



## **Action Comics #28**

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*Action Comics*

Issue #28: "Family is Like..."

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Fragments of memory whirl around in the void. Ghost images and after-thoughts clash and collide, whispering through the Phantom Zone. Consciousnesses were incomplete here. Projections torn from Krypton, copied, translated, and deposited. He had been here for so long. He couldn't remember the time when he had entered, though like any other occupant of the Zone, he could remember photograph fragments of his entrance. A planet rocked by quakes from deep within the core. Explosions of light and power, green, radiating minerals piercing the surface of the world, and then an accidental triggering of a Phantom Zone emitter—

—Jor-El had landed in a prison of his own design. He had been here for so long. And when that gentle tug of physical form began to pull him through the dimensional layers of the world, an emotion came over him, flooded his soul form. Relief? Ghost-criminals watched as he was torn from the moorings of the Zone, and then without a sound, he was in flesh, and he was aware.

He was dazed, his head swimming, his body new and aching. He stumbled forward, glanced around, and before he passed out from the strain of passing through the dimensional walls that separated the Phantom Zone from Earth, he declared: "I am Jor-El of Krypton, where am I?"

Lex Luthor was shocked for three seconds. Then his mind began to click and spark with ideas. Jor-El? Then obviously the blood sample was from... Superman's father? How did it come to be in the space-craft? The neural feedback created by what had turned out to be Jor-El's consciousness had interrupted the growth of the clone, he was but a boy, but a Kryptonian boy was still a Kryptonian, and with the mind of Superman's father inhabiting the clone's body... The irony was delicious. "Jor-El," he hissed, his hands around the boy's shoulders, shaking him, "Are you alright?"

The boy's eyes fluttered to awareness. "Who are you? Where am I? I... My head... I remember the Phantom Zone and then..."

Lex remembered that piece of information. He memorized it. "I am Lex Luthor! You are on Earth! Oh, my experiments worked, you're here!"

"What? What is going on, Lex Luthor?" The boy touched his mouth, realising he wasn't talking Kryptonian, but English. How was that? He remembered flickers of things in the Phantom Zone. He understood what he saw when he was there, watching his son from high on above... His mind had been altered by his time in the Zone, maybe that explained his knowledge of the Earth-language? He didn't know. "My son! Where is my son?!"

Lex Luthor shook his head, sadly, "That is why I have pulled you here, across the void," he didn't know what he was saying. He was relying heavily on supposition. The Phantom Zone? Superman had always thought his family had died on Krypton. He knew that. So if the Phantom Zone was involved... He always had wanted to get his hands on a Phantom Zone projector... Since General Zod, since Doomsday, since... Superman. It would be a truly magnificent weapon in his hands. Maybe he could get Jor-El to give him the schematics... "The process was flawed, you came too soon, and the body... The clone-body wasn't ready..."

Jor-El grabbed Luthor by the lapels of his white labcoat, and attempted to hoist him up, but his shoulders burned at the effort. He had not been exposed to yellow sun radiation, and... and... thoughts eluded him. "My son, Lex Luthor, where is my son?!"

“He is...” Luthor rubbed his temple, his hands shaking with apparent fear. “He rules this planet with an iron fist, Jor-El, and I thought... I tried... You had to be the only one who could stop him!”

“My son... Evil?” Jor-El shook his head. “That cannot be... My son...”

“Was raised by a despicable family! He was twisted by abuse, by his adopted parents, and so when his powers manifested, he...” Luthor scrambled over to a computer console and pulled up an image from Metropolis. “Here, a statue erected to appease his monumental ego! The people feign love because if they do not worship him like the God he has set himself up as, he uses his powers to destroy!”

Jor-El stared at the image in disbelief. Could this be true? “Rao preserve us...”

### *Meanwhile, in the Fortress of Solitude...!*

The Fortress was silent.

Superman flew beneath the cold waters beneath Mt Vernon and closed his eyes. He knew the way now, he knew it by heart, and it was during these scant moments he could reflect. He thought about his cousin. The look she gave him when they were first brought together, and that... scared him. He'd been alone for so many years, and yet, now, with a family member just moments away, he was scared. He emerged from the water, and then landed in the Fortress silently, red boots creaking as his foot connected with the cold metal floor. He shook his body at super-speed, drying off, and then hurried toward where his cousin would be residing.

The door leading to where the boom-tube had taken her to hissed open, and Superman went in tall and strong. Keelex hovered before the force field that contained Kara. Kara Zor-El. His cousin.

“How is she doing, Keelex?”

<Our guest has stopped trying to escape; I can tell you that much, Kal-El.

I was concerned the force field would not hold, but it has been efficient so far.>

Superman smiled weakly as he looked at his cousin, who stood in silent attention as he entered. "What have you been doing while I've been away?"

<Informing your cousin on her roots, Kal-El.>

"Roots? I told you to wait till—"

"Fmm." He turned at her voice, and watched as she played with the noises her mouth made. "Fmm..."

He watched in amazement. In wonder.

"Faaaam. Famlee." She coughed, grunted, trying to get the word out. She touched her chest, and then put her hand against the force field. "Family."

"Family," gasped Superman, as he put his own hand against the force field. He touched his chest and nodded. "Kal." He pointed at her, "Kara."

She nodded. "Kara. Zor El."

"Rao..." He smiled, and then turned to Keelex. "Lower the forcefield."

<Kal-El, do you think that wise?>

"She's family, I can't..." He stepped forward as the force field dropped, and put his hand on her shoulders. "You stay here; Keelex will help you understand, ok?"

She nodded slowly. "Unnerstan."

He turned away, hesitated, and turned back, smiling and nodding once more. "Raise the force field, and continue with what you're doing. I'll be back soon; you know how to get a hold of me."

<Yes, Kal-El.>

"Family," whispered Superman, as he headed back toward the water access. "Family." He dove into the cold depths, and headed back toward America.

Keelex hovered before Supergirl, and buzzed to life. <So, Kara Zor-El, repeat after me: Apple.>

*Deeper inside the Fortress of Solitude:*

Above the flapping of alien wings, the chattering of alien teeth, insides the Intergalactic Zoo, a voice could be heard whispering. "You think he heard us?" The door leading to the chamber opened slowly, and then the whispers became louder. "Because, you know, Kryptonian super-hearing is notoriously... Super."

"Our heartbeats were masked, our breathing too. Even the blood pumping through our veins was muted." There was a sigh of electricity as a cloaking device was deactivated, and the veil of silence Blue Beetle had activated around Booster Gold and he vanished. They were tired, battered, bruised, but had work to do. "We're not in holding cells, so I assume not, Booster. Come on. We need to get what we came for, and then back to Rip."

"Yeah, so what do we need?"

Blue Beetle looked at his wrist, where he had scribbled all the things they had needed to collect. "Argh, damn, it's a big one. A projector."

"Projector?" repeated Booster Gold, as he checked the power cells on his gauntlets.

Blue Beetle looked up from the list, and back to his best friend. "Yeah, dammit, a Phantom Zone projector!"

"Oh... Nass."

*Metropolis:*

"That was fun then," smiled Clark, as Lois looked at him. He stroked her face with his finger, and she smiled too.

"Yes it was, Smallville, more so than I expected it to be, if you don't mind me saying," Lois laughed softly.

"Oh, that's no problem at all, Lois, please continue undermining my self esteem, gosh knows I love it."

"Sarcasm, Smallville?" She backed away from him in mock horror. "Who are you? What have you done with the real Clark Kent?"

He laughed, rolling his eyes. "Yeah, yeah, laugh it up, Lois."

"You've changed, Clark, and I don't know, I think I like it," she moved closer to him.

"Maybe you're the one who changed Lois," replied Clark slowly. "I don't mean to be mean, but I don't think I ever stood a chance with Superman floating around like a God, but you and he... Has something happened...?"

"I think," started Lois, her lips so close to Clark's now, "When he left Earth, I think I realized that we wanted different things. And maybe what I wanted was right in front of me all along."

They kissed. Slowly and softly, their lips parting and their eyes meeting. "I think I'll take that as a compliment, Lois."

"Please do, Clark, please do."

Clark looked past Lois for a second and then gasped. "Oh—"

"What?"

Superman hovered outside the window of Clark Kent's apartment. His face was a mixture of emotions, shock, surprise, curiosity. Anger. His

arms were folded across his chest. He forced a cordial smile on his face. "Lois." The look faded some what, a façade dropped, and his look at Kent was one of irritation. The name took a moment to leave his lips. "Clark."

"Oh, hello Superman, what are you doing here?" She smiled. "Clark and I just got back from the movies; I thought you were off world?"

"I came back. I came here to tell you that, I heard your heart beat, and, well, here I am."

"Oh, yes, well, we all knew you would eventually. Why did you come tell me personally?"

"You're the reporter Lois," replied Superman slowly, as he pulled his cape tight in his hand. "You tell m—"

Whatever it was, it hit him hard. The window he had been hovering outside of shattered completely, and he hurtled through the near deserted streets, bouncing off the concrete, skipping toward Centennial Park, and landing in front of the monument erected in his honour. His head hurt. Ached. He rubbed his nose. Blood? "What in God's name?"

He looked up, and the anger that had been swelling inside him erupted in a scream.

"LUTHOR!"

*Meanwhile, in the Fortress of Solitude:*

"I don't like this, I hate this sneaking, but we've got to—"

"Here!" The room was marked PHANTOM ZONE PROJECTOR CHAMBER. Booster laughed at the bluntness. "Right, so what do we need."

"We need IT. We can return it, I guess, but—" Beetle looked around the room. There were three projectors against the wall. He reached out to them, but his hand shot back, a spark of electricity penetrating his glove.

“Ah, Jeez.”

<INTRUDER. INTRUDER.> Security robots began to swarm toward them.

Booster raised his gauntlets, ready to start firing. “We need one of those bad boys and we need one of them now, Teddy, so figure out how to bypass his security system and get us out of here!”

Beetle looked around. “Oh, crud, crud, I need to think.” He looked around and found a security panel that was emblazed in kryptonian letters. “Great. Great. Umm.” He began to read, and to think. The “S” was familiar to him. Other ruins too. “If I was Superman, and I had to have a password, and it was—” He began to type. It buzzed red and another bolt of electricity shot through him, shaking him to the core. “Ah, damn damn damn!” He paused, and turned to Booster. “What are you doing?!”

“Thinking! I don’t want to damage them, we’re in the wrong here, so if I—” he worked at his gauntlets, and a field of energy shot out in front of him, separating them from the security droids. “I can’t maintain this for long, so think, what password do you have on YOUR computer?!”

“Oh. You’re good.” Ted typed in something on the panel, and flinched back, and then grinned as the panel flashed green. The forcefield protecting the projectors dropped, and Beetle took the one closet to him. “Let’s go!” He switched on his time-bracelet, and began to fade out with Booster.

“What was it?”

“What else could it be? His mother’s name—” And with that they vanished, back into the time stream.

### ***Metropolis:***

The green and purple power suit was familiar to him, buzzing with power and energy. Lightning crackled over the gauntlets of the weapon. He thought that the evil genius had utilized a more compact micro-weave version, but apparently he’d returned to the old version. His face

was covered by a dome helmet, a black slit probably allowing him to see.

Superman shot up like a bolt, but howled in pain as red hot spikes of pain burnt into his chest. He reeled back in agony; the S-shield burnt right off his uniform, erupting into flames and being burnt into nothing due to the sheer heat of the attack. Superman looked up at Luthor.

<Luthor allowed me access to his battle suit. He told me all about your oppression of the people.>

“Huh?”

More heat beams shot out from the helmet, scouring into Superman’s chest and causing him to scream in pain.

<He showed me the evidence. The destruction you have caused in this world. The pain.>

“Who are you?!” Superman took a deep breath and blew a wave of arctic air at his attacker, but his attacker maneuvered effortlessly in the suit. Whoever this was, it wasn’t Luthor. Luthor pressed the attack, face to face, or he worked in the shadows, manipulating others, just as, Superman assumed, he was doing now.

<I never thought I’d have to do this, Kal-El.>

“WHO ARE YOU?!”

The suit began to uncoil, and then out of it shot a black and red shape, which collided hard with Superman and began pounding fists into his face. Superman was surprised at how much this hurt, how much it felt that teeth were coming loose and flesh was rending. “Ghh...”

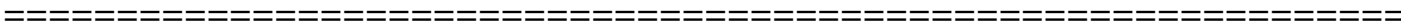
The boy that was beating him up could be no older than 16. He resembled Superman himself, when he was a lad on the farm in Smallville. But he glowed with a golden aura, his Kryptonian cells supercharged by solar batteries inside the armour.

“Who am I, Kal-El? Can you not tell?”

A punch powerful enough to destroy a skyscraper hit Superman square in the face, sending his head cracking into the concrete in front of the statue. Superman felt himself get lost in the closing darkness.

“I’m Jor-El, I’m your father, and you have disgraced your family house! As much it pains me, Son, you must be punished for your crimes!”

*To Be Continued...*



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