

"I Was Superman's Double!"



Where to, Buddy?

Where? You'll have to speak up a little, pal, I can't...

The *Daily Planet*? The Newspaper building? Yeah, sure. Climb in.

You're a tourist, right? Don't tell me, pal, I'll tell you! I've got an instinct for this stuff—comes from years of being a cab driver. I see you there on the kerb and I think "Right! This guy's a tourist." It's like extra-sensory perception, you know what I mean? And if you're heading for the *Daily Planet*, then that's the clincher. I mean, nobody who lives here in Metropolis wants to go and see the *Daily Planet*. It's a piece o' junk. It's just because of all this Superman stuff that out-of-towners always have to go and check out the *Planet* building. Who needs it?

Superman? Yeah, sure, I know the guy pretty well. He owes me a couple of favours, like. I can't go into detail because... ahh, what the heck. It'll take us at least half an hour to get to the *Planet* from here, even if I take the special Secret Cab Driver's backstreet route. I reckon, since we got time, I might as well tell you. But listen, you have to keep it to yourself or a couple of guys from the C.I.A. will come round and sort you out. No word of a lie.

You see, the big secret about Superman that nobody is supposed to know is that he's a wimp. I mean, you're talking to somebody who's met the guy, right? I mean, don't tell me, I'll tell you, know what I mean? Oh, excuse me for just one second... you don't mind if I turn my meter off? Works out cheaper for both of us. You don't mind? That's just swell. Now, where was I...

Oh yeah, I was telling you about what a wimp Superman is in real life when they don't use special photography to make him look tough. First off, in real life Superman is only five feet seven inches tall. I mean, I'm five foot eight and when I met the guy I was looking down at him. I'm not saying he's a wimp just because he's *small*, you understand. I mean, a lot of us feisty little guys are pretty tough in a scrap. Actually, I think the thing that made Superman seem such a wimp in real-life is his voice. He's got this real tiny, squeaky little Mickey Mouse voice, y'know. Every time you talk to the guy it's all you can do not to laugh. In fact, when the Government asked me to impersonate Superman, I think the voice was the hardest thing that I had to do...

Huh? Yeah, you heard right. That's what I said. The Government asked me, *Hermann Schwartz*, to impersonate the Man of Steel. It was a matter of National Security so I couldn't refuse, could I?

It all started one day, right? I'm drivin' round in my cab, when all of a sudden these two C.I.A. guys wave me down and jump in. I knew they were C.I.A. straight away, on account of the fact that I used to be in the C.I.A. myself and I know all the secret give-away signs. But that's another story...



Anyway, these two guys climb into the cab, and next thing I know one of 'em pulls out a gun and sticks it in my ear and tells me to drive to some address that I'm afraid I can't repeat. Now, I'm sittin' there with a gun in my ear, right? I think about using some of the karate stuff that I learned from Bruce Lee when we were buddies, but I think what the heck? I'll just take these goons where they wanna go rather than break both their necks with a single blow of my hand. See, by this time, I'm intrigued. It's like Frank Sinatra always used to say about me: "That Hermann! When he gets his teeth into something there's no shaking him!"

We drive to this place I can't tell you about, and I'm led into a big underground room. When I see who's there waiting for me, at first I can't believe it. There's a guy that I recognise from my time in the agency as being the Head of the C.I.A. Next to him is Ronald Reagan. That's right. The President of the United States is sitting around waiting for *me* . . . Hermann Schwartz of Brooklyn! Actually, I taught him a lot of the stunt work for his old cowboy pictures way back when he was in Hollywood, so we were sort of old pals. Still, it was kind of a surprise. And next to Ronald Reagan was Superman.

Just lookin' at him, I knew something was wrong. For starters, he was sitting curled up into a ball in his chair. Secondly, he was crying and whining in that squeaky little voice of his. Thirdly, he was hugging this big pink Teddy Bear. I tell ya, I took just one look and straight away I had the whole picture.

"Holy Cow!" I said to President Reagan, "Superman's gone Nutso!" The President shook his head.

"He's been like this for a long time, Hermann. We've been trying to keep it quiet. You know all those stories about Red Kryptonite and how it makes Superman behave unpredictably? Well, between you and me, we made 'em all up. There's no such thing as Red Kryptonite. We just needed some sort of explanation for all the weird stuff that Superman is likely to do when he has these nervous breakdowns every two or three months. If somebody spots him wandering round Metropolis dressed in a ballet dancer's frock and frogman's flippers then we just get the *Daily Planet* to run a story about Red Kryptonite and nobody suspects the real truth, which is that the Man of Steel is nuttier than a fruitcake."

Now, I'm sitting there and I can't believe what I'm hearing. If it hadn't been the President himself talking I'd have laughed in his face. But the facts were staring right at me . . . there was Super-Schizo, sitting chewing the ear of his Teddy Bear and whimpering into his cape. It made me feel weird just to look at it. I took a deep breath and spoke.

"Ron, give it to me straight. Where do I fit into this crazy business?" I'll give the guy his due, he levelled with me straight away:

"Hermann, Metropolis is in grave danger. We've just had word that Brainiac wants to shrink the whole city with a special ray and stick it into a soda-pop bottle. Now, normally, we can just get Superman to scare him away before he does any damage. See, Brainiac is so scared of Superman that he usually chickens out straight away and doesn't stick around

to see if Superman is *really* tough enough to take him on. It's a psychological advantage."

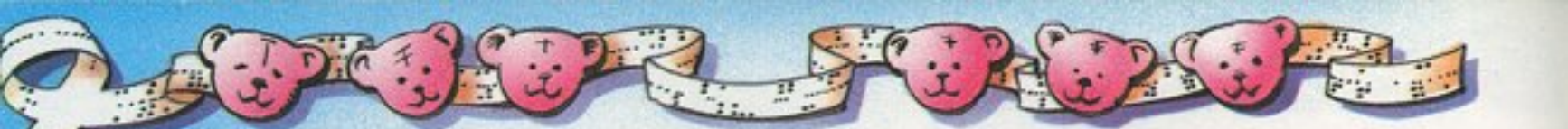
"Somehow though, Brainiac has heard about Superman's true condition and this time he won't give up so easily. Now, we've tried explaining the problem to this big blue disaster area . . ." (At this point, the President stood up and kicked Superman in the leg which made him cry.) "But all he does is sit there and sob. What we need, Hermann, is a stand-in for Superman!"

I gasped. I was starting to get the picture. You see, it's something that people have remarked upon for years . . . the fact that me and Superman are so alike that we could be twin brothers. Sure, I know I don't look like all of those publicity pictures of Superman that you see, but then neither does the guy himself. Not in real life. Anyway, to cut a long story short, the President told me that they'd run a list of names through the Pentagon computer to find the American male who was most perfect for the job of impersonating Super-Wimp. And, when the ticker tape came out at the other end, Hermann Schwartz was the name at the top of the list. It figured really. We were just so much alike it was uncanny.

All the same, there were a couple of things that needed brushing up. For starters I had to learn to talk in that funny voice. That took me *hours* of practice. The next big hitch was the fact that I didn't have any Super-Powers. As it turned out, this wasn't any major problem. See, Superman has this big machine that gives people super-powers stashed away at his Fortress in the Arctic Circle. Now, before you say a word, I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, "If Superman has a machine that will give people super-powers, why don't the military use it on our G.I.'s so that they can fly round the world without using planes and beat the daylight out of everyone who's not Flavour of the Month?"

Well, as it turns out, this machine only works upon maybe one in *six billion* people. It was just





sheer luck that I happened to be the one guy in six billion that this machine would work on. Crazy, I know, but anyway, they used the machine on me and whizzo, I had super-powers!

What was it like? Listen, buddy, I can't describe it. I mean, no offence, but you look like a pretty meek and mild kinda guy. Looks like you have a little trouble with the eyesight too. A guy like you would never understand what it's like to be able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. Anyway, I can tell you this, I had a whole lot of fun with the X-Ray vision. But I'm getting away from the point. Where was I? Oh yeah. Brainiac wanted to shrink Metropolis.

Well, one Saturday afternoon I'm toolin' around in my cab and this special coded announcement comes over the station that my car radio is always tuned to, a message that only I can understand. So, straight away I pull the cab over to the kerb and jump out. I'm looking for a phone booth where I can change into my costume. Problems? You bet I had problems! Every phone booth was full. I mean, can you believe it? Eventually, what I had to do was use my super-speed to change my clothes right there in the street, only so fast that nobody could see me. In fact, I was so fast I even had time to go and buy a newspaper and fill in the crossword as well. Fast? Listen, pal, forget it. So there I am, right. In my Superman suit. Then, in a sort of cartoon character falsetto I squeak out "Up . . . Up . . . and Awaaaaay!"

Everybody turns round and gasps in amazement. They say, "Gasp! It's Superman!" But by this time I'm already streaking up into the sky faster than a speeding bullet. I've never met this Brainiac guy, but he better watch out. He's not dealing with Superman now. He's dealing with Hermann Schwartz! So, within about a second and a half, I'm up in outer space. Using my telescopic vision I can see this Brainiac guy heading towards Earth from somewhere out near Andromeda. I look, and I can't believe it: The guy's got a whole Armada with him!

There's about seven million space-ships and they're all heading in my direction. I decide that I'd better even up the odds a little.

First, I just kinda flex the bicep on my right arm. It doesn't look like much, but the *shock wave* is powerful enough to cripple about a million of the enemy fleet. Next, I clear my throat. The sonic vibrations resulting from this turn about three million of the Armada into dust immediately. Finally, I go for the grand slam. What I do is, I just *listen* very hard. You see Superman is so powerful that all he has to do is listen hard to something and it disintegrates. Anyway, another couple of million ships go Klabooney on the strength of this manoeuvre, and eventually there's just me and Brainiac left, with him inside his super-indestructible flagship. I was gonna have to take off the kid gloves. From now on, it was no more mister Nice Guy! So, no holds barred, I just smashed straight through the wall of his ship and pulled the guy apart. Literally. Yeah, yeah, I know . . . the real Superman's got this code about not killing things, right? Well, I was just a stand-in, and anyway, I hear Brainiac's really some sort of robot, so it's not like he's really alive, is it? So, after I 'disconnect' him, I turn him into ash with my heat-vision and then use my super-breath to blow all of the ashes somewhere in the direction of Pluto. I guess that just about showed him who was running the show.

It was all over. I went back to Earth and was told that the real Superman had made a slight recovery – by which I mean he could tell the difference between food and furniture again, and that he could get his costume on without help. I wasn't needed any more, but Ron and the C.I.A. were so grateful to me that they let me keep the super-powers in payment. Mind you, I had to promise not to use them for personal gain . . . Yeah, that's right. I still have those super-powers. That's why I'm such a good cab driver . . . I can use my super-hearing to catch traffic announcements in advance, and my X-Ray and telescopic vision let me know where the traffic build-up's the worst. Sure comes in handy sometimes.

Anyway, here we are. *Daily Planet*. Not much of a place for sightseeing but . . . Oh, so you work here? Wait . . . I *knew* it! I knew I'd seen that face! You're that Kent Clark guy, right? Reporter buddy of Superman, yeah? Knew it all the time. That's why I kidded you with that story. I knew you were the kinda guy who could take a joke. Guys like you always appreciate a good story. Er . . . Anyway, it's been a pleasure having you in the cab, Mr Clark. I reckon it comes to around twenty seven dollars and eighty cents, but we'll call it a round twenty seven, seeing as I know ya, and . . . What? *Illegal*? Turning off my meter is illegal? What are you trying to pull, four-eyes? What? I'm not legally entitled to any money? You must be kidding! Hey, where are you going?

Freeze in your tracks buddy, or I'll give you some tyre-marks! I mean it! Yeah, you! I'm talking to you! I won't warn you twice . . . Well, whaddya know. He's gone. Cheapskate big-shot reporter. No sense of humour, I guess. Wish I'd recognised him earlier, though. I could've given him the one about getting the Nobel prize for my latest book instead. Oh, well. Can't win 'em all!

THE END

