



**Action Comics #23**  
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*Action Comics*

Issue 23: "Home is where the hurt is"

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**Metropolis:**

Lois lay there listening. No more sounds. The men had loaded all the equipment and left. The ribbon was still wrapped tight around her. She tried to breathe without moving her chest. Every time she exhaled the bands wrapped a little tighter. She began to inch her way out from under the large chunk of debris, the arm rest of the chair wouldn't hold it up much longer. Winslow lay directly in front of her. He was alive, but barely.

"The gunmen must have messed up a point blank shot", Lois thought out loud, "Doesn't speak much for the caliber of hired guns these days."

It was no use the more she moved the tighter the ribbons got. Her right arm was now completely numb.

There were a few things that Superman always kept himself attuned to. A few months back he worked with Batman to train himself to detect the smell of certain chemical compounds that could be used in explosives, in particular, semtex. It worked pretty well except for the whole time Batman kept referring to him as Lassie.

The air carried the scent of semtex, and something else. Superman paused in mid air, hanging in the sky, suspended like a dandelion on a lazy summer breeze. Lois' perfume, there were several thousand women in Metropolis that wore the same perfume as Lois, but when combined with the scent of semtex, there was no doubt in the Man of Steels mind that it was Lois.

A combination of telescopic and X-ray vision, Super-vision, in the general direction of the scent, revealed the abandoned building with the gaping hole in its side. Heat still emanated from the wound, it hadn't been long since it happened, a deeper infrared scan showed the heat of two bodies inside, one barely alive.

Lois' breathing was shallow. She was trying her best to fight the panic. At first when the chunk of concrete started moving she thought it was coming down on her, but instead it was lifting up.

Superman lifted the chunk of concrete like papier-mâché and tossed it aside. He grabbed the strips of ribbon and tore them apart. On the way there he had examined Lois and the rapidly fading Schott.

"Lois, that man is nearly dead! I'm going to fly him to Metro General, are you OK for now?"

The restrictive ribbons gone, her body starved for oxygen, the air rushed into Lois' lungs so quickly that she was unable to speak until she had fully inhaled and exhaled.

"I'll be fine she rasped. Go, go."

Superman picked up Winslow's limp body.

"Stay put Lois; I'll be back for you." Superman flew out the hole in the wall with Winslow cradled in his arms.

### **Smallville:**

"Mmmmmm, pancakes."

The next morning Clark woke up in his room in Smallville to the smell of pancakes. No matter where he went in the universe, no matter what wonders he saw, nothing would ever be like home. He was late getting home last night after going back to the sight of the explosion and of course finding Lois gone. He didn't have to use much super-vision to find her though, she was back at the Planet already writing up the story

so he left her to her own devices.

Clark showered and dressed and hurried downstairs for a stack of pancakes. Clark came up behind his mother and gently kissed her on the cheek.

"I got in pretty late last night Mom, how did you know I was here? Do you have a superpower I don't know about?"

"Sure do Clark, its called Mom hearing, remember when you and Pete tried to sneak out of the house in the middle of the night?" Martha shoveled several golden brown pancakes onto Clark's plate. Clark poured thick sticky syrup over the stack of pancakes. He chuckled. "Yeah, you were like Batman, you were already standing at the bottom of the window when we got to the ground. You scared the bejezzuz out of us. We didn't try that again!"

Clark cut a big triangle of pancakes and stuffed it into his mouth. He chewed slowly, savoring the mixture of the sweetness of the syrup and the fluffy consistency of the pancake. It was such a treat to enjoy something like this with his senses instead of explosives and chemicals.

Martha walked to the sink and rinsed out her coffee cup. "Clark, I need to talk to you about something." Clark stood and walked to his mother dabbing with his napkin at the syrup on the corner of his mouth. "Is there something wrong?" Why is it, Clark wondered, that bad news always came in the kitchen. When his puppy ran under the tractor tire, Ma had made him a strawberry pie. They let him eat it all before they told him. When they weren't going to be able to afford the saxophone for him to play in the school band, it was chocolate cake in the kitchen. Pa had died fighting off Para-demons during the Apokolips invasion, coffee and tears, in the kitchen.

"Clark... Jonathon has been gone for over a year now. I know that you came to live here and take care of me and the farm, but it's not fair to you. You have responsibilities that I can't even begin to imagine and I don't know how you shoulder them every day. Quite frankly you're Father and I wanted so much more for you than this farm."

"Stop right there, Mom. I'm not leaving you and the farm. I can do this."

Clark gingerly grabbed her by the shoulders and leaned in to kiss her on the forehead. Martha pulled away.

"Stop Clark, I'm sorry, this is something you can't kiss away, what is that, a new superpower or something? I've already talked to Pete and he's going to help me. Clark I'm selling the farm."

### **Metropolis:**

"PAPER NOW!" Luthor screamed. The assistant timidly handed the paper to Lex who was seated behind the large black desk. Luthor snatched it. "Get out." The poor assistant ran, and kept running only pausing at the front desk of the Lexcorp building long enough to throw his ID card down and say "I quit".

Luthor only read as far as the Daily Planet headline:

### **LUTHOR TO BE INVESTIGATED ON ELECTION TAMPERING**

He stood and threw the paper into the wastebasket.

"Olsen" he spat.

He touched a spot on the desk and a chime sounded." Grace, call a press conference and get Mercy in here NOW!"

Luthor picked up a cell phone and flipped it open. "Teng, you better have good news for me."

"The DNA in the rocket was definitely kryptonian, using that and what we learned from the other kryptonian, I'm confident we can rebuild the DNA helix and produce a viable clone in a few weeks."

"You have two days and Teng if this one turns out like that monstrosity Doomsday, kill it... and yourself." Lex closed the phone and threw it in the waste can.

**Smallville:**

"Clark, are you Ok." Martha poured Clark a glass of water and handed it to him. Clark smiled at her.

"I'm fine Mom. Are you sure this is what you want to do? You and Pa, I mean all the years here, I just ... " Clark sat back down as Martha began to clear the breakfast plates.

"Clark, how many times since you left home, did Jonathon Kent ever ask you to come back and help with something."

"None, but... "

"How many times when you came back to visit was there ever anything that was not done."

"None, but ... "

"Jonathon never wanted you to feel like you were tied to this farm, Clark. He understood full well that you could have done everything that needed to be done in barely the blink of an eye. We have to move on Clark. Keep your Father alive in your memories, not tied to some dusty old piece of land. Move back to Metropolis, save the world, inspire people. Teach them the things that Jonathon taught you, that's what he would want. Your Father was proud of you Clark, both of you."

Clark and Martha stood and hugged each other. It was more than arms around each other; it was the love of a Mother surrounding her child. And something more, they could feel the arms of Jonathon Kent wrapped around them both.

**Metropolis:**

"Lois!" Perry yelled from his office door.

Lois wondered why Perry even had an intercom or a phone, his preferred method of communication was to stick his head out of his office

door and yell.

"Here chief." She called back.

"Stop what you're doing and get down to Lex Corp, its hit the fan."

"But Chief ... I..."

"No buts, Lane, go... NOW!"

Lois grabbed her purse and her tape recorder and sprinted for the elevator.

Lexcorp Plaza was awash with a sea of reporters. Cameras, microphones, tape recorders all jutted out from eager hands thrust toward the tall bald man in the black Armani suit at the podium. Luthor cleared his throat.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the press, I am sure that all of you know of the article published in the Daily Planet. As a result of that malicious and unfounded attack I am now under investigation and must concede the Mayoral Race to Mr. Irons. Rest assured that the parties responsible for this blatant, unfounded and unsubstantiated attack shall pay for what they have done to Lex Luthor."

Cameras snapped and reporters started talking all at once each louder than the other in hopes of getting their question answered. Lois pushed her way to the front of the pack.

"Luthor", she yelled. "Is that a threat?" All noise stopped, except for the electronic whine of cameras and tape recorders.

Luthor's eyes narrowed to slits. "Consider it a promise, *Ms. Lane.*"

Luthor turned and walked back into the Lex-Corp building ignoring the outburst of questions from the crowd.

**Smallville:**

Martha handed Clark a small wooden box, on the lid was an intricate carving of a mallard. "What's this?" Clark asked.

"If I 'm going to sell this place, there are few things that we need to clear out of here, don't you think, Clark."

Clark opened the wooden box. Inside it a small green crystal glowed slightly.

"Oh, yeah right."

"Your father pulled this out of your ship when we found you. You should probably put it somewhere safe."

"I know just the place Mom. Thanks." Clark grinned at her and kissed her on the forehead.

**Metropolis General:**

Winslow P Schott lay in his hospital bed, bandages wrapped tightly around his head, oblivious to the machines that hummed and pinged around him. His chest rose and fell steadily.

"So that's it Dr. Riggans?" Maggie asked.

"'Fraid so Captain Sawyer," The young Doctor replied. "He was lucky; the bullet only grazed the outer portion of his brain."

"Yeah, lucky him. Any idea on how long he'll be out?"

"Hard to say, his body has shut down into a coma, to try and heal itself, might last a week, and might last a year."

Maggie reached into her shirt pocket and handed Dr. Riggans a card. "Here's my number, I'll leave it with the staff too, call me if there's any change."

### **The Antarctic:**

The area between 90°W and 150°W, the only unclaimed solid land on the planet.

Superman stood on the shore of a frozen lake, water from surrounding glaciers melt and seep over the lake, freezing and capping the lake with a thick sheet of blue ice. In the distance, diamond dust, a ground-level cloud composed of tiny ice crystals, shimmered and danced across the frozen landscape. Vinson Massif, the highest peak in Antarctica 16, 050 feet above sea level, loomed in the distance.

Here on Earth were wonders and beauty, as brilliant as any far-away-planet he had ever been on.

Superman looked for miles in every direction, in this harsh dry environment with temperatures of 112 degrees below, only the toughest lichens and fungi managed to cling to life. He did spot the flightless midge *Belgica antarctica*, just 12 millimeters in size, the largest land animal in Antarctica.

“This should be a good place to get away from it all.” He thought.

Twin beams of heat shot from Supermans eyes and bored through the lakes ice cap; steam erupted, obscuring his dive into the frigid water captured beneath the frozen surface. The ice cap over the lake quickly froze back in the frigid air. Deep in the lake Superman bored a tunnel through the wall of lake for miles, until breaking through to an underground lake in an immense chamber under Mt. Vinson Massif.

“This should be safe from prying eyes and super-villains. Funny”, he thought.

“Crystalline structures in the Arctic, space folding tesseract, and finally a hole in the ground.” Superman placed the green crystal on the ground stepped back and whispered, “Do your stuff.”

The crystal shimmered and began to glow brighter. The green light filled the enormous cavern and the earth trembled as the crystal sank below

the earth. Crystal spires erupted from the ground punching up through the cavern ceiling. Superman floated over the cavern lake and watched as Krypton erupted on Earth. At last, a crystalline control panel rose over-looking the lake. The tremors subsided and the cavern was filled with a white glow that seemed to emanate from all around. Superman floated over to the control panel. The green crystal sat inside one of the tube like slots. He reached for it and was thrown backward by a jolt of energy. He sat there on the ground stunned as a dozen small robots swarmed up to him. They had triangular shaped heads with long necks descending from the back point and small slit like visors on the front. Their bodies were shaped like flattened bells and two cable like arms swung from their sides. One hovered forward.

*"I am Keelex, this is the house of El you will leave immediately or face termination."* The robots all raised their arms in unison, energy crackled and spit from their ends.

### **Lex Luthors Office:**

Lex's body guard Mercy stood taunted at Luthor's desk. She was tall, thin, and dangerous. Lex was engrossed in some papers on his desk. Mercy barely glanced at them, mathematical computations and scientific mumbo jumbo, she couldn't understand it even if she had been looking at it right side up.

Luthor never looked up.

"Kill Olsen."

"Lex do you ... " Lex cut her off.

"Mercy, if you are about to question what I just told you to do I would strongly suggest you reconsider. I am in no mood to be trifled with today. Do what you were told. NO EXCUSES!"

Mercy turned and walked out of the office. Something was wrong. Lex usually got his way and his revenge, but he was rarely so blatant about it.

### **The New Fortress:**

“Keelex, I am Kal-el, son of Jor-el, stand down.”

*“Negative, energy scans negative I.D. you are not of the house of EL, termination will begin.”* Superman dodged the energy blasts from the robots and flew up into the upper structure of the fortress.

*“Intruder alert, upper levels; identify and eradicate.”*

“Lightray’s energy blast to juice me up on solar energy must have screwed up my energy signature!” (\*Action Comics #19) Superman thought as he dodged another blast from the robots. “I need to reset my **Kryptonian chi** but I don’t think I’m going to have time to do it with hot stones and relaxation right now.”

The robots hurled another blast and this time connected. Superman went flying through the wall into the grand hall, landing at the crystalline carving of his parents holding a globe of Krypton.

“Hold on a minute,” he thought, “I should have the entire Kryptonian chi I need right here.”

The robots swarmed into the room; with a blast of super-breath he knocked several against the wall. They sputtered and fell to the ground.

Keelex fired an energy blast and Superman deflected it on his outstretched palm.

“Keelex, I am here to destroy the house of El and I will as soon as I find the Fortress’ energy source.” “Hope that sounded convincing”. Superman thought. He watched as two robots broke off the attack and swerved off into the fortress.

Superman followed them with Keelex and the rest close behind firing energy beams, as he dodged and weaved between the crystal spires, keeping sight of the two robots that would lead him to the fortress’ energy source. Three robots couldn’t keep up with the twists and turns and smashed into crystal support beams. A quick blast of heat vision took

out another two.

Superman could feel it now, a small rapid vibration coursing through his body. Deep down in the womb of the fortress he saw it. The Fortress' power source, three large crystals 10 feet high, hummed with life. Tendrils of crystal radiated off each one like a spider's web, carrying energy to all the fortress' systems.

The two lead robots, turned and immediately opened fire, Superman dodged the blast, two more robots behind him did not.

A blast of super-breath pushed the other two robots into the crystal chamber. They began to shake violently till they literally fell to pieces. Superman hoped the same thing wouldn't happen to him as he dove between the massive crystals. He felt as though his eyes were being shaken out of his head. The power from the crystals vibrated into the man of steels very cells. Superman cried out. He was dizzy, about to black out, he had to get out of there, he couldn't take anymore. He stepped from between the crystals. The last thing he saw before he passed out was Keelex coming toward him.

Superman awoke; he was floating on his back. Sensors hovered over his body tiny crystal cables snaked out to a control panel monitoring his bodily functions. Keelex floated into the room. Superman touched to the ground instinctively ready to dodge.

*"Kal-el of Krypton", Keelex said. "All of your functions are operating within normal parameters."*

*"What happened?"*

*"An intruder triggered the Fortress' defense systems, myself and a defense squad tracked the intruder to the power core where you suddenly appeared."*

*"Keelex, that wasn't an intruder, it was me. My energy signature was messed up and you didn't recognize me as kryptonian till I reset myself with the power source."*

*"I will review the fortress logs to make sure that mistake doesn't happen again."* Keelex floated off deeper into the fortress.

Superman floated into the great hall, Keelex and the drones had already repaired the damage. Superman stood at the base of his parents statue. His adopted mom's words ringing in his ears. "Your father was proud of you."

"I wonder if Jor-el would be proud of me." He thought.

**Smallville:**

"Hello, Mrs. Kent. This is Pete, I have good news and more good news. The farm sold."

"Land sakes, that was fast, wasn't it?"

"Surprisingly so, Mrs. Kent, a farm this size usually stays on the market for a while. It not only sold quickly, but the buyer even offered more than our asking price."

"How much more, Pete?"

"A lot more, more than fifty percent, a Thomas Kane with the Chiroptera Foundation was the person who contacted me. He insisted on paying that amount too, something about preserving it for a wildlife refuge."

"Wildlife, here? Nothing much here Pete, but squirrels, mice and bats."

*The End*

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