"I Cannot Lie," He Lies

by IantoPace

Summary

Prompt from lemon-drops-are-yummy:
Soulmate AU where on everyone's skin is a tattoo of the first serious lie your soulmate tells you.
A Question

It comes when it feels as if they’ve been dating already. Camaraderie in engineering turned into weekly lunch and dinner meetings, turned into hesitant shoulder touches (mostly on Geordi’s side) and casual invites to each other’s quarters.

Geordi doesn’t know if Data notices his too-long looks, doesn’t know if Data would understand how his heart quickens when he sees Data’s aura come through the door a millisecond ahead of him.

Data doesn’t know if Geordi notices the extra glances he sends his way. He ultimately hopes his friend doesn’t notice the increased frequency at which he instigates conversations. He cannot yet determine the reason for the repeated urges to seek out and be around the man, something beyond gaining more familiarity with human behaviors, something he’s been trying to define for some time now. Though he is sure, if he had the ability to enjoy things, he would enjoy Geordi’s company immensely.

So it comes when Geordi brings it up at one dinner meeting that went longer than he takes to eat. Most such meetings have been going on for far longer than ‘practical’ when both have enough free time, so it is not out of the ordinary. The only unusual aspect has been Geordi’s apparent nervousness since the evening began. Data did not want to bring it up, as he’s observed pointing out such things tends to make humans uncomfortable.

He finds out eventually that he does not have to, as Geordi starts a fumbling sentence.

“Look, Data. There’s, um, well there’s something I wanted to ask you about in particular tonight.” He takes a moment to shift in his seat, Data thinks nothing of it. Humans are rarely still - something he’s tried to emulate. “We’ve worked together for a while, now, and I think we’ve become good friends, wouldn’t you?”

“Yes, we have followed what I determined to be a natural progression towards friendship based on observation of others and your own notes to me about the path to friendship being a gradual, mutual process.” Data realizes he started speaking at his usual pace, which he had recently learned might come across somewhat rapid to others, and adjusted appropriately before continuing. “Our friendship has been a valuable experience in my time on the Enterprise. I hope I have not done anything to make us not ‘good friends’?” With this implied inquiry, Data tilts his head and furrows his eyebrows.

Geordi is quick to ease his worry. “No, no, of course not, Data. I just... I mean I was wondering if you’d like to maybe go on a date - a romantic date, as a... couple.” Geordi then had to wait an agonizing moment as Data’s mouth opened and closed again while he processed Geordi’s statement.

An answer comes almost too soon. “Geordi, while I appreciate the sentiment and do not wish to end our usual meetings or familiarity, I believe the attempt at a romantic relationship between us would be a fruitless venture.”

At Geordi’s initial hurt and confused expression, Data quickly continues. “I simply mean that such a relationship would not be mutually beneficial, as I have nothing to offer you from what a romantic relationship usually contains. As many efforts as I can make towards humanity in myself, I still do not have feelings. I cannot give you love. It would be unfair of me to pursue a relationship beyond friendship with someone whom I cannot reciprocate such feelings to.”
Geordi’s night only worsens when Data’s comm badge beeps at that moment, calling him to a matter on the bridge. He’s thankful enough to be able to reciprocate Data’s departing farewell before his close friend is quickly out of sight, leaving him in a quiet corner in Ten Forward, pulling up his sleeve just to be sure and knowing he can’t leave the matter where it is with Data as he rereads

*I still do not have feelings, I cannot give you love*
The Counselor

Chapter Summary

Data seeks help because he's sometimes clueless. Deanna's also sometimes clueless but she's usually a competent counselor.

Geordi is a very good friend. Data is thankful for this. Over years of researching humanity, humour, and the arts that he sees as quintessentially human, Geordi continually supported his efforts. Furthermore, as Data learns more about what being human is like, he is understanding the patience Geordi must have in order to stay through every bad joke, every failure to use contractions, every glaringly non-human aspect that Data is continuing to see as flaws. And he is understanding the lack of patience others seem to have.

Data does not understand ‘love’ at all. It is a frustratingly confusing emotion. Humans use it about their favourite food, the seasons, each other, in a very unclear way that indicates varying degrees of a positive emotion. It suits situations of material culture, friends, spouses, and, Data is sure, many more situations he has not yet witnessed.

Data would, he both decides and realizes, love Geordi in many degrees.

If he could feel.

That is why he had to reject his good friend’s invitation a few days ago. Geordi deserves a lasting, devoted relationship built on mutual emotion. Data regrets that he is unable to provide that for him.

This does not, apparently, keep certain things from unexpectedly appearing in his dreams: He is in that same booth as a few days ago, across from Geordi, whose head is turned to admire the small band playing classical music but whose smile -Data can sense- is all for him.

Data feels a feather-light touch on his hand and looks down to see Geordi slowly brushing over a few of his fingers with his own. The song ends and another begins, Data continues to watch Geordi’s soft hands - calloused hands he has seen work over and sort through wires, hands that have worked on Data and been a comfort to him and have fixed him.

And they are so soft, and they are on Data in this dream, not for work, not to support him during a malfunction.

He is then in what must be someone’s personal quarters, a pipe in his mouth that he promptly removes and, accordingly, wearing the rest of his Sherlock Holmes outfit. A door whooshes open and Geordi walks through, though in his routine uniform. He stops in front of Data, hands coming from behind his back to show a bundle of flowers in them. He holds them out and Data accepts them without a thought then pauses.

“Flowers?” He quickly identifies the flowers, red roses and short winter jasmine.

Geordi breathes a laugh and has a small smile on his face. “Flowers, Data. I know there’s no real use for them, but it’s kind of a custom on Earth. Means I was thinking of you.”

Data’s confusion continues to show on his face, wondering exactly why Geordi thinking of him is
And rather *unpleasantly*, he finds himself thinking. He would have liked to continue that dream. Hopefully the subject matter will return in future sessions.

Data is still lying down as he considers these thoughts - these *hopes*. Why is this the first dream sequence in months that he wishes to continue? He was not engaged in particularly excitable or interesting acts with Geordi, barely anything happened. A brief analysis identifies that the dream specifically showed repeated activities Data has previously read about *couples* doing; and the peculiar part - being in his favoured holosuite outfit - fit the potential connection by being something Data associates with Geordi.

As Data continues to wonder at the purpose and initiation of his dream, he decides he would require advice on it.

Thus, after his shift, during which he saw a particular lack of Geordi, he stands in front of Counselor Troi’s door, requesting access.

He is invited in with a smile and, “Ah, Data, what can I do for you?”

Data greets her and takes the seat she gestures to across from her. This is another reason he is comfortable seeking her help: she never stopped offering him a seat even after he mentioned that, unlike humans, he has no need to rest his legs.

As usual, he does not skirt the issue. “I had a peculiar dream I was hoping to discuss.”

“By all means,” Deanna leans back in her chair, joining her hands on her crossed legs. “What was this dream about?”

“I believe it might have been caused by something Lieutenant La Forge said to me last week. He expressed an… interest in going on a romantic date with me.” Deanna’s brows raised, but she gave no other reaction. “In the dream, I believe we were on such a date, but we were not speaking to each other, only listening to music in Ten Forward.”

Data pauses for a moment and looks to the ground, considering the more important points of the rest of his dream. “I was then in what I believed to be Geordi’s private quarters, and he handed me a bundle of flowers. He then seemed to imply that they were a symbolic gesture of him ‘thinking of me’.” He raises his gaze to Deanna, prompting, “Then I woke up.”

“Well, it seems like you were dreaming of yourself in a few traditional Earth scenarios of couple activities.” Deanna says this without any note of judgment or concern, not that this dissuades Data’s own worries.

“That is the conclusion I came to. But I rejected Geordi’s invitation based on our incompatibility and my capabilities of being an adequate partner.” He easily slips into the familiar, acknowledging this as quite an unprofessional conversation. “Why would I now be subconsciously imagining scenarios that would happen had I accepted?”

“Sometimes our dreams tell us what we subconsciously want, Data. Tell me, what do you believe makes you an inadequate partner? I know you’ve tried dating before. You were even open to the idea of marriage. What changed?”

The android’s lips pressed together, preparing to explain. “A number of reasons, Counselor. First, some time ago I became more aware of the occurrence of ‘soulmates’. Some cultures, including Earth for much of its history, consider finding one’s soulmate one of the most important duties in
one’s life, assuming that one has a soulmate. I assumed that Geordi, like sixty-three point three percent of humanoids, probably has a soulmark. I would not wish to prevent him from one day finding, and accepting, such an important event.

“Second, I have found that most lasting relationships require that both partners feel strongly for the other. Since I am unable to feel, it would be unfair of me to enter into a relationship with someone whose romantic feelings I cannot reciprocate. And… I do not wish to integrate the emotion chip my father made for me, because the last time I experienced emotions from it, I very nearly caused irreversible harm to my friend.”

Deanna’s eyes sadden at this. She remembers the unfortunate events very well, even is sometimes kept awake by memories of the confusion and fear the many Borg were filled with at the time.

“I understand your concerns at feeling emotions you associate with that incident, but we came to the conclusion that you were not at fault for what Lore manipulated you to do. Do you still blame yourself?”

Data honestly already has the answer. “I do.”

He remembers the long conversations with Deanna when returning to duty, how she explained he was showing typical signs of trauma as he spilled his worries on her floor. He ranted about feeling guilty about his actions so he was practically avoiding Geordi then he felt guilty for avoiding him and he did not know how to proceed with his friend, if they were even still friends. Data was lost, wishing somebody like him was there to talk to. He attributed the overwhelming emotions to being aftereffects of Lore’s influence.

Deanna nods, Data worries that he has displeased her, but she moves on. “Well, I personally think that you should discuss this with Geordi; Not the emotion chip part, unless you feel the need to address that again. But I think he deserves a say in this, Data, because, speaking as a friend, I think you do want to be with him. And if he’s alright with what your limits are, there’s no reason you shouldn’t at least try. Plus, you don’t know for sure if he has a soulmark if you don’t ask.”

Fear of failure has caused many people to not pursue a goal, the android knows. While fear is not a very available experience for Data, he realizes he has avoided such a question because one of the answers can end a particular possibility. Or, if Data presents all the deterrents of a relationship, Geordi will realize it is not a good idea after all.

But human nature is pursuing curiosity and goals, so he might as well practice. Deanna is right -not an uncommon occurrence- Data would like to resolve the uncertainty, either somehow enter a romantic relationship with Geordi or return to the remarkable companionship they had.

Data thanks Deanna, leaves, and finds a time to talk to Geordi.

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