

Authentically You

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/20489345) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/20489345>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Categories:	Gen , M/M
Fandoms:	Star Trek: Discovery , Star Trek
Relationships:	Hugh Culber & Sylvia Tilly , Hugh Culber/Paul Stamets
Characters:	Hugh Culber , Sylvia Tilly , Paul Stamets
Additional Tags:	Friendship , Queer Themes , Mentors , Advice , Self-Acceptance , Self Confidence Issues , Self-Discovery , Queer positivity , friends helping friends , Hurt/Comfort , Emotional Hurt/Comfort , Comfort , LGBTQ Themes
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2019-09-02 Words: 2,698 Chapters: 1/1

Authentically You

by [Aphelyon](#)

Summary

The future isn't easy, fraught with new and unfamiliar things for the crew to discover. Self Discovery is a constant throughout all personnel on-board. But a recent away mission takes a hit at Tilly's newfound self, and she seeks comfort and advice through someone with more lived experience than her.

Aka, Hugh being a gay space dad to baby queer Tilly.

Notes

Unauthorized copying of this work, any and all of my works, inclusive of writing and all artwork imagery of my creations, to any and all other sites is not permitted.

what's with all these friendship fics i'm suddenly writing, where the fuck are these coming from.

Dedicated to [EmmaKeladry](#), she knows why.

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

It is a quiet night in Medical and Hugh appreciates that. It's late, near the end of his shift, and he is currently sitting in the office, working through updating patient files on who left the ship and who still remains. It's quiet work, and easy work, but the late night coupled with how quiet it has been makes him a little sluggish. He's spent half of his time working on these files staring out the port window, watching the stars and lost in his thoughts. Such as it always happens on these quiet late night shifts.

He has been taking more and more Gamma shifts since they had gone through the wormhole, flinging themselves into the future. While the Discovery had retained a considerable amount of personnel with those who decided to stay behind - or was it ahead? - there were many who had decided to board the Enterprise, and keep their normal lives. Much like he nearly did. Although, he wasn't doing it to keep his life, *per se*, it was more along the lines of wanting to start completely anew. This idea ultimately didn't settle right with him knowing that this time his home - his true home - would be forever lost to him. Not the ship, no, he didn't care about a bucket of bolts. When he thinks about his home, he means Paul.

Still, as much as they had come back together - and it hadn't been easy or quick - they have both found themselves pulled and stretched between work to make up for the dent in the crew that had been lost to both the battle and the Enterprise. Both Paul and himself have been covering a few too many shifts, something which used to be a contentious point between them in the past, but with the current state of the ship and crew, they both understand how necessary it is.

Paul had ranted angrily when equipment and systems in engineering had been badly damaged when they had gotten too close to a nebula while under the command of Captain Lorca... Well, if Paul had thought *that* was bad damage, he'd have thought nothing of it if he had known the kind of damage that could be done to his equipment and harvested spores after going through a wormhole. He has a lot of work to do, but unlike in the past, he seems content and happy to fix the damage. Something really has shifted in Paul, maybe in himself, too. Things - everything - is different now. It's unfair to measure each other by the past.

Hugh doesn't look up or turn around when he hears the doors to Medbay open, instead glancing at his clock. He's a few minutes early, but Paul does that a lot these days - finishing work early to spend time together. Especially when they were both stretched so thin between all these extra shifts. So he waited, preemptively smiling to himself, waiting for those surprisingly strong arms to slink around his shoulders. If the familiar action wasn't enough to know it was Paul, could recognise him with his eyes shut by the feel of half rolled up sleeves, the hard augments in his forearm and the kiss that would be planted on his he-

"Commander Culber? Uh, Doctor Culber? Commander Doctor?"

Hugh's eyes fly open as he's snapped out of his thoughts and expectations. He blinks furiously for a few seconds, grounding himself back in the present. These late shifts really

aren't as easy as they used to be.

Turning his chair around, he tries his best to clear his face of any lethargy.

Tilly is standing awkwardly in the door frame, still dressed in her pyjamas and hair spilling wildly over her shoulders. She looks like she's had about as much sleep as he has. Her eyes are rimmed with red, her cheeks are a little blotchy and she wears an expression of worry. Worry looks strange on Tilly. Not that he and everyone else wasn't used to Tilly worrying, but this is different - this is obviously a sad type of worried.

"Come in Ensign, pull up a seat." He gestures towards the seat to the side of the desk.

She reaches for the chair, and pulls it up to the desk before she slumps down into it. All very uncharacteristically unenthusiastic of her.

"What's wrong, Tilly?" He asks softly. Not his usual approach, but it was clear that something was indeed wrong and he hopes that the added informal approach will help her feel at ease with him.

She bites down on her lip, shrugs a few too many times and bobs her head side to side - her long mane of curls bouncing along with the movement. "Can't sleep." She manages to get out in an unsteady voice, bunching a little tighter into herself.

Hugh gives her a small understanding smile, leans forward on the desk and puts his hands down in front of her with the palms facing upwards in invitation.

"Something tells me you're not here for a sleeping hypo?" He says slowly, carefully.

She shakes her head a little more vigorously this time, and puts her palms on Hugh's almost a little hesitantly, her eyes glistening as they start to fill. He squeezes them resolutely to let her know that this is okay, holds her gaze.

As soon as he does, whatever was holding her back breaks. She holds tightly onto Hugh's hands in return - and she's shockingly stronger than Hugh ever expected. He doesn't wince, but he can't deny that it hurts, although that doesn't matter to him right now. She sobs, loudly, for a good couple of minutes. Hugh just lets her. At this stage, it's the best thing he can do for her. She even uses their clasped hands to ineffectively wipe away tears at one point. Then, again to wipe her nose ungracefully, but realises quickly what she has done.

"Sorry," she blubbers out.

"It's okay, Tilly." Hugh just laughs a little, he doesn't mind and it's hardly the worst thing he's had on his hands.

"I just... I just didn't know who else to go to. I thought... well. I thought after everything you've gone through, you'd understand?" She sniffs, still breathing uneasily. "Maybe? I don't know..."

“I do.” He squeezes her hands tightly again, which earns him a small, sad smile as she chokes back a sob.

Everyone onboard knew that it hadn’t been a light undertaking to make when they decided to stay aboard and leave behind the life they once knew. In a way, it made him feel closer to everyone onboard. He could empathise with feeling disconnected from a former life, to memories he’ll never really feel in full again.

“I know I shouldn’t let what they said get under my skin, but I can’t help it, it’s so upsetting.”

They? “It’s important to feel the things that affect us.” He gives her a little nudge. “What happened to Ms. ‘I like feeling feelings’?”

“Yeah, I know.” She smiles a little. “It’s just that, I’m still so new to this, I don’t really have any reference point, so what they said to us all really shook me a little. Made me feel like I wasn’t queer enough, and that makes me feel *terrible*.”

Oh. This wasn’t about what he had thought it would be about at all. He had thought it was about losing her former life and being isolated from everyone and everything she once knew. No, this is about the recent away mission that she and Paul had gone on.

There had been a distress hail from a warp-capable planet. A species that had apparently become part of the Federation in the time that they had skipped over, but no one really knew anything about them. For the most part they were isolationist, but had agreed to certain treaties that allowed passage through their space, and in turn they benefited from the trade that came their way. Otherwise, they kept pretty much to themselves, protecting their customs and mindsets. That’s all that the crew really knew since they still weren’t able to connect to any old Federation data logs, so they had to rely on what this species told them. Which wasn’t a lot, and felt very biased. It was also evident that this civilisation had been out of touch with anyone for centuries.

They were very peculiar, to put it kindly. Their social interactions were hardly considerate, and often just flat out rude, even to each other, as Paul had told him. Or as he’d put it, *‘They make me look like a saint.’*

“They said they only wanted to talk to a *‘my’llei*’ which the computer translated to ‘full queer’ and I’m not sure if that was just a term lost in translation, but after that they exclusively talked to Commander Stamets. Even after I said I sometimes like people of the same gender as me, just not as often. So I don’t know what to think about that. But the way they only talked to the Commander made him *furious*, which I’m sure you heard about -” He sure did, *furious* was a very kind word to use. “- but they didn’t like me or didn’t think I was enough to answer their questions, and totally dismissed me. Maybe I didn’t sound confident enough, because this is all still so new to me. I don’t know, it’s just... different and maybe I don’t know how to define it all yet. But... It really hurt me, Hugh - uh, Commander.”

All this had been spurred on after a few of the diplomats clued in that Paul was talking about another man when he mentioned his partner, and not a work partner - a romantic and sexual

partner. They had so many questions, as this was not something that was considered in their culture in any capacity.

From what he had pieced together based on Paul's and Michael's accounts of their independent observations, and from what he had heard from the rest of the crew that had gone planet-side over the next few days, he didn't like the picture of the society that formed in his head. They were a curious species, yes that was true, but those windows remained small - only interacting through trade and emergency situations such as this. It was clear that whatever allowances they made for other species and cultures in the small windows of contact they had, they did not allow for themselves. They were incredibly oppressive to their own kind.

After Paul had said what he needed to about the unfair treatment of Tilly, he had told Hugh about the members of the delegation who had pulled him aside to ask questions about his relationship. He had said that it felt like there was a lot of unspoken things being asked, and although it had been hard to pick up on these things when relying on a universal translator, he said that he had noticed a quiet yearning, as if these people were looking for validation within themselves, too. It had upset Paul that this was a spacefaring civilisation, yet they had not come to terms with or accepted queer people. He couldn't fathom how they could reach space before they could have reached acceptance. Hugh had to remind him that it had been the same with humans, too. Even though Paul was - and probably still is - furious about how they treated Tilly, he hopes that their conversations with people on the planet could be the spark that allowed the oppressed people in their civilization to be able to live authentically.

From their own human history, they knew that this will likely take a long while - too long if you asked Hugh - but the hope for the species beginning to take those steps is there.

"It has nothing to do with you, Tilly. They were wrong to treat you like that. You know yourself, and you know your truth in this. It doesn't matter if you're 'new to this' or if you fall for any one gender more than another. You certainly are queer enough, even if they don't understand that yet."

"...I know... Or maybe... I don't know. I've only just been able to accept myself, so it really hurts when people don't accept me like that. It feels like they're not really seeing who I am, as if they're dismissing this big part of me."

"We see you. All of us on the ship. We love and accept you. We see you for who you are, all of it."

"Thanks." She obviously tries to smile, but it falls short. "I know the Commander probably gave them an earful, but, I felt like I couldn't. Like it wasn't my place? Even though it was about me, which doesn't make sense at all but I felt like I couldn't say anything after that and that I shouldn't push it, or stand up for myself."

"What would Paul say?"

"Well, he'd say they can shove it up their -"

"No. Not that." He cuts her off, and laughs. Although Paul *would definitely* say that, too.

“What would he say to *you* ?”

“Never hide who you are.” She says softly. He knows Paul would already have said it to her, at some point. It became his mantra after Hugh had said it to him in regards to him being oddly self-conscious of his persnickiness one day.

“Exactly.” He smiles, giving her hands a final squeeze before getting up and going around to pull her up into a hug. “You are enough, you belong in these spaces and your voice does, too.”

“Thanks, Hugh.” Her voice is muffled as she speaks into the collar of his jacket, squeezing him tightly back.

“Besides,” he says, letting her go. “I pride myself on my infallible Queer-dar, and it went off as soon as Paul told me about you.”

“But I didn’t even know then!”

“Exactly,” he says, prodding her in the shoulder. “My reputation remains untarnished, because I was right, wasn’t I?”

“Yes, you were,” she giggles at him.

He smiles fondly at her. “Now, please go get some sleep.”

“Alpha shift starts in less than an hour... I can’t.”

“No. Go sleep. You’re taking the day off. Doctor’s orders.” She looked like she was about to protest. “Besides, if anything goes wrong while you’re this sleep deprived *I* won’t stop hearing about it for at least a week. For both of our sakes, you’re having the day off.”

She smiles at that, seemingly conceding to his orders. “Thanks again, for everything.”

“Any time, kiddo.” He squeezes her arm, “I mean that.”

She smiles brightly at that as she leaves. It may be Paul’s nickname for her, but it sure has rubbed off on him using it as well.

It’s only a couple minutes later when Paul strolls into the office, wrapping his arms around Hugh’s shoulders and kissing him on the head.

“Time for bed, sleepy?” He asks. Hugh wonders who he is really asking, as he sounds exhausted himself.

Hugh sighs contentedly, leaning back into Paul’s chest and resting his head against Paul’s pronounced collarbones. His stubble scratches against Hugh’s forehead.

“Mmmh... Please. Although, you might have to find a replacement before we retire for the

night. You're down one staff for tomorrow."

"Tilly?"

"How'd you know?"

"Oh, I ran into her on the way here. She looked like shit."

"Yeah, I gave her the day off. She needs it."

"Poor kiddo. Alpha will manage, I start at Beta tomorrow anyway."

"Ugh, when's our next day off?" He groans as he stands up, stretching. He notices that Pollard has already arrived for Alpha shift and is puttering around the empty medbay, which blessedly means he's free to leave.

"Two days," Paul takes Hugh's hand in his as they walk out, with both of them waving to Pollard before they leave.

"But make sure you clear your schedule, I have a whole lot planned for us."

"What have you got planned?"

Paul gives a wry grin. "A whole lot of absolutely nothing."

Hugh sighs, happily, leaning into Paul as they walk towards their quarters. "Sounds *perfect*."

// End

End Notes

And may *you* be authentically yourself, too. Your identity is your own, and yes, you are queer enough - be it gender identity or orientation, or both. Your voice matters. IDIC, peoples.

Thank you for reading! As always, I really, really love your thoughts and feedback. I appreciate it a lot.

Thank you to [Cygfa](#) and also [Wolfchasing](#) for Beta-ing this lil thing.

You can also come find me over at [tumblr](#) or [twitter](#) - I post drawings of Culmets stuff I do there too.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!