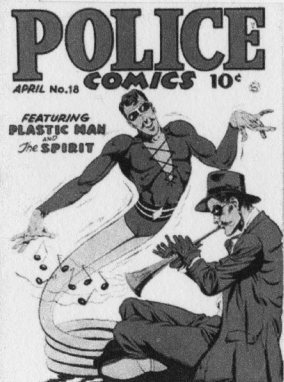
1941

July: Patrick "Eel" O'Brian, former gangster, gains his powers & starts working for the law.

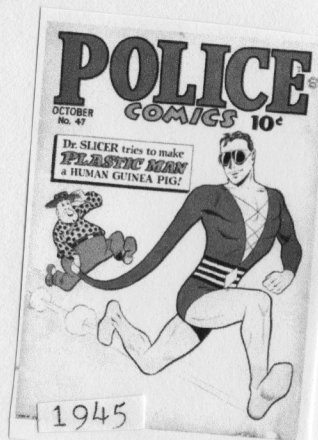
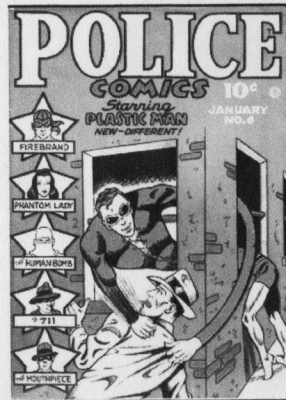
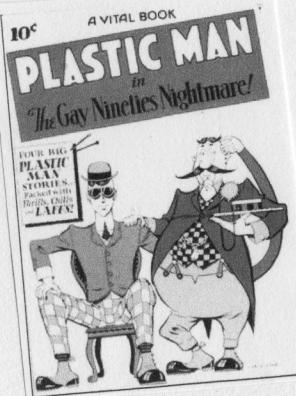
December: the USA joins WWII.

1943

April: Plastic Man joins the FBI.



1944



May: WWII ends.

The Great Depression ends.

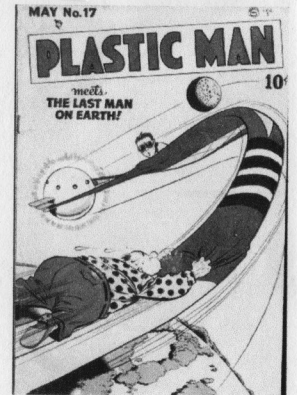
A (CONTINUED) TIMELINE OF RELEVANT EVENTS

1947

March: The Cold War begins.

Loyalty-security tests are put in place to screen applicants to govt jobs.

1949



1950

February: Joseph McCarthy begins making claims about secret communists in federal positions.

November: Police Comics stops publishing Plastic Man stories.

1951

June: Hoover issues the memo creating the FBI's project to uncover "sex deviates"

May: Executive Order 10450 takes effect. Federal depts must re-conduct background checks on all employees.

1953

September: the last original Plastic Man adventure.



1954

April: Seduction Of The Innocent is published, closing the Golden Age.

