my body is a souvenir

by quick_ly

Summary

"The first time Mary wants to kiss Declan, she’s just shown him the glade." Mary learns to deal with life and herself and Declan, and maybe along the way finds out how to be happy.

Notes

So apparently I decided to write Misselarch fic, because I am trash who doesn't have anything going on at the moment, and also these dorks gave me some feelings (guys you have to understand, I grew up watching that movie shipping them hard, I was like born to ship Mary and Declan). This was kind of thrown together, and I don't really know if it's any good, but here have a fic.

Mild warning for cursing, Mary saying "dude" a lot, and some casual talk about death. Title taken from the Sleater-Kinney song "No Cities to Love". Feedback would be much appreciated, because I feel hella uncertain about the quality of this thing and also don't know if I got any of the characters right.

See the end of the work for more notes

[root, roo • t, roo • ts]

1. the part of a plant that attaches it to the ground or to a support, typically underground,
conveying water and nourishment to the rest of the plant via numerous branches and fibers. 

2. establish deeply and firmly.

“However many years she lived, Mary always felt that ‘she should never forget that first morning when her garden began to grow.’”

- Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden*

The first time Mary wants to kiss Declan, she’s just shown him the glade. He’s sitting on that tree, wiping dirt onto his pants, not that it makes much of a difference since his hands are filthy anyway (which oddly… reminds Mary of the mother, the sheer amount of anger she would have had if Mary had ever treated her clothing like that; too late to be mad now mom, hun?!), going on about his family and how they used to roam the woods like it was their own, and for a minute – for a second, really – she feels the smallest urge to kiss him.

*Small* is the key word there. Tiny, minuscule, basically non-existent. The feeling is so brief that Mary doesn’t even think it really deserves any further thought, just a little idea that wouldn’t lead to any good in reality but seemed okay to grace her head for a second: *what if she got up, walked over to that tree and just… let her lips lightly brush his, let herself fall into him just a little bit. What would his reaction be?*

It’s stupid. She knows this a second later when he’s commenting on her childhood, trying not to be rude, and Mary instantly regrets whatever it is she was feeling, gets this sort of surge of embarrassment, like he can read her mind and is obviously judging. Declan is not even a little bit her type, and even if he was… she’s a bitch. He’s a Sower. It wouldn’t work.

But yeah, that’s when she wants to kiss him. The first time.

Sometimes, when Mary is feeling hella self-deprecating and depressed and has stolen too much wine, she thinks that about how it would be possible to pack up her entire life into a suitcase. All her clothes and books and make-up and shit, a pack of cigarettes, all the things that have come to define her (because when you never stay in one place for more than a year and your parents don’t give a shit about you, material things do actually begin to carry some amount of weight); they’d all fill up a suitcase, and maybe a carryon bag, but nothing more (she knows this because she’s had to pack and unpack them so many times). Her entire existence would have no trouble boarding a flight.

Most people have too much stuff to fit on a plane, but even more so, most people have actual other human beings in their lives who tether them to places, who work as their roots or something. Their lives couldn’t fit in a suitcase simply because they have actual living, breathing people who are a part of them, who can’t just be moved around at the drop of a hat like an accessory (cause fuck, does Mary know what that’s like). Most people have… more than she does, that’s for sure.
Because Mary has things, but not a lot of them. She has a cat, who probably only barely knows
who she is and also most definitely is ridden with diseases. She has Dr. B, who she only ever talks
to through a computer screen and thus can be moved with her. She has Medlock, who only
actually seems to care about Callie, so she doesn’t count, and Callie, who apparently only cares
about video games and acting like a baby, so no there. Phoebe is paid to spend time with her, and
also has been lying to her for months so Mary could do without. Her uncle Art barely seems to
even register that she exists so… nope.

And then there’s Declan who… she doesn’t know if he counts or not. He’s a nice enough guy,
yeah, and she might occasionally have the smallest urge to press his lips against hers, but like, that
can just be blamed on weird teenage hormones, right? Like, he is just some guy, he doesn’t need
to be entangled in the weird-ness bullshit mess that is her life.

That’s the problem with not having anyone at all in her life. Every time you meet someone who
isn’t a jack-ass, every time you make any kind of connection at all… it means too much. It’s too
important.

He doesn’t want to be a major part of her life. He wouldn’t want that.

Right?

The problem with Declan is that she just doesn’t understand him at all, no matter how hard she
tries (and, believe it or not, but Mary tries quite a lot; she does her best not to spend too much time
thinking about most things, but Declan is not one of them). He’s the kind of person that will seem
like one thing, will spend the entire day acting in this very specific way that Mary thinks she can
pinpoint, and then will suddenly do something different, something that completely surprises her,
and Mary won’t know what to think.

Declan is sweet, first and foremost. He’s kind, he thinks about other people and actually cares
(which is more than Mary can say for herself, at least on a more surface level). He’s a lot like his
sister in that way – he rarely ever says anything negative, like he doesn’t want to be rude to the
universe or something – but there’s also this really distinct difference between the two, this witty,
almost sly side of him that is so… Declan. He hardly ever scolds Mary for her mean comments,
doesn’t pretend to be her parent or gatekeeper or whatever, and she appreciates that, probably
more than she would ever let on. And sometimes, he’ll let out these little sarcastic comments –
they’re so small and so easy to brush over, but he says them, and Mary knows that he has to get at
least a little satisfaction out of the small set of giggles that she always lets slip (and immediately
tries to suppress).

And also… he actually likes her. Like, that probably says more about him than it does her since
she is a human robot incapable of being a person, but whatever. He likes her. (Not like that,
because for the life of her Mary cannot imagine him feeling anything for her besides friendship,
like it physically pains her, because then she would have to think about how she kind of likes him
in a more-than-friendship way but that he just sees her as a buddy and just– no, nope, not gonna
go there.) Most people run away once they’ve spent more than five minutes in her presence, but
Declan… actively seeks her out. And tries to help her. And always comes when she asks him to.

It’s weird. He’s weird. Mary doesn’t understand.
“Declan, do you ever like… do anything normal?” she asks him one day when they’re hanging out in the glade. He makes a face. (And it’s so goddamn annoying, like he looks offended but it also smiling a little bit and like, it must be a Sower specialty or something.)

“Oh, you know I didn’t mean it in a shit way,” she says, using a mocking voice. “Just like, you’re eighteen, dude, and you spend your all time working at a wildlife sanctuary and hanging out with me in the woods.”

He laughs a little. “And that’s a problem?”

“No, but… don’t you ever do anything bad. You know, negative life choices and shit, things that normal adults wouldn’t approve of?”

“Like you do?”

“I smoke cigarettes,” she retorts back, though it sounds a lot more badass in her head than it does when she says it out loud. “And besides, when I’m not here, I am ignoring homework and disobeying my authority figures. I am not the one on trial here, buddy. You on the other hand…”

He raises an eyebrow, but nods his head. “Fair point, I guess. Um… alright, I got something, but you need to promise not to laugh.”

“I make no promises. But yes.”

He shakes off her joke. “Um, I sometimes… occasionally… smoke pot.”

Mary’s jaw practically drops. How did she not see this one coming? It’s like, the most obvious thing in the world, and for whatever reason, it never actually crossed her mind. Clearly, she wasn’t giving him enough credit.

“Oh my god, I cannot freaking believe this,” she spits out, not laughing but also smiling a whole lot. “I mean, I can, because it might make the most sense of anything the universe has thrown at me ever, but still… shit.” She’s shaking her head, a strange feeling of realization coming over her. “Declan the pothead.”

“Okay, that’s maybe a little bit strong,” he corrects. “I wouldn’t say pothead, just that I… do it sometimes.”

“How often is sometimes?”

He thinks for a second. “I don’t know, sometimes I’ll do it a few times a week, but then I’ll go a whole month without,” he says, shrugging his shoulders. “It’s not an addiction or anything, it’s just… something I do.”

Mary nods her head, mostly satisfied because this has been an honestly magnificent turn of events, and then she suddenly gets possibly the greatest idea she has ever had.

“Do you have any right now?”

“Mary—”
“We should smoke it.” Declan begins to shake his head, but Mary persists. “Come onnnnn, it would be fun, like a bonding experience. We’ve never gotten high together.”

“We’ve never done a lot of things together.”

“Well, we’ll be able to cross this off the list,” she says, ignoring the various ideas that pop into her head (because what could a lot of things entail exactly, like a whole lot of shit is falling into that category for her at the moment…) “Seriously, think about how fun it would be, lighting up in basically the prettiest place that either one of us have ever been in, under the trees, together.” A pause, Mary looking down and kind of wishing she could take back that last part. “I’ll be fun, and you know I’m right.”

Declan for his part doesn’t seem to be phased by her specific choice of words, is just staring hard like he’s actually thinking about it, and Mary cannot believe her luck.

“I only have the one joint on me,” he says. “And I’m not going home for weed so, that’s all we got.”

Mary smiles a little too brightly, doing a bit of a fist pump into the air and drawing out a yessss under her breath. “I don’t need much man.”

He gives her this smile that is like, whimsical and amused and excited. Her heart melts just a little.

They smoke in the glade, sitting on the ground against a tree. They talk and tell really stupid jokes and laugh a lot, and Mary maybe gets that urge to kiss him again. Whatever. She’s high, and dude is attractive taking a hit and talking about how all he really wants to do in life is save the planet.

It’s not a thing.)

He picks her up from school in his truck one day. Or, more accurately, she bugs the hell out of him for weeks on end to let her ride in his car, to the point where he occasionally lights up with her just to get her to stop talking, and then randomly shows up in his truck after school one day, a defeated look on his face.

Mary for her part just feels hella victorious (because in addition to getting to ride in his truck/making fun of his truck, she also doesn’t have to ride on the lame bus – score!), bursting into a weird mixture of smiles and laughs as soon as she sets eyes on him, which probably just makes her fellow students think she’s even stranger than they already thought, but whatever, they’re all a bunch of lame losers anyway.

“You know Sower, you really didn’t have to do this,” she says mockingly as she gets in. “God, it’s almost like you thought I wanted to ride in your truck or something.”
Declan doesn’t even dignify her comment with an answer, which like, fair enough bro, Mary can understand that one. His truck is kind of a piece of crap, but also very him (like, there’s a bunch of gardening shit in the back and mud literally all over the thing), and she likes it. It’s a breath of fresh air in comparison to the various forms of public transportation she’s used to riding in; sitting in the passenger’s seat as he cruises along, blasting Belle and Sebastian with the windows rolled all the way down, the rolling her hand in the wind.

“You know what we should do,” she says a while later, after they’ve been sitting in content silence for like ten or so minutes.

“Tell me.”

“We should go somewhere.”

“I thought that’s what we were doing.”

“No,” she says, shaking her head. “We need to go somewhere cool, somewhere that we haven’t been to.”

“What, like a roadtrip?” he starts, giving her a weird look. “Cause I don’t have enough gas for that, and also I am pretty sure that takes some planning.”

“Okay, fine, somewhere we haven’t been in Missethwaite, though I like your thinking and we definitely need to roadtrip at some point.” He still looks confused. “Come on, we’re in your car, we’ve got an afternoon to kill, we got the wind in our hair – or at least I do. Take me someplace!”

“Mary, I’ve lived here my entire life,” he starts as if trying to explain himself. “There aren’t exactly a lot of places I’m not familiar with.”

“Oh, come on Sower.” She puts on her Brit Marklan sunglasses and looks him dead in the eye, not that he can tell. “There has to be somewhere in this tiny little dumpster pit of town that you haven’t stepped foot in. A drug store, a funeral home, the meat-packing factory.”

“I… think there is a McDonald’s near the mall that I’ve never been in.”

Seriously, what the hell is up with this dude? “Wait, you’ve never been to McDonald's?”

“My parents didn’t like us eating fast-food.”

“And they’re okay with you smoking pot?”

“Well, they don’t exactly know about that,” he laughs, making a turn. “And come on, I think it’s fair to say that a little grass every once and awhile is far healthier than even a single trip to McDonald’s.”

Dude might have a point there. “Alright, fair enough. But still, we have to go.”

“Mary–”

“I’m sorry, but I cannot allow you to continue going on in life without ever having eaten fast food. It’s simply too weird.”

“Um, it’s not too weird, it’s called having a healthy diet.”

“Nope,” she retorts, “it’s called being a sad person who has never tasted the deliciousness that is terrible-for-you-food.”
“That doesn’t even make any sense!”

“You just don’t understand because you have been deprived your entire life.”

(They argue about it for up to an hour, at which point he caves and says that he’ll take her there but he isn’t getting anything. She shoves a milkshake in his face after they’ve been there ten minutes, and he ends up eating most of her fries. Success.)

Okay, so like, Mary doesn’t need a lot of things. She needs to get Callie out of that damn room. She needs a new pair of Doc Martens. She probably needs to quit smoking, but whatever.

She needs people to stop hassling her about the nature of her relationship with Declan. She really fucking needs that.

Because like, nothing is going on. Mary is one-hundred percent sure that nothing is going on. And she is sure that Declan feels the same way, and that is – fine. It’s good, it’s what she wants. What they want. Because they are friends and that’s cool and that’s awesome and that is what they desire out of their relationship, and any other feelings that she may or may not have are tiny and virtually not real and also don’t have to exist outside her head, so why does everyone keep on trying to pry them out?

Callie won’t stop making little comments – like it’s also stupid and so- fifteen, but still, it could stop (Mary doesn’t need to be a part of her newest ship, thank you very much). Phoebe brings it up one day during a tutoring session, and Mary briefly considers murdering her.

“So I’ve noticed that Declan has been spending a lot of time with you,” she says, not even looking up from whatever it is they are supposedly doing, pretending that it is just a whatever subject and that she doesn’t care enough to make eye-contact. Nice try Phoebe. Mary’s known that trick for years.

“Yeah, I guess we have.”

“You two seem to run off together every day.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes, and he mentions you sometimes.”

“Good for him.”

“I just think it’s nice that the two of you have made friends, since you were both having trouble with that.”

“Phoebe…”

“I mean, who knows the last time Declan has had a close friend that wasn’t an animal, you know?”

“Okay, I don’t need you to take pity on me or whatever.”
“…I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Me and Declan are friends, end of story. Can we please just get back to my homework?”

Mary has no idea how, but somehow Phoebe still wins, with a raise of the eyebrow and a knowing smile, and this suddenly feels like even more of a trap than it did before.

And it occurs to her: if Phoebe is broaching the subject with her, she probably already has with Declan, and Mary is downright mortified, the sheer embarrassment at the thought of his reaction just a little too much.

People make friends all the time. Friends hang out all the time. Friends mention their other friends to their family all the time.

Have any of these people ever had any actual friends? *God.*

(Mary is ninety-five percent sure that nothing is going on. And like, that’s basically a hundred. Basically.)

He’s not like any of the guys she’s liked before. Not that this is… whatever. Yeah. It’s not. But also, he’s not.

She’s only had a few boyfriends, but they were always popular pretty guys who only wanted her to get the opportunity to meet her mom, to say that they were dating Elle Lennox’s daughter. Mary is at least a little pretty, she knows this (she has the fucking covermodel genes to prove it), but it was kind of hard to compete with a women who had practically bared all on the cover of about a million magazines. The closest Mary had ever gotten was a bikini at the pool, and even then, it’s not like at fifteen and sixteen she exactly had the kind of body people would stop and stare at.

That’s not a problem with Declan (it’s hard for your mom to steal the spotlight when she’s in a coffin). He doesn’t care about her parents, or like, he does in the way that he cares about her and he’s not a shitty person, but the fact that they were filthy rich and her mother was a gorgeous model don’t even seem to make it on his radar. But she does.

And even besides all that, Declan is just so… nice. Really, genuinely. Not in an over-the-top way like his sister, but there is just something so completely real about him – the way the woods make him so giddy, the quiet little smiles he shoots her.

Declan in like taking a breath of fresh air, and realizing that for your entire life you have been breathing gasoline.

Mary has never really thought of herself as a genuine person, but maybe she just hadn’t ever really found herself, and now she suddenly had. Whenever she is in the glade it’s like… she can’t describe how it makes her feel, can’t form into a thought the feeling that being in that beautiful… magical place makes her feel, but it isn’t like herself. It’s better than herself, or at least the person she was before. It’s so genuine and it’s all her.

Dr. B had said something about how there were people who would be interested in her, she just hadn’t found them yet.
She thinks this might be that. But it’s not just Mary finding the right people (even though that’s a part of it), it’s like… Mary finding herself.

Or something.

She thinks about what it would be like to kiss him… sometimes. That is a thing that happens.

And no, it’s not because of some stupid, non-existent crush that she mostly certainly does not have. Mary is just… curious, okay? Like, the dude can be awkward as hell sometimes, but he also isn’t fazed by her at all, and he makes her laugh more than most people can, and honestly, the idea of kissing him is just so… intriguing to her. Interesting. Something she can think about for hours and still not completely get. The way he would react, if he would hold her. Would he be eager or slow, use too much tongue or not enough (or, alternatively, just the right amount). Mary wonders if he would see it coming, if he would want it, or if he would be so surprised he would just like… freeze up. She has absolutely no idea if he’s be any good but she… she think he would be?

It’s something she’s curious about. For science reasons, obviously. To think anything else would just be… ridiculous.

“So, how old were you when you had your first kiss?” she asks one day when they’re in the glade, Declan kneeling down pulling out some weeds. He makes a face when she says this, and raises an eyebrow a little bit.

“My first kiss?” he asks, with an air of disbelief that she’s even asking, which like, fair enough. They don’t usually talk about this kind of stuff (probably because their families won’t stop bugging them about each other, and actually broaching the subject together would just be hella awkward), but Mary simply has to know. “Um, I don’t know… fifteen, I think? At least, that was my first real kiss.”

“Hmmm, interesting.” Mary picks up a stick, and starts using it as a microphone, like they’re on a talk show or something. “And, can you reveal the name of this mysterious woman for the viewers,” she asks, motioning towards Robin.

He laughs a little, but Mary sticks with her character. “I’m pretty sure her name was Emily Lake. We were in the same year in school.”

“I see, yes yes, and what was your relationship to Ms. Lake?”

“She was kind of my girlfriend, I guess,” he says, but he doesn’t look at her.

She wants to ask him what it was like, but that seems a little too invasive, and also probably too on the nose. Mary kissed guys when she was fifteen, she knows what it’s like. (And knowing Declan, he’d probably just get all awkward and then blurt out something like, “wet”.) Mary thinks he is already weirded out by the whole thing, or at least he should be, and she doesn’t need to add another level to things. So she smiles a little, throws the stick on the ground and gets down there with him, starting on those weeds that he still hasn’t finished off.

They just sit there for a while, pulling out weeds and not talking. It should probably be awkward, but it’s not. It’s just nice.
She cries in the shower the night he tells her he can’t keep on coming, but it’s not actually about him at all. For reals this time.

It’s just… why is it – seriously – why does everyone leave all the time? Like, out of all the people in this giant-ass universe, why is it that Mary is the one who has to have literally every single important person in her life leave, or her leave them, or just everything fucking change because that is the only reality she has ever known? Like, why can’t things just stay the same for a while, why can’t a status quo pop up and actually stick around for a while, instead of flying off into the unknown after god knows how long?

(Why can’t things ever stay around long enough for her life to extend out of the suitcase?)

And with Declan – fine, okay she gets it. Dude has to work and babysit and shit, he’s got a life outside of her, great. It’s just… he’s like one of the only good things she has going on in her life right now, okay? Like, things suck more than usual (because let’s be real things have always been shit); she has fuckin’ Medlock on her case nonstop and those idiots at school, and Callie, who she loves but who seriously needs to get out of that damn house one of these days and Phoebe who won’t stop being a ray of goddamn sunshine and it’s all just… Declan is good, okay. Declan is normal and cool and makes her laugh, and yeah he’s a fucking dork but like, so is she (Mary has acted out scenes from *Parks and Rec* on multiple occasions; she knows what she is), and it’s just… after everything that has happened in the past year, Mary was finally starting to feel like things were good, and it was because of the glade and because of Callie, yeah, but also it had to do with him. It had to do a lot with him.

It’s fine. It’s whatever. They’re gonna help Callie and he’s still going to be around sometimes, and it’ll all be normal. Mary is just pretty sure she is completely alone in the world, and for a little bit it felt like maybe that wasn’t true. But it is and she is and as usual there are no surprises, because everything going shitty in Mary’s life is to be expected.

(Mary never even liked her parents, but she didn’t want them to fucking die. That wasn’t the out she was looking for.)

He meets her in the glade the next day. He’s there, with his guitar and perky attitude and a bag of snacks, as well as the beginnings of a plan to get Callie out there (he actually wants to venture into her room, which like, good luck buddy, let’s just see how that goes). He doesn’t mention anything of their earlier conversation, and Mary thinks about bringing it up but… that doesn’t seem necessary. He seems happy to be there, she is happy to have him, they don’t need to talk about things that are sad and upsetting and stupid.

(They do need to talk about how this boy needs to improve his snack-packing abilities, because trail-mix without chocolate-chips? No thank you. Honestly, she really thinks that that is the biggest issue that have going on at the moment. For reals.)
“You know you don’t have to keep on coming out here with me.” This comes after Phoebe has talked to her, after it’s become clear that Declan has apparently been ignoring all his other responsibilities (and a whole week after he told her he was gonna come less and then continued to be there every single day). Mary doesn’t know why she brings it up exactly – something like guilt keeps on tugging at her, even if she knows this isn’t actually her fault (like she said, Declan is a big boy, he can choose what he wants to do, and he wants to hang out with her… right?), and it seems like the right move to address it, to make sure he knows that she won’t like, fall into poison oak without him.

He looks up from where he’s examining a plant when she says this, and gives her a confused face. (Ugh, she doesn’t even want to have this stupid conversation, and dude isn’t making it any easier.)

“I just mean, I know what most of the plants are now, and we’re probably going to get Callie out here soon so like,” she pauses, thinking that maybe drafting a version of this thing beforehand would have been a good idea. “If you have other shit you gotta do, I understand.”

“Oh,” he says after a second, like he still doesn’t understand what is going on (and like, dude… is it not crystal clear?)

“I just know that you have other things you have to do or whatever, and since I basically understand everything about the glade now I thought—”

“Did Phoebe talk to you?”

“I… what? Um, no…”

“Mary.”

“Okay, fine princess. She might have… mentioned something, but I mean, you’re the one who brought it up in the first place and then didn’t do anything, and I just thought you should know like, I’m cool with it.”

But he’s not listening to her, just looking up at the sky and changing his hands into fists (she’s pretty sure he is trying to force himself not to run a hand through his hair, since his gloves are filthy). He doesn’t seem angry with her exactly, just… frustrated maybe? Like dude needs to take a chill pill, definitely, but still, she doesn’t like him like this. Like, he’s never seemed so flustered.

“She shouldn’t have done that,” he says after a moment. “I told her not to say anything.”

“So you have been talking with her about the glade then?”

He shrugs his shoulders. “It was kind of hard not to mention anything, she’s noticed that I haven’t been around as much.”

“And she heard you on the phone with your boss.” He looks upset that she’s brought that up – probably that she knows about it at all – but whatever, this is all his own fault for worrying his sister and shit.

“That too,” he says. “I was going to stop coming last week.”
“And then instead of listening to your conscious, you listened to me.” Mary doesn’t intend for it to come out just a little spiteful, but she can’t really help it – it just happens.

“I just… I really like coming here and helping out and being with… the glade. Like, I don’t want you to think you’re forcing me to be here or anything.”

“… I know that.”

“The fact that I have to come here less has literally nothing to do with you.”

“Roger that, bro.”

“I just… have responsibilities, and people that count on me and…”

There is a snippy comment somewhere in there about how Mary doesn’t actually have people, not really (well, she guesses she has Callie now, but also Callie has Medlock, so actually even Callie doesn’t need her; the only person who is counting on Mary is Mary, and quite frankly Mary’s concern for herself isn’t exactly that much of a priority), but she doesn’t make it, doesn’t have it in her to make Declan feel any more shitty than he already does. She isn’t sure when it is she became even a slightly considerate person, but there it is.

“Declan, it’s fine,” she starts up again, trying to put some of an end to the weirdness (because awkward conversations about feelings are – shocker – not really her thing). “I’m not mad, I get it. You have shit you gotta do.” She tries to smile at him, but he still looks at her in disbelief. “I’m not mad. I swear.”

And it’s not even a lie, at least it mostly isn’t. The thing is, Mary has never really been big on caring about people at all – not out of a meanness or whatever, just like, it never seemed like the thing to do. Like, it wasn’t a problem with her parents (like they ever really cared about her to begin with), and even though she gave a shit about Callie for years, she was far away and not a little kid anymore, and there wasn’t a lot to do there. And when you’re always the weirdo new kid who happens to have a supermodel mom, not caring can come in handy – it makes it a lot easier when you have to leave and realize that you aren’t actually leaving anything, cause nobody ever liked you in the first place. Mary has survived on not-caring; it’s done her good these last seventeen years.

But the things with Declan is that – well, it’s that she cares. About him, a lot. Mary doesn’t do caring, but she gives a shit about him and how he feels and what he thinks of her. And it’s not something she’s used to but it’s also… nice, having someone to care about. Having Declan and having Callie and having people who she would miss if she suddenly had to leave. And so, because she is trying out these new hobby of giving a shit about individuals that aren’t herself, Mary is a little fuzzy on the dos and don’ts, but she is pretty sure that not being a jerk and being okay with the person you care for actually having to go back to work and care about other things is on the do list.

“I really wish I could spend all my time here,” he says after a minute, after he’s actually started to believe her. “It’s so beautiful and calming, and just perfect, you know? It’s magical.”

Mary doesn’t think she has ever agreed with Declan quite as much as she does then. Or been more charmed by him.

This caring shit. It might not be the worst thing ever after all.
Surprise, surprise Callie loves the glade. Now who saw that one coming? (The answer is every single person who has been paying any attention, which admittedly is just her and Declan, but still.) And in another shocking-but-not-really turn of events, she does just fine outside of her room, aside from a hit of hunger which is cleared up with the candy. All in all it’s a good time.

Mary isn’t sure if she has ever seen anything quite as perfect as Callie rediscovering the glade, if that isn’t the cheesiest thing you have ever heard. The way she slowly moves, running her fingers over almost everything. The faint little smile that won’t leave her lips, and the way that she looks like she actually can’t believe it’s all still here, still standing and ripe and beautiful. She keeps looking over at her like Mary is going to suddenly reveal it’s all been a joke, but Mary doesn’t even find that annoying, Callie’s sheer happiness just a little too much to get on her nerves.

Declan apparently feels the same way; he won’t stop shooting her these little smiles that make Mary’s heart swell up just a little bit, and every time Callie marvels at something new he’ll start to explain it to her with the kind of enthusiasm she knows all too well is completely genuine. (This guy’s love affair with nature would be weird if it wasn’t so cute. Ugh.)

“I wish I could just never leave,” he says a while later, Callie sitting on the around pulling out weeds and the two of them standing off, watching over her like proud parents.

“Yeah, I mean this is basically the coolest place in the world, so I feel you.”

“It is,” he smiles his fucking dorky smile. “And you’re pretty great too.”

Mary doesn’t even try to hide the grin the spreads on her lips, but Declan does her to courtesy of not pointing it out to Callie (who would eat this shit up). He just smiles right along.

The first time she actually kisses him… well… he kisses her. So there’s that.

They’re in the glade again, which seems fitting, and they’re alone together for a first time in a while. (Callie usually always tags along with them these days, which they both like (and Declan sees less of, since he actually does go into work on most weekdays), but today she was actually sick, and no party wanted to risk what would happen if they got out there and things became worse.) She hadn’t really noticed how long it had been since it was just them, probably because she was just so happy to have gotten Callie out of the house, to have actually brought her to the glade and made her love something besides video games and weird lame music.

It’s a relief how well she’s taken to it. Mary feels like maybe she’s gotten her cousin back.

But yeah, back to her and Declan. It’s been a while. He’s had a work more than he did before (since she took up all his days off), and when he hasn’t been working they’ve been the three amigos, so the times when they would just sit in the glade and talk have been far and few between, and well… she’s missed him a little bit. It’s dumb and pointless, but she’s missed just talking to him and listening and staring, and having his attention completely reserved for her and the glade. She’s just… that’s the only way to put it; she’s missed him.

(Fuck, at this point Mary is pretty sure that continued denial of her feelings for Declan is futile.
They’re sitting in the glade, on one of the trees they used to climb on, talking about Callie and how much she has brought to the glade, and then he just… reaches over and kisses her. There’s a lull in the conversation, a moment when they don’t know what to say so they just look down at the ground, and instead of starting off with a whole new topic, he kisses her. Declan kisses her. This is a thing that happens in her life.

(And, shit, it is nothing like she had imagined, like she had thought about what it would be like so damn much, and it was never like this. For one thing, he is the one who kisses her, which like hell there, Mary did not see that one coming, because for a while there she seriously was considering just throwing him down on her bed and working from there. But also it’s got this… sort of passion to it. Like, he’s being timid, but he also isn’t necessarily holding back, or pretending that neither of them have done this before. He kisses her like he wants it, like it’s something he’s thought about before.

Also it’s short. Somehow that never made it into her imaginings.)

He pulls back after a moment, immediately turning to look at the sky, the leaves, his hands, basically anywhere but her face. Mary can’t tell if he’s just nervous or if he actually regrets it, and she feels a long thump in her stomach right as he begins to speak.

“Sorry,” he breathes out, still not looking at her, just sort of nodding his head.

Mary just lightly shrugs her shoulders and tries to pretend this isn’t one of her more awkward encounters of recent memory. It’s honestly a lot harder to do than she would want, but hey, what can you do. (The answer is obviously run far far away, but that doesn’t exactly seem like much of an option at the moment.) “It’s cool dude,” she says after a moment, trying to maybe possibly ease the tension a little bit, failing a whole lot, feelings like the biggest idiot in the world just sitting next to him, silent, trying not to just crawl into herself and die.

And it’s… ugh, fucker, it’s so stupid. Because she likes him so damn much, to the point where it probably qualifies as a deadly disease or something, and like, he’s obviously not completely indifferent to her, at least it really doesn’t seem like that and just… this is the worst. Feelings are the worst. This is her grand romance, and it’s literally just the two of them sitting in the glade acting like a couple of robots.

She’s tired of the rate at which things are progressing.

“You can do it again,” Mary suddenly spits out. “If you want.”

(If the world was wondering if it was possible for things to get anymore silent and also awkward… ding ding ding we have a yes.)

Declan looks like he freezes up for a second, some sort of realization passing over his face like he’s discovered fire (which… actually, let’s not use that metaphor). “What,” he lets out, finally turning towards her, and suddenly they are locking eyes and just… fuck, did she mention that feelings are like the literal worst.

(This time, she kisses him, and it’s a little like how she imagined it but also a lot better. She didn’t do him enough justice in her mind, that’s for sure, and also probably didn’t give credit to what it would feel like to feel his breath on her lips and stick her tongue in his mouth and run her hand through his hair and–

They don’t leave the glade for a while.)
They take that roadtrip eventually. They pile a bunch of shit into the back of his truck, beg Callie for literally weeks on end, and develop a series of specifically tailored playlists, and then they just go. Leave Misselthwaite for a while. Mary looks back at the smile on Callie’s face every so often and gets a surge of happiness, and she finally feels like… maybe her life doesn’t fit in a suitcase anymore. Maybe there is more to her existence than just things.

Maybe, finally, she’s got herself some roots.

fin.

**End Notes**

Oh, also the idea for Declan to smoke weed was shamelessly stolen from a post on tumblr that I cannot find now, so if you made it and want credit (or know who did make it), shoot me a message and I'll give you the shoutout you so dearly deserve.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!