

The Languid Leaf

The Rhodie strutted in like he owned the place. Sunlight shone into the dark bar from the opened doors, giving him a temporary halo and causing his outermost petals to glow translucently. Seeing this, he flexed his stalk and cast a suggestive gaze at a couple of lithe Lilacs occupying a small table. They ignored his advances, they have seen his type before. Rhododendrons are all the same.

He sat next to a Hydrangea at the bar, and ordered a shot. The Languid Leaf has the best hooch this side of the forest. A colorful commotion drew his eye. It was a hot number from the tropics, a Bird of Paradise. She glided in followed by an entourage of thick Beefsteak Tomatoes and a few other hothouse thugs. His confidence waned. He knew he could not stand up to muscle like that.

He stared into his glass, looking for inspiration. An image flickered, reflected on the surface of his shot. A smile, accompanied by sparkling green eyes looked back at him. He turned to face the Hydrangea, summoning all his courage.

"Hi." It was all he could muster. He fought back the urge to wilt.

Her smile curved up on one side.

"Celia," she offered, extending a leaf.

"Malcolm."

They touched leaves, and for a moment the whole room went hazy for Malcolm. He steadied himself on the bar with a gesture he hoped looked nonchalant.

"Your aroma is magical. It is like nothing else around here."

"Well that's because I'm not from this farm. I live in the fields beyond the hedgerow."

"You're wild?"

His eyes grew large. She smiled and nodded. He sat thunderstruck. A million questions flooded his mind.

"How do you survive out there? I heard that roving bands of slugs roam freely, consuming all in their path. And the donkeys, oh, it's too dreadful to contemplate." He bit his lip.

"You have heard a lot. Some of the tales are true. We lose many, much more than in here, but we would not trade places. Do you ever wonder where pollen goes, once aloft on the breeze?"

"I suppose I've never really considered it. It just blows away and that's that."

"Correction. And that's me. A seed here, a wafting of pollen there, and viola!" She spread her leaves in a motion that accented her face.

"Whoa, do you have memory from the pollen on the wind?"

"I do. I also chat with the honeybees. Their fur is so tickly that I often struggle to keep from giggling them right off."

“So why are you in here?”

“It’s fun to see the mix. Those exotics over there wouldn’t last a day in my meadow, and they know it. Same goes for most of you, so we don’t get many visitors. Sure, the odd deadhead may drift through aimlessly, but almost never on purpose.”

“Almost?”

Celia leaned in and lowered her voice.

“Last year a gang of Johnny Jump-Ups tried to move in and take over the Top-O-The-Mound, the sunniest spot in all the meadow. Local Snapdragons beat them back for a while, but those Jump-Ups were determined. Then the Krokus showed up with a Hellebore. We all hid. By sunup not one petal remained from that gang. Just gone.”

Malcolm whistled low, impressed.

“Would you like to visit?”

Fear welled up inside Malcolm. He steeled himself, and looked her in the eyes.

“Yes, I would like that.”