



Action Comics #32
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Published: 2008

Categorie(s): Fiction, Fan Fiction

Tag(s): DC2 Comics Superman "Lois Lane" "Jim Gordon"

Action Comics
Issue #32: "The Life Yet Lived"
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"It is entirely seemly for a young man killed in battle to lie mangled by the bronze spear. In his death all things appear fair. But when dogs shame the gray head and gray chin and nakedness of an old man killed, it is the most piteous thing that happens among wretched mortals." - Homer

DAILY PLANET GOTHAM'S BATMAN DEAD!

Superman looked down at the headline again. From here atop the Daily Planet building using his supervision, a combination of x-ray and telescopic modes, he could see Gotham. The explosions had cut a great scar across the city and it bled crime and despair.

Why hadn't he called? Why did he refuse help from the League? Bruce, why did you have to be so damn stubborn?

"I'm sorry; I know you two were friends." Perry White lit the cigar, taking several quick puffs to get it lit.

"We had our moments." Superman said without looking around. "How sure are they about this, it is Batman after all."

"I wouldn't have run the story if the facts weren't there, son."

"What are you doing up here?" Superman asked.

Perry let out a long plume of cigar smoke.

"We're a non-smoking building now. Man can't even enjoy his vices anymore without going to the ends of the earth."

"You should really quit you know."

"I know, but I don't think I'd like living out the rest of my day's miserable, without one." Perry took another long drag from the cigar.

"I have to go see for myself, Mr. White."

"I know you do, Son. When I served as a reporter in the war there was a guy reporting on the front line that was captured and killed. Years later, after the war was over, some friends and I got together and went back to get him and take him home. We thought we could go in there, flash our press passes around, tell everyone we were American and they would hand him over to us. That didn't happen; we had to go through their system just like everyone else. Gotham is like a different country, we can't go in there flash our passes and get what we want."

"I understand, Mr. White. I'll be careful not to step on any toes."

"And if you find something suspicious, make sure you tell Kent or Lane about it before you do anyone else." Perry winked.

Superman smiled, Perry White, father figure, mentor, friend, colleague, boss, but above all, reporter.

Superman flew off toward Gotham city.

Lois checked the clock on her cell phone. It was six pm, it would be dark soon. Not that it bothered her. The park was generally a safe place, and she could take care of herself. She was nervous that her informant wasn't

going to show. He was probably waiting, making sure she hadn't been followed.

A couple approached her on the walking path. They were locked arm in arm. She could hear them whispering sweet nothings back and forth. She couldn't tell if she was more embarrassed for listening or jealous that she didn't have that.

A hand touched her shoulder.

"Don't turn around Ms. Lane, keep facing forward."

"What is all this about? You said you have information on Fero Corp."

"Get up walk to the next bench."

"What's with the cloak and dagger, is Fero really this dangerous."

"You have no idea Ms. Lane, go to the next bench."

Lois stood, turning slightly to try and catch a glimpse of her informant but he was already gone. She walked to the next bench and sat down.

A few seconds later a voice from behind. "Get your cell out, drop it on your left, beside the bench, when you reach to pick it up, there'll be a black smart drive taped to the bottom of the bench, pick it up as you pick your cell phone. That'll be all you need."

"How do I get in touch with you again?"

"You won't. I've already lost a loved one because of this. I'm done; the rest is up to you."

Lois faked dropping her cell phone and found the smart drive right where he said it would be, she dropped it in her pocket and headed back to the Daily Planet to open it.

Dammit Dammit Dammit! This city is so screwed up, he thought. The

elevated roads, all the well lit areas, dammit.

He had lost Dalton, The boss was going to be so pissed! The only thing to do was start back at the beginning, the bus station. He pulled the trench-coat around him tighter to conceal the white he wore underneath and started retracing his steps back to the bus station.

Mr. Dalton wiped the sweat from his forehead with the back of his sleeve. It was done. The Lane woman was a good reporter, she would be able to piece it all together and Metropolis was far enough away that no one would suspect him to go there.

He checked his watch, fifteen more minutes the bus would be here, and he would be on his way to South Dakota, he would just leave the rental car there, they would find it eventually and he had given them a fake name anyway. He fished out the prepaid cell phone from his pocket to call Amber and make sure she was Ok

The glow from Dalton's cell phone lit up the interior of the car. Across the way, from atop the building he could see Dalton through binoculars, dialing his cell phone.

"Bingo."

Dalton heard the first ring of the phone, a movement at the car window caught his eye a glimpse of something white, then a red beam of light pierced the window, then Dalton's rib cage and through his heart in less than a second.

The man in white opened the door on the driver's side and pushed Mr. Dalton over to the passenger's side. The bus would be here any minute.

"Hello? Hello?" He picked up the cell phone.

"Yeah, hello, uh, is Markus there?"

"I'm sorry, there's no Markus here, you must have the wrong number."

"I'm sorry, what number did I dial?"

"This is 605-361-4343, what number were you trying to call?"

“Never mind.” He snapped the phone shut and repeated the number. That should buy me some points with the boss, maybe even a promotion.

Now which way was that large body of water, he wondered.

Gotham city came alive at night, and not in a good way. The absence of Batman and the news of his apparent death had sent the underground spewing forth like a criminal geyser.

Superman flew into the city, the air was somehow thicker here.

POP POP POP gunfire rang out from below. He had promised Perry he wouldn't get involved and let Gotham handle its own, but he couldn't just ignore it when it was under his nose.

“Scream all ya want you old bag! Ain't no Batman to come save ya now.” The punk sneered at the woman making a swipe at her with the knife he held in his hand.

A second thug grabbed the purse she clutched to her. “Let go, bitch, or the next round goes in yer gut.” He leveled the gun at her.

Her eyeliner had mixed with her tears and ran in long streams down her cheeks.

“Puh-please”, she begged.

“Oh yeah, lissen at her Gee, she wants it, she's begging for it.”

“I don't think she wants what you fella's are giving.” Superman said, floating behind them. It was corny, he thought, trying to be a tough guy like Batman.

Gee leveled the gun at the frightened woman's head. “If it ain't the boy scout from 'tropolis. They coulda least got somebody with a decent street cred to take Bat's place.”

“What you gonna do, soupman”, the knife guy said, “Take us to jail?”

They coulda least got Green Arrow, I hear he's a mean mother ... "

Before knife guy could finish his sentence Superman had snatched the gun from Gee and was holding him up by his collar. The frightened woman peered out from behind his cape. Superman held out the gun and squeezed it into a ball of metal.

Knife guy held his ground, "That s'pose to scare me? Boy scout? Go ahead take me to jail we'll be out in an hour."

"Well then let's make sure you have a nice trip before you go." Superman said flinging the gunman into the air up past the buildings into the night sky.

Gee's scream trailing off into the night.

Superman focused his heat vision directly on the air in front of him, igniting the oxygen and stray carbon molecules, causing his eyes to glow red and smolder.

"Look punk, you're nothing but dog crap, and two things can happen to dog crap, it can get stepped on and squashed or it can dry up and blow away, like your friend. So what's it going to be", Superman paused for effect. "Punk."

The boy released the knife and it clattered to the ground.

"That's what I thought", Superman said. Thank goodness for GBS' late night, Dirty Harry marathon, he thought. Maybe now I'll get some street cred, let's see Green Arrow shoot lasers out of his eyes.

Superman grabbed the boy by the collar and looked back over his shoulder at the lady still cowering behind him.

"Are you all-right miss?"

"Huh, me, yeah, I'm fine. Thank you." She smiled

Superman caught Gee, passed out, about 200 feet over Gotham Harbor and turned them both over to the desk sergeant at police headquarters.

Commissioner Gordon was startled by the knock at his door.

“Come in.” he said without looking up from his work. He heard the soft sound of the latch catching as the door closed. “Well, what is it? What do you ... ” He looked up to see Superman patiently standing in front of his desk, his hands folded in front of him.

“Excuse me, sir; I don’t mean to interrupt your work.”

“Well, I wondered how long it would be for the Justice League would come around.” Gordon pushed his chair back from the desk. “You used the front door, that’s a new one on me.”

“I’m not here in a Justice League capacity, I’m here as a friend of Batman’s.”

“I wasn’t aware Batman had friends.”

Superman didn’t understand, Bruce had always spoken highly of Gordon; it seemed at times he was like a father figure to him. Where was this hostility coming from?

“Commissioner, I know what the papers say, is there something more?”

“Look, Superman, Batman chose to work outside the law. He was a vigilante who put himself above the law and even at the last aligned himself with the criminal elements of this city. Don’t expect me to shed tears for another criminal being off the street. Now if you don’t mind we have all the help here that we need.”

Superman’s posture changed. His hands unfolded and hung open at his side, Gordon noticed.

“I wanted to take a look at where it happened, the reservoir.”

Gordon walked around the desk toward the door, forcing Superman to follow him. It was a detective’s interrogation trick, establish yourself as the leader make the suspect follow you.

“Make sure we didn’t miss anything?”

“No sir. Make sure I’ve done all I can to find out what happened to my friend.”

“If you’re asking for my permission, I can’t stop you.” Gordon opened the door. “But don’t interfere with our investigation.”

Superman walked through the door as Gordon closed it behind him. He stood there for a moment wondering what had just happened.

The Daily Planet staff had gone and the night shift had kicked in. Everything in the building became blue at night, the sunlight from the large windows replaced by the glow of the overhead fluorescents.

Lois popped the flash drive into the USB port on her computer.

The Lexor 08’ dialogue box popped up

Lois clicked the ‘open file’ option

It looked like invoices, no more like a manifest with things she had never heard of particle accelerator cannons, white noise amplifying generators, boom bombs, it read like some sort of science fiction weapons checklist, and they were all being funneled through another Fero office in Star City.

Lois scribbled down the location and pulled the smart drive from the computer. She went online to check the flights to Star City. There was one leaving in 15 minutes.

“Damn.”

She tore the paper she had written on from the pad, picked up her purse from the floor and sat it on her desk shoving the paper in it. She opened the bottom right hand drawer and pulled out a small mirror. She checked her hair and what little make up she wore, no reason I can’t look good *and* crack the story of the year, she thought to herself.

She replaced the mirror, slammed the door shut, and snatched up her purse as she headed out for Metropolis airport.

Superman stared into the dark water. There was nothing, nothing that the police had left behind anyway. Superman even searched for human proteins in the water. It was full of them, runoff from rivers, sewers, even the rain as it knocked against your skin carried minute traces of all of us into the water. There was no way to tell if it was Bruce's or not. Even if he could, it only proved he was in the water. Bruce was gone. Surely if it were some trick, some plan of Bruce's he would have let the League in on it, so as not to waste resources and time in loss and, he hesitated to think about it, but it was time, mourning.

Superman drifted up into the air still staring into the water and turned to fly towards Wayne Manor.

The house was empty, as it had only been empty once before, when Bruce's parents had died. Alfred had been sitting for hours, in the large chair in the study, directly under the Wayne's portrait. It was where Bruce was sitting the night that thing had flown in. Over the next few days, more seemingly chance encounters with bats would lead Bruce down an ever darkening path.

The Bats, thought Alfred. The damn bats had taken the man he very nearly called his son.

The light from the lamp flickered three times in quick succession. He was here, in the cave. Alfred rose from the chair and crossed to the old grandfather clock. His fingers found the spring latch like they had done millions of times before.

Superman hovered in the middle of the cave. Alfred could here the water, pat, pat, pat, on the cave floor as it trickled off Superman's boot. The water entrance, Alfred thought, that would have to be drained and filled.

"Alfred." Superman's voice filled the enormous cave. Alfred noticed how large the cave seemed now.

"I'm sorry." Superman descended to the butler's side. "He was a good man, Alfred, one of the best."

"At what, sir?" Alfred paced over to the still running computer system. "At striking fear into the hearts of criminals? At keeping his friends and family at arms distance. At alienating everyone who cared for him. Yes sir, you're right he was the best."

Alfred touched a button and the computer screen went dark, the electronic whine of the disk drives whirred to a stop.

Alfred started back up the stairs. "Turn off the lights and lock up when you're done."

Superman watched as Alfred walked back up the stairs into the darkness.

He flew back into the underground lake and out of Gotham harbor, straight up into the upper atmosphere.

Bruce how did you let things get so bad, he wondered. Why did you let things get so bad?

What would his family, his friends say about him when Lex, or Kryptonite, finally did him in. Would he leave a trail of broken hearts and betrayal? Bruce's life was so wrapped up in avenging his parent's death he failed to see the harm he was doing to those closest to him.

He wondered who else knew. He glanced down at New York, the Themysciran Embassy. Did she know? They were so much alike in a lot of ways, Bruce and her. Superman outstretched his arms and flew down, down to tell her that their friend was dead.

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