

**CHARLIE HAS A COLD- A  
CHARLIE AND KY SHORT**

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**M**y nose wouldn't stop running. My eyes were watery and my head felt like it was going to explode. I wanted my bed, a cup of tea, and a *Gilmore Girls* marathon. Stat. I sniffed as I dug around for my keys in my man bag, forgetting I was on the phone with Zero's new lawyer or maybe it was the receptionist. I couldn't remember what the hell I was talking about anyway.

"...get the final docs signed by Thursday and we should be squared away."

I sighed in relief when I found my house key. "Okay. Square is good. I mean, Thursday is good. *Ah-choo!* Sorry. I have to go. I'm slowly deteriorating outside my front door. I need all my strength to deal with the lock, Xavier."

"Xander," an amused voice corrected.

"That's a good name. I need to tell my boyfriend we're naming our first son Xan—*ah-choo!*—der. He'll say I'm nuts, but I think I'll get my way. When the time comes, of course."

"Of course. Feel better, Charlie."

"Thanks." I wrestled with the lock and flung the door open.

The sound of a guitar being tuned immediately soothed me. I didn't know if Ky would be home, but I was grateful he was.

I dropped my bag in the entry and sailed into the great room with my left arm outstretched before flopping onto the sectional sofa. I was a firm believer that theatrical entrances sometimes carried more weight than words. And now was one of those times.

Ky flattened his hand over the strings of his guitar and cocked his head. "I sense drama. What's going?"

"I'm sick. And if you thought I was high-maintenance before, you're about to be blown away. I'll understand if you want to escape for a few days. I've heard I'm a horrible—*ah-choo!*—patient," I groused, wiping the corner of my eyes with my shirt sleeve.

Ky propped his guitar against the glass coffee table and sat beside me. He set his hand over my forehead then kissed my brow. "You feel warm. I'll get you some Advil. Take your shoes off and relax."

I covered my eyes with my forearm and groaned. "I can't. My feet are too far. I have no energy. Put a fork in me. I'm done."

"Okay. I'll do it." He pulled my Italian loafers off and tugged at my arm until I sat up. Then he gently pushed my suit coat over my shoulders, tossing it to the other end of the sofa. He set his hand over my mouth and shook his head. "I don't want to hear one word about the proper care of Cavali. Just close your eyes. I'll be right back."

"It's Hugo Boss," I corrected as I reached for a pillow and lay down.

"You're right. I *am* the boss. So sit tight and chill," he said with a half laugh.

I stared at the groves on the wood beam in the middle of our high-pitched ceiling. We'd moved into the modern Venice Beach townhouse three months ago. It was a gorgeous space with an open floor plan, contemporary features, and a killer view of the

Pacific. Ky loved the location and I loved the kitchen. And though we both complained about the commute to the studio, we were exactly where we wanted to be. By the ocean and together.

Sharing a home with a lover was a big step. Hell, I'd certainly never done it before. I'd never been romantically involved with anyone I liked well enough to put up with dirty laundry and troublesome bathroom habits. But Ky was easy company and moving in together seemed so natural. Like something we knew we'd do anyway, so why wait?

When Ky asked if I wanted to move in with him, the conversation went something like...

"Think about it. We could save money on rent and gas, spend more time together. Besides, your cat loves me. What do you say?" Ky tugged at my curls and flashed a winning smile.

"Caprice is a ho for a catnip and a scratch behind the ears. Don't get excited. And if you want to live together for convenience, I think it's a bad idea. You'll hate me within a month," I'd assured him with a huff.

"Nope. Not possible. I love you. And nothing about you is convenient," he'd teased.

I'd swatted his hand away and scowled. "Hey."

"And I like it that way." He laughed, pulling me against his chest. "The thing is...I want to come home to you. Every night. Always."

Now who could say no to that? Not me.

We moved to the beach in July, went on a successful mini tour on the West Coast with Zero in a tricked-out bus in August, and came home to a fuckton of work. The band divided their time between the studio, a few local shows, and some radio appearances, while I kept busy in the background. Launching Zero and their rival, Jealousy, was exhausting. The two bands were in different places and the balancing act required to push

them into the limelight had proven to be a team effort. I'd hired a fantastic staff to help out at Scratch Records, but I was terrible at delegating.

No wonder I was sick. I'd been running myself ragged for weeks, trying to give one hundred percent to everyone who needed me. But sometimes I worried that I didn't save the best parts of me for the person I loved the most. Whenever that particular fear gripped me, I tended to rely on sex to prove that our relationship always ranked number one. Not a hardship at all.

But look at me. I was a fucking mess. My nose was runny, my eyes were red, and my body ached. I couldn't give a blow job without gagging and unbelievably, I didn't want his dick anywhere near my ass. I just wanted to be still and quiet and as close to Ky as possible, even if we were just in the same room. The trick was to remember to be nice. I hated being sick and worse, I tended to lash out when I felt like crap. I'd never mastered the art of compartmentalizing my emotions. If I was happy, I let the world know. And if I was miserable...well, same thing.

Poor Ky. A fucking cold might actually fuck things up.

*Be nice. Be nice. Be nice.*

"Here. Sit up, sexy boy," Ky said, perching on the edge of the sofa. "I brought you some Advil, cold medicine and water."

"I need tea and a blanket. And probably some soup, but I'm not hungry, so don't ask me if I want any."

"Got it. Sit up."

"I can't. I'm too weak. And I'm sore," I sighed.

Ky set the water on the coffee table and pulled at my arm. "Your ass is about to get a little sorer. Take your medicine, Char. Come on."

I grumbled as I sat up and held my hand out. "This is a

fucking pharmacy. I can't take all these tablets at once. I'll choke or die or something."

"Charlie..."

"My nose running. I need tissue. And—oh my God. That's my phone. Where's my bag? Where's my bed? Where's my cat?"

"Holy fuck." Ky held my chin and plied the tablets from my hand. "Open up."

I cooperated 'cause wow...Ky's stern "don't mess with me" expression turned me on. I ignored my hopeful dick as I dutifully swallowed the pill then took a sip of water. "Happy now?"

"Ecstatic." Ky ran his fingers through my hair and rubbed my cheek with his thumb. "I thought your voice sounded raspy this morning. I'm sorry you're not feeling well, baby. You need to rest. You've been going too hard for too long."

"Mmm." I leaned into his touch like a cat. "So much to do still. But I'm so tired."

"I know. Take your clothes off and lie down. I'll grab some tissues for you." He massaged my scalp then kissed my cheek before heading toward our bedroom.

"And my phone, please."

"No phone," he called.

I didn't argue and it seemed like too much effort to get it myself. So I closed my eyes and tried to clear my mind of excess worries. I couldn't do it. My brain started spinning at warped speed. I had twenty things to do before the end of the day and zero desire to do any of them. If I dropped the ball now, everything would fall apart.

I swung my legs around and sat forward, cradling my head between my hands before slowly standing. I stepped forward and smiled at Ky when he came back into the room with a box of Kleenex. Fuck, he was hot. His blue striped board shorts hung low on his hips and his ancient concert tee had holes along the collar. I studied his lean body, his longish dark blond hair, stub-

bled jaw and pretty blue eyes and wondered for the millionth time how I got so lucky.

“Thank you,” I said when he handed over the tissues. “What’s that?”

“Your pajama bottoms and one of my T-shirts.” He worked on the buttons of my oxford shirt, pulling the fabric from my suit pants before unbuckling my belt. He had an uncanny ability to get me out of my clothes, so I wasn’t surprised to find myself dressed in sleepwear in record time. “Want to lay here or on our bed?”

“Um...”

Ky gave me a lopsided grin when I didn’t continue. “I’m about to do a few things that are gonna drive you crazy. Just trust me, okay?”

He pulled the cushions off the sofa then tugged at my wrist until I fell on top of him. I propped myself on my elbows and worked on a mock scolding speech about treating our new furniture with care. But the second I met his gaze, I busted up laughing. The whole house could fall around my ears and wouldn’t have given a shit. This was where I wanted to be, I mused, snuggling against his side.

I ruined the moment with a sneeze attack. Ky pulled a few tissues from the box and dabbed at my nose.

“Thanks. You should quarantine me. Aren’t you afraid you’re going to get sick?”

“Nah. I never get sick.”

“But what if I have something serious, like bronchitis or pneumonia or—”

He set his finger over my lips. “You don’t. You have a cold. It’s not going to turn into anything worse ’cause I’m gonna take good care of you.”

I went perfectly still. I didn’t think Ky realized what he did to me sometimes. He had a gift for making the simplest sentiments

sound like a love letter, a poem, or a sonnet. The type of declaration I'd secretly inserted into every fantasy I'd ever had about the man of dreams. And yeah, I was that guy. Sue me. I loved romance and I wanted it bad. I just never thought I stood a chance because...I was me. A little too chatty, too opinionated, too bossy, and yes...too fabulous.

It seemed improbable that someone so cool and calm and free-spirited would find something worth loving in all this considerable crazy.

And everyone who knew me, including my boyfriend...knew that my wonky filter leaked like a sieve whenever I got flustered. So I leaned on my elbow, narrowed my gaze, and said, "You really do love me, don't you?"

Ky pursed his lips as if to hold back a laugh, but the twinkle in his eyes gave him away. The corner of his mouth lifted in a lazy smile that spread like wildfire across his face. I was humbled by the sweetness in his expression. It was full of affection, pride, and love. For me.

He nodded slowly as he caressed my cheek. "I do. You want to know how much I love you?"

I snorted. "No. I was kidding. Don't listen to me. That cold medicine is crazy shit. No wonder they make you show your license and give up your firstborn. His name is Xander, by the way."

"Huh? Who's Xander?"

"Our son."

"We have a kid?" he asked, widening his eyes comically.

"Not yet. Some day."

Ky smoothed my hair from my forehead. "Got it."

I stared at him. "Didn't I just freak you out?"

"No."

"But I told you that you're going to be a dad some day and you told me once that's something you didn't want. And let's get

real. I may not seem like it, but I'm very traditional. You're going have to marry me first." I winced. "Shoot. Pretend I didn't say that. I'm unraveling. I don't do sick well. Don't be alarmed. I don't need rings or kids or—"

"Shh." He set a finger on my lips. "Hey, we're gonna do all those things. Not tonight. But it's all gonna happen some day. Don't question us, Char. We're good."

"I know. I just..."

"I know you. You freak out when you can't check off everything on your list. You don't feel well and you started spinning and questioning every detail...even when you know there's no need."

"I do that?" I pointed at my chest with faux surprise.

"You do. Look at me, baby."

I sniffled. "I can't my eyes are watering."

Ky pulled a clean tissue from the box and dabbed the corner of my eye. "Better?"

"Yes."

"Good. Now listen up...I'm about to tell you how much I love you. Pay attention." He waited a beat then continued, "I love you more than skateboarding."

"Wow. That's a lot," I conceded with a smile.

"Yep. And I love you more than coffee or chocolate or music or...the beach."

"What about surfing?"

"That too." He inclined his head and brushed his nose against mine. "You're everything I love wrapped into one crazy ass beautiful man. I never know what you're gonna say or do. Geez, I give you a tissue and the next thing I know I'm married and I've got a kid named Zerman."

"Xander." I rolled my eyes. "But...do you want to have kids with me?"

"I want to do everything with you, Char. Wherever you go, I

want to go too. I want to spend the rest of my life soaking in your sunshine. I'll do whatever I can to make you happy, to make you well, to ease your mind...because I love you."

Ky pulled another tissue from the box and brushed a tear from my eye before it ran down my cheek.

"Thank you."

"Don't thank me. I'm a lucky guy. I don't mind wiping your nose and making you soup when you don't feel well. I'm sure you'd do the same for me."

I made a funny face. "Don't catch my cold. For your own sake. I'd make a terrible nurse."

He chuckled. "Liar. You'd do it for me. 'Cause you love me too."

"Yes." I nodded profusely and wrapped my arms around his chest. "So much it hurts sometimes."

Ky kissed the top of my head. "Same here, baby."

I let a comfortable silence stretch before adding, "I want three kids. Two minimum."

He squeezed me tightly and laughed. "You got it."

I looked up at him then and grinned. I wasn't sure what force in the universe brought Ky into my life, but I was endlessly grateful. He balanced me, calmed me, and made my life whole. I wanted to do all those things for him...and more. As soon as the Zyrtec kicked in.

"What if we had a girl first? Do you like the name Zara? I don't think the initials have to match, but you know I love to coordinate and it would be fun if their names all shared the same sound."

"Oh boy..."

