



## "I Need to Know"

### *Flash Fiction - Romance*

Claire gazed over her steaming coffee mug at Bart as his eyes meandered through the park across the street. "I need to know," she said. "Where do you see us a year from now?"

He cocked his head to the side and smiled at her, then noisily sipped from his mug and sat it on the table. "Where did that come from? That's a serious question this early in the morning." A smile spread across his face and Claire's heart fluttered. Months before his smile caught her attention at this sidewalk café. It always melted her heart. But now it also stirred something else.

"I really —" Her voice cracked. She cleared her throat and lowered the coffee mug to the table. She studied it and wiped a drip near the rim, unable to face his smile. She cleared her throat. "I really need to know."

He sat back and crossed his arms, his eyes twinkling over a mouth struggling to hide his smile. "Well, who can foretell the future?" Always the tease.

Claire bit her lower lip. When she planned this conversation at their favorite spot, it seemed safe. He always relaxed here. Would she scare him away? She shifted in her seat and met his eye. "Bart, I'm serious."

A grin broke through and spread across his face. "So, I see."

She leaned back from the table and looked at the park. Was asking him a mistake? She wrapped her arms tightly across her chest and shivered in spite of the warm morning sun. Would he wrap her in his arms after this conversation or retreat into a distant silence?

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“Hey.” His soft word turned her face. “Nothing will change in the next year.”

“But it must.” Her lips trembled and she blinked back a tear. An ache squeezed her throat. “It has to change.”

Bart wrinkled his forehead and focused on her. A hint of his smile playing with the corner of his mouth. “What kind of commitment are you looking for?”

The words almost escaped but she pursed her lips. She needed to hear his heart, not force him to say what she wanted. She swallowed. “Whatever you want.”

Bart reached across the table and took her hand. A shiver shook her shoulders as she met his gaze. His smile appeared like the morning sun from behind a cloud. “I want to spend the rest of my life with you.”

Tears flowed down Claire’s face as she pulled her hand back and looked away. The longing to hear his words replaced by dread they would never become true.

Bart sat back in his chair as Claire fished a tissue from her purse. She stole a glance at him. He studied her, all the mirth drained from his face. “I’m confused.” He cleared his throat. “Where do you see us a year from now?”

Her head bent forward as she wiped her nose. Her voice came weak and low. “I don’t know.” Fresh tears streamed down her cheeks in spite of the tissue she used to wipe at them.

“What’s wrong?”

She sniffed and licked her lips. “My doctor called me yesterday.” She took a deep breath. “I have cancer.”

He leaned across the table, nearly spilling her coffee. He took her hand with a warm, gentle grip. Claire raised her eyes to his and he said, “I’m not going anywhere.”

[Comment on "I Need to Know"](#)

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## Notes & Updates

- I love my beta readers! Thanks to Rachel Fuller, Elaine Fuller, Denise Brownfield, Debbie Mueller, Amy Dahman and Brittney Lohman - you've made my novel better!
- *Growing Up Ozark Poor* is 40% through a major rewrite based on feedback from beta readers, an author friend and an agent rejection.
- My website is up and running at [www.elmerfuller.com](http://www.elmerfuller.com). I blog (mostly short posts) a few days per week.
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