

A Grief Shared

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Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	F/M
Fandom:	Star Trek: The Next Generation
Relationship:	Guinan/Jean-Luc Picard , Jean-Luc Picard & Robert Picard
Character:	Jean-Luc Picard , Guinan , Robert Picard
Additional Tags:	TNG S04E02: Family , Mind Control Aftermath , Recovery
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2022-12-15 Words: 2,363 Chapters: 1/1

A Grief Shared

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Summary

During the episode Family, Guinan comes to visit Jean-Luc at the vineyard.

Notes

Written for peasina in Star Trek Holidays 2022
betaed by sixbeforelunch

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Jean-Luc had been out wandering around the vineyard, soaking in the sun and indulging in a bit of nostalgia. That one cathartic mud fight with Robert hadn't cured all that was wrong with him, but that plus his decision to return to *Enterprise* and Starfleet had loosened up a bit of what had been locked tight within him. He could be more present in the moment than he had been, those first days home. There was still a good deal of work to do, putting himself back together from the ruin the Borg had left of his psyche; but he felt better up to it than he had before his leave.

Counselor Troi was right when she said that talking about it, instead of ignoring it, was an effective tool toward healing. Much as he would have preferred differently.

He didn't realize he'd missed lunch until his stomach started grumbling. He debated walking into the village to eat at a café, but the lure of Marie's cooking brought him back to the house. She'd probably set something aside for him; he wasn't used to eating family-style, but Marie seemed more relaxed about such things than his parents had been when he was a boy.

Much to his surprise, he found the kitchen already occupied. Robert was sitting at the table drinking wine with, of all people, Guinan.

"Hello," Jean-Luc said, coming in to join them. "You didn't tell me you were coming, Guinan, I would have been here to meet you."

"Your brother has been entertaining me with stories of your childhood," Guinan said, eyes twinkling. "I wouldn't have had that opportunity if I'd called ahead."

"Jean-Luc, why haven't you married this charming young woman, yet?" Robert asked. "She's apparently been willing to put up with you for many years already, and there can't be *that* many women of sense and taste willing to do that, even in the wider galaxy."

Jean-Luc paused, wondering which—if any—of the misconceptions to address. Guinan was no help, drat her, all she did was sit there and smirk at him. "I rather think if Guinan wanted to marry me, she would have said something," he said. "She's had enough experience with the institution—how many spouses have you had?"

"Twenty-three," Guinan said.

Robert raised his eyebrows in disbelief.

"When we first met," Jean-Luc said, sitting down with them and pouring himself a glass of wine, "I was a callow young lieutenant. Guinan looked very much as she does now."

"So I should have been asking *you* for stories about my brother's misspent youth, rather than the reverse," Robert said. He looked like he

desperately wanted to ask how old she was, or possibly what species, but couldn't bring himself to be that rude.

"I like listening to people tell their stories," Guinan said. "And yours are ones I couldn't get from anyone else."

"Then I am happy to have been of service, madame," Robert said with a nod of his head and a lopsided smile.

Jean-Luc realized with horror that Robert was pulling out his charm. As boys, Robert had always been more popular with girls; he had a sort of gruff, chivalric charisma to him that Jean-Luc, gawky and younger, had always envied. To see it directed at Guinan, of all people! But Guinan, of all people, knew how to handle herself, and happily-married Robert was probably doing it just to see if he could get a rise out of him.

"I'm happy to see you, of course," Jean-Luc said, "but is there anything in particular you're here for?"

"You once promised me a tour of the vineyard," Guinan said.

Jean-Luc vaguely remembered something along those lines, but it had been years, before he'd taken command of the *Enterprise*.

"Him, give a tour of the vineyard?" Robert said. "Bah! Hasn't stepped foot on it in over thirty years before this month, and hasn't *worked* it for what, forty-five? Now, if you want a tour, I'd be happy to oblige, in return for a few stories of what he's been up to in all the years he's been gone."

"That sounds like a fair exchange to me," Guinan said. "Will you join us, Jean-Luc?"

And what could he say to that but "Of course."

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Robert certainly pulled out all the stops to show the vineyard—and himself—in the best light, paying charming attention to Guinan the whole time and listening appreciatively to every story she told. Guinan, for her part, was happy to play along, sharing stories that made Robert cackle with glee at his younger brother's foolishness. Nothing too sensitive or personal, but still things he knew Robert would certainly use to needle him for the remainder of his stay.

"You've been quiet, Jean-Luc," Robert said as they headed back to the house. "Don't like to hear yourself the butt of the joke? Don't like to hear your girlfriend make light of you?"

"Guinan's a much better storyteller than I am," Jean-Luc said. "And you know far more about the vineyard's operations than I do, as you yourself pointed out. I didn't have much to add." She also wasn't his girlfriend; the word was too simple and unimportant to describe all the things that Guinan was to him.

The banter might have gone on for longer, but there was a party in the village that night—for what, Jean-Luc was not entirely clear—and Robert had to go dress for it.

"Do you want to go?" Jean-Luc asked Guinan. He hadn't been planning on it himself, but perhaps Guinan might find it interesting.

"Not particularly," Guinan said.

"There's no replicator in the house, and I'm afraid I'm not much of a cook," Jean-Luc said. "But I believe there may be leftovers, and if nothing else there will be salad makings and bread and cheese and wine."

"I think we'll manage," Guinan said.

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Once Robert and Marie and René had left, Jean-Luc prepared a charcuterie board and he and Guinan settled themselves out on the patio to enjoy the evening.

"You sound better than you did before you left to go on leave," Guinan said. "France must agree with you."

"It does," Jean-Luc said, "but so does serving in Starfleet."

"I've always thought so," Guinan said.

Something about the way she said it—"Did you know I was considering retiring from Starfleet?" Jean-Luc asked, surprised.

"I knew you weren't comfortable in your own skin," Guinan said, "and you were restless."

"Is that why you came to visit me here?" Jean-Luc said. "Out of all the places you could go to in this solar system?"

Guinan shrugged. "I've been all over this system, in more than one era. I've almost certainly spent more time here than *you* have, all things considered."

"Really?" Jean-Luc asked. Guinan liked to listen, but she rarely talked about her past, and Jean-Luc had always wondered about the things she

didn't say.

"Really," Guinan said. "But I've never been to France, actually."

"Then perhaps we should take the next few days to so that I can show you the sights, such as they are," Jean-Luc said.

"If you like," Guinan said. "I'm more interested in you than in the countryside. And in your brother—from what little you've said of him, I expected someone more hostile."

"Yes, well, we actually worked through a bit of that," Jean-Luc said. "We lived together as boys, of course, but looking back I'm not sure how well we actually knew each other, as opposed to seeing the other one as competition and everything that we were not. We've both grown a great deal, and yet I found when I arrived that he brought out *exactly* the same feelings as he always had, and was just as obnoxious as ever. It was almost like time travel. It was infuriating—and yet it was curiously comfortable, after everything that happened recently."

"I can see that might be the case," Guinan said.

"It couldn't last, though," Jean-Luc said. "Eventually, he poked too hard at the wrong thing, and I took a swing at him. We ended up brawling in a mud puddle just as we had as boys." He reached out to the charcuterie board, and took great care selecting a piece of sausage, and some cheese to go with it. "Except instead of our father coming out with a hose to break us apart, I started to cry. He'd been talking a lot of rot about me being a hero, and after everything—I told him what the Borg did to me."

He took a bite of his sausage, and chewed it slowly. He could feel Guinan's attention on him.

"You never told me about that," Guinan said. "I know what happened, of course. But you never came to talk with me about it."

He looked up at her in surprise. "I couldn't—you, of all people. You lost your home and your people to them. I suffered at their hands, but Earth is still here. Starfleet—even my *ship* is still here. You lost so much more than I did, and the battle had to have stirred up old wounds for you. I didn't want to add to your burden."

"It did," Guinan said. "But pain isn't a game with a high score and winners and losers. You can't compare degrees of suffering and come to any good result. I've had a lot of time to heal, and you haven't. From another angle of view, I lost my home but I never had their voice in my brain, never lost *myself* to them as you did. My home was invaded, but my body and mind remained my own. So who suffered more at their hands? It's not a question with a real answer."

She leaned forward. "But think about it this way. If our positions were reversed—if Earth was destroyed by the Borg, and then later they attacked my homeworld, and I was assimilated but rescued and restored to myself—if that happened, would you want to comfort me?"

"Of course," Jean-Luc said. He reached out and took her hand. "I should have thought—I'm sorry."

"Apology accepted," Guinan said. "You don't have to talk to me, of course. And it doesn't have to be tonight. But if you want to," she shrugged, "I'm listening."

Jean-Luc looked down. "If it were up to me, I would never speak of it," he said. "Or at least, nothing more than what needed to be reported to Starfleet. But Counselor Troi was right when she said talking about it would help. It has. Speaking about it is so terrible, but then afterwards I feel like the monster in my imagination is a little less present. It will never fully go away, of course, but...."

Guinan squeezed his hand. In a low voice, he told her what it had been like. What it had felt like. There were moments when she flinched, a little, but her attention was unwavering, and filled with warmth.

Evening turned to night while he talked, and by the time he was finished the stars were out. They took the remains of their meal in with them, and sat on the couch in the living room in a companionable silence.

"Thank you for telling me," Guinan said at last. "I've imagined a lot of things, over the years. It's better to know for sure, I think."

"Did you have any close family or friends who were assimilated?" Jean-Luc asked.

"Two of my children were confirmed assimilated," Guinan said. "Others ... I'll never know. By the time we knew to evacuate the planet, the Borg were in position to intercept fleeing ships. I survived because I was on the fringes of El Aurian space. They might have been assimilated. Or they might have died fighting. I hope they died."

Given El Aurian lifespans, they would spend centuries as drones, Jean-Luc realized with horror. They might well have been part of the force sent to assimilate Earth. He shivered at the notion. "I'm sorry," he said.

"Thank you," Guinan said.

Jean-Luc took her hand again. They could both take comfort in touch, tonight.

"Were you planning to beam back to the ship, tonight?" Jean-Luc asked. They could both do with something lighter to think about.

"Hadn't decided yet," Guinan said.

"There's more than one guest room," Jean-Luc said. "And from how Robert was flirting with you earlier, I can't imagine he'd mind having you stay, and Marie likes company. Or you could stay in my room—though I warn you, Robert will make jokes." His relationship with Guinan had gone through many phases, and it would not be the first time they'd shared a bed, sometimes sexual, sometimes not. They hadn't slept together in any sense since Guinan had come on board *Enterprise*, but that didn't matter.

"I don't think I want to be alone, tonight," Guinan said thoughtfully.

"Neither do I," Jean-Luc said. "Though I warn you, I am very prone to nightmares, just now."

"So am I," Guinan said.

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The next morning, Robert smirked at both of them as he asked Guinan if coffee and a croissant would be sufficient for breakfast, or if she'd like eggs to go along with them.

"Coffee and a croissant is fine," Guinan said blandly.

Robert opened his mouth to say something, but shut it again and shifted as if Marie had kicked him under the table. Marie didn't look up from the PADD she was reading.

"Are you and my uncle going to get married and settle down?" René asked, through a mouthful of his own croissant. "Papa was saying you should."

"One of the things your uncle and I share is that neither one of us is much interested in settling down," Guinan said. "We both have wandering feet."

"Oh," René said. "Have you been on many adventures together?"

"We have," Jean-Luc said.

"Guinan has some wonderful stories about them, I'm sure she'd love to tell you one," Robert put in. Jean-Luc shot him a brief glare; no doubt Robert was hoping for more things to tease him about.

"Would you?" René said eagerly.

"Of course," Guinan said.

End Notes

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