Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Star Trek: The Next Generation
Relationship:	Data/Geordi La Forge
Character:	Geordi La Forge, Data
Additional Tags:	Friends to Lovers
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2023-05-26 Words: 3,364 Chapters: 1/1

Essential To Your Own

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Summary

Data has a proposition for Geordi.

Notes

Written for: colormejaded in the 90s_channel_tv_exchange 2023

In the Star Trek universe, every species name is capitalized: Vulcan, Andorian, Betazoid, Klingon, Bajoran, Cardassian, etc., etc. Therefore, by analogy, "Human" should be capitalized as well.

See the end of the work for more notes

Geordi was staring aimlessly at the warp drive. *Enterprise* was in perfect condition, he was up to date on his reports, and they were in transit through well-charted space, having just finished up with a delicate aid mission, and heading toward a diplomatic conference. Both were important in the grand scheme of things, but neither were the type of mission that asked much of Engineering.

On a quiet shift like this, he'd normally work on a personal project. Most of his people were; a Galaxy-class ship could practically run itself, when you weren't running head-first into a dangerous situation. And it was easier to keep good engineers when you didn't make them do boring busy-work when there wasn't any *real* work to do. Dern was writing a holonovel. T'Hes was working on a puzzle, as always—Geordi had tried one, last year, and it had been *fiendishly* difficult. Mansaray was working on a new intermix chamber design, just for fun, and Geordi dreaded the day she'd get promoted to a desk at Utopia Planitia, where they'd let her experiment with new designs to her heart's content.

Geordi didn't have any projects in progress, and he was drawing a blank on thinking up something he could start. So he was staring at the warp core and trying not to think about *why* he didn't have any projects in progress.

"Geordi?"

"Yeah, Data?" Geordi said absently.

"You seem preoccupied. Is anything the matter?" Data's voice was warm and attentive, as it always was.

"Not really," Geordi said. "Nothing major. Just feeling a little down." Though he felt a little better that Data had noticed something was off. The android was a keen student of human behavior, and he'd made a particular study of Geordi.

"Because of Lieutenant Ortuno's departure?"

Geordi shrugged. "Sort of. Not really. We both knew it was going to be short-lived, and it was fun while it lasted. But even if we had more time, I don't think it would have turned into anything serious."

"If you are not missing Lieutenant Ortuno, then … may I ask what is causing your distress?"

"I don't know if I'd say it's serious enough to qualify as 'distress,'" Geordi said. "Mostly, I was just feeling a little sorry for myself. Even knowing it wasn't going to last, I enjoy romance. Partnering up with someone and getting all wrapped up in them, and them in me. And there's just not that much opportunity for that on the *Enterprise*, not for me. There's none of the regular crew interested in me that I'd want to date, and we don't get new crew that often. I always knew the dating pool on a starship was pretty small, but when I was first posted here, I figured, with

a crew of a thousand, surely there would be *somebody* for me, and … there wasn't. Unless a miracle happens, all I'm gonna get for the next several years is the occasional fling."

"I am sorry to hear that," Data said. "You have previously mentioned a regret at your lack of romantic prospects, but I had not realized it was this serious."

Geordi waved a hand. "My life is pretty good, Data, don't worry about it. I love my job, I have a lot of good friends here on the ship—especially you—and I wouldn't want to change any of that. It's just this one aspect of things that isn't ideal." He didn't like dwelling on things he couldn't change—what was the point?—and honestly, he loved his life, all things considered. "So, what were you up to while I was busy with Amya?"

Data regarded him thoughtfully, and Geordi could tell that he didn't quite believe him. But Data was usually pretty good at respecting when you didn't want to talk about something, and so he gamely listed off all the things he'd done in his off-duty hours. Much of it Geordi already knew at least a little about; wrapped up in a girlfriend or not, *Enterprise* was a small ship and everyone heard about everything eventually. But as always, Data had an interesting perspective. Right now, he was working as set designer and props person for Doctor Crusher's latest play, and Geordi didn't know much about the theater but Data had some interesting ideas about symbolism that he'd worked into it, and by the time he was done explaining, it was time for shift change.

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Six months later, Geordi had pretty much forgotten about that conversation, and only rarely thought about Amya. He was caught off-guard when Data brought it up out of the blue.

"Geordi," Data said after their shift was over one day, "would you like to go to the holodeck together tomorrow? As a date?"

That stopped Geordi in his tracks, and he closed his mouth on the automatic 'yes' he'd been about to say. "I didn't know you were thinking about dating again," he said noncommittally. "After how things went with Jenna."

"I believe that relationship was what one might call 'a learning experience.' I did learn a great deal, although I regret how it ended."

The turbolift doors opened and they entered. There were already three others in it, so Geordi let the conversation lapse.

He got off on Deck Two, with Data, heading for Data's quarters. When they got there Spot yowled at Data to complain about his having been gone all day, and rubbed around his ankles while ignoring Geordi, which was a comforting bit of normality in a day which had suddenly taken a turn for the unexpected.

Geordi ordered juice from the replicator while Data cuddled with his pet. *That could be you*, a traitorous voice in the back of Geordi's mind said. Which was interesting, because he hadn't thought cuddling with Data was something he was missing. Or was it just long enough since he'd had a partner that anyone was starting to look good?

Geordi set that aside to think about later. But it was good to remember, watching Data and Spot, that although Data had no inherent biological need or desire for the sort of touching and companionship that Humans did, he genuinely enjoyed caring for Spot. Geordi knew what it looked like when Data was doing something merely because Humans did it, but got no innate satisfaction out of it. (The relationship with Jenna D'Sora had been one of those times.) This wasn't that. Data cared about Spot, and enjoyed spending time caring for Spot, and spent much more time thinking about Spot than was necessary for responsible pet ownership.

It was easy to remember that Data wasn't Human—if nothing else, Data would remind you if you forgot. But being an android didn't mean Data didn't care, didn't genuinely desire companionship and relationships with other living things. It wasn't just programming and logic.

"You have said that you would prefer to be in a relationship, and regretted the fact that there were no prospects on *Enterprise*," Data said. "It has occurred to me that a romantic relationship between us would be beneficial for both of us. I understand if my request to change the nature of our relationship seems sudden, Geordi. I assure you that if you choose to turn me down, I will understand and will not be offended."

"Of all the concerns I have, Data, *that* isn't one of them." Geordi sometimes thought that Data should be *more* willing to be offended by the way other people treated him, because he sometimes let himself be taken advantage of and rarely objected to being hurt for the convenience and bigotry of others. The chances of Data holding something against him—unless he did something monumentally and calculatedly cruel—were so small as to be nonexistent. Which was actually a reason to be cautious. No matter what happened, if they tried this and it didn't work out, Data would assume that all the fault was his. Even if it wasn't.

"Then what are your concerns?" Data asked.

Geordi sighed and headed over to the couch, sitting in his usual spot. "Walk me through this, Data. Why do you want a relationship? Why now? Why me?"

"You are my best friend," Data said, sitting down just enough further away than normal to be noticeable. "If a romantic relationship entails being wrapped up in another being for an extended period, there is no one I would rather be focused on. And, as I said, I believe I have learned enough since my relationship with Jenna to not make the same mistakes."

"You know," Geordi said, "looking back on that, I think we all made some mistakes. And one of them was, we were all worried about Jenna getting hurt, but nobody was worried about *you* getting hurt. What she wanted … she had this idea of the perfect partner, and she wanted you to *be* that. Instead of accepting you for who you are, and figuring out what an honest and real relationship between the two of you would look like. And that's not a good way to run a healthy relationship, for either of you."

Data cocked his head. "That did occur to me, after the fact; I spent some time comparing my analysis of our time together with standard relationship counseling advice, and realized that there were fundamental imbalances in our respective goals and wishes which were major contributing factors to the way things played out, and which would have been damaging forces even if the immediate issues which ended the relationship did not exist. However, we both had reasons for beginning a relationship that had little to do with the other person involved: she believed that I could fulfill her fantasy of the 'perfect man,' and I wanted to experience what it was like to be in a relationship, and did not pay enough attention to who I wanted to be in a relationship *with*, or what sort of relationship I wanted."

"Neither of those are good reasons for starting a relationship," Geordi said.

"In some respects, no," Data said. "However, I have observed people who have made successful relationships work that started with less substance, and other cases that did not last despite a stronger foundation. You yourself have started relationships merely because you were lonely and wanted company and the person was available and willing."

"My dating history isn't necessarily the greatest," Geordi pointed out. "I wouldn't hold it up as something to be *emulated*."

"Still, you can hardly object to *me* trying something that you yourself have done," Data said.

Rather than respond to that directly, Geordi backed up and asked about the reason he'd given. "Data, are you lonely?"

Data paused. "I am not lonely at present; I find my friendships here on *Enterprise* generally satisfy my needs for companionship. However, I am aware that our service together on this ship cannot continue indefinitely. When some or all of us are reassigned, the chances of me being assigned to a post where I will be accepted and befriended as I have been here are small. While I believe that the friendships among *Enterprise*'s command staff are strong enough to survive when we are inevitably separated, that is not the same thing. In particular, my life would be greatly lessened if you were not a daily part of it. I hope that we will always be together, regardless of what form that takes."

Geordi smiled. "Me too, Data; me too."

"Thank you, Geordi," Data said. "If we were to begin a relationship, and that relationship lasted long enough to formally declare to Starfleet, it would greatly increase the chances of our being stationed together in the future."

"That's a good point," Geordi said. He wasn't as awkward as Data was, and he didn't face the same sort of stigma that Data did, so he wasn't afraid of having to make new friends. But every Starfleet officer knew the pain of being stationed in a new place far from your friends and loved ones and having to build up new connections from scratch. Taking your family with you helped with that … but only for the people who already had families that could and would go with them. "But I don't know that it's a good enough reason to try for a romantic relationship. What would you be getting out of it that you don't already get from our friendship, besides a chance at a posting together in the future? I mean, I know you want to be Human, but is that a good enough reason? It's not like you're going to fall in love."

"Humans form long-term romantic and sexual relationships for many reasons," Data said. "Not all human cultures have romantic love as a concept, and not all humans from the dominant culture experience romantic or sexual attraction. Moreover, even humans who *do* experience romantic attraction may form relationships for reasons other than romance: companionship, sexual compatibility, child-rearing, shared domestic labor, legal protections, cultural compatibility, and many more. If Humans can form relationships for reasons other than being in love, I do not see why I should not be able to do so. I wish to be in a long-term relationship with you; I believe it would be beneficial to both of us."

"All right," Geordi said. "Besides keeping my best friend with me when, in the distant future, we get reassigned, why would it benefit me? It might mean that I wouldn't have the opportunity to start a relationship with someone I was attracted to." He paused. "Assuming you want monogamy, that is." Geordi was pretty thoroughly monogamous, himself.

Data cocked his head. "Have you ever considered whether you are attracted to me?"

Geordi floundered a bit. *Had* he? Data had seemed so naïve when they first met, younger than you'd expect for his rank, and Geordi had never been into younger people. By the time Geordi had realized his mistake, Data had firmly been in the mental box marked 'friend.' "Not really," he admitted.

"Perhaps you should consider it," Data said. "I do not mean to pressure you, or prevent you from forming a fulfilling relationship with someone else should you choose to do so; but I also do not wish you to dismiss the idea out of hand."

Geordi thought back to that moment when he'd imagined Data cuddling with him. "Maybe I should consider it," he said in bemusement.

"As to monogamy, I would prefer it," Data said. "I find myself … unsatisfied, when you are in a relationship with someone else and, as you describe it, wrapped up in them. I miss you, even though you are still here."

"You're jealous," Geordi said with a smile. It's not that jealousy was a *good* thing, but … he hadn't realized Data felt that strongly about him. For anyone else, what Data described would have been tepid and lackluster. But for Data, it was practically a declaration of undying love. And if hearing that Data loved him made him feel this warm and happy, maybe he needed to take a closer look at his *own* feelings.

"Jealousy might be too strong a word," Data said, "as I do not experience emotions. And I have no wish to prevent you from having fulfilling relationships with others. But I confess I prefer it when I am not coming second place in your attention."

"Okay," Geordi said. "So what is it, exactly, that you want? What would it look like, if we were in a romantic relationship? How would it be different from our friendship now? We already spend a lot of time together."

"Physical intimacy would obviously be one factor," Data said. "In addition to sex, you are much more tactile with your partners than with your friends, and I would be pleased to share greater intimacy with you. Aside from that aspect, I have analyzed our relationship and concluded that we already fulfill many of the standard marks of dating—the amount of time spent together and mutual focus on each other, for example. The

key differences would then be of intent, not form."

"About sex," Geordi said, "I know you're fully functional, but do you enjoy it?"

"I do not have a sex drive, but I find intercourse to be a positive sensation," Data said. "In addition, there is the satisfaction of having pleased my partner."

Geordi couldn't help remarking on that. "You're good at … pleasing people then?"

"I am," Data said. "My programming in technique is very thorough, and I am able to notice and respond to physical cues with a high degree of sensitivity."

"I see," Geordi said, and he *did* see—he bet Data approached sex with the same attentiveness and compassion he applied to everything. To be the focus of that attention … would probably be quite something. He got a bit distracted by that, for a bit.

"I do not expect an answer immediately," Data said.

"Good," Geordi said. "Because I have a lot to think about."

"If you had no interest in a romantic relationship with me, you would not need time to think," Data said. "Therefore, I conclude that there is a chance you will say yes."

"Yeah," Geordi said. "I'll let you know."

He went back to his quarters and took his VISOR off, putting it carefully in its place and feeling himself relax as the overwhelming visual input ended. He laid down on his sofa to think. Given his spotty dating history, he'd done the initial falling in love and getting to know someone stage a lot, but he and Data already *knew* each other. They'd be jumping straight into the deep waters of being with someone you knew intimately, which Geordi didn't actually have much experience of. He and Data could figure out what that meant together. Even if it didn't work out he had faith that they could go back to being friends with no hard feelings on either side. There wasn't really any risk to trying, was there?

He could see himself with Data, though, was the thing. He could imagine growing old with Data at his side. He could imagine having kids with Data, if they both decided they wanted them—Data was great with kids. Maybe he'd want to try building another android, again, if they could figure out what went wrong with Lal, and how to ensure that any other androids were treated as people, not property.

Geordi spent some time imagining various scenarios of what their life together might be like, and all of them felt good. He was leaning towards saying yes, he realized.

"This is crazy," he said out loud. "How long have I known Data, and we're only just *now* thinking about this?"

He shook his head and got up to pace along the wall that didn't have furniture, one hand dragging along the wall to keep himself oriented. "Guess that just leaves sex, then," he said. If their sex life wasn't going to be fulfilling, that would be a major problem that Geordi wasn't sure could be overcome. Data might have all the moves, but if Geordi wasn't interested, that wasn't going to matter. "Time for some preliminary research," Geordi said.

He walked into his bedroom, undressed, and got into bed to consider the question of whether sex with Data might be something he'd be interested in.

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Some time later, Geordi pulled himself together enough to clean up. He was *definitely* interested in Data. That had been a *very* successful experiment, and he was looking forward to recreating it with a partner.

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"So, Data," Geordi said the next day at lunch. Data was on the bridge this shift, but they often met in Ten Forward for lunch. "What did you have in mind for tonight?"

Data gave him a pleased look. "I have found a new series of holodeck mysteries I that might be the right mix of challenging and entertaining. I thought we might start with dinner, and then a mystery." He paused. "After that, we might return to your quarters for dessert."

Geordi lowered his voice. "Or … *dessert*."

"Indeed," Data said.

"I look forward to it," Geordi said, and smiled.

End Notes

At <u>AO3</u>. On <u>Dreamwidth</u>. On <u>tumblr</u>. On <u>Squidgeworld</u>. On <u>Pillowfort</u>.

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