

Crash and Burn

MacGyver slid through the door to his home, dropped down his backpack and slumped into the nearest chair. Just lately it didn't seem like he'd had much downtime, and then there had been the incident at Christmas to contend with, and that alone had left him exhausted both physically and mentally.

He exhaled, blinked and pulled himself wearily up to get a drink of water. As he reached out for a glass, he spotted a piece of notepaper on the nearby table.

But I locked the door...

Mac put the glass back down and snatched up the message. The writing was a crude scrawl, as if it had been hastily written, but the meaning was clear enough.

Meet me at Reno's Place, tonight at eight. Sam gets it if you don't...

Reno's Place was a seedy downtown biker bar – the type of establishment MacGyver usually avoided, and he certainly didn't know anyone who worked there. That left a more sinister implication to the note.

But then, he'd only been able to think of one name since he'd picked it up off the table – Roger Mariotte.

Mariotte hated Sam, and he didn't think much of MacGyver. Was this one of his mind games?

Mac's stomach lurched just thinking about it and what might be happening to his son while his mind was turning it all over. He checked his watch. It was seven-thirty already, and the bar was at least a half hour away.

He tugged the Jeep's keys from his jacket pocket and raced from the door, not even realizing if he'd looked just that little bit closer, that the handwriting on the note was kind of familiar.

Reno's Place
Downtown L.A.
8.35p.m.

The bar didn't disappoint. It was dark, grimy and full of men with bald heads, large beards, and huge muscles. If it came to a fist fight with one of them, Mac was definitely going to have to use brains over brawn.

He inched his way carefully up to the counter, letting his eyes play around the room for signs of Mariotte or anyone else that might be familiar.

The overly-tattooed bar tender nodded to him as he approached. "What can I get you?" The man scrutinized MacGyver like he was an insect about to get squashed.

Mac slid a twenty across under the man's nose. "A little information?"

The tender smirked and began rubbing at a glass absently with a towel. "You a cop? 'Cause you oughta know the folks in this establishment don't take too kindly to questions."

MacGyver shook his head. "Nope, not a cop," he answered honestly. "I just got a message to meet someone here at eight-thirty?"

The man's eyes suddenly lit up knowingly and he nodded. "Ah, then you'd be wanting the back room..." He pointed with a wiry finger to a curtain behind the bar, just back of where he was standing.

Mac licked his lips. This could so easily be a trap, and yet he'd dismissed the idea of the police, or any Phoenix back up in case it put Sam's life at risk.

And just where was Sam anyway?

He moved to a section of the bar counter that lifted open and slipped behind it, pausing at the grime-ridden curtain to suck down a breath. A bullet could be waiting for him, or any other manner of deadly weapon, and he had no choice but to take whatever was coming.

MacGyver exhaled and stepped forwards, pushing the curtain out of the way to find himself in a small, and very glum room with a table at its center. There was a beer and an orange juice sitting on it, waiting.

"Compadre, what took you so long?! I thought I was gonna have to leave without you!"

Mac scrunched his fists together, resisting the urge to punch Jack Dalton square on the nose. His heart was racing, his mind was spinning, and for what? Another one of Dalton's hair-brained schemes, no doubt.

Jack seemed to sense his friend's anger and pushed back on his chair, holding up a hand in submission, while clutching a huge cigar like a lottery winner with the other. "Mac, me boy, what'd I say?" He seemed genuinely surprised he'd done anything, as ever.

"Dang it, Jack, what were you thinking leaving notes like that?" MacGyver moved closer to the table, but despite his reddening cheeks, his anger was already abating. He never could stay mad at Dalton for more than a few minutes. "You almost scared me half to death!" He pulled out a chair, ran a hand through his hair and then sat down. "And just what did you mean by 'Sam gets it', if I didn't come here?"

Jack grinned, took a puff on his cigar and let out a huge plume of smoke that earned him a scowl. “Because, Mac, my good buddy, Sam gets the adventure of a lifetime if you turn me down...”

MacGyver rolled his eyes, the urge to hit Jack returning with every word the pilot offered. “Aww c’mon, not another one of your crazy schemes? I am so *not* repairing any planes, minding any of your offspring, or giving you any of my money to invest in anything illegal... Oh, and forget anything to do with the CIA and rogue agents while you’re at it!”

“Hey, at least you know I’m not hypnotized to kill anyone this time. At least I don’t think I am...” Jack prodded the front of his flying jacket for good measure. “Anyway, I’m wounded, Mac, genuinely wounded that you would think its any kind of scheme or trick!” Jack’s eye twitched just a tiny bit, and MacGyver had to smile.

“Your eye’s telling me otherwise,” Mac teased. “So out of curiosity, just what is this little adventure? ‘Cause you’re so not involving Sam.”

“It’s simple. I have a job delivering a very nice airplane to Africa, and I wanted my good buddy along for the ride.” Jack took a sip of his drink and waited patiently.

“Are you kidding me? I’m never getting on a plane with you again – *not ever!*” Mac threw his hands in the air in a gesture of defeat. “And besides, don’tcha think I had enough with the whole Boeing incident a couple of Christmases back?”

Jack smiled again and leaned forward, patting MacGyver on the shoulder as if it might soothe his old friend. “I can see why you might doubt me, I really can, but this time it’s all above board, legal, safe, and what’s more, the bird in question is a new million dollar Learjet, so you have nothing to worry about!”

MacGyver looked away, unconvinced and mumbled. “With you, I always worry. Call it a reflex action after years of practice...”

“You know, I could kind of turn on the thumb screws?” Jack batted his eyelashes pleadingly. “That Boeing incident with you and Sam you just mentioned? Just *who* was it found you a nice cozy airstrip to land on when Papa Thornton came up empty handed?”

Mac scowled, and reluctantly whispered, “You did.”

Jack put a hand to his ear, feigning deafness. “What was that, Mac, I can’t hear you?”

“YOU DID!”

“Right, so I figure you owe me this trip.” Jack took another puff on the cigar. “Don’t worry; it’s a regular milk run. We just drop off the Learjet with some rich African dude, collect our fee and spend the rest of the weekend being pampered at the guy’s extensive estate.”

MacGyver was still frowning. “So why do you need me?” There was suspicion in his voice.

“Can’t a man want a little company on a long haul flight? Can’t he ask his bestest buddy who he always thinks of, trusts and helps out?” Jack’s eye twitched again and he rubbed at it, possibly attempting to hide the tick.

It didn’t work.

“*Jack...*”

“If you don’t come, I’m gonna ask Sam, I swear...”

MacGyver considered a right hook, or maybe even an uppercut to the jaw, but instead sighed and capitulated. “No,” he bemoaned. “I really don’t want Sam involved. I’ll go, but that plane better be just how you described it, or I swear...”

Jack grinned. “Trust me, Kemo Sabe, it’s all that and more!”

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LAX Terminal 3 Private Gate 24

MacGyver stared at the Learjet so hard his eyes actually hurt – but he simply couldn’t shift his gaze off the plane. It was new, it was big, and it was *very* expensive. Basically, the aircraft was everything Jack Dalton had described.

Could Jack have turned a new leaf and actually be doing an honest days work for a genuine businessman?

Mac shook himself. No, that really would be asking too much. Something was going on, and he just hadn’t figured it out yet.

The Learjet’s door floated open revealing steps and Jack in his usual cap. He saluted. “Your transport awaits, dear sir!”

MacGyver grabbed his backpack and hopped up the steps two at a time, pausing at the top to look around inside the cabin. There were thick leather seats, a bar, built in media center, and much more. He ignored the lush aft section and climbed upfront, settling into the co-pilot’s seat to check out the instruments.

Again, everything was perfect – no broken dials or missing radios.

I must be dreaming. Jack Dalton doesn’t fly something that isn’t on a wing and a prayer.

“We do have a flight plan?” Mac asked suspiciously.

Jack stuffed a hand inside his flying jacket, pulled out a crumpled piece of paper with coffee stains and stuck it under his friend's nose. "All above board, me boy!" He rummaged under his seat and came out with a large roll. He tapped it over MacGyver's head playfully. "And just for you, I even have *charts!*"

Without waiting for a reply, he tugged off his cap, and pulled on the leather flight helmet he usually wore on his motorcycle. Goggles came next, to complete the effect. "Chocks away, and all that!" He chuckled as he began his pre-flight checks.

MacGyver was speechless, at least for a few seconds as he watched Dalton assess the instruments. Once he was convinced he wasn't dreaming, he moved to close the hatch and then settled down in the back.

There really was no point sitting up front, because Jack had already connected the earphones in his helmet to his usual tape deck. The sound of Blue Oyster Cult's *Don't Fear the Reaper* filtered through the cabin, he had it turned up so loud.

Why that song, out of the hundreds he could listen to..?

Jack began to sing along as he hit the throttles for take off, and it was more than Mac could stand. He slammed the door between the flight deck and rear cabin and put his fingers in his ears.

MacGyver had no idea how long he'd stayed that way, but a few hours later he awoke with his hands still clamped either side his head. Thankfully, the horrendous racket from Jack's mouth had stopped, and he was now whistling.

Mac rubbed at his eyes and glanced out of one of the port shaped windows to see it was dark. How far had they traveled? He'd been pretty beat when he'd arrived back at his place, and then Dalton had run him across downtown L.A. and beyond with his note. Could he really have slept his way halfway across the world?

He yawned and poured some water from a glass decanter set into the wall, but as he tried to put the drink to his lips, he realized the Learjet was suddenly yawing wildly to the right.

MacGyver set the drink down, rolled his eyes and headed for the front. "Jack Dalton you so better not be asleep at the wheel or I'm gonna kick your b..." He paused as he saw Jack stabbing at a button manically on the cluster in front of him.

Jack's expression said the button wasn't exactly playing ball. "Err...Mac, I think I might need just a little, tiny, teeny weenie bit of your expertise..." He grimaced. "As in, I think we have a small fire..." He glanced over his shoulder, out the window to the engine.

Mac's eyes widened and he stretched over Dalton to the cockpit glass, just so he could see the rear of the plane. Sure enough, the super expensive, brand new Pratt and Whitney turbofan engine was engulfed in flames.

"Small! *SMALL!* Jack we have a fireball for an engine!"

Jack shrugged. “Well I think you’re maybe being a tad over-dramatic, but if you insist on putting it that way...”

MacGyver resisted the urge to go find a parachute, and instead focused on the Learjet controls. “What about fire suppression? This thing is supposed to be so state of the art, it has to have extinguishers?”

Dalton pointed to the button he’d been feverishly pushing. “It does! Well actually, no...it has a button for them, but as you can see it doesn’t really work.”

“You said it was brand new. You said it was perfect. *You said* nothing could go wrong!” MacGyver threw both hands in the air, then tugged out his pocket knife and began to dismantle the panel that held the fire systems. “Why Jack? *Why* did I believe you...?”

Jack’s expression said he was trying to think of a logical answer, but his twitching eye suggested he wasn’t exactly having honest thoughts, as ever. He rubbed at the offending orb as if it would stop the tick. “Err, because for once *I* actually believed what I was saying?”

MacGyver couldn’t argue. They’d both thought this trip was going to be the one, the only none-dramatic journey they’d ever made together. Now, Mac was having pretty bad flashbacks to United Airlines Flight 4177, a nightmare he’d hoped never to have to relive.

At least Sam isn’t with me this time!

The thought spurred him on, and after a few more precious seconds, MacGyver had the small metallic panel he was working on free. He pulled it away from the main console and couldn’t help but simply stare at it agog.

There were no wires, no nothing attached to the rear of the button Jack had been pressing. It was impossible. An aircraft like this would have stringent safety checks during production, and no way would an error so glaring get through quality control.

“Say, Mac, I’m no expert, but isn’t that supposed to have like, something connected to it?” Jack actually looked a smidgen worried.

“Ya think?” MacGyver dropped the panel onto his lap and stuck his hand in the hole it had come from. Nothing had come detached or was hanging loose. “Now might be a good time to start diving the plane. It might help with the fire.”

Jack didn’t appear to have a sassy retort. At least, if he did he kept it to himself, and quickly slid the yoke in his hands forwards. The plane’s nose dipped as its angle of decent increased dramatically, and MacGyver had to hold on as he stretched forwards to peer inside the panel.

He couldn’t be sure, but it looked like a harness should link between the button and a small circuit board using two connectors each end.

So where the heck is the harness?

There was no time, however, to worry about missing components. MacGyver pulled his head from the console and looked frantically around for something to bridge the connection.

Without asking permission, he tore off Jack's flying helmet.

"Hey, watch the hair!" Jack bemoaned. "If I'm gonna die I at least wanna look good!"

MacGyver ignored him and began cutting the headphone wires free from the hat and player. When he had the right length, he used his penknife to strip back the ends and twist them onto the connector on the board. It was hard to get them to stay put, and there was no way it was going to work on the rear of the button. He was going to have to physically hold the two wires onto that connector.

Mac closed his eyes, pushed the wires and prayed. "Jack, will ya press the button again?"

Dalton took one hand from the yoke he was now struggling to hold and pressed hard. The light on the panel section turned from red to green and a buzzer began to sound from the depths of the cockpit.

"Mac, me boy! It's working!"

MacGyver dared to open his eyes and crane his neck to look to the rear of the aircraft. Foam was pumping from some hidden system all over the engine, and as he watched, the licking flames began to die as they were starved of oxygen.

A few seconds later, the fire was gone.

"Maybe we could stop diving now?" Mac suggested as he spotted just how fast they were falling and how badly the wings seemed to be shaking. "I really don't want to see Africa that up close and personal."

Jack's eye began to twitch, and MacGyver's stomach instantly lurched.

"Well, it would kinda help if I had some fuel?" Jack tapped a finger on the jet's twin gauges. The two red warning lights were now flashing along with the fire suppression one.

"You *did* fuel this thing up?"

Jack looked hurt. "Of course I did! I watched the crew fill this baby full to the brim! I even got them to clean the windshield and check the tires." He wiggled his eyebrows mischievously, despite their situation. "Seriously, Mac, I have a receipt and everything." Dalton pulled a payment slip from his pocket.

“So where’d it go?” MacGyver wasn’t incredulous anymore, he was suspicious. This wasn’t just a regular Jack Dalton episode, this was something different. He believed his friend had fuelled the jet, and no way was the engine fire a coincidence.

If they lived through the whole thing, then there would be a lot of questions to ask. Right now, though, surviving was the priority.

“*Ex-act-ly!*” Jack drawled as if to ask the same question MacGyver had. “Maybe it leaked out somehow?” He proposed after a seconds thought. “Although that usually entails someone shooting us full of holes first, like that time we rescued Mike...”

Mac shook his head. Another quality issue on a brand new plane just wasn’t feasible. “We’ll worry about that once we land,” he suggested, harnessing himself into the co-pilot’s seat.

“Or crash and burn,” Dalton said woefully. “Well maybe not burn, seeing as the fuel is gone...but crash is definitely sounding like the only option in town...”

MacGyver refused to be defeated so easily. He took up the yoke in front of him and began to pull hard back on it, attempting with Jack’s help to straighten up the nose of the Learjet.

The instruments suggested it was working – to a degree, at least, but simply not fast enough.

The altimeter counted down rapidly, but in the depths of night, neither Mac nor Jack could see the earth below closing on them. Perhaps that was a good thing.

“At least there’s nothing much to hit out here,” Jack offered helpfully. “Cept for maybe a few elephants, and maybe Tigger, or how about Tarzan..?”

Mac grimaced and tugged harder on the controls until his knuckles looked like they would pop. “I don’t think the elephants, or Tarzan would find that very comforting!”

The Learjet agreed, and finally decided to lift its nose barely seconds before its belly slammed into African brush land. There had been no time, and no point in lowering the undercarriage, as it would have been torn off on the uneven ground anyway.

The plane bounced and groaned as its sheer speed propelled it through drought-hit trees, flattening an already barren landscape further. Metal screamed as the airframe buckled and the tail section came adrift settling in a dry river bed while the rest of the Learjet continued to slide.

MacGyver felt the straps of his harness digging into his flesh as the terror ride carried them further, but was thankful he’d put it on; given the alternative would have been a swift trip through cockpit screen.

The danger wasn’t over yet though.

Ahead, even in the encompassing blackness of night, he could see a huge dark shadow in their path, and there was no way to stop the jet's momentum.

Whatever it was, they were going to slam into it, *hard*.

"Jack, we're gonna hit something!" Reflexively, Mac threw his arms in front of his face, and waited for the impact, hoping that the nose cone would take the brunt of the collision.

When Jack didn't answer, MacGyver had one split second left to glance over and see why.

While MacGyver had strapped himself in earlier, Dalton had not. And right now, Jack was still fumbling with the centre buckle on his harness.

As the Learjet struck the immovable object outside, Jack just had enough to time to mouth. "Oops..."

And then their world went darker than the African bush that had swallowed them up.

Part Two

MacGyver groaned, pulled his arms from over his head, and stretched. Apart from a cut to his arm from the screen glass, he'd somehow come away in one piece. He blinked, then remembered Jack, and the fact that he probably hadn't gotten his harness on in time.

Jack seemed to appreciate the concern, and groaned as MacGyver clambered over to him and started checking him over.

"Oh, baby, was there really any need to get that rough with me?" Dalton groaned half-consciously. "I swear I never met that other gal before..."

"Jack!" Mac gently shook his friend's shoulder. "Talk to me!"

Dalton blinked, squinted up at MacGyver and given his expression probably realized he wasn't talking to a girl. "Err...oops...again."

"You alright?" MacGyver asked, and then realized it was a dumb question. "Well, as alright as *you* can be?"

Jack put a hand to his bleeding temple and winced. "I think my brains are still inside. *Somewhere*, at least," he chuckled.

Mac nodded, satisfied and then peered out through the smashed screen. It was only now he understood what they'd crashed into.

It was a tank, or rather the rusting hulk of a long-dead one.

He didn't know why, but that somehow bothered him, although he kept the thought to himself.

"So now what, Mac?"

MacGyver noted a first aid box on the wall at the back of the cabin and plucked it down. He opened it up, found a pack of antiseptic wipes and offered one up to Jack for his head. "We wait," he suggested. "There's no fuel, so no danger of an explosion. I'm thinkin' we're safer here, for tonight at least."

Jack's eyes widened. "Huh? You know I beg to differ Kemo Sabe! We should go find a nice safe village or something. I mean, there might be wild animals out here! As in, wild and hungry! As in, *eat US!*"

Mac took a wipe and swabbed at the cut to his arm whilst eyeing Dalton suspiciously. As hair-brained as Jack could be, he *had* to know staying inside the wrecked Learjet was the best and safest option.

"C'mon Jack; is there something you're not telling me?"

Jack's eye ticked, just the once. "Absolutely not! I mean, can't a guy want to get back to civilization without being suspected of foul play?"

MacGyver's eyes narrowed. "When it's you? Probably not." He screwed up the bloodied wipe and stood up, looking around the wrecked cockpit for anything useful. Apart from the first aid kit, pickings were slim, so he moved aft into the rear cabin leaving Jack to cogitate.

Somehow, the water hadn't been spilled, and there were snacks packed into a small cupboard at the back. Food and drink weren't going to be an issue.

Scavenging further in a locker meant for crew use only, he found emergency equipment including flashlights, a flare gun, and a carefully packed inflatable dingy.

Mac smiled, that was one thing they wouldn't be using – at least not in the way it had been originally intended.

He tucked the flare gun into his belt and took both flashlights, intending to give one to Jack.

As he moved back towards the cockpit with his finds, Dalton emerged, and he wasn't looking happy. Something was definitely going on in that head of his.

"We should probably try radioing for help," Mac suggested casually.

"Already tried, and it's kaput – even too kaput for you to fix, my friend." Jack magically produced his flying cap and stuck it on instead of the helmet MacGyver had cannibalized earlier. "And with that in mind, I'm off to find help! I'm like Captain Oates to your Scott!" He pushed on the door and it groaned open. "I may be some time!"

Seconds later, Jack had bounded out into the night.

“Yeah, well look how well that ended!” Mac called after him. “Do you even *know* what you’re quoting?!”

Dalton didn’t answer, and for a few short moments MacGyver pretended he didn’t care. Jack was a grown man; he could look after himself..

Except Mac knew that wasn’t true. Jack mostly had the mental age of a school kid and almost always got himself into the worst kinds of trouble imaginable – which right now could be anything from being eaten by a wild animal to walking into a desert. He didn’t seem to have taken any charts, a compass, or any provisions, and it was far too cloudy to navigate by the stars.

Mac sighed, rolled his eyes and clambered out into the darkness after his friend.

“Jack, will you just hold up?”

Jack didn’t answer. At least, not what MacGyver would have called a normal answer.

Instead, he began screaming at the top of his voice from some unseen location, and he sounded terrified. “Please don’t eat me! I’m not the right flavor, honest! Heck, you’ll get indigestion, or heartburn, or something...*MAC!* Over here! Hurry, this thing wants to chow down on me like I’m some kinda t-bone! *Maaac!*”

MacGyver cautiously followed Jack’s harried cries. It was obvious he’d been cornered by something, and Mac didn’t intend being the dessert. He paused, listening rather than using the flashlight he held. Sometimes in these situations, you had to use stealth, rather than brute force.

Jack whimpered from somewhere to the right, now possibly even too scared to yell for help.

Mac licked his lips and followed the sound until the clouds overhead gave way, allowing the moon to illuminate the scene.

Dalton was backed up to a tree and a large and very angry looking lion was eyeing him as if he might be supper. It roared as he moved just an inch, warning that next time he dared to move, it may just pounce.

Mac took a few steps from the grass he’d taken cover in and put a finger to his lips for Jack to keep quiet. It was an impossible thing to ask.

“Mac! It’s gonna eat me!”

The lion sensed the second presence and spun its head, a long, golden mane whirling in the moonlight. Its eyes narrowed, and it snarled just enough to show its huge front teeth.

MacGyver tensed, but didn't move. Not just yet. "It's a male, Jack...its primary job is to defend the territory of the pride while the females hunt."

"So the big fella only wants to eat me half as much as his girlfriends?" Jack scowled. "Somehow that won't be very consoling when he's using my leg as jungle jerky."

"We're on its turf," Mac almost whispered. "Just don't panic. All we need to do is spook him and get back to the plane."

Jack mouthed "Spook him? Are you *serious*?" And his eyes grew even wider, but for now he seemed to have suddenly lost his voice.

The idea amused MacGyver, even in the current situation, but there was no time to savor seeing Jack at his mercy.

Careful not to anger the lion by any abrupt movement, he slowly drew the flare gun from the Learjet from his belt. He had no intention of hurting the big cat, but he needed to get his aim just right so that it ran in fear, rather than charged in temper.

Apparently finding MacGyver somewhat boring, the lion turned its enormous head back to stare at Dalton. Jack's bottom lip quivered and his eyes pleaded with Mac to make his move.

Using the lack of attention to his advantage, Mac did just that. Aiming with the skill of a sniper, despite his hatred of guns, MacGyver fired the flare between the animal and his friend and watched as it ignited in a wild scarlet glory that lit up the grasslands around them.

The lion's reflex action was as expected – it roared and bolted to the left with a sudden but brief burst of speed. How long it would keep away was anyone's guess, but Mac was betting once the flare died down they'd be at its mercy again.

Wanting to avoid that option, he dived across the ground with almost as much grace as the beast he'd vanquished. Grabbing Jack's arm, he yanked down hard on it, waking Dalton from his daze. "C'mon, will ya! He won't stay away all night!"

Jack shook his head and broke out into a run, following MacGyver like a kid following its mom around shopping mall. Eventually, Mac slowed, checking if the lion was pursuing them – for now, it wasn't, and he dared to catch his breath.

"Just *what* were you thinking?" He puffed out, waving his arms in exasperation.

"I was thinking I was on Clarence there's menu!"

Mac pinched the bridge of his nose. He was sure he was getting one of his Dalton-induced headaches. "I meant, what were you thinking racing off into the night when we had the plane to keep cover in until morning?"

Jack looked away. Was that so he couldn't be caught out lying yet again with that twitch of his? "I thought we could get to a village...I told you. And now that we're out here anyway..."

MacGyver shook his head. "Oh no, we're going right back to the Learjet until morning, or next time I leave you to the lion."

Jack scowled, but when Mac plucked a flashlight from his belt and headed back to the crashed jet, he reluctantly dropped into step behind him.

* * * *

The Next Morning...

MacGyver slept lightly, occasionally stirring to open one eye and check that Jack was still under a blanket in one of the Learjet's plush rear seats. Something was eating at the pilot, and there would be no rest until Mac had pried the problem out of his friend.

As the sun emerged over the dusty landscape, MacGyver rose first, taking a measured drink of their water supply before checking out the plane.

Brand new aircraft just didn't crash for no reason, and Mac intended to find out just what had gone wrong with this one. His first question, was where had the fuel gone, if Jack had really had the jet fuelled as he'd promised.

MacGyver started with the wing that hadn't disintegrated as they'd impacted the ground. Normally, it would have held a portion of their fuel supply in a tank, and that was what he wanted to check out.

Rolling underneath the wing as far he could, Mac wriggled until he reached the section that held the tank. He ran a hand over the skin of the plane until he reached something that shouldn't be there. There was a small puncture in the aluminum that ran from the outer to the inner frame, and probably the tank itself.

Damaged in the crash maybe?

But MacGyver knew otherwise, this was not only man-made, it had been caused by a very small, and very neat charge of explosives. He ran his hand inside and felt the remnants of wires. Gently tugging at them, he was able to retrieve what was left of a tiny digital timer.

The Learjet had been booby-trapped both with the fuel tank, and the fire suppression system. But why? Was someone after Jack?

Mariotte is the one who likes to bring down planes...

MacGyver was instantly assaulted by memories of Flight 4177, and of Sam lying in his own blood. Maybe Mariotte had hoped Sam had gone with them?

Mac shook himself and scrambled from under the jet back into the early morning African sun. No, this wasn't about Mariotte because Jack had been spooked the instant they'd crashed.

This was something Dalton related, as ever.

I should've known not to fly with him again! But then if I hadn't been here, Jack might be dead right now...

MacGyver toyed with the remnants of the timer before setting them down on a rock. First they'd eat, then they'd find a village, and then, why then he was going to get the truth out of Jack if he had to squeeze it out of him with his bare hands.

Jack seemed to be one step ahead.

"MacGyver! What a glorious morning for a magical mystery tour of the African bush!" Jack jumped down from the jet's exit and headed off with Mac's backpack over his shoulder. It was bulging – probably with their food and water rations. "Did I ever tell you I thought about doing airborne mystery tours? Of course I couldn't get the funding; people with lots a cashola are just so narrow-minded about spending it..."

"Jack, where do ya think you're going?"

"To find the lost valley of the Amazons?" Jack teased with a twinkle in his eye. "Where'd you think I'm going? I'm heading for the nearest village..."

MacGyver jerked his thumb in the opposite direction and then held out his other hand to reveal his trusty compass. "I uh, think you'll find it's *that* way." He couldn't resist a smile as Jack made a harrumphing noise and turned tail.

* * * *

MacGyver and Jack had been walking for about twenty minutes when Mac realized what was wrong – Dalton was silent, and that *never* happened. That meant he was still hiding something, or he was sulking, and Mac suspected it was the former, as Jack was usually too upbeat to sulk.

"So what's eating at you?" He prodded. "I would say cat got your tongue, but then it very nearly did last night..." Mac tried the jovial approach.

"Ha ha!" Jack feigned a half-hearted laugh. "There I was trying to save the day and..." He stopped mid-sentence as a small boy in a ragged t-shirt, homemade shorts and bare feet stepped out in front of them. "Say, Mac, we got company."

MacGyver had already noticed. "Hey there!" He flashed the youngster a broad and friendly smile and kneeled so that he was the same height as the boy. "Name's Mac, and this is my buddy Jack." He nodded to Dalton. "We're kinda in trouble and could sure do with your help."

The kid, who Mac guessed was about seven, or maybe eight-years-old eyed them with huge brown orbs that seemed to dance in the sunlight. Eventually, he cocked his head in apparent amusement and held out a hand to be shaken, like he was a tribal elder. "I'm Ayo," he announced stoically. "It means joy, although my mother says she made a mistake giving me that name."

Jack chuckled. "Little guy full of a whole lot of mischief, huh?"

Ayo's brow furrowed, but he didn't deny the accusation. Instead he looked back to MacGyver. "Why are you in trouble?" He asked innocently.

"Well, see me and Jack were delivering an airplane to its new owner, except we never got there. We crashed a ways back there last night." Mac pointed back towards the grasslands. "Now we need to find help, maybe a telephone, or the local police?"

Jack flinched. "Did you have to mention the word police? You know it gives me the chills." He shivered to prove his point.

Ayo shrugged. "We could go to my village, it's just over the next hill, but I don't think we have what you need." He took MacGyver's hand anyway and began to tug.

Mac capitulated with a shrug of his own. "Guess we're going to his village," he told Jack. "Although I doubt there are any half-clad Amazons there..."

Jack scowled, but once again followed.

* * * *

The village was much smaller than MacGyver had imagined. For the most part it was still very traditional with wooden and straw huts for homes. There were a couple of white, more western styled buildings on the far edge, and one was possibly a small school house, but there were no vehicles to be seen anywhere, or any phone lines.

Ayo led them to a hut nearest the school and then stopped, waiting patiently for some unknown event to happen. Eventually, a very tall, thin woman appeared from the dwelling as if she'd sensed them.

It didn't take a genius to realize she was Ayo's mother.

"Can I help you?" She asked, looking both men over with an air of apparent suspicion.

"Their plane crashed, and they need our help!" Ayo offered obligingly. "They're Americans!"

"I'm MacGyver, and this is Jack," Mac introduced them both once again. "We're just looking for somewhere to clean up, then we need to find a phone or some transport to report our aircraft is down."

"I'm Ayo's mother, Ife. You can clean up in our home." She gestured to the hut doorway. "But there are no phones or vehicles here. You will need to walk to the next

village for those.” Her eyes looked them over again, pausing at the bump on Jack’s head, and the cut to Mac’s arm. “There is a doctor there too, if you need one.”

MacGyver nodded his thanks and was promptly led inside by Ayo.

The hut was surprisingly spacious, and there was a large bowl of water waiting for them to wash up. In just a few minutes, MacGyver felt half-human again, although rubbing a hand across his face he realized he really needed a shave.

Once Jack had cleaned himself up, they reemerged from the hut to find Ayo waiting for them.

“I can take you to the next village if you like?” Ayo appeared excited by the prospect, but MacGyver noted that other children were now making their way towards the building he’d assessed as a school.

“Shouldn’t you be going to class with everyone else?” He hunkered down to look the boy in the eye.

Ayo slid his hands behind his back and abruptly looked sheepish. “They won’t miss me just for today...”

Mac rubbed a hand affectionately across Ayo’s hair and smiled. “Nope, Jack and me can make our way just fine. Education is important; you shouldn’t miss one tiny bit of it.”

Ayo let out a deep sigh, but skittered off to join the other kids milling around the white painted building.

“Boy, I’d give anything to be his age again,” Jack offered his eyes almost glassy.

“I thought you still were most of the time!” Mac couldn’t help the jibe. “C’mon, let’s go find that phone.”

Jack nodded, but as they walked away onto a small dusty path, he couldn’t help but look back at the children playing.

MacGyver noticed. Maybe Jack was wondering what it would be like to be a dad again. He’d come close once, but in the end it had turned out not to be his son. Back then, Mac had almost been jealous, but now he actually knew what it was like to be a parent, and Jack didn’t.

“Maybe you should actually think of settling down some day?” He offered as they walked. “Get a regular job, a house...”

Jack scowled. “Do you have to use that kind of language in front of me? I can’t settle down, it’s not in my nature. You know that.”

Mac shrugged. “I thought like that once, but now I have Sam...”

“Kids mean a whole lot of responsibility, and a whole life of worry.” Jack stopped to think about it, mopping his brow as the heat of the sun grew as midday approached. “I don’t think I’ve grown up enough for either of those yet.”

MacGyver was ready to agree when a burst of staccato gunfire made him pause. Both men spun around in the direction of the shots. They were coming from Ayo’s village.

The sound of shouting and screaming erupted in the distance, galvanizing Mac and Dalton into a sprint back the way they had just come.

More gunfire ensued, and as they reached the brow of a small rise, MacGyver realized that some of the huts they’d seen earlier were now ablaze, the flames and smoke licking up into the haze from the sun like eerie demonic sentinels.

Scattered about the village were soldiers of some unknown army, dragging people, some children even, from their homes. By the school, two more men in olive drab were ushering the kids from the building with their AK47’s.

“We have to get down there!” Mac picked up speed, but they were still a good ten minutes away, and just exactly what could they achieve when they arrived?

Why? Why is this happening now?

As he ran, the thought hit him that this was since they’d arrived. Could there be a connection? Had the soldiers found the plane and made some wrong conclusions about its passengers?

All kinds of scenarios flicked through Mac’s brain, but in the end, the answer always came back with one name.

“Jack, just *who* were we delivering that Learjet to?” He asked as he continued to sprint along the path.

Jack’s eye twitched uncontrollably as he ran. “Ugh, his name’s Ademola...”

MacGyver almost stopped dead in his tracks – almost, but he had to get to those kids and their families. All the same, his stomach lurched at the name.

“Ademola, as in *President* Ademola of the state of East Zambula?” Mac was incredulous. “The guy is a power mad dictator who punishes his people for just looking the wrong way! How the heck did you get involved with him?” He shook his head. “I should’ve known...that’s why you wanted to get away from the plane last night, wasn’t it? You knew he’d be mad about the crash.”

“Hey, I didn’t know who this run was for – not until it was too late and Ademola’s agent had paid me. By then I daren’t back out!”

“And that’s why you suckered me in! Jack, there’s a good chance that Learjet was sabotaged by one of Ademola’s enemies, and there’s also a dang good chance

Ademola is taking his anger out on this village because they helped you and me, and he blames *us* for losing his plane!”

Jack grew silent and he stayed that way as they finally entered the village.

In just fifteen minutes the place had gone from a thriving community to a burnt out hulk with people hurt and crying in what was the “main street” of the settlement.

Luckily, Ademola’s private guard appeared to have had their fun and left already, but what they had done here would be remembered for decades.

MacGyver felt sick, but there was no time for that, he had to do something to help, to put right what had been brought down on these innocent people.

A familiar, and yet different voice crying in native Yoruba made Mac stop in his tracks and hone in on the accent. He didn’t know these people, and yet he knew this person.

Mac whirled to see Ife standing by a river that ran behind the school. He had totally missed it earlier due to how low the embankment was to the south of the structure.

He ran to the crying mother with Jack in tow, and took her by the forearms, holding her tight to reassure her. She continued to sob in Yoruba.

“Slow down,” MacGyver soothed. “We don’t understand...”

Ife rubbed the tears from her eyes and gestured to the water below in despair. “The soldiers, Ayo tried to stop them damaging the school. One of them hit him on the head with his rifle...” She crumpled to the ground, more tears flowing freely when words could not.

Mac looked to the river and his own heart sank.

Ayo’s motionless form was bobbing on the current, face down in the water, his arms splayed out and his skin as pale as a ghost.

Part Three

MacGyver didn’t have time to think, he just reacted, diving into the river with no regard for his own safety. To his credit, Jack Dalton was mere seconds behind him.

Mac reached Ayo first and quickly flipped the boy over so his mouth and nose were clear of the water. Ayo didn’t move, he didn’t cry out in pain, he simply bled from the head wound onto his rescuer’s shoulder.

MacGyver tried not to think about it as he passed Ayo over to Jack so that he could scramble up the muddy, and pretty steep bank. Once clear of the current, he reached down and gently lifted the boy’s prone form clear of the water, laying him carefully down by the school house.

Jack clambered from the edge of the river to join them, his hair and clothes soaking wet. “Is he..?”

MacGyver shook his head. “He’s not breathing!”

Dalton wasn’t taking that as the end. Maybe because he felt responsible, or maybe because he was a better person than most people assumed.

He dropped down onto his knees and carefully began mouth to mouth, while Mac started chest compressions.

Ife watched, both frightened and yet thankful that someone was trying to help.

After a few seconds that seemed like hours, Mac let his hand slide to Ayo’s neck, and then put his ear to the boy’s chest. “Pulse’s pretty weak, but he’s breathing...”

Ayo coughed, bringing up river water with a gurgle, but his eyes rolled instead of staying focused, and he didn’t stir further.

Ife dared to move closer, her eyes pleading with the two men who have pulled her son from the water. “Will he be alright?”

MacGyver held Ayo in his arms, and for a moment, he couldn’t bring himself to answer. All he could see over and over was Jesse bleeding, Jesse dying...

Kids shouldn’t ever be put into these situations. Not because of guns, not because Jack had made a bad business decision, and most of all, not because some power mad dictator felt he had to exert his iron hand.

Eventually, MacGyver looked to Jack and then Ife. “He’s in and out of consciousness from the head wound,” he explained honestly. “You said there was a doctor in the next village? I think we need to get Ayo there as quickly as we can.”

Jack pulled a soggy handkerchief from his pocket and pressed it against the cut on Ayo’s head. It was more symbolic than anything, but Mac knew the guilt his friend was going through. He’d felt that very same guilt over Jesse’s death.

“I’ll carry him.” Jack didn’t offer, his voice demanded, and MacGyver understood why.

Mac shifted Ayo’s weight in his arms and handed the boy over. Before he could say anything, Jack was on his way back to the path they’d been on earlier, carefully cradling Ayo like he was a piece of fragile porcelain.

“I...” MacGyver turned to Ife, but suddenly found he had no words to give.

Ife put a hand on his arm, and she wasn’t angry – at least not with MacGyver or Jack. “My people have put up with this for many years. This wasn’t your doing. You were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Go now, and save my son...I will follow

after I have found his father.” Her eyes turned glassy, and she spun around, apparently unwilling to show anymore emotion.

MacGyver laid a hand on her shoulder, but didn't attempt to look her in the eye. “We'll look after him. I promise.”

But could he really?

Mac exhaled and swallowed hard, and then chased after Jack. Time was of the essence now.

***The Avery Clinic
Southern Province
East Zambula***

MacGyver had never seen Jack Dalton move so fast, not even when he had half of L.A.s finest on his tail and a couple of C.I.A. agents to boot.

Still, Ayo in his current condition was a dead weight, and halfway to the village Mac had to swap places with his friend, supporting Ayo's injured head with his hand as he ran.

It was hard over such rough terrain not to jolt the kid, but he tried.

The journey on foot should have taken an hour, maybe more, but somehow the pair made it in forty minutes.

Mac bounded up the wooden porch steps to the clinic screen door, but Dalton was faster, barging through the entrance and straight into a small waiting area.

Locals looked at him like he was a madman, and to a point, he probably was right at that moment. Jack looked around frantically, and then headed for a door marked “Treatment Room”. He hammered on it with his fists until a woman in surgical greens, with long flowing blonde hair answered him with a slap across his left cheek.

“Come in here when I'm with a patient again, mister, and it'll be more than a slap!”

Had the situation not been so grave, MacGyver would have found it funny, but instead he pushed past Dalton and offered up Ayo. “We need help,” he pleaded. “Some of Ademola's soldiers attacked his village...”

The people in the waiting room began to murmur and look at one another in fear. It was obvious this kind of thing wasn't new to them, and it had struck a terrifying chord.

The blonde, heaved down a breath as if she too was sick of seeing Ademola's work and gently took Ayo from Mac's arms. She turned quickly, shutting the treatment room door behind her.

Jack began to pound on it again until MacGyver pulled him away.

In apparent defeat, Jack slumped down onto a waiting room chair, his energy seemingly draining like the color had from his face. “This is all my fault,” he whimpered. “I’ve as good as killed that kid.”

MacGyver took the next seat, but he didn’t know what to say. Words just wouldn’t come to him because he felt the same guilt.

“*You* haven’t done anything.”

Mac and Dalton looked up simultaneously to see Ife watching them with eyes like a night owl. She was still clearly upset, but had gathered herself enough to talk.

“This happens here too much,” she continued. “You didn’t hurt my son; Ademola did, like so many innocents before.”

“We shouldn’t have been here. It would have helped.” Jack spoke with his eyes to the ground and his hands cradled in his lap.

“No it wouldn’t!” Ife seemed angry suddenly. “Today, two people died in my village when the troops came. One of them was Ayo’s father. He wasn’t killed because of you, but because he stood up to Ademola and his regime and constantly spoke against it!”

“We’re very sorry, ma’am...” Now even MacGyver’s eyes were on the ground – not because of any guilt, but because he felt so helpless – right when he wanted to do something for these people.

The blonde doctor returned from the treatment room, stifling any further ideas he might have had on the subject, for the moment, at least.

Jack was on his feet first, his cap scrunched between tremulous hands. “How is he?”

“Not good.” She shook her head, looking at both men, then to Ife. “There’s just so little I can do here. We don’t even have an x-ray machine, and really, the boy needs a brain scan. I think there might be intracranial bleeding, but there’s no way we can move him any great distance to a hospital.”

Ife seemed more certain of the outcome. “He will live,” she said matter-of-factly taking the seat Jack had just vacated.

The doctor frowned, and Mac expected her to correct Ife, but she didn’t. She looked to him instead, as if he held all the answers. “I just don’t have the facilities here...”

MacGyver bit his lip. “Didn’t I read somewhere that cooling a patient with a brain injury can help?”

“I’ve read about it, but it’s all speculation right now. I think there are studies going on, but it’s pretty irrelevant anyway.” The blonde stuffed her hands in the pockets of the white coat she’d donned at some point and turned to go back into the treatment room.

MacGyver wasn't leaving it at that so easily, and followed. "Would it hurt to try?"

"No – that is, if we actually had any ice. Like I said, we don't have the facilities here of a Western hospital."

Mac couldn't believe his ears. "You don't have a refrigerator? What about the medicines and drugs that need to be kept cool?"

"We have a refrigerator, a rather ancient one that has no freezer compartment, hence, no ice." The doctor slumped down onto a chair with a torn leather seat and put her head in her hands. "Some days, I just feel so helpless."

"Well don't!" MacGyver leaned over, took the doctor's chin and looked into her pale blue eyes. "C'mon, let's make some ice for Ayo..." He tugged her to her feet. "Name's MacGyver by the way."

"I'm...I'm Helen Scott. Doctor Helen Scott..." She stammered as he dragged her around the room. "What exactly are we doing?"

"Looking for a fire extinguisher. Got any around here? We need a Co2 one..." Mac winced as he came up empty after looking in every corner of the room.

"There's one out in the waiting room, and one over in the village. I don't even know if they work, let alone what type, though. They were given to us." It was Helen's turn to take the lead, as she pulled Mac out to where Jack and Ife were still patiently sitting. "Here!" She held it up triumphantly and Mac quickly examined it.

Technically, it was the wrong type of extinguisher for the clinic at all, but today, it was a miracle, as it was just what he was looking for.

Mac bounded back in the treatment room with Helen in tow.

"Right, I need something cloth, something enclosed..." MacGyver was thinking again, but the doctor beat him to it.

"How about a pillow sham from one of the clinic beds?"

Mac smiled. They made a good team. "Perfect! Have you got any thick gloves too, this stuff can be so cold it burns if you don't handle it right."

Helen vanished into another room and returned with the sham, and what looked like a pair of welding gloves.

"You got the goggles and blow torch to match?" Mac raised a brow cheekily, and the doctor managed a wane smile.

"Not me personally, but one of the villagers is very handy with the old oxy acetylene." She took down a breath, becoming more serious. "So you're going to make ice? How?"

Mac pulled the pin on the top of the extinguisher and placed the horn inside the pillow sham, making sure to hold it tight as he pressed the release valve. The sham instantly began to blow up, and white vapors seemed to ebb from the end.

After a few seconds, Mac released the trigger and opened the sham to reveal lots of white crystalline clusters. “Easy as that,” he concluded. “Although chemically speaking, this is dry ice – like I said, much colder than the normal stuff, so we need to be careful how we pack it around Ayo, so we don’t give him frostbite.”

Mac handed Helen the gloves, silently assigning the job of cooling the boy to her, while he made more of the crystals. Fifteen minutes later, they were done, and Doctor Scott was pulling off her huge mittens.

“Thank you,” she said softly, her eyes becoming slightly moist.

“What for?”

“Trying?” There was a silent moment, and then the doctor moved to some shelving and began gathering a few first aid items. When she’d done, she grabbed Mac’s hand and led him out onto a porch at the back of the building. “Let me fix up that cut on your arm while we talk,” she explained.

Mac glanced down at it. With everything that had happened it seemed too small and insignificant to even bother with. “It’s nothing.”

“Well, it’s a “nothing” that at least needs cleaning and a couple of butterflies.” She began to work, despite his protests.

“Ow!” Mac complained so heartily even Jack would have been proud. “You know, you remind me of someone...you ever see the movie *Roadhouse*? You remind me of the doc in that...”

“Does that make you Patrick Swayze?” Helen teased.

“Are you kidding? I have two left feet unless it involves hockey.” Mac looked down at his tan boots to prove his point.

“I wasn’t talking about dancing.” The doctor’s brow ticked up, and abruptly she looked much more serious. “I was talking about how he cleaned up that bar and stopped the bad guys. Somehow, I have a feeling he was your kind of guy.”

MacGyver suddenly realized what she was talking about. “That was a bar. *In a movie*. This is a whole African state. You think one man can change what’s happening here?”

Helen finished up placing the last butterfly. “I think maybe two men might be able to do it.” She looked up into Mac’s eyes, and there was conviction in her words, and maybe, something more.

Attraction even?

Mac blinked and turned away.

He knew Helen Scott was right about what kind of man he was, and there was no way he would leave these people behind without trying to help them.

“How long has this all been going on?” He asked, looking out over the untouched grasslands. It would have been a beautiful place, had he not known what was happening to its people.

Helen moved to join him. “About two years, give or take. In the time I’ve been here, there have been twenty-four deaths in the nearby villages alone. Ademola spends all his peoples’ money on himself, and anyone who gets in his way is promptly dealt with.”

MacGyver winced. He’d seen this all so many times, and yet the world’s nations never seemed to be able to quite stop it happening over again. “Has no one tried to ask for outside help? There are organizations that would get involved. I work for one, in fact...”

The doctor shook her head, her long blonde hair blowing back in the warm breeze. “Some have tried. But they’ve died for their trouble.”

Mac ran a hand through the front of his hair in exasperation. “How can someone treat his own countrymen this way? Money, power, it isn’t everything. In the long run, it isn’t *anything*.”

Helen opened her mouth to reply, but was cut off by the door to the treatment room slamming. She whirled around, just in time to see Jack Dalton barreling in, his face red and his eyes bulging.

“Guys, sorry to interrupt your little interlude of romantic proportions, but we have a problem. A big one!”

Mac scowled. “Romantic *what*?”

Jack shrugged. “Hey, I could see the way you two puppies were looking at each other...”

This time Helen scowled. “We were talking about Ademola!”

Jack’s features ticked into a grin. “Sure you were...” He shook himself. “Hey, we can talk about that stuff later. Right now, we’ve been cut off at the pass, as in, surrounded by the President’s men. Our goose is well and truly cooked!”

MacGyver let out a long calming breath, and then gave Jack his best, most serious stare. The soldiers had come for them, and them alone. “We have to give ourselves up, Jack, no heroics. We can’t put the villagers or the clinic in danger.”

“What? No making bombs outta chloroform or whatever?” Dalton looked disappointed.

“No bombs,” Mac confirmed. “We just walk right on out with our hands in the air.”

“And get shot,” Jack concluded. “But hey, it’s bound to be fun while it lasts…” He gulped, but headed for the waiting room, and the door to the outside.

MacGyver followed, only pausing when he realized Helen was at his side. “Stay here. Look after these people. I’ll be back. I promise.”

The doctor’s blue eyes danced with uncertainty, but she took his hand and squeezed it. “I know you will. Who else can make me more ice?” Her lips curled into a thin smile.

Mac squeezed her hand back, and then was gone, walking out onto the porch with his hands in the air.

Outside, the clinic was encircled by troops, some with their weapons drawn. At the center of the front contingent was an officer, but it wasn’t Ademola.

As Jack and MacGyver exited, the officer, badged as a general, stepped out to meet them. He was a small man, but what he lacked in stature, he more than made up for in poise. He held both hands clasped behind his back, and his chest stood out true and proud.

“Don’t tell me, this is the part where you threaten us with torture and all manner of nasty, untimely ends?” Jack was pushing his luck, and he didn’t seem to care.

The general’s eyes narrowed, and then he walked up the porch to stare right into Jack’s face. After a moment, he huffed. “Actually, this is the part where I ask for your help.”

Mac dared to lower his hands. Was this a ruse, or maybe the officer had a sick sense of humor? “S’cuse me, you need *what*?” Now even MacGyver was pushing his luck with the incredulous tone of his voice.

“My name is General Okilo, and I need your help.” The officer repeated his plea. “I may work for a tyrant, but my loyalty is with the people of my country. At this time, my sole purpose is to rid Zambula of its evil master and return rule to the public.” He sighed moving his hands to clench them in front of him. “I have made one ill-fated attempt to dispose of Ademola, and in doing so, I fear I have brought his wrath upon you, and on the villagers.”

MacGyver thought about Okilo’s words, and finally realized what had happened to the Learjet. “You had Ademola’s new jet sabotaged, but it didn’t quite go to plan, did it? I guess the charges went off before they were supposed to huh?”

Okilo’s hands returned to their position behind his back and he grew even more stoic. “Indeed. Next time, I shall do the job myself and make sure it is done correctly.” He looked pointedly at MacGyver. “Will you help me?”

“I won’t be part of any killing,” Mac answered quickly. “That’s not how I do things.” And yet, despite having misgivings about getting involved in a foreign country’s affairs, he did want to stop the persecution and deaths.

It was a no win situation, unless he could figure a way to stop a tyrant without anymore bloodshed.

Okilo seemed disappointed. “Then you won’t help?”

MacGyver shook his head. “I didn’t say that. I’ll help, but on one condition – if we can do this without any more violence.”

“With Ademola, that is impossible.” Okilo sighed. “It is the only language he knows.”

“Then we’re gonna teach him a new one.” Mac smiled, and the gesture seemed to break down the steely barrier between them. “C’mon, it can’t hurt to try, right, Jack?” He glanced to Dalton for support.

“Try is my middle name!” Jack agreed heartily. “As long as there are no more lions involved...I really didn’t like the look of that puppy’s teeth. Huge was an understatement!”

Okilo stared at Jack as if he’d gone mad and Mac had to intervene. “Don’t mind him, he’s always that way.”

“That may be,” Jack admitted. “But I think I’m the only sane person in this venture. Let’s face it, how exactly *are* we going to stop Ademola without violence, when he has an army, guns, bodyguards, *tanks* even!”

MacGyver remembered the hulk the Learjet had crashed into. Yes, Ademola had a whole arsenal at his disposal, but the old adage was still true – the bigger they were, sometimes, the harder they fell.

“Don’t worry,” Mac smiled. “I have a plan...”

Jack’s moustache twitched. “Yeah? But is it a good one? Are we gonna make something outta nothing? Use duct tape to build an escape tunnel maybe? Or how about fixing up the Learjet with just your knife and a paperclip and flying everyone outta this place?” The disdain was evident in his sarcasm.

MacGyver’s smile never wavered. “Nope, we’re gonna kidnap the President!”

“We’re what?!” Both Jack and Okilo chimed simultaneously. “How?!”

Mac looked back to the clinic. “With the good Doctor’s help. That’s how...”

Part Four

MacGyver wriggled as the rope his wrists were tied with dug into his flesh just a little too much.

Playing prisoner to Okilo's soldiers was one thing, but the man assigned to "guard" him had taken his role just a bit too literally.

Mac fidgeted as he walked along with Jack at the center of the troops. This had been his plan, and yet now, as they approached Ademola's stronghold, he couldn't help but wonder if Okilo could be trusted.

Have I just given our heads on a plate to the President?

MacGyver shrugged off the feeling. No, he was a good judge of character, and Okilo was on their side.

Jack apparently wasn't so sure. He leaned awkwardly over as they walked, his hands bound behind his back like Mac's. "I sure hope we can trust General Custer over there..." He nodded towards Okilo as they came to a small gatehouse and paused.

Mac winced. "Did you have to use that particular reference? I don't plan on this being our version of Little Bighorn."

"Just look how famous we'd be, though!" Jack winked and then grew silent as Ademola emerged seemingly from nowhere.

The President was average height, but his stocky build and chubby features made him appear smaller. He wore a uniform and cap, even though he'd never seen a day's military service in his life.

Surprisingly, his voice was high pitched and whiney. "I knew you would find this scum for me, Okilo! Were they hiding among the villages? If so, I want the people who took them in punished!"

"I found them near the wreck of your plane, Sir," Okilo lied. "Cowering, like the invertebrates they are, Mr. President!"

Ademola walked up to MacGyver and circled him several times. Mac noted he held a small whip akin to that of a jockey's tightly under his right arm. No doubt if they didn't give the answers the president required, he and Jack would feel its wrath at some point.

"Take them to the room next to my office," Ademola barked at the two guards watching Mac and Dalton, and then glanced to Okilo. "I will follow shortly."

Okilo nodded and then prodded MacGyver to move, guiding him into Zambula's version of a presidential palace with Jack and the two soldiers in tow.

Inside, the building was much more lavish than Mac had expected. The slightly barren outer walls gave way to rooms full of expensive carpets, wall tapestries, paintings, vases, even sculptures.

It reminded the troubleshooter of all the loot the German E.R.R. had stolen – but then, was Ademola any better than those people?

They moved up a shallow staircase and stopped outside a pair of doors. Okilo dismissed the two guards. “I will take it from here. I have questions for these two...”

The men backed away, obviously uncertain at leaving Okilo with the prisoners. When they had vanished back down the stairs, Okilo opened the door to the right and they all entered. Once the door was closed again, he untied MacGyver and Dalton.

“Are sure this is gonna work?” Jack asked, tossing down the ropes that had bound him. “I mean, laughing a bad guy into submission has to be a first!”

“It’ll work, just as long as Ademola and his aids stay in here long enough to breathe this.” MacGyver slid out a long metal cylinder from a flap he’d sewed into the inside of his jacket.

“And if the President goes next door straight away to interrogate us?” Jack asked with a scowl.

“Then I think,” Okilo joined in. “That as you Americans said earlier, our goose will be cooked.”

Jack scoffed. “Cooked? Heck, we’ll be burned at the crisp until even my moustache is cinders!”

Mac smiled at the banter as he fixed the bottle of nitrous oxide under Ademola’s desk with several strips of duct tape. The contents, commonly known as laughing gas, was used by Doctor Scott as an anesthetic, but release just enough into this room and Ademola and anyone else inside would be rendered pretty helpless, and true to its name, very giggly. The trick was getting it right.

He opened the valve up on the cylinder and nodded to the other two men. After a moment of recognition, all three used an adjoining door into the next room and quickly donned gas masks that Okilo had brought along under his jacket.

“Y’know...maybe it would be fun to get just a tiny whiff of that stuff,” Jack mumbled through the mask. “It might lighten you guys up a little.”

“Shush!” Mac put a finger up in warning as he heard approaching voices in the corridor. It was Ademola. MacGyver dared to open the door just a touch to watch the President.

Ademola entered through the right door as they had, and there were two other men in uniform at his side. He was mouthing orders to them and gesturing as if he was still angry from earlier.

The whip from under his arm abruptly appeared, and he swiped one of the soldiers across the face with it.

The guard yelped, clasped at his cheek and then began to laugh.

Ademola's eyes bulged, and he swiped at the man again, but instead of retreating or apologizing, the soldier burst into fit of giggles.

Beside MacGyver, Jack almost did the same, although somewhat more quietly. Mac did a double take to make sure his friend still had his mask on, but Jack was just being Jack.

The second guard suddenly found his friend's laughter intoxicating, and he too began to chortle uncontrollably until he was forced to slump down onto one of the President's expensive chairs.

Ademola was mortified, his face reddening and his eyes popping.

And then, out of the blue, he started to giggle.

He dropped the whip in favor of holding onto his stomach; it apparently hurt so much to laugh so hard. Within a minute, he was also down on the chair behind his desk – the perfect cue for MacGyver and his companions to storm the room.

Grabbing a platted curtain tie-back, Mac cut it to size and used it to bind the two guards. While he did the same with Ademola, Jack and Okilo hid the soldiers in a cupboard, gagging them with more cut to size curtain accessories.

Maybe it was a good thing Ademola had such rich tastes in décor after all?
MacGyver mused as he worked.

“Are we okay for time?” Jack looked at Mac. “Because, you know I have to be home in time for Double Jeopardy...”

Mac rolled out two body bags that Dalton had hidden in his own jacket, and they dragged Ademola into the first one.

“We're okay,” Mac confirmed. “But I think it's time “we died” or the other guards not on our side might get suspicious.

“Yes, Ademola would not let you live long.” Okilo agreed, reaching to his belt holster for his automatic. “Would you like it in the heart or in the head?” He asked in a somewhat bemused tone.

“If this was Ademola's doing, I'd have more said in the back!” Jack jibed. “But I think I'd like mine *in the wall*, if you don't mind.” He clambered into the second body bag, and MacGyver followed.

Okilo waited until they were secure, and then fired two bullets into the plasterboard opposite Ademola's desk. For added effect, he spread a vial of “blood” near the holes that Mac had cooked up back at the clinic with a few chemicals.

By the time he had finished, there was a frantic knocking at the door. Okilo opened it to find two guards looking very flustered.

“Is everything alright, General? We heard gunshots?”

Okilo huffed. “The President was not happy with the answers his guests gave.” He moved back to let the first soldier see the body bags. “They will not be giving any more unsuitable replies. Take the bodies outside and dump them in the awaiting truck. I will make sure they are disposed of later.”

“And the President?” the guard pushed.

Okilo seemed almost blasé. “He has retired to his personal quarters and does not want to be disturbed. I fear he is still angry at the loss of his new plane.” He pointed to the bags. “Follow your orders and all will be well.”

The second soldier seemed more compliant and pushed passed his companion, picking up one end of the bag with Mac and Dalton in. Eventually the other soldier joined in, grunting as he apparently felt the weight of his load.

Okilo chuckled. “These Americans, they eat too much junk food, yes?”

Neither man dare argue with him. They left the room, and were back within five minutes for the bag with Ademola in.

Okilo followed them down with it, ever-watchful of their actions.

“This one is much lighter than the first!” One of the soldiers noted as he lifted the bag up over the truck’s tailgate.

The General opened his mouth to reply, but then stopped as his eyes spotted Ademola’s hands poking through a gap in the zipper. The direction of his startled gaze gave him away, and the guard that had spoken only moments earlier instantly looked in the same direction.

The President’s ring was all he needed to see to sound the alarm.

“The President is being kidnapped!” The soldier reached for his sidearm and spun to turn it onto Okilo.

Inside the other body bag, MacGyver instantly knew there was something wrong and fumbled in the darkness to find the zipper.

“Ouch! Do you mind, I just got your elbow right in my moustache!” Jack grouched.

Mac ignored him and used his knife to slice his way out. As he exited the bag, he rolled out of the truck, knocking the second soldier straight off his feet. Without giving the other guard time to react, he bounced up and shot a right hook straight at the man’s face.

The soldier ducked just in time and pulled back on his trigger, but the shot went wide, pinging off a nearby Jeep and through a window.

MacGyver dodged behind the truck to avoid another slug, but was just in time to see Jack use his now empty body bag to knock the automatic from the guard's hand. He then stuffed it over the man's head and chest. For good measure, Okilo quickly wrapped his belt around the bag to secure it.

Jack winced. "Oops...remember earlier when we were talking about our geese being cooked?" He gestured across the yard as a dozen of Ademola's men approached with rifles. "Well, I think that moment has arrived. I can feel the skillet frying me up already..." A barrage of bullets agreed with him as the troops opened fire, spattering the truck and nearby outer wall with holes. "Jeez, I'm gonna be the first human sieve!"

Mac put Ademola over his shoulder, then grabbed Jack's arm, yanking him backwards behind the truck's hood. Okilo joined them after giving return fire with his automatic.

"So now what, Mac, me boy?" Jack was getting vocal. "We can't drive outta here, and we sure as heck can't walk..."

"May I suggest we fly?" Okilo slipped another clip into his Browning.

Jack huffed. "Hey, I might be a pilot, but I can't just grow wings ya know?"

Okilo pointed to their right. There was a Hughes 500 sitting on a helipad painted in Zambula's national colors. "I suggest we use the President's current form of transport?"

Jack's expression changed from exasperation to one of pure joy. "Well now why didn't you say so?" He rubbed his hands together, and then slapped MacGyver on the back. "We're back in business, back in the clouds, back..."

"Back in a whole lot of trouble," Mac grouched. "Do I *really* have to fly with you again? I mean...maybe I should just give myself up to these guys. It might be safer..."

Jack didn't hear the jibe. He was already dodging more of the soldiers' gunfire as he zigzagged his way across the yard into the cordoned area where the chopper sat.

Amazingly, there wasn't a guard anywhere to be seen near the chopper, and he jumped behind the controls with a whoop of joy.

Mac rolled his eyes and Okilo actually looked afraid, but they both followed Dalton across to the Hughes, MacGyver taking point with the President as Okilo brought up the rear with covering fire.

As Mac clambered aboard, he laid down Ademola on the rear seat and dived to miss another volley of bullets that spattered the Hughes' glass. By now the rotors were moving, and the noise and downdraught were almost a godsend.

“I sure hope you took lessons since I last saw you with one of these things!” Mac shouted above the gunfire and the helicopter’s engine.

“Sure...” Jack’s eye twitched uncontrollably. “I’m a certified expert. Kind of...”

“It’s the certified part I’m worried about!” *Do I really have to do this? Do I really have to fly with him again?*

MacGyver pushed away the bad vibes and helped Okilo into the bird. As the General swung his body onto the seat next to Ademola, the Hughes finally began to rise off the ground.

The chopper’s skids hovered, then bounced back on the pad, then rose again before finally taking flight. It was far from a gracious liftoff, but Jack whooped for joy anyway.

Mac winced as the Hughes banked, its tail spinning around wildly before leveling off and soaring skywards. “Is everyone okay?” he asked, checking the body bag Ademola still lay in for extra holes.

“I’m more than okay!” Jack oozed. “I’m airborne and loving it!”

Okilo’s expression said he was *not* loving it, and neither was MacGyver.

“Jack, do you think you could actually fly this thing in a straight line at a consistent height?” Mac bemoaned as they were tossed from side to side by Dalton’s efforts. “I’m starting to feel sea sick...”

Jack shook his head. “Hey, I know I’m still kind of a beginner with these things, but it’s not me, I swear! This bird has a mind of its own.” He pointed down to the controls which were shaking violently in his hands.

Mac felt the color drain from his face as quickly as the bullets had faded into the distance once they taken off. “Are you telling me we’re in trouble? *Again?*” He looked down, realizing the African grasslands below were flashing by in blur. Were they going to be a mangled and very dead part of that blur soon?

“I think the term “we’ve been hit” might be an understatement!” Jack gritted his teeth as he spoke, apparently using all his strength to keep the Hughes’ nose up. “I’m going to have to land or we’ll be off Tarzan’s Christmas list when we tear up his neighborhood!”

To confirm Dalton’s fears, the helicopter’s tail began to spin around again, and this time he didn’t seem to be able to stop it.

“That’s it! I’m never, not ever flying again. Not a plane, not a chopper, heck, not even a kite!” Mac wasn’t sure whether he was joking or serious, but the quip made the knot in his stomach loosen just a touch.

Jack didn't hear – for once he was concentrating on flying, or rather avoiding crashing for the second time in just two days.

The Hughes seemed to appreciate his efforts, and slammed into the ground in one piece, its skids shuddering as the ungainly momentum of the chopper was jarred to a halt.

“Are we down?” Okilo had his hands in front of his face, and MacGyver wondered if he had been saying a prayer to whatever god he worshipped.

“We're down,” Mac confirmed, sliding out of the back as the rotors above began to slow. “And for once, in one piece!”

Jack grinned. “That's because I'm getting good at crashing!”

“It's about the only thing you *are* good at!”

“Mac, I'm wounded that you'd say that, and after all we've been through!”

MacGyver ignored Dalton and unzipped Ademola's body bag. The President glared back at him, but Mac tugged away the gag that silenced him anyway.

“How dare you treat me this way?” Ademola didn't waste a second before beginning his tirade. “I will see you all die a slow and painful death for this!” He turned his head to Okilo. “I will save the best torture for you, my friend. I promise.”

Okilo turned away, but Jack appeared to find the verbal assault quite amusing. He waited until the President ran out of air and then put his finger to his lips in an unvocalized hush. “I'd be quiet if I were you,” he warned, nodding towards MacGyver, who was now appraising the Hughes for damage. “You see my buddy there? If he gets his hands on a gun, why he's likely to just shut you up the old fashioned way.” Jack's eye twitched madly, but Ademola had no way of knowing what that meant.

The President's eyes narrowed, but he continued his threats.

MacGyver, oblivious to Jack's joke, moved to the pilot's now open door and sighed. “I can't see any significant damage apart from a few holes in none-vital areas.”

“That,” Dalton replied, “Is because the problem is right here!” He tapped one of the controls in front of him. “See how loose this thing is? If we hadn't landed I got the feeling it was going to come away completely in my hand.”

Mac leaned in, craning his neck to look at the base of the stick. “I think a stray bullet has shattered the cyclic controls' shaft where it connects at the bottom here...” He shook it to prove his point.

“I don't suppose you have a spare up that magical sleeve of yours?” Jack teased. “And maybe some tools to fit it?”

“I’ll see what I can do.” MacGyver glanced around the front of the Hughes, but there was nothing to work with unless he could put two headsets to use.

He moved to the back of the chopper and started to rummage behind the rear seat. There was a rather ancient rifle, but it held no clip. That didn’t matter, at least, not for what he had in mind.

“...tomorrow I will see you all hang, my troops will be upon you within the hour. You didn’t get far enough from my enclosure with your little escape plan...” Ademola was still in full swing until his eyes spotted what MacGyver had found. Suddenly his voice turned into a stammer. “You wouldn’t kill me..? I can stop the soldiers from hurting you. I can issue a full pardon...I...”

Mac looked at the man in front of him, one minute an evil tyrant, the next a sniveling coward who begged for his life. It was a sobering thought. “I’m not going to kill you,” he assured. “I’m not that kind of man, even if you are. Trust me; I don’t ever want to stoop that low.” He shook his head and moved back to the front of the Hughes.

Ademola watched him go, his face a masque of incredulity, and also relief. He didn’t attempt to make any more threats, or even speak, but instead curled into a ball on the rear seat, watching his captors work.

“You sure told him!” Jack noted as MacGyver pulled out his knife. “So what are you really gonna do with the gun?”

“Shoot *you*, for crashing again maybe?”

Dalton sniffed, feigning hurt pride. “That’s harsh. I like to think of it as more of a controlled decent.”

MacGyver didn’t grace his old friend with an answer. Instead he pulled out the saw blade on his knife and examined it. He really wasn’t sure it was up to the task he was about to give it, but if they had any chance of escape, this had to work.

Measuring with just his judgment, Mac marked the barrel of the gun with the edge of his thumb, placed it on the raised end of the chopper’s skid, and began to hack away at the metal, praying the blade didn’t snap.

It was slow going, and as he worked, Mac knew the blade was becoming damaged, but he took his time, and eventually his patience paid off.

The section of barrel came away in his hand and MacGyver sighed with relief. Now came the slightly easier part. Shooing Jack from the pilot’s seat, he leaned in and examined the damaged shaft. There was no accurate way to replace it, so he was going to make a “splint” just like the makeshift ones used on broken bones.

Offering up the barrel section to the original part, he pulled out a flattened roll of duct tape from his jacket pocket and began to wind it tightly around the two metal pieces until they effectively became one.

Once complete, he stood back and tugged on the control shaft, testing its strength. There was still play in the rod, but whether Dalton would be able to compensate enough was anyone's guess.

Jack's a better pilot than you give him credit for, MacGyver hoped silently.

Jack had less confidence in his abilities. "You're not actually asking me to fly this puppy like that, are you?" He raised a brow.

"All the wrecks you've got me to fly in and you ask me that?" MacGyver raised a brow of his own. "I seem to remember a certain DC-3 with no landing gear for starters. You know the one I kinda fell out of trying to fix?"

"Hey, at least you had a parachute! *MY* parachute!" Jack poked his own chest with his forefinger. "Besides, we needed to get that down on the ground. This bird is already down; we don't need to push our luck and take back off again!"

MacGyver shook his head and pointed to several dust trails already appearing in the distance. "See those? They belong to Ademola's elite guard. If we stay here, that will *really* be pushing our luck. C'mon, this time you can fly *my* piece of junk for a change, *Kemo Sabe!*"

Okilo watched the exchange in apparent fascination, but as Jack saluted MacGyver and dived back into the cockpit, the General retook his seat, seemingly relieved that they would soon be moving again.

This time, MacGyver sat up front next to Jack, just in case the pilot needed a hand.

Jack, however, was already muttering to himself as he got the rotors whirling. "If this works, I'll never lie again...at least not on a Sabbath..." He looked skywards, and then grabbed the controls, getting a feel for Mac's handiwork.

After a few expletives under his breath that earned him a scowl from MacGyver, he finally tried to take off.

The Hughes groaned and seemed to refuse to move for a few frightening seconds, and then it slowly moved sideways, soaring into the sky at an odd angle as Dalton attempted to find the cyclic control's new "center".

"See, I told you I was good," Jack chuckled as they reached a decent height. "Now all you have to do is sort out all the fuel we're leaking and we're home and dry..."

MacGyver's throat suddenly felt drier than the ground they were sweeping over. "Not again..."

Jack slapped him on the back so hard Mac almost slammed into the windshield. "Just kidding, me boy! We actually have plenty of gas, for once!"

Mac blinked, resisting the urge as always to punch his friend, but his anger soon turned to a smile as he heard Okilo nervously laugh from the rear.

Maybe for once, one of Jack's schemes had done some good. Maybe now they could all go home happy and safe – even the people of East Zambula.

He patted Jack's shoulder and then pointed to the two headsets. "Do you think you can get us over the border and in touch with the nearest authorities? I think we're going to need Pete's help to finish what we've started."

Jack nodded and bravely let go of one of the controls just long enough to slip on a headset, settling the mike over his mouth, he began to put out a mayday.

MacGyver allowed himself a moment, closing his eyes and imagining returning to Zambula some day to find it a flourishing country that's nation ruled by democracy, not tyranny.

And maybe with Phoenix's time and political connections, that day would be soon.

* * * *

*East Zambula
Southern Province
Somewhere South of The Avery Clinic
Sometime Later...*

The Land Rover bounced across the rugged terrain, jarring the bones of its occupants over and over as it raced through a patch of burnt grassland.

MacGyver didn't notice the ride quality. His eyes were fixed on the beauty of the landscape and its very wild occupants. A giraffe munched aimlessly at a treetop as they passed, not a care in the world, a group of gemsbok drank at a small waterhole, and in the distance, a lion bathed in the warmth of the sun, watching and waiting for its next meal to pass by.

Is that Jack's lion, Mac mused, maybe I should point it out to him?

Jack was sitting on the opposite side of the Land Rover and was unusually quiet. Still, a great deal had happened in a short time, and it was a lot to take in for the wayward pilot – well, for everyone.

After Jack had landed the helicopter in neutral territory, the Phoenix Foundation had quickly become involved in the people of Zambula's struggle.

To be fair and impartial an election had been arranged in which President Ademola was allowed to stand, along with representatives of the people. The understanding had been clear – if Ademola should lose the election, he would stay in exile and hold no claim to Zambula or its treasury any longer.

Ademola had protested, naturally, but given that Okilo and the rest of the army had already arrested the President's elite guard, he'd had little choice in the end but to capitulate.

The election had taken place one week ago now, and as expected, Ademola had lost. MacGyver sighed. He was probably living it up on some tropical island by now, given that his secret bank accounts hadn't been traced in time to freeze. But at least the locals were safe from him and his tyranny.

"Are we getting close?" Pete, who was sitting in the front passenger seat, broke MacGyver from his thoughts. "I'm eager to meet these people."

Mac looked up and realized he could already see the clinic on the horizon. Outside, there was a crowd waiting for them, and even at this distance he could see Helen's bright blonde hair standing out like a striking beacon against all the locals. The sight made him smile, and he realized just how much he liked the doctor.

Maybe in another time, another place...

"Just about there," Mac acknowledged as the soldier driving them began to ease off the gas. "And it looks like they have a surprise party waiting for us!"

At the words "party" Jack looked up and his slightly dour face tweaked into a smile. "Did somebody say party?"

Mac shook his head. "Not *your* kind of party, that's for sure! No women, no drink, no wild..."

"Hey, I can be normal sometimes ya know? Well kinda..." Jack complained.

The Land Rover squeaked to a halt and Mac clambered out, followed by Dalton. The soldier came next, opening the door for Pete and guiding him out next to his friends.

Helen and Ife were first to greet them.

"It is good to see you again, my friends!" Ife clasped her hands together in delight. "I know Ayo cannot wait to give you a hug!"

On cue, the little boy appeared and ran straight into Mac's arms, grabbing the troubleshooter and squeezing hard. "You saved everyone!" His big brown eyes looked up and MacGyver almost melted. It was so good to see the kid alive and well, and so happy. Mac squeezed affectionately back.

"See! I told you this trip would be worth it in the end!" Jack oozed. "Okay, so the original plan was kinda a disaster, but look what we achieved! Who knew that I could be such an international savior?"

Dalton was bristling with all the attention the locals and their children were giving him, and MacGyver was sure he could see the pilot's head swelling under that cap of his.

"You know what would really be the icing on the cake to all this?" Mac smiled innocently back.

Jack frowned, possibly sensing the calm before the storm. “Err, I get the feeling you’re about to tell me..?”

“If I *finally* got to punch you right about now!”

Jack ducked reflexively, even though MacGyver didn’t actually take a swing. He moved so quickly, he actually lost his footing and tripped over, landing in an undignified heap next to a mule.

The crowd, especially the children roared as if the best clown in town was playing before them. But then, maybe he was.

Finally, Mac felt like he’d gotten his own back for years of torment and chuckled uncontrollably. Pete joined in, even though he couldn’t see what was happening.

“Oh funny, *very funny!* Now I’m never going to cut you guys in on my new *Dalton’s Flying Circus* deal.” He tried to brush off dirt from his trousers and then his head cocked to one side as something apparently hit him “Actually, maybe the Phoenix Foundation might be interested in throwing a little funding my way?” Jack started to babble about helping the needy and cheering up the old, the sick, and the underprivileged.

The exaggerated pleas didn’t wash.

“No WAY!” Pete and Mac chimed together between fits of laughter as they joined in with the crowd, poking fun at the man who had gotten them here in the first place.

Jack let out a long breath and finally gave in, chuckling himself as Ayo bounced down beside him, a huge grin on his face.

MacGyver watched as the two began to chat, relaxing and enjoying the moment. And when Helen Scott appeared beside him and silently took his hand, guiding him back to the clinic, he didn’t argue.

Maybe he’d like to get to know her better, not in another time and another place, but here and now.

Because in this life, you never did know just what was around the corner.

The End