

Declan Saves the Day

I fell clumsily into his guest chair. If Declan was giving up on love, then the world was a scarier place than I thought.

Declan snorted. "Now who's being dramatic?"

I stared into his eyes, searching for the cause of his sadness. In our many years together, I had seen him experience a wide range of emotions. Happy Declan ruled the roost, but appearances were made by Angry Declan, Embarrassed Declan, Irrational Declan and even Mortified Declan. I had never seen Bereft Declan before. I felt completely out of my element.

"But..." I sniffled. "You're the ray of sunshine in this relationship."

He brought his hand to his forehead in his best Southern Belle imitation. "Glowing praise indeed."

"I'm a terrible friend." I reached for his hand. "I'm so sorry—"

"Stop!" He squeezed my hand and smiled. "You were so young when you went through such unimaginable pain. The experience left you..."

"Beaten?" I supplied helpfully. "Shattered? Not fit for human interaction?"

"Wounded," he said softly.

"Another brilliant assessment," I murmured. "What can I do to help *you*?"

"This is what you can do. Forget you ever saw my maudlin display and tell me something good." He clapped his hands together. "I know! When do you see Mmmorgan again?"

"You *have* to stop saying that. It makes me want to hurl."

"All the more reason to keep saying it!" he sang.

"You're the reason the word 'incurrigible' exists."

"Wouldn't have it any other way." He took a long pull of his coffee. "Spill!"

I did my best to push the guilt aside, knowing Declan would rather gossip than discuss his personal woes. "He's coming here for lunch today."

Declan gasped. "And you chose this...ensemble?"

I glanced down at my black long-sleeved shirt, jeans and black lace-up boots. "What's wrong with this?" All of my garments were hole-free for once!

"I don't have time to explain, Meri." He stood up, opened one of his overhead cabinets and removed a makeup kit and a selection of scarves. After giving me a final once over, he selected a deep purple scarf with bright blue flowers on it.

"You can't be seri—"

He held up his hand. "No one asked you." He then performed some kind of magic with this scrap of fabric which I will never be able to repeat. The scarf somehow draped carelessly across my shoulder, a series of intricate knots holding it in place. It was gorgeous.

Declan was clearly on a mission. He rifled through the makeup kit, pulling out tubes and wands in various colors, muttering to himself the whole time. I'm pretty sure I heard "hopeless frump" in there someplace. I thought about responding, but he was right. I had never cared about looking good for anyone. Until now.

Ten minutes later and a few eyebrow hairs lighter, Declan released me from my chair prison. He held up a mirror triumphantly.

"*Voila!*"

I peered in tentatively, afraid he had given me more style than I could pull off, but was pleasantly surprised. Declan had evened my skin tone with a light foundation, added a hint of blush to accent my cheekbones and dusted my eyelids with shimmery pink eye shadow. He had also applied a light coat of mascara and the most beautiful shade of purple lipstick I had ever seen.

"Holy crap."

"Didn't know you could look so good, did you?"

"No." I giggled. "You're a miracle worker."

He snapped his fingers in jubilation. "That's how I know this guy is different. You didn't bitch and moan the way you normally do. You *want* to try this time. You're ready."

The intercom crackled to life and Courtney's bored voice filled the office. "*Meri to Dan's office. Meri—*"

After a series of loud grunts, Dan's voice reverberated through the office. "*Meri, get your ass to my office now!*" Declan laughed. "Well, at least you'll be a gorgeous corpse."

Excerpt from *Gamer Girl* by Glynis Astie, Copyright 2016