

The Final Word

by Kala Lane Kent

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Rating: T

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The event was officially known as the *Daily Planet* Anniversary Party, supposedly commemorating the founding of the newspaper. But by long-standing coincidence, the date of the party fell on the weekend closest to the Editor-in-Chief's birthday. Which, in this case, was the last weekend in March.

Perry had rented out conference space in one of the better hotels, and virtually everyone on the DP staff was there. The office cliques prevailed, however; most of the beat reporters were in the largest room, the accounting people had taken over a smaller area, the advertising folks were in another room, and the print room guys were mostly outside smoking. The sports writers were in a room just off the main one, which happened to have a large television as well as being convenient to the bar.

Lois rarely stayed with her own group at these events. She circulated - she had always made a point of knowing everyone in the paper, from the interns to the mail room staff. Besides, she *was* the star reporter; everyone should know her on sight.

What she never admitted to herself was the fact that she was also the heir apparent to the Editor-in-Chief's desk. When she finally had to assume that mantle, being on good terms with every single department involved in running the paper would be a huge asset. And already, she was widely respected for forging those connections.

At times, though, she also made her rounds of the company events for the pure enjoyment of meeting so many people. But tonight, Lois had a specific agenda, and she stalked into the hotel's conference area with her head held high, returning greetings with a friendly, distracted wave.

Ever since she'd finally dragged the admission out of Jimmy about the old bet between himself and Lombard, Lois had been working on a way of making sure Grizzly couldn't welsch. *Little as I like to encourage wagering on my sex life, this is Jimmy we're talking about,* she

thought, stopping by the open bar for some vodka. *And he was pretty much defending my honor. What he said was true even then - Clark had a better shot at getting me than Lombard ever will. Too bad for Grizzly he was overconfident enough in his own appeal to bet a car on the outcome. Either that, or he figured Clark didn't have a chance with me, and he'd never have to pay up.*

Lois grinned as she sipped her drink. *Poor Grizzly. He has no idea who he's messing with.*

As she headed into the main room, conversation stopped. Lois just smiled coyly and let her stride become a strut. The black skirt was just above the knee, and tight enough to require the slit up her left thigh. Her red blouse had a dangerously low v-neck, and it clung to her body as if to insist that being a mother had only changed her for the better. But the clothes were provocative instead of being blatant; the outfit she'd seen on one of the secretarial girls would've looked more at home on a street corner than in an office party, and Lois wouldn't be caught looking like that. Not even when she was dressing to use her Office Hot Chick title as a weapon.

A few wolf whistles greeted her, and Lois rolled her eyes as she stalked through the room, her calf-length boots making her four inches taller. Perry looked up, caught a glimpse of her, and then started chuckling to himself. Poor Jimmy turned around to see who everyone was whistling at, and managed to drop his club soda right onto his own shoes.

But at the very back of the room, one man stood up, several inches taller than everyone else in the room. The expression of surprise on Clark's face was sweeter than ambrosia to Lois, and she glanced his way with a wicked grin. To forestall questioning from her fiancé, Lois whispered, "Jimmy's car," under her breath.

Not even the people nearest her heard it, but Clark did. He started to grin and sat back down, following her progress through the room with amusement. The bet between Jimmy and Lombard was more than seven years old, but Grizzly was still driving the same restored Corvette convertible. He treated that car like it was his firstborn son - which was all the more reason why he shouldn't have used it to wager that he'd be able to bed the infamously hard-to-get Lois Lane.

Lois didn't go after her quarry immediately. She circulated, chatted with old friends, watched younger women glare at her in jealousy and men sigh with longing. Only after an hour had gone by did she collect her third drink of the night and head for the room where the sports department had holed up.

The game was on, of course, and this room was exclusively male even though the actual department wasn't. The few women sportswriters were hanging out with the regular reporters, avoiding the fog of testosterone and nostalgia that cloaked the room.

In his pro football career, Steve Lombard had been famous for his savage tackle - hence the nickname Grizzly. Even now, years after his career-ending injury, his former status still earned him the respect of the other sportswriters. That was why Lois found him seated on the largest and most comfortable couch in room.

She didn't give him or anyone else a chance to do more than wonder why she was there. Lois sauntered in with a sultry grin on her face and went right to Lombard. He froze with his beer halfway to his mouth, staring at her.

For once, Lois let him look, smirking a little as her swaying hips apparently hypnotized him. Before anyone could even remark on her appearance, she'd hopped up on the arm of the sofa, those long legs stretched out across Grizzly's lap (but thankfully not touching him). Lois

leaned in close, watching his eyes practically cross as the front of the blouse pulled down just a tiny bit.

"Hello, Steve," Lois purred, taking a deep breath. He was utterly captivated by her cleavage, by the barest hint of black lace revealed beneath the red blouse. She had to catch his chin and force him to look up at her before his dazed eyes could focus on anything but that. "Enjoying the view?"

Grizzly blinked, but he couldn't form a coherent sentence. Besides, what could anyone really say in such circumstances? While every other sportswriter in the room watched in open-mouthed shock, Lois leaned down until she was only inches from his face.

"Better treasure it, Grizzly," she murmured, and the purr became a growl. "Because this is *all* you'll ever get. If you were the last man on earth, you'd never touch me without spending two months in a cast for the privilege. *Never*. You are an arrogant, chauvinistic, disgusting pig, and there is absolutely no way you could have *ever* won that bet."

Her grip on his chin was painful, and Grizzly tried to wince away, but he was too confused to muster much force. Lois wasn't done with him yet. "Now, Clark? He's a gentleman. And one *hell* of a lover - pussycat in the boardroom, tiger in the bedroom, you know? *He's* seen it all, and had his hands - or his mouth - on just about every inch of it. Yes, those twins are very much *his*. And furthermore, the other rumor's true, too. I did spend the whole week in bed with him, and it was absolutely *amazing*."

The first hint of anger showed in Steve's eyes then; he had never liked to be taunted with something he couldn't have. But Lois had one final trick up her sleeve, and she whispered it in Steve's ear, letting him catch the scent of her hair as it fell teasingly across his face. "I know about that cute little intern with the heart tattoo on her ankle, Steve. You *really* shouldn't have emailed her from your work computer, you know that? Even though you didn't use the company email server, we've recorded every keystroke you've ever typed. And you really don't want anyone to know she calls you Snuggly Bear, do you? Oh, by the way, I also know she's *seventeen*. I personally think she's old enough to know what she wants, but the law says she isn't. If anyone else were to find out, you might just wind up arrested for statutory rape."

Grizzly gulped. "What do you want?" he asked hoarsely, as Lois sat back away from him, feeling unclean.

"Your car keys," she purred, giving him a vixenish smile. "And have the signed title on Jimmy's desk Monday, or everybody on the company server gets a copy of your emails..." Lois dropped her voice, a wicked gleam in her eyes... "*Snuggly*."

Scowling, he reached into his pocket and dug out the keys, dropping them in Lois' outstretched palm. "And how the hell am I supposed to get home?" he grouched, half-under his breath.

"Take a cab," Lois said. "Or walk. Might be a good way to get rid of some of that extra padding." With a last sarcastic grin, Lois got up and sauntered off.

Clark had watched and listened to the entire show. He was torn between embarrassment at her blatant description of him, pride that he'd earned such praise, and a certain discomfort brought on by seeing her behave so provocatively in circumstances that prevented him from acting on his feelings for her. Still, he watched her, amazed that this woman was *his* - and would be even more officially his in two weeks.

Clark found a comfortable place to stand and watch Lois, tracking her through the walls as she worked her way back to the main room. Her confidence was at an all-time high, the

force of her personal charisma making everyone she passed stop to look at her appreciatively. He just grinned; they could look, but none of them could do more than that.

Lois seemed to be heading for him when she got back, but she walked up to Jimmy instead. Taking the stunned photographer's hand, she dropped the keys into his palm. "There you go, Jimmy. And if the title's not on your desk Monday, I'll have Lombard's head on a platter."

It took him a moment to reply. "Wow! How on earth didja manage that, Lois?"

She grinned viciously. "Intimidation tactics, Jimmy. A little cleavage, a little blackmail, the reminder of past broken bones. But don't you *ever* make a bet about my sex life again; do you hear me, James Bartholomew Olsen?" Lois caught Jimmy's tie and stared into his eyes. "If it was anybody but you, under any circumstances but those, you'd be driving a wheelchair instead of a convertible. Are we clear?"

"Yes, ma'am," he stammered. "I didn't mean... Grizzly was being such a pompous jerk... It wasn't supposed to be a bet at first..."

"I know," Lois said, letting go of his tie and smoothing it slightly. "I just don't want to encourage gambling among the younger generation." Impulsively, Lois kissed his cheek, and wandered off leaving Jimmy looking dazed.

Clark just laughed to himself. He had always known that Jimmy had a bit of a crush on Lois, and the outfit Lois wore had to be fueling a lot of desperate longing. Add a peck on the cheek, and Jimmy would be lucky if he could remember his own address when he finally left the party. Clark couldn't help but feel sympathy for him; he'd been in the same predicament with Lois, loving her hopelessly while her heart belonged to another man. *Funnily enough, I was the other man back then, too. No one here would guess, but I was my own competition back in the old days. However, I **did** finally win Lois for myself, and Jimmy's proud of me for it.*

Olsen had been their chief supporter from the moment the rumors were confirmed. Any time someone expressed disbelief, Jimmy would leap to their defense with a few remarks on good guys with old-fashioned values, and the crazy modern girls who loved them. He claimed to have guessed there was more than friendship between them years ago, and insisted that Lois and Clark would still be together when the rest of the office gang were going through their second divorces. His staunch belief, as well as their longtime friendship, had prompted Clark to ask Jimmy to be the best man at the wedding, an honor that floored the young photographer.

Musing on the blessing of friendship, Clark moved casually through the crowd to catch up to Lois. He ought to at least be seen with his fiancée tonight...

Most of the staff had left by midnight, leaving the party to the administrators, the brown-nosers, and those who attended solely for the open bar. In days gone by, Perry would have hung around until almost dawn, then gone to work early and drunk enough coffee to be awake when he berated the fools who had stayed up late just to curry favor.

These days, his cardiologist strictly forbade such exploits. Perry had to leave the party at midnight, *or else*. Loueen was right beside Perry as Lois and Clark approached him, keeping close tabs on the disgruntled editor.

"I'm not gonna turn back into a pumpkin, Loueen, you can quit watching the clock," Perry muttered.

"A pumpkin?" Lois snorted as she walked up. "More like a toadstool. C'mon, Chief, we're calling it a night, too."

"Drive evasively," Loueen said. "You'll need to shake everyone off your trail after sashaying around in that outfit all night."

Lois laughed easily. "Clark's taking me home. I've had a few too many to drive." As if to prove her tipsy state, she leaned back against her fiancé's chest and grinned at him happily.

Loueen's eyebrows went up. "Oh, yeah, you're toasted. Kent, you take care of her, all right? Some of these goons would love to get her alone before she's off the market for good."

"She's already off the market," Clark said softly, his arm around Lois' waist protectively. "And has been since last year. If they haven't figured that out yet, well..." He just shrugged, but Loueen and Perry grinned.

"Atta boy," the editor said, with a friendly punch to Clark's arm. "If anyone around this place deserves her, you do."

"You sure that's a compliment?" Loueen asked her husband.

Lois just rolled her eyes and stuck out her tongue. Everything seemed funny, even the diffident way Jimmy approached them. "You guys heading out?" the photographer asked.

"Yeah, might as well," Perry said. "It's just management and drunks, now. If Lane's leaving, that's the last *entertaining* drunk out the door, so we might as well."

"I'm not drunk," Lois protested stubbornly. "I'm just a little tipsy."

"You're a little tipsy like the *Titanic* hit a little iceberg," Loueen told her. "C'mon, you hard-boiled reporters. Let's scam."

They were not the only ones ambling toward the door. Lombard was there, unsteady on his feet and full of liquid courage. He scowled on seeing Jimmy, making the photographer pause warily, but then the sportswriter caught sight of Lois and Clark. Clark, whom he had taunted for years without the other man ever so much as raising his voice in self-defense...

Lombard grinned nastily at Lois. "G'night, Lois," he slurred. "By the way, tha's a verry nice bra." He paused as everyone in the party looked shocked, then added, "Verr' nice."

Lois glared, her eyes narrowing. How *dare* that sonofabitch try to make Clark jealous! There wasn't enough alcohol in the world to make *Lombard* look good to her. She drew in breath for a loud and profane retort...

But Clark beat her to it. His arm was still around her waist, quite possessively. Instead of berating Lombard, he just smiled brightly at him. "Actually, Steve, it's a corset," he replied cheerfully.

Lombard's jaw dropped as Perry, Loueen, and Jimmy all turned to look at Clark, their expressions a mix of disbelief and amazement. Lois, however, burst out laughing, and Clark had to hold her up as Lombard slunk away in defeat.

Perry just shook his head. "I'm leaving," he said. "That puts the cap on the night; nothing else that funny'll happen even if we stay past dawn. Kent, I hope you realize you're gonna hear that repeated all day Monday."

Clark couldn't reply; Lois had degenerated into uncontrollable snickering, and at last he simply picked her up and carried her to the car.

Lois stalked in the door of her apartment, grinning triumphantly. That'd put paid to Grizzly Lombard for a long time - and remind everyone at the office that Lois Lane was still the Official Office Hot Chick.

She couldn't be smug for long, however. Only two steps into the living room, she found herself lifted up and pinned against the door as it closed behind her. Lois gave a startled little yelp that was silenced by Clark kissing her with sudden passion.

A few minutes later they broke apart for breath, Lois' hair ruffled and her eyes gleaming with mischief. "Well," she murmured, "I guess you liked the outfit."

"A little," he whispered. He slid his hands up her thighs under the skirt, making her gasp, and nuzzled her neck as he added, "I like what's under it better."

Lois laughed breathlessly, arching her hips against him. "I never knew you enjoyed the corset *that* much."

"Not the corset," Clark murmured, trailing kisses down her neck. "*You*."

"Oh, well, in that case..." Lois' teasing ended in another gasp as Clark lifted her slightly, pinning her against the door at an angle that made her shiver in anticipation. She wrapped her legs around his waist, freeing his hands to slide her blouse up and off. Lois hooked her fingers under his tie, whispering, "Where are the twins?"

"Your mom's house," he replied, unbuttoning his shirt and kissing her. "I told her we had to stay late for a very important meeting."

Lois laughed as she ran her nails lightly down his chest. "Important meeting? Oh, really? You're playing fast and loose with that 'I never lie' business."

"It is important," he insisted, kissing the curve of her jaw. "The heads of the two biggest departments at the paper have to stay well connected, you know."

"Well connected?" Lois chuckled, leaning back against the door. "You're being rather bold."

"Blame it on my lover," he teased. "She's the one who tempted me."

"You know this wasn't specifically just for you," Lois murmured huskily, running her fingers through his hair.

"No, but you knew how I'd react," Clark whispered against her lips. "Or at least you should have."

"Careful, hero, this might be construed as taking advantage of me," Lois murmured. "I have had a few drinks tonight, you know."

"I know," he replied, "that's why I brought you home, remember? And I know full well that you're more aware and in control while tipsy than most people are sober."

As he spoke, he had been sliding her skirt further up, running his fingers along her thighs possessively. Lois sighed, unable to suppress a little shiver of arousal. "I thought we were going to be good," she whispered in a small voice. "Only two weeks left. You said..."

He smiled against her lips as he kissed her again. "Oh, I will be good."

"You're a bad man, Kal-El," she murmured teasingly, but her voice had dropped and her eyes were lidded.

"Am not," came the husky reply, and Lois moaned softly as he slid his hands up her sides, cupping her breasts through the corset. A moment later, he reached inside the silk and lace and lifted them free, her nipples hardening instantly in anticipation of his mouth.

Her last coherent words, before he pinned her hands above her and bent his head to her breasts, were spoken in a breathy murmur. "We need to call my mom ... and tell her the twins are staying overnight."