

Fall Into Your Sunlight

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Fall Into Your Sunlight

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Summary

When a snowstorm interferes with the transporter, Pike and Number One are forced to take shelter in an abandoned cabin. Revelations ensue.

Notes

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First Officer's Log, Stardate 1893.3

The Enterprise is currently in orbit around Delta Cygni VI, the site of a former Earth colony that was abandoned eight years ago during a period of extreme solar flare activity. Solar radiation has now returned to baseline, and our mission is to take readings and samples from the planet and surrounding system in order to ascertain whether the colony can be recreated.

Number One turns in a slow circle, surveying the scenery. Not that there's much to look at; the only thing around them besides seemingly endless flat white snow and scattered members of the landing party is a rocky outcropping a few kilometres to the east.

It's been snowing since they beamed down, but it's heavier now, the wind starting to pick up. She's squinting at the sky, trying to decide if it's getting darker, when Chris comes over to her, his cheeks flushed red with the cold.

"Not exactly Risa, is it?" he asks, rubbing his gloved hands together exaggeratedly.

"You say that like it's a bad thing," she deadpans. Chris opens his mouth to respond, only to be cut off as his communicator chirps.

"Hold that thought," he says, digging for the communicator and flicking it open. "Pike here."

"Captain, our sensors show a storm heading in," La'an's voice reports. "I suggest you return to the ship as soon as possible."

Chris nods. "Understood. Keep monitoring the storm, let us know if anything changes."

He shuts off the connection and adjusts his communicator, opening a channel. "Pike to landing party, return to the beam down point. We're getting out of here."

The landing party begin heading back, and she counts them in silently. Including her and Chris, there are eight of them, which means they'll have to beam up in two groups.

The snow is definitely getting heavier now, and Chris pulls his balaclava up to cover his face before flicking open his communicator. "Pike to *Enterprise*, we're ready for beam up. Take the others first, Number One and I will bring up the rear."

"Understood, Captain. Beaming now."

She's familiar enough with transporters to tell when something is wrong, and she frowns as the landing party seem to shimmer, flickering in and out like a bad hologram before finally disappearing.

"Did that seem off to you?" Chris asks, echoing her thoughts. She doesn't have the chance to answer as his communicator chirps and he moves to answer it. "Pike here."

"The storm is starting to interfere with our transporters, Captain," Kyle responds. "We got the landing party up okay, but I'm still working on getting a lock on you or Number One."

A gust of wind blows past, nearly knocking them off their feet. "Speed would be appreciated," Chris replies as he fights to keep his balance.

There's a pause, then, "Beaming now."

She feels her fingers and toes start to tingle, the way they always do during beaming, but when the sensation vanishes she's still on the surface of the planet, Chris staring at her with a frown.

"*Enterprise*, report," he orders. "Can you beam us up or not?"

The response, when it comes is fragmented and barely comprehensible. "Capt... storm... interfe... ansporter... cations."

Chris curses, fiddling with the settings on his communicator. "*Enterprise. Enterprise*, can you hear me?"

Nothing. He tries again, boosting the power to maximum, but the storm must be too strong. She tries her own communicator – not because she expects it to work any better than Chris's, just because they might as well explore every option – but she doesn't have any more success.

It looks like they're on their own.

Another gust of wind blows past, bringing with it a flurry of snow. "We should get moving," she says, pocketing her communicator. "We need to find shelter." She has to raise her voice to be heard over the storm.

"There's a ridge in that direction," Chris replies, pointing past her. "Or there was. It's hard to see in the blizzard."

She turns, scanning the scenery, but he's right, the ridge has disappeared in the gloom.

For lack of any better options, they begin heading in that direction. She packed a tricorder along with her survival gear, and she digs it out of her backpack as they walk. She can tell it's struggling to work in the storm, but she manages to identify a few potential sources of shelter, including one that almost stops her in her tracks.

"Found something?" Chris asks, and she glances at him before looking back down at the tricorder readings.

"There's a building," she says. "About one point five kilometres that way." She points in a direction ahead and to the left of them, past where the ridge would be if they could see it.

"A building? That's unexpected, this far from the main colony site." He hunches his shoulders, wrapping his arms around himself, and adds, "But welcome."

"My thoughts exactly," she tells him.

In normal circumstances, a distance like that would be no problem at all. But attempting it in a blizzard, with the temperature well below zero and the wind still attempting to blow them off their feet, is another story.

It quickly becomes obvious to her that she has the advantage in this situation. Her body was designed to cope with extreme temperatures like this, but Chris's wasn't, and she can tell he's starting to struggle. More than once he stumbles, nearly falling, and she has to grab onto him to keep him upright. Eventually she moves closer and links their arms, encouraging him to lean on her.

Eventually the building comes into view, a dark shape in the storm that becomes clearer as they approach. It's a small cabin, maybe eight metres by six, and has clearly seen better days, but it's shelter and right now that's all she cares about.

The door is locked, but a quick shot from her phaser takes care of that. She pulls Chris inside and shuts the door, the storm outside dropping to a faint roar. It isn't much warmer inside, but at least they're out of the elements.

The cabin is dimly lit and sparsely decorated; a bed in one corner, a small stove and cabinet in another, a door that she hopes leads to some kind of bathroom. And a fireplace, still stocked with logs, which she sets alight with the help of another blast from the phaser.

Chris is still leaning against the door as if using it to keep himself upright. He's shivering violently, and she frowns and lays a hand on his shoulder. "Chris?"

It takes him a second to react, and her concern ratchets up a notch, the symptoms of hypothermia running through her mind. "Do you know where we are?"

He blinks at her before looking around. "Looks like some kind of hut."

"Do you remember how we got here?"

"There was a storm?" He doesn't sound entirely certain.

"What planet are we on?"

He frowns, looking a little lost. "I don't..."

"Okay, we need to get you warmed up." He's coherent enough that she doubts he's in immediate danger, but she knows even mild hypothermia can be serious if not promptly treated.

She drags the mattress and blankets from the bed onto the floor in front of the fire before returning. "Take your outer layers off and get under the blankets."

Chris just stares at her for a moment before the words seem to register and he begins pulling clumsily at his jacket.

While he's doing that, she pulls out her communicator and tries contacting the ship again. There's still no response, though, and she doubts there will be until the storm has passed.

Chris manages to get his gloves, jacket and balaclava off, but struggles with his boots, his fingers slow and stiff with cold. She moves to help him, and it isn't long before he's stripped down to his thermal underclothes and safely ensconced in blankets in front of the fire, his snowy outerwear draped over the bed frame to dry.

Part of her wants to join him, but there's a few things she has to do first.

A search of the cabinet reveals a couple of pans, along with cups, bowls, plates, and even some cutlery. No food or drink, but she has some emergency rations in her pack, and it isn't like they're exactly short of water.

Grabbing a pot, she steels herself, then cracks open the door and darts out an arm to scoop up some snow. It only takes a few seconds, but the storm is still howling, and she lets out a breath of relief as she pulls her arm back in and shuts the door. The pot is half-full with snow, and she drops in a purification tablet from her pack – her tricorder didn't pick up any obvious contaminants, but better to be safe – before putting it over the fire to warm.

That done, she gives Chris a quick scan with the tricorder – body temperature still too low, but starting to rise – then begins stripping off her outer clothing and draping them over the bed frame next to his.

He barely reacts as she slips under the blankets next to him, and she gives him a sharp poke in the ribs. "Don't fall asleep."

"M'tired," Chris mumbles, which at least tells her that he's still awake.

"I know," she replies. "But you need to warm up first." She hesitates, considering her options, then shifts closer until she's cuddled against his back. He's still shivering, but less violently now.

He gives a faint huff as she wraps an arm around him. "Body heat. Someone's been reading their survival manuals."

He seems less confused than he was before, which she takes as a good sign. "If you know that much, you also know why you can't go to sleep right now."

"Mmm," Chris agrees, settling back against her. "Talk to me then. Keep me awake."

She searches for a topic, but her mind is blank. "Talk about what?"

"Anything." He pauses, then adds, "Tell me about your childhood."

She's had a whole backstory worked out since before she joined Starfleet, some of which he's familiar with, but she knows that's not what he's asking. "You mean what it was like growing up as an Illyrian."

He nods, and part of her wishes she could see his face. "It's fine if you don't want to tell me, but we've never talked about it, and we've got nothing but time here. I thought maybe we could."

She's spent so long not talking about it that the very idea makes her nervous. But he's right, it isn't like they don't have the time, and if she can't trust Chris, who can she trust?

"I don't know where to start," she admits. "Except... well, I guess I should tell you my name."

"It isn't Una?"

She shakes her head, even though she knows he can't see it. "That's a pseudonym I took on when I joined Starfleet." She's gotten used to it, over the years, learned to react as though it has always been her name. But it'll never be truly hers.

"What's your real name?" Chris asks, and she tells him, letting the syllables roll off her tongue.

"Unusual," he says. "But pretty."

"I suppose," she replies. "It was a standard name on my home world. Illyrians plan their families carefully, to make sure there will always be sufficient resources. I was the oldest of three children, so my name translates as First of Three."

"You're Number One," he says, and she can hear the smile in his voice.

"An imprecise translation," she replies. "But I admit the thought has crossed my mind."

There's silence for a few moments before Chris asks hesitantly, "Forgive me if I'm being nosy, but how much about your makeup did your parents have control over? Could they have decided your sex, your appearance, your blood type?"

"Theoretically," she tells him. "But the culture I grew up in didn't put much importance on things like that. My parents were more concerned

with traits that would help me adapt to our environment – improved strength and agility, enhanced immune system, increased resistance to cold-

"Which is why I'm half frozen and you're perfectly fine," Chris interrupts. "Must have been hard all this time, pretending to be one of us ordinary humans."

She thinks of everything Chris has said and done since they've known each other and shakes her head. "You could never be ordinary."

It feels strange, being open about it all after so long spent hiding. She tells him about her family, her parents and sisters and how hard it was to leave them. She doesn't regret her choice to join Starfleet, but there'll always be an ache, deep down, a wish that she could've had both.

When the water boils she pours them each a cup and is relieved to see Chris's hands are steady as he takes it.

He sips at it slowly, looking mildly amused as she scans him again. "Am I going to live?"

"Your temperature's still a little on the low side," she reports, "but I think it's safe for you to sleep now."

He rubs at one eye, stifling a yawn. "Good to know. I might take you up on that."

He finishes the cup and curls back up in the blankets, throwing her a glance over his shoulder. "Are you going to join me?"

"Well, since you ask so nicely..."

If she listens carefully she can still hear the storm raging outside, but here, in the warmth of the fire with Chris lying there next to her, it feels far away and unimportant.

"Thank you," she says impulsively. "For listening."

"Thank you for telling me," he replies.

She makes sure her communicator and phaser are in easy reach, then settles back against him, closing her eyes and letting the sound of his breathing lull her into sleep.

* * *

She wakes up some time later to the feeling of Chris shifting in her arms. She opens her eyes, blinking as he rolls to face her. He looks much better now, almost back to his usual self.

"Good morning," he says with a slightly sheepish smile.

"Is it morning?" she asks. It's a genuine question; she has no idea what time they got here, never mind how long they slept.

"I don't know, actually," Chris admits. "But it feels like morning."

"And how are you feeling?" she asks.

"Much better," he tells her. "Thanks to you."

Any response sticks in her throat as it hits her suddenly how close they are, her heart speeding up as a dozen idle fantasies rush through her mind. She tells herself it's ridiculous; he's her friend, and her captain, and that's all. Nothing's going to happen between them.

But this doesn't feel like nothing.

Chris's gaze drops to her lips – just for a second, nothing she'd notice if she wasn't looking for it, but she is, and she does. He opens his mouth to say something, but she moves before he can, leaning in and brushing her lips against his.

He returns the kiss, one hand resting on her hip as he shifts to meet her before pulling back. "This is a bad idea."

"Stop me then," she tells him, and leans in again.

He hesitates briefly before seeming to give in, moving closer and wrapping his arms around her. She smiles into the kiss as she slides her hand down his side, her fingers finding the hem of his thermal undershirt and pushing it aside to brush the warm flesh underneath.

She pulls back enough to murmur, "You've warmed up," and he gives a faint huff in response.

"Feels that way."

This close, his eyes are startlingly blue, filled with amusement and something close to wonder. Warmth blooms in her chest and she kisses him again, because she can, because he wants it as much as she does.

She pushes him gently, rolling him over until she's on top, and is reaching down to pull off her undershirt when the sound of a communicator rings out, sharp against the silence. They stare at each other for a second, eyes wide, before scrambling to answer it.

Chris gets there first, grabbing the communicator and flicking it open. "Pike here."

"Captain." Anyone less familiar with La'an's tone would miss the slight tremor of relief behind the words, but to her it's as obvious as a shout. "Are you hurt? Is Number One with you?"

"Yes, she is, and we're fine." He glances at her and adds, "Cold, but fine. We found shelter in an abandoned building."

"That was lucky." La'an pauses, then adds, "We can beam you up now. The storm has eased enough for us to get a lock."

"Understood," he replies. "Give us a few minutes to get organised. I'll signal you when we're ready for beam up."

"Affirmative," La'an replies. "We'll wait for your signal."

Chris flicks the communicator closed and gives her a rueful look. "Guess we'd better get moving." She can almost see him slip back into work mode as he shoves the blankets aside and reaches for his now dry outerwear. Their eyes meet briefly as he passes over her own clothes and part of her wants to say something, but she hesitates a fraction too long and the moment is lost.

It doesn't take long for them to dress and pack up their few belongings. Chris helps her douse the fire and put the cabin back as they found it, and she takes a last look round as he signals the *Enterprise* to beam them up.

* * *

A check over in sickbay shows no major issues for either of them, though Chris's temperature is still a little below baseline. M'Benga puts him on leave for the day and prescribes rest and warm drinks.

"I'm not sure I've ever been prescribed coffee before," Chris muses as they leave sickbay.

"Make sure you get the dosage right," she replies with a smile, and he gives a brief laugh in response.

They enter the turbolift and he orders it to deck five before turning to her. "Do you have a few minutes? I feel like we should talk."

She feels her heart speed up, but all she says is, "Sure."

She's accompanied him to his quarters hundreds of times over the years, but this feels different. There's a tension between them now, a new knowledge of each other, and the air feels charged as she follows him inside and lets the door close behind her.

He leans against the counter and lets out his breath in a rush. "About what happened on the planet..." he begins, then trails off as if searching for words.

"I don't regret it," she says. "Do you?"

For a second she worries he's going to say yes, but then he shakes his head and murmurs a no. "But I wasn't wrong when I said this is a bad idea. Our friendship is important to me, I don't want to risk that. And what about Starfleet? Or my future-" He cuts himself off and swallows hard, fingers tightening on the counter.

"Forget about all that for a moment," she says. "What do you *want*?"

"I don't want to lose you."

"You won't." Even in the worst case scenario, with it all going down in flames, she can't imagine that.

She steps towards him and he pushes himself upright, moving to meet her. "It doesn't have to mean anything," she says. "We can forget about this and continue on like we were. We won't talk about it, it'll be as if it never happened. If that's what you want."

"And if not?" The words are quiet, barely audible.

"Then I guess we pick up where we left off." She takes another step forwards, bringing them close enough to touch. "So I'm asking again, what do you want?" She knows what she wants, but this has to be his choice.

Chris reaches out hesitantly, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. "You're beautiful, you know," he says almost absently, fingers lingering on her neck. "I forced myself not to notice, told myself it could never be anything, and yet..."

She can feel her heart pounding in her chest. "And yet?"

He studies her for a moment, looking as if he's fighting with himself, then closes the distance between them and kisses her.

"You know this won't be easy," he says when they break apart. "There's so much we still have to deal with."

"I know," she replies. "But whatever comes, we'll face it together. Like we always do."

"Like we always do," he agrees, and kisses her again.

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