Quiet Aftershocks

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Quiet Aftershocks

by pebbleinalake

Summary

Tag scene to episode 2x14 "Tunnel Vision". Charlie and Rex return home, but it's hard to shake off the effects of their experience in the mine.

Notes

Takes place towards the end of 2x14 "Tunnel Vision", immediately after they were rescued from the mine. There's no real plot here, I just felt that Charlie deserved a chance to go home and cuddle with his dog after everything that happened.

See the end of the work for more notes



The steady rumble of the engine nearly lulled Charlie to sleep. When Joe's car finally pulled up in front of his townhouse, it took all of his effort to make himself move.

From the driver's seat, Joe said, "You know, you're welcome to stay at my house overnight. I can always drop you back here in the morning."

It was a generous offer, and Charlie was touched by the concern he could hear in Joe's voice, but he shook his head.

"Thanks, but I'm good. Besides, I wouldn't want to wake up Camilla, coming in at this hour."

The part he didn't add was that he was simply too exhausted to deal with being in someone else's house — even someone like Joe, who was practically family. After the long and terrifying night he'd had, the only thing Charlie wanted was to be in his own home.

"Okay, if you're sure." It was clear from his tone how hesitant he was to leave Charlie unmonitored, but he thankfully didn't push the issue. "Just do me a favor and call if you need anything. And I want you take the day off tomorrow."

"I need to come in. I need to talk to Ian before he finds out that Nell made it out of the tunnels." At his boss's questioning glance, he added, "He's the murderer, and he's trying to frame her."

The surprised expression on Joe's face said he had a million questions to ask, but he also obviously didn't want to hold him up any longer. "Fine. But at least take a late morning. If I see you in the station before noon, you're going to be on desk duty for a month."

Charlie might have been tempted to protest, if he hadn't glanced at the clock on the dashboard just then. He grimaced as he realized how much of the night was already gone.

It had taken the excavation crews several hours to safely dig their way inside the collapsed tunnel and remove the debris keeping them trapped. By the time everyone was back on the surface, it was well past midnight. Even then, Charlie's night hadn't been over.

The paramedics set up a field station outside the mine entrance so they could check over everyone as they were brought out. Sarah was thankfully cleared and released, having been a little banged up in the initial collapse but otherwise fine. Ian had been sent straight to the hospital due to how long he'd been unconscious.

When the paramedics got to Charlie, they were able to determine that his leg wasn't broken and that, aside from an assortment of scrapes and bumps, the worst of it was a patch of severe bruising along his leg and hip from where he'd been pinned down. Nothing that sounded concerning. The news had briefly filled him with the hope of being released to go home. Unfortunately, after finding out that he'd lost consciousness for a while, they were insistent that he get checked out more thoroughly at the hospital. Apparently passing out from lack of oxygen was not something they were willing to shrug off.

His protests were shut down quickly by Joe stepping in. The superintendent used his privileges as Charlie's boss to strong arm him into compliance, though he'd also pulled some strings to let Rex ride along, since Charlie was reluctant to leave him behind. The poor dog had been practically velcroed to his side since the rescue crew pulled him out. They soon had him loaded onto an ambulance with an oxygen mask over his face and Rex curled up at his feet.

Joe had met him at the hospital. The doctors ran every test they deemed necessary — though, to Charlie, it felt like they ran a few more than necessary — before reassuring him that he had suffered no serious repercussions from his misadventure. They did make him stay on oxygen for a while longer so they could monitor him, but eventually cleared him to go home, with stern warnings about giving his body time to properly heal.

Since his own car was still at the entrance to the mines, Charlie had been grateful for Joe's offer of a ride home. Besides, he probably wasn't awake enough at that point to drive. Not safely, at least.

Now, with the night basically over and dawn rapidly approaching, he realized that maybe taking a half day wasn't such a bad idea.

"It's a deal," he murmured around a yawn, reaching clumsily for the door handle.

Even Rex had less bounce in his step than usual when Charlie released him from the back of the car. Together, the duo plodded their way up the steps to the porch and into their home.

The house was dark when they got inside. *Too dark*. A tinge of panic clawed at Charlie's throat as he reached quickly for the light switch beside the door.

Warm, golden light flooded the entry area.

Tension ebbing away, his eyes skimmed over the familiar surroundings, from the faded sofa to the half-finished motorcycle.

A concerned whimper rose from his side, a leathery nose pressing against the back of his hand.

“I’m okay,” Charlie said, even though he knew Rex wouldn’t be fooled. There was a strange comfort in having someone around who could understand when things were wrong without him having to say the words.

Rex headed straight for the couch, but Charlie caught him before he could jump up. “Sorry, but you desperately need a bath.”

Shedding his suit coat and shirt, he pitched them straight into the trash can, knowing there was no hope of saving either one. The bathroom downstairs didn’t have a tub, so he ignored the throbbing in his leg and struggled his way up the narrow staircase.

Having dealt with previous mid-bath escape attempts from Rex, he automatically shut the bathroom door behind them as they entered.

The bathroom suddenly felt smaller than it had only a day ago. Too small, and too closed in. *Trapped*.

It probably couldn’t hurt to leave it open this one time. He shot a warning look at Rex as he propped the door open. The dog merely cocked his head innocently, as if his human was worrying over nothing.

It took a bit of maneuvering to lower himself into a position beside the tub that wouldn’t aggravate his leg or hip. Finally managing it, Charlie fastened the dog-washing attachment to the tub faucet and turned on the water.

“I really don’t have the energy to chase a wet dog through the house,” he said. “So, please behave this time.”

Miraculously, Rex actually did behave himself perfectly. He didn’t put up any resistance when Charlie wet him down or started scrubbing the shampoo into his coat. Dirt, gravel, and dust swirled over the ceramic before disappearing down the drain. His own eyelids drooping, Rex sat back and let himself be cleaned.

Drying his thick coat was always a challenge, but Charlie found the familiar motion settled his nerves tonight. Sitting against the side of the tub, Rex stretched out beside him, he worked the drying rag through his fur until it was soft and fluffy, then set to work with the detangling brush. And if he spent a bit more time on the grooming session than he normally would have, at least Rex didn’t seem to mind.

The next task was the less pleasant one. Rex hadn’t been the only one covered in grime from the cave-in.

“Okay, good job. You’re free to go,” he said, groaning as he dragged himself into an upright position. “My turn now.”

Rex dropped his head onto his paws with a determined huff. He obviously wasn’t planning on moving. A tension that Charlie hadn’t even realized was in his chest suddenly eased.

“Thanks, pal,” he murmured, giving his partner a grateful pat on the head. “I’ll be done in a couple minutes.”

It didn’t take long to rinse out the tub and switch the water to the showerhead. Peeling off and discarding the last of his ruined work clothes, he stepped into the steaming shower with a tired sigh. The remnants of his dirt tomb washed away layer by layer. It took longer than he wanted to get all of it scrubbed off, but he was finally free of it. Breathing came easier as he stepped back out onto the bathmat.

Rex followed at his heels as he changed into the softest pair of sweatpants he could find, pairing it with an oversized t-shirt that had been around since forever. The chill of the tunnels had settled deep into his bones, and even the hot water of the shower hadn’t been able to wash it away.

The idea of limping back down the stairs again was too much. It wasn’t as if he was hungry enough for dinner. And it’d be time for breakfast in another couple hours anyway.

Yeah, food could wait. Sleep first.

He took the painkiller the doctor had sent home with him and collapsed on the bed. It took a minute to get settled in comfortably, having to find a position that wouldn’t aggravate his bruised hip.

“You can go back down to your bed now,” he said, noticing Rex still standing in the doorway. “Time for sleep.”

It was a command Rex knew well by now, but he didn’t leave the room as usual. He pawed at the carpet, whimpering, and turned in an anxious circle.

Sighing, knowing that he didn’t have the heart to send him away after the night they’d had, Charlie patted the empty spot on the bed. “Okay, fine. Just for tonight.”

A happy bark rang out as Rex hopped up onto the bed. He flopped down beside his human, wiggling around until he was comfortable.

“I guess you’ve earned it. You did a great job tonight, partner. I’m proud of you.”

Giving the dog one last pat on the forehead, Charlie leaned back and clicked off the lamp on the bedside table.

The room plunged into darkness.

The shadows were heavy as they pressed in, filling the already cramped space of the bedroom. It was too closed in. Suffocating.

Rex whined as the lamp clicked back on. He wiggled closer, licking tentatively at Charlie's chin.

"It's okay, buddy," he said. The breathless sound of the words made him aware of how close he was to hyperventilating. With effort, he slowed down his breathing. "I'm okay."

Maybe leaving the light on wouldn't be a bad idea. The sun would up soon anyway.

Rex shifted, pressing more firmly into his side. One paw stretched across Charlie's body, and Rex's head came to rest on his chest. He was effectively trapped under a heavy blanket of German Shepherd.

"Hey, I'm sorry if I worried you. It's been… a rough night."

The understatement of a lifetime.

The brown eyes staring back at him were free of judgement or annoyance, though. Only kindness. Maybe a fair amount of concern.

Blinking back tears, Charlie reached down and ruffled Rex's fur. He planted a kiss on the dog's forehead and got a lick on the face in return.

"You're the best, partner."

Rex merely wagged his tail and dropped his head back onto Charlie's chest.

Being trapped under this kind of weight was a different thing altogether. There was nothing cold or suffocating about it. Rex's breath puffed against his neck, keeping him grounded in the moment. The warmth of the giant dog seeped down into his body, finally chasing away the chill of the mines.

Fully relaxing for the first time since they'd gone down into that tunnel, Charlie closed his eyes and fell asleep to Rex's gentle snores.

End Notes

I know Charlie mentioned that Rex's snoring usually keeps him awake, but I think this would be an exception. Also, speaking from experience, nothing eases anxiety better than falling asleep with a pet curled up on top of you.

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