

Love Conquers All
By Xaqtly

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This story takes place approximately one year after James and Zig Zag first met.

James unlocked the front door and opened it for Zig Zag, still grinning from the evening they had shared. She smiled at him as she entered, and James' knees got slightly weaker. It was amazing to him, how after all this time she could still do that just by looking at him. He recovered and walked in after her, closing the door behind him.

They had been dancing again, and James could not have imagined a better evening. Nothing had mattered tonight but him and Zig Zag, and he was still aglow from the exertion and from holding Zig Zag close to him all night. His smile widened as her scent came rushing back to him, remembering how he had buried his muzzle in the fur of her neck as they were dancing slowly in the soft glow of the candlelight.

"James?" Zig Zag asked softly.

James looked up, slightly startled. He realized he had been staring into space since he had closed the door.

"Sorry, just thinking about what a great time I had tonight," he said, as they walked slowly into the great room.

Zig Zag turned to him and looped her arms around his neck. "Did you really have fun tonight?" She asked, kissing him.

James returned her kiss. "Only the most fun so far. Who knew I would ever enjoy dancing so much?"

"It must have been the company," Zig Zag teased with a grin.

She turned and sat down on the sofa, and James sat down beside her. He realized the evening had taken more out of him than he thought, and he was glad to have the chance to sit for a while. Zig Zag leaned against his side, and he put his arm around her shoulder, a great sense of contentment overtaking him. He closed his eyes, trying to imagine anything more perfect than what he was experiencing right now, and nothing came.

Zig Zag sighed contentedly, feeling James' warmth and his arm around her shoulder. She had never known security and happiness like this before at any point in her life, and she wondered how it was even possible, considering the formidable defense systems she'd built around herself over the years. And yet there it was; she was happy. No, not just happy; she was deliriously happy. James was everything she had never thought possible, and she knew now that she could never let him go.

James opened his eyes and looked down at Zig Zag. He knew that he had something special with her, and he knew it was something most people would never have a second

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chance at. He had never imagined he could ever love somebody as much as he had loved Beth, but he recently realized he loved Zig Zag at least that much. Maybe even more.

Over the year he and Zig Zag had been together, they had forged what seemed to be an unbreakable bond, getting stronger with every minute they spent in each other's company. Each of them dominated the other's thoughts when they were apart, and they could think of nothing but each other when they were together. Tonight, sitting on the sofa, James knew it was time.

"Zig," he ventured.

"Mmmm?"

He started to say something else but faltered. Zig Zag lifted her head from his shoulder and turned to look at him. "Are you okay?" she asked, concern in her eyes. She noticed James' expression had changed from happy to serious.

"Oh no, I'm fine," James assured her. "I just..." he trailed off.

Zig Zag waited expectantly for James to recoup his thoughts, a curious expression on her muzzle.

James looked up at her. "Zig, can I ask you something?" he finally managed to say.

Zig Zag nodded at him, wondering what was causing him so much trouble. "Are you sure you're okay?" she asked, noting that his paws had started to tremble slightly. She put her paw on his arm, hoping to calm him.

James felt her paw on his arm and the trembling got worse. He cursed himself inwardly for losing control like this. "Yes, I'm okay. Just a little nervous is all."

"Nervous?" Zig Zag wondered to herself. What could possibly be making him so nervous, hadn't their evening gone nearly perfectly? She was confused, but wanted to hear what he had to say so she nodded and waited for him to calm down enough to speak.

James struggled with the words, not knowing how to say them or in which order. He knew he was becoming flustered so he forced himself to take a couple deep breaths in an attempt to calm down enough to sift through the thoughts careening through his mind. She was waiting for him, and he knew he had to get this out while the moment was still there. He glanced at her and started trembling again.

"Zig," he began. "I love you." That was a good start, he thought, and relaxed a little bit. "You make me happier than I can ever remember being, and I love being with you."

Zig Zag was surprised by the sudden compliment and smiled warmly at him. She leaned over and kissed his cheek tenderly.

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James tingled all over and he swallowed hard to try to continue. "When we're apart I count the days till we're together again, and when we're together I lose track of time completely," he continued. "You've become a part of me that I couldn't possibly live without. I'm madly, deeply in love with you, Zig."

Zig Zag's eyes widened, as she realized James had never said anything like this to her before. Her heart started beating faster as she waited for James to continue, thoughts starting to fly around her head like atoms in a supercollider.

James took her paw in his and looked deep into her eyes, winning her full attention. "I can't live without you Zig," he said, raw emotions roiling just below the surface. "You mean everything to me, and I want to make you happy for the rest of our lives." He paused for only a moment while Zig Zag continued to stare wide eyed at him, trying to assimilate what she was hearing.

"Zig, you are the love of my life and my soul mate. Will you marry me and make me the happiest coyote on Earth?"

One second passed, then two. Then three, four, five seconds passed. Each second felt like a sledgehammer, every moment a beating drum so loud it threatened to drown his senses. The lights in the room dimmed slightly with every heartbeat as he fought to stay focused on Zig Zag, anxiously awaiting her reply.

Zig Zag sat staring at him, eyes wide and mouth open, trying to collect everything he'd said so she could comprehend it. She understood one part with crystal clarity, though; he had just asked her to marry him. Her mind reeled as she tried to put what he had said into some form of measurable context, but she had nothing to compare it to. She danced among her memories looking for something to grab onto, and she realized there was nothing. She knew James was serious, and she had never had to take a marriage proposal seriously before.

But then, she had thought about this before, hadn't she? In idle daydreams and flights of fancy. She had even written Zig Zag Sheppard in the margins of James' business proposal without even realizing it. She thought back on her and James' relationship, how it had blossomed and grown, and how her love for James had grown with it. She trusted him implicitly now, having laid all her secrets bare only to find that he loved her even more for it.

James was far more than she had ever expected, far more than she thought was even possible. And yet, here he was. And she trusted and loved him completely, she realized. She couldn't live without him any more than he could live without her. Finally it sank in that Rebecca had been right; Zig Zag was only going to get one chance at this and she knew it.

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Zig Zag broke out of her reverie and looked at James. She began to tremble herself, knowing that she was about to tear down every last vestige of her defenses. She focused on James' eyes, looking straight through to his soul, and what she saw there she finally recognized as true love. A tear formed in her eye as she whispered, "Yes."

James sat stunned, hardly believing what he was hearing. He dared not move or speak for fear of shattering this most fragile of moments. Zig Zag took his other paw in hers and repeated, voice taut with emotion, "Yes, James. I love you more than I've loved anything in my life. You make me happier than I ever imagined I could be," and her voice began to crack with emotion, "And I would marry you a hundred times over."

James wrapped his arms around her shoulders, pulled her close and kissed her desperately. Zig Zag held him tightly as tears streamed down her face, dampening his muzzle as they kissed for hours, then days on end. The world boiled away and the sun shrank in comparison to the magnificent passion between James and Zig Zag. Stars collided, new life was formed and over a trillion years, a universe expanded around them and they were oblivious to all of it.

Finally they parted, and they sat looking into each other's eyes. Zig Zag sniffed and wiped her eyes with the back of her paw, and James smiled, gazing lovingly at the most beautiful woman in the world as she smiled back at him. Slowly he stood, offering his paw to Zig Zag. She took it and stood a bit shakily, feeling somewhat vulnerable but at the same time exhilarated, the happiest she had ever been.

James bent carefully and picked her up, making sure to gather her beautiful tail so it didn't drag on the floor, then carried her slowly towards the bedroom. Zig Zag brought her arm around his neck and lay her head on his shoulder. She put her other paw on his chest and felt his heart beating, knowing for the first time in her life that she would never be alone or scared again. Then she raised her head and whispered softly into his ear.

"Yes..."