

Dead by the Deadline

By [Deadly Chakram](#) <dwelf82@yahoo.com>

Rated: PG

Submitted: January 2019

Summary: For the first time, Clark misses a deadline at work.

Story Size: 1,291 words (7Kb as text)

Disclaimer: I own nothing. I make nothing. All characters, plot points, and recognizable dialogue belong to DC Comics, Warner Bros., December 3rd Productions and anyone else with a stake in the Superman franchise.

Author's Note: This fic is in response to challenge stating "Make up a creative reason for missing a deadline at work." I may have tweaked the idea to better suit my needs. This story is a companion to "[Missed Deadlines and Forgotten Periods](#)."

Special thanks to DailyWritingPrompt on Twitter for the idea and to Feli, who helped shaped this idea and gave her blessing to run with it.

"Hey, Clark?" Perry asked in his soft Southern drawl, sounding nervous as he drew the words out longer than was necessary.

"Yeah, Chief?" Clark asked, looking up at his boss as he started his computer up.

"Could I, uh, see you in my office?" Perry continued, shifting his weight from his left foot to his right foot, and Clark could see how ill at ease his editor was.

"Sure, Perry," Clark replied cautiously. He stood and gestured. "After you."

Perry grunted in acknowledgment, then led the way through the busy, noisy bullpen to his office. He opened the door, then stood to the side, allowing Clark to enter first. He gestured.

"Take a seat, son," he softly commanded.

Clark's skin rose in a series of pinpricks and the short hairs at the base of his neck stood at attention. His stomach twisted into a knot of fear, but he sat down on the plaid couch Perry kept in his office nonetheless. Perry softly closed the door, blocking out the sounds of phones ringing, the fax machine printing, and the staff talking to one another or to sources over the phone, then paced the room for a minute before finally settling on standing before his desk, leaning back against it ever so slightly in a bad parody of a relaxed stance.

"What's going on, Chief?" Clark forced his now-dry mouth to ask.

Perry uneasily rubbed at the back of his neck before responding. Then, finally, as the words appeared to take shape in his mind, he finally locked his gaze on Clark.

"Well, Clark, it's like this. You were late getting in again this morning *and* you missed your deadline last night. Now, I get that sometimes things can pop up, but you had a simple murder-suicide story to file. It should have been easy for someone of your skill to get through."

Clark felt his face redden and heat up in a flush. He dropped his gaze to his hands on his lap. How could he have been so *stupid*? He'd been called away to assist at a dangerous car chase, then a fire had broken out at a campsite, three muggings had taken place as he'd returned to the city limits, and then, to top it all off, there had been a hostage situation in Montreal. By the time Superman had been able to call it quits last night, he'd forgotten

all about the unsent article that Perry had been expecting to see in his inbox in the morning. And then, that morning, he'd made a detour on his way into work to break up a prison riot. He'd done it as quickly as he could, but he'd still been an hour late getting into the bullpen.

He hung his head. "I'm sorry, Chief," he apologized. "I couldn't, uh, find my keys this morning. And last night... I meant to send you the article but I, uh... forgot. To, uh, get to the bank before it closed."

Perry's eyes narrowed and he shook his head. "You expect me to believe that, son?" he asked in an almost dangerous way.

Clark found no response waiting on his tongue so he merely stayed mute, waiting for Perry to take the lead.

"You know something, Clark? This isn't the first time you've given me a flimsy excuse for not being here on time. Now, granted this is the first time you're ever missed a deadline, so I'm inclined to cut you a little slack on that. But, come on, do you *really* expect me to believe you couldn't find your keys?"

"I...uh," Clark stammered, feeling the walls closing in around him.

Perry shook his head, clearly disappointed. "I've been keeping a list over the years, you know."

"List?" Clark squeaked.

"Uh-huh. Of your excuses."

"You... have?" Clark swallowed nervously.

"Mmm-hmm," Perry hummed with a quick bob of his head.

He strolled around his desk and opened one of the drawers there with a small silver key he produced from his pocket. Clark could hear his boss shifting some papers and folders around, then Perry extracted a black and white marble composition book. Clark had the fleeting, searing memory of school days gone by, when those notebooks had been required. Perry skipped pretty far into the book before stopping to read aloud.

"Cheese of the Month Club delivery," he read without looking up at Clark. He ticked off the points on his fingers as he spoke. "Two flat tires. An overdue video rental. *Wine* of the Month Club delivery. Cabbie got lost. Three early doctor's appointments in three weeks. Waiting for a certified letter. Source was a no-show. Sprained your elbow at the gym. Only to be seen using it just fine an hour later, I might add. Burnt yourself making coffee at home. Got locked in the parking garage. Grocery shopping ran longer than expected. Alarm clock never rang. Had to buy stamps. A suddenly remembered dentist appointment. New glasses that had to be picked up first thing in the morning. Which, by the way, looked *exactly* like your old ones. Suit pants ripped on the way in. Dishwasher broke and you had to clean up. Line at the *ATM*, of all places! Had to pick up your parents at the airport. Which might have passed for believable, if the flight number hadn't checked out to one landing in *Newark, New Jersey!* Line at the coffee shop. Oh, and my personal favorite from last month – had to take wife's pet fish to the vet."

Perry closed the book with the solemn look of someone closing an ancient, sacred tome. He leveled his gaze on Clark.

"Every single one of these excuses rings phonier than a lock of Elvis' hair in a Memphis souvenir shop."

Clark squirmed under the Chief's unwavering gaze. "I... can... explain," he stuttered as his mind whirled and raced, trying to concoct a believable explanation.

Perry held up a hand like a traffic cop calling for a "stop." Clark's mouth immediately shut.

"Son, you've got a whole *slew* of these half-formed excuses over the years. Now, I know, I've never said anything up until now. I always hoped you'd feel comfortable in just telling me the truth," Perry drawled in a softer tone.

"Perry," Clark began, wondering how on Earth he was going to finish that statement, and wishing Lois would come and rescue him.

Perry held his hand up again.

“Look, son, this is getting a little out of hand. I don’t mind in the least that you don a pair of tights and fly around rescuing people and all of that. I don’t even mind that it makes you late once in a while, because you always bring in the story. But, if you don’t want people finding out you’re Superman, you’ve *got* to start creating better excuses. Taking sick fish to the vet just won’t cut it eventually, when I retire and you have a new editor.”

Later, when he came to, Clark was glad he’d been sitting on the couch when he passed out.

THE END