

## A Safe Place to Fall

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## A Safe Place to Fall

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### Summary

Chris gets ill from working too hard. Ash tries to make him feel better.

### Notes

Written for Mimm in the 2021 Hurt/Comfort exchange. Originally posted on AO3.

Ash heads down the hallway in quick strides, a PADD clutched in one hand. If anyone asks, he's bringing a report to the captain. Which is true. It's just not the *whole* truth.

He has to signal for entry at Chris's quarters, which is unusual. Chris usually leaves his door unlocked, projecting his image as the friendly approachable captain.

The door slides open after a few moments, and Ash steps inside. The first thing he notices is that the lights are dimmed a little, maybe 75% of normal. The second thing he notices is Chris.

It isn't the first time Ash has seen Chris out of uniform, but on those occasions he was either wearing workout clothes, or, if Ash was very lucky, nothing at all. Either way, it doesn't prepare him for the sight of Chris in what looks like pyjama pants and a dark blue Starfleet Academy sweatshirt, hair sticking up as if he's just woken from sleep. It gives him an air of vulnerability, like Ash is seeing him without his armour.

He rises to greet Ash, giving him a tired smile, before his gaze falls on the PADD in Ash's hand. "Not sure I should take that," he says. "I'm on medical leave."

"What?" Ash blurts. "Why?"

Chris rubs a hand over his eyes. "Went down to sickbay to get some meds for a headache. Doctor Pollard insisted on scanning me as a precaution, and apparently I'm running a fever."

Ash raises his eyebrows. "You didn't notice?"

Chris shrugs and sits back down on the sofa, which has acquired a soft-looking grey blanket and several more cushions since the last time Ash was here. "Not really? I knew I wasn't feeling great, but I thought I was just working too hard."

"You do work too hard," Ash points out. They've all been working overtime recently, trying to figure out a way to combat Control, but as captain Chris has a tendency to push himself harder than most.

"Yeah, that's what Pollard said. She gave me a lecture about taking better care of myself, and banned me from duty for at least twenty-four hours. Or until my fever breaks, whichever's longer." He gestures at the PADD and adds, "Saru's in charge until then, so you can give that to him if it's urgent."

"Just a routine report," Ash tells him. "It can wait." He bites his tongue before he can add anything embarrassing like, *I just wanted to see you*.

Chris pulls the blanket around himself and rests his head against the back of the sofa, looking exhausted. Something twists in Ash's chest, and

he takes a step closer. "Are you okay?"

"Mmm," Chris replies, stifling a yawn. "More or less. She said it's probably just a minor bug, but that it could easily turn into something worse if I don't rest up. So I'm resting." He gestures expansively at the sofa.

"Sorry I interrupted," Ash says.

"Don't be," Chris replies instantly. "I feel better for seeing you." He flushes and adds, "Sorry, you can ignore that. I'm not really fully coherent right now, as you might have noticed."

Ignoring it is pretty much the last thing Ash wants to do, but he manages to restrain himself from asking what exactly Chris meant by that. "Do you want me to stay?" he asks instead.

"You don't have to," Chris tells him, which Ash notes isn't a 'no'. "I'm not sure I'd be very good company right now. And I doubt Pollard will be very impressed if I end up passing this on to you."

Ash shrugs. "I don't mind," he says. "And I don't get sick easily." As far as he can remember, he hasn't actually gotten ill since the *Yeager*, back before the war. Whether that's down to luck or something the Klingons did is a question he doesn't have the answer for, and mostly prefers not to think about.

Chris studies him for a moment. "You really want to stay?"

"Yeah," Ash admits. He gives a faint smile and adds, "Someone has to make sure you don't overwork yourself again and make things worse."

Chris huffs a laugh. "Your faith in me is astounding," he says, then nods at the space beside him and adds, "You might as well sit down, if you're staying."

Ash sets the PADD down on the nearby desk before joining Chris on the sofa. Chris shifts to lean against him and Ash hesitates before reaching out to wrap an arm around him. His hand brushes the hood of Chris's sweatshirt, and he tugs on it gently. "Have you really had this thing since the academy?"

"Shut up, it's comfy," Chris mumbles. He edges closer, resting his head on Ash's shoulder, and Ash's breath catches in his throat at the knowledge that Chris is letting him see him like this, sick and vulnerable and stripped of all the markers of rank, and trusting him not to take advantage of it.

"You okay?" he asks, running his hand lightly up and down Chris's arm.

"I guess," Chris says. "Head still hurts like hell though."

"Didn't Pollard give you anything for the pain?"

"Yeah, but the regular painkillers don't do much, and the stronger ones make me nauseous. Which is not exactly something I need help with right now."

Ash makes what he hopes is a comforting noise. "Can I get you anything?" he asks. "Tea, cooling pad, backrub?"

Chris gives a soft laugh. "I know you're joking, but a backrub actually sounds great right now."

"Who says I was joking?" He actually was, a little, but if Chris wants to take him up on it he's not going to object.

Chris shifts until he can look Ash in the face. "You meant it?"

"Yeah," Ash says. "I mean, if it'll help." He moves his hand to the centre of Chris's back and rubs gently. "Turn around."

Chris shifts until he has his back to Ash, head resting against the back of the sofa. Ash hesitates, then starts at his shoulders, searching for any knots and tension and rubbing with his thumbs to remove them. It'd be easier if Chris wasn't wearing his sweatshirt, but he's shivering even with it on so Ash isn't about to ask him to remove it. "This okay?"

"Mmm," Chris replies sleepily. "Keep going."

Ash continues downwards, feeling Chris relaxing under his touch, and by the time he reaches Chris's lower back realises that he's fallen asleep, still sitting up against the sofa.

Ash hesitates, then reaches out and shakes his shoulder gently. He hates to wake Chris when he's so obviously exhausted, but sleeping sitting up like that can't possibly be comfortable.

"Hmm?" Chris mumbles. "Ash?"

"Hey," Ash replies, and Chris turns to look at him. "You might want to lie down before you go to sleep."

Chris blinks at him in confusion for a moment before the words seem to register. "Oh. Right." He rubs at his eyes and shifts until he's lying down on the sofa, blanket wrapped around himself tightly.

"Thanks," he says, just as Ash thinks he's fallen back to sleep. "For the massage. You're good at that."

"That's just the fever talking," Ash tells him, and Chris huffs a laugh before his breathing slows, evening out again into sleep.

Ash has never actually seen Chris asleep before; one of them always left before it got to that point. He looks younger, freed from all the stress and pain of his waking life, and the surge of emotion that hits Ash at the sight takes him by surprise. For all their attempts at keeping it casual, it feels like tonight things have shifted, becoming something deeper, and he isn't sure how to feel about that.

With a sigh, he straightens up, deciding that that can be a problem for tomorrow. "Computer, dim lights," he orders quietly, and leaves Chris to get some sleep.

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