

Matters of Perspective

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Matters of Perspective

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Summary

Jean-Luc had many things to do when he returned from San Francisco of 1893. Reuniting with an old friend is one of them.

Notes

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Thank you to Karios for betaing and providing a title.

Also, you guys, if you've never shipped Guinan/Picard, I suggest you rewatch Time's Arrow I & II and pay extra attention to the scenes they share. Wow.

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

There were many things to do when Jean-Luc returned from San Francisco of 1893: a debriefing with Riker of all that had happened on board Enterprise since he had left, a medical examination, a long shower and a change into his own uniform. Tomorrow would be taken up with writing his own report and debriefing over subspace with a number of historians who specialized in Earth's 19th Century. But with the immediate chores done he could take some time to visit an old friend, and so he headed to Ten Forward.

He walked in the door, and paused: this was the Guinan he knew, in the setting he knew her in. He walked slowly to the bar, treasuring the very ordinariness of it.

Guinan looked him up and down, and smiled. It was a warm smile, as Guinan's smiles were wont to be; at least, the smiles Jean-Luc was used to receiving. It wasn't until he had met her younger self and she had not known him, that he had realized she did not smile at everyone that way. "So, you made it back safely. I'm glad."

"You knew I had," Jean-Luc replied in some surprise. Guinan did not know everything, but that was sometimes hard to believe.

"No," Guinan said. "I knew you had left 19th Century San Francisco, and that others of your crew who left before you were able to get home. I didn't know for sure that *you* would be able to make it back. I hoped you would. But things don't always work out the way we hope they will. I've spent a lot of time in the last five centuries wondering."

"Did you ever consider not sending me back?"

She shook her head. "No. If we hadn't met then, we wouldn't have met later; and by the time I got to know you the second time we met, I knew that you would rather fulfill your mission and be stuck in the past than leave innocent civilians to die."

"True." Jean-Luc took a seat at the bar, thankful that Ten Forward was empty and he didn't have to worry about people listening in. "But why wouldn't we have met? I've been wondering about that."

"The galaxy is a big place, Picard," Guinan said. "I like to travel, I always have. See new things, hear new stories, meet new people. I don't come back to a place unless there's something compelling about it ... and let me tell you, 19th Century America didn't exactly give me many reasons to give Humans a second look."

"I don't blame you," Jean-Luc said. "There are many eras of Earth history that I find fascinating to read about or experience on the Holodeck,

but very few I would have any interest in living in. But what was it about me that was so compelling?"

Guinan tipped her head. "The way you looked at me," she said. "Like I hung the moon and stars. Like the two of us were the only ones there. Like you knew me inside and out, and found every inch of me captivating. People have looked at me like that before, but I've married the ones who did ... and not even all my spouses looked at me like that."

Guinan had been his friend for so long, one of the people he trusted most in the whole world. It had never occurred to him to wonder what that looked like from the outside. "We were in a strange place, and you were a connection to home," Jean-Luc said, unsettled.

"The rest of your crew didn't look at me like that," Guinan said. "Just you. And then you stayed in the past because I was hurt and needed attention, even though it might mean you never got home. I wouldn't have thought Earth could produce people like you. And there you were. I was curious. Not that many people look at me like that, and it would be a shame to miss one. So," she shrugged, "here I am. And here we are."

Jean-Luc wasn't quite sure what to make of that; but then, that was often the case when speaking with Guinan. He hadn't thought of Guinan as a potential lover in years. "So why did you turn me down when I propositioned you, when I met you for the first time?"

She smirked at him. "You didn't look at me like that yet. And also, you were a puppy. An adorable puppy, I will grant you that, but still."

Jean-Luc thought back to himself as he had been when (from his point of view) they met. He'd been a young ensign on his first cruise, enamored of a bar tender who was full of wit and wisdom. "I can't say you're wrong," he admitted. "Thank you for turning me down gently."

"You were a puppy," she repeated. "I don't kick puppies."

A pair of ensigns came in and took a seat at a table on the other side of the bar, and Guinan excused herself to serve them. Jean-Luc considered inviting her to his quarters after her shift so they could speak without interruption. How seldom they met in private to talk! It seemed an astonishing lack, given how much he enjoyed her company. Fencing matches and other games, adventures on the holodeck, they did many things together; but they spent little time simply talking together, and most of *that* was in Ten Forward, where interruptions were frequent and privacy not guaranteed.

When she finished with the ensigns, Guinan returned to the bar and sat next to him. "So, what was your first impression of me?" she asked.

"In that bar on Starbase 247, or in San Francisco in 1893?"

"Either. Both."

Jean-Luc considered. "On Starbase 247, I thought that you were gorgeous, and compassionate, and knew a great deal more than you said." He spoke quietly, not wanting to give rise to any rumors on the crew's gossip mill. "I wanted very badly to see what was beneath those robes and behind those eyes, and I thought perhaps if I gained access to one, you might also give me access to the other."

"And you've always enjoyed a challenge," Guinan said.

"Indeed," Jean-Luc said. "And you have always rewarded my efforts ... though not, always, in the form I would most prefer at the time."

"What about in San Francisco?"

"In San Francisco, you were very different," Jean-Luc said. "Not ... shallower, but there was less weight to you. I thought at first it was because you were much younger, and that might be part of it, but then I realized ... the great tragedy of your life had not yet occurred."

Guinan looked down at her hands, folded on top the bar. "No," she said softly, "it hadn't."

"I considered warning you," he confessed.

She tilted her head. "Thank you. It wouldn't have changed anything in the end, though, or at least, not for the better." She looked up at him. "I wondered, those first few years after our homeworld was destroyed, why you hadn't. I thought through every possible scenario: what I could have done with the information, all the different might-have-beens ... I blamed you, for a while. It was easier to cast blame than to live with my grief."

Jean-Luc had never been through anything half as terrible as Guinan had; when he lost himself to the Borg, he had been rescued, and restored. Guinan had lost her entire world and most of her people, and that loss had been permanent. But he understood the impulse to blame someone, anyone, rather than face the enormity of grief. "What changed?"

"When we met for the first time, I was just a young hothead, running around the galaxy for my own amusement. You hadn't exactly had time to collect any proof, or any records that might have been useful. Would I have believed a stranger—however compelling his looks—who predicted the destruction of my people and our home? I wouldn't have wanted to. And if I *had* believed you, would any of my people have listened to me, with no proof? And if they had, what then? We El-Aurians were never great fighters, nor great engineers. Even with centuries of warning, we could never have defeated or held off the Borg. We might have been able to evacuate more people, earlier, but ... nobody wants to believe their home is going to be destroyed. It's a nice fantasy, but I highly doubt anything you told me would have made much difference, in the end."

Jean-Luc nodded, soberly.

The doors opened, again, and a rowdy group, mostly in Science blue, spilled through. Celebrating Crewman Vrattias's pregnancy, he thought. Very inconvenient; Guinan was the only server on duty, since this was usually a quiet shift in Ten Forward. They'd keep her busy for the rest of the shift, if he was any judge.

Guinan made the same calculation. "See you tomorrow in the dojo," she said.

That evening, Jean-Luc found himself turning over their history together. It was something he'd done many times since meeting Guinan again for the first time in 19th Century San Francisco, but this time he found himself going back to the first time *he* had met *her*.

He'd been with a group of friends on shore leave, relishing the freedom to drink things other than synthahol. She'd been tending bar, and he hadn't given her a second thought until it had been his turn to buy a round, and he'd gotten her attention to order. When he started talking, she'd looked him up and down with an interested expression, which in retrospect made perfect sense. *Guinan's* face might not change in forty years, but Jean-Luc's face certainly had. As a young ensign with a full head of hair he had looked far different than the mature starship captain she had met. His voice, however, would have changed little.

She'd introduced herself while she got their drinks, and they'd talked, and when he'd returned to his friends they'd teased him for flirting with her. She'd watched them with a sardonic air, and he'd *known* there was something more to her.

The next day, he'd come back alone, just after the bar opened, to see if he could figure out what that something was. She'd flirted with him, but turned down his invitation for more, and he'd taken it in good stead. An attractive, empathetic person tending bar must get an awful lot of propositions, after all. But talking with her was more interesting than anything else to do on the station, and so he'd kept coming back at times when the bar wouldn't be busy, and when his ship had left, he'd had her com address.

In all the years since, he'd not spent much time dwelling on how attractive she was. He'd never lacked for intimate company and a good friend was harder to find than a bed partner. But if she'd turned him down because he was too young and immature, because he didn't yet care for her as deeply as he had when she first met him ...

It occurred to him that he was no callow youth any longer. And if he asked her now, her answer might be different.

They met at the gym for their weekly fencing, as usual. Guinan had changed and was mostly warmed up by the time Jean-Luc emerged from his dressing room.

"Trouble getting out of bed this morning?" she asked, starting up a more complicated round of stretches than she usually bothered with.

He hummed and started his own warm-up routine. "Trouble falling asleep last night."

"Anything you'd like to talk about?" Guinan asked. She was insatiably curious—she always was, even with strangers, but *especially* with close friends—but she'd learned centuries ago that patience and openness got better results than anything else.

"Nothing that concerns you," Jean-Luc said, which was not a 'no.'

And he was lying. Which made her even more curious. But he would tell her eventually, so she set it aside.

He seemed awfully eager to put his fencing helmet on, she noticed. Afraid she would see something in his face, perhaps?

The fencing itself was as interesting as it ever was. They'd been doing this long enough that muscle memory worked in her favor, but of course as with any combat, real or play, there was strategy to it.

Jean-Luc was a little distracted. Not much, but just enough to give her a slight edge, which she took ruthless advantage of.

"You're doing very well today, Guinan," he said halfway through their hour.

"You're slipping," Guinan said. "I prefer to beat you when you're in top form." Not that she often did; he'd been fencing much longer than she had. But she was getting better, slowly but surely, and if this specific martial art was new to her, it was far from the first she'd practiced.

"I shall endeavor to give you better competition, then," Jean-Luc said, and he did pay more attention from then on. But she did still notice his focus start to slip, on occasion.

Their scheduled hour drew to a close and Guinan took off her helmet, checking to make sure her scarf stayed in place.

"Good match," Jean-Luc said, taking off his own mask and grabbing a towel.

"Were you distracted by the same thing that kept you from sleeping last night?"

Jean-Luc froze, briefly, before raising the towel to his face. "Yes, actually."

She let it sit there, between them, for a little while, since he had shut down a direct question earlier. But he seemed a little more open, now, a bit less defensive. "Do you want to talk about it?"

He pondered the question for a bit. "Yes," he said, "but not here. And not in Ten Forward. Dinner in my quarters, perhaps?"

She raised her eyebrows. *That* was new. "I'd like that. Tomorrow night? I could re-arrange the bar schedule for tonight, if it's urgent."

"Tomorrow night is fine," Jean-Luc said.

The next night Guinan arrived at Jean-Luc's quarters in plenty of time for dinner. She'd been in his quarters before, of course, but not regularly and not often; she'd actually been in his office more, she realized, all the various times she had had some insight into whatever particular mission the ship was working on. They tended to spend time together either in the gym, the holosuites, or Ten Forward. Inviting her here meant something new, something private, and she wasn't sure whether or not to ascribe the standard Human meaning to a private dinner.

On the one hand, he'd never given any particular indication of sexual or romantic interest in her since she'd turned him down the first time, decades ago. On the other hand, he'd recently had an experience that might have changed how he saw her ... and it would explain his distraction when they fenced.

Jean-Luc came to the door to greet her, rather than simply telling it to open. "Guinan," he said warmly. "Come in." He stepped back and gestured her in.

The room gave her no clues. It hadn't been redecorated since she'd last seen it, and while the spread on the table looked good, there were no candles or roses or other Human signs of romantic intentions. Then again, Jean-Luc had enough experience with cross-species relationships (in every sense) that he wouldn't necessarily rely on Human-specific trappings to signal intent.

"Please, have a seat," Jean-Luc said, gesturing to the table. "Would you like some wine?" He held up a bottle with a familiar label.

"Please," Guinan said. "What's the occasion?" Even captains had weight and space restrictions, and they weren't close enough to Earth to resupply all *that* often. The Chateau Picard got brought out only rarely.

"I can't just want to treat an old friend, whom I know has a deep and nuanced appreciation of alcohol in all its forms?" Jean-Luc said.

"You never have before," Guinan pointed out. "Not without a special occasion of some sort."

"True," Jean-Luc said. He carefully poured them each a glass and sat down.

Guinan picked her glass up and sniffed it, savoring the aroma.

"We've known each other for a long time," Jean-Luc said. He was idly twisting the wine glass in his hands, but his gaze on her was steady. "I haven't always put much thought into that relationship; throughout virtually my entire adult life, you have simply been there when I needed you. I think I have taken you for granted more than I should."

"It's possible," Guinan said, when he paused. "But then again, I do have ways of getting attention when I want it. And in some ways, life is much simpler when you are overlooked. If I felt neglected, trust me, you would know it. Or I would have left, by now."

"Thank you for the reassurance, but that still doesn't mean I should take you for granted," Jean-Luc said. "In any case, you have always been a magnificent woman, body, mind, and soul. And after our conversation the other night, I have been thinking over ... paths not taken, and wondering if perhaps it might be time to take a new path." He stared down into his wine glass. "And then I wonder if perhaps it might be selfish of me, to ask for more, when you will outlive me by such a great margin. I have no wish to add grief or pain to your life."

"Just to clarify," Guinan said, "you're talking around the possibility of adding a romantic or sexual dimension to our relationship?"

"Both, I would hope," Jean-Luc said. "I'm not a puppy any longer."

"No, you are not." Guinan smiled, and looked him up and down. She knew, from their fencing, just how much power and strength there was coiled in that wiry frame, and she spent a few seconds imagining how it might be used for the pleasure of them both. And she already knew his character, which was far more important. "You know there aren't many species that are as long-lived as El-Aurians. If I wanted to be around people I wasn't going to outlive, I would never travel away from my people."

"Yes," Jean-Luc said, "but—"

"Jean-Luc." Guinan leaned forward, cutting him off. "Do you really think there is anything we could do with our bodies together that would make me grieve your eventual death more than I already will?"

"Ah," he said. "Probably not."

"There's no use grieving ahead of time," Guinan said. "I prefer to live my life forwards, not backwards. So with that in mind, Jean-Luc, ask your question."

"You aren't going to make this easy on me, are you?" he said, ruefully.

"I never have before. Why start now?"

"True," he said. He set the wine glass down on the table and leaned forward, staring intently into her eyes. "Guinan, you are the most incredible woman I've ever met, and I find you attractive on every level. I always have. Your wisdom, your compassion, your iron determination which you only show when it is needed, your ability to perceive the world differently and help me to see it as you do, I love all of these things about you. I love *you*, on a very deep level. And though I have set aside the more carnal feelings you arouse in me so that for many years, I would enjoy exploring them with you. While a sexual or romantic relationship is not necessarily deeper or more meaningful than a close friendship, I wonder if you might like to explore those other dimensions with me?"

Guinan's lips curved into a smile. "Jean-Luc, it would be a pleasure. In every sense of the word." She leaned in closer, and he met her half way for a kiss.

End Notes

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