

Not To Question Why By Scribblesinink

Jake shifted uncomfortably on the hard, plastic chair of the hospital waiting room; the stress and abuse his body had suffered the last few days was finally catching up with him. He hadn't had time to pay it much attention before, but his shoulders were still in agony over having his arms bound behind him for days, and the rest of him wasn't doing much better.

Adrenaline only got you so far.

He glanced at the clock on the wall. The EMTs had brought them to the on-base medical center, military doctors whisking Hawkins away into surgery immediately. But they'd been gone for a long time already, and Jake was beginning to worry about the lack of updates. Wouldn't it just suck if Hawkins didn't make it, after all they'd been through together?

Chavez had joined Jake in the waiting room about an hour previously, informing him that the engineers were still examining the bomb, and that the authorities would want to talk to Jake and Hawkins first thing in the morning.

"We're not under arrest, are we?"

Chavez had chuckled and shaken his head. "No. But I wouldn't suggest you try and leave Lackland right now. They'll have questions, and as long as Hawkins is out, you're the next best guy to answer them." Taking a seat next to Jake, he'd added, "Hey, don't worry. They're just being cautious. Once they finish with the bomb, it'll all be different."

Jake fidgeted again, unable to sit still. The pungent smell of antiseptic was starting to make him nauseous. "I need some air," he muttered. He pushed to his feet, and a wave of dizziness made him sway.

"Whoa there!" Chavez caught his elbow to steady him. He squinted up at Jake, eyes narrowed. "When's the last time you had anything to eat?"

"Umm—" Jake fell silent, realizing he couldn't remember "—a while ago."

Chavez made a noise and got to his feet as well. "Come on." He gestured for Jake to follow him.

"Where're we going?"

"Gotta get you some chow. There's nothin' you can do here, and you certainly won't be of any use to anyone if you drop dead from lack of food." Chavez grinned at him.

Jake followed him through the warren of hospital hallways and out the front door, where Chavez directed him to a military issue jeep parked nearby. "Get in. I think the O-club still serves burgers."

The mere mention of burgers was enough to make Jake's mouth water; without a word of protest, he got into the shotgun seat, for once happy to let someone else call the shots. He was beat and only sheer willpower was keeping him on his feet.

Chavez steered them down the main thoroughfare that ran across the entire base; the street was largely deserted, although lights shone in many of the office buildings. Far in the distance, the roar of jets taking off or landing never fully ceased. It might look calm, Jake realized, but appearances were deceptive: Texas had just gone to war, and the base would be abuzz with activity.

He tried not to think about it too much. Hawkins was probably right; this war might well've been coming with or without them. But the thought of American soldiers fighting American soldiers gave him chills. Hadn't happened in over a hundred and fifty years. They could only trust that the Cheyenne government, its secret exposed, would do the smart thing and surrender before too much American blood had gotten spilled.

Somehow, after hearing Tomarchio's speech and having listened to Hawkins' tales about Valente, Jake didn't have too much hope they'd give up so easily.

The officer's club wasn't far from the medical center, and it didn't take more than a couple minutes before Chavez and Jake were seated in a booth, nursing cold beers. Probably not the wisest choice on an empty stomach, Jake thought, but it tasted like the best beer he'd ever had.

He took another swig from the cold bottle and glanced around. Lackland AFB's officer's club wasn't much different from Bailey's on a quiet night, he decided. Except, of course the customers wore Air Force uniforms with the flag of Texas sewn onto their sleeves instead of checked flannel shirts and worn jeans. A couple of lieutenants were having a late evening meal two booths over, and a handful of off-duty fly boys were enjoying a drink at the bar; otherwise, the place was as quiet as the streets outside had been.

It didn't take long for Jake's order to arrive. "Homemade with real Texan beef from real Texan cattle." The waitress smiled encouragingly as she put the plate down in front of him. Her accent told Jake she wasn't originally from around here. Somewhere on the east

coast, he thought. He figured she should count herself lucky to be alive, seeing how many bombs had gone off in the cities along the Eastern seaboard.

He grinned back. "Thanks."

The food certainly looked and smelled amazing, and definitely better than any of the army fare he'd gotten used to eating in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"Wow, looks like you've never had a burger in your life." Chavez looked on with an amused grin as Jake attacked his burger and fries.

Jake shrugged, mumbling around a mouthful of beef, "You've seen what state Jericho's in."

Some of the amusement faded from Chavez's face. "Yeah. It'll be better soon, now."

"Will it?" Jake took another bite. "Jericho's still under Cheyenne's control. And with Beck in charge—" The thought of his hometown being at the mercy of the AS army major turned the bite of burger in his mouth to sawdust and he took a large gulp from his beer to wash it down.

"Beck's not a bad guy." Chavez leaned back into his seat and started toying with a paper coaster. "Bit of a stickler for the rules, maybe, but—."

Jake snorted. "You obviously haven't been around, lately. Beck's—."

A stocky man with a buzz cut approached their table, stopping Jake from finishing what he'd been about to say.

"Jake Green?"

Jake looked up, a little wary until he noticed the guy's name embroidered on his right chest pocket. "Thompson...?" He tilted his head up further so he could see the man's face. "*Colonel* Thompson, of the Air National Gard?"

Thompson nodded. "One and the same."

"You saved my ass back there."

Thompson smirked. "Sure looked like I did."

"Please, Colonel, won't you sit?" Jake pointed a fork at the bench opposite him, while Chavez slid across to make room.

"Weirdest day I ever had." Thompson took the offered seat but waved the waitress away as Jake called her over to order more beers. "Thanks, but I'm gonna go up again at oh-six-hundred." He fixed Jake with a sharp gaze. "But I wanted to see with my own eyes what you look like: the guy I went to war over. What's so damned important, anyway, that I had to shoot down Americans?" A shadow crossed Thompson's face. "Wasn't even allowed to give them fair warning after they went weapons hot on you."

"Sorry." Jake glanced away. Many more lives would be lost before this was over. But, to be honest, he'd never been more shocked and glad all at once than when Thompson had shown up and blasted the Cheyenne planes out of the sky. He looked back at the colonel. "In any case, it's not about me. It's—." He paused, glancing over at Chavez in silent question.

Chavez shrugged. "Not like the news isn't gonna be out soon, anyway."

"I guess," Jake agreed. And it was only fair that Thompson knew why he'd been ordered to fire on fellow American pilots. "I was carrying a bomb."

Thompson's left eyebrow rose. "A bomb?"

"Yeah. A nuclear bomb. The last of the devices used in the September attacks."

Thompson's jaw dropped. "And you'd bring that to Texas, why?"

"Cause it's evidence." Chavez leaned forward. "It'll expose Cheyenne for the lying bastards they are."

Thompson's gaze flicked to Chavez, before he turned his attention back to Jake. "How did you get a-hold of it?"

Jake chuckled. "That's a bit of a long story."

"Well...", Thompson waved the waitress over, "I think I'll have that beer after all. No, make it a Scotch. On the rocks." After she'd left, he looked back at Jake, shrugging. "It's —." Suddenly his eyes narrowed shrewdly. "Wait, are you telling me Cheyenne was behind the attacks? That they're the ones who nuked the hell out of Dallas and Houston, and all those other cities?"

"I don't know if they were behind it or not." Jake ran a tired hand through his hair. "But I believe they knew about it, knew when and where it would happen, and used the opportunity to their best advantage."

Thompson sat back. "Hot damn...."

That about summed it up, and silence ensued. Stomach full, Jake found himself growing drowsy, and he wondered where he could find a place to sleep tonight.

After several minutes, Thompson pushed to his feet and held out his hand. "Well, Jake Green, it was good to meet ya in the flesh. Now, I should hit the sack, so I can beat the crap outta those guys tomorrow." Jake shook the offered hand, and Thompson left, his Scotch untouched.

Chavez snatched it up and took a swallow. "Sounds like damned fine advice to me. Let's head back to the hospital, see if there's any news on Hawkins. And then I'll drop you off at the Gateway Lodge. They got a bed with your name on it. Get some rest."

Jake nodded, yawning behind his hand. Yeah. It was gonna be another long day tomorrow.

Disclaimer: this story is based on the Junction Entertainment/Fixed Mark Productions/CBS Paramount Television series *Jericho*. It was written for entertainment only; the author does not profit from it nor was any infringement of copyright intended. Please do not redistribute elsewhere without the author's consent.