

The Habits Of The Common Wallflower

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The Habits Of The Common Wallflower

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Summary

Avoiding the party might be considered rude, but fixing things that don't work is definitely polite, isn't it?

Notes

Set in like S2 or something, you know that bit where they're alllllmost friends but Miles still finds Julian a bit annoying? That bit. That's when this is set.

The people of Mirinax have been nothing but friendly, so far at least, and have been only too delighted to show their visitors around and explain the nuances of their society when asked. They seem like nice people. It's a good first contact, practically textbook. And tonight they're throwing a party, with music and lights and free-flowing alcohol.

Miles isn't really in a party mood, though, so he's left Julian to do the diplomacy and is out on a balcony with a broken light-machine and a pile of tools kindly provided by the Mirinaxans when he asked for them. Avoiding the party might be considered rude, but fixing things that don't work is definitely polite, isn't it? Even if it isn't, he finds that people are usually grateful when things start working again. There are worse things he could be doing, at least he's keeping himself quiet and out of trouble.

Julian appears in the doorway, holding two glasses of a sparkling green liquid and with his uniform half-unfastened. He's swaying on his feet, just slightly. He asks, "What are you doing out here?" and the words aren't quite as articulated as they should be. The bloody idiot's already got himself drunk, then.

Miles indicates the scattered elements around him. "I'm fixing this thing."

Julian shakes his head, steps towards him. "We're at a party, Chief!"

"I don't like crowds."

"Then stand in a corner and talk to the wallflowers, but you can't just hide from everyone. We're guests, we have to try and mingle. Talk to people, enjoy the atmosphere, exchange cultural perspectives." He holds out the glass in his left hand. "Here, have some of this."

Miles takes the glass and sniffs at the drink. It smells like burnt paper. "What is it?"

"Social lubricant." Julian shrugs. "The local equivalent of wine, more or less."

Miles sets his glass down next to the broken machine. "I'm not much of a wine-drinker."

There's a couch on the balcony, far too ornate, covered in cushions and blankets. Julian half-falls onto it, stretches his legs out in front of himself, puts his glass down rather clumsily on the balcony wall. "Well, there's quite a selection in there, I'm sure you'll find something you like the look of."

"I thought alcohol killed brain cells." It certainly seems to have killed some of Julian's.

"That's just a myth. Actually, it -"

Miles interrupts to avoid a lecture on basic neurology. "I'll pop in and have a look when I'm done here," he promises.

Julian nods and closes his eyes. "I'll hold you to that." He opens his eyes again, sits suddenly upright. "Have you seen the women here? They're gorgeous. And the men, too. All of them. Gorgeous." He waves a hand in the air. "I know, I know, you're married, so you won't have noticed, but you can trust me on this."

Drunk Julian is definitely more annoying than sober Julian. Miles turns his attention back to the light-machine. "Well, why don't you go and exchange cultural perspectives with one of them, then?"

"Oh, I plan to."

"Good for you," says Miles, irritated. He thinks he's found the problem now, he needs to replace the -

"But I'd be representing the entire Alpha Quadrant. What if I can't find where she keeps her -"

"Julian."

"Yes?"

Miles nods towards the glass on the wall. "How much of that have you had?"

Julian shrugs. "That's my second glass, why?"

"You're sure it's just wine?"

"Oh, probably." He doesn't seem concerned, and maybe he should be. "Does it really matter?"

"I'm not sure how much cultural exchanging you'll manage to do if you keep drinking that stuff."

Julian waves a hand. "I'll be fine. At least I'm attending the party, not just hiding on the balcony fixing a... what is that thing, anyway?"

"It's part of the lighting array."

Julian doesn't look impressed. "Surely someone else can repair it?"

"They could, yes," says Miles, forcing himself to be patient, "but I like having something useful to do when I'm bored."

"How can you be bored? There's music, and wine – probably – and have I mentioned the women?"

"I'm married, remember."

Julian nods. "I'm sorry."

"I'm not," snaps Miles. He's not in the right mood to listen to Julian's thoughts on marriage. He'll probably never be in the right mood for that. He ignores the stammered apology and tries to focus on getting this machine fixed. The tools are presumably the right ones for the job, but some of them look so strange that he has no idea what they actually are. He's doing his best, though, and that's usually enough.

The next time he looks up there's a woman standing on the balcony, with legs that go all the way up to her... well, he's a married man, he doesn't notice these things. She's looking at Julian, who has fallen over on the couch, apparently asleep. She opens her mouth to say something and Miles shakes his head. "I don't think he'll be much use to you, friend, he's had a bit too much to drink. Best to leave him where he is, let him sleep it off."

The woman nods and disappears back into the party. Miles turns back to his machine. He works in a contented silence, almost unaware of time passing, and finally he switches it back on. Nothing happens. He hits it on one side, swearing at it under his breath, and it lights up. He grins.

He stands up, stretches, congratulates himself on a job well done. He leaves the glass of whatever-it-is untouched and then, feeling a little guilty, covers Julian with one of the blankets piled on the side of the couch. He heads indoors, relaxed and intrigued, to see what all the fuss is about.

The light-machine drapes the balcony in colours, one after another, lighting up the night. Julian sleeps on, not even aware that he's missing anything worth seeing. It's a warm night, and the party lasts until morning.

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