

Program Error

Project Asclepius
“Peckwash Facility”
Southern Front Range,
Colorado

The labs were like a prison to him – a place that he was familiar with, but no longer belonged.

He looked down with glazed eyes at the bloodied white coat he wore. The coat was meant to symbolize something to him, but he couldn't remember what.

In fact, he couldn't remember much at all beyond the primal need to kill or be killed, to be the hunter, not the prey.

The lights around him were muted and dull, and a throbbing red glow seemed to fill the entire complex.

Red – the color of blood – why did he suddenly enjoy the sight of it so much?

There were footsteps in the adjacent corridor and he paused, wondering if “the others” had caught up with him?

In the beginning, there had been many of them, but he had greatly reduced their numbers with his newfound skills.

He was more alert, more agile, and his strength grew with every heartbeat – with every cell division within him.

Panicked voices followed the footsteps, and he knew it was time to do something again he had once abhorred.

He ducked into a locker room and forced his back against the wall, waiting for them to come in.

On the wall opposite was a mirror, and what he saw in it made him flinch. Strange lesions and growths covered the flesh on his face and hands, and his eyes glowed with an almost yellow tinge that reminded him of a wolf.

He liked that idea.

Wolves liked to stalk their enemies, and they liked to tear them to pieces once the hunt was over.

Something wet trickled down his chin, and he realized he was drooling at the idea of taking the life of another human being.

Somewhere in his skull, a tiny voice asked “wasn’t that wrong?”

He shook his head and grinned, clenching and unclenching his fists in anticipation.

Eventually, the locker room door swung gently open, as if the person outside was wary of what was within.

The muzzle of a rifle tentatively moved through the opening, followed by its owner.

The newcomer wore a lab coat too, a thin individual with a wiry frame and terrified eyes that suggested he wasn’t familiar with this kind of situation.

The man’s hands shook as he held the weapon, and perspiration covered his skin until it glistened in the scarlet hue that was the only filtered light in the facility.

He moved closer, until he was just a few feet away.

And then, the short-lived battle commenced.

The rifle was quickly snatched from the lab technician’s hands before he could even fire a shot.

He yelped and tried to draw back from the “thing” – the man that was attacking him, but it was no use.

Both men tumbled to the floor in a pile of flaying limbs.

It was over as quickly as it had begun.

The technician lay at an odd angle, his neck skewed to one side where the vertebrae inside had been snapped.

His eyes stared out hollowly into nothing, and his legs twitched from some reaction in his already dead nervous system.

The killer sighed.

The death had been too easy, too boring.

He wanted a more suitable adversary, and somewhere in his warped and altered psyche, he knew the government would send one, and soon...

* * * *

MacGyver’s Cabin Minnesota

Sam was sitting in the tiny row boat with a scowl on his face, a fishing rod gripped loosely in his hands as he stared aimlessly into the horizon.

After awhile, he took a deep sigh, set the rod down, and looked at his dad with an air of apology that suggested the tedium had finally gotten to him.

“Tell me *again* why we’ve been sitting here for the past three hours?” Sam bemoaned.

Mac smiled. “*Food?* You know that stuff you like to eat so much? And no additives, strange numbers or colorings. Not to mention, it’s a great way to relax.” As he spoke, something caught on his line and he began to gently reel it in.

Sam wasn’t convinced. “It’s so much easier to go down to the store! Actually, it’s easier to stay in L.A. and just go for a burger...”

“Don’t you know you are what you eat?” MacGyver smiled as he unhooked his “catch.”

“Then I guess I’m a very greasy burger with fries...”

Mac nodded. Teaching Sam that guns were a bad idea had been easy compared to trying to convince him to eat healthily.

Still, that hadn’t really been the point of bringing him out here to the cabin. No, that had been all about learning more about his roots, and about being at one with nature sometimes, rather than always living the city life.

So far, Sam hadn’t been impressed, but then this was only their second day.

Wait until I really take him into the wilderness MacGyverland style, Mac inwardly chuckled.

Sam sensed his dad’s amusement and rolled his eyes. “You’re enjoying this, aren’t you?”

“Well, maybe just a little.”

“Yeah, well wait ‘til I try cooking that thing.” Sam gestured to the fish as if it were an alien object. “Then you’ll really wish you’d gone for the burger!” He opened his mouth to say more, but the sound of a helicopter’s rotors cut him short.

The noise instantly grabbed MacGyver’s attention too. It wasn’t very often chopper’s flew over as low as this one was – there simply wasn’t any reason for it in this neck of the woods.

Mac put a hand to his eyes to shield them from the morning sun, and eventually picked out the shape of a Bell JetRanger coming in low from the south.

He squinted, focusing on the logo on the tail until he realized it was Phoenix Foundation property. That probably meant it was Pete Thornton.

And to come out here like this, it also meant something must be gravely wrong. He would never ruin Mac's "downtime," especially not with Sam, unless it was an all-out emergency.

"He's flyin' pretty low?" Sam observed. "I'm guessing this is for you?"

The helicopter banked, disappearing behind a line of trees as it made its descent. It looked like the pilot was trying to get as close to the cabin as possible.

MacGyver puffed out a breath. He'd wanted to enjoy some time in the boonies with his son, especially after the Hawaii escapade with Penny, but it looked like that was about to be put on hold.

"Yeah, I have a feeling its Pete, and it's something real bad..." Without saying more, the troubleshooter picked up the oars and began to row to the shoreline.

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By the time Mac and Sam reached the cabin, Pete Thornton was already seated at the meager table that sat at its center. Any hint of his usually jovial features was hidden behind a mask of unease which instantly set MacGyver's senses tingling.

"Pete, what brings you up here?" It was a stock question, because Mac already knew it wasn't a social call.

Pete sighed, his cheeks tinged with just enough of a red glow to say his blood pressure was up – he was spooked by something. "Mac, I hate to say this, but I need to speak to you *in private*."

National security then, Mac instantly guessed.

He glanced at Sam, who shrugged and headed back for the door.

"I'll go get the fish from the boat," Sam offered, apparently realizing this wasn't for his ears.

Before Mac could argue, he was halfway down the path heading back to the lake.

Pete seemed to sense his distance, and began to hurriedly talk. If MacGyver was honest, he'd never seen his old friend so flustered.

"Mac, I'm sorry to drop on you like this but...we have a problem. A *big* one." Pete paused, apparently expecting to be chewed out for ruining his friend's weekend. When it didn't happen, he carried on. "A few months ago, a Russian scientist named Gregor Mitrovich decided to defect to the U.S. It was a relatively easy affair compared to the old pre-Glasnost days..."

"But I'm sensing a problem?" MacGyver intervened.

Pete nodded, fidgeting with his white cane. “Mitrovich is a specialist in nanotechnology – we’re talking cutting edge stuff. He’d been forced to use his research for military purposes when he originally only wanted to do medical studies.”

“I guess his old bosses weren’t too happy about him leaving and handing us all his work?” MacGyver was expecting to be told Mitrovich had been grabbed back by the “opposition” and he was required to plan some kind of rescue mission.

What came next was a surprise.

Pete squirmed on his seat. “We don’t exactly know what’s happening,” he admitted. “Mitrovich went to work in one of our top medical research facilities in Colorado. All he wanted to do was use the nanites he’d designed to target certain cells in sick people – like cancer for instance. The problem is the lab he was working at has gone quiet. It’s a grade “A” facility built into a mountain range, and we haven’t heard from them for two days.”

MacGyver cocked a brow. “And nobody’s tried to gain entry?”

Pete licked his lips. “When the blackout began, the military sent a Special Forces unit in, just in case the soviets were trying to steal Mitrovich back. We haven’t heard from them since they entered the mountain.”

Mac took in what he was being told, his brain already working on possible scenarios. None of them ended well. “Why me?” He eventually asked.

“The government thinks you’re singularly well qualified to go in there alone. After all, you do have experience entering labs with shall we say, *issues*.”

MacGyver was well aware of what Pete was talking about. Some eight years ago he’d stopped an acid leak at a lab that had been sabotaged and subsequently exploded. And then there was the affair at the Strategic Research Development Administration when the lab’s computer, named Sandy had gone just a little nuts.

Those kinds of situations usually had strings attached too – like time limits before the military tended to take out the “problem.”

From Pete’s dour expression, Mac was expecting much the same with this scenario.

“What’s the catch? Apart from the obvious?”

“The level of nanotechnology we’re talking about is unprecedented. Mitrovich was twenty years ahead of the U.S. with his work. That, coupled with the fact that the Special Forces unit haven’t returned, has forced the military to add a time limit to any rescue mission. Anyone entering the mountain has twenty-four hours, and then the lab will be targeted with missiles and destroyed.”

There was a stony silence as MacGyver took in all the information. It was what he’d expected, but it was still a lot to process. Yes, he’d dealt with these situations in the past, but nothing like this in years.

And while he wasn't exactly dumb when it came to technology, he'd also had no clue that nanotechnology had progressed far enough to be useful, let alone dangerous.

"Jeez, Pete, you know how to drop in on a guy!" He paused for thought, needing more answers. "I've read Drexler's stuff on this back in the eighties, but *seriously?* Mitrovich has made it work?"

Pete nodded soberly. "Trust me, I've read all the files with my very own fingertips," he referred to his newfound skills with Braille. "It's scary stuff, MacGyver. That's why we need you to go in and find out what's happened."

MacGyver wanted to say no.

He wanted to finish his time out here with Sam without worrying about what mankind might inadvertently do to itself.

But he couldn't, because that wasn't in his nature.

Something had gone wrong, and he was needed to help fix it, for his country, for everyone.

"When do we leave?" As the words left Mac's mouth, Sam returned with the fish they'd caught hanging from a hook. From his expression, he'd overheard his dad's last sentence. "Sam...I'm sorry but..."

"You need to go. I get it." Sam smiled wanly. "I guess I'll just wait here and try and fend for myself. I just hope we have lots of canned food hidden somewhere, because I have no clue how to gut a fish..." He dropped the catch on the table and slumped onto a chair, making his dad instantly feel guilty.

It was the first time MacGyver would feel accountable for his actions on the assignment, but it wouldn't be the last.

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Project Asclepius
"Peckwash Facility"
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MacGyver wasn't sure what he'd expected to find at Peckwash, but the entrance to the facility was on a lonely outcrop of land in the Southern Front Range, and it was currently being guarded by more U.S. soldiers than the he'd thought possible on such a small area of land.

As the chopper he was on finally touched down, he took a second to survey the landscape before exiting.

There appeared to be only one way in or out to the facility, via a heavily guarded door cut into the rocky outface of the mountain. This doorway was currently surrounded by troops, their rifles pointed unreservedly at the entrance.

More troops were stationed further back, at what Mac could only assume was the so called “command center” of the whole operation.

He clambered from the Huey’s doorway and headed for the large olive drab tent, but before he reached it a rather portly officer emerged along with Pete.

The officer offered up a hand as he approached. “General Eastman, and you must be MacGyver?”

Mac nodded and shook the general’s hand. “Yes, sir.” He glanced over his shoulder towards Peckwash, shouting over the noise of the retreating helicopter’s engine. “Any change in there?”

Eastman shook his head. “Still no contact. We’ve established the place is in primary lockdown mode, but communications are still up. If anyone is alive in there, they’re not getting in contact because they *choose* not to.”

“Or something, or someone is stopping them,” Mac pointed out. “So can you get me inside, or is that something I need to figure out too?”

Eastman ushered the group back to the command center. He had people inside working at consoles that were obviously linked to the mountain facilities computers.

“We have some limited control,” the officer confirmed. “We can get you inside, but then you’re on your own. I take it Mr. Thornton already briefed you on the twenty-four hour window?”

MacGyver nodded. “Yeah, just make sure your watch isn’t fast, okay?”

Eastman didn’t see the humor and grunted. “Just make sure you’re as good as they all say, and I won’t have to...”

* * * *

Peckwash was dark and deathly quiet as MacGyver entered through the main atrium. It was like the place had been closed down for months.

The fact that he wore a HAZMAT suit, just in case there was some biological issue wasn’t helping. Mac hated the dang things because they impaired not only his vision but also his senses.

Sometimes, you just had to “feel” a situation, and that was pretty hard to do with a thick layer of material and a visor between you and the outside world.

Given the facilities research subject, it made sense to wear one, though, until they knew what was going down inside.

Mac reached the secured entry zone and scanned the area with his flashlight. It was like standing in a dark metal box that glowed with a spooky red tint.

To his left was a desk that would have usually been manned, and a state of the art console with swipe card reader.

MacGyver fumbled in the satchel he'd brought, struggling with the cumbersome gloves he was forced to wear and retrieved a security card. He slid it through the reader, waited for a green light and then tapped in another code on the console.

After a tense few seconds, the Peckwash computer accepted his credentials, and the metal blast door behind the desk whooshed open.

Mac pointed his light down the long, foreboding corridor that lead into the heart of the mountain. It was narrower than he'd expected – perfect for an ambush, in fact.

The troubleshooter pushed that thought away and began the long descent down into the labs. He could hear the sound of his own heartbeat inside the suit and the noise of his rubber boots squeaking on the polished stone flooring.

Both made him want to cringe.

The silence was too much, like he was walking in a cemetery at night. But then, maybe all that was left here was the dead?

He pushed on, thinking about how he'd left Sam behind, and how this was just another job to deal with, and then he could return to the cabin.

There are people here, lives on the line...

Something ahead caught in the beam of his flashlight, and he redirected it to the source. There was a crumpled heap at the end of the tunnel that could be a pile of clothes – or a splayed out body.

MacGyver picked up his pace until he reached the thing that had once been human. He clumsily hunkered down in the suit and examined the man.

At a guess, he'd been dead a few hours, and no virus or biological entity had been the cause. No, this person had been beaten to death. It wasn't pretty, and it didn't make sense.

Even if the Russians had come back for their man, they'd have used guns, not fists.

Mac moved on further into the complex, waving his light to and fro to try and pick out any more clues. It wasn't long before he found another body.

And this one had come to a violent end too.

It was a petite blonde woman whose nametag suggested she was a scientist here, and someone had broken her neck.

Mac flinched at the sight, but there was nothing he could do for her.

He put a gloved-hand back into his satchel and plucked out a small monitor that detected foreign substances in the atmosphere. There was a whole lot it couldn't scan for, but what it could was coming back clean.

MacGyver decided to take a risk, and pulled off the heavy HAZMAT helmet. In his head, he already knew what was happening here wasn't airborne, and losing the bulky protective suit would give him much more freedom of movement.

He set the bright yellow garb down on a desk and retrieved his light and satchel before moving into the next area.

The place looked like it had once been a locker room for the staff, but now the carnage within had turned it into some blood-soaked arena swathed with corpses.

And all of them had been killed in some gruesome manner that appeared more animal instinct than murder.

Mac turned away from the doorway and had to put a hand to his mouth.

This wasn't anything like what he was used to, and it certainly wasn't what he'd expected.

So if it's not a virus, then who is doing this? Why? And where the heck are the Special Forces guys?

The list of questions was a growing one, but he had yet to find one answer.

Mac moved back into the main hallway and tried to picture the schematic of the facility Eastman had showed him during his briefing. The main lab should be down the corridor, first on the left. Maybe there would be something on the computers there that would shed some light on what was going on?

He moved on in that direction, away from the bodies and gut-wrenching scene of butchery.

The main lab was exactly where he'd remembered it, and as he pushed on the door, Mac soon realized that it too held more death.

A young technician's body lay sprawled against the doorframe, and Mac had to lunge at it with his shoulder to gain entry.

Avoiding eye contact with the mangled corpse, he headed straight for the row of computer consoles that adorned the right side of the room. They were still booted up, and someone had left them logged on.

Mac moved to pull out a chair, and then paused when he finally heard a sound – the *first* sound since he'd entered the complex.

The noise was from deeper in the bowels of the facility, and had he not known better, MacGyver could have sworn it was some kind of guttural howl from an animal.

The hairs on the back of his neck bristled and he felt his stomach squirm.

Peckwash and whatever it held, was spooking him out, and that didn't happen all too often.

Ignoring the sensation that he was being stalked, Mac dropped down onto the chair and began to call up any files the console allowed him access to.

Every few seconds, he couldn't help but look up at the only doorway into the lab, some inner voice saying he should have barricaded himself in.

Sheesh, will you stop with the freakin' out already, Mac, what would Sam think? The inner-chiding didn't work. His senses still screamed that he was being watched, appraised...*hunted*.

MacGyver carried on, drawing up a file that Gregor Mitrovich had been working on. Surprisingly, any passwords had already been bypassed.

He read the contents, trying to understand some of the scientific jargon that was beyond even his skills.

The crux of it all was that Mitrovich had designed a nanite that would travel via blood and replicate itself once inside the human body. The thing was programmable to attack different cells, including the likes of cancer.

If Mitrovich could make it work, it would change history.

Mac paused as he thought about it. This was something so huge that any nation in the world would definitely kill to get hold of it. But, it still didn't explain why all the bodies had been torn up. Military units and spies didn't tend to operate that way, they used guns, poison gases even, not their bare hands like some feral creature.

He checked more of the files and realized that some had either been corrupted, or wiped.

While that meant no immediate access, it didn't mean the end of the road in Mac's search. Retrieving lost files was one of his specialties, and he quickly set to work on the undertaking.

The bigger task at hand might be how to understand them once he'd recovered them. Nanotechnology was purely science fiction, not fact to most, and Mitrovich had broken the mould in that department with his discoveries.

MacGyver carried on regardless, his thirst for the truth dulling his instincts for self-preservation just enough for him not to hear muted footsteps in the corridor outside.

He tapped away at the keyboard, oblivious that someone had stealthily slipped into the room, using the low-key lighting to their advantage.

Several files finally popped into view on the screen in front of him, and he paused, pinching his nose and closing his eyes to take a second to deliberate.

It was then that he finally heard the shallow, rapid breathing behind him.

Without thinking that it might startle whoever, or whatever he shared the lab with, Mac whirled around on his seat, his imagination doing overtime until he expected to see some crazed monster staring back at him.

Instead, he saw a petrified woman in a lab coat, who he guessed was probably in her late thirties. She had her hair tied back, and wore dark-rimmed glasses that made her look terribly serious.

It wasn't her expression that worried him, however, it was the automatic Beretta that shook violently in her grasp.

Was the weapon from the Special Forces unit?

Mac looked her over mentally, locking on the nametag that said Dr. Sharon Millward.

She's a scientist – more likely to be able to get through to her, if she'll just listen...

But Millward was beyond scared, her whole body was shaking, and her eyes were so wide they looked like they were about to pop out of their sockets.

MacGyver slowly started to rise from his chair, putting his hands in the air as he moved away from the desk. It was a neutral move, but one that was too much for Millward.

She closed her eyes in fear, and pulled back on the automatic's trigger without even aiming.

But then, at this range, she really didn't have to.

Part Two

MacGyver anticipated the doctor's move from her agitated state, and as he raised his hands, he also took a dive sideways, taking his flashlight with him.

The move limited just how much Millward could see in the muted red lighting of the room, and she panicked even more, spinning around wildly.

Mac used her disorientation to his advantage, and rolled forwards across the lab floor, knocking the Beretta from her grasp with just one blow.

The gun skittered across the hard stone and came to rest under a bench. Mac grabbed it before the doctor made any attempt to retrieve it. He flicked on the safety and tucked it into his belt.

Millward watched, her eyes moving from the gun to Mac's face and back again. She was nervously wringing her hands, but she made no attempt to run or escape.

Eventually, she dared to speak, her accent giving away her British origins. "Who are you?"

"Name's MacGyver. When you folks stopped talking to the outside world they sent me in to find out why. Actually, they sent in a Special Forces unit first, but we lost contact with them too."

Mac watched Millward for a reaction. She seemed to take in what he was saying, but her expression said she had more on her mind than just his identity. "Now it's my turn to ask questions..." He pointed to her tag. "You obviously work here, so maybe you can explain what's going on?"

Millward relaxed just a little and took a seat. She shivered, but MacGyver suspected it wasn't because she was cold.

"It's all a little crazy. I don't really know where to begin, or even if I should be telling you any of this." She stared at the floor for awhile, and then looked up, her gaze locking with MacGyver's.

"Trust me, I have full clearance," Mac assured. He tugged out the swipe card he'd been given from his pocket and offered it up for inspection.

Of course, it could be a fake and he could be a Russian spy, but he guessed he just had a trusting face, because Millward nodded and began a short narrative.

"Dr. Mitrovich had come up with a design for a nanite that could enter the human body. It was more than cutting edge, it was miraculous..."

"Yeah, I've seen some of the files," Mac intervened. "So what happened? Did someone come in here and attempt to steal it?" He already suspected it wasn't that simple.

And did I really hear a howl? He kept that thought in his head, for now.

Millward shook her head, her face turning back into the mask of fear it had been when he first met her. "No...nothing like that. You see, Mitrovich became infected with his own creation. And let's just say the results weren't exactly what any of us were expecting."

Mac scowled and he swung his flashlight over the carnage in the room. “You’re saying *he* did all this?”

“After twelve hours Mitrovich began to change, both physically and mentally.” The doctor began to shake more at the memories. “It was like something out of a Frankenstein movie. He started to attack other staff and they couldn’t stop him. The nanites he’d programmed to fix cells in the human body did just that, but on such an accelerated level that he effectively can’t be mortally wounded. Heaven knows what he’ll become as the nanites progress through his system...”

Whatever MacGyver had been expecting, it wasn’t a technologically enhanced adversary. He took down a breath, his mind racing as he wondered where Mitrovich was. He could be watching them right now, and they wouldn’t know it.

The howl...

It felt like they were stuck in some Carpenter “B” movie, and they usually ended badly.

Millward sensed his apprehension. “It gets worse,” she continued apologetically. “Mitrovich’s blood is infested with those nanites, and they’re still self-replicating. If you get any of his blood on you and you have an open cut, you’re likely to get infected too. I’ve already seen it happen.”

“The Special Forces unit?” Mac guessed.

“They soon discovered their weapons were useless against him, so some of the soldiers tried it hand to hand. It got very bloody and two of them started to turn, just like Mitrovich.” Millward shuddered and her eyes scooted to the doorway.

It was so dark, so uninviting the other side, MacGyver almost shared her fear of what was beyond. “What happened to them? Are they still out there like Mitrovich?”

“They’re dead.” The statement was final, and from her tone it was easily apparent that Millward carried a burden of guilt over the men’s deaths.

Mac raised a brow. “*How?* Shouldn’t they be virtually immortal, like the doc?”

“One of the labs is equipped with a failsafe device that effectively means it becomes an incinerator if any dangerous bacteria or pathogens are released. I lured the soldiers inside...” Millward’s eyes narrowed, and she looked blankly at the lab wall. Killing was obviously as abhorrent to her as it was MacGyver, and yet she’d been forced to do it to survive. “I vaporized them. Not even the nanites could fix that...”

Mac put a hand on her trembling shoulder and she flinched. “There was nothing else you could do,” he soothed. “Could there be anyone else left down here alive?”

Millward shook her head. “I think we’re the only ones...and Mitrovich.”

“Do you know how he became infected in the first place?” MacGyver was thinking again, and some of the facts weren’t adding up. His senses were telling him this wasn’t just an accident, but he couldn’t figure out the why and the how just yet. “Did anybody have time to check why the nanites aren’t working like they were programmed to?”

Millward blinked as if the thought had never occurred to her. “We didn’t have a chance. No one knew Mitrovich was carrying the things until he changed. I wouldn’t understand the programming of the nanites anyway – I’m the medical side of the project. Mitrovich was the nano-scientist.”

MacGyver moved back to the console he’d been working at. “Then we need to find those answers. We can’t let this thing get out to the outside world.” He began tapping at keys until more of Mitrovich’s research studies came up.

Some of the files had been decrypted, and some totally erased, but by the scientist, or by someone else?

The troubleshooter sensed Millward looking over his shoulder as he tried to retrieve some of the lost work. As a folder flashed open on the screen, she pointed to some of its contents.

“I’m no computer geek, but doesn’t that string look corrupted?” She sighed. “Surely Gregor wouldn’t make such a blatant error even considering the pressure he was under?”

MacGyver scrolled back, checking when the file was last edited, and by who. The login said it was Mitrovich, which suggested the nanites had malfunctioned because of a simple program error.

Unless the scientist had done this on purpose, or someone else had accessed the system using his log-on credentials?

Why?

Mac returned to the main menu and looked for security control access. After about five minutes, he found what he was looking for. Cameras and sensors put Mitrovich in his quarters at the same time the computer file had been altered.

He tapped the screen. “Take a look at this. The nanites didn’t malfunction, they were reprogrammed by someone, and that someone wasn’t Mitrovich. I’m guessing he wasn’t *accidentally* infected, either.”

Millward took down a long breath. “But that’s like...*murder*? I can’t imagine any of the staff here doing such a thing – they were all so committed. Not to mention, everyone but me is dead...”

Mac stared over his shoulder at the doctor. “Are you sure? Could someone have done this and then escaped before the lockdown?”

She shook her head. “I tried to count the bodies. I don’t think any of the Peckwash people did this.” The doctor looked warily at the doorway again. “Do you think some of Mitrovich’s own people could be behind it? The Russians, I mean?”

It was a possibility MacGyver had already thought about, but why not just snatch the scientist back or kill him? Why the elaborate game with the nanites?

Millward broke him from the thought. “You know, do we really care at this point how it happened?” She seemed focused on the escape key on the computer as if it had an ulterior meaning. “Can you get us out?”

“We should be able to get out the same way I got in. We can’t just leave Mitrovich down here, though. There must be something we can do for him?” MacGyver reached into his satchel and pulled out a small radio.

The military would probably open fire on anyone trying to leave unannounced, so he needed to let Pete know what was happening first.

Millward stared at the radio as if she’d dropped out of Hell into Heaven. “I don’t know of any way to stop the nanites,” she admitted. “But then, as I’ve said, the technological side of this research wasn’t my field.”

There was unease in her voice as she spoke, and Mac guessed she was terrified he was going to suggest staying back to try and save Mitrovich.

He put a hand on her arm reassuringly. “Don’t worry, I’ll get you out, then I can come back and try and...”

Try and what? Time was already ticking off the army deadline, and there was no clear way to save Gregor Mitrovich, or discover who had sabotaged the nanites and caused the carnage.

But I can’t just leave him down here! And what if the person responsible took a sample of his handiwork? That would be the world’s scariest weapon...

MacGyver clicked the transmit button on the radio. “MacGyver to control, do you read?”

Pete’s voice came back through a layer of static. “We hear you. What’s the situation down there?”

“Not good, Pete, some of the Mitrovich nanites were reprogrammed and let’s just say not to do nice things to the human body. The military unit is all dead, and so are most of the staff down here.” Mac paused. How did you explain so much, given so little time? “I’m coming out with a survivor, so tell your army buddies not to shoot. I’ll explain more when we get topside.”

There was more hissing and then Pete finally responded. “Gotcha, and...be careful, Mac.”

Pete was worried. MacGyver could tell from just the way he said the last words. And that was before he knew the full extent of what had happened.

“Can we go now?” Millward pleaded. “Because I have a really bad feeling about this.”

Mac nodded and picked up his flashlight. The trip down to the labs from the main entrance hadn't taken too long, but he had a funny feeling it was going to seem like a marathon to get back.

He flicked on the light and aimed it into the corridor outside the room. Even with the beam cutting through the dim crimson emergency lighting, it still felt like they were ambling through the passageways of Dante's *Inferno*.

And somewhere out in the complex, the devil was waiting to greet them.

Millward took Mac's free hand without asking, and he assumed the contact made her feel more secure.

It did nothing, however, for the sickening sensation in his gut that said they were being watched again.

“So you're not from around these parts? Your work bring you over here?” Mac tried to make conversation, hoping it would take both their minds off what might be lurking behind every corner.

“My husband brought me over here.” Millward scowled as if it was a bad memory. “And then he left me exactly six months later. You could say I buried my head in the sand, or rather in a Colorado mountain to be precise.”

MacGyver mouthed “ouch” and carried on into the next corridor. “Sorry,” he apologized.

Millward shrugged. “Don't be, and besides, any conversation beats the silence.”

Mac paused and swung his light in an arc.

Ahead was the entrance and reception area where he'd originally entered. They were almost out, and somehow that idea made him twice as wary.

If Mitrovich was going to make a move, it would be here.

“What's wrong?” Millward sensed his apprehension.

Mac put a finger to his lips. He wasn't sure, but something in the shadows of the tunnel between them and freedom had caught his eye.

An odd silhouette – a fleeting image in the periphery of his vision that had vanished in the literal blink of an eye.

“Stay here...” MacGyver let go of Millward’s hand and moved slowly forwards. All he could hear was his own breathing, but even that sounded more ominous in the tunnel.

Each step was an agonizing one, waiting for Mitrovich to show himself.

Mac reached the control room, and noted the red lighting was flickering now as if something was interrupting the flow of current to it.

He slowly exhaled and surveyed the scene, playing his flashlight around to search every corner, every hiding place.

The beam finally reached the table that held the computer console – except this time there was an addition the troubleshooter would rather not have been there.

Mitrovich was sitting on the chair at the desk, and as the light hit him, he spun around to face MacGyver.

It was only now that Mac truly understood how far the transformation had gone.

Mitrovich’s features were hidden by huge bulbous growths that stuck out from his flesh. Some of the tumors glistened in the light where the skin had stretched and contorted until it took on a shiny appearance.

But it was the scientist’s eyes that were the most frightening of his new form. The orbs that looked out on the world were more lupine than human, and they darted wildly about the room, assessing, determining what move to make next.

Was there enough of a man left inside to even try and reason with?

MacGyver slowly held up his free hand and hoped the move conveyed the message he meant no harm. “Easy there...”

Mitrovich sniffed.

Is the guy actually “scenting” like an animal? If he were honest, the thought terrified Mac because it meant there would be no talking the Russian down.

Instinctively, he took a small step backwards towards the corridor.

Mitrovich appeared to take this as his foe trying to escape, and finally dived from his chair at MacGyver.

The speed with which the scientist moved caught the troubleshooter by surprise and he dropped his flashlight as Mitrovich barreled into him. The pair slammed into the tunnel wall with such force that the air was knocked from Mac’s lungs and he suddenly had no strength to fight back.

Not that he stood a chance in that department anyway.

Mitrovich was not only fast, but he had more physical power than anyone Mac had ever met.

The nanites were not only changing him, they were turning him into a super-fast, agile killing machine with the muscle of a world-class strongman.

Mitrovich seemed to sense his opponent's alarm and grinned as he slid a hand to Mac's throat and began to squeeze and lift at the same time.

Insanely, MacGyver half-expected to see teeth the likes of a werewolf would bare, but the old man's canines were at least still normal if nothing else was.

Mac coughed trying to draw down air as his own hands clawed at Mitrovich's, but the scientist wasn't about to let go, the expression on his deformed face said he was enjoying himself far too much.

From behind, MacGyver saw Sharon running down the corridor towards them, and he tried in vain to shake his head, his eyes beseeching her to run, to not get involved.

Millward ignored him and charged at Mitrovich, wrapping her arms around his in an attempt to pull him away from Mac.

Her full-frontal approach had no effect, and the scientist disregarded her completely in favor of his "kill."

Sharon looked wildly around the entrance until she spotted the flashlight Mac had dropped. Grabbing it, she spun it around in a one-eighty until the beam caught a cabinet inset in the wall containing an axe in case of fire.

She ran for it, slamming the light against the safety glass over and over in blind rage until it shattered in a myriad of pieces.

Not thinking of herself, she battered away the rest of the fragments with a clenched fist, several of the shards drawing blood as she swatted them away to grab the axe.

Whirling back around, Sharon lunged again at Mitrovich, this time using the dull edge of the axe to whack him in the face with every bit of energy she could muster.

Mitrovich's already swelled bottom lip exploded and he finally released his grip enough for MacGyver to slump down and away from him, gasping for air.

Mitrovich snarled and spun to meet Millward, who looked back at him in both shock and surprise.

He swiped the axe from her trembling grasp with just one blow from his right hand, and then swiftly took it for himself, swinging it back at the doctor like a professional mace thrower.

Somehow, Millward managed to dodge the blow, and the blade from the axe embedded itself deep into the control room wall.

Mitrovich howled and yanked at the thing, trying desperately to tug it free as Millward backed away, her eyes watching as more and more plaster crumbled from the wall slowly freeing the axe.

Across the room, Mac forced his body up off the floor despite its protests, and he made a dive for the desk and console.

If Mitrovich couldn't be stopped and helped, then there was only one other choice – he had to *be contained*.

Right now the scientist was on the verge of being let loose on the outside world, and MacGyver couldn't let that happen.

The computer was still booted from when he'd logged in, and trying not to think about Mitrovich, or what he would do to Millward if he got free, Mac began to type in a new security protocol.

After mere seconds a message flashed on the screen "Please Confirm full auto lockdown."

MacGyver took a deep breath and hit the enter button, knowing he was probably condemning himself and Dr. Millward to certain death.

There are always ways, Mac, you know that, his subconscious tried to soothe.

But was there really this time, considering what was at stake?

An image of Sam at the cabin flashed before his eyes and he felt something lurch in his stomach, then it was back to the task at hand.

As he left the chair to try and help Sharon, a huge metal blast door dropped into place where he'd entered the building.

Much the same was happening all over the facility where anyone might try to gain entry, or indeed exit the structure.

Mitrovich yelped as he noticed what was occurring, and he let go of the axe, making a dive for the tunnel back into the complex.

Mac guesses that deep down, part of the scientist's brain was still aware of the truth, and of what was going on around him, and right now he had realized there would be no escape from the lobby area.

Has he actually panicked and run? How much of the man is left inside..?

It was something to think about, and maybe use later, but for now MacGyver needed to asses the situation and make sure Millward was still in one piece.

She was sitting on the floor in the relative darkness, staring down at her bloodied white coat like it transfixed her somehow.

Mac offered her a hand up, his eyes checking her over for injuries as she got to her feet. “You okay?”

Millward was shaking again, maybe even in shock. She held out her free hand and then he realized why.

When she had broken the safety glass, she’d gotten several small cuts that ran from her little finger and down her palm. Nothing serious, heck, they wouldn’t even need stitches.

But the cuts were covered in blood, and from Millward’s terrified expression, Mac guessed not all of it was her own.

He closed his eyes and saw the scene with Mitrovich play over again in slow motion in his head, and when the scientist’s lip had been busted with the axe, his blood had sprayed everywhere, including on Sharon.

Mac took her by the shoulders and gently squeezed, knowing what she was thinking. “It might not have gotten in the cuts, okay? You might be just fine.”

Sharon shook her head and she pulled away, tears forming in her eyes. “Except I won’t. I’m never that lucky. Hell, I’m never lucky with anything, not my marriage, not cars, my career. I mean come on, who else would take a job that ended *in this*?” She spun around gesturing at the chaos that surrounded them, and then stood dejectedly shivering in the doorway.

Mac took her hand and tugged her back towards the main labs. “C’mon, it hasn’t ended at all yet, okay?”

Millward let him lead her, but her demeanor said she had already given in.

* * * *

Sharon was sitting on a high stool as if she’d had one too many at the local bar. She looked around the lab like it was something new to her, but as MacGyver checked the blood sample they’d just taken, he had to wonder if it already *did* look new to her.

Was she seeing the room with a different perspective because her cells were already being changed?

Mac looked away from the microscope and wasn’t sure how to tell the doctor the nanites were in the sample.

Millward guessed what his unspoken words were saying anyway. “It’s full of the things already, isn’t it? Twelve hours and I turn into *Swamp Thing*, like Mitrovich.”

MacGyver sighed and walked over to her. There had to be a way to stop what was happening, but this wasn't his field. "I'll radio the surface and get them to open the blast door. Maybe my friend Pete's people at the Phoenix Foundation can help. They have some of the country's top scientists working for them."

Sharon scowled. "Maybe, but they don't have Mitrovich."

It was a fair point. The Russian hadn't been just good, he'd been formidable. But now that his mind was gone, was there anyone in the world who could work with his legacy and reverse what the nanites were doing?

Mac put the thought aside and tugged out the radio from his satchel. "Pete, do you copy? We have a small problem down here."

The radio crackled, struggling with the signal through the natural rock structure of the mountain.

"We kind of guessed that when we saw the blast door controls had been activated," Pete finally answered. "What's going on, Mac?" There was deep concern in his voice.

But then precious time was ticking away on some invisible government clock.

"Mitrovich attacked us in the lobby room. He was trying to get out of the mountain, so I threw the security controls." MacGyver glanced at Sharon. "And we have another problem – Dr. Millward got some of his blood on her. We need to get the doc out and some help as fast as you can. Can you release the blast door controls your end?"

Silence followed, and then Pete's voice was replaced by General Eastman. His tone was somber, and final. "I'm sorry, son, but we can't release those controls..."

Mac grimaced and ran a hand through his hair. He'd been afraid of this. "Can't, or won't?" He eventually questioned.

"Both," Eastman offered honestly. "I'm afraid I can't allow an infected person topside. You know the implications if this thing got out. My job is containment, and if you can't find a solution to this yourselves, then the lockdown and the countdown remain in place."

In the background, MacGyver could hear Pete arguing, but he knew it would have little effect. He clicked the transmit button and simply answered, "Understood." There was nothing else to say.

Millward smiled as if she had known all along what would be said. "You had to know that would be their reaction? I'm expendable, and so are you now."

Mac nodded, but he wasn't done just yet. "Yeah, well I've been there before, and I haven't quite finished. Not by a long shot..."

He glanced at his watch, a quarter of the deadline was already gone, just how much could he achieve with the time they had left?

Part Three

Sharon shook her head. “You’re ever the optimist, aren’t you?”

Mac was back on the computer already, searching for better schematics of the labs than he’d already seen. “I try.” He smiled, hoping the fact that he wasn’t giving in would inspire Millward not to either.

It didn’t.

Millward was pacing across the lab, constantly wringing her hands as she obviously thought about what was happening inside her.

And the worst of it is she’s a doctor, so she knows better than anyone what’s happening...

MacGyver stopped typing when he realized Millward had stopped her marching and was staring at him.

“I can feel it,” she admitted honestly. “It’s started already, like something clawing at my brain, urging me to do things. You need to forget about me and find a way out of this place. In another few hours I probably won’t even remember who you are...”

“You should know something about me,” Mac countered. “I don’t walk away from people that need my help. Especially people who don’t deserve what’s happening to them.”

“You might not think that way when I’m clawing at you like a rabid animal in twelve hours time.” Millward cocked a brow. “You can’t *always* win.”

“If I can find another way out it’s a start.” Mac began typing again, and after a few moments pointed to the monitor.

In the dull light, a design diagram was just visible on the screen.

“This is a ventilation shaft cut into the mountain all the way up to the surface. If I can override the protocol for the access door we might be able to climb out.” MacGyver traced the tunnel’s path with his fingertip.

“Climb? I’m not turning into a monkey, you do realize?” Sharon’s lips curled into a wry smile.

“Well, it’s not strictly meant to be an exit, but there are internal features for workers to be able to get into and repair the air fans in there.” Mac sat back in his chair, thinking. “I’d need to get us in through the access doors, though and I can’t do that from here.”

“And you can’t take me out of this place, either. I agree with the General on that one. Even if you tried, he’d probably shoot me on sight.” Millward took off her glasses and absently set them on the desk.

She doesn’t need them anymore, Mac realized.

The nanites were already making *improvements*.

“Then we need to fix you first. And if we can do that, maybe we can even help Mitrovich.” MacGyver returned to the console and putting the schematic safely in a corner of his mind somewhere, he clicked back into the research files.

Sharon joined him, leaning on the desk to watch as the nanites programming scrolled down the monitor, string after string of code that meant nothing save for the fact it was slowly killing her.

“I doubt anyone could save Mitrovich now. Even if we could disable the nanites in him, what about the damage and irreversible changes already made to his system?” Millward closed her eyes, and Mac guessed she was imagining the tiny machines flowing through her veins. “He’s been infected too long,” she whispered under her breath.

“Maybe,” MacGyver admitted. “But there’s never any harm in trying. C’mon, we can fix this.” He turned back to the computer and stared at the pages of code that gave the nanites their instructions.

Pages...

And some of the programming was beyond MacGyver.

You’re thinking too hard! You can’t reprogram them inside someone anyway, so what other options are there?

Sharon sensed his frustration. “Will you just go to the vent shaft and get out of here? I’m sure Mitrovich and I will be enjoying one another’s company soon enough.”

Mac ignored her and rubbed at his temple. Maybe the muted lighting was giving him a headache, or maybe, just maybe an idea was forming.

“What if we take a second batch of nanites that are essentially blank, no programming at all, and program them to attack the Mitrovich ones? They’re designed to kill unwanted cells in the human body, right? So why not other nanites? Once they’ve destroyed their targets they could be programmed to shutdown.”

Millward laughed ironically. “It’s a brilliant theory, and I actually believe it might work, but, do you realize how many months it took to work out the current programming? You can’t redo all that in twelve hours.”

MacGyver refused to give in and began scrolling through the program on the screen. “I’m hoping I don’t need to rewrite *everything*, just the corrupted parts, and the part

that controls what they target..." He was so focused now, that he didn't even notice Millward getting closer. "Your medical knowledge will help too..."

Millward put a hand on his shoulder, and then suddenly he felt something tugging at his belt.

Mac spun around, but Sharon had already stepped back, the Beretta he'd taken from her earlier now firmly back in her grasp. She wasn't exactly pointing it at him, but he had to be careful of his next move – they were too close for him to dive out of the way of a bullet this time.

"I know you mean well," Millward sputtered. "But there really isn't enough time for what you're trying to do. I want to thank you for trying, but it's time you got out of here now."

MacGyver shook his head. "Just let me try?"

"Sorry, but I can't let you do that. What if I change sooner?" Sharon eyes filled with moisture and she had to blink away tears. "I'm already dead, so maybe I should just help things along a bit."

Millward turned the gun in her hands, putting the barrel to her chest. "Thank you," she whispered almost inaudibly.

And then she pulled back on the trigger before he could move to stop her.

The sound of the gun echoed through the room and surrounding corridors, the noise of the blast stopping Mac dead in his tracks.

Blood splattered on the wall behind and onto the stone flooring, and then, as if in slow motion, Millward's lifeless body crumpled to join it there.

Mac's mind screamed that he should have stopped her, that he should have seen it coming, but in truth he couldn't have predicted the move.

He leaned over, checking in vain for a pulse, but he couldn't find one.

Dang it we could have still beat this thing if...

"If" was always such a little word, but one that could change the fate of everything depending where and how it was used.

MacGyver reached for a lab coat that hung innocently on a hook in the corner, and gently covered Sharon's body with it. Her hand lay still clasping the automatic, and he pried the gun from her fingers and stared at it.

Normally he hated guns anyway, but today he held a special revulsion for the things.

She hadn't deserved this, and he'd failed in his mission.

Everyone was dead now apart from Mitrovich.

And I still don't even know why.

Mac put the gun back in his belt. He didn't want it near him, but he also couldn't risk leaving it around for Mitrovich to find.

He glanced at the code on the computer, but there was no reason to carry on now.

Grabbing his satchel, he decided to head straight for the vent shaft before he became a casualty of the military countdown.

* * * *

MacGyver didn't know why, but now that he was alone again, the corridors and tunnels at Peckwash seemed even more ominous.

Shadows seemed longer, sounds more attenuated, and time seemed to pass at twice the speed.

He came to the point where he'd removed his HAZMAT suit, and as he saw the bulky material he actually considered putting the thing back on. Maybe it would afford him some protection if Mitrovich attacked again.

Mac stooped to pick it up, and then realized someone had beaten him to it.

The suit had been torn into shreds by something long and deep – a weapon perhaps, or worse still maybe long and deformed fingernails?

He shuddered and let the remnants drop to the floor.

Mitrovich meant business, and Mac was sure tearing up the suit had been a message of what was to come next.

I need to be on my guard or Sam is going to be on his own at the cabin a whole lot longer.

Mac moved on until he reached the access panel he needed. Pulling out his knife, he took out the screws that held it in place to reveal a small console in the wall meant for repair crews.

The lockdown sequence appeared to have shutdown all the power to the unit. And no unit meant no access codes, which in turn meant no escape.

MacGyver looked in the conduits running through the wall for an alternate power source. The facility was full of cable and ducting, and some of it powering the emergency systems was still live.

He flicked out the saw option on his knife and used it to cut through a plastic channel to the cables he needed beneath.

And all the while he worked all his mind could focus on was Millward.

He'd not known her for very long, and yet he'd liked her. Would her ex-husband even care when he was given the news of her passing?

Life just isn't fair.

Mac took the live cable he needed and temporarily cut the feed to it while he rerouted it into the console. It was tedious work, especially in the poor light, but eventually, he made the connection, replaced the feed, and the console lit up.

Now he had to break the access codes initiated on the full lockdown, and that was going to take even more time – something he was short of right now.

He glanced at his watch.

What was going through Pete's mind topside, he wondered.

Mac's fingers danced across the console keys as his mind raced. Three codes were required to open the vent shaft, and so far he'd broken just one of them.

Something moved behind him, and his hands paused over the keyboard. He listened, and the sound came again.

It was breathing, but it sounded more like an animal panting than a human.

MacGyver whirled around, but not in time to stop Mitrovich lunging at him.

The scientist looked angry, but somehow not quite as deranged as he had before.

Was there some of the man left in the deformed shell?

Mac didn't get time to find out.

Mitrovich grabbed the troubleshooter's wrist and spun him around until Mac's face was firmly planted against the concrete wall of the complex. The scientist's strength was so great there was no room to maneuver, no chance of wriggling free.

To make his point further, Mitrovich pulled Mac away and then slammed him back into the concrete until he drew blood. "Give me the...codes."

Somehow, through busted and twisted lips he was managing to talk, to *think*. Maybe it was pure survival instinct, but he wasn't all animal yet.

Mac shook his head. "I think you know I can't do that. I can't unleash what's inside you on the public."

Mitrovich leaned low until his mangled face was next to Mac's right ear. "You will," he grumbled. "Oh *you will*..."

The scientist yanked his prey backwards until he reached where Mac had been working on the console. He spotted the penknife and grinned.

With his free hand, he retrieved it, staring at the open blade as if it was a thing of beauty. He stayed that way for a long moment, as if his brain had frozen like an overloaded computer.

Then he shuddered and pushed MacGyver back against the wall. Taking the tip of the blade, he used it to trace a small cut along Mac's right forearm.

The seeping blood seemed to excite him, and he shook violently as the sentient part of his brain fought the feral half.

"You know what it means if I bleed on you..?" Mitrovich sliced at his own tumor filled palm until the flesh opened up, then he made a fist and squeezed until his blood dripped on the floor at Mac's feet. "Give me the codes or you can enjoy my research up close and personal..."

Mac blinked, he couldn't fight the man, could he reason with him? "There might still be a way to save you. I have an idea, and with your knowledge it just might work." He locked eyes with the scientist, but Mitrovich's yellow orbs only gave back scorn.

"I don't want *saving*. I want *out*!"

MacGyver remained silent, he would never give up the one password he had.

Mitrovich appeared to sense he wasn't going to get what he wanted.

But then, in a way *he had* gotten what he'd originally prayed for – a worthy opponent. Perhaps not in physical strength, but in mental ability.

His grip loosened slightly as he stepped back, and MacGyver seized the chance, elbowing the scientist in the ribs as he made a leap for the open wall panel.

Mitrovich howled, not with pain, but with temper and dived to reaffirm his grip. He had speed, agility even, but MacGyver was the one thinking more clearly, more speedily.

Mac grabbed at the power line he'd only recently hooked to the console and tore it free. He spun around with the live end, just as Mitrovich barreled into him.

The current hit the older man instantly, but he seemed to absorb it, and for a moment MacGyver thought it would do nothing at all.

Then, Mitrovich suddenly backed off, like a fly that had been swatted. His plaid shirt smoldered slightly from the electrical burn, and Mac could smell the aroma of scorched flesh, but the scientist didn't collapse – he simply stared at his enemy.

And then, his lupine gaze turned into an all-too human grin of victory.

At first, MacGyver couldn't understand what was so amusing, but then he followed the crazed man's eyes to his own arm.

The arm where Mitrovich had cut him.

Across the small, inconsequential wound was a handprint in blood.

Mitrovich's blood.

Somehow, as they'd tussled, the scientist had achieved his goal, and now MacGyver had the same twelve hours deadline that Sharon had given into.

Mitrovich gave a small, insane salute and then faded away into the shadows of the adjoining tunnel. He wasn't going to get the codes now, and his untamed psyche knew it.

Mac swallowed hard and looked at the cut. The only chance now was to finish what he'd started back in the labs, or give in like Sharon had.

Defeat wasn't an option. There was still a cabin and a son to go back to.

But programming empty nanites without Sharon's input was nigh on impossible.

You've achieved the impossible before, don't you dare give up on me now, Mac.

Except this time, he couldn't exactly use duct tape and a safety pin on something you needed a microscope to see.

* * * *

The lab felt cold as he entered it, but maybe that was what was happening inside his body rather than the actual temperature of the room.

As he took a seat back at the computer, MacGyver had to admit he could see why Millward had taken her own life. Maybe it was a better option for her than to have it taken and controlled by some fleet of tiny micro-machines.

Machines he now needed to command and use again.

Mac started by tapping in the information to repair the original program that someone had corrupted. That left him with nanites ready to target unwanted diseased cells. The next part was the hardest. How did he change those orders to target the original nanites?

It looked like he needed to change the profile of the objects being targeted, but that meant imputing all the original corrupt nanite data again, and it was going to take a long time.

Sharon was right...

MacGyver carried on anyway, using copy and paste where he could over and over again until his fingertips became numb.

He glanced at the wall clock. Three hours had passed.

The program was as ready as he could make it, but now he needed the actual micro-machines to encode with the data.

Data he had no clue would work or not.

The nanites were apparently stored in the adjoining lab in a refrigerated safe-room. And the room had security measures too.

MacGyver wearily pushed up from his chair and walked through to the large brushed steel door. It reminded him of something in a morgue and he almost shuddered.

The door had a card reader built in, and Mac swiped the one Eastman had supplied him with. The lights turned from red to green, but the room also had an ordinary lock.

Given the importance of its contents, he guessed only Mitrovich would have the key, and that option was definitely out.

MacGyver turned and looked around, his eyes darting from bench to bench for something he could use. When he initially couldn't find anything, and it wasn't exactly the environment for paperclips, he moved on to the wall of drawers on the opposite side of the room.

Sifting through various medical instruments, Mac came to a drawer containing syringes. Ironically, he'd need one soon to try out his theory, but for now, a couple of larger gauge needles were required.

He found the thickest he could and moved back to the steel door, focusing on the catch. It wasn't the easiest lock he'd ever picked, especially not given his impromptu tools.

After snapping one of the syringes, he finally heard the barrels inside the lock click open on his second attempt.

Wasting no time, MacGyver yanked open the door and stepped inside. It was cold, uninviting, *definitely like a morgue...*

He pushed the thought aside and ran a finger along each batch of nanites until he reached the one he needed – number fourteen.

The tiny robots were in a thin metal cylinder inside a saline solution. Once they had their programming, he could inject them directly.

Mac closed his eyes, not liking the idea of having any more of the things inside him. He took a breath and then jogged back into the main lab.

The little cylinder slotted into a perfectly tooled hub that was able to transfer the data to the nanites. At least, that's what MacGyver hoped as he hit the enter key on the computer and watched the program being downloaded to its targets.

The programming took another forty minutes of valuable time, and when the screen blinked "complete," MacGyver removed the cylinder and stared at it in the palm of his hand.

So small, and yet so very frightening.

Mac found a syringe and filled it with the nanite infested solution. It looked clear, the hundreds of machines it held hiding in plain sight due to their size.

He bit his bottom lip; this was insanity to even try, wasn't it?

Then before he could change his mind, Mac slid the needle into a vein and pressed the plunger. Of all the things he'd jury-rigged in his time, this had to be the weirdest, scariest and probably the least likely to work.

He waited, wondering what was going on in his bloodstream, and at first, it felt like nothing.

Mac wondered how long he should wait before checking a sample under the microscope, but then, something started to happen – to change.

The only way MacGyver could describe it at first was that he felt weird – lightheaded, maybe even dizzy. He grabbed the bench in front of him to keep his balance, but the room was spinning and his breathing was suddenly getting labored.

He caught a glimpse of his own reflection in a mirror across the room and realized he wasn't just pale, he was almost white.

It wouldn't have worked for Sharon any more than it has me...she was right, it was impossible.

Somehow the inner thought wasn't as comforting as it should have been.

Mac stumbled, even the bench no longer keeping him upright. He fell forwards, hitting the floor facedown and hard, but he didn't even have the strength to roll over anymore.

All he could hear and feel was the irregular pounding of his own heart as it raced far too quickly.

He wouldn't have to listen to it for much longer, though, because the room around him was turning black.

Someone's turning off the emergency lighting?

But somewhere deep down MacGyver knew the answer was a far more ominous.

He was dying, and he wouldn't even have the luxury of a few last words to Pete and Sam.

Part Four

The voice was an insistent one, screaming in his ears every few minutes not to dare die. Of course, it was a pointless demand, because he was already dead, wasn't he?

The darkness began to open up and the room appeared to be spinning – or rather the ceiling he was staring at was spinning.

MacGyver blinked and things seem to focus a little.

He was still on the lab floor, but somehow he'd moved onto his back and his legs were propped up slightly.

Not the greatest position to land in the afterlife...

And *he was* dead, of that he was sure, because Sharon Millward was standing over him.

It hadn't been like this back at the hospital when Harry had paid him a visit, but heck, what did he know about heaven and hell?

And how come I have a headache the size of Everest if I'm on the other side?

Mac moved to get up, but Millward finally stirred and dropped to his side. She pushed him back down, and given how he felt, he didn't resist.

His body hadn't ached so much since he'd taken a dive off a multi-storey.

“Getting up might not be such a great idea yet,” Millward warned. “When I found you an hour or so ago, you were close to arresting. I had to pump you full of enough epinephrine and antihistamines to drop a horse just to get your heart back in a sinus rhythm.”

Mac ran a hand through the front of his hair and took a moment to try and figure out just what was happening. “*Okay...so I'm not actually dead and in heaven...*”

Sharon smiled and shook her head. “No, you just look like you've spent a while in hell.”

“But...you're here, and you definitely..?” MacGyver couldn't actually bring himself to say “died.” It somehow seemed rude when she'd just saved his life.

“I forgot one thing when I shot myself, we both did in fact. The nanites won't allow me to die anymore than they will Mitrovich. They repair *any* injury. That's what they

do. I'm not as far gone as Gregor, so I suppose it just took awhile." Millward sighed and let a hand slide to Mac's wrist to check his pulse.

When she didn't offer any reason not to, MacGyver pushed up onto his elbows. For a second, his vision blurred and then came back into focus. He ignored it. "So my dumb idea to get rid of the nanites didn't work, huh?"

"On the contrary," Sharon stood back up; reached to the nearest bench and retrieved a test tube filled with blood Mac guessed was his. "I took a sample a few minutes ago and all the "Mitrovich" nanites are gone. The ones you programmed to attack them are dormant now and will eventually pass out of your system..."

Mac frowned. "Why am I sensing a "but" in your next sentence?" He rolled over, climbing to his feet only to quickly drop onto a chair before his legs gave way under him.

Millward stuck her hands in her pockets, her eyes carefully watching him. "The whole process almost killed you," she explained with a sigh. "The original design of the nanites was to be undetectable by the human immune system, but once they started attacking one another your body perceived them as a threat and your antibodies kicked in big time."

"Yeah, I kinda get that impression." He rubbed at his head wondering if the lab had anything to quell the constant drum banging inside his skull.

"The closest thing I can compare the reaction to is anaphylactic shock, and if I hadn't found you when I did..." Sharon's expression said it had been a close call, and one that had obviously frightened her.

If I'd died, she'd have been stuck here, changing, with no hope...

But he hadn't died, and now they had options.

"Hey, it worked, that means as long as we have the drugs handy to counteract the immune system response, we can fix you!" Mac was looking around and hoping Millward hadn't used everything on him. "Maybe we can even do something for Mitrovich?"

Sharon considered it. "We have enough of the drugs, but it would only stop Gregor changing further. It won't put him back."

"But *it will you*. You should take a shot of them right now." MacGyver moved to get another syringe and fill it, but Millward caught his arm, stopping him.

"If we try to get out of here, Mitrovich will be waiting again. We have to deal with him first – every time we're in contact with him he can re-infect us. He can't if I still have them anyway." Sharon didn't look convinced at her own words.

"You're saying *wait*? Are you crazy?" Mac wafted his hands in the air not believing what he was hearing. "Just take the cure and I'll deal with Mitrovich."

Millward turned away angrily. “No you won’t. If you get re-infected, trying to cure you again would probably kill you! Don’t you get it, you just *almost died!*”

There was a long pause.

MacGyver understood the odds perfectly. “You died once already today,” he said so quietly she almost didn’t hear him. “I don’t want to see it become a more permanent option.”

Sharon spun back around. “All we need is a little more time. You can prepare the solution and we’ll take it with us. I have to deal with Gregor or we’ll never get out, then I can take a dose of the nanites. And before you say I can’t fight him, I don’t intend to.” She pointed to the automatic still tucked in Mac’s belt. “I’m going to shoot him...”

“You’re gonna do *what?*” The fact that he didn’t like guns aside, MacGyver couldn’t believe she was suggesting shooting Mitrovich when taking a bullet obviously hadn’t worked on her. “Didn’t we already prove we can’t kill him that way? And not that I’d approve anyway...”

Millward smirked at the latter comment. “I don’t want to hurt Gregor,” she confirmed. “But the impact would probably drop him for awhile, like it did me. While he’s down we give him the nanites.” She shrugged. “I don’t think it will cure him but...”

“You’re hoping there’s enough of the man left inside to make him see sense,” Mac saw the logic in the idea, and Mitrovich had shown signs he could still reason when they’d fought earlier.

But that had been hours ago now.

Heck, he might not even look like a human anymore, let alone think like one.

“I don’t like it.”

Sharon huffed. “I’m not exactly thrilled, either. I wasn’t born to be an all American hero like you.” She smiled again.

“Well, that’s probably because you weren’t born an American at all,” Mac teased, feeling the mood lighten just a little. “C’mon, let’s do this before I change my mind.” He grabbed his satchel and began loading it with two syringes of the programmed nanites, and anything else Sharon pointed out they might need.

But deep down, Mac couldn’t shake that niggling feeling that things weren’t about to go their way.

* * * *

Getting back to the vent shaft was easier than MacGyver had expected. Mitrovich might be watching them, but so far he hadn't made an appearance, and that was a good thing.

If Millward's plan was going to work, they needed to drop him as near to the shaft as possible, and then use the "cure." There was no way any of them could go topside still infected and not get shot.

Now that they were at the access panel, it also gave Mac the chance to work out the two remaining codes he needed to open the vent enough to get out.

While he worked on the console, restoring the power cable he'd been forced to pull earlier, Sharon was the lookout for any sign of Mitrovich.

This time, she held the Beretta with much more confidence, and that scared Mac just a little. She'd been infected hours now. Were the nanites giving her the same thirst for blood and death that Mitrovich had, or was she simply so desperate to survive it was swelling her self-belief?

Wishing she already taken the antidote, he continued to work on their escape, every now and then looking up to check out the brooding tunnels around them.

He'd slipped up here last time, after all, and it had almost cost him his life.

The computer beeped in front of him and the screen finally flashed the last code Mac had entered was the correct one. Once he hit the enter button, the vent could be opened.

If Mitrovich was going to try anything, it would probably be now.

MacGyver felt his heart rate increase a notch as he tapped the keyboard and the metal blast door protecting the shaft slid open behind him. He held his breath and waited.

A few seconds passed, and Sharon dared to take her eyes off the darkness and look at Mac. "He's not coming, is he?"

A scratching sound erupted from the nearest corridor as she asked the question, and after a moment's pause, what was left of Mitrovich sauntered into view. He was scraping long, sharpened fingernails down the passageway walls, and his eyes flashed with madness.

"Oh, I think he wouldn't miss this party for the world..." Mac watched the scientist, still wishing there was another way than a gun to down him.

Sharon held no such convictions anymore, and as he drew closer, she pulled back on the Beretta's trigger repeatedly until Mitrovich was thrown backwards and down with the force of the impacts.

Why didn't he run, or try and avoid the bullets? Maybe deep down Mitrovich had thought there could be an end to his suffering, or maybe he had become too deranged to know what was happening?

As the elder man's body hit the ground, Millward moved forwards, keeping the gun aimed at him. MacGyver joined her, having the sense to wear surgical gloves before touching Mitrovich.

"Hurry," Sharon was shaking again, but from fear, or the uncontrollable urges her boss had suffered from? "I don't know how long that will keep him down for..."

Mac retrieved one of the syringes from his bag and injected Mitrovich. The scientist didn't move – he didn't do anything. Would the nanites even be strong enough to overpower the ones already in his system?

Sharon stared at Mitrovich and then swallowed hard. "I guess it's my turn?" She looked terrified, and who wouldn't be in her situation?

MacGyver pulled out the last needle and she took it from him. The expression on her face suggested this was something she needed to do herself. Maybe she thought it would take away any guilt he might feel if this went wrong.

"Here goes nothing..." Millward rolled up the sleeve of her lab coat and took the last dose. She rubbed absently where it had pierced her flesh. "Just be ready with that second needle if I go into shock like you did..."

Mac patted his satchel. "Can't you just take it now?"

Sharon shook her head. "We have to let your creations do their work first." She glanced at Mitrovich. He still hadn't moved, but he was breathing normally. "I suppose we'll never know how this happened now," she said vaguely.

"Then perhaps I should tell you?"

The voice was a new one, with a slight accent that suggested he was a fellow countryman of Mitrovich. He stepped into the soft red light, a pistol in his left hand.

"You caused all this?" MacGyver moved between the Russian and Millward, his eyes darting to the computer console to his right. Was he close enough to hit the escape key and lock the shaft back down?

"In my homeland, I was charged with watching over Gregor. He was considered a high risk for defection. When he escaped, I was...*punished* for my negligence. This is my way of returning that punishment and taking on, shall we say new employment?" He rolled one of the nanite canisters around in his hand, smiling at it like it was going to bring him a fortune.

But then, maybe it was.

“You changed the programming on purpose, to both punish Gregor, and test what the nanites were capable of? So you could sell them *as a weapon*?” Millward wheezed out the accusation – her immune system was obviously reacting to the nanites the same as MacGyver’s had.

Their time had just run out.

If the ex-Russian agent realized what was happening, he didn’t show it.

“What Mitrovich has become would be a perfect weapon with a few modifications. I’m sure there will be plenty of global interest. All I have to do is escape this mountain and make a few calls.”

MacGyver took the last comment as a cue for action. He couldn’t let anyone take something so deadly out into the world anymore than he could have allowed Mitrovich to escape.

Making a lunge for the console, he managed to hit the escape button before the Russian got off a shot.

The blast door slammed back into position as Mac rolled across the stone floor and came to rest by the wall, amazingly with no extra bullet holes in him. He took a gamble and clambered back up, hands raised in the air.

It was a calculated risk, but if the Russian wanted the access codes, he couldn’t kill Mac outright. That only gave them a short window of opportunity to come up with a plan, but any time was better than none.

The Russian shrugged as if the move had been pointless. “You’ll give me the codes, and then you’ll die here. Your deaths will go down as casualties of your own government when they blow the mountain. No one will ever know you were already dead.”

MacGyver looked over at Sharon. She was slumped against the wall, pale as a ghost. “If we’re gonna die anyway, why should I give you anything?”

The Russian moved across to stand beside Millward. He seemed amused at her labored breaths, as if perhaps fate would take her before his bullet did. Then he placed the muzzle of his gun to her forehead, and she didn’t even have the energy to pull away from it.

“If you don’t give me the codes, I’ll kill your lady friend first. And I can see from the look in your eyes that’s not an option.”

Mac licked his lips. Sharon was going to be dead in minutes if she didn’t get the epinephrine in his satchel, or she might be dead in seconds if the ex-agent decided to pull the trigger.

He was too far away to try and disarm the man, and there was nothing to use as a weapon, or a distraction. This wasn't just stalemate, this was checkmate, and his opponent was the winner.

Except, MacGyver had forgotten one pawn in the game – Mitrovich.

For some reason the scientist hadn't gone into shock like Mac and Millward had. Possibly because of how much his body had already been changed.

And from the angry expression on his face, Mitrovich *remembered* the man now threatening them.

Pouncing from the floor like a leopard, Mitrovich knocked the gun from the Russian's hand and grabbed him by the throat like he had Mac earlier.

MacGyver didn't know whether Mitrovich understood what had been said, or that they'd tried to save him, but he did know he needed to act fast to save Millward.

He tried to slide past the two fighting Russians, but they were thrashing around so much he was knocked backwards.

The blow wasn't a heavy one, but Mac landed on the satchel he'd tried to be so careful with. The bag popped with a sickening crunch as the contents smashed under his weight.

He recovered quickly, and as Mitrovich tossed his foe to the left, Mac dived through the gap on the right.

Trying hard not to think about what might have happened to the radio, and the vial that was needed to save Millward, he re-keyed the access codes to get the blast door up.

As the hydraulics kicked in with a hiss, Mac moved back to focus on the satchel. Flipping it open, it soon became apparent that everything inside had been destroyed, and that included anyway to tell the authorities outside they were clean from the nanites, and coming out.

There was no time to worry about that now, though.

Because Sharon was dying, and he had nothing left to save her.

MacGyver wanted to be angry, to blame himself for not making her use the antidote sooner, but sentiment wasn't going to save the day.

He grabbed Millward and threw her over his shoulder, noting she was already unconscious and barely drawing breath.

Mac tried to ignore the obvious that it was over and climbed into the vent shaft. Holding onto his load with one arm, he reached out and relocked the door via the console with the other.

Mitrovich, and the man who had ultimately killed him were now locked in battle, and trapped forever in the bowels of the labs – at least until the F14's came to destroy it.

MacGyver should have felt guilty for sealing them to their fates, but there was no other option, and right now all he could think about was the deaths that they had both caused.

It wasn't Mitrovich' fault...

But Mitrovich had ultimately infected Sharon, and now she was going to die too.

Mac clambered onto the rungs of an access ladder and almost stumbled. Carrying a dead weight up a shaft was almost insane, and yet he wouldn't, *couldn't* let go, because deep down he blamed himself.

I should have made her take the cure.

He knew Millward would never have accepted that, she was as stubborn as he was, but he chided himself up the next two ladders anyway, the anger, the pure adrenaline pushing him on when he should already have been too exhausted to climb anymore.

Mac reached a ledge and paused just a moment to catch his breath. He couldn't feel the rise and fall of Sharon's chest anymore against his shoulder, and he couldn't check for a pulse without putting her down – which given his precarious position wasn't even possible.

The agonizing thought that he might already be too late spurred him on, and he climbed again, his boots slipping on the rungs as he tried to move too quickly.

Eventually, after fifteen excruciating minutes, he reached the main fans that sucked air into the vents. Somehow, luck here at least was on his side. The fans weren't moving.

Feeling bad about how he had to handle her, Mac slid Millward's prone form through one of the blades and crudely pushed.

Her body sagged limply the other side, but she was through.

Grabbing the edges, he yanked his own body up and between the fins and then balanced on them to try and get the grille to the outside open.

Working with his penknife, it took another ten minutes to unscrew the metal lattice, and a whole lot more energy than he had with his back against it to pop it open.

MacGyver was soaked with sweat, covered in grease and bruises, but he didn't feel a thing. He grabbed Millward carrying her a safe distance from the shaft before laying her on the snow-capped ground.

He quickly felt for a pulse at her neck, but there was nothing.

Too long, it took me too long to get up the shaft...

In the distance, he heard the sound of rotors and new Eastman's people were coming, maybe Pete too. But that would be too late.

Mac refused to accept that it was over. It wasn't fair, it couldn't end this way. He began CPR, even though common sense was already screaming in his head that without the epinephrine it wouldn't work.

He carried on for minutes, until the helicopter was landing behind him, the noise of the engines drowning out his thoughts, his prayers.

And eventually, he stopped.

Sharon's eyes stared blankly back at him, and he knew deep down that she was dead, and there was nothing he, or any army medic could do for her now.

He rocked back on his knees and closed his eyes.

This wasn't fair, and he should have prevented it.

A hand fell gently on his shoulder and Mac opened his eyes to see Pete standing over him. There was compassion there, but concern too.

Eastman was less sympathetic as he jogged over with four soldiers in tow. "Is she clean of the nanites?"

MacGyver wanted to punch him, to grab him by the collar and shake him. "She's dead, and that's all you can say?"

"We have to know if the area has been compromised." The general's tone was demanding.

"No, it hasn't, the nanites were contained in the labs." Mac watched as the soldiers placed Millward in a body bag and loaded her onto the till running chopper. He wouldn't look at Eastman.

"C'mon." Pete tugged at MacGyver's torn shirt. "We have to go. The F14's will be here soon."

MacGyver nodded, but he really didn't care. He felt numb.

He could build things out of nothing, he could put his own life at risk all day long, but the one thing he had no skills with at all, was dealing with losing someone.

It had been like this with Mike Forrester and Lisa Kohler, and although he hadn't known Sharon as long, he still felt the same uncontrollable guilt over her death.

Mac pulled himself into the rear of the UH-60 and sat silently as it veered away from the mountain. Eastman was yelling orders, but the troubleshooter didn't know, or care who they were aimed at.

And all he could think as explosions behind them filled the evening sky, was that maybe he should have stayed at the cabin after all.

In fact, maybe it would be whole lot better if he just stayed there period, where he couldn't hurt anyone.

MacGyver's Cabin
Minnesota
Two Days Later

Sam watched as the Phoenix helicopter circled and then slowly came in to land. He hadn't been allowed to know the full circumstances of what had happened on his dad's assignment, but Pete had already explained that MacGyver wasn't coming home his usual jovial self.

Mac had spent the previous two days at a military hospital containment area until the authorities had been convinced he wasn't "carrying anything extra" in his blood.

Pete had warned Sam the only thing extra his dad was carrying was a whole bunch of guilt over someone's death.

In a way, Sam could relate to that. He'd felt the same way when Kate, his mom had been killed, even though he'd been just a kid at the time.

The chopper's skids bounced down in front of the cabin and Sam put away sad memories in favor of focusing on his father.

Mac jumped from the helicopter first and then turned to give Pete a hand. Once his old friend was on safe ground, he grabbed his bag from the rear of the JetRanger and ambled towards the cabin.

There was no happy smile, no greeting for his son. He nodded to Sam, and then carried on inside, his dark, troubled eyes showing the burden his soul was carrying.

Sam didn't try to follow, instead waiting for Pete to make it up the path. If anyone could help, it was Pete Thornton.

"You weren't kidding when you said he was in a bad place!" Sam stopped Pete at the door, not wanting his dad to hear the conversation.

Pete sighed. "Your dad's good at everything he tries – except coping with death. It's his Achilles heel. Ever since I've known him, if someone dies he's around, he feels responsible."

"He can't save everyone. Surely he knows that?" Sam stuck his hands in his pockets and stared as the morning sun broke over the horizon.

“It’s his way.” Pete shook his head sadly. “I was in Romania with him once when he was taken hostage by one of Ceausescu’s followers. The man had been brainwashed since he was a kid, he thought everyone was his enemy – until your dad got through to him.”

Sam turned away from the sunrise. “So what happened?”

“He ended up giving his life to save us, and your dad felt to blame for his death. It was stupid to feel that way, but that’s how Mac is. Passionate about what he does is an understatement.”

“So what do I do?”

Pete smiled and reached out, patting Sam’s arm. “You just give him time. It’s all we can ever do.” He turned then and headed off back towards the chopper. When he grew close, Nikki Carpenter emerged and helped him back onboard.

And then, the Bell was soaring off into the bright blue sky and vanishing over the nearest ridge.

Sam licked his lips, took a breath, and headed inside to face the great Angus MacGyver, in all his melancholic glory.

Mac was sitting at the table, his head in his hands, apparently thinking – and from his expression Sam guessed they weren’t exactly pleasant thoughts.

“You want to talk about it?” He offered, not really knowing where to begin.

“Not really,” Mac’s voice was low as if he had a heavier burden than Atlas on his shoulders. “But I’m guessing from previous experience with Pete and Nikki that you’re not going to take that for an answer?”

Sam shrugged. Maybe people had pushed too hard in the past and sometimes that wasn’t the way to get through to someone hurting.

He moved over to the stove where he’d started to cook the morning “catch”. “If you don’t want to talk, I’m fine with that.” He flipped the fish, grimacing at the sight of it – not that Sam couldn’t cook fish just fine, but it was the perfect tool to maybe cut through the doldrums his dad was stuck in. “Seeing as you left me out here, *I am* going to expect you to eat what I’ve caught and cooked though...”

MacGyver looked up, glancing at what was in the pan. He *had* left Sam up here with virtually nothing, and no survival skills to speak of either.

The idea seemed to actually bring on a new pang of guilt – a different one that took his mind from the Peckwash fiasco and Millward for awhile.

“You actually caught that? On *your own*?” He asked with a tinge of suspicion.

Sam nodded and grinned. “Sure did, it took me two hours this morning, so you better try it!” He slapped the slightly blackened and charred fish onto a plate and stuck it under MacGyver’s nose.

Mac smiled thinly and took up a fork, but hesitated before tucking in.

Sam ambled closer, making sure his dad knew he was scrutinizing his every mouthful.

With obvious reluctance, MacGyver broke off a piece of the fish and popped it in his mouth. He chewed, grimaced and swallowed hard. “Jeez, you did bone this, right?”

Sam tried to look innocent. “Well, you never actually got around to showing me how to do that.”

There was a pause, Mac set down his fork, and then made a dive for the small waste bucket in the corner.

It was brimming over with empty Macdonald’s wrappers. “Eating “survival style” while I was gone, huh?”

Sam grinned. His plan to distract his dad was working. “Hey, you left the keys to the Jeep, and I was hungry! It was a bit of a drive out to town, but...”

The tiniest of smile’s crept onto MacGyver’s face. “Just wait until tomorrow. I’m taking you out camping, and you’re on berry rations for the rest of the week!”

Sam didn’t care. He’d eat berries, caterpillars, lizards, whatever it took, as long as his dad was the happy go lucky guy he’d come to know again.

“Ten bucks says I can eat whatever you throw at me,” he challenged, wanting Mac to be busy thinking about testing his willingness to eat woodsman style, rather than the Peckwash assignment.

MacGyver raised a brow. “Ah, c’mon, you know I don’t gamble!”

“What if we make it I clean your place for a week if I lose?” Sam was teasing now, knowing this was one bet his dad wouldn’t be able to resist.

“*Really?*” Mac’s tone was filled with incredulity.

“Really.” Sam bobbed his head and then chuckled.

It was good to see his dad smile again, whatever he had to give up to make it happen.

Over the next few days, he was going to make sure Mac stopped beating himself up – even if that meant admitting he did actually have a few survival skills of his own.

MacGyver had already proven he was a worthy father, now it was Sam’s turn to prove his worth as a son.

And he didn't intend to let Mac down.

The End