Rating:	[General Audiences](#)
Archive Warning:	[No Archive Warnings Apply](#)
Category:	[M/M](#)
Fandom:	[Star Trek: The Next Generation](#)
Relationship:	[Data/Geordi La Forge](#)
Character:	[Data](#), [Geordi La Forge](#)
Additional Tags:	[Alternate Universe - Soulmates](#), [TNG S04E03: Brothers](#)
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2021-02-22 Words: 8,453 Chapters: 1/1

open your heart knowing

by [Beatrice_Otter](#)

Summary

Geordi had no idea what his soulmark meant, until he saw Data's manual.

Notes

Written for eafy70 in Black Is Beautiful 2021

Yes, I know that the show implies that Data had never played poker before he played it with the senior officers, but given how common poker is in Starfleet, I am disregarding that.

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

Geordi had always known his soulmark was a little unusual. For one thing, it was on his back, and most humans had their soulmark in a place where they could see it themselves without a mirror. For another, it wasn't a word or symbol anyone recognized. Instead, it was a semi-regular pattern of dots.

"Maybe they're stars," his mother said, when he was about twelve. Geordi and his sister Ariana had just come back from a day at the beach on the holodeck with the few other kids aboard, and he'd been complaining that nobody had a weird mark like his.

"That makes sense," his dad said, "he spends enough time among them." Dad's latest research project had ended a few weeks ago and his next one would take a few months to organize, so in the meantime all four of them were together on Mom's ship, and the two of them were curled up together on the couch, doing paperwork for their respective jobs.

Geordi looked at his parents sitting cozily together and debated whether he were too old to join them and snuggle as he did his homework. They weren't together as a family all that often, and he had to take his chances where he found them. He decided regretfully that he probably *was* too old to snuggle like a little kid, but then decided he didn't care. He grabbed a PADD with his schoolwork on it and flopped down on top of his parents. It took some squirming around but they found a configuration everyone was comfortable with. But instead of doing his homework, Geordi thought about his mark some more.

"If they're stars, does that mean I'm going to meet my soulmate in space?"

"Maybe," his mom said. "You do spend enough time out here. And you're planning to go into Starfleet, and there are never enough officers who are truly good with extended deep space missions to fill all the posts that need them, so the chance of you getting posted to a starbase or planet are pretty low."

"Could be the constellation you'll be in when you meet them," Dad said. "Or maybe they're not human, and their species has different patterns of soulmarks, and they're not stars at all. Don't get too hung up on any one explanation, Geordi; speculation is fun, but with an unusual mark like yours, you don't want to rule anything out."

"Yeah, okay," Geordi said, and turned his attention to his schoolwork. They'd just gotten their first real look at the schematics for an antimatter reactor—not a toy version dumbed down for kids, but with the *real intermix formulas*, and he'd never seen anything so fascinating in all his life. Much more interesting than any *soulmate*, and anyway, he probably had *years* before he was going to meet them.

At the Academy he learned that unusual soulmarks were more common in Starfleet than in the rest of the Federation. "It does not, however,

mean that your soulmate is necessarily of a different species," the instructor said. It was a one-credit basic orientation class that everyone had to take first semester, and the instructor was a bored lieutenant commander waiting for their next assignment.

They droned on. "A higher than average percentage of Starfleet personnel marry outside their species, but anomalous or unusual soulmarks are just as frequently a reflection of the weird things Starfleet ships encounter. You'll be changed by them, your soulmate will be changed by them, your mark reflects that. *Don't* use your time in the service as an opportunity to go alien-fucking in search of your soulmate. If you screw something up, your superior officer is *not* going to care if you met your soulmate, and they're *definitely* not going to cut you any slack because you think you *might* meet them."

"It's *amazing* how they manage to make 'alien soulmates' boring," the cadet next to Geordi said quietly.

"Yeah." Geordi didn't need to take notes, of course, the class wasn't for a grade and there were no tests, but that left him plenty of time to wonder. *Could* his soulmate be another human, just a fellow officer changed by their service? He'd sort of assumed that it was probably someone from another species.

It didn't really matter, though, he thought, as the instructor switched to another topic. Geordi was only just starting his career, he wouldn't be ready to settle down for years yet. There was time to figure it all out.

Geordi was overjoyed to be assigned to the *Enterprise*, especially as a bridge officer—the flagship of the fleet was a plum position, especially for someone who'd only just transferred from engineering track to command track. (Starfleet had just come out with a really stupid policy where starships would have multiple chief engineers and the first officer would be in ultimate control—something about promoting flexibility and depth of experience—and Geordi wasn't the only engineer junior enough to switch tracks who'd seen it in the works and transferred out to avoid being stuck in the confusion. His mom said it wouldn't last and he should stick it out, but if it didn't last, he could always transfer *back* to Engineering, once the whole mess was over.)

Which was why he was surprised to be called to Engineering a week after they headed out from Farpoint Station.

"You wanted to see me, sir?" he asked Commander MacDougal, who probably would have been Chief Engineer if the Enterprise had *had* one.

"Yes, Mister LaForge, come in," MacDougal said, gesturing for him to enter the chief engineer's office. "I've been looking over your transcripts, it's a pity we've lost you to command. Anyone can sit at conn, but good engineers are harder to find."

"That's kind of you to say, sir," Geordi said, and it was, but he wasn't going to transfer back to Engineering willingly, not with the state things were in at the moment. Of the three who shared the status of "chief engineer" depending on which shift it happened to be, MacDougal was great and Argyle wasn't bad, but Logan was a real jerk. Geordi had heard some nasty rumors that there was already the beginnings of a turf war going on, and he had *no* intention of getting in the middle of it.

"As you know, we're a bit short-handed, given that so many promising officers such as yourself have transferred out of Engineering track," MacDougal said. "This isn't unique to *Enterprise*, unfortunately, so it won't be getting better any time soon. I don't suppose there's any way to get you to transfer *back* to Engineering?"

"Not under the present circumstances, Ma'am," Geordi said, honestly. "Not voluntarily."

"Hm," she said. "That being the case, there are some duties that would normally fall under the purview of Engineering, that we simply do not have enough trained people to manage. So we're farming them out."

"Really?" Geordi said, surprised. Years of listening to his mother talk about intra-ship politics and the ways in which various departments protected their duties and prerogatives and honors had taught him that the *last* thing she should want was to lessen the power of her department by giving away responsibility like that. On the other hand, they really *didn't* have enough people … and it was a way to keep everyone who'd transferred out still tied to Engineering in some way. "What do you have in mind for me? It would have to be something that didn't interfere with my bridge duty."

"It shouldn't," she said. "What do you think of Mister Data?"

"Data?" Geordi shrugged. "He's a nice guy. Bit naïve. Good at his job."

"You don't mind working with him as a fellow officer?"

"Nah," Geordi said. "Honestly, he's easier to work with than some organic beings I know, and like I said, he's good at his job."

"Excellent," she said, and handed him a PADD. "You're in charge of maintenance and repair, if he ever needs something he can't do himself."

"What do you mean?" Geordi asked.

"If he were biological, and got injured, he'd go to sickbay," MacDougal said brusquely. "But he's not. What could Doctor Crusher do for him? Not much. Any engineering technician will know more about how his systems work than a nurse or doctor. But his systems are beyond cutting edge, they're *bleeding* edge. I want someone thoroughly familiar with them, inside and out, *before* the first time he needs help."

"Sir, my specialty is warp cores," Geordi said, "not cybernetics or positronics."

MacDougal shrugged. "You can learn. And you work next to him, and you seem to respect him as an officer and a person, and not just a piece of equipment, which means I can probably trust you with him. Dismissed."

It *was* fascinating reading, and Geordi'd wanted a peek at how Data worked since the moment he'd heard about him. It was a bit odd to know

so much about a fellow officer's construction, but then he realized that it was no different from what a doctor or nurse would know about Geordi's own construction.

And then he got to the section on Data's brain, that positronic net. There were pictures and diagrams. The pictures were interesting, but it wasn't until about the third or fourth diagram that Geordi stopped, stared, squinted at the PADD as if that would make the image change, and swore. He looked at the diagram for a while. Then he brought up a picture of his soulmark for comparison.

It was a perfect match.

It took Geordi a while to figure out what to do. He'd never thought that his soulmate might be a superior officer. They weren't directly in the same chain of command—Data wasn't writing Geordi's evaluations—but it was still awkward. And while Geordi was *great* with anything with engines, that didn't transfer to the sort of social skills that were useful in asking a superior officer out on a date. (Did he *want* to date an android?) Finally, he decided to just be direct.

After shift the next day, he got on the same turbolift car as Data and waited until they were the only two on it. "Hey, Commander Data, could you come to my quarters for a bit? I'd like to talk with you."

"Regarding what subject?" Data asked.

"You'll see when we get to my quarters."

"Lieutenant," Data said, tilting his head, "you should know that I do not appreciate practical jokes and will put you on report if it turns out to be one."

"No!" Geordi said, horrified. He'd never thought of that, but he could only imagine what 'pranks' the worst type of person would try to play on someone as isolated and awkward as Data. "No prank. It's just … personal," Geordi said. "I'd rather wait until we had some quiet space to talk."

"Very well," Data said.

They got off the turbolift at the right deck, and Geordi led the way to his quarters. "I've tried to come up with a good way to say this, and haven't figured anything out," Geordi said once they were inside. "So I'm just going to say it. I'd like to show you my soulmark."

"May I ask why?" Commander Data said, polite as always. "I understand that to be a private thing, for adult humans."

"Yeah, well, I think you'll understand once you see," Geordi said, unzipping the top of his jumpsuit and shrugging out of the top half. He turned around.

There was an unnerving silence. Geordi fought the urge to turn around and look at Data, see his face.

"That appears to be a diagram of my positronic net," Data said.

"That's what I thought when I saw the diagram," Geordi said. "I always knew it was odd, of course, but I didn't think I'd stumble across it in an engineering manual." He pulled the top half of his uniform back on and turned around.

Data was frowning. "I do not have a soulmark," he said. "Unreciprocated marks are rare, in humans; could it be that your match is my creator, Doctor Noonian Soong?"

Geordi shrugged. "I thought of that, and looked him up. Even if he weren't dead, I don't think so." He'd never had a thing for older men (or women), and also, he'd read some of the man's journal articles and the news reports about him. Assuming they got any of his personality right, the man was a bit of a jerk, and Geordi had never been attracted to jerks, either.

"I am sorry that I cannot reciprocate," Data said. "I will follow your wishes in this matter."

"Well, we've only just met," Geordi said. "We barely know each other. Even if it were reciprocal, it usually takes a while to get to know one another and fall in love." He wasn't thrilled that his soulmate didn't have emotions, but was it any worse than having a soulmate who was a Vulcan, really? "So, do you have emotions?"

"No, I do not," Data said. "Although my programming and construction are superior to humans in many respects, I do not have the capacity to experience emotions. I would give a great deal to be able to experience emotions as humans do."

"But, Data," Geordi said, "isn't *wanting* something an emotion?" He was a warp drive engineer, not a psychologist or neurobiologist, but the debates around artificial intelligence and sentience and computers was centuries old, and you couldn't be *any* kind of engineer without knowing *something* about them. And he was pretty sure that having preferences was the basis for emotional states.

Data hesitated. "I am using a colloquial definition of emotions common among humans, rather than a precise technical one. I have many preferences and wishes, some of which were programmed into me, others of which I have developed on my own. And you are correct in that those count as emotions in the technical sense. But compared to most sentient species' emotions, they are muted and inflexible. I do not experience emotional 'highs' and 'lows' due to circumstances I encounter; I rarely form new preferences, and have *never* discarded an old one. My emotional state, such as it is, is monotonous in the extreme. And it is subordinated to and subdued by the rest of my programming and subroutines. You will undoubtedly find me cold and unfeeling; most people do." His voice was warm, and gentle, and there was a tinge of regret in it.

"Really?" Geordi said, frowning. "You don't sound cold or unfeeling to *me*."

"I am adept at mimicking certain social cues," Data said, "and have subroutines for determining the proper 'tone' to convey my meaning. But, as I said, I do not experience emotions as humans do, and mimicking a tone of voice does not mean the underlying emotional state matches what humans wish or feel comfortable with."

"That sounds like a problem on the humans' part, not on yours," Geordi said. "Anyone who can't adapt to dealing with someone who thinks and feels differently than they expect shouldn't be in Starfleet."

"Perhaps," Data said, "but if all those who cannot do so were removed from the service, there would be exceedingly few left."

Geordi frowned, not liking that but unable to argue with it.

"Also, most people find me very pedantic and boring," Data said.

"I can see that," Geordi admitted, "but so far you've been talking about yourself and your programming, and I think you're fascinating. I bet *engineers* don't find you boring."

"Unfortunately, it is often the case," Data said. "Many engineers would rather talk *about* me or *to* me than *with* me, and are unhappy when I correct or contradict them."

"I'm sorry," Geordi said. "That's terrible of them. I'll try to do better than *that*, at least."

"Thank you," Data said.

"Anyway, you shouldn't assume things are going to go badly before they start," Geordi said. "Not all soulmate relationships work out, but most do … and if there wasn't a real possibility things would work out, I wouldn't have your positronic net on my back."

Data's face brightened. "This is true. I shall factor that into my calculations and assessments, going forward." He cocked his head. "Do you wish for a sexual relationship? I am fully functional in that regard."

Geordi shifted, a little uncomfortable to have it stated that baldly. "Data, do *you* want a sexual relationship?"

Data cocked a head. "Sexual contact often increases positive social bonds between humanoids. In addition, many humans require regular sexual contact for optimum mental and emotional health, and intercourse with a soulmate is particularly beneficial. I would estimate that that would be especially true when the soulmate in question is unable to reciprocate any emotional attachment."

"So, what, you think it would be good for me?" Geordi shook his head. "That wasn't what I asked. Sure, I like sex, and it makes me happy when I have it regularly with someone I like, but a lot of things make me happy, and I'm fine without it, too. The question is, why would *you* want it? You don't have a sex drive, I'm pretty sure, or if you do it isn't in your manual."

"A sex drive is only one reason out of many to have sex," Data said. "A desire for positive social bonds, a desire to experience diverse sensation or experiment, a desire to please one's companions—"

Geordi listened to his list, and thought about 'a desire for positive social bonds' coming from a guy who'd had so many problems with bullies that he would assume there was a possibility that a *subordinate* might try to play a dirty trick on him. He really didn't like the way that sounded. On the other hand … Data was an adult, possibly the smartest person in the entire fleet, and *definitely* the strongest, with enough interpersonal skills to be appointed second officer on the flagship of the fleet. Geordi wasn't going to assume he was too innocent or too stupid to manage his own sex life.

"Okay, there are a lot of reasons to have sex even if you don't have a sex drive," he said when Data finished his list. "But I don't tend to jump into bed with people quickly, I like to get to know them first. And I'd feel weird if it was just something you were doing for me, and not something *you* wanted for your own reasons." Besides, if he *did* fall in love with Data, he was pretty sure that having sex knowing Data didn't love him would be worse than staying celibate. "I mean, if *you* develop a preference for sex with me, and not just because you think I need it, that's one thing. But … honestly, even if you were human I'd want time to get to know you before we started getting physically intimate."

"Very well," Data said. "What do you suggest?"

"Well, what do you do for fun?" Geordi said. "How do you spend your off-duty hours?"

"I often work two shifts, one on the bridge and another in the science labs or engineering, as I do not need to sleep," Data said. "I sometimes have personal research or projects related to missions we have served. I take art classes or play in musical ensembles, if such things are available."

"What instrument do you play?" Geordi asked.

"Any one I wish," Data said. "I do not have to develop 'muscle memory' in order to play an instrument with a high degree of accuracy; learning technique is simple. It is an avenue for social contact where the relations are highly structured and my presence is beneficial to the group. Similarly, if there is a gaming group which will allow me to participate, I often do so."

"Sports?" Geordi asked.

"Competitive sports are counterproductive, because in any contest of speed, strength, or skill, I will win easily unless I deliberately choose not to. It is not pleasurable for my opponents. Also, I have a cat named Spot."

"You know, I had a Circassian cat when I was a kid," Geordi said. "His name was Alexi—my family moved around a lot, and it was good to have a companion who was always with me no matter where I ended up. I'd like to meet Spot."

"I doubt you would find it pleasurable," Data said. "Spot likes me, but she is very picky with her affections and quick to show displeasure or mistrust."

"Maybe she'll just need time to get used to me," Geordi said. "Sometimes, with animals, taking the time to prove you're trustworthy and they can relax around you makes a big difference."

"That is possible," Data said, "and it would be interesting to experiment. That might be one variable in her preference for me; I am very patient."

"I bet."

"What do you like to do with your free time?"

"Right now, I'm still getting settled in, getting to know the ship and crew," Geordi said. "I like to play card games, but I'm not picky about which one; board games are okay, if I have friends who like them. I don't care for things like chess that are too straightforwardly easy to brute-force solutions to—I spend all my time thinking I could program a computer to play it and do a better job than I could."

"With chess, you would not need to program the computer to do it," Data said. "Most human-designed computers have a chess engine built in, both because historically playing chess was one of the early tests of machine intelligence, and because humans like to play and sometimes require a computer partner."

"Exactly!" Geordi said. "What's the point? Anyway, I'm not into sports much, but I like to go to the beach and hang out, and I like to swim. And I like certain kinds of puzzles, and some holonovels. I like a lot of things, really, I'm pretty easy-going. I'm not very musical or artistic, I'm afraid."

"Many humans are not," Data said. "I gain satisfaction from my artistic endeavors, but I gain satisfaction from many things. Primarily, they are opportunities to build and maintain social bonds, and to experience an aspect of humanity to the extent that it is possible."

They talked about hobbies and social pursuits and common interests, and Geordi felt a lot better about the whole thing. Data was strange— well, normal for himself, but different from humans—but they had a lot in common, and Data was interesting to talk to. The rest would come, or it wouldn't. Eventually, Geordi excused himself to go eat and sleep. (Data, it turned out, *could* eat, but didn't need to, and didn't gain any sort of aesthetic satisfaction from taste, and so generally didn't bother.)

The next day, before his shift, Geordi called his mom to give her the news. (His dad was stationed on a planet-side research base, and operating on local time instead of the Federation Standard that Starfleet ships kept, and it was night for him.)

His mom listened to him with a slight frown as he told her all about Data and their talk. "Well," she said at last, "it's nothing anybody could have predicted, but I find I'm not surprised that if anybody could be soulmates with an android, it would be you. And it sounds like you like him, which is good. I'm worried that it's not reciprocal, of course, and that he won't be able to love you in the same way you love him, but … it sounds like you might do well together anyway."

"He does *have* emotions, of a sort," Geordi said, "that's what preferences *are*, when you get right down to it. The larval form of them, anyway. I wonder if we encourage them, if he could develop something more like human emotions?" It was something he'd thought about, as he drifted off to sleep, and he'd woken with a sort of half-formed plan that he'd have to do research on before suggesting.

"If he wants emotions as much as you say he does, and it was that simple, he'd have done it himself," Mom said. "He's had enough time to experiment with such things that he's no doubt tried the obvious stuff. And even if he hadn't, Geordi, you can't get into any sort of relationship with someone on the basis of wanting to change them. Even if they genuinely want to change! It's a recipe for disaster. If you can't accept him and love him as he is, you'll both be better off without each other."

"Right," Geordi said, chagrined.

"I'm sure you'll work it out," she said, "but both of us have shifts starting soon. I love you."

"Love you too, Mom," Geordi said.

He was really glad nothing interesting happened, next shift; they were just cruising through space to get to their next assignment. He was, if possible, even more distracted than he'd been since he figured out Data was his soulmate. Now he'd actually had a long conversation with the guy. What did they do next? Schedule a game night? If Data'd been a human, Geordi would know what sort of romantic things to start planning. If he'd been an alien, Geordi could have started researching what cultural stuff would be appropriately romantic. But Data didn't *have* a culture, it was just him.

Was Data even *interested* in romance? Geordi could take it or leave it, and he guessed he'd be leaving it. But what did that leave? Game nights? That sounded fun, but Geordi had had a lot of game nights with friends, and it felt like he should have something more special than that for his *soulmate*, for crying out loud.

He got through his shift, but it was a good thing it was just a standard watch.

When it was over, he followed Data to the turbolift and they ended up with the car to themselves. "I wish to assure you that I have not told anyone that I am your soulmate, nor will I do so without your permission."

"What?" Geordi stared blankly at Data. "Where's this coming from?"

"I noted that your fidgeting had increased today, along with other symptoms of unease, and have been attempting to ascertain the most probable reasons for it, given that meeting a soulmate is traditionally seen as a source of joy and happiness in most human cultures. However, there is also a long history of stories in which engineers fall in love with their creations, and those are virtually always either comedies in which the engineer is ridiculous, or tragedies."

"So, what, you think I'm ashamed of you, or worried about what other people will think?" Geordi asked. "I'm not, by the way, I've already told my mom and will be calling my dad within the next few days, whenever our schedules line up. They'll be fine, and so will my sister. And if other people give me grief over it, it'll just prove that they're bigots who can't see you as a person. In other words, not the sort of person whose opinion I care about."

"Then may I ask why you were uneasy?"

Geordi shrugged. "I like to know what I'm doing. I like road maps, and clear expectations. I mean, when I'm designing something new or running an experiment, that's one thing, but in my social life I like to know what I'm getting into. If you were a human, I'd know. If you were an alien, I could research your culture, and again, I'd know. But there *isn't* any tradition or cultural expectation with you. We're doing something new. I want this to work, and once we get to know each other, I'm sure things will be fine. It's just getting there I'm worrying about."

"Then the obvious solution is to get to know one another quickly," Data said. "Unfortunately, I have a prior commitment tonight. However, I believe there is an open poker game tomorrow at 0900 in Ten Forward, if you are interested and available."

"Sure," Geordi said.

He did manage to call his dad the next morning before shift, and told him the news.

"An *android*?" Dad sagged back in his chair, frowning. "Huh. That's one I hadn't considered."

"Neither had I," Geordi said.

"Do you like him?" Dad asked.

"Yeah," Geordi said. "I mean, I don't understand him, yet—he thinks a lot differently than you or I do, and he's as complicated as any person is. He *is* a person, his own person."

"Well, of course he's a person," Dad said. "And at least you *know* you can't make any assumptions. Too many people think that just because they've met their soulmate everything will be easy and they won't have to work at getting to know them and building a solid relationship. And then they get into trouble because they assume too much and *don't* actually know their partner at all. You don't have that illusion; maybe it'll be a good thing."

"I guess," Geordi said. He always *had* kind of thought that you met your soulmate and everything fell into place.

"I knew from the time you were little that there wasn't much I could teach you," Dad said. "You were always far more like your mother than like me, especially once you started getting fascinated with engines. But I thought at least I might have some relationship advice for you along the way. I don't know what to say about dating an android, though."

"You know, just the reassurance that everybody has to work at it helped," Geordi said.

"It's true!" Dad said. "Although, it will be a bit easier for you than it was for your mother and I, because your specialties are close enough it will be easy to find postings together that suit both your careers."

"I hadn't thought of it that way, but you're right," Geordi said. He glanced at the chrono. "Look Dad, I've got to go, soon—any other words of wisdom before we sign off?"

His dad shrugged. "I'm not quite sure what to say, except the obvious: don't be afraid to take things slow. Care more about what makes the two of you happy than about what you think things should be like. And don't listen to anyone who's being ignorant or mean-spirited. I love you, Geordi."

"I love you too, Dad," Geordi said. "Take care."

The poker night was a mixer, designed to help people get to know one another, and there were several tables going. The lights in the ceiling were brighter than they usually were, and the table lights lower, which made it easier to see the cards. Geordi and Data sat down at a table with some lieutenants from various departments, and introduced themselves.

Everyone knew who Data was, of course, but Geordi was just another Lieutenant J.G., and none of the other lieutenants had any particularly noteworthy or important jobs, so Geordi hadn't met them, either. Data, of course, knew everybody, or at least, had their records in his databanks.

It was a little awkward at first, partly because Data was Data, and partly because he was senior to all of them—two ranks senior to Geordi and the other J.G. But eventually things settled down, and they had a good game. Geordi enjoyed it, and Data … well, he didn't quite know how to read Data's responses, yet, but that would come. But he thought Data hadn't been bored, at least.

When the game broke up, he and Data were in the middle of a conversation on Starfleet's current Engineering Department policy, and they continued it back to Data's quarters. Geordi was curious, and Data wanted to introduce him to Spot.

Data's quarters were bigger than his, of course, being a full two ranks above him, and although he certainly could have gotten rooms on the outer edge of the saucer section, with windows, he'd chosen a suite on the inside with viewscreens instead, and had the viewscreens set up to show various schematics and ship's statuses instead of family photographs or landscapes or starscapes. Between that and the big desk, his living room felt more like an office than quarters. Or, no, Geordi realized, looking around; he did have a living room with a sofa, and an extensive cat tree for Spot; it was just that he'd chosen to have the more personal living spaces in the quarters' interior.

"Spot is on the third level of her structure," Data said, leading him over to the tree in his living room.

The third level was an enclosed dome, and sure enough, when he peered inside, he could see a white muzzle and the faint glint of eyes deep within. "Hello, Spot," he said, "I'm Geordi."

There was a rumbling from within, not purring, but not quite growling, either. "Geordi is a friend, Spot," Data said. "You should not growl at him."

"It's okay," Geordi said. "Cats like who they like, and sometimes it takes time."

"Would you like me to extract her, so that you can see her better?"

"Nah," Geordi said. "That's fine. We've got time, and I doubt she'd be happy about it." He looked around. Even in here, the only personal touches really were Spot's things. He turned back toward the office and noticed the only personal item sitting on the desk: a visor, made out of frosted transparent plastic. "What's this?" he asked, going over and picking it up.

"In the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, electric lights were often harsh and direct," Data said. "People in many professions would wear such visors to shade their eyes from the glare. I replicated this to wear to the game, and then decided that eccentric fashion choices were best left to games in more private places, with other players I know will not mind."

"Right," Geordi said. "So, you like dressing up in historical costume?"

"In some circumstances," Data said. "Perhaps it would be more accurate to say, I appreciate the use of props to set a particular mood or frame of reference."

"Huh," Geordi said. He didn't necessarily enjoy dressing up for its own sake, but he *did* like holodeck programs that encouraged getting into character. Which was basically what Data was talking about. "So, things that help you get into a particular character."

"Not precisely," Data said. "Unlike humans, external aids to not induce any internal sensation of change or difference. But clothing and accessories are, among other things, items that humans use to signal a wide variety of information. Since I do not require protection from the elements and have no inherent aesthetic sense, the only purpose clothes serve for me is to preserve the modesty most humanoid cultures require, and to signal information."

"Makes sense," Geordi said. "Do you ever do things on the holodeck that require costuming or props like that?"

Data cocked his head. "I seldom use the holodeck for personal purposes; as I derive less pleasure from such pursuits than humans do, and holodecks are often intensely scheduled, I tend to leave them for those who will receive more benefit from them than I will. Though, of course, when participating in activities with other people, that calculus changes."

"And the *Enterprise* has a lot of holodeck space for the size of the crew," Geordi said. "If you were going to use the holodeck, what sort of thing would you be interested in? Puzzles, mysteries? Novels? Historical fiction? Cultural events?"

"Puzzles and mysteries would depend on the quality of the puzzle," Data said. "Given my superior processing capabilities, many puzzles that humans find challenging are simple for me."

"I bet we can figure something out," Geordi said. "I've always had a soft spot for Sherlock Holmes. How about a deerstalker, for a symbolic prop? I'll be Watson." Yeah, that would be fun. He could throw himself into things without having to worry about looking funny or not acting the part well enough; Data wouldn't judge.

They did both enjoy an enhanced Sherlock Holmes case on the holodeck, though it turned out, they had to be careful how they instructed the computer in making a worthy opponent for Data. (They got a paper on artificial intelligence out of that particular adventure.)

After finding the body of the other Data-like android, Geordi and Data spent their off-shift in Data's living room. Geordi wrote out his report on a PADD, while Data sat next to him and petted Spot. (Data didn't need to actually type things out; he was quite capable of composing a report in his brain and then simply uploading it as text to the ship's computer.)

"Geordi," Data said.

"Hmm?" Geordi said, looking up from his PADD.

"Do you think it is possible that your soulmate is, in fact, the other android we discovered in Doctor Soong's lab?"

"No, I don't," Geordi said. He'd thought about it, of course, since they found the pieces, but not for very long. "Pretty sure it's you, no matter who or what the other android turns out to be."

"How can you be sure?" Data asked. "Our positronic nets are visually quite similar."

"That doesn't mean you're both the sort of people I could fall in love with," Geordi said. He reached out and took Data's hand. "Even if you

started out completely identical—and I doubt it, you're not mass-produced, and things made by hand craftsmanship always end up different because you learn in the making and do different things, that's the whole reason for making things individually in the first place. But even if you *did* start out completely identical, you've changed and grown since they found you down there. I know you have; I've read the reports on your early years, and you've talked about what you've learned. Leaving everything else aside, you are the best friend I've ever had, and learning you have a twin isn't going to change that."

"What if we are *both* your soulmate?" Data asked.

"Then I'd have *two* positronic nets on my back, not just one," Geordi said.

"Thank you for that reassurance, Geordi," Data said, squeezing Geordi's hand.

"You're welcome," Geordi said. "It's the plain truth." He squeezed back, and went back to typing his report one-handed.

Afterwards, after Lore had betrayed them and been beamed out into space, Geordi and Data went back to Data's quarters to collapse and lick their wounds. Data sat perfectly upright on the couch, as was his habit, but Geordi curled into his side and laid his head on Data's shoulder. In response, Data relaxed a little and put his arm around Geordi's shoulder.

"There was *never* any chance that Lore was my soulmate," he said.

"I cannot imagine any scenario in which you formed a close relationship with him," Data agreed. "I am glad that I chose not to share the status of our relationship with him, for he would certainly have misused it."

"I don't even want to think about it," Geordi said. He took off his VISOR and rubbed at his temples. His VISOR was amazing, but it was also overwhelming and right now he needed to relax.

He felt a slight lurch as Spot hopped up on Data's lap, looking for attention. She came to rest so that she was partially on Geordi's lap, too.

"Interesting," Data said.

"That's new," Geordi said. He brought his hand up slowly until he felt her, and began gently stroking her fur.

"You know, Data," Geordi said, after a bit. "Your brother is a terrible person. Why don't you share my sister, instead? I think you'd like her a lot better. She's nice, and good, I promise."

"Thank you for the offer, Geordi," Data said. "I'm afraid the only family I can offer to share with you is Spot."

"That's okay," Geordi said. "Spot's a great cat. Worth ten of Lore, at *least*."

After a year on the *Enterprise*, Geordi was called in to Captain Picard's ready room to find both the Captain and Commander Riker there. "You wanted to see me, sirs?"

"Ah, Mister LaForge, please sit down," Picard said, gesturing to the empty seat next to Commander Riker.

"Your promotion to full lieutenant just came through," Picard said. "Congratulations."

"Thank you, sir," Geordi said, beaming. It wasn't a secret he was up for it; he'd been a lieutenant j.g. long enough for promotion to be a consideration at any routine personnel review, but not everybody got that promotion the first time they came up for it.

"As you know, Geordi, we are short of engineers," Riker said. "We'd like you to transfer back to Engineering. As the Alpha shift chief engineer."

"Your skill with engines are remarkable," Picard said. "I have thought that since we met. You are wasted on the bridge."

That was true, Geordi thought, and things in Engineering had settled down since Lieutenant Logan had transferred out. But if he weren't on the bridge, he wouldn't be with *Data* every shift, and it surprised him how much he didn't want that. Data was the best friend he'd ever had, and they were inseparable both on-shift and in their free time. Surely, being on duty in different departments wouldn't make *that* much difference?

"What about Commander MacDougal and Commander Argyle?" he asked. "Shouldn't one of *them* be the Alpha shift chief?" They still outranked him, and while current policy was that ships had multiple 'chief engineers,' in practice the Alpha shift chief was the de facto head of the department.

"They're both happy where they are," Riker said. "MacDougal's a night owl, and Argyle hates paperwork. They're both gifted, but neither wants a promotion or increase in responsibilities."

Geordi considered it, but much as he'd miss being next do Data all day, he *did* love Engineering more than the conn, and he couldn't deny the captain's request.

As it turned out, he needn't have worried. A chief engineer looking for excuses to go up to the bridge could usually find them, and a second officer looking for excuses to go down to engineering could usually find those, too. They actually ended up talking more together on-duty than they had while nominally being assigned to the same bridge shifts.

When Data hijacked the Enterprise, four years into their mission, it wasn't the most hazardous problem the *Enterprise* had ever faced—only

one life was on the line, and the ship itself was in no real danger—but for Geordi, it was almost as frightening as the Borg. Data wouldn't have done this voluntarily, and his defenses were *really* good. Even the Borg hadn't been able to breach them. Anything that could get inside his brain and override his will like that could do just about *anything* to him. What if there was permanent damage? What if they reprogrammed him, somehow? Sure, Data kept backups, but he'd never had to use them, and nobody knew what would happen if he tried.

Geordi forced it out of his head as he tried to figure out how to override the lockout.

"I'm sure he'll be fine, once we find him and figure out what happened," Riker said as the senior staff gathered to strategize. Riker knew, of course, that Data was his soulmate; all the senior staff did. And while it wasn't something Geordi talked about with his subordinates, everybody on board knew he and Data were really close. He wished they didn't; he could do without the pitying looks he'd gotten since Data had taken over the ship and locked them out.

"Yeah," Geordi said grimly. "I'm sure you're right." He just wished he could believe it.

They got down to the surface to find Doctor Soong, Data's creator, injured and dying, and Data switched off. His first guess was that Soong had some unknown enemy, who'd hurt him and forced him to bring Data here for some reason, but no. No, Soong had overridden Data on his own, as if Data were a piece of equipment instead of a person, and *then* he'd let Lore get the better of him.

They didn't have much time to spare if they were going to save Willie Potts, but they could at least let Data say goodbye to Soong, who was going to die soon anyway. Data asked for Geordi to stay with him, and Geordi said okay. He was pretty mad at Soong, but that wasn't what Data needed right now, so he could set it aside until they were back up on the ship and on their way.

"Father," Data said, taking Geordi by the hand and presenting him to Soong, "this is Geordi."

"So, this is him," Soong said, looking him up and down. "An engineer, eh? You work together? I'd prefer a cyberneticist, but you could do worse."

"Geordi is one of the best engineers in Starfleet," Data said. "And a very good man who matters a great deal to me."

"Eh," Soong said, but his eyes drifted closed.

"He is sleeping," Data said.

"Data, are you sure we should leave him here?" Geordi said. "I know he wanted to stay, but he's in no condition to take care of himself, and nobody should die alone." He was angry at Soong, but that didn't mean the man should be abandoned.

"His cognitive functions, while slower than in his prime, are still working at acceptable levels," Data said. "And he was quite clear as to his wishes."

"We could leave someone here with him," Geordi said. "A nurse, maybe?"

"I do not wish to chance Lore's return," Data said. "I calculate that the odds he would choose to do so are small, but I have never understood his thought processes well enough to anticipate his behavior for certain. But you are right, that I do not wish my father to suffer unnecessarily."

"You aren't thinking of staying here yourself?" Geordi asked, as Data surveyed the damaged structure.

"No," Data said. "We should see if the replicator is functional, at least." It was, and they moved Soong next to it, so that he could get what he needed easily.

Soong woke up briefly, complained about their moving him, asked for a glass of juice, confirmed that he didn't want to leave with them, and fell asleep again half-way through his glass. They beamed back up to the Enterprise.

As the ship left orbit and warped out on a course to Starbase 416, they went to the conference room where Data gave his account of what had happened. Captain Picard listened, his face grave, as Data explained what Soong had done.

"He's been alive all this time. He couldn't have called you and said hello?" Geordi said when he couldn't stand it any longer. "Asked how you were doing, if you needed anything? Said, 'oh, by the way, I have a present for you?' Couldn't have *asked* you to come visit him? You could have gotten leave and taken a shuttle! We would have been happy to drop you off!"

"I do not understand his motivations any more than I understand Lore's," Data admitted. "He does not seem to have considered any needs or desires I might have, nor did he consider the problems for others that his chosen course of action might cause."

Geordi sagged. It wasn't *Data's* fault that his creator was a self-centered jerk. "I'm sorry, Data."

Data nodded.

"Now that you know the override Soong used exists, can you block it in the future?" Captain Picard asked.

"I am uncertain," Data said. "I believe so, with certain modifications to my positronic net."

"Make it so," Picard said. "Mister LaForge, please run a complete diagnostic on Mister Data, so we can be sure there aren't any other … unpleasant surprises lurking, from either Soong or Lore."

"Yes, sir," Geordi said.

"Dismissed," Picard said.

They held hands on the turbolift down to the science lab closest to engineering, where they usually did the more complicated maintenance or repairs for Data.

"I am sorry for frightening you," Data said.

"It wasn't you, Data, there was nothing you could have done," Geordi said. "I'm sorry about your father." Sorry he was dying, and sorry he was a selfish, terrible person.

"Thank you," Data said. The turbolift doors opened, and they separated; holding hands wasn't professional, and Geordi was on duty.

Everyone stared at Data as they walked through to the lab; Geordi sighed, it would take a while for things to get back to normal and people to trust Data again, and it wasn't fair because it *wasn't his fault*. Yet another thing to lay at Soong's feet. He was probably going to have to schedule a few sessions with Counselor Troi to work through this, because the *last* thing he wanted was to dump his feelings on Data, who probably had his own stuff to work through about his father and Lore, and didn't need Geordi's feelings on top of it.

"Geordi," Data said once they were inside the lab, "I told my father that I am your soulmate. He was surprised, but told me that when I was young, a mark appeared on the inside of one of my access ports. He never found what had caused it, but it looked like a soulmark. As he did not believe that a cybernetic life form would have a soulmate, he dismissed it as irrelevant."

"Where is it?" Geordi asked. He'd never noticed anything, but then, there were several ports that he'd never had cause to open.

Data stripped off his uniform and turned his back to Geordi. What had looked to be seamless skin separated, and a door popped open over what would have been Data's heart, if he'd been human.

Geordi stepped closer and looked at it. It took him a second to spot it; he was used to looking at Data's insides, not at the hatch itself. "Data," he said, staring at it, "that's my VISOR." All this time, they'd both assumed that it was one-sided, that it *had* to be one-sided, because Data was an artificial being who didn't feel emotions the same way most biological species did. And Geordi had been fine with it; he'd *had* to be, and he wouldn't have traded Data for anything. But to see his mark on Data …

He laughed, giddy, and put his hand on Data's shoulder. Data reached up to grasp it in his, and Geordi leaned into him. They stood there together for a few minutes. "Come on," Geordi said at last, "let's get you checked out, make sure you're okay and nobody can do this to you again."

End Notes