

A Favour for the Enemy

Part One

Footsteps.

Heat on my neck.

That's all I can remember.

Darkness.

I don't know this place.

The smell of antiseptic. Cabbage. Sweat that didn't come from exertion.

Quiet steps. Careful movements. Whispers. They sound serious.

The taste of blood.

I open my eyes, still dark. Why is it dark? Why can't I see?!

It's night. There's a light under the door. A cupboard. A metal frame beside me. A chair.

I'm in bed. Got to get out of here.

Get up. Get up now.

It hurts! It hurts! I'm screaming but I can't hear it.

Pain has a colour. Who knew?

Who kn...

Footsteps, coming up behind me.

Hot breath on my neck.

A hand, clamping around my mouth. The glove smells of dirt and leather.

My legs are kicked from under me and I'm falling.

I twist as I fall and fight back, but my balance has gone. God's teeth, he's big!

I curl up, got to protect my head. A swish of cloth and something hard and heavy connects with my temple.

Everything's echoing. I can't get up. My knife is in my boot. Why can't I get it? Why won't my hands work?

I knew this was coming. I knew as soon as I made the call.

But who did I call?

The man frowned and shifted in his bed. A nurse tiptoed in and checked the monitors, increased the dose of painkillers and gently brushed his unruly hair off his forehead. Her expression was sad, unable to understand what could drive one human to do this to another.

Footsteps in my room, the scent of antiseptic and vanilla perfume.

A hospital.

Don't let them know I'm awake.

Someone's touching me.

Everything hurts.

A tug inside my elbow. Something cold and heavy seeping into my veins.

Echoing footsteps. They're going away.

I open my eyes. It's daytime. Why won't they stay open?

I'm tired.

I'm slipping away.

Ambushed in my own kitchen, for pity's sakes. How the heck did that happen?

I'm in real trouble here...

He's going to kill me. Out! Get out!

They've traced the phone call. They know it was me.

But who are THEY? Why can't I remember?

Who did I call? I can't...

The police.

I called the police and reported a bomb threat.

Why did I do that? Not my style at all.

And... Why am I still alive?

The man opened his eyes and took a deep breath. He screwed up his face in pain and clenched his fists, squinting against the sunlight. The nurse turned towards him.

"Hi there! Nice to have you back with us." She smiled at him, moved nearer to check his monitors, took his pulse and shone a bright light into his eyes. The man shied away from the light and she put her hand up to the side of his face.

“Hold still, please – I have to check your pupils. You’ve had a nasty bang on the head, you know... That’s fine. OK, let’s get you sitting up a bit.” She propped the bed up and smoothed the sheets. “That’s better, isn’t it?” The man stared back at her, his dark eyes confused. The nurse moved to the foot of the bed and picked up a chart.

“Can you wiggle your toes?” The man concentrated and the nurse waited with her pen poised over the chart, but nothing moved. The nurse turned up the end of the blanket. “Try again for me?”

The man’s forehead creased and he looked frightened. He tried again, but still nothing moved. The nurse nodded, made a mark on the chart.

“Can you move your arms? Squeeze my hand? Turn your head?” The man complied, seeming distant. When the nurse had finished her checks, he continued to stare into space.

“Do you know your name?” The man refocused, pulling his attention in from somewhere very far away. He shook his head. The nurse sighed. “I’ll get the doctor to look in on you.”

Pretend to be dead.

Let him think he’s killed me.

He’s still hitting me, pounding and kicking and hurting.

I can’t fight back. I can’t move right. I’m dizzy.

He’s stopped. Footsteps, walking away.

He thinks I’m dead.

Check for a pulse, you idiot. No, don’t check. Walk away. Walk away.

I can’t move.

Maybe I am dead...

I turned down the contract. That’s why he came.

What had I been asked to do?

I still feel sick at the idea of doing it. Why?

After all, I kill people for a living.

A sharp sting and pressure inside my elbow.

This time I open my eyes. A different nurse, younger, with long blonde hair.

She’s smiling at me. She tells me I’m improving and that the doctor has decided to take me off the morphine.

Even though my legs don’t work.

She reminds me of someone.

Long blonde hair, fanned out across tumbled snow. My precious sister, lying dead. I turn and snarl at the mountain that has taken her from me.

I'm crying.

I'm...

I vow never to take a contract involving the deaths of children. I make that promise to Ashton, and lay a rose on her grave and walk away.

I keep my promise, and refuse this last contract. But not everyone at HIT feels the same way. Someone will take it.

I tell the nurse I need to make a phone call. She writes down the number, agrees to call and asks me what my name is.

But I pretend I don't know who I am.

MacGyver parked his bike, unzipped his jacket and walked across the parking lot to the hospital.

The phone call had him puzzled as well as worried. He knew plenty of Brits from his travels abroad, but none who would name him as next of kin. Then again, amnesia could play many tricks with the mind, as he knew from experience. He glanced at the ward number he'd written on his hand and headed for the elevators.

Pushing open the ward doors, MacGyver walked up to the nurses' station and propped his sunglasses on his head.

"Hi, name's MacGyver. I got a call to say one of your patients had asked for me?" He smiled down at the nurse, who smiled back and picked up a file.

"Right this way." She came out from behind the desk. "You should be aware that your friend was attacked and hurt very badly. We thought we were going to lose him the first night, but he's healing really well now, much faster than expected." MacGyver nodded.

"But he has no idea who he is?" The nurse shook her head.

"Whoever he is, he's been badly hurt before. He has metal plates in his leg and evidence of a lot of other injuries. Oh, and he's had plastic surgery on his face. Really well done too."

MacGyver's eyes narrowed and he frowned.

"Here we are. Visiting finishes at four, OK?" MacGyver nodded, not really listening. His attention was fixed on the figure in the bed.

"You."

Part Two

"You."

The figure moved slightly, opening one eye. A smile ghosted across the bruised mouth and one bandaged hand lifted in a languid wave.

“Hello MacGyver.” The voice was no more than a croak. “Thank you for coming to see me.”

MacGyver shoved his hands into his jacket pockets and strode towards the bed.

“Explain to me why I’m not calling the police RIGHT NOW to come and pick you up?!” He spun away, pacing the length of the room. A cracked and breathy laugh followed him. “What sick game is this NOW? You pretend amnesia and you tell the doctors that I’m your best friend? What the heck are you playing at, Murdoc?” MacGyver balled his hands into fists and glared at the man in the bed.

“Don’t you want to know what happened to me, MacGyver?” Murdoc’s whisper sounded amused.

“I don’t care what happened to you! Whatever it was, I’m sure you deserved it!” Murdoc shifted painfully on the pillows and reached out for a paper cup of water.

“Interestingly enough, no. Not this time. This —” He indicated himself with the cup, “This is the direct result of NOT carrying out a hit. Ironic, isn’t it?” Murdoc drained the cup and set it down, watching MacGyver intently.

MacGyver scowled back at him.

“You’ve got exactly one minute to make this relevant before I call the cops.” Murdoc nodded.

“Very well. I refused to carry out a hit because it would have involved the deaths of a group of children as collateral damage. Knowing the job would be offered to another HITman, I made an anonymous phone call to the police and told them about the threat. Do I have your attention now?”

“OK.” MacGyver studied the smaller man, trying to decide if he was telling the truth.

“But I wasn’t as careful as I should have been, and word got back. HIT sent someone to show me the error of my ways.”

“Looks like they nearly succeeded too.” MacGyver couldn’t remember when he’d last seen someone in such a bad state. Murdoc nodded.

“Rumours of my death and all that, eh, MacGyver?” Murdoc closed his eyes and frowned.

“However, as you can see, I’m temporarily inconvenienced, which is why I need a favour from you.” He cracked one eye open to watch MacGyver’s reaction.

For a moment, MacGyver just stared.

“You want a...” He closed his mouth, blinked and tried again. “You want me. ME, to do YOU a favour. Wow.” He turned and paced the room. “Wow. A favour.” MacGyver shook his head. “How much have your brains been scrambled? You and I have spent the last however long on opposite sides! You’re the bad guy! You kill people! For money! You’re...” MacGyver clenched his fist and waved it at Murdoc. Murdoc watched him, waiting for him to finish.

MacGyver let out a sigh and dropped his hand down to his side.

“I don’t even have the words for what you are, Murdoc.” He sat down in the chair.

Murdoc waited.

“Man, you must be desperate if you’re coming to me for help.” MacGyver shook his head. “Why ARE you coming to me for help?”

Murdoc carefully folded the edge of his bedsheet, avoiding MacGyver's eyes.

"Because I need your particular set of skills. And..."

"And?" Murdoc bunched the sheet between bandaged hands.

"And because I don't have anyone else I can ask." He pressed his lips tight together and folded his hands.

"What makes you think you can ask me?" MacGyver was still angry, but anything that caused Murdoc to lose his cool was probably worth investigating...

"Do you remember when we worked together before?"

MacGyver folded his arms.

"Worked together is stretching the truth, don't you think?"

Murdoc waved a hand dismissively.

"So you remember how... persistent my work colleagues can be, yes?"

"I remember. Where is this going, Murdoc?"

Murdoc watched MacGyver, waiting for the penny to drop. He watched horror dawn in MacGyver's eyes, and nodded.

"That's right. The hit is going to go ahead without me."

MacGyver blew out a sigh and sat back in his chair. If Murdoc was right, then he might very well be the only person in a position to prevent the deaths of innocent children caught up in some twisted plot to assassinate... Who? Or was it another of Murdoc's mad plots to get to MacGyver himself? Had he walked straight into a trap? Then again, whoever had attacked him had clearly meant to kill him, so...

"Tell me about the hit." MacGyver dropped his head into his hands. "I can't believe I just said that!"

"It seemed like a straightforward job," Murdoc settled back in his bed. "Jerry Overton, elementary school teacher by day and conspiracy theorist by night, had been digging around in places he'd have been better leaving alone and unearthed some very dirty secrets about a big pharmaceutical company. Going public with this information led to some very expensive lawsuits and a number of senior management positions suddenly becoming vacant." MacGyver nodded, remembering the story breaking in the news recently.

"Well, success went to Overton's head and he carried on digging. Eventually someone decided that he must be made to stop. Threats didn't work and he wound up on my desk a week or so ago." Murdoc sighed and shifted again as if his back was hurting him. "I recommended a hit at home, no collateral damage, but the client rejected the proposal. Wanted something loud and messy, something to send a message to Overton's conspiracy theorist friends, you know? And the client suggested a school bomb." MacGyver was surprised to see that Murdoc looked sick at the idea. He waited for the HITman to compose himself without commenting.

"And I couldn't do it." Murdoc picked at the bandages on his hand. "But, of course, when I called in the bomb threat, it got tracked back to me and the HITman whose paycheck I'd ruined came to

thank me in person. He'll try again, and he'll do it before the Summer Program finishes on July 15th, because the client has already expressed impatience with how long the job's taking." He smiled at MacGyver, but the smile didn't reach his eyes. "So here we are. I know about it, but can't prevent it. Now you know about it too. The question is, what will you do about it?"

MacGyver stood up and crossed to the window, parting the blinds to peer between the slats. Seeing no snipers on the surrounding rooftops or suspicious-looking characters in the parking lot below, he let the blinds snap shut and turned back to Murdoc.

"This still sounds like a matter for the police. They have bomb disposal experts for this kind of thing, you know? Some of them are really good!" Murdoc flinched, as though MacGyver's sarcasm had stung. "So why do you want me? Which of my 'particular set of skills' did you want to exploit?" MacGyver made quote marks in the air, then shoved his hands back into his pockets.

Murdoc frowned, nettled by MacGyver's inability to understand.

"Come, come, MacGyver. The HITman we're dealing with is cunning, adaptable and creative. His skill with explosives rivals mine and I need someone who can not only get into the school undetected, but also defuse whatever he finds in there. If my 'colleague' sees the bomb squad pulling up in all their noisy glory, I guarantee he'll detonate remotely." Murdoc lay back against his pillows, his face grey under the bruises. "I need you, MacGyver."

MacGyver studied the broken man before him. Murdoc was dangerous and crazy, but he was also sincere, believing totally in whatever he was doing at the time. And now he was reduced to begging help from his nemesis.

"Man, I bet that hurt to say." Murdoc hunched deeper into the pillows, but didn't reply. "OK, Murdoc. Tell me everything I need to know about this guy."

After MacGyver left, Murdoc turned his attention to his room. He had to find a way to escape, no matter that he's promised MacGyver that he'd turn himself in once the bomb had been defused. But how to escape when he couldn't move...

Experimentally, Murdoc tried to wiggle his toes again. The blanket over his feet twitched slightly in response, and Murdoc grinned a wide, feral grin.

Part Three

MacGyver turned the Jeep into the parking lot of Stevenson Elementary School. He got out and looked around, pretending he wasn't sure he was in the right place, and let his gaze drift across the surrounding rooftops, the open windows in buildings overlooking the school, and...

There.

Just a glimpse of a dark figure in an upstairs window, the flash of light on glass, and then it was gone.

Keeping up his pretence, he studied the piece of paper in his hand, scratched his head and shrugged. He walked up the steps, looked through the glass in the main door, and then went inside.

Inside, the hallway was cool and quiet. MacGyver could hear children talking and laughing somewhere in the building, and followed the sound.

Murdoc had been thorough in his description of this particular HITman's style. He preferred radio detonators, he always watched the show from as close as he dared get, and always, always kept line-of-sight on his targets. He liked his explosions as loud and messy as possible, causing maximum damage to property as well as people, allowing him to slip away in the chaos following detonation. He planned meticulously and was proud of his ability to handle very volatile explosives that other HITmen wouldn't touch. His choices had occasionally resulted in early detonation, simply because his bombs were unstable and easy to trigger accidentally, and he was tolerated only because he would carry out any job, no matter how terrible, with equal, clinical efficiency. There was no target he would refuse, for to him it was all about the artistry of the explosion, and never the human cost. Murdoc had smiled thinly and explained that was how this man had acquired the nickname 'Rembrandt'.

MacGyver had learned a number of things from that conversation:

First, the HITman would be watching. MacGyver would be unable to evacuate the children and their teacher from the school because Rembrandt would see them start to leave and detonate the bomb.

Second, MacGyver could not be seen entering the classroom because Rembrandt would see him and probably detonate the bomb.

Third, the bomb was probably very large, or made using a very powerful explosive. Murdoc had told him that Rembrandt often used TATP, liking the amount of damage that could be caused by a relatively small amount and the delicacy of touch required to use it without blowing yourself up in the process. He also often attached canisters of nails or other metal objects to create a deadly cloud of shrapnel. Even Murdoc had looked queasy, talking about that.

Last, because of the pride Rembrandt took in assembling his bombs, there were probably dummy wires, redundant pieces and fail-safes set to make the device more pleasing to the eye and to stop anyone else from tampering with its perfection.

MacGyver reached the end of the hall and flattened himself against the wall, careful not to let his shadow fall across the doorway for Rembrandt to see.

How could he contact Jerry Overton without alerting the bomber?

Could he slip a note under the door? The kids might all turn to look, Overton would come and pick up the note, and then... BOOM!

Could he just knock on the door? No-one else was supposed to be in the building. Rembrandt might get twitchy when Overton came to answer the door, and then... BOOM!

Could he... The door opened, and a very small child came out.

Seeing MacGyver, the kid opened her mouth to call out and MacGyver made frantic shushing gestures. Wide-eyed, the kid nodded. Closing the door behind her, she leaned forward and whispered.

"You're not supposed to be here!"

"I know," MacGyver whispered back, "But it's real important that I get a message to Mr. Overton. Can you help me?" The kid nodded.

"Thank you," He smiled at her. "My name's MacGyver, what's yours?" She thought about this, frowning.

"I'm not supposed to talk to strangers, Mr. MacGyver." She thought some more. "What do you want me to tell Mr. Overton?"

"Just ask him to come talk to me for a minute, OK honey?"

She nodded, then turned to run off down the corridor.

"Hey!" She turned back at MacGyver's panicked whisper. "Where are you going?!"

"To the bathroom. Mr. Overton said I can." MacGyver ran a hand through his shaggy hair.

"Can you be quick?" She nodded.

"That's what my Mom says." She smiled at him and ran off down the hall.

MacGyver leant against the wall again, sliding down until he was crouched out of sight. He closed his eyes and gave a frustrated sigh.

"I washed my hands." MacGyver opened his eyes again to see the kid standing in front of him, hands held out for inspection.

"Good. That's good..." MacGyver forced a smile. "Now go get Mr. Overton, OK?"

Moments later, a man came to the door. It took him a moment to spot MacGyver leaning against the wall, but then he stepped out into the hallway, pulling the door closed behind him.

"Chloe told me that someone was here to see me. Can I help you?" MacGyver took Jerry Overton by the elbow and led him a little way down the hall.

"Yeah, we have a problem here. My name's MacGyver, I work for the Phoenix Foundation." Overton shook his head.

"I've never heard of them."

"Doesn't matter. What's important is that there's a bomb in this building and I'm here to..." MacGyver shot out a hand and grabbed Overton's arm as he turned back to his classroom. "... to defuse it."

"Where's the bomb squad? We need to get the kids out of here!" Overton struggled against MacGyver's grip, eyes wide and frightened.

"Listen! The bomber's watching the school from the building opposite. He can't suspect that we know or he'll set it off." MacGyver waited until he was sure Overton wasn't going to raise the alarm, and then let his arm go. "So we can't evacuate, we can't have the bomb squad turn up and we can't have the kids know that anything's wrong, or he detonates the bomb."

Overton swallowed hard, sweat beading on his brow.

"What kind of sicko bombs a school?" MacGyver shook his head.

“Don’t get me started. Right now, I need to get into your classroom unnoticed.” Overton took a deep breath.

“Can I at least get the kids outside? They go out about now for recess anyway, so that’s not suspicious. Please...” MacGyver nodded.

“That’s a great idea. As they file out, I’ll sneak in. Tell them NOT to look at me though, because if the bomber suspects anything, then...” He shook his head and Overton paled. “And I need you to look in all the cupboards and boxes before I do and find the bomb for me without touching it – I need to be able to get to it without moving stuff around and getting seen. Can you do that?” Overton nodded.

“Yes. But why us?”

“Later.” MacGyver turned him round and gave him a gentle push. “Don’t look scared, don’t act suspicious and don’t panic the kids. OK?” Overton cast him a last, terrified glance and went back into his classroom.

MacGyver crouched down again next to the door and listened. He heard Overton opening doors, picking things up and moving stuff around. He heard a sharp intake of breath and then Overton’s voice, a little higher and louder than before.

“OK kids, recess time. Take your snacks with you and don’t run in the hall.” Overton added some extra instructions in a low voice and the door opened.

The kids filed out, carefully not looking at MacGyver. Chloe caught his eye and gave him a tiny smile, then went back to staring at the kid in front of her. MacGyver crawled in through the door, hidden by the line of children. He spotted the cupboard left open, right under the window and scrambled quickly under the tables towards it. Overton had pushed a table right up to the cupboard, hoping to shield MacGyver from view.

The last child left and Overton followed, leaving the door ajar behind him. MacGyver reached out and carefully moved the book that Overton had propped up to hide the bomb from his kids. Placing it on the floor, MacGyver got his first proper look at the bomb.

“Oh... Man...”

The bomb was actually quite beautiful. There were a lot of wires, far more than could possibly be necessary, and Rembrandt had looped and twisted them together so that the whole resembled a skeletal butterfly. An enamelled bowl of white crystals nestled in the middle of the device, with a painted glass jar, filled with coloured drawing pins on each side. MacGyver took a deep breath, trying to remember everything he’d ever known about remote controlled bombs. Most of his experience had been with improvised devices far less hi-tech than this. He crawled as close to the bomb as he could, his head in the cupboard, and looked around the back of the device.

Set behind the bomb was a child’s watch, wired into the mechanism. MacGyver traced the wires back into rest of the device without touching them, and frowned. If the bomb was on a timer, he daren’t try to remove the watch for fear of setting it off. Murdoc had said the Rembrandt rarely used timers, so this could be a dummy designed to confuse, but still...

There were so many wires, in so many different colours that MacGyver couldn’t see a place to start. They looped around the dish, the watch and the jars seemingly at random, with no clear way to tell

which ones were live and which were there for distraction or decoration. So he daren't cut any of the wires.

Resting in the bowl of crystals were two fountain pens, each with a wire curling out of the end. The wires looped around the jars and disappeared underneath the device. MacGyver blinked sweat out of his eyes. These must be the blasting caps. If he could remove these really carefully, he might be able to defuse the bomb. He took another deep breath to steady his nerves and blinked hard as the strong bleachy smell coming from the crystals made his eyes tear up.

Bleachy smell.

"Oh, man... Not that!" MacGyver backed carefully out of the cupboard and frowned. The smell reminded him of defusing improvised devices in a dozen classified locations. He remembered the bleachy smell of a particularly nasty home-made explosive as the last thing a number of his brothers in arms had reported before...

If the dish of crystals really was TATP, he daren't pull the fountain pen blasting caps out either – even the small movement of the pens could be enough to set off the bomb.

What could he do?

Part Four

What could he do?

Rolling onto his back, MacGyver scanned the part of the room he could see from underneath the table. Standard classroom stuff. Wooden chairs. Scratchy brown carpet. Maths supplies. Spare exercise books. Pot under the sink to catch the drip from a leaky pipe. Paint. Science cupboard.

Science cupboard.

MacGyver crawled under the tables to the cupboard, opening the door just a crack to see inside. Hopefully Rembrandt hadn't seen the door inching open. MacGyver found magnifying glasses, bottles of food colouring, mirrors, vinegar and tape, all of which he shoved to one side. His hand closed on a small pot at the back of the cupboard.

Baking soda. He stuffed it into his pocket.

Crawling to the sink, MacGyver carefully pulled the brimming pot towards him. He carried it back to the bomb, moving as slowly as he dared to avoid spilling, and, one dribble at a time, poured the water into the crystals. When the dish was full, he pulled the baking soda out of his pocket and poured some into his hand. Very delicately, he sprinkled a pinch onto the water, then another. How much would he need to neutralise the explosive? He couldn't remember... He reached out a shaking hand and eased the first pen out of the dish. When nothing blew up, he eased the second one out, then heaved a sigh of relief.

Now he just had to find a way to get out without Rembrandt seeing him, and quite possibly shooting him. Murdoc had said that Rembrandt was a good shot and never travelled unarmed. Then he had to get Overton and the kids to safety without any of them getting shot either, capture Rembrandt and get back to the hospital to secure Murdoc.

He was going to need some help.

Looking around, MacGyver spotted the dressing-up box in the corner of the classroom. He crawled across, pulled out his knife and cut a hole in the side of the cardboard carton. He pulled the costumes out and discovered a pair of brown curtains folded at the bottom. Spreading them over himself, he laid flat and crept along the floor, pulling himself along with just his fingers and toes. Hopefully the brown curtains would disguise him against the carpet enough that Rembrandt wouldn't see him. He crept out from under the last table, the hair on the back of his neck prickling.

Three more feet

Two feet

Turn the corner and...

MacGyver stood up, pulling the curtains off himself and stretching. He ran down the hall and found the office, dialling a number with shaking fingers.

"LAPD."

"Yeah, hi. I need to report a bomb..." MacGyver screwed up his face and waited for the dispatcher's reply.

"Sir, are you sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure! It's at Stevenson Elementary School and it's..." MacGyver became aware that he was yelling and took a deep breath, trying to calm himself.

"Calm down, Sir. Give me the details and I'll get a team on the way."

"NO! If you send the bomb squad, the sniper will start shooting, probably at the kids!"

"Sir? Sniper? What..."

"Sniper! Assassin! Lone gunman in the building opposite! You know – SNIPER!"

"Calm down, Sir." MacGyver gave the phone a murderous look. He glanced out of the office window. The kids were playing outside and Overton was doing a good job of looking like everything was as normal.

"Sir?" MacGyver gripped the receiver, deciding that he would not shout at the dispatcher, however slow he sounded.

"There is a bomb. I have defused it. There is a yard full of kids I can't evacuate. The bomber is in a building opposite, probably with a gun trained on their teacher. If the bomb squad turn up, someone is going to get shot. Send someone to get hold of the bomber. Please. Now."

There was a pause.

"Officers are on the way. Sir, may I ask how you came to be involved in this?"

MacGyver took another deep breath and deliberately loosened his stranglehold on the receiver. This was going to take some explaining...

“And in other news, LAPD’s finest have just arrested a man on suspicion of attempted murder. They were tipped off by a concerned citizen and have the man in custody, so our Long Beach listeners can go about their business, knowing that the police have it covered. And now the weather...”

Murdoc switched the radio off and his eyes darted around his room, weighing up possible escape options. He had no clothes except an open-backed hospital gown, no weapons, no means of escape, very limited movement in his legs and he was in the most pain he could remember since falling off the rock face...

He grinned to himself and clenched his toes, feeling sensation returning. What would MacGyver do? Or, perhaps a better question, what would HE do that MacGyver would never contemplate doing?

Two hours later, MacGyver found himself listening to a completely different phone ring, willing the owner to pick up the call.

“Pete! Yeah, it’s me. I know I’m supposed to be in the office, but something came up.”

The guard folded his arms and gave MacGyver an unfriendly stare.

“Me too. Thing is, I’m in Long Beach Police Department right now, and...” MacGyver ran a hand through his hair. “Very funny, Pete! Matter of fact, yes I am, and I could use your help!”

There was a pause while MacGyver listened.

“Yes, really!”

Another pause.

“It’s real complicated, Pete. What? No! Of course not!” MacGyver listened again, then nodded.

“Thanks Pete, I owe you.” He replaced the phone on the trolley and gave the guard a relieved smile.

“All sorted, complete misunderstanding, and...” The guard glared harder and turned away, wheeling his phone trolley back to his office. MacGyver watched him go, shook his head at the man’s rudeness and sat down to wait for the cavalry.

“Hey Mac! Wake up.” Nikki stood outside the cell with her arms folded.

MacGyver opened one eye, then scrambled to his feet.

“Nikki! Boy, am I glad to see you.”

“They’re putting the paperwork through now. Should be out of here any time. So, tell me what you’ve been doing with your morning, while I’ve been slaving over a hot desk...”

Eventually, the sour faced guard returned. He gave the papers to Nikki, returned MacGyver’s knife and keys to him, opened the cell door with obvious reluctance and stood aside to let MacGyver out.

Walking out of the station, MacGyver was sure that the sunshine on his face had never felt so good. Nikki unlocked her car and reached across to open the passenger door.

“So, let me get this straight. You get a phone call from Murdoc, who tells you he needs your help.” Nikki put the car in gear and pulled away from the kerb. “You agree to help him, because for once in his slimy life he’s playing for the good guys, and because he promises to turn himself in if you’re successful.”

“Pretty much, yeah.” MacGyver slumped down in the seat and stuffed his hands into his jacket pockets. Nikki took advantage of a red light to stare at MacGyver disbelievingly.

“And you seriously expect him to keep this promise, do you?” MacGyver squirmed.

“It’s not like he’s going anywhere, Nikki. Man just got beat to within an inch of his life. He’s going to be flat on his back for months, even if he regains the use of his legs at all. I read his medical charts.”

“Nuh-uh.” Nikki concentrated on threading through the heavy Los Angeles traffic. “That man is part cockroach – you can stomp on him all you like and you still won’t slow him down.” She stood on the brakes and honked the horn at a lumbering Buick. “Nice signal, idiot!”

MacGyver unclenched his hands from the dashboard and tightened his seatbelt.

“Almost there.” Nikki swung the car into the hospital parking lot. “Ten bucks says he’s gone.” MacGyver shook his head.

“You’ll lose your money. If Murdoc even tries standing up right now, his spine is going to fall out on the floor.” Nikki wrinkled her nose.

“You’re disgusting.”

MacGyver opened the door to Murdoc’s room, threw his hands in the air and stormed out again. Nikki slipped past him into the room. The bed was unmade and empty, one of the cupboard doors and the drip stand were missing and a half-dressed nurse was asleep in the armchair. Nikki crossed to the bed.

“Mac? Get in here.” MacGyver strode back in, furious with himself. Nikki pointed to the pillow. Neatly pinned to it with a hypodermic needle was a note:

Dear MacGyver,

Well done for accomplishing our mission. Perhaps we can work together again some time. I really am very grateful to you, but I can’t quite bring myself to let you catch me this time.

Au revoir, MacGyver!

M.

P.S. Please don’t wake the nurse.

MacGyver crumpled up the note and threw it at the bin. Nikki followed him out, stopping at the nurse’s station to try and find out what had happened. Unsurprisingly, they were as confused as she was...

She came down the hospital steps to see MacGyver leaning against her car, his face like thunder. Sighing, Nikki let him into the car and they set off back to Phoenix.

“Look at it this way, Mac – you stopped the bomber.”

Silence.

“And Pete spoke to Overton. He’s OK, just shaken up.”

Silence.

“All the kids are fine, never even knew what was happening.”

Silence.

“You really thought you’d got him this time, didn’t you?”

Silence.

“Are you going to sulk the whole way back?”

“Maybe!” Nikki shot MacGyver an exasperated look.

“It’s a good job I like you Mac – you can be really hard work!” MacGyver sighed, stretching his legs in the footwell.

“Yeah, I know. Sorry, Nikki.”

“No problem. It has to be frustrating, getting so close to him and having him slip away like that.” Nikki pulled up next to MacGyver’s Jeep in the school parking lot. “See you tomorrow?”

“Yeah.” MacGyver fished something out of his pocket and laid it on the dash. “I believe I owe you this.”

Nikki picked up the \$10 bill and unfolded it, smiling.

“We’ll get him next time, Mac. Soon as we work out how he did it this time...” MacGyver returned her smile.

“Yeah, next time.”