

Parallels

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Summary

Guinan never got to meet Tasha Yar.

But she misses her, nonetheless.

Is it strange to miss someone you've never met?

The personnel photo for Tasha Yar shows a young woman with her hair clipped short. Youth has made her features soft, her face round. She stares straight at the camera with hard blue eyes and lips thinned into a frown, but it doesn't stop her from looking her age: twenty years old, and from the stories Guinan's heard about her, temperamental, impulsive, desperate to please.

The young man at the bar is older now than Tasha will ever be. He wears the pips of a lieutenant, and like all visitors to the Enterprise, he's a little on edge, hyper-aware that he's on the Federation's flagship, that everyone else in Ten-Forward has been deemed the galaxy's best and brightest. That he, perhaps, has not. He hunches his shoulders, darts a glance to Guinan.

"I'm Simon Bolanos," he says, screwing up his courage. "I-I went to the Academy with Tasha Yar."

Of course he did. Guinan studies him, automatically cleaning the dirty glasses left behind by her patrons. Her silence draws him out.

"Did you know her?" he asks.

And although sometimes she thinks she did, somehow, Guinan says, "No."

Tasha's ghost clings tighter to some crewmembers than others.

In Ten-Forward, Guinan stands behind her bar and watches Lieutenant Worf walk in. He isn't meeting anyone. He strides in with a warrior's drive and focus, the same way he walks everywhere, but then he stops. He doesn't take a seat. He stands there, hands clenched into fists, eyes surveying first one table then the next, as if he's not sure where he's welcome.

Riker automatically joins Troi. La Forge automatically joins Data. Troi automatically joins Crusher, and so on in a loop, but Worf is friends with all these people, and yet something keeps him away. He settles by the bar instead, face drawn into a scowl, and lifts his finger.

This time, he wants something stronger than prune juice. He's sipping ale when a gaggle of security officers wander in, wearing the same yellow tunics as Worf, and they sit together without him, without even a second glance.

Tasha worked security too. Guinan knows it from her profile. And Tasha was prickly, defensive, and struggled to make friends — she knows that too, from the vague way certain people talk about her. They talk about her good traits in the most general tones, and grief or more accurately decorum has sanded all of Tasha's warts away. The anger issues. The defiance. The fact that she was an orphan, that her culture demanded toughness from her, and if she didn't rise to the challenge, then she'd better just lay down and die. A life like that can make you unfriendly. It can make you unlikable, strange. It can make you the sort of person who sips ale alone at the bar, with no one to sit next to, blind to the welcoming waves and cheerful hellos behind her, behind him.

Worf, Guinan suspects, wouldn't ignore those warts. Worf, she suspects, would treasure them.

But Worf never speaks of Tasha. He just downs his ale and goes.

Sometimes, when he returns from an away mission, Commander Riker visits Ten-Forward alone.

He smiles to his band, but he doesn't join them. If Counselor Troi is in, he leaves at once. But if she's not there, with her uncanny ability to dip into his mind, then he sidles up to the bar and orders a drink. He does this when the mission goes well, when everyone makes it back safe. When the mission *doesn't* go well, he doesn't leave his quarters at all.

"What'll it be?" Guinan asks him.

"Whiskey," he says.

"You don't care what kind?"

He's not even looking at her — his eyes are pinned to the corner, staring at the wall. "No," he says.

But Guinan doesn't let it go. She gives a thoughtful hum. "I think you do," she says. "Normally, you're pretty adventurous with your drinks. You like to try something strange and new. Exciting. But you know what I've noticed?"

He reluctantly drags his gaze back to her. "What?"

"After away missions, especially dangerous ones, you don't like adventure," says Guinan flatly. "You like cheap whiskey, not synthehol, and you like the kind that gives you a headache in the morning and leaves you nauseous all night."

Riker is still blinking, struggling to defend himself, when Guinan pours him a glass.

"There you go," she says pleasantly. "Worst whiskey in Ten-Forward. I saved it just for you."

"I don't—" Riker hesitates, but he takes the glass. He turns it in half-circles without taking a drink, staring down into it: into his amber reflection, warped by ripples and ice. "I just don't want to be a bother," he says.

"What bothers a bartender is bad taste," says Guinan. She leans on the counter, arms folded, and raises her eyebrows. "Why do you punish yourself if everything went right?"

Riker's face darkens. He stops hesitating; he downs the whiskey in one long swallow, head tipped back. And it really is the worst whiskey in Ten-Forward, so he slams the glass down with a gag, his cheeks flushed red.

"I did warn you," Guinan says.

He almost smiles. But the humor doesn't reach his eyes, and when he lifts a hand to wipe his mouth, he leaves it there, covering his lips with his knuckles, letting his gaze skitter away. Stress lines etch new pathways at the corner of his eyes. He doesn't seem to be breathing — not deeply, anyway — and when Guinan refills his glass, he doesn't notice.

But finally he says, "You didn't know Tasha."

His voice is little more than a whisper. He forces himself to look at her, questioning, like he doesn't know what else to say. Like he wishes he could take it back. So Guinan just shrugs.

"I know she died under your command," she says. "I know you were set to face her in a martial arts competition, but you bet on *her*, not on yourself. Deanna told me that, and Deanna was her closest friend, so I know she told the truth. I know that the same entity that killed her almost killed you. And I know that at her funeral, her holo thanked you for trusting her. Encouraging her."

"Yes," says Riker softly, his eyes strained, "but you didn't know *her*."

Guinan studies him. He looks away, back into the whiskey.

"Sometimes," Guinan says, "I wish I did."

There is a young woman, only twenty years old, who wears her hard past like a cloak over her shoulders. There is a young woman who joined the Enterprise prickling, and defiant, and angry, and desperate to prove how tough she is. A young woman who knows how to fight, who isn't afraid to say so, who walks with her hands clenched into fists and swears she isn't here to make friends.

She's sitting alone in Ten-Forward now, and her name is Ensign Ro.

In the span of a single hour, Guinan watches Ensign Ro launch stinging insults at Dr. Crusher and Counselor Troi — the only crewmen lining up to be her friends. Guinan is standing behind the bar, all ears, when Worf lets his voice carry his derisive opinion about the dishonorable Maquis, the Bajoran freedom fighters, down the canteen straight to Ro's pierced ears. Guinan is there when Commander Riker, beloved for being so easy-going, gives Ro a dressing-down that Captain Picard would be envious of.

Ro revels in it. This is how she wants to be treated. This is how she expects to be treated. This is how she pushes and goads and insults people until they reach their breaking point, to prove to herself that she's right to be guarded, right to distrust.

But Ensign Ro can't see Deanna Troi seated behind her, staring out the viewport with sadness creased across her eyes. Ensign Ro doesn't look up when Worf storms out abruptly, doesn't know where he's headed: to the holodeck, to work out the aggression in a combat holoprogram he hasn't touched since Tasha died. And Ensign Ro doesn't see Commander Riker pacing in his quarters, palms sweating and gut tight, and swearing to himself that no matter what happens he will never let someone so reckless, so defiant, join him on an away

team. Not again.

Not again, the Enterprise thinks. It swells like a deep and calming breath, a singular thought pulsing through every brain on deck. They turn their backs without thinking about it. They protect themselves from grief. They look at Ro's sharp features, her gaunt cheeks and sleek black hair, and tell themselves this is a face they've never seen before, a face they don't like.

Ro meets Guinan's eyes across Ten-Forward and pinches her narrow eyebrows into a glare. In response, Guinan just smiles — gathers her robes in her hands — makes her way to Ro's isolated table in the center of the room and pulls out a chair.

“Am I disturbing you?” she asks.

But what she means to say is:

It's nice to meet you, Tasha. I feel as if I've known you for years.

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