

When I was fourteen

I was wishing I had planned something different to say – something clever, perhaps. No, not clever. More like funny. Something that would make her laugh. Then we would have that laugh to share and begin with, and then maybe something more could come of it.

And then I was scared again.

I wanted to let my mind wander, so I wouldn't be so scared, but it kept wandering in the same direction. The scary direction. The direction of what might happen. What I wanted to happen. Smiles warming a quiet shyness. Holding hands. Long walks together. A sort of tender friendship, for however long. Weeks, or perhaps months – that's as long as I could imagine. Or just an easy afternoon together. Or even just odd moments. Little intervals in a lifetime.

That's what I thought I wanted – and what I was terrified of – as I waited there, shaking inside, walking up and down to stop shaking, knowing she would walk past, soon, and I would stop her and say the words that I was practising and practising in my already panic-stricken mind. Longing, as well, for her to turn me down, to just say no, because if I was dreading anything more than saying those words to her, it was what it might lead to if she said yes.

I wanted to go home and feel brave for having tried.

I suppose it may have been because of the mixed up longing and dread, the not knowing which was which or what for, that everything went haywire when she finally came round the corner.

Either that or her red hair, or her eyes, or how pretty she was.
Or everything about her.

Perhaps that was what threw me.

Or the way she looked at me so curiously when I said her name, as if she had no idea what I was going to say. Perhaps that was why I suddenly had no idea either.

I said, "Mary."

She stopped and looked at me.

I said, "Mary," again.

I think I only said it twice, but it may have been more.

I could have said what I had planned and practised: simple, direct and over with.

I could have said, "Would you like to go out with me some time?"

Instead, I said this:

"I would like to kiss you one day."

She didn't say anything.

I've tried for some time, from time to time, to think of another word for what she did next, but
I've never found one.

She giggled.

Not a silly, empty, brittle giggle. More, it rather seemed, a somehow warm, nearly eloquent
giggle.

Then, even before I could wonder what that meant, the giggle turned to a smile.
And an endless pause.

Then, "That would be nice," she said.

How could I ever forget a moment like that?