

Unexpected Outcomes

by Tanaqui

Beck steered his car through the streets of Rochester, the route still largely familiar even though it had been seventeen months since he'd last driven it. There was a moment when some construction work and a change to an intersection had him turned around, but he quickly figured out where he was and pointed himself in the right direction again. Even so, by the time he reached Bo's bar and parked the car, the place was already busy with the early Friday evening crowd.

Beck found a stool and hoisted himself up, nodding to Bo as he caught the barman's eye. It was a couple of minutes before Bo could make his way along the bar and pour the usual measure of scotch. "Good to see you, major."

Beck rolled a shoulder. "It'll be lieutenant colonel soon," he admitted a little shyly. He'd been up before the promotion board last month and heard the news a week ago. Maybe that was what had finally prompted him to call Bo and let him know he'd be making the trip to Rochester, even though he'd been stateside for seven weeks.

"Is that so?" Bo popped the cap off a beer for himself and saluted Beck with it, before turning and unlocking a drawer and producing a set of keys. "Here." He laid them on the bar in front of Beck.

"Thanks." Beck took a sip of his scotch. "Is everything okay with the place?"

"It's fine." Bo turned his head, looking along the bar. "Gotta go." He headed off to serve another customer. Beck sat staring at the keys while he waited for him to return. He wasn't sure he wanted to go to the apartment. Maybe he should just get a room, like he'd done before—. He suppressed a sigh. He'd have to go back sometime. Best to get it over and done with.

"How was it?" Bo made his way back along the bar, breaking into Beck's gloomy anticipation of how bleak the apartment would be when he walked in and found it cold and empty.

Beck knew Bo was talking about the deployment. He didn't much want to think about that either. By the time his battalion had arrived, the top brass were claiming they were meeting their objectives; didn't make it feel much more secure on the ground or mean there were far more deaths than he'd have hoped for in the following months. "Better when we left than when we arrived," he conceded, knowing Bo wouldn't ask for further details unless he showed he wanted to talk. Appreciating that Bo would also let him talk, and understand, if he needed to.

Bo nodded, before disappearing down the bar again with an apologetic wave. This time when he came back, Beck gathered up the keys and downed the last of his scotch. "I should go. You're busy." He put some bills on the bar.

Bo picked them up slowly. "Drop by later. If you feel like it."

"Will do." Glancing up as he pushed off the stool and fumbled for his car keys, Beck was surprised to catch a grin on the barman's face. Maybe he was just glad to see Beck back in one piece.

oOo

The temperature had dropped sharply while Beck was in the bar. By the time he reached the apartment building, the dirty slush was starting to freeze over on the sidewalk and on the path up the front door. He made his way carefully over the slippery ground, glancing up just once at the darkened window that sat bleakly between others from which a little warm light spilled out around curtains and blinds.

Fumbling to get the key into the lock of the outer door, he again felt the urge to check into the Four Points and pretend that the months he'd spent visiting here every other weekend had never happened.

No. He couldn't pretend that. Things had changed; *he* had changed. Though he hadn't been with a man since before his deployment, longer than at any time since he'd first discovered what he was, he had no desire to return to his old haunts and seek out a few hours of pure physical relief. At some point during those months with Jake, he'd accepted that what he wanted might still be a sin in the eyes of the Church, but it was no less love than what the Church taught was right. With that, he'd no longer felt the need to try to wall himself off from that part of his life inside his mind—until he could stand the lie no longer and needed to head to Rochester to give in to the temptation that gnawed at him.

Or perhaps it was that Jake had simply filled him up with enough love to quiet the craving for another man's touch.

Wrestling the door open at last, Beck hoisted his bag more securely on his shoulder and headed briskly up the stairs. The hallway was quiet, as always, though he thought he could hear music from the apartment opposite. He wondered briefly if that woman Jake had been friendly with—Anna? No, Anita—still lived there. Unlocking his own place, he pushed open the door.

A wave of warm air, laden with the smell of cooking, flowed out at him from the darkness inside, and Beck checked on the threshold. Then a light flicked on and a familiar voice said, "Welcome home."

Beck gaped at Jake. He was standing by the couch. Beyond him, the curtains had been drawn in the time it had taken Beck to make it upstairs. The table was laid for dinner and a pot was

simmering quietly on the stove.

Only half aware he was doing so, Beck took a step forward and closed the door behind him, his old caution kicking in. He went on staring at Jake, while the pleased look slipped from Jake's face. Finding his voice at last, Beck demanded, "What the hell are you doing here?"

Jake scrubbed a hand across the back of his neck. "Well, it's good to see you too...."

Beck could hear the hurt in his voice, but he was too confused and shocked to do more than drop his bag and blurt out, "Why aren't you in Kansas?"

Jake gave him a long, thoughtful look. "Because I came back?" he offered. "Because I live here? Because *we* live here?"

"I didn't think...." Beck was still having trouble connecting what he was seeing, what Jake was saying, with what he'd expected.

"You didn't think I come back? Once I'd gotten my life back?" Jake raised his eyebrows.

Beck nodded silently. That was exactly what he'd expected.

"Is that why you didn't tell me you were being deployed? Why I had to find out from Bo?"

Beck nodded again. "Yes. I suppose so." It was hard to speak.

Jake stepped forward and put his hands on either side of Beck's face. "My life is here," he said quietly. "With you. If that's what you want."

Beck was trembling: from shock and from the dizziness that had swept through him at Jake's touch. He tried to shape the words he wanted to say, but they wouldn't come out. Instead, he reached up and pulled Jake's mouth down onto his, knowing it was answer enough.

oOo

Beck woke slowly, breathing in the scent of the man spooned against him. For a moment, he didn't know *when* it was, his mind playing tricks and wiping out the long months apart. Then memory returned. He wasn't sure which of them had made the first move toward the bedroom while they kissed, just that they had been tugging each other step by step, turn by turn, toward the bed, while Jake helped Beck shed his coat and jacket.

They'd been nearly at the door to the bedroom when Jake had broken away. "Dinner," he'd explained breathlessly, pushing Beck toward the bedroom door while he hurried into the kitchen and turned off the burner under the pot.

"Should we—?" The question came out in a croak. Beck cleared his throat. "Won't it spoil?" Jake had obviously gone to some effort to surprise him and welcome him home, and he didn't

want to upset him further.

Jake shook his head. "It'll keep." He crossed back to Beck and put his hands on Beck's shoulders. "Didn't know when you'd be arriving or... what we'd want to do when you got here." He grinned at Beck and bent and kissed him again, pushing him backwards through the door and on to the bed.

They'd made love for a long time, at first frantically, reacquainting themselves with the taste and touch and sight of the other, getting each other off with hands and mouths, both of them knowing without having to say it that they were being too rough and desperate for anything else. Then, once the first frenzy had passed, they'd made love again more slowly, Beck reaching around to get Jake off while he pushed deep inside him. Jake had been the one to produce lube and condoms, clearly recently purchased, from the nightstand drawer—which was just as well, because Beck hadn't packed any. Hadn't expected to be spending the evening like this with anyone, let alone Jake. It was final proof, if he'd needed any, that Jake really wanted this.

Jake must have felt him waking, because he turned so he could meet Beck's gaze. "Missed me?"

"Uh-huh." Beck propped himself up on one elbow and leaned forward, capturing Jake's mouth for a moment with his own.

When he pulled back, Jake was grinning. "Again?"

Beck shook his head. Jake might make him feel like a giddy teenager, but he didn't have that kind of recuperative power these days. "Maybe in a while." He ran his thumb along Jake's jawline. "What if I hadn't come back?"

Jake's expression sobered. "You mean, what if something had happened to you? Over there?" He jerked his head slightly.

Beck nodded.

Jake put his hand up, touching his fingertips to Beck's temple. "Tried not to think about that..." Sliding his hand around the back of Beck's head, he pulled Beck down for another kiss in which Beck could feel the worry. When they broke apart, he added softly, "Was there reason to?"

Beck knew Jake was as aware as he was that there was always reason to worry, but he shook his head. "No particular reason, no." Several soldiers in his battalion had died while on patrol, he'd been in convoys that had come under mortar attack three times, and a couple of RPGs had been fired into their camp once, but he'd never been close to getting hurt himself. "What about you? Have you been okay for... money and that kind of thing?"

Jake nodded. "Got a job flying cargo feedliners out of the airport here." Apparently catching

Beck's doubtful expression at the word 'cargo', he grinned and added, "Don't worry, it's all legit. We're mostly carrying stuff for FedEx and I haven't been anywhere but the Northeast US for months."

The last few words were accompanied by a noisy growl from Jake's stomach. He gave Beck an embarrassed look.

Beck put his hand on Jake's stomach. "Maybe we should go eat that dinner you cooked?" he suggested. He shifted his hand down, brushing it against Jake's cock, as he leaned in for another kiss. "We've got all weekend for this."

Savoring Jake's lips under his, he couldn't help thinking what he hadn't ever dared think before: *Maybe even the rest of our lives....*

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.