

Missed Deadlines and Forgotten Periods

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Summary: When Lois misses an important deadline, it drives Clark crazy trying to figure out what it was.

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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 "[Dead by the Deadline](#)."

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Clark stifled a yawn as he pulled back the bedsheets. He was exhausted from the night's rescues, including two fires, a ten-car collision, and saving a group of climbers on Mount Everest after a blizzard had overtaken them and threatened their lives. One member of the group had already passed on from exposure before he'd arrived, and it had been all Clark could do to leave the deceased there until everyone else was safe. Then he'd retrieved the body, flying the poor man back down the mountainside with a heavy heart, back to his grieving friends.

Everything had kept him busy all night, but now, after a quick, hot shower and a change of clothing, he was ready to climb into bed and lose himself to sleep. He smiled as he looked over to the spot next to his. Lois was facing away from him, already sound asleep. He felt his heart ache with the immeasurable depth of his love for her. He sat down on the mattress and pulled the covers up around his waist, luxuriating in the warm softness of the well-worn flannel. He looked again at Lois, smiling softly at her tousled hair and the Midwestern sweatshirt she'd stolen from him and claimed as her own while they'd still been dating. He leaned over and gently kissed her cheek. She stirred for a moment, but did not fully wake. Still, she murmured in her sleep.

"Hey," she slurred in her dreams.

"Hey, I'm home," he whispered back, adoring the way she always tried to talk to him when he came home from a late night.

"Good." She half-yawned and snuggled further into her pillow, her eyes still firmly shut. "Missed..."

Clark's smile grew and he stifled a chuckle. "I missed you too." He kissed the side of her head, near her temple.

"No...missed...deadline."

"Deadline?" Clark's exhausted body snapped into full wakefulness. "A missed deadline? What story? I could have sworn we sent everything to Perry before we went to dinner."

But Lois was content to keep her secrets. A light snoring filled the room. Unwilling to wake her, Clark ran through a checklist in his mind. He knew for a fact that each story that came to mind had been dutifully filed. And the few that hadn't been sent to their editor simply weren't ready. They were still waiting on sources and to check a few important facts before they would be confident enough to submit the articles to Perry. He threw himself back into

his pillow as he thought, growling in frustration that he couldn't place the missed deadline, even after carefully combing through his exceptional memory for every article they'd worked on in the last month. Nothing struck him as being missed. Surely, if something *had* gotten by them, Perry would have let them know about it.

"She must be dreaming," he finally decided in a low whisper meant exclusively for himself. The idea made him chuckle softly. "Leave it to Lois to dream about work."

With his mind finally at ease with his deduction, he switched off his bedside lamp and closed his eyes. In mere moments, he was fast asleep.

Clark awoke early the next morning to the sound of a radio, picked up by his super hearing. Groggily, he tried to make sense of the unwanted intrusion in his ears. It took a few precious seconds, but he finally realized that it was reports of a shootout in Chicago. He hopped out of bed and spun into his Superman attire, wishing he could stay in bed next to his wife. But people needed him. It was up to him to save as many lives as possible. He scrawled a note to Lois, letting her know he would meet up with her once Superman was no longer needed. Then, faster than a bolt of lightning, he was gone.

Like the night before, the shootout led to other pressing emergencies. Not far from where he airlifted the last suspect to the police station, he heard another cry for help. It was a woman in labor, and he just barely got her into the hospital's emergency room entrance before she started to scream about the urge to push. A healthy, squalling baby boy made his appearance right there in the waiting room, with a harried-looking nurse and a level-headed young doctor there to make the catch. He flew back to Metropolis, figuring he would pick up some of Lois' favorite in-city Chinese food for lunch, since it was one of those rare days when she was scheduled to work while he had the day off.

Spinning back into his civilian attire, he pulled his cellphone out of his pocket to check for any missed calls. He saw one missed call from Lois, and the little icon that indicated a voicemail had been left. He leaned against the cold brick of the alleyway he was in and dialed his voicemail.

"You have one new message," the cheery robotic feminine voice informed him.

He pressed the button that would allow the message to play. He was instantly greeted by a wall of static. But he could just make out Lois' voice.

"Hi, honey," she said, her voice muffled by the white noise. "It's me." It went inaudible for a moment. "...At work....Need to...missed the...forgot all about...periods. Going to...later. Don't call...source...be home...dinner." Nothing more could be heard for the final fifteen seconds of the message.

Clark frowned at the phone and played the message again, but could glean no further insight into it. He deleted the voicemail and shoved his phone into his pocket. He thought about trying to find Lois, but decided against it. She'd mentioned a source and he knew from experience that some of them could be skittish and flee if anyone else showed up to a meeting with her. As Clark or as Superman, he risked Lois not getting whatever information she needed if he showed so much as his pinky finger at the meeting. Still, he wondered what Lois had been trying to tell him. It sounded like she'd missed a deadline at work due to...what? Forgetting to go back and edit in some missing punctuation?

He scratched his ear in thought, then shook his head. It didn't really sound like something Lois would do, but, then again, they'd both lived through much weirder situations than that. Clark shook his head, then, with a grumbling stomach, he decided to make his way to his favorite burger joint, just two blocks uptown. He would save the Chinese food for another day, when he could share it with Lois.

After lunch, he found himself in the unique predicament of

trying to figure out what to do with himself for the rest of the day. He thought about making his way to the public library to pick up a couple of books to read when another cry for help caught his attention. Abandoning the idea of having a relaxing afternoon, Clark found the closest sheltered spot to change back into his Superman suit. Then he was off like a shot, zooming to the source of the call – a fallen tree that had trapped an elderly man and his grandson beneath its spreading branches. Clark carefully lifted the tree off them both, then flew them to the hospital to be checked over, though the tree’s naturally curved trunk had spared them from being crushed too severely.

He was on his way back home when a group of boy scouts caught his attention. They waved and called his name, and Clark was happy to stop and chat with them. The group was standing around a table and several chairs. Clark could see a large insulated thermos and a stack of Styrofoam cups as he came in for a landing.

“Superman!” one of the boys cried, waving enthusiastically.

“Hi, boys,” Clark greeted them with a smile. He gestured to the table to make small talk. “What are you guys selling?”

“Hot chocolate,” replied another, slightly older boy. “Want a cup?”

Clark’s smile grew. “I’m afraid I don’t carry any money,” he gently teased.

“That’s okay!” a third boy piped up. “It’s on the house.”

“Oh, I couldn’t,” Clark protested, feeling guilty. He wanted to support the boys, but he could only do that as Clark. Yet he didn’t want to make Superman run out on the boys either.

“Seriously!” the third boy insisted, while one of the others poured a steaming cup of the dark liquid. “You’re always there for everyone, day or night, and never ask for anything in return. We’re happy to give you a cup of hot chocolate.”

“Well...thank you,” Clark said, gratefully accepting the cup as it was pressed into his hands. He made a silent vow to return later on as Clark and give the boys a donation. “So...what are you guys raising money for?”

“The Coates Orphanage,” a different boy spoke up. “We’re trying to spread awareness ahead of the holiday season and raise some money so the kids can all get gifts.”

“I’m impressed,” Clark said proudly, taking a sip of his drink. “Usually, don’t fund raisers go toward offsetting the cost of a camping trip or something?”

The same boy shrugged. “We thought this was better than raising money for our yearly trip to Washington, DC,” he explained. “We’ll find some other way to bring in donations for it, or forfeit it until next year.” He shrugged again. “We’ve all been there the last three years in a row. We don’t mind changing our focus this time to something worthier.”

Clark reached out with his free hand and clapped the boy on his shoulder. “You’ve got a good heart. All of you do. I’m so proud of you.” He glanced around, noticing for the first time that the boys were alone, without a scout leader present. “Is your pack leader around? I’d like to compliment him on what a wonderful group of boys you are.”

The first boy jabbed this thumb back over his shoulder. “He ducked into the sandwich place to use the men’s room. He should be back in a few minutes.”

Clark nodded and remained where he was, drinking his hot chocolate – which he had to admit was perfectly made – and chatting with the kids. A few minutes later, the portly, friendly, ruddy-faced leader rejoined the group and Clark made good on his promise to compliment the man on leading such a great group of kids. But the man brushed it off, stating that he’d had no part in guiding the boys to the decision they’d made. They’d come up with the idea themselves after one of the boys in the pack had been to the orphanage when his family had adopted his little sister. The boy himself had been a resident of Coates as well, but had been

adopted at the age of five months old – well before he could have formed any memory of the place.

Clark lingered there for a solid fifteen or twenty minutes, talking with the boys, answering their questions, even signing a few things at their request. His presence at the table also drew interest from passersby, and before long a decent-sized line had formed at the table. Clark overheard more than one person remark that if the hot chocolate was good enough for Superman to drink, surely it would be good enough for them as well. He was happy to draw in some business for the boys, but he also wasn’t completely comfortable with becoming an impromptu billboard for the hot chocolate stand. He didn’t want people to buy a drink simply because he’d been offered one himself. Then, as he was trying to figure out a way to gracefully leave the scene, his enhanced hearing picked up a call for help. He quickly bid the kids a good day, thanked them for the drink, and flew off.

The call for help turned out to be from an older woman suffering from a heart attack. Clark rushed her directly to the emergency room. Then he returned to the hot chocolate stand, this time dressed as himself, not Superman. He bought a cup of the rich, chocolatey drink, and handed the boys a twenty-dollar bill, refusing the change. Before they could argue, he’d already started moving down the block.

Good group of boys, he thought to himself as he made his way down the sidewalk, sipping his drink. *I wonder if our kids would have joined the scouts, if Lois and I had been given better news by Dr. Klein about our chances of having a family.* He sighed softly.

Five years.

They’d been given the bad news a little over five years ago. It still drove a dagger in Clark’s heart whenever he thought about it. Still, Lois had been determined to prove Dr. Klein wrong and Clark had, at first, been just as ready to make the impossible happen. So, for a long time, they’d actively tried to get pregnant, doing everything in their power to increase their chances, even the occasional “screwball home remedy” – as Lois had called them. Nothing had happened and they’d eventually given up hope, focusing on just enjoying life as a couple.

Clark smiled a private smile as he thought about their life together. After as many false starts and outright disasters that had plagued them as they’d moved from partners at work to a married couple, it still felt surreal that he was married to the love of his life. He’d always hoped he’d one day find a woman special enough to give his heart – and the deepest, most terrifying secret about himself – to, but finding Lois had surpassed even the wildest dreams he’d once had.

Speaking of...I should probably try checking in with her again.

He tossed his now empty cup into the closest sidewalk trashcan and then took out his cellphone. He quickly dialed Lois’ number but he was immediately directed to her voicemail. He hung up before it could even beep and start to record his voice. If Lois was so busy that her phone was off, she wasn’t likely to get his message until she was already back at home. It had happened more than once before.

He stopped only once as he made his way back home so that he could pick up some groceries. He figured the least he could do was whip up a good meal to have ready when she got home from work. He decided on a ham, with potatoes, carrots, corn, buttermilk biscuits, and cranberry sauce. By the time he left the store, his mouth was already watering with the promise of the dinner and the leftovers to come.

Clark hailed a taxi for the remainder of the trip home, simply to blend in and appear as normal as possible. He tipped the driver well once they pulled up to the house, then he leisurely got everything prepped in the kitchen so that he would only need to stick things in the oven to warm up once Lois got home. While he waited for her shift to be over, he set about doing a few tasks

around the house that had gone unfinished in the wake of distress calls for Superman and late nights researching stories with Lois.

He became so engrossed in his work that he didn't even notice how late it was getting until the phone rang. Picking it up, he glanced at the clock and frowned. It was nearly seven at night. Lois should have been home an hour ago. A knot of worry twisted in his stomach but he forced his voice to sound normal as he picked up the phone and answered. Maybe it was Lois calling.

"Hello?"

"Hey, CK?"

Clark's heart deflated a little. "Hey, Jimmy."

"Just wanted to call and let you know that Perry moved the staff meeting up tomorrow to eight instead of nine."

Clark nodded absently. "Thanks, I appreciate the heads-up."

"No problem. I would have told Lois, but she was already gone before Perry made the announcement."

Clark's heart seized up. "Gone? What time did she leave?"

"Um..." He could hear Jimmy trying to remember. "I guess it was four-thirty. Five. Somewhere around there. I'm not exactly sure. I popped into the darkroom to get some film started and by the time I went back out to get the rest of it from my desk, she was already gone."

"So, she didn't say anything about any...detours on the way home or anything?" Clark asked carefully, not wanting to alarm Jimmy.

"Not that I can think of. Why?" Jimmy's voice pitched a little higher as he caught on to what Clark was asking. "Is she not home yet?"

"Clark?"

Clark let out a rush of air in a relieved sigh as Lois' voice echoed through the house from the front entryway.

"Never mind," he told Jimmy quickly. "She just got in. Thanks."

"No problem. See you in the morning." Clark was pleased to hear the ever-present near-laugh in his friend's voice again.

"Bright and early," Clark promised before hanging up.

As soon as the phone was placed back on the cradle, he rushed through the house to find Lois. He found her hanging up her coat and rubbing some warmth back into her arms. Clark immediately went to her and engulfed her in his embrace. She hugged him back just as tightly.

"Are you okay?" he asked with concern, finally letting go of her and holding her at an arm's distance to check her over for obvious signs of injury.

"I'm *fine*, Clark," she laughed with a smile. There was a gleam in her eye but Clark was still recovering from his worry that something bad had happened to her. "But we *do* need to talk. Right after I get changed into something more comfortable. My feet are killing me in these heels."

Clark chuckled. "Go on. I'll get dinner started. And then, you have *got* to tell me what this business about a missed deadline was all about."

Lois stopped in her tracks and laughed nervously. "Well... that's actually what we need to talk about. And I never called it a missed deadline."

"Sure you did," Clark replied with a shrug.

"When?" she asked, looking at him like he'd suddenly sprouted a few extra heads.

"When I got home last night," he explained. "I got into bed next to you, kissed your head, and you said you'd missed a deadline. I've been running every story we've worked on for the last month or so over in my head, but I can't figure out what we missed. Unless it was one of your stories that you've been working on solo?"

"Clark, honey, there is no forgotten story," she began, but Clark was already continuing his train of thought.

"And then, your message on my voicemail. I'm guessing you

were someplace with really bad reception, because it was all broken up and staticky. But it sounded like you were talking about a missed deadline due to...some forgotten punctuation. Which sounds totally out of character for you but that was all I could make out."

The change in Lois' face was immediate and incredible. A tremendous grin lit up her face as she burst out into a deep, hearty laugh. Tears streaked down her eyes as she laughed, leaving Clark more confused than before. Lois started to nearly hyperventilate as she struggled to master herself and catch a decent breath.

"Clark...what *exactly* did you hear in the message?" she managed to get out, just before another howl of laughter overtook her.

"Um...something about something missed, some static, then something about forgotten periods," he recalled slowly.

"Oh God! Forgotten...*punctuation!*" she roared in amusement, wiping at her eyes. "Oh, honey! That's *not* what I said at all!"

"Well, then...what *were* you trying to tell me?" he asked, shaking his head in entertained befuddlement at the way she was trying to hold herself together but failing.

"What I said was that I missed my last *cycle*," she said, stressing the word. "With all that's been going on lately, I haven't been good about tracking my periods. So, I went to the doctor on the way home. Hence why I'm late getting in."

"Uh..." Clark stammered as his brain raced to absorb this unexpected information. He blinked. "What?"

"Honey, we're nine weeks pregnant."

THE END