

...Such-Like I Love...

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...Such-Like I Love...

by [NothingEnough](#)

Summary

In which discussing Ray Bradbury reveals more than Geordi intended.

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“I don’t think choice is the point of the story, is all,” said Geordi.

“It was highly relevant to my experience of the story,” said Data.

“Okay. I’ve got to ask,” Guinan said, shaking her head. Her amber headdress shifted across her shoulders. “What story?”

They stared at her for a moment in silence, because, like a good bartender, Guinan had vanished from their notice until now. By now, she couldn’t stand it. She’d been listening to these two chuckleheads debate the philosophical implications of *the story* for twenty minutes straight, and not once did either of them mention a title. Given that she offered stories as frequently as drinks, not knowing was mildly irritating.

“‘I Sing The Body Electric!’, by Earth writer Ray Bradbury,” said Data. He picked up his glass of suspension and drank it. He drank precisely every eighty seconds. It was Guinan’s business to know how quickly her patrons drained their glasses, even when they didn’t have to drink.

“Never heard of him,” Guinan said.

“It is a tragic--” Data said.

“Don’t listen to him,” Geordi snapped. “It’s not a tragedy. He’s getting a little wound up.”

“I am not capable of becoming wound up,” Data said. Which might be why Guinan didn’t usually like his company. Winding people up was almost as fun as giving them advice, and the android never wanted either from her. “The story concerns a robot who is purchased by a family to serve them as a ‘grandmother’ figure. Over the course of the story, one of the children struggles to love their new grandmother, but eventually, she is won over.”

“Which--”

“--Which the grandmother,” Data said, “is not permitted to do. Her programming is limited to caring for the family who purchases her. She cannot grow, develop, or change over time. It is considered a selling point of this type of robot that they cannot change. She is incapable of having her own interests, or her own thoughts.”

“I never figured you to be such a cynic,” Geordi said. His mouth tightened. He looked down at his synathol and didn’t touch it. Right, time to intervene. She didn’t like anybody in her bar to leave frowning.

“Look, it sounds to me like Data’s got a point. But isn’t that why we have ethics committees for robotics and AI? Because stories like that one made people think about the fairness of limiting an, ah, artificial life form’s choices?”

Data gave her a neat little nod, which, to his credit, didn’t look like something his subprograms wrote for social situations. Geordi shrugged.

“But,” Guinan went on, “Geordi, you said it wasn’t a tragedy. What made you read it so differently?”

“He is a human,” Data said. “He struggles with the implications of the majority of fictional stories regarding AI, since, at present, all such stories are written by biological life forms, and inevitably possess an inherent bias towards--”

“Hang on a minute,” Geordi said. His knuckles rapped the bar as he turned in his stool a touch more violently than necessary, facing Data directly. “She asked me, not you. Do you like the sound of your own voice that much?”

“You may speak,” Data said.

“You sure?”

“Of course.”

“You absolutely sure?”

“Do you require a greater expression of reassurance than what I have already offered?”

“... no.” He turned back around on his stool, took a good, healthy shot of his synthahol. Guinan eyed the glass. Not yet ready for a refill. “It’s... uh, w-well, I always thought it was about... love. It was just about, you know, this grieving family falling apart because the mom’s died. Then the robotic grandmother enters their lives. And she loves them. Maybe because that’s what her programming tells her to do, but she *loves* them. This pure, unselfish, eternal love that makes all their lives better. And they all love her back, by the ending. They love her because she’s a robot, just the way she is, and I-I guess that was a story I needed to hear.”

Guinan pursed her lips. Geordi knew what he just said. She could tell by how he suddenly turned his head, his ViSOR focusing on his glass, and how he silently pushed it in her direction. She picked the glass up.

She knew what he just said, too. She hadn’t lived this long not to pick up on what Picard would call a Freudian slip. She put the glass in the replicator and quietly placed another order. The question was whether or not Data had figured it out.

She turned with the full glass in hand, and Data hadn’t quite gotten it yet; he had that baffled look he frequently got around humans, his strange gold eyes flickering in focus from the engineer to the bartender. She set the glass in front of Geordi, and suddenly, Data’s eyes widened. He might as well have had *Oh!* printed on his eyeballs.

“I see,” said Data. “On second thought, I retract my objection. It is a good story.”

“... did I just win an argument with you?”

“It has been known to happen,” said Data. And if she didn’t know better, she might think he sounded miffed.

Geordi grinned. “You know, Data, you ought to try writing fiction one of these days. We biological life forms could use a story about an android, written by one.”

“I am told that my attempts at fiction are dry,” Data said, “and that I lack the ability to properly observe and calculate emotional reactions in a realistic fashion. But I am learning.”

They clinked their glasses.

“Ain’t love grand?” Guinan muttered.

“Sorry?” Geordi didn’t even pretend to look in her direction.

“I said I’ve got a customer over here who needs a refill,” and, like a good bartender, she vanished as completely as she arrived.

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