

the simple secret of the plot

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the simple secret of the plot

by [Beatrice Otter](#)

Summary

Then the world discovers as my book ends/How to make two lovers of friends

Notes

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

The lunch rush was over, and Guinan's staff was setting things to right and cleaning around the few lingering stragglers when Picard walked in. He often took lunch later in his shift than most people did to avoid the crowd. "Usual?" she asked.

"Yes, please," Jean-Luc said, heading over to a table near the windows that had already been cleared.

Guinan got his order from the replicator, and a snack for herself, and took them over to the table he'd selected. Neither of them liked to eat alone.

"Thank you," he said, starting in on his Salade Niçoise.

"You're welcome," she said, nibbling on a piece of fruit.

"I'm sorry you didn't like Dixon Hill," Jean-Luc said.

"It was interesting," Guinan said. Not what she would have chosen on her own, but interesting.

"Not all mysteries have that edge of violence and danger," Jean-Luc said, spearing an anchovy. "There's a whole subgenre called the 'cozy mystery,' which are usually quite calm."

"Despite being based around a murder."

"Well, yes," Jean-Luc said, popping the anchovy in his mouth.

"You might be interested in those *now*, I doubt you would have been into those as a young person," Guinan said. The first time he'd met her—though not the first time she'd met him—he'd been young, brash, and mad for adventure. She could see why the excitement of Dixon Hill might have caught his attention then, and she could feel his nostalgic contentment now.

"Oh, I tried—my Maman was not a fan of anything violent—but I found most of them dreadfully dull. I like them better now."

"My people have puzzles, some of them in fiction, but they don't usually involve crime or violence," Guinan said. She spread some cheese on a cracker. "Those things were usually reserved for tragedies."

"Do you have any favorite holodeck programs you'd like to show me?" Jean-Luc asked. "Possibly one of those puzzle stories?"

Guinan popped the cracker in her mouth and chewed it, giving her time to consider how to answer. "My people had technology similar to holodecks," she said at last, "but we used them to create environments, not fiction. Our awareness of other peoples' minds means that it's hard to suspend disbelief when talking to a computer simulation." It was perfectly true, and answered the question without drawing attention to how

much had been lost when the Borg conquered them. No doubt the Borg had copies of every El-Aurian play, somewhere in their databases, if they hadn't discarded them as irrelevant.

"Oh!" Jean-Luc said. "I apologize, I hadn't thought that through. What form of entertainment would you prefer?"

"Oh, I'm fine with holodeck stories," Guinan said, fixing up another cracker. "I always enjoyed play-acting when I was a child, but El-Aurian actors have to be good at projecting emotional states congruent with their characters' feelings at any given moment, and I was never much good at that. But it doesn't matter on the holodeck, with humans; you couldn't perceive any projection I made even if I were a professional actor."

"I see," Jean-Luc said. "And if projecting the right emotions was an important part of acting—and it was difficult to project emotions other than what the actor was genuinely feeling in the moment, which I imagine it would be—that would be another reason why violence wouldn't be a major staple of your entertainment."

"Exactly," Guinan said. "Also, I enjoyed how *you* were enjoying yourself."

He inclined his head. "I'm happy to have entertained you, then," he said. "But there are many programs that both of us would find entertaining, I'm sure. Send me some you like, and I'll try one."

"Okay," Guinan said.

"But I'm sure that there are some things you must miss, as the only one of your people aboard," Jean-Luc said. "If not a holo-novel, perhaps something else?"

Guinan considered. Much of El-Aurian entertainment required either a larger group of people, or mental awareness and projection that nobody else aboard was capable of doing. (Or both.) El-Aurian empathy wasn't like telepathy, and it wasn't like Deanna Troi's abilities, either. "There are some dances for two people," she said. Courting dances, but it wasn't like human pair dances didn't have romantic or sexual signals embedded in them. And Guinan did love to dance.

"Excellent," Jean-Luc said. "I'm sure I'll enjoy it."

"You know, we may be doing things backwards," Guinan said. "As long as we've been friends, we're only just now exploring each others' favorite entertainments?"

Jean-Luc shrugged. "We've seldom been in the same place together for very long, though," he said, "and often under high pressure, which is excellent for forming close bonds and revealing character, but not for revealing one's favorite guilty pleasure."

"Is that what Dixon Hill is?" Guinan asked. "A guilty pleasure?"

Jean-Luc smiled. "Well, it's *certainly* not a hobby I usually bring up with admirals and diplomats."

"I don't know if the dances I have in mind are quite guilty enough," Guinan said, smiling back at him.

"I'm sure I shall enjoy them all the same," Jean-Luc said.

It was fun, dancing with Jean-Luc; he was coordinated and athletic, with a decent sense of rhythm. And if she'd forgotten more than she'd expected and had to fudge here and there, well, there was nobody to care.

El-Aurian courting dances weren't fast-paced, but they *did* require stamina and muscle control as the couple moved through the poses together. By the time they were done with their time in the rec room, Jean-Luc was flushed with the effort. It looked good on him. "That was a different sort of effort than I was expecting," he said. "But I liked it."

"I'm glad," Guinan said. "Thank you. I've missed this." She came to any open dance anyone was having on board, but it was different, dancing as she'd learned to in her youth.

"You're welcome," Jean-Luc said. He paused, considering, and Guinan waited to hear what he had to say.

"It was ... more sensual than I was expecting," he said at last.

"They were courting dances," Guinan said. "The other dances I enjoy need more people. Or more telepathy."

"So your choice of dance was practical, and not a hint?" Jean-Luc asked.

Guinan paused, and thought about it. Jean-Luc was perceptive, given how young he was, and always had been. It was one of the things she liked most about him. And she was viscerally aware of him, after that dance. Not just as a person she liked and admired, but also the physical nearness of him. *Had* she been trying to hint something? "Perhaps a little of both," she admitted.

"Hm," he said, and she could feel *his* awareness of her ... not increase, but relax, perhaps. He was always *very* tightly disciplined in his attentions, whether professional or personal, which she liked about him. But it was ... nice, to feel him let go of that discipline.

She hadn't been planning this (consciously, at any rate), but wouldn't object to seeing where it went.

"Would you care for some coffee?" he asked, diffidently. "It occurs to me that, given your current occupation, you spend a great deal of time waiting upon others, and perhaps you might enjoy being waited upon, for a change."

"Perhaps," she said, matching his tone.

"Would my quarters be an acceptable venue?"

"They would."

Jean-Luc gave her a half-bow and gestured towards the door. Guinan smiled at him, and they walked out together.

End Notes

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