

# If $Y = X$ then....

by Tanaqui

Bill slammed on the brakes and cursed as two women emerged from the cornfield to his left and ran out into the road, waving for the patrol car to stop. "What the—?"

Both women doubled over, apparently trying to catch their breaths. Looked like they'd run across the field to stop the car. Maybe they knew something about the whatever-it-was that had come streaking across the sky half an hour back, heading north east.

As Bill got out of the car, the women straightened up. He didn't know either of them, and he wondered how they'd managed to get past both Beck's patrols and the Rangers—and why they'd even bothered. But he sure would've remembered this pair if he'd ever run into them before. They were both tall, and the brunette was quite a looker, with long-lashed dark eyes, and high cheekbones, and a wide, generous mouth that Bill could imagine—. He caught himself from following up the thought and transferred his attention to her friend. She wasn't much to look at face-wise, but that was more than compensated for by the way she filled out—no, was almost bursting out of—the check plaid shirt she wore.

"Ladies." Bill smirked at them as he approached. "Can we help?" He glanced back at where Jimmy was puffing as he hauled himself out of the car.

"Stay back," the dark-haired one ordered, holding out a hand, and backing up herself.

Bill raised his eyebrows but stopped where he was, a dozen feet away. "Is everything okay?"

The blonde cast a frustrated look at her friend, and then turned back to him. "Bill, it's us," she hissed.

Bill frowned at her, wondering how she knew his name. Because, really, there was no way he would have forgotten these two.

"It's us," the blonde repeated. She rubbed a hand across her forehead, stretching the shirt in such new and interesting ways that Bill almost missed her snarling, "Jake and Stanley."

"What?" As the woman's words sank in, he turned from one to the other. He could sort of see the resemblance; the blonde did look a little like Bonnie Richmond, and the brunette could maybe have been Jake's sister. But they were... girls. They had—he was painfully aware of it in the blonde's case—girl parts. His eyes slid downwards briefly, because that was something you so didn't want to be caught checking out on another guy, and, yes, there seemed to be a distinct lack of boy parts.

"Something crashed on Stanley's ranch." The brunette's words pulled Bill's attention back to her face. She turned her head away a little, frowning in annoyance. "Some kind of military satellite, maybe? Stanley gave it a poke, and it broke open and sprayed us with this dust."

"Sprayed some of the corn, too," the blonde supplied. She grimaced. "Couple of minutes later.... Well, I know there's plants with male and female flowers, and corn's one of them, but I've never seen male flowers change into female ones in front of my eyes."

"And then it started working on us." The brunette gestured down at herself. "By the time we were halfway back to the road...."

"You guys have got to be kidding me?" Bill shook his head.

"I wish." The brunette's tone was grim.

"I don't get it." Jimmy was looking from one woman to the other and back again.

The brunette gestured to the blonde and then to herself. "It's Stanley and Jake, Jimmy. We got sprayed by some dust and," she let out a harsh laugh and Bill saw the resemblance to the Jake he knew, because the laugh was still the same, if a little higher pitched, "...we got a sex change."

"Okay." Jimmy sounded like he still didn't believe it, or still didn't quite understand what was going on, but was prepared to take it on trust.

"Well," Bill took a deep breath, trying to make sense of the situation, which was like nothing he'd run into in more than ten years as a deputy, "I guess we should get Kenchy to take a look at you."

"Yeah. Hey!" The blonde—Stanley, he reminded himself—snapped her fingers at Bill. "I'm up here." As Bill dragged his gaze upward, the blonde turned to the brunette and sighed. "Did I used to do that?"

The brunette laughed, and punched her in the arm. "All the time!"

"Dammit." The blonde jerked her head in annoyance. "No wonder girls always seemed kinda off with me."

Another thought struck Bill. "Is this thing contagious?" He backed up a step.

"I don't know." The brunette shrugged; again, the shrug was all Jake. Bill was finally beginning to believe they really were Stanley and Jake, and trying hard not to think about how, even knowing that, he *still* found both of them hot.

Jake—Bill could think of her as Jake now—was still talking. "I guess not. We both got hit pretty hard by the dust. If it's some kind of weapon, the military probably wouldn't want it happening to their own guys when they turned up. But I guess we shouldn't come into town and spread this stuff any more than we have."

"Yeah." Bill backed up another step, making an effort not to drop his hands to cover his crotch, because he did so not want to lose his—.

"We need containment." Jake frowned in thought. "You guys need to go back up the road and radio into town. Get them to...", he—she? he?—sighed heavily, "...to contact Major Beck. He should have hazmat suits and the manpower to cordon off the area. Tell them about the satellite, and that there's some kind of contamination." Jake closed his eyes for a moment, before looking back at Bill. "Just don't tell them what—." He gestured down at himself.

Bill nodded. Yeah. He wouldn't want people knowing either.

"They're here." Stanley swatted Jake's arm and pointed up the road. Three humvees were approaching where Bill and Jimmy had stopped the patrol car about quarter mile away.

Jake stood up from where he'd been squatting on the shoulder, trying to come to terms with what had happened. This was kinda crap for him, but he suspected it was much worse for Stanley, who had a fiancée. The two of them hadn't really spoken, though. Once, Stanley had said, with a kind of bravado in his voice, "Maybe it'll wear off?" but mostly they'd just waited to see what would happen.

The new arrivals began milling around, some of the troops putting on hazmat suits. After a few minutes, two of the suited troops began to make their way down the road. The rest fanned out into the field toward where the remains of the satellite—or whatever it was—lay.

Jake shaded his eyes with his hand. "Dammit."

"What?" Stanley came and stood next to him.

Jake jerked his head down the road. "It's Beck." Even suited up in hazmat gear, the major's bearing was unmistakable.

Not that Beck wouldn't have learned the truth soon enough, but Jake would have preferred not to face him until the idea was a little less raw in his own mind. He at least had the satisfaction of seeing Beck's confident stride falter as he got close enough to realize what had happened, before the major visibly pulled himself together and hurried on.

"Jake? Stanley?" Beck stopped in front of them, and looked from one to the other.

Jake nodded, suddenly feeling very self-conscious in his new body as Beck looked him up and down. Beck seemed almost embarrassed to be making the inspection, quite unlike Bill's open leering, and somehow that was far, far worse. Jake had a horrible feeling that, deep inside him, all those new female hormones were pointing out to him that Beck was *attractive*.

Pushing the thought aside, Jake met Beck's gaze. The other man swallowed and nodded. When he next spoke, it was all brisk practicality.

"You think the device was a satellite?"

Jake shrugged. "I guess. From the way it came down...."

"Is there any possibility it was a missile with a failed guidance system?"

Jake thought about it. The device had been pretty messed up, but anything coming down through the atmosphere uncontrolled would maybe have burned up more. And if the guidance fins had gotten ripped off.... He'd seen film of missile tests that had gone wrong, and the way the device had skittered across the sky hadn't been too dissimilar. He nodded at Beck.

Beck turned to the soldier with him. "Radio camp and tell them to step up patrols and be extra alert. Cheyenne may be preparing an assault."

"You think Cheyenne sent it?" Stanley made as if to fold his arms across his chest, and then apparently thought better of it.

Beck turned back to him. "I think it's extremely unlikely that a satellite would randomly choose to fall right on this particular town at this particular time, don't you? And I wouldn't put it past Cheyenne to pull a trick like that. We all know what they—and the people working for them—are capable of doing."

He glanced back at Jake; even through the plexiglass of the hazmat suit helmet, Jake saw for a moment the self-reproach in Beck's expression, before it was quickly veiled. They hadn't spoken of what had happened since Beck's apology the day Jake returned to Jericho, but there'd been enough moments like this that Jake knew Beck would probably carry the scars of those four days longer than he did.

Clearing his throat, Jake concentrated on the current situation. "So it was meant to explode mid-air and blanket the town?"

Beck nodded.

"And turn everyone into girls?" Jake couldn't help but notice how squeaky Stanley's voice was. He hadn't sounded like that since he was twelve. Stanley squared up to Beck, an annoyed look on his face. "Do they think we wouldn't fight them if we're *girls*?"

Jake snorted. "I can think of one or two women around here who'd disabuse them of that notion pretty quickly."

"I think it's a good way to confuse and disorient your enemy, if only temporarily." Beck dropped his gaze briefly, apparently unable to stop himself from once again taking a look at the more visible evidence of the changes in them. He coughed apologetically as he met Jake's gaze again.

"You think it could be temporary?" Stanley beat Jake to voicing the question.

Beck shrugged. "I don't know. Meanwhile, we'll set up some shelter and take care of you here, while we figure out whether anyone else will be infected and whether it'll last." He peered out across the field. "You said the corn was affected too? Maybe that'll help us figure out what's going on. And....," he turned back to face them, his expression softening, "we'll keep exactly what's happened quiet. Just let people know you're in quarantine." He straightened his shoulders and nodded to them. "Now, if you'll excuse me...."

Watching Beck stump off down the road, Jake realized with annoyance that Heather was right: Beck *was* a good man.

Or maybe that was just the hormones speaking again....

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