

A man and a woman are standing on a metal grating walkway in a lush, futuristic garden. The woman is wearing a red leather jumpsuit and the man is wearing a dark blue polo shirt and jeans. They are holding hands and looking at each other. In the background, there are large windows showing a starry space scene. The garden is filled with various colorful plants and flowers.

STAR TREK: THE LEXINGTON ADVENTURES WHAT IS LOVE ANYWAY

An Original Short Story
by Lexington creator
Joey Bonice

“What is Love Anyway?”

**Story by
Joey Bonice**

**Star Trek: The *Lexington* Adventures
based on Star Trek® created by
Gene Roddenberry**

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Valentina Tereshkova was sweating profusely while working hard on the elliptical machine, trying to unravel the puzzles of the universe during her daily workout. She looked at the clock, seeing that fifteen minutes had already passed since she had started with this machine. The high intensity music coming from her lightweight on-ear headphones helped to keep her motivated and to push herself harder.

The question is, she thought as she went through her routine, if I like him or not. You would think this would be a simple question, but questions are rarely that simple, or so says our science officer. I really don't know what to think here!

There was a pleasant tone that rang in her ears, meaning it was time to move to another activity. Ever since reporting aboard the *Lexington*, she worked out at least an hour a day, usually after her shift on the bridge was over. Lately, she had been working about ninety minutes, asking herself the same questions every day in the hopes of getting new answers.

She towed off before moving over to her next station, the free weights. She slightly adjusted her shiny black sports bra before picking her weights for the twenty-minute session. Valentina slipped the weights onto the bar before starting her next routine.

Now how is it, she kept thinking as she lifted the weights, that I cannot figure out if I like him or not? No matter how many times I ask myself that question, I cannot get a straight answer. Is there something wrong with me?

She kept lifting the weights as if that would present an answer, but they were silent as the iron they were made of. She kept mulling over her life, and she kept coming up short of an answer.

Valentina thought she had a crush on someone on the *Lexington*, but it was driving her crazy that she didn't know for sure. In reviewing her love life, there wasn't much to tell. She wanted to be in Starfleet so badly that she didn't date at all in high school; and when she entered Starfleet Academy, there was someone she had her eye on but with her workload and extracurricular activities, she never got around to acting on this weird feeling she had when she was around him.

The headphones dinged again and Valentina put the weights back on the rack. She again towed off and adjusted her ponytail before she moved to her next station, the punching bag. Now, here was something she liked doing.

Valentina adjusted her headphones and shorts before she put on the red boxing gloves and tested their weight. Just like any other time, they felt fine. She approached the bag and after a few test punches, she started to throw real punches, letting the day's frustrations and anger seep out onto a harmless punching bag. She grunted with every throw of her fists, every punch a full power knockout.

Why is this so hard for me to figure out? she thought as she punched the bag. *Either I like him or I don't and I've no idea which way I am leaning!*

Her indecision fueled her punches. If it was one thing Valentina hated, it was being indecisive.

When she was nearly through with the punching bag, she saw Sophea Bennington-Fox, come into the "*Lexington* Gym". She was wearing a red shiny tank top and matching running shorts, in stark contrast to Valentina's black shiny sports bra and bicycle shorts and the engineer didn't have any headphones with her. Headphones were not exactly an anachronism in the 23rd Century, but they still allowed someone to have privacy when they desired it; in a loud gym like

this, the navigator was grateful for the privacy they afforded.

Sophea was headed for the punching bag, meaning she either had some frustration or had a mental puzzle to figure out. Valentina waited until the dark brown-haired engineer came over to the bag. Sophea suddenly felt around her ears and cursed.

"Goddess damn it," she said, half whispered. "I forgot those damned earphones back in my locker!"

Valentina stopped punching the bag, knowing her time was about over anyway. "Hey, Commander?" she asked. That got the Hawaiian's attention.

"We're off duty, Valentina, so you can call me 'Sophea' or 'Sophie'. What do you need?"

The Russian hesitated for a second, wondering if this would be a good idea. "Sophie, I need to ask you something, if you don't mind."

"I don't mind at all. But I left my earbuds back in the locker room. Come with me while I go get them?"

"Not a problem. Can you help me get these gloves off?"

Sophea did as requested and in no time, Valentina hands were free. Putting them back on the rack, she removed her headphones and put them around her neck, a sign of respect. She walked over to Sophea then they started over to the women's locker room.

"What's on your mind, Valentina? Can I call you 'Tina'?"

"I don't want to be a pain, but I hate the nickname 'Tina'. And 'Val'."

"Hey," Sophea said as they came to the locker room door. "No problem. After all, I hate being called 'Soph'. I don't mind 'Sophie' though. But again, what's on your mind?"

Valentina hesitated again as Sophea went to her locker and retrieved the bright red earbuds. "Can't believe I forgot these little guys. Again. Maybe I need to get bigger ones," she pointed to Valentina's headphones, "like those so I don't forget them."

"I've come to like these, thanks to Angie and Kimmie." Valentina was referring to Commander Angelica McKnight and Lieutenant Kimberly Bautista. "Between both of them and talking me into playing in their band, headphones have become a way of life. Those two are constantly in the recording studio!"

"I hear that," Sophea replied. "Lucky for me, I don't sing or play an instrument. I build scale models of old aircraft carriers and battleships; especially the old *Essex* and *Iowa* classes."

Valentina shot her a surprised look. "I didn't know that!"

"I fell in love with the hobby as a teenager..." The engineer paused, realizing her *faux pas*. "Look at me hijacking your conversation. You asked to talk to me and I end up talking about headphones and scale models." Sophea shook her head as she mock hit it. "How stupid of me."

"Not really," said Valentina. "I got to know you a little better."

"Let's sit on the bench," Sophea requested. Valentina sat down on the left and the Hawaiian on the right. They were facing each other with Sophea hitching her right leg up on the cushioned bench. "'Floor's yours' as the captain would say."

Again, Valentina hesitated before speaking. "What I've to say is rather... *private*."

"If it's private, wouldn't Dawn be a better choice to talk to?" Sophea was referring to the ship's chief medical officer, Lieutenant Commander Dawn Mathias.

"For what I need to discuss, I don't need a doctor. I need a friend who's good at love."

Sophea looked at her quizzically. "Are you sure I should be the one you're talking to? I mean, I'm a lesbian. I like girls; I'm even married to a girl. I don't know how well I can help you."

"You're married, right? That's good enough for me."

Sophea sighed. "Then don't say I didn't warn you. What's your question?"

"How can you tell if you like someone?"

Just the simple way Valentina said it took Sophea off guard. "What?"

"I think it's a simple question to ask. How can you tell if you like someone?"

Sophea cleared her throat, hoping to gain a little time. "Didn't your parents tell you about the birds and the bees?"

"Birds and...'? Yes, if you're meaning the... biological and physical aspects of love, then yes, I know all about it. I am a grown woman, after all. No, what I am asking is how can you tell if you *like* someone?"

Sophea shrugged. "Well, Valentina... that depends on the person."

"What was like for you when you met your spouse?"

That got Sophea's full attention. "You mean when I met Christina? I think my heart fell to the floor and my stomach was in knots. I mean, when I saw her across that room, I just knew she'd be my wife and sure enough, six months later, we were married. But I don't know how much of a help that is to you."

"Well," Valentina hesitated, "it sort of does help me."

"If you gave me more details, Valentina, maybe I can help you more. I mean, I can tell you what my experience with Christina was, but your experience may be different."

Valentina nodded. "Oh, I know that."

"So, what's the matter?"

"I think I may like someone in the crew."

In as many minutes, Sophea was shocked. "Oh? And who is this person that is the center of your affections?"

Valentina hesitated again. "I'd prefer not to say. I can say that I can't make up my mind if I like him or not!"

"Forget thinking," said Sophea. "There's your problem! You act like you're trying to solve an – an *equation*! Love is more than a pattern!"

"Sophea, my whole *job* revolves around solving equations and patterns! And I've always been good at solving equations and patterns. Why is love any different that solving complex hyperspace equations?"

"Because love isn't something physical, Valentina!" Sophea pointed at her to make a point. "Love is from the heart. From in here." She pointed at her own heart. "Love is more complex than any hyperspace equation you've ever solved."

Valentina thought on this for a minute. Long enough for Sophea to toy with the earbuds in her hand. "Don't think this is not appreciated because it is. But I am still wrestling with the idea if I like someone."

Sophea stopped playing with her earbuds. "Valentina, you have to stop thinking! You're approaching it as a problem to solve and it's not. You have to listen to your heart and emotions. They will tell you the answer. All you have to do is listen."

"What if I don't know how, Sophea?"

Sophea shrugged. "Then you've got a hell of a bigger problem than you think."

At the same time in the *Lexington's* bowling alley, Captain Alexander McKnight, Commander Angelica McKnight, Lieutenant Commander Jason Tovey-Whitfield, and Ensign Jamie Johnson were having fun with bowling night. Jason had actually come up with the idea and asked Captain McKnight if he bowled. Alex replied he sometimes did, so Jason invited him. Alex, naturally, invited Angelica to come with him. To round out the teams, Jason's friend, Johnson was already there, warming up by herself to play a game or two when Jason invited her to come over instead of bowling by herself.

While he had been itching to talk to the captain, it wasn't until about the third frame when Jason finally got up the courage to address Alex.

"Uh... sir?"

"Jason," Alex said, getting ready to take a sip of water, "I'm off duty. How many more times do I need to tell you that?"

"At least once more, Captain. I'm not comfortable calling you by your first name."

"I've been doing it for twenty years, Jason," said Angelica as she prepared to throw her ball. "First time is always hard though!"

Jason smiled in response before returning to address the elder captain. "Skipper, there's something I need to talk to you about."

"So, *that's* why you asked me to come here," chuckled the captain. "I knew you had an ulterior motive."

"Well," admitted Jason, "I really did want to bowl this evening."

Just then, Angie threw her ball and took down seven pins. She pouted and said something, but Jason didn't catch it.

"I'll admit," Alex said, "it's been a while since Angie and I have had a date night in public, much less in a bowling alley."

"Much too long, honey," came the High Wycombe accented voice of Angelica, dressed in her usual leather shirt and pants outfit. "I really don't remember the last time I bowled."

Jason scratched his head, trying to figure out how to ask his question. "I really don't know how to ask this, sir."

"Well, being straight and to the point usually is a good place to start."

"Before you say anything, Jason," said Angelica as the ball came back in the return, "I'm going to take a guess and say it's a woman."

Jason's jaw dropped. "How did you know, Angelica?"

Angelica shrugged. "I can see it written on your face. After twenty-one years of marriage, especially to this handsome devil of a man," she paused to give Alex a quick wink, "you can tell when it's a relationship problem."

"She's right," Alex agreed. "You've got woman problems."

Angelica threw a gutter ball, and she spat a Klingon curse before relinquishing the lane to Jamie, as it was the girls versus the boys in this round. Angelica took Jamie's vacated seat and gave Alex a quick peck on the cheek.

"Is it really that apparent?"

"Not on the surface," Alex said. "But to someone who's been married as long as we have, it's easy to spot." He smiled. "We old timers like to see young turks like you have relationship issues. Makes us feel needed."

Jason had to smile at the captain's reference. "Glad to be of help. But yes, I've got a woman problem."

Angelica threw up her hands in celebration. "YES!" she screamed in excitement. Alex had a smile on his face. "So, dish. Who's the lucky girl you've got your eye on?"

Jamie had thrown her ball and got five pins. She mock pouted to Jason, who smiled back. "It's not her, is it?" Angelica asked.

"No!" he said a little too forcefully. He cleared his throat, as if that would have done anything. "I mean, I know Jamie and she's a friend but it's someone else."

"So, who is she?" pestered Angelica. "You've got me curious now."

Jamie threw and got her spare. All three clapped in approval as Alex stood up. "Excuse me a moment. Got to see if my own wife will beat me in this frame."

"Bet your arse I will, Loverboy," she teased as Jamie was walked over to the replicator to get a non-alcoholic beer, as Alex had forbidden serving or drinking real alcoholic beverages unless it was a special occasion or on his orders. "You won't get a strike." She then turned to Jason. "My question still stands."

"I'd really prefer not to say, Angelica."

"It's 'Angie'. 'Angelica' is too formal for a bowling hall."

"Okay, but I still don't want to say who it is."

Angelica nodded as Jamie returned with her beer bottle. She knew better than jump into this conversation but couldn't help but blurt out, "Oh yeah, he's got a thing for someone all right!"

Angelica turned to her teammate. "Do you know who that would be?"

That's when Jamie realized she had just put her foot in her mouth. "I've been sworn to silence, Commander," she said as she took a long swig of beer, wishing all the time it was the real thing.

"Okay, I get it," said Angelica, looking at both Jamie and Jason. "It's all classified information. But if I can't know who it is, then what's your issue?"

Jason sighed. "I'm trying to decide if it's okay to date another officer."

Angelica speared him with a look. "You know the rules about fraternization. And you've seen Alex and I break those rules."

"Yes, I have."

Just then, Alex made his throw and knocked down six pins. "Goddamnit," he said, ticked at himself. "I thought that was a strike for sure."

Angelica laughed. "Told you so!"

"Oh, don't you go there, woman!"

"I'll go there and more, flyboy." She turned back to Jason. "So, you like a woman that's in our little crew and you want to know if it's okay."

"Over one thousand people on this ship, Angie," said Alex, "is not a 'little crew'."

"And you're evading the question," she pointed out. "You want my advice?"

Jason nodded as Alex threw again and got the spare. It was Jason's turn to bowl. He went up and Alex took his seat.

"What did Jason want?" he asked as he drank his water.

"Oh, he's certainly got girl trouble," Angelica said. "But he wants to know if he can date a girl in our crew."

"As long as she's not enlisted, then why not?" Alex said, putting his glass on the table. "After all, we're living proof."

"Of breaking all the fraternization rules," retorted Angelica. "But then, if these five-year missions go to seven... hell, there is *already*! And that's part of why I'm here... to see if a married couple can survive being on the same command staff as each other."

"I know that," he said. "I was the one who wrote the policy on it."

"Did you, or did someone on your staff? Admirals don't have much time to write!"

"Well, Angie, I *found* the time because it was important. And when's something's important, you *make* the damn time."

Jason threw and hit six pins. From his vantage point, Alex thought Jason got robbed and even shouted as much.

"I'll hit that strike on the next frame!" said the Welshman as he prepared for his second throw. "But we're still ahead, Captain!"

"By only one pin!" countered Jamie. "We're going to kick your ass... er, butt!"

Angie looked at Alex and he looked at her. "So, what are you going to tell him? I know what I'd say."

"Yeah, I know what you'd say," said Alex.

Jason got his spare and came back to the table, but Angie did not walk up to prepare for her frame. She stayed put as they talked to the Welshman as Jamie excused herself to the restroom, knowing what was about to be said wasn't for her ears.

"Have you two given any thought about my little problem?"

Alex looked at Angie as she looked at him.

"Angie, this seems better suited to your particular skill set."

"You mean, it's because I'm a woman." Angelica looked at Jason. "For me, I'd say why not? But there's something you need to know about dating a fellow officer. And I'll let Alex say what that is."

"Gee, thanks," he said sarcastically before looking at Jason. "The big secret is this: you've got to be able to separate the officer from the lover. And, brother, believe me, there are times it's hard to do." The memory of when Angelica had been captured by a terrorist and suffered electrical torture at his hands popped in his head. He remembered wanting to kill the bastard with his bare hands, but if he had shown what he was really feeling, he would have turned the amperage up and electrocuted her. Though he had played the captain, it was really hard to not have the husband interfere.

"He's right," Angelica said. "If you can't separate the two, don't even bother trying to date a fellow officer."

"But how can you do that?" Jason asked. "Separate the lover from the officer?"

Alex looked at Angelica, who looked back at Alex.

"That's probably more dependent on the person," replied Angelica. "I know for me, it's like there's a switch in my mind. When I'm on duty, I am a commander and Alex is my captain. When I'm off duty, I'm a wife and Alex is my husband. That's not to say there aren't times when the switch gets confused." Her eyes twinkled. "But that's the way it is for me."

"I'd have to say there's something similar for me," Alex added. "But you will have to find your own way to think like that if you're going to have a girlfriend, Jason."

Jason nodded and you could see he was thinking hard.

"I think I understand."

"I hope you do," said Angelica. "If not, you're headed for a world of bloody hurt."

A few days later found Valentina and Jason in the *Lexington's* botanical garden; the same one where a certain vampire found his destiny and almost managed to take three Starfleet officers with him just a couple of months earlier. This evening found the compartment vacant, allowing the two command staff officers a rare opportunity of privacy.

Ever since her talk with Sophea, Valentina had been pondering her feelings even up to that evening when she met Jason. She had agreed to Jason's proposal to meet at the garden merely to see what he wanted to see her about. She had dressed in one of her favorite jumpsuits, a muted red PVC jumpsuit, in case what she was suspecting ended up being correct... that she was about to hear an admission.

For the same amount of time, Jason was pondering how he could tell her that he liked her but at the same time, wondered if he could separate the officer from the boyfriend. He had dressed in a dark blue polo shirt and jeans, hoping that he would not come off as desperate or too eager to make an admission to her.

The two young officers were walking a tidy dirt path that led from the port to starboard windows. As they walked back and forth, they were making small talk, and each was actively avoiding the real reason they were there.

"We must have walked this path at least a dozen times," Valentina mused. "We're definitely getting a workout in this evening."

I've had enough of this, Jason thought. *Time to figure this out, once and for all!* He stopped and turned towards Valentina.

Could it be that I've been right this entire time, she thought as he gently took her hands. *Was it that he was going to finally admit that he likes me? What does he see in me to like? I'm only a simple Russian girl and not worthy of someone liking her!* Valentina showed her surprise at his action but allowed the contact.

"Valentina," he started then paused, searching for words. *God*, he thought, *why is it that I almost always get tongue tied every time I'm not on the bridge with her?* "Valentina, I have to know what this is."

The dark-haired navigator looked at him, more confused than anything else. "I've no idea what you're talking about, Jason." *Which is true but not entirely accurate. I think I know what he's after, but I want to hear him say it to be sure!*

"How long have we known each other, Valentina? Almost all our adult lives? We were at the Academy, then on the *Anniston*, and now on the *Lexington*... seven years now. So, I have to know where this is going."

She still wanted to hear what he was driving at. "What are you talking about, you crazy Welshman?"

Jason sighed in aggravation. *She's not about to make this easy, is she?* "Don't you know, you silly Russian? What does it take for you to answer if this is a date or not?!"

"A date?" She pulled away, taken aback for a moment. *I knew it*, she thought. *I damn well knew it! He likes me and he's all but admitted it! Now, my question is if I like him in return?*

"You think *this* is a date? Where would you have gotten *that* idea?"

"Well, isn't it what you call it when you're with someone you like?" Jason instantly regretted saying this. He didn't want to admit it just yet that he liked her but now that cat was out of the bag. *Goddamn it, he thought. I overplayed it because she got me frustrated at her! Or was that her plan all along? Lord, why could you not have made human women understandable?*

For Valentina's part, she was pleasantly surprised. Unlike Jason, she wasn't worried about dating another officer, but she had been worrying that she was even capable of liking anyone. As Sophea said earlier in the week, she had been trying to approach this like a complex mathematical equation but now that she had been confronted with her friend's confession, it all instantly fell into place.

Valentina Tereshkova liked Jason Tovey-Whitfield.

"Is this what this is?" she asked. "You're thinking this is a date because you just confessed to me about liking me? Is this an old-style K-drama?" Valentina liked watching those old early 21st Century Korean romantic comedies, and she wasn't about to let Jason off the hook so easily.

"Well," said the helmsman, "I just said I liked you, but I just now realized that I could date a fellow officer. And I want to date you. But I need to know where you stand, Valentina. How do you feel about me?"

She looked at him coyly. "I think you know if I'm down here in the garden with you."

"Oh, no. You're not getting off that easily. I want to hear you say it."

"You want me to say what?" Now it was her turn to take his hands in hers. "That I've liked you since the moment I laid my eyes on you and haven't stopped since, but like the dumbass I am, I overthought things? I acted like I was trying to solve an equation instead of being a woman and listen to her heart? Is that what you wanted to hear? Or was it this?"

She reached up and kissed him full on the lips, putting her hands on his chest as he grabbed her hips.

"That was nice," he admitted as she broke off the kiss. "And that was a little more than I was expecting."

"Why, thank you," she cooed. "And just how many times have you seen me kiss anyone else?"

"None."

"So, if you are the first man I've kissed since high school, doesn't that answer your question?"

"No," he answered with a chuckle. "I need to hear you say it."

She kissed him again. "Okay, smartass, I like you too."