

Mission on Fifth Street

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Rated: G

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Summary: What happened when Clark showed up at the Fifth Street Mission in the episode “All Shook Up”? Who really recognized him at the Mission? Does his secret remain safe when he doesn’t remember he has a secret to keep?

Story Size: 4,413 words (24Kb as text)

A prequel to [“The Nun’s Tale”](#).

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Thanks to Marcelle for being the GE for this story. Your helpful suggestions added clarity to make this story flow better and easier to read.

Day 1

Mother Mary Frances walked on the sidewalk next to the buildings. She allowed the more hurried pedestrians to pass her. Today she was in no rush, because she was early.

This was one of the perks of her recent promotion. She set her own schedule and would occasionally indulge herself in watching the people around her. It was something her dad had taught her when they were waiting on an arrival at Metropolis International Airport years ago, before Mary Frances became a novitiate. The flight was delayed for several hours. Rather than getting upset, her father calmly took the opportunity to watch the people in the airport. He told her stories she’d never heard before, sharing how many acquaintances and family members whom he hadn’t seen for years had crossed paths with him in one busy airport or another.

It was one of the last lessons he taught her, and one she took to heart. Whenever she could, she would find a way to do something productive instead of getting upset if her plans were suddenly changed, or if she found herself with a long wait. And when she looked at the people around her, she remembered her dad’s stories and really looked at them. Not only to see if she knew any, but also to gauge their emotions, and when possible she liked to brighten someone’s day.

Today was a sunny day with people hurrying to work. It was a bit early in the day for shoppers or tourists, and it was not the peak tourist season in Metropolis anyway.

Suddenly, the world became dark as an ominous shadow passed over the sun. The pedestrians all stopped where they were since they couldn’t see in the unexpected darkness.

She heard a car skidding and instinctively turned in its direction, even though she was still temporarily blinded by the sudden darkness and couldn’t see what was happening. Before her eyes could fully adjust, the sun returned.

And Mary Frances found herself looking directly at a young man in a business suit with dark hair and glasses standing next to the stopped car. In the blink of an eye, he looked like he was thrown in the air and turned around so that he ended up sitting in a pile of trash. Before she could fully process what she saw, his companion, a brunette in a red power suit, called out, “Clark!”

Mary Frances moved closer to see if the man was injured. After a couple of steps she stopped when he got up. He rubbed the back of his head, but didn’t seem hurt. Before she could politely

turn away, he turned his head and she saw his face. She recognized him, but couldn’t immediately place him.

This whole scene seemed familiar somehow. Then it hit her. The bus! This was the young man she saw stop a bus with his bare hand.

He was Superman!

She clamped her jaw shut so she would not give him away, and stopped staring at him. She remembered the look on his face after he saved the bus. It reminded her of one of her former students who didn’t know the answer to a question and was frozen in fear. She remained silent because the last thing she wanted to do was to cause him any distress or to reveal his secret. Of course, that assumed she could say anything, since Mary Frances thought it likely she couldn’t speak coherently now due to her surprise.

He and his companion spoke briefly, stopped at the coffee kiosk where he bought them each a cup of coffee and then headed into the *Daily Planet* building.

Mary Frances took a deep breath and walked up to the coffee kiosk. She was pleasantly surprised to see Mike there. She hadn’t seen him in a long time, but he always had a smile and was pleasant.

“Hi, Mary Frances! Congratulations on your promotion,” Mike said as he handed her a cup of tea, fixed exactly the way she liked it.

Mike’s smile and welcoming manner put her at ease. She relaxed and found herself able to speak to him.

“Thank you, Mike,” she said as she handed him the money for the tea. “Keep the change.”

He smiled and replied, “Thank you. And you’re welcome. Be sure to go to the Fifth Street Mission tomorrow evening.”

“Can you tell me why?”

“You’re needed there. They’ll be shorthanded.”

Mary Frances took a sip of her tea and asked, “Why me?”

Mike kindly replied, “You have an important mission. Don’t worry, you’ll know what to do.”

She left with a new spring in her step. As soon as she left the kiosk she forgot about seeing Mike there and continued on to her appointments, feeling happy and blessed.

In front of the *Daily Planet* building, she stopped to buy a copy of today’s paper. She noticed the lead article on the front page was by Lois Lane and Clark Kent.

As she walked to her appointment, Mary Frances reminisced about Lois as a driven ten-year-old. She wondered if Lois had figured out just who her writing partner was, and what kind of woman Lois had become. Apparently she was still driven to be the best.

The rest of her day was unremarkable.

Day 2

Mary Frances spent the next morning and early afternoon in a flurry of activity due to her usual schedule, plus the unscheduled added responsibilities due to the imminent threat of the asteroid Nightfall colliding with Earth.

After lunch, her secretary came rushing into her office, anxiously saying, “The Fifth Street Mission is shorthanded tonight. They need another person to help. Apparently some of their volunteers cancelled with Nightfall threatening. The Mission will provide transportation there and back. Or someone can stay overnight at the shelter.”

“Okay,” Mary Frances calmly replied.

“But how can we find someone on such short notice? Everyone has plans or is scheduled to work.”

“Oh, I’ll go. Or rather Sister Mary Frances will go.”

“Are you sure? I can ask—”

“No, I go there at least once a month. I feel that I need to go. It’s important, although I can’t explain why. I’ll plan on coming back tonight and will pack an overnight bag just in case I need to

stay.”

“I’ll call them back.”

“Thanks. I’ll take them up on an offer of a ride. Ask them if they want me to bring anything.”

An hour later her secretary returned with the devastating news that EPRAD had lost audio and radar contact with Superman. EPRAD announced a news conference for the next day. For the next hour, Mary Frances prayed for Superman’s safe return.

The Evening of Day 2

Sister Mary Frances looked around at the clientele of the Fifth Street Mission. Tonight there were more folks than usual.

Most of them were more fearful and cautious than normal when coming into the mission. After a hot meal and some extra attention from the staff and volunteers, most seemed more relaxed than before. As she looked around, she noticed that Henry O had a companion at his table tonight.

She noted how this was unusual, since Henry usually was alone. While Henry seemed relaxed and was chatting, she noticed the body language of his companion was tense. He seemed to shrink as Henry talked. As she watched for a few minutes, he seemed to become more uncomfortable, not less.

Mary Frances was concerned since she didn’t recognize this man. He was dressed in what looked like mismatched clothes. His shirt looked to be part of a uniform, perhaps a repairman. His pants didn’t match, and his clothes were worn. As he turned, she saw his profile and noted that his glasses seemed too small for his face.

She had the nagging feeling all day that something important was coming and she needed to be watchful especially here in the mission.

As she cautiously approached their table, he turned towards her. She stifled a gasp of recognition and schooled her features into a neutral expression. What touched her heart most was the lost expression on his face.

Henry O cheerfully greeted her, “Hello, Sister. Care to join us?”

“I’d love to, if you don’t mind.”

“Please.”

The young man next to Henry politely stood as she approached, and held a chair for her as she sat, then resumed his seat.

“Thank you. So how are you two doing tonight?”

Henry O answered, “Well, I’m fine. But my friend here needs some help.”

“Well, that’s my job. How can I help?”

“See, he’s lost his memory. I think he was mugged. Found him in a hole without a stitch of clothing. Excuse me for using such language.”

“That’s okay. I’ve heard far worse from children.”

Henry chuckled and then continued, “Who would do such a terrible thing? I was concerned he might’ve been drugged, but he doesn’t seem drunk. He was reluctant to come here, but I convinced him to get something to eat and that no one would hurt him.”

“Of course not! We’re here to help.” Turning to Clark she asked, “Are you hurt anywhere?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

“Do you remember anything? Your name? This city?”

“No, not my name. Maybe... Metropolis? I’m not sure...”

“That’s right. You’re in Metropolis. So you do remember some things. If you’re not hurt this very well may be temporary.”

“But I don’t know who I am.”

Mary Frances gently replied, “Well, we haven’t met formally, but I think I know who you are.”

“You do?”

Henry eagerly interjected, “See, I was right! You needed to

come here! So who is he?”

“Well, I think he’s Clark Kent.” Turning to Clark she asked, “Does that name sound familiar?”

“Maybe. I don’t know.”

“Okay. Will you let me contact a friend of mine on the police force? I think he knows you and can get you in touch with your family and friends.”

“Police? I didn’t do anything wrong,” Clark said with a tremor in his voice and an expression filled with fear.

In a calm voice Mary Frances replied, “Oh no, if you’re who I think you are, then you are definitely one of the good guys. And you work with the police sometimes. Will you let me call my friend and see if he can meet us here? I won’t let him take you anywhere unless you feel comfortable with him.”

“O-kay.”

Mary Frances excused herself to go to the office and call Inspector Henderson. He was on duty so she talked to him. He couldn’t come personally to the mission, but would send two officers in a squad car to bring Clark to the station. Mary Frances told Henderson that either she or Henry O might need to accompany Clark since he seemed so skittish. He agreed and would inform the officers.

When she walked back into the dining room, she was startled to see two burly men at Henry O’s table. They looked menacing, and appeared to be threatening Henry and Clark. Henry looked annoyed but remained calm. Clark, if that’s who he was, looked both terrified and upset.

She was incensed that anyone would come into the mission, a place of sanctuary for all and disturb the clients. Especially that particular young man! Summoning all her courage and authority, Mary Frances marched over to the table to discover what was going on.

She stood next to Clark’s chair and asked in her best nonsense annoyed voice, “Can I help you gentlemen?”

They turned to her, saying, “We’re looking for someone.”

“Oh? Perhaps I can help you. I’ve been here all night.”

“We’re looking for a friend who may be hurt. We, um, need to find him.”

“What’s his name? Do you have a description or a picture?”

“Well, he’s tall and has dark hair. Like this guy, except our friend is taller, has more muscles and doesn’t wear glasses.”

“Really? So what’s his name?”

The two men looked at each other but remained silent.

Mary Frances stood looking at them and crossed her arms across her chest. While she had to look up at them since they were physically taller, she felt as though she were towering over them. She said in a tone indicating she had reached the end of her patience with these two, “I’ll ask you once more. What is his name? Surely your friend has a name?”

“Well, we’re not sure what name he’s using. We think he’s hurt and may be hiding.”

“I see. How about a picture or more specific information than he looks like my friend here? He looks like a lot of people.”

“Yeah, I suppose so.”

“And who is he hiding from? If you don’t know what name he’s using, how about introducing yourselves? Prove to us that he’s not hiding from you.”

They remained silent.

Quietly, the mission staff had noted what was going on. Suddenly those two men realized they were surrounded by six of the volunteer staff, including two men who often worked as bouncers. They moved between Mary Frances and the two interlopers. The intruders lost their surly attitude and seemed uncomfortable with the added attention.

After a few minutes of silence, Mary Frances told the men, “Okay, gentlemen. Here’s what we’re going to do. We could ask you to leave because you’re upsetting the men at this table.

However, I'll accept that you're looking for your friend. Since we can't help you, there are two policemen coming in a few minutes. You can wait by yourselves at that empty table by the front door and discuss your search with them."

"Oh, no. We don't see our man and had best be on our way." They scurried out of the mission like the police were already on their tails.

As soon as they were gone Clark turned to Mary Frances and said, "Thank you. I didn't know what to say to them, but I know they were lying. I'm not sure how I know that, I just do."

"I have no doubt you're absolutely correct. I called my friend Bill and he can't come himself. He's sending a couple of officers in a squad car to talk to us. If you want, I can go with you to the precinct to see Bill."

"Yes, thank you. That would be nice. This is all kind of confusing."

"Of course it is. We want to help you get your memory back."

Henry added, "You see? You came to the right place. Now Sister thinks she knows your name, and she got rid of those guys. You know, Sister, I don't think they're Catholic."

"Oh, what gave them away?"

"Anyone who's worked with a nun, especially one who's been a teacher, knows not to mess with her."

Clark looked bewildered.

Mary Frances, Henry and the volunteers laughed. The volunteers returned to their duties.

The two police officers arrived within a few minutes. Mary Frances had the mission's staff contact other missions and shelters in Suicide Slum to be on the lookout for those two men and then filled the officers in on what had happened. The officers put out a description, and that those men were wanted for questioning.

She accompanied Clark to the precinct. After Inspector Henderson recognized him and introduced himself, Clark felt comfortable being left with in the inspector's care. Before returning to the mission, Mary Frances asked Bill not to mention her involvement. She explained she didn't know why but it seemed important for her to remain anonymous tonight. She had told him about the two men who approached Clark at the mission, and he promised to question them himself if they were found. He told her he would just indicate that two of his policemen had found Clark at the mission. While it was true, it wasn't the complete story.

Day 6

Clark was on a mission to find Sister Mary Frances.

It had been frustrating. The administrator of the Fifth Street Mission was away for two weeks, and no one else knew how to contact the sister. They didn't even know how she knew to show up when they needed additional help. Inspector Henderson was away on a special assignment and unreachable. To Clark's frustration, no one else at the 12th Precinct knew Sister Mary Frances.

He wanted to find her and be sure she was okay. His sources had informed him that those two guys were hired by "The Boss" to find Superman. Apparently someone had suspected his plummet to Earth. If EPRAD missed it, it meant someone with powerful connections had been looking for him. If he had to guess, he would suspect Luthor or Bureau 39 were involved... or maybe both. Now that scared him, more for Henry O and Sister than himself. But, he had no proof, only his instincts.

Clark had already found Henry, and made sure he was okay. He even convinced him to stay at the shelter for a few days. Clark wanted to reassure himself that Sister was also okay. Both Henry and Sister had been so kind that night. He would never forget them.

Other than Sister Mary Frances, the only two other women who had ever defended him so boldly and bravely were Lois

defending Superman and his mother defending him as Clark.

So he searched all the city's Catholic offices for leads to Sister Mary Frances as often as his other duties permitted. If necessary he would call or visit every orphanage, church and office.

He found himself one afternoon asking the Mother Superior's secretary about Sister Mary Frances. The secretary was cordial but reserved. She called the Mother's extension, and to Clark's surprise, he was ushered immediately into her private office. The door closed behind him.

Clark looked around the office, and saw a blonde middle-aged woman dressed in a business suit next to a table. She was setting out a second cup for tea. A plate of chocolate chip cookies was already on the table.

Looking up, she extended her hand, saying, "Mr. Kent? I'm Mother Mary Frances. It's nice to meet you. I'm a fan of your work."

Stunned, Clark gently yet firmly shook her hand and said, "You're the Mother Superior?"

"Yes. Would you like to join me for a cup of oolong tea and cookies? And tell me why you're here. Please have a seat."

Clark stood politely until she was seated and then said, "I have been looking for Sister Mary Frances from the Fifth Street Mission. It looks like I may have found her."

Mary Frances enigmatically smiled at him and poured him a cup of tea. She said, "Fix your tea as you like it. I have cream, sugar, honey and lemon. We can probably find some milk if you prefer. I'm not sure about nondairy creamer or artificial sweetener if you want those. And yes, you've found her. Although I hope you don't plan to publish that."

As Clark fixed his tea he replied, "This is fine. And this is not for publication. It's personal. I wanted to be sure you were okay, and to thank you for your kindness last week."

"You're welcome. Why wouldn't I be okay?"

"My sources told me those two men who stopped by Henry's and my table looking for someone were hired by the shady underworld character known as 'The Boss.' I wanted to be sure neither they nor anyone else bothered you."

"Nope. But then very few people know where to find me."

"I found that out over the past few days. Do you mind if I ask why?"

"No, I don't mind." She paused, and then explained, "I've been Mother Superior for only a few weeks, and Sister for many years. People treat me differently since I've become Mother Superior. It's like I'm not allowed to have a sense of humor or to have problems like regular people."

Clark smiled to himself at that description. As Superman he dealt with those same issues.

Mary Frances continued, "So, sometimes I need to just be a regular nun. In the case of the Fifth Street Mission, they know me as Sister Mary Frances and so I'm her when I go there to work. I am sorry you had problems finding me."

Clark thoughtfully replied, "I wouldn't call it a problem, just a challenge. The mission administrator and Inspector Henderson are both unavailable, and no one else seemed to know how to contact you. I was concerned that you were safe."

His concern and tenacity to find her warmed her heart. She took a minute before replying, "I appreciate that. I should have given you my contact information before I left you with Bill Henderson. Here, take my card. It has my direct line if you ever need to contact me." She handed him her business card.

Taking the card Clark replied, "Thanks. I am curious how you recognized me. As far as I know, we hadn't met before that night."

"Not officially, no." Mary Frances took a sip of her tea, and studied Clark.

"May I call you Clark and you call me Mary Frances?" After he nodded yes she continued, "Clark, what I'm about to tell you I will never tell anyone else. And I'm asking that you not share

Sister's identity with anyone. I don't expect your promise until after I complete my story."

She thoughtfully paused to gather her thoughts. This was harder than she thought it would be. And unexpected since she hadn't thought Clark would come to find her.

Steeling herself, she began her story. "In early September, Sister Barbara and I were shopping downtown. We were crossing the street when a bus headed out of control towards pedestrians. As we reached the sidewalk, Sister Barbara turned to help an elderly woman next to her and I turned to look back at the bus. I saw a dark haired young man in a trench coat and business suit stop the bus with his bare hand. I'll never forget the look of fear on his face as he scanned the crowd before disappearing into it. And frankly, I never want to be the cause of that fear.

"A few days later, Superman appeared. I figured he was the same young man. Clark, he saved my life and the lives of all the people on the bus and the other pedestrians. I would never endanger him or his family. He did give me the idea, though, that Sister Mary Frances could do what Mother Superior can't. You see, Mother Superior can't be silly or funny. As her, I often seem to be put on a pedestal, and frankly feel like I'm living in a glass house or a fishbowl.

"Anyway, about a week ago, I was walking down the street when the Nightfall solar eclipse occurred. I was almost in front of the *Daily Planet*, and saw the same young man in front of a stopped car when the eclipse ended. Now I didn't see him actually stop the car, but I did see him jump into a pile of trash after the car had stopped. He didn't seem seriously hurt.

"A young woman called him 'Clark' and after buying coffee, they both went into the *Daily Planet* building. I bought a *Daily Planet* paper and saw the front-page byline of Lois Lane and Clark Kent.

"When I saw you at the mission, I recognized you. I'm sorry if this has caused you any distress."

Clark had turned pale as she told her story. Using his super senses, he closely watched her body language and listened to her heartbeat throughout her speech. He felt confident she was telling the truth, and had no plans to expose him.

"Mary Frances, what you have discovered is a dangerous secret. If you read the *Daily Planet*, you may have read about Colonel Trask and Bureau 39. In an effort to capture Superman, they took my parents, neighbor, Lois and me hostage. My neighbor was actually tortured. He and my parents nearly died."

"Are they okay now?"

Clark smiled wistfully as he answered, "Yes. The neighbor Wayne recovered fully. And my parents... well they're just amazing."

"Clark, as I said before I have no intention of sharing this with anyone. Ever. I've already taken a vow of silence on the matter, with you as the only exception. I don't know what else I can say to convince you of my honesty.

"Except that my identity as Sister Mary Frances is not dangerous, but I do believe being able to be her occasionally is important for my mental health. I'd probably go crazy or resign as Mother Superior if she didn't exist. And exposing her would do just that. Does that make sense?"

Clark nodded affirmatively.

Mary Frances continued, "You have a secret. I have a secret. We each keep our own and each other's secrets. Now I am okay with you telling your family about Sister since I assume they also can keep a secret. If you need to tell anyone else though, I would ask that you let me know first."

Clark finished his tea, and was deeply touched by her sincerity and concern. He quietly said, "I believe you. Thanks for sharing your secret and for keeping mine."

"Now tell me, Clark, are you okay? Did you have any serious injury from Nightfall?"

"Only the amnesia, which lasted until shortly before Superman deflected the rest of Nightfall."

From there, they continued conversing about Nightfall, the *Daily Planet* and other topics. They found they both enjoyed teas. Clark told her about some of his travels, while Mary Frances regaled him with amusing stories of her secret identity.

And they began their lifelong friendship over that pot of oolong tea and plate of cookies.

THE END