

You Know IT'S Love

The title 'You Know IT'S Love' is written in a black, handwritten-style font. The words are arranged vertically: 'You' at the top, 'Know' in the middle, 'IT'S' in a smaller font below 'Know', and 'Love' at the bottom. Three small hearts are scattered around the text, two to the right of 'You' and 'Know', and one to the right of 'Love'.

EPILOGUE

Myles

I'll never get tired of this sound.

Three months ago, I couldn't have imagined I'd be standing in a kitchen in the East Village, listening to the laughter of my girlfriend and daughter while they hide out in a blanket fort in the living room. Even now, I have trouble believing it.

A little blond head pokes out from a blanket draped between two chairs. Amber's blue eyes are wide and excited. "Is the tea ready?"

"Almost," I say, arranging the tea cups on the wooden tray. It was Cat's idea to have a princess tea party in a blanket fort on this rainy fall afternoon, and Amber was delighted by the suggestion. When I pointed out that surely I, as the handsome prince, shouldn't be the one *making* the tea, they voted two to one against me and sent me straight into the kitchen.

But I don't mind at all.

Amber ducks back into the fort and a pink head pops out. "Need a hand, Prince Myles?"

I stroll across the room with the tray, grinning. "You think I can't handle making tea after all my years in hospitality?"

Cat gives me a wry smile. "Yeah, because you spent so much time making tea—*not* cocktails for pretty girls."

I set the tray down on the floor in front of her, bending to plant a kiss on her forehead. "Well, now I make tea for princesses."

She reaches out, catching me around the back of the neck before I can pull away, and presses her soft mouth to mine.

“And it’s the best job I’ve ever had,” I whisper against her lips.

With a chuckle, she takes the tray inside the fort. I head back into the kitchen and begin to put the kettle away, when Amber calls out.

“Dad? Are you having tea with us?”

My hand stills on the kettle. Warmth floods into my chest, like it always does when she uses that word.

Dad.

It was three weeks ago that she first called me that. She just said, “Thanks, Dad,” when I handed her a snack while she was coloring at the table.

Cat was sitting beside her, coloring too, and her gaze flew to mine when she heard it. She watched me with a small, encouraging smile, waiting for my response.

I had no fucking clue how to respond. It took me a full minute to finally say, “You know, you don’t have to call me that if you don’t want to.”

Amber stopped coloring to look up at me from under a furrowed brow. “But... you are my dad. Why wouldn’t I call you that?”

And all I could do was nod, while she returned to her coloring without giving it another thought. I looked at Cat again, and when I saw the tears shimmering in her eyes I had to wipe my own and look away.

I glance now at the fort and smile. “I’d love to,” I say, crossing the room and crawling in through the blanket doorway. Amber and Cat are sitting cross-legged, sipping from their teacups, when I enter. “How’s the tea?”

“It’s great!” Amber’s cheeks round into a mischievous smile. “Do you want to be a princess like us? Cat said I could do your hair again.”

I suppress a groan. Amber loves to play hairdresser with me, combing my hair and adding sparkly barrettes. I think she only finds it half as much fun because Cat is always in stitches when she does it.

“Did she now? Well, I guess if she said it’s okay I’ll have to let you.” The truth is, I don’t care if I have sparkly barrettes in my hair. All I care about is seeing my girls happy.

I grin at Cat but her gaze drops to her lap. I try to push away the uneasy feeling this tiny action gives me, but this isn’t the first time she’s felt a little off recently.

Sometimes I wonder if it's too much, having Amber here every Sunday—even if it was Cat's idea. She's been unbelievably supportive since I decided to fight for my right to see Amber. It was Cat who suggested I contact Nikki and explain I would be speaking with a lawyer, just to give her one last chance before going to court. It worked—Nikki finally saw sense and agreed to meet. Cat came too, bringing the dresses she'd made for Amber. It only took Nikki half an hour to warm up to Cat and finally, *finally* agree to let me see Amber.

Cat welcomed Amber into our lives with enthusiasm and love. She's been with us at every visit, and in between our visits she plans fun things to do, talks about Amber, and makes her more outfits. She even sewed her a blue dress like the one from that *Frozen* movie after they watched it together one weekend.

Still, we've only been dating for three months. And Cat has had a lot going on through that time—including starting therapy a few weeks back. Ever since then, things have shifted and I can't figure out why. Part of me worries that talking about her life with someone else is making her see things with me and Amber in a different light—that maybe she's reconsidering everything.

And that thought crushes me. Because if I had things my way, she'd have my ring on her finger, not one foot out the door.

I take Cat's hand and thread my fingers through hers. When she squeezes back, I feel myself relax a little. I'm probably over-thinking things. Cat's love was hard-won, and getting to this point with Amber has been a long road. Sometimes, it feels like it could all be too good to be true.

I spend the next hour being made over into the prettiest damn princess you've ever seen. No barrette is spared. I draw the line when Cat gleefully suggests Amber try some makeup on me though, mainly because our time together is up. *Not* because I'm not man enough to handle a little eyeshadow.

By the time I've removed all the barrettes and taken Amber downstairs to be collected by her mom, my heart is full. Every Sunday we spend together I feel us growing closer, building trust. I think of Cat growing up without her dad—how that created the blueprint for everything she believed about men—and I'm determined to do better. I might not be able to make up for what happened in Cat's childhood, but I sure as hell

can stop it from happening to my own daughter. Every day I'm grateful that Cat came into my life and showed me that.

I head back upstairs and into the apartment, finding Cat at the sink with her back to me, doing the dishes. Everything about the scene is so perfect: the way the late afternoon light hits the living room and illuminates all the vintage decor Cat chose for our place, the sound of Etta James's *A Sunday Kind of Love* drifting from the record player, and my gorgeous girl, her pink hair fluffy from crawling through the fort, her floral cotton dress a little ruffled. I can't help but step close to her, sweeping her hair to one side and pressing my lips to the warm skin of her neck.

"You're so amazing with Amber, baby," I murmur. She's quiet, and when I slip my arms around her waist and trail kisses up toward her ear, she stiffens. It's almost imperceptible, but I feel it. Anxiety stirs in my gut and I take a step back. "You okay?"

"What?" Her back remains turned as she dumps a mug into the sink. "I'm fine."

"You sure?"

"Of course." She adds a shrill laugh for effect, but it's not fooling anyone.

I thrust a hand through my hair and find a stray barrette, yanking it out with a sigh. I know this version of Cat—this is the one who pushes me away, who doesn't want me getting too close. I haven't seen this Cat for a long time. "Hey," I say, trying to tread carefully. "If it's too much having Amber here every week, you just have to let me know. I never expected—"

"Marry me," she blurts.

My eyebrows hit my hairline. It takes me a few seconds to process what she's just said—something I'm quite sure she didn't mean to say, because her shoulders tense right up to her ears. But that doesn't stop my heart rate from ticking up hopefully as I ask, "Did you just say, *marry me*?"

"I—" Somehow, her shoulders creep higher. "Yes, but I didn't..."

I feel myself deflate. "You didn't mean it?"

She's silent for a beat, then she puffs out the biggest breath, letting her shoulders fall and finally turning to face me. "Yes, I meant it. I just didn't mean to *say* it." She cringes, drying her hands on a dishtowel. "I'm sorry. I've been thinking this for a while and I promised myself I wasn't going to say anything. I know it's way too soon, and it's probably the last thing you want to hear right now, but—"

“Why on earth would you think that?”

She hesitates. “I don’t know. We’ve only been together for three months.”

“So?”

“So...” She scratches her arm, looking away as her cheeks flush. “That’s quick.”

I fight back a smile. Three and a half months ago, I told Cat I was in love with her before she was ready to hear it. And now, she’s the one worried she’s moving too fast for *me*. I love her so much it hurts. “Does that matter?” I ask gently.

Her gaze comes back to mine. “Well, Mark and I were impulsive—we got married after only six months. And look how that turned out.”

I step forward and reach for her fidgeting hands, running my thumbs over her knuckles. “This is not the same. You know that.”

“Yeah...” She nods, taking a deep breath. “You’re right. It’s not.”

We stare at each other for a long moment, electricity tingling in our joined hands. Her breathing is erratic and my pulse must be off the charts. I want to marry this woman so badly; I’ll fall to one knee right now if she gives me a sign she’s serious.

But before I get the chance, her mouth tugs into a tentative smile and she drops to her knee in front of me, taking my left hand.

Holy shit. Is this actually happening?

My eyes begin to prickle and I swallow hard. *Fucking keep it together, man.*

“Myles Ellis,” Cat says in a wobbly voice, “you’re the best thing that has ever happened to me. I love you more than anything. Will you marry me?”

Ah, fuck. It’s a losing battle.

I fall to my knees and gather her against me, clutching her tight. Her arms curl around my back and her hands stroke in gentle circles while I fall apart on her shoulder. I thought I was losing her, but *this* is what was on her mind?

“Is that a yes?” she whispers.

I draw away, wiping at my cheeks with a chuckle. “Of course it’s a yes.” I brush a kiss over her lips. “You think I haven’t wanted to ask you this a hundred times? I didn’t want to scare you away.”

She giggles, and this time I have to wipe a tear from her face. “You could never scare me away.”

“I thought—” I smooth a hand over her hair, breathing out. “I thought you were having second thoughts. About me, and everything with Amber.”

“No way.” The shake of her head is firm. “I love having Amber in our lives. Seeing you with her every week has just made me fall in love with you all over again.”

My chest is so full of emotion, I could burst. But I’m done sitting on the kitchen floor in tears. I stand and pull Cat to her feet, grinning. “We should celebrate. Do you want to go out?”

“No. I just want to be here with you.”

I cradle her face, taking her mouth in a passionate kiss. Her hands snake around my waist and slide down to my butt, squeezing. Then she pulls my hips against hers, dragging her mouth over my neck and back to my lips. One of her hands ends up in my hair, fingers twisting and tugging, her tongue stroking hungrily over mine.

Oh, shit. All the blood in my body rushes south and I’m instantly dizzy. Dizzy and hard as fuck.

I know she feels the way my body responds, because she grinds herself against me, moaning into my mouth. “I want you naked, baby.”

She doesn’t have to tell me twice. I lift her into my arms and carry her through to the bedroom, kissing her the whole way. She lets out a delighted little squeal when I toss her back onto the mattress, watching the way her breasts bounce with the movement and giving a grunt of approval. Her lips curve in a devious smile as she trails a hand down between her cleavage, biting into her bottom lip.

Fuck. She’s the sexiest thing I’ve ever seen.

I climb over her, caging her inside my arms. Her fingers immediately go to my jeans, loosening my belt buckle and tugging at my zipper, but I stop her. I pin her hands over her head, then lower my mouth to hers in a slow, hard kiss. She squirms, wanting to touch me, but I know she loves it when I make her wait.

But as much as I intend to take my time making love to her, I can’t—not when I finally get her clothes off and push into her wet heat, holding her close, knowing she will always be mine now. And definitely not when she nudges me onto my back and climbs on top to ride me, hard.

This woman... God, she's everything. Ever since I first laid eyes on her at the bar, I knew I wanted her. She had a sharp, feisty sense of humor, a beautiful smile, and a spark that ignited a fire in me I couldn't put out, no matter how hard I tried.

Honestly, I wanted to marry her the night we met.



A little while later, I settle onto the sofa in the living room with a whiskey while Cat chooses another record—Ella Fitzgerald this time. Then she sinks down beside me and swings her legs up over my lap, reaching for the vodka soda I made her on the side table.

She clinks her glass against mine and I pause. “We should have champagne.”

“No.” Her lips curl into a smile. “This is perfect.”

I twist to face her properly and lean my head back on the sofa, gazing into her hazelnut-brown eyes. “Let’s go pick out a ring for you tomorrow.”

“Oh.” She looks surprised. “We really don’t need to—”

“Yes. We do.” I reach out to tuck a loose strand of hair behind her ear, then rest my hand on the sofa. “You do realize that if I’d known you wanted to get engaged, I would have bought you a ring and proposed. I would have got down on one knee and put it in skywriting for you, baby. You deserve all that.”

She quirks an eyebrow. “Skywriting, really?”

“Well, no,” I say, chuckling. “Probably not that. But I would have done something cool. Maybe gone around the city and photographed all the graffiti I could find, then printed it out in a series of pictures to spell ‘marry me’. Or gotten it embroidered onto a pillow and waited for you to discover it.” I gesture to the sofa which is, quite frankly, overrun with pillows Cat has made. “Nah, you never would have found it on here.”

Actually, what she’s done with the place is really cool. With the help of her friend and employee, Hayley, she scoured flea markets and local stores until she found the exact pieces of furniture she wanted. Then she added all her own little handmade touches, like the curtains, and a table she repainted, and the pillows—one of which is made from the sofa throw she originally made for my apartment, back when we met.

And she hung all my framed photographs, which inspired me to get out and shoot the city again.

She laughs, leaning her cheek against my hand and touching her lips to the inside of my wrist. Despite the fact that we literally just got out of bed together, there's a twitch in my pants, and I find myself wondering how long I have to wait until I can undress her again.

"I still can't believe I get to marry you. I feel like I've won the lottery."

Her eyes sparkle with a smile. "Me too. Oh!" She sits up suddenly, nearly spilling her drink. "I should design my own wedding dress!"

I grin at the pure excitement on her face. This is my favorite Cat: the one who pursues her passion without apology, who has such a thriving business she can barely keep up with the orders flooding in.

Well, that and naked Cat. Naked Cat right after sex when her hair's ruffled and she's all soft and snuggly.

"I could design a whole line of wedding dresses!" She's so animated that I take the drink from her hand and set it down with a laugh. "They'd do really well in Claudia's friend's store, too! Why didn't I think of this before?" She's on her feet now, grabbing her notebook and a pencil, scribbling. "Could you add a wedding section to the site?"

"Sure." I take a sip of my whiskey, enjoying the burn on my tongue as I ponder it. The site could probably use a few tweaks anyway, now that we know what's working best. And my next project isn't due for a month so I could easily fit this in.

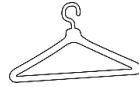
A minute later she looks up sheepishly from her notebook, then tosses it aside. "Sorry." She climbs onto my lap, straddling me, placing my whiskey on the table.

"Why are you sorry?"

"Because I should be focusing on my *fiancé*." Resting her forehead against mine, she lets out a tiny sigh. "I love you so much. Myles—" She cuts herself off with a shaky exhale, and her eyes are shining as she whispers, "I've never been this happy."

I close my eyes to stem the rising tide of emotion inside me. Because I feel it too. With Amber in my life again, building my web design business, and creating this new life with Cat... I've never been this happy, either.

And now, I get to spend the rest of my life with this woman. It's the best damn thing I could ever ask for.



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