



Action Comics #35
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He had felt the slight ping of the magnetic pulse a few days ago; using his corporeal body like a Geiger counter he followed the signal to where it was the strongest. There the barrier between the phantom zone and the outside world began to tear. A large pulsing scar between the two dimensions it snapped shut as Dr. Xadu stepped from the Phantom Zone, into the Fortress of Solitude.

"What a glorious tribute to Krypton." he said looking around. His legs unsure of holding his weight wobbled a little beneath him. Years of existing only as a phantom in the zone had made his body unsure of itself.

"What a wonderful new world, so many new creatures to experiment on."

"I'm happy for you Lana, I really am." Clark stared out the window of the hotel room.

"Problem?" Lana asked.

"Uh, no, I just wish you could have told me about you and Pete earlier."

"No, I meant what are you looking at? Out the window."

"Oh, just keeping an eye out." Clark was a little embarrassed, to be caught not paying attention. He moved away from the window.

"I'm sorry Clark, it's just that you're usually too busy, ya know."

"Yeah, I do."

Lana walked to the kitchenette and opened a bottle of water.

"Clark, Ross industries will be headquartered in Denver. We're moving there next month after Pete and I are married."

"Why Denver, If I may ask?"

"Pete likes it there, and to tell you the truth Clark, I want to be somewhere you're not."

Clark took off his glasses and unconsciously straightened himself to his full height. "You want to be away from me?"

Lana stared at him for a second. Every time she saw him do that she couldn't get over what a difference it made.

"Clark, we had something growing up and I have been clinging on to that for years. The whole thing with Brainiac and Conner, it made me realize that I have to move on."

"Lana I ... "

"Clark, it's OK. It's not your fault, really. Look at the things you do. The things that you face everyday. Brainiac gave me a whole other life Clark. Conner was as real to me as you are. I have memories Clark, of every birthday, of every tear, of every 'I love you mommy'. I can't be a part of your life anymore Clark, I don't have the strength for it."

Clark took Lana's hand. "I could ask Martian Manhunter to take those memories from you, or Zatanna could ... "

Lana pulled her hand away. "This is what I'm talking about Clark. Martians, evil computers from outer space; I want a normal life, and to do that I think I have to be away from you."

"Do you love Pete?"

"I do Clark. As much as I once loved you."

Breep breep. The tiny receiver in the belt of Clark's uniform beeped. "Sorry, I have to go check this out."

He mimed opening his shirt. "Do you mind?"

"No, of course not." Lana said as she opened the sliding glass door that lead out onto the terrace.

By the time she turned around Clark had already changed into the blue and red uniform of Superman. He leaned, over and kissed her on the forehead. Thanks Lana, and congratulations. I know you and Pete will be very happy together. He smiled at her and she knew it wasn't a disingenuous smile, he really did wish that for her.

The signal on his belt was the fortress intruder alert alarm. Someone was there. Superman flew high into the atmosphere to where he could see the Antarctic mountain that hid the fortress buried underneath it. There was a large hole in the side of the mountain. Boulders the size of locomotives lay strewn about the hole, where someone or something had punched its way in, but something didn't look right.

Superman stood in the main hall and called out. "Fortress, explain, security alert."

A computer voice filled the air. "Magnetic pulse, disabled fortress systems, systems reboot reactivated security fields and alerted to security field exit breach."

"Exit Breach?"

"Affirmative."

That was what looked wrong Superman thought. The boulders around the hole, in the side of the mountain. Something went out, not in.

"Fortress, what left here?"

"Nothing, all entities are present and accounted for."

"Then what caused the breach?" Superman walked over to the crystal console.

"Undetermined as breach happened during systems outage."

"Can you determine the origin of the magnetic pulse?"

"Negative, there have been no further, readings."

"Repair damaged systems and take action to shield from further pulses."

Superman flew up back out through the hole. Guess I'll have to do this the hard way, he thought as he flew in ever widened circles outward.

"Bradley, why did you call me down here, Homicide isn't usually my beat." Maggie Sawyer Captain of MSCU, shuffled up behind the police detective. Slam Bradley stuck out his hand. Maggie's long slender fingers slid into his hand as both cops squeezed into a firm handshake.

"Thought you might want to see this." Bradley lifted the yellow crime scene tape for Maggie to walk under it.

The old brownstone was almost falling in. Only the cockroaches still held it up. Suicide Slum was an enigma. A section where no matter how much you scrubbed or how much money philanthropists threw at it remained a festering sore embedded like a parasite in the city of Metropolis.

Bradley handed Maggie a small white face mask. "Here, you'll need this." She took it and covered her nose; the smell of menthol stung her eyes.

Bradley led her into the decrepit brownstone. The room was dark. Even through the menthol of the mask she could smell the scent of decaying flesh. Bradley switched on an overhead light that swung in the middle of the room. Half a dozen bodies lay on the floor. Some were missing limbs

others their heads. All of them were opened, their skin peeled back. Bones protruded from the thick red and pink masses. Some of them bleached white.

Maggie lurched forward her stomach threatening to rise to her throat. She fought it and stifled a cough.

"This is terrible Bradley", Maggie's voice muffled through the mask, "But I still don't see what this has to do with me unless you've got a Meta-perp in the wagon, I don't see how much help I can be to you."

"I thought since you seemed to have a working relationship with ole big blue, that you could help us with this." Bradley pushed the swinging light to one side and the light crawled up the far wall to reveal symbols written in blood on the walls. Maggie recognized them immediately, they were Kryptonian.

Funny, how one little brown speck could get lost among all the whiteness of the Antarctic ice. The whiteness overwhelmed the little brown tent and the wind drove the loose ice and snow into the air breaking the lines of the tent making it hard to see. If he hadn't been looking for something, Superman would have missed it.

X-ray vision was useless. The snow and ice particles moving in the wind blurred his focus.

He landed at the small tent, on the ice field.

"Hello", he shouted. No answer. He stepped inside. The little tent was filled with electronic equipment. Charts and maps lay strewn over makeshift tables. Superman picked one up and studied it. Looks like they were mapping the area under the ice. That's probably where the magnetic pulse came from. They were using them like radar, shooting them into the ice and then reading the bounce back. But where were the researchers he wondered. Superman stepped outside the tent and scanned the surrounding countryside. A few hundred yards away he could see some equipment had been set up. He landed there and discovered the researchers. The extreme cold had preserved their last tortured moments.

Their parkas had been torn off them, their skin hung in great flaps from their bodies. Some of their organs were lying around the bodies as if they had just been plucked out and laid aside.

Blood stained the ice and snow under them. The wind had stripped away any that had lain on top. Superman scanned the equipment, everything seemed normal, nothing broken or taken. Then he saw the footprints, on the leeward side, protected from the wind by the large magnetic pulse gun. They were bloody and smaller than either of the researchers, they were perfectly side by side, as if someone had stood, waiting.

Superman scanned near those for traces of prints either leading to or from those, not even a trace. Superman lifted into the air to start for home and it hit him. The prints were there because who ever it was had flown.

He flew off toward home, toward Metropolis. The bodies, what were left of them, would be well preserved in the sub-zero cold, until he could alert the authorities.

"No, Maggie I don't know how to get in touch with Superman. Yes I am well aware of what the tabloids say. Why don't **you** jump off the building since it's you that wants to talk to him."

Lois slammed the phone down. "Man, he really needs to get a cell phone."

Lois watched Jimmy Olsen back his way into the newsroom. His back pushed the door open as he turned she could see he was holding a tray of coffee. She chuckled, would he ever stop being the newsroom gopher she wondered.

"Olsen, have you seen Kent", she asked.

"Nope, haven't seen him all day."

Clark stepped around the corner placing his hand on the inside of the

door; he pushed the door open for Jimmy as he entered.

"Seen who Lois, you looking for somebody?"

"Thanks. Mr. Kent", Jimmy said. "Olsen", Perry shouted from the news-room. "Where's my coffee?"

"Coming Chief. Catch you later Mr. Kent."

Clark laid his coat on the back of his chair, sat down at his desk, and immediately started to type on his keyboard.

"Big story, smallville?" Lois asked.

"Um, no, not really, seems Superman discovered a couple of researchers in the Antarctic, they were torn up pretty bad, probably a polar bear or something, he notified the authorities. I thought it might be a sidebar piece."

"Definitely sidebar material, can you still get in touch with him, Maggie Sawyer has been pestering me all morning to find him."

"Did she say why?"

"No, and believe me I tried."

Clark stood up and grabbed his coat.

"Where are you going?"

"To contact Superman for Captain Sawyer."

"... and just how are you going to do that"?

"Lois, you of all people should know, you just jump off a roof."

"Funny, Kent. If you get a story out of this, I should be in on it, after playing answering service for everybody."

"If there's a story Lois, I'm sure you'll get it in the end." Clark walked out

pulling the door behind him.

Wait a minute Lois thought. There aren't any polar bears in the Antarctic. What was Kent up to?

Clark stepped outside and crossed the street to a phone booth on the corner, not one of the old booths that colleges students used to try and see how many of themselves they could cram into, it was the ones that replaced those, with flared sides just big enough to lean into so you could shield the receiver from the surrounding noise. One of the few booths on any kind still left in the city. He deposited his coins and dialed Maggie's number.

"Sawyer here, whose this?"

"Captain Sawyer, It's Superman, I heard you were looking for me."

Captain Sawyer was a little stunned to be receiving an ordinary phone call from Superman, but sure, why not, she thought.

"126 Boring and Staton, I'm here now and you had better see this."

"Be right there." Clark hung up the phone and did a quick look around to make sure no one was watching... they weren't. He was airborne faster than the human eye could see; high in the air his Kent clothes came off and he super compressed them into a tiny square and hid them in the pouch of his cape. He then turned west toward suicide slum.

Maggie snapped the phone shut as Superman landed in front of her.

"That was fast."

"It helps when I know where you are." Superman smiled and it quickly faded when he noticed the stretchers being carried out of the building they were standing in front of. He took a look under one with his x-ray vision. Captain Sawyer could have sworn he went pale.

"Oh my, Maggie, what happened to them?" His voice, usually strong and

confidante, was barely a whisper... a shaky one at that.

Slam Bradley stepped up between them.

Bradley was a graduate of the old school. The way you solved a case was to get out on the street. Look at the crime scene, talk to people, and ask questions. Being behind a desk and pounding away at a keyboard was for accountants and writers, not cops, and certainly not for him.

Clark thought that he looked like one of the detectives in the dime store novels that his dad used to read. The worn hat, with the front of the brim bent down, the slouchy trench coat and the permanent cigarette dangling from his lips. The smoke curled up past his dark circled eyes.

"Can you account for your whereabouts six hours ago?" Bradley pushed the brim of his hat back releasing the cloud of cigarette smoke that had been trapped there.

"Bradley, you seriously aren't asking Superman for an alibi are you?" Maggie asked.

"Why not, it is his language."

Superman held up his hand. "It's OK Maggie. Mr. Bradley, six hours ago I rescued some hikers in the Ural Mountains of Russia. I'm sure that the Russian government will back my story if you'd like to check. What's this about something being my language?"

"In here." Maggie led him into the small room.

The bodies were gone but the room was spattered with blood. CSI had setup equipment and lights, the walls glowed where the techs had sprayed them down with Luminol, the blood fluorescing under the UV lights. On the far wall the Kryptonian symbols glowed so brightly they seemed to light the room.

"Great Rao", Superman exclaimed under his breath.

"What does it read?" Maggie asked.

Maggie was sure that he went pale this time. "Superman, what is it, you look like you've seen a ghost."

"Worse Maggie, far worse."

"What does it read?"

Superman recited the words without reading them.

*"sleep the sleep that does not dream,
speak the sound that does not scream,
When all is done and Rao dies
Dr Xadu will survive."*

"What is that, some kind of Kryptonian nursery rhyme?" Maggie asked.

"Something like that, yes. Dr. Xadu was a scientist on Krypton, he was sentenced to the phantom zone for performing illegal cryogenics experiments, as he was being sent into the zone, he said that.

"That statement, his experiments, the man himself, became part of our folklore. Like an Urban Legend."

Bradley spoke up from behind them. Superman hadn't even noticed him there.

"Are you telling me I have a Kryptonian nut job on the loose?" He lit up another cigarette.

The three walked outside into the bright sunlight. Slam Bradley pulled the brim of his hat down shading his eyes from the sun.

"Not for long, Mr. Bradley. I'll find him and he'll pay for what he's done."

Superman took to the air. He didn't tell Slam Bradley or Captain Sawyer, that Dr. Xadu's crimes were never this violent or gruesome. Apparently

his time in the phantom zone had not been to his betterment.

The bodies had been cut open, examined. Dr. Xadu was researching, learning about human physiology.

Superman sensed the pressure wave coming up behind him and turned just as Dr Xadu plowed into him and send him flying headlong into the nearest building. The office workers inside scattered as Superman burst through the wall. Most ran for the exit several ran to help him. He stretched out his muscled arm for them to stop, stay there. "No, I'm fine." Superman quickly scanned the area where he burst in, no structural damage the wall would hold. "Please take the nearest exit and get to safety."

Dr. Xadu floated in the open hole.

"Hello Kal-El, I was hoping to run into you."

Superman stood placing himself between Dr. Xadu and the people standing, staring, they just weren't leaving.

"Please", Superman whispered over his shoulder, "for your own safety, get out."

"Touching, compassion for these beings, as I'm sure you know, I've done a few exploratory operations on them, they really are inferior you know."

One of the guys to the right ran for the door. Dr. Xadu's heat vision shot out, but Superman intercepted it splashing across his chest.

"Leave these people alone!" Superman breathed in deeply and blew out toward the floating Dr. Xadu. The unexpected gust blew the Doctor backward and upward into the sky.

Dr Xadu tumbled backwards out of control; Superman was on him in a second.

Dr. Xadu was much smaller than Superman, instinctively Superman pulled his punches. A hard right cross, snapped Dr. Xadu's head back.

"Oh, C'mon Kal, you can do better than that." Dr. Xadu rubbed his jaw. "I'm Super, like you, I can take it. Unlike your earth pets. You should have heard them scream. If you listen with your super-hearing you can actually hear their life force leaving them."

Superman plowed forward smashing into the Doctor, pushing him down toward the earth, intending to smash him into it, bore him down into the planets core if necessary, to stop this madman.

"You Monster!" Superman screamed. "I'll make sure that you never hurt anyone again!"

Dr. Xadu laughed. "Funny, that's the same thing your father said, right before I did this to him too."

Though physically smaller and weaker than Superman Dr Xadu possessed knowledge of Kryptonian physiology, he drew back and landed a super powered blow to a specific nerve bundle just under Superman's left ear.

"Yeeow", Superman screamed out and slipped into unconsciousness, Dr Xadu pushed away and Superman slammed into the ground outside Metropolis.

He had a headache; he couldn't remember ever having one before. Superman slowly pulled himself up from the darkness in his mind. He squinted at the light that shone in his eyes. His body wouldn't move, it tried but it was held back, held back by what. His senses began returning, at the edge of his mind, fuzzy, still unsure. The light was blinding him. He was strapped down. How was that possible? His vision slowly cleared the light blinded him. The red light. He turned his head from it. Across from him someone lay on a table, that's when he realized that he was naked and strapped down to a table.

Someone walked into the room.

"Good, you're awake."

For a moment the man's head and thick black unruly hair blocked out the red light and Superman could see Dr. Xadu staring down at him.

"I really have to commend you. You have a great lab here at your little, what is it you call it? Fortress of Solitude?"

"What are you ... ? "Superman struggled to talk.

"Now now, don't try to talk. The drugs I invented for my cryogenics experiments are coursing through your veins, keeping you subdued, holding your body right at the point of death." Dr Xadu turned and picked up something from a table.

"Your Father told me the drugs were too unstable, too dangerous, I laughed at him. Too bad he was right."

Superman felt a sharp pain down his ribs.

"Uggn", he grimaced, "What did you... "

"Oh that, I'm doing a little exploratory surgery. You see I was on the verge of a breakthrough in Kryptonian medicine, in understanding our unique physiology when your Father told the science council what I was up to."

Superman felt another sharp pain and saw Dr. Xadu make sweeping motion with his hand. "Oh dear, that's unexpected." He said.

"You see, rather than put one, rather average specimen, in a rocket ship and send it off in the hopes that it would survive. My idea was to clone our entire race, and store them in the phantom zone. That way no one would have to endure that But Jor-El wouldn't have any part of it. Hold still I hope this hurts a little."

Dr. Xadu drew the scalpel across the muscles of Superman's stomach.

"Aaaiigghhh", Superman screamed out and beads of sweat popped up on his forehead.

"You see the problem with our DNA is that for some reason it degrades

very quickly, so any sample has to come from deep, deep, tissue. Like an internal organ for example. Oh dear, looks like I'm done with you for the moment. Lets up your drug dosage so you'll stay nice and comatose, and well turn off the radiation so you can heal for next time shall we."

He wiped that sweat from Superman's forehead and patted him on the shoulder. "This is so much easier than back home, there everyone died."

Superman could feel the drugs taking him back down. "Who is ... " he managed to whisper.

"Oh over there?" Dr. Xadu pointed to the other examining table.

"That's your cousin, Kara. But don't worry, you rest. It's her turn now."

Superman couldn't even struggle as the drug took him back to oblivion.

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