

## Something Like That

If you asked him how he felt about her, he'd just say he liked her. Of course, that's just what he'd say. If you asked him about it, he'd say it was silly. It was stupid. A triviality those of a weaker mind succumbed to<sup>1</sup>. But that's just what he'd tell you.

It came quietly, as beauty so often does. He resisted. He fought. Try he did, oh my how he tried.

But as that irresistibly sweet melody began to seep its way into his heart, as that heart began to hum a tune he'd never quite known, he felt it impossible to shut the music off, to even turn it down. As his heart continued to hum that new favorite song, he realized just how little he knew himself to ever think he could go on without this, to go on alone.

When he looked at her, he saw everything; the mountains, the rivers, the sky, because she *was* everything—all those things a mere fraction of her beauty. It may have been the sun that marked a new day, but it was she that marked a day worth living, the everything that she was dwarfing all else that could be offered to him.

Really, there are a million ways to describe, a million adjectives and nouns we can plug in for the endless pursuit of putting thought to word, meaning to reality. One could go on and on and on—there was no shortage of feeling in that heart. That's what humans do, they dress it up in lace and pomp, in ribbons and bows, so we can sell it as more. Make it feel like more. But really, truly, can any word describe it better than love?

It was love. He loved her. Or it was something like that.

If you asked him, he'd just say he liked her.

But today, he had a plan.

It was a field trip, the sciencey<sup>2</sup> sort. Some kind of nature exploration. It didn't really matter why they were there. What did matter was *where* they were.

Surrounded by sprawling hills was a lake, vast, shimmering, *crystal*—or at least it looked it. Not to repeat myself, but it was beautiful, truly and utterly. The way he saw it, the perfect place for the perfect girl.

He'd convinced<sup>3</sup> one of her friends to ask her to meet them by the edge of the lake, where it was quiet, where it was calm, where it was still. The friend would never show, and so she'd be there, waiting.

He wasn't much of a romantic, obviously. But he was going to tell her how he felt. He was, he swore it. Or at least, some of how he felt. The important bits. The nice and casual stuff. The—well, he'd say what he had to say. More or less.

He glanced down at his watch, the thin hands ticking away in tandem with his pulse. He was already late.

*Hm. Not good.*

Before he knew it, he was scrambling madly like a toddler souped up on every drug under the sun, darting between people and trees as he rushed towards the lake. People gawked and people were shocked, as he stumbled and stormed his way forward. Reluctantly, he slowed slightly at the sight of two diverging paths entering his sight.

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps an issue of the ego.

<sup>2</sup> Yes, "sciencey" is a word. Don't look it up, just trust me.

<sup>3</sup> Begged, more so.

One was an intimate and inviting, wide and winding, walking trail that led towards the lake, beckoning to him, calling him to walk its tried and tested tread. He ignored it, instead careening towards a small hill that'd take him there directly. He slowed down as he approached the hill, preparing to descend carefully. At least, he tried to slow down. Instead, he tripped<sup>4</sup>.

Thump.

Thump.

Thump.

He thought he was done.

And then, just one more thump.

For a moment, he simply laid there, processing what'd happened.

"Ow. Ow," he managed to mutter through his groans, gathering his bearings as he finally rose from the ground. It seemed he'd fallen down the entire mound, and judging by the pain, seemingly every part of his body had hit seemingly every part of the hill. "Ow," he groaned once more, just to get the point across. Although admittedly speedy, it seemed in retrospect a poor method of transport.

Looking down at his clothes, mud and dirt and leaves had made their way to every inch and crevice of his body, a high-school student turned to a homeless man in but one fall.

"Great. Classy." He stared resentfully at the hill, who no doubt had done it on purpose.

"Very classy," a voice called out in response from behind. His neck snapped backwards as his body flung with it, contorting in a panicked frenzy. There she was, standing there, watching<sup>5</sup>.

With all the haste of a quick drying paste, he stopped brushing the filth off himself and tried to act casual<sup>6</sup>. Counter to his intents, a deep blush was brought forth unto his face, a stutter and a stammer taking over his ability to talk.

"It—it's not... there was a hill." He pointed aimlessly in the direction of the hill.

"I can see the hill. You fell?"

"I had a...not so-graceful descent. From said hill."

"Oh, well, as long as you didn't fall. That'd be embarrassing," she joked. He laughed, far too loudly, relieved she didn't care. Internally, he cringed at his laugh.

"So embarrassing."

"You—you got a little something on you," she said, now pointing at the dirt that'd taken up home on his body.

"It's a new look I'm trying."

"Suits you. It's *classy*," she said through a grin.

The first time he'd ever seen that smile, he'd been terrified, horrified at the thought that he'd never see it again. He knew how corny it was to talk about a girl's smile, how unoriginal it was, but God, that smile was undeniable.

For a beat, silence reigned, the tempo of their conversation pausing as the two looked at each other, each waiting for the other to bring back the rhythm. Rest after rest, pause after pause, his heart beat faster and faster, quarter, half, eighth, sixteenth note until finally, *finally*, he couldn't help but say something, anything, like the words themselves were knocking down the doors of his mouth and demanding dialogue with the wind, with the world, with her.

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<sup>4</sup> The kid had all the coordination of a concussed clown.

<sup>5</sup> She saw the whole thing, of course.

<sup>6</sup> Tried and failed, for the record.

“So!” he accidentally shouted, a sudden burst of energy and enthusiasm and excitement and *fear* shooting out. He cleared his throat, awkwardly of course<sup>7</sup>. “So,” quieter now, “so, hey, um.” He was doing it. Finally, after, well, too long, he was saying it. All he’d been wanting to say, needing to say, all to this girl whom he’d say he liked.

And then he stopped.

Doubt twisted and turned itself around him, digging through his skin, bumping and sloshing through bone and vein, dragging his confidence to a cold, dead halt. He just wanted to be around her, that’s all. To be her friend. If this could ruin that, ruin everything, then what was the point? No, no, this was silly. A mistake.

“So...” She leaned in, almost eagerly, waiting for that tantalizing next word. His mouth hung ajar for a moment, ensnared by indecision.

“I—never mind. Sorry.” Cowardice won.

“Oh.” She sounded disappointed—not that he’d pick up on that.

“I, uh, I like your sweater,” he meekly deflected. “Bye.” He turned, dashing away and cursing himself for his emotional impotence.

“I like you.”

It was blurted out, abruptly and suddenly, the words slamming into him as he slammed the brakes of his walk. Slowly, he turned once more, now facing the now blushing girl.

“What?”

“I like you,” she repeated, He blinked in disbelief.

“W—why?” *Did I just ask why? Am I stupid?*<sup>8</sup>

“*Why? Did you just ask me why? Is he stupid?*<sup>9</sup> *Why doesn’t that bother me? Oh God.*”

“I—sorry. Sorry.” He attempted to recover from his mistake. “Me to—I like you too.”

“You are so awkward.” Between each word a giggle escaped, now unable to maintain her cool demeanor. “So you wanna hang out sometime?” She’d been waiting for him to do this for a while. A *long* while. Almost as long as he’d wanted to. Well, she’d gotten tired of waiting.

“You know, that’s what I was gonna—I was gonna do that. Was gonna say that.”

“You were going to—”

“I had like, a whole thing. It was good, I think. It was fine. It was okay. It was... it was a thing.”

“You don’t really strike me as the big romantic speech type.”

“Well, some people have that effect on me.” The sky above was turning as red as their faces, a velvet blanket pulling itself over the world above.

“So, is that a yes?”

“That’s a yes.” That music he’d been hearing, that melody, it crescendoed into some sort of beautifully thunderous rhapsody, one belonging only to them<sup>10</sup>.

Finally, as the two walked back to the forest where the rest of their school was no doubt dillydallying about, she asked a question that’d been on her mind.

“Were you waiting till you could ask by the lake?”

“It’s nice here,” he shrugged.

“I would’ve said yes anywhere, you know.”

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<sup>7</sup> In fact, assume that if not strictly said otherwise, everything he did was awkward.

<sup>8</sup> Undoubtedly yes.

<sup>9</sup> He is, in his own, special way.

<sup>10</sup> Nothing quicker than copy-right law.

Really, he needn't have spared a thought for that lake so vast, shimmering, crystal. It didn't matter. Of course it didn't. They didn't need that. They just felt. They're human, how could they not feel? Of course they felt. We all feel. Someone just has to say it. One of them just had to say it. Didn't matter where. Didn't even matter *what* they said. Someone just had to say something.

Really, there are a million little ways to describe how the two of them were feeling. I could dress it up in lace and pomp, in ribbons and bows, in anything and everything. But no. A simple thing deserves a simple story, a simple word. One needn't talk of moons<sup>11</sup>, or melodies, or mountains. There's only one word that is anything and everything. Only one word means it all, for all of us.

Really, truly, can any word describe it better than love?

Or at least, it was something like that<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> There are no mentions of moons at the bequest of an editor, or as I like to say it, at the hands of censorship.

<sup>12</sup> Hey, that's the name of the story!