



Action Comics #30

Roy Flinchum and Charles Wilkins

Published: 2008

Categorie(s): Fiction, Fan Fiction

Tag(s): "Lex Luthor" "Lois Lane" "Jor-El" Superman Supergirl

Action Comics

Issue #30: "Release"

Written by: Roy Flinchum, with Charlie Wilkins

Cover by: Craig Cermak, Roy Flinchum, and Ramon Villalobos

Lois' head hurt. Her eyes slowly came in to focus. She moved her hand to block out the bright light that stabbed at her but it wouldn't move. Her mind suddenly cleared like wiping away the frost from a window on a cold morning. Lex, the car, CLARK! She strained against the restraints that held her fast; she was tied, no, clamped to a table. Luthor's bald head eclipsed the light shining in her eyes.

"Finally awake Lois? I was beginning to worry that I had given you too much Chloral Hydrate."

"Luthor, what is the meaning of all this, why am I strapped down? Have you've been watching too many 1950's science fiction movies again?"

"I have to admit Lois, I owe you and the alien a debt of gratitude, if it hadn't been for your incessant prying, and his meddling interference, I wouldn't be free from the shackles of society." As it stands now, no one can stop me from taking over Earth and reshaping it into the utopia I know it can be."

"You mean totalitarian dictatorship don't you"?

"TOmato, toMAto, POtato, poTATo."

"You'll never get away with what you done."

Lex laughed, "Now you sound like the cliché in a 1950's sci-fi movie."

"You killed Clark, why don't you just go ahead and kill me Lex, get it over with."

“Don’t worry Miss Lane, I will, but you’re going to suffer, just like I’ve suffered over the years.”

“Superman will... ”

“No, I’m afraid not, you see even if he survives my little surprise, his emotional state will be in no shape to deal with me, or anyone else for that matter. In fact I hope he does survive, I want to see his face when he finds out I have killed the woman he loves.”

It was Lois’ turn to chuckle. “Those purple pajamas must be too tight Luthor, Superman doesn’t love me, in fact... ”

“Oh Lois, you keep making this sweeter and sweeter, you really have no idea do you?

I’m going to give you a secret to take with you to your grave.”

Luthor leaned into Lois and whispered in her ear. Her eyes grew wide. Luthor touched a switch on his glove. Tendrils of energy shot through her nervous system and she screamed out in pain.

Lois’ car sat on the ocean bottom. Inside sat Clark Kent, or more precisely, the Clark Kent android that Superman had left in his place. Circuits and pathways deluged by seawater and pressure, combined with already faulty programming, sparked a new programming. Some say that all life on earth originated in the ocean depths... at least this one did.

Superman looked back at the man who followed closely in his wake. It was him, his father, somehow saved from the catastrophe that made him alone in the universe. Only now not so much alone now with the discovery of Kara, only something wasn’t right, perhaps the cloning process was flawed, for whatever reason, he was aging, fast. A quick scan at the molecular level during their fight had confirmed that his Father’s cells were rapidly deteriorating.

Superman knew he might only have a few hours left with the man who had given him life, not once, but twice. He heard Lois scream again. Superman looked back to Jor-El, only to find that he had heard the scream too, and surged ahead. Superman grinned, Jor-El was learning his powers very quickly, and he wished he had more time.

The offices of The Daily Planet hummed along as usual, punctuated by the occasional outburst from Perry, which, the employees had taken to calling "white noise".

"Where is Kent! Lane! Where the devil has Olsen been for weeks! Is there anybody who works at this newspaper anymore?!" Perry stood just outside his office door shouting into the bullpen.

"Luthor was just sighted over the ocean. Troupe! Troupe!" Perry shouted.

From across the room Ron Troupe poked up his head.

"Uh, right here sir!" Mr. Troupe responded.

Troupe was the relative new guy on The Planet. He had been relegated to covering city council meetings that most of the city council didn't even attend.

Perry pointed with his finger, stained brown on one side from years of cigar smoking, "Troupe, grab a pilot and a camera, buzz the location, see if anything turns up".

"Yes,sir, Che ... " Perry's look stopped him in his tracks. "... Uh, Mr. White." Ron ran out into the hallway and stopped a copy boy to ask him how to get a news chopper. The copy boy pointed to the roof, "Up, up, up. You gotta go to the roof; Mr. White will have already sent the paperwork".

"Thank you." Ron ran into the elevator. "Newbies." mumbled the copy boy.

"Still with me Lois?" Lex opened one of Lois' eyes. She spit in his face.

"Yeah, I'm here you bastard, takes more than what you've got to break me."

Luthor's face turned red, "Believe me Ms, Lane, I've got plenty more to give and since it seems your boyfriend is either dead or as you say, doesn't give a damn, I suppose we should just end this." Luthor drew back his gloved fist and Lois braced herself for the blow.

The outer wall of the Lair exploded inward with such force that Luthor flew across the room to the far wall.

Thick dust poured in through the gaping hole, a dark form, eyes glowing red stood there, silent.

"About time Superman, I was beginning to think you weren't going to show up."

The dark form stepped into the room, the dust swirling around him. It was Jor-El, he had aged again, probably in his forties now by human standards.

"You lied to me Luthor."

"Welcome to Earth, Jor-el" Luthor stood pointing a gloved hand at Jor-El. Energy shot forth. It splashed against Jor-el's chest. He took a step back, but he didn't falter, to Luthor's horror he pushed forward.

"Your experiment somehow pulled me into this defective clone body."

The energy surged from Luthor's hand but Jor-El continued to advance.

"You took advantage of my confusion."

The circuits in Lex's glove began to smoke. Jor-el was pushing it to its limits.

Jor-El reached out grabbing Luthors outstretched wrist. Bones snapped. Luthor cried out in pain.

"You made me doubt my SON!"

Jor-El flung Luthor behind him. He went sprawling out the hole Jor-EL had entered through, with Jor-El following close behind.

"This is the area Mr. Troupe! What now!" The helicopter pilot shouted over the roar of the blades cutting through the air.

Ron looked out, what he thought was the very thin glass, of the chopper at the expanse of seemingly non-descript ocean.

"Is there any land around here?" He shouted back?

"Maps say there's a small island about 75 miles west." They both looked west at the empty horizon. "But they have been known to be wrong."

Ron found that hard to believe in this day and age when the whole globe was encircled by a halo of satellites.

"O.K." he shouted. "Go west, see what we find."

The ground of the small island was quickly rushing up to meet Luthor. Frantically he touched areas on his gloves and the straps that ran across his chest, trying to reroute power to his boot jets. Jor-El had crushed some of the micro-circuitry as well as his wrist.

Jor-El closed the gap with a burst of speed, snatching Luthor from free-fall and hoisted him back up into the sky, high above the island, above its protective camouflage.

"What happened, Jor-El? You kill Kal-El with a super powered punch? Is he hiding, letting his Daddy fight his battles?"

Luthor tapped his gauntlet and his suit responding by sending almost a joule of energy coursing through Jor-El's body.

"Yeeaaarrgghhhhh!" Jor-El released Luthor and fell toward the island. A few deft strokes and Luthor's flight systems were back on line. He went into a power dive catching up with the stunned Jor-El, and smashed him into the rocky ground.

BA-WHOOM

Lois fought against her restraints. She could only hope that who ever that was that had attacked Luthor, could keep him occupied till she could get free. The bonds were too tight, or she was still too groggy, she couldn't tell which. She saw the light spilling in from the hole in the wall flicker, and felt a wisp of fresh air, then the voice. "Lois."

Fear, resentment, rage, pity, anger, love, hate, all the emotions, as a reporter, she had taught herself to resist. All the emotions, that, as the Daughter of Sam Lane and an army brat, she had taught herself to repress. All the emotions that she would never had shown to Luthor no matter what he did to her, or what he said. They all came rushing out to him, to Superman.

Without a word Superman slipped his fingers underneath her restraints, they popped out like paper. He picked her up and she buried her face in his broad shoulder. Tears ran down his shoulder.

"Lois, I'm sorry, about before. I want to make us work."

"I'm sorry" Lois said between sobs. "About John Henry, about Clark... CLARK! Lois jumped from Superman's arms. "Luthor dumped him in the ocean, in my car!"

"Clark is OK Lois. We need to talk, but not now. First you're going home and then ... "

"No, I'm not. You go catch that Son-of-a-bitch and I'm going to write the story."

Superman smiled a little. "Of course Lois", he turned to leave. "Who is the other guy?" Lois asked. "My Father." he answered, and leapt out into the air.

Lex climbed from the smoking crater, pulling the rapidly aging body of Jor-el after him.

"Put him down."

The voice came from behind Lex, and even though he knew it was Superman, the authority and conviction in the voice sent a chill down his spine.

Lex turned and Superman stood there, his entire body was tensed. His eyes glowed red.

The scanners in Lex's suit registered power readings beyond the previous baseline for The Man of Steel.

"I must say, I'm surprised to see you here. I thought you would be off sulking in a corner somewhere by now."

Superman floated inches above the ground and slowly began to advance on Luthor. "You have no idea, what you've done?"

"On the contrary Kryptonian, I know exactly what I've done, and you're going to watch me undo it."

A blast erupted from the hand holding Jor-El enveloping him in energy. Lex opened his hand and Jor-El fell, lifeless back into the pit.

"NO!" Superman shouted as he bolted forward, only to be caught by a viscous and sudden uppercut from Luthor.

Superman twisted backwards crashing into the rocky ground. Lex leaned down, and placed his knee in Superman throat. He pulled back a gloved fist, the energy crackled, from yellow to green.

"Don't think Superman, that over the years I haven't perfected replicating the energy signature of Kryptonite, that coupled with the extra strength my suit gives me, should be enough to split your head like a watermelon. And just think, you'll die alone, on this little rocky island. And when you're dead and forgotten, I will take your place. I will be the MAN! The Human, The EARTH man that you only wish you could be!"

"GET AWAY FROM MY SON!" Jor-El plowed into Luthor with the speed and force of a freight train.

"This is Lois Lane of the Daily Planet, can anyone hear me? Over." Lois spoke into the microphone at the communication console she had found.

Nothing but static answered back.

"Damn, he must be blocking communications." Lois looked over the console, there was a switch labeled cloak, "It can't be that easy can it?"

She flipped the switch.

"One more pass and we'll head back." Ron said.

"Wait a minute, that wasn't there before!" The pilot pointed out at island that shimmered in the distance.

The radio squawked, "This is Lois Lane of the Daily Planet, Mayday, Mayday."

The Pilot keyed the mike. "Lois?"

"Charlie? That you?" Lois asked.

"Somehow you keep dragging me into thick of things, Lane."

"Who you got with you?"

The pilot looked at Ron trying to remember his name.

"Ron Troupe", Ron shouted at the mike.

"Hi, Ron. You and Charlie get that chopper over here pronto."

Luthor tasted the bitter blood on his lip. Jor-El had punched through his force field. Luthor watched in amazement as Jor-El lifted a boulder the size of a bus over his head.

"You will not harm my son; you will not blacken the house of El. Even if I have to kill you to make sure that it doesn't happen." Jor-El pitched the rock forward, Luthor rolled, but the rock was so huge that he couldn't get out of the way. It crashed on top of him. His force-field held, barely.

Superman's throat burned, where Lex's knee had tried to crush it, he hoarsely cried out. "Father! no! he's not worth it."

Jor-el turned to his son, "No, this is why I am here, this is what I can do for you. I can rid you of this problem." Jor-El punched the boulder, it cracked and split. Lex lay under the rubble, barely conscious.

Jor-el picked him up. "Jor-El, wait." Superman pleaded. "Not this way."

"I'm sorry, son, it's what I have to do." Jor-el inhaled sharply and blew out toward Superman, blowing him backwards.

Jor-El snatched up the fallen Luthor and streaked upward into the sky.

"I don't get it, why isn't the Kryptonite affecting you?" Luthor asked.

"It is. You should research your experiments more, my cells aren't dying... they are bursting. The Solar energy that you "jump started" my metabolism with has caused my cells to absorb solar energy more readily, so much more in fact that it's more than they can handle, there's simply no room for more solar radiation, much less your kryptonite radiation."

Luthor struggled against the now elderly kryptonians grasp, but it was no use. His strength now was immeasurable, Luthor could feel his ribs begin to crack.

"You, can't... you wouldn't." Luthor choked.

"I wouldn't? Don't forget, you know nothing about me Luthor, you have no idea what I'm capable of, what I've done, to insure that my son survives."

Jor-El's eyes were now seething energy, as he climbed higher and higher above the filtering effects of earth's atmosphere.

Jor-El wrapped his arms around Luthor and whispered, "Good-bye my son."

Superman shook his head, trying to clear the buzzing from the kryptonite exposure. His Father and Lex were specks in the distance. He took a breath, tensed and pushed off with such force that the rock under his feet cracked as he sprang into the sky.

Lois rushed out to meet the helicopter as it touched down on a smooth rock ledge. Lois climbed in, "Charlie, they went that-a-way, get us a close as you can."

A brilliant light filled the sky with silence as Jor-El's cells filled to overflowing finally expanded beyond their capacity. The power stripped the suit and whatever protection it held from Luthor, and his skin seared. For a few seconds he hung there in the upper stratosphere washed in the energy that poured from the silhouette that was Jor-El.

The energy faded, and Luthor began to fall. Superman came up underneath him and gently caught him. There was no sign of his Father, he shifted his vision into the infrared range, and there he was; the vague wisp of a memory, the last remaining image that was his father.

He reached out toward it and it reached for him. Superman's hand passed through it and in his mind he heard. "Thank you, Son. I am proud of you."

Lois' fingers banged out the story on the keyboard. Luthor, his plunge into madness, the discovery of Superman's rocket, The Toyman, Superman's cloned father. It read more like science fiction than a news story.

"Hi, Lois." Lois looked up, Clark Kent stood at her desk. She cringed.

"Hey Kent, you look pretty good for being dropped in the ocean."

"Yeah, I uh panicked and kinda started pushing all the buttons in your car, one of them put the top up and trapped enough air for me to breathe till Superman pulled me out of there."

"Speaking of Superman", Lois fidgeted with her keyboard. "Look Kent, I know we kinda had a thing there for a while, but Superman and I are going to give this thing a try."

"What thing?"

Lois rolled her eyes, he wasn't going to make this easy. "A relationship, Clark. We're going to try and have a relationship."

Clark pushed his glasses up on the bridge of his nose. "You mean you and ... " he made a flying motion with his hand, "... Superman? Golly. Guess if I have to be dumped that's a great guy to be dumped for."

"I'm sorry, Clark."

"It's ok. Really Lois, in fact I was coming to tell you that I didn't think we should date and work together."

"What! Clark Kent!" Lois looked around for something to throw.

Perry appeared in his office doorway. "Lane! Where is that story?"

"Almost done chief!"

"Hi gang! 'sup?" Everyone turned to see Mr.Action himself standing in

the doorway.

"Olsen!" Perry screamed. "Where the deuces have you been?"

"Well chief, it's a long story, maybe even a series."

Superman stood on top of the Daily Planet looking out over the city. He loved watching the spectrum of the city at night. The colors were vibrant and pulsing. He remembered the last fading image of Jor-El, he was proud of him. Pa Kent had told him that many times, but he often wondered what Jor-El would have thought of him, now he knew.

"Hello Lois." Said Superman

"Will I ever be able to sneak up on you?"

"Sorry, there's only one person who can do that, and I must say it's very disconcerting."

Superman floated back from the edge, coming to rest in front of Lois.

"So are we really going to give this a try"? She asked.

"I'm game if you are? But Lois, you have to understand that there are certain aspects of my life that I am not going to feel comfortable sharing with you." "Not yet." he added.

"I'm always going to be a reporter." She said.

"I understand, so maybe if we meet somewhere in the middle."

"Agreed," Lois stepped into Superman, his energy jumped from him to her. She felt it, it pulsed. "Somewhere, about here?"

Superman put his hand under her chin and lifted her face to his. "Maybe a little closer."

They kissed, a long and heartfelt kiss. Superman slowly pulled back.

"Lois? In the spirit of sharing, I want to tell you something."

She blinked; this was it, what Lex had whispered to her.

"I'm not alone anymore, I have a cousin and her name is Kara Zor-el, I'd like you to meet her."

From the distance a police siren wailed.

"Lois" Superman started. She put her finger to his lips.

"I know, you better get going, we'll continue this conversation later. Just remember. I get the exclusive."

Superman smiled back at her, it felt good to give that smile, that little piece of emotion so freely.

"Absolutely." He flew off into the night.

Lois turned to head back down into the building. "Not exactly the scoop I was hoping for, but it's a start."

Lex Luthor was in pain, but it wasn't pain from the burns, that the prison infirmary had treated and wrapped in bandages. Lex's pain was much deeper, past the bone and marrow, down deep in his soul; it was a pain of rejection, the pain of humiliation. Whether real or imagined, Lex's pain was far worse than the pain of a broken bone, or flesh being seared. Lex's pain was the kind that would not heal until its source was snuffed out. Lex's pain would only end when Superman did.

Kara Zor-el paced the cold crystalline floor of the fortress. Keelex, watched as she walk back and forth.

"Kara, you seem to be agitated. Is the garment I provided for you unsatisfactory?"

"No, Keelex, it is", she ran her hand over the sleek blue body suit and searched for the word, "satisfactory"

"Your pulse is elevated, is there something wrong with your functions?"

"No, Keelex I am functioning normally. I left my home suddenly, my pack, my family, will miss me."

Kara lifted off the ground and flew out of the chamber to the main chamber.

Keelex followed close behind. "Where are you going?"

"I must go home." Kara answered.

End

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Food for the mind