

## Dead Flight

*United Airlines Flight LA4177*

*Boeing 747-400*

*December 22<sup>nd</sup> 1992*

Angus MacGyver blinked, stretched, and finally put down the tech magazine he'd been reading for the past hour. It wasn't exactly fascinating stuff, but it had been better than watching the rest of the passengers doing what amounted to very little.

At his side, Sam was sleeping like a baby, and had been that way since he'd gotten on the plane. How he could sleep so deeply when they'd been through some pretty rough pockets of turbulence, was anyone's guess, but his eyes were still tightly closed and occasionally, he actually let out a small snore.

Mac smiled. It still felt weird having a kid – and a grown one at that.

Sometimes he felt like he'd missed out on so much, not seeing Sam's childhood, not reading him bedtime stories, or teaching him hockey.

But then, that was what the last few months had been about.

Mac had chosen not to renew his contract at the Phoenix Foundation, and he and Sam had taken a long road trip together to try and really get to know one another like a father and son should.

It hadn't always gone smoothly, and there had been one or two quarrels, but Mac was proud of Sam, and he got the feeling Sam didn't think he was too shabby a dad, either. So he guessed it was all good, considering the circumstances.

Their grand tour had taken them halfway across the country and back on their bikes, and their last stop had been Mission City, Minnesota, where Mac had been born. He'd not pushed Sam to go there, but was pretty glad when the kid had wanted to see his roots.

There was so little of the MacGyver family left, it was good to have a son to share his memories and hometown with. They'd even taken in a hockey game together.

That was when things had suddenly gotten a little strange.

The game itself had been pretty cool, and Mac had enjoyed sharing it with Sam, but then, when they'd gotten back out into the parking lot, Sam's bike had vanished.

Getting a car or bike stolen wasn't exactly big news, and the local cops hadn't really held much hope of finding it. The insurance company hadn't been much more helpful, either.

Still, Sam had been adamant he wasn't going to let that little setback ruin anything. He'd aimed to find a dealership and buy another cheap bike just to finish their trip.

Fate had gotten other ideas about that plan too, though.

As soon as they'd returned to their motel, the manager had come knocking on the door with a message.

And this was where it got even weirder.

The note was from Pete Thornton.

There was very little information, except that he was in trouble and needed MacGyver's help. Along with the note, were two plane tickets back to L.A. for that evening.

Now Pete was never normally that cryptic, so Mac had tried to call his office at Phoenix, but Pete's secretary had said he hadn't been in all day.

The whole affair had worried Mac. He was still worried now they were on their way back to find out what was going on.

But one thing he had been proud of was Sam.

Sam could have asked Mac to forget Pete; he'd left Phoenix behind, after all. But instead, Sam had insisted his dad go back to help an old friend – it was what *he* would do.

Now that had made Mac smile.

A yawn from Sam as he dozed broke MacGyver from his thoughts, and he couldn't help but let out a small yawn too.

*I guess I'm just gonna have to stop wondering and wait and see what Pete is up to. I hope it's not a surprise Christmas party, he knows how I hate those things...*

He looked at his watch and realized they'd been traveling longer than he'd originally thought. Not long now and they'd been making their final approach.

Mac stood up and dropped the magazine onto his seat, intent on grabbing a drink of water before the seat belt light came on.

Reading tech and engineering babble about in-flight communication advances was thirsty work, after all.

As he hunkered over to push past Sam's snoozing form, he inadvertently glanced out the window, and then paused.

Mac was no astronomy expert, but after living in an observatory for awhile, he did like to think that his knowledge wasn't half bad.

And right now, that knowledge was saying Flight LA4177 was in the wrong place.

He did a double take, but the stars twinkling outside in the night sky simply didn't lie. In fact, as he scrutinized what was happening more carefully, it quickly became apparent that they were circling.

*That's pretty odd. Some air traffic problem, maybe?*

It made sense. Air traffic control often put birds on holding patterns due to weather conditions, hold ups at airports, other aircraft taking priority due to technical issues.

Except, something about this was already getting his senses tingling.

MacGyver had been in enough situations to know when something was normal, and when things were getting strange.

Mac carefully took a look around the cabin for other signs of something being "off," and it didn't take too long to find what he was looking for.

At the far end, nearest the cockpit, the co-pilot was talking discreetly to a stocky, grizzled looking character, and the conversation didn't look like it was all that friendly.

Mac noted the second man was getting more and more agitated as the pair talked, and what alarmed him about that fact was that the man had a bulge under his jacket that could only be one thing – a firearm.

Given how conspicuous the weapon was, Mac guessed he was looking at either a government agent of some kind, or an air marshal.

*Probably not an air traffic problem, then...*

MacGyver glanced back to Sam, but he was still oblivious to anything, his eyeballs darting back and forth under their lids as he dreamed fitfully.

Perhaps he was better off asleep, given that something was definitely going on.

Mac moved into the aisle, unable to control his inquisitive nature any longer. Moving slowly towards the two arguing men, he was careful to make his approach friendly, rather than confrontational.

He spoke to the co-pilot first. "Excuse me, but I can't help but notice we're circling. Is everything okay?" He kept his voice low, so the other passengers weren't alarmed.

"Everything is fine. Now if you'd just get back to your seat and stay there, Sir." The air marshal was as ill-tempered as Mac had suspected. His words were polite enough, but the way he said them left a lot to be desired.

Mac ignored him altogether and still focused on the co-pilot. "I'm ex-DXS," he offered, carefully showing the flier his wallet and I.D. Feel free to radio ahead and check me out."

The co-pilot thought about it, but didn't answer. It was as if he was almost scared of the marshal.

"Look, I know something is going on here, and maybe I can help. I've worked through some pretty unusual situations in my time..." Mac was speaking more firmly now, hoping to get one of the men to see sense.

The marshal wasn't impressed. "I don't care what you've worked through, if you don't sit your butt down, I'll put you down myself. All you need to know is that the situation is under control."

He moved to grab Mac by the shoulder and spin him back towards his seat, but Mac was just a little too fast and dodged sideways. The marshal stumbled, cursing under his breath.

Finally, the co-pilot grew a backbone. "Actually, Mr. Grant, I think we do have a problem here, and any help from this man would be appreciated. He held out a hand to MacGyver. "I'm Dean Sheckley, co-pilot on this flight, and this is Grant, our ill-mannered marshal in tow."

"Name's MacGyver." Mac held out a hand to both men, but only Sheckley shook it warmly. "So what seems to be the problem?"

Sheckley sucked in a deep breath. "About twenty minutes ago, the control tower received a message that there is a potential terrorist on board. They put us on a holding pattern while they get confirmation of what we do next."

"But there's been no outright attempt on the plane?" Mac asked, raising a brow.

Sheckley shook his head. "Nothing. Everything was just fine until the tower contacted us."

MacGyver thought about it. The whole thing could be a hoax, but then no one was going to risk that. "The authorities will probably just send a SWAT team to the airport and then

let us land,” he suggested. “We’ve not had any problems on board for them to take any more drastic measures.”

Grant huffed and wiped a hand across his mouth. “Yeah, well I have one big problem.” His eyes narrowed suspiciously and he stared pointedly at MacGyver. “*You!* How do I know you’re not this nut job who sent the message, huh? How do I know you’re not the terrorist? All we’ve seen is some I.D. anyone could buy on a street corner.”

“And that,” Mac pointed out, “is exactly why I told you to go radio through and check me out.”

Grant wasn’t giving in. He pushed past both men, heading back towards the cockpit, despite not actually having the access codes to get in. “I’ll check you out alright,” he spat. “And if you aren’t as clean as a ...”

The marshal’s voice trailed as he was suddenly forced to focus on grabbing the nearest seat to keep his balance.

Mac and Sheckley were forced to do the same as the 747 suddenly veered sharply to the right.

The angle was far too steep for a normal maneuver and anyone standing was left fighting to keep their footing as the plane yawed violently.

Sheckley regained his balance first, diving for the cockpit access panel in a blind panic as he obviously realized the situation had just gone from potential hoax, to potential hijack.

MacGyver was close behind, carefully watching as the co-pilot keyed in his code to open the security door between the passenger cabin and flight deck.

Mac really shouldn’t have been looking, but if anything had happened to the pilot, the code might be something he needed to know later on. There was something to be said for the phrase “Be prepared.”

There was a two second pause, and then the door clicked open.

Sheckley pushed in first and then stopped, his mouth opening, but his vocal chords not responding.

Mac pushed in beside him and could instantly see why.

The pilot, a man of about fifty, with graying hair and a rather portly figure, was slumped over in his seat, small trickles of blood ebbing from his ears and nose.

There was no way to tell for sure without checking, but Mac was convinced from the way his eyes simply stared out and didn't react, that he was already dead.

Sheckley moved to check anyway, but MacGyver grabbed his arm, tugging him back away from the body.

“Don't touch him!” Mac pointed to the base of the pilot's seat. It wasn't easily visible, but if you looked carefully, the chair had been wired into the electrical system of the plane somehow.

Sheckley sucked in a breath. “How do we check if he's alive?” He was shaking slightly and his voice quivered just a little. But then, it wasn't every day you got to see your friend and colleague murdered.

“We can't,” Mac soothed, “but I'm pretty sure he was dead when we got in here. The main thing now is not to touch anything else until we're sure it's not wired too. Whoever did this must be able to control the electrical current in here.”

“What the hell..?” Grant had finally decided to come up front and see what was going on, and now he had, he was wide-eyed and staring wildly at the Boeing's controls. “If he's dead, who's flying the plane?”

As if to answer, the 747's instruments chirped and beeped, the odd light flashed here and there, and occasionally, both yokes moved to make some minor course correction.

The bird was perfectly in control – of itself.

“The autopilot's engaged,” Mac said, matter-of-factly. “We're not in any immediate danger. Well, at least as long as whoever did this doesn't decide to make any more *adjustments*.”

The marshal snorted. “Pretty convenient that this happens right when we were gonna check out just who you are?”

MacGyver cocked a brow apologetically. It actually did look pretty bad, but there was very little he could do about that now. Instead, he took a look at their heading. He was no expert, but it looked to be empty space. “Sheckley, do these co-ordinates actually take us anywhere other than over empty ocean?”

The co-pilot took a look and frowned. “No,” he admitted. “Not if you factor in what fuel we have.”

Mac nodded. “So whoever has control of the plane plans on taking us out to sea, where we'll end up ditching when the gas is all burned. Pretty much a one-way ticket if we can't get control back.”

“Maybe I should just punch you out and take control myself,” Grant offered under his breath.

Mac ignored him. He was listening to the muted radio chatter he could hear from the captain’s headset.

The control tower was trying to reach them.

*“Flight LA4177 this is LAX, do you read? Flight LA4177 we’re showing a deviation from your designated flight plan, can you confirm?”*

“We need to find a way to talk to the tower.” MacGyver’s eyes were searching the flight deck as he spoke, searching for more booby traps, and a way to talk to the people on the ground.

For a split second, that was all he was concentrating on – and that split second was enough.

Sheckley was so focused on what needed doing, that in that instant, he forgot all about not touching any of the Boeing’s systems, and reached out to pick up his own headset.

Mac saw the move one millisecond too late. “Dean, *NO!*”

Sheckley already had the headset in his right hand, and as he held it, his whole body convulsed as current from some unknown source flowed through him.

Mac took a risk and grabbed the pilot’s briefcase from behind his seat, using it to knock the headset from Sheckley’s violently shaking hand.

The receiver and mike fell onto the co-pilot’s seat where it sat innocently waiting for its next victim.

Sheckley tumbled forwards, almost hitting the throttle controls with his forehead before Mac could lose the case and catch him.

Grant simply stood in the doorway, watching everything transpire as if it was all a dream. Maybe it made him feel better to think it was.

MacGyver continued to ignore him, and was relieved when an attendant pushed past the marshal to try and help.

At least she wasn’t panicking, despite seeing two of the flight crew flat out.

And then it hit Mac – this was the 400 model 747, and that meant *it only had* two flight crew.

As he checked for a pulse at Sheckley neck, the girl leaned over. She looked scared, but not panicked. “What...what...I mean, who are you and..?” She rightly had a million questions, and not one answer.

Sheckley had a pulse. It was racing, and he was out cold, but he was alive.

Mac turned his attention to the girl. He was going to need all the help he could get, and for that, he needed her to trust him.

“My name’s MacGyver and I’m here to try and help.” He looked her in the eye, deciding just how strong she was. Could she take the truth? “The pilot’s dead,” he admitted. “Dean here just took a nasty jolt, but I think he’s gonna be okay. Can you help me get him in the back and comfortable, and then I’ll explain everything?”

The blonde flight attendant nodded, and as MacGyver took Sheckley’s weight, she helped him out to the nearest seat they could drop down. “My name’s Dana, by the way,” she offered wanly.

Mac smiled back at her, trying to look more assured than he was feeling. “Pleased to meet you, Dana. Now do you think you can take care of Dean here, while I go back to the flight deck and try and call for help?” He lowered Sheckley as carefully as he could from his shoulder.

The co-pilot slumped lifelessly onto the chair below, and Mac couldn’t help but notice several of the passengers eyeing what was going on.

It wouldn’t be long before they had a blind panic on board if he didn’t do something, and fast.

“I guess,” Dana sighed. “But then you come right back here and explain, or we’re going to have a situation we can’t handle.” She looked over her shoulder at the passengers, obviously realizing the same thing Mac just had.

These people *knew* something was wrong.

Mac nodded and scooted quickly back to the cockpit.

The Boeing was still happily cruising along at mach 0.85 according to the airspeed indicator, and there didn’t seem to be any other aircraft showing in the immediate area. They were at a good height, and the auto-pilot still held its bizarre course.



Mac licked his lips. Now it was time to try and get in touch with LAX and get some help to regain control.

He focused firstly on the lethal headset that belonged to Sheckley. Without touching it, he followed the wires back to where it plugged into a console. Whatever had been done was behind the panel.

Taking out his knife, he carefully removed the metal plate and traced more of the wires.

Whoever had done this hadn't been too bothered about it being "defused." With one simple twist of his wrist, MacGyver had cut through two joined wires and the thing was safe.

To Mac, that could only mean one thing.

There were bigger, better booby traps to come.

Mac swallowed and checked out the rest of the console that contained the radio equipment. It "looked" clean, but dare he try and use it?

Gingerly, he slipped on the headset and hit transmit. "This is Flight LA4177 do you copy LAX?"

Static hissed back at him, interspersed occasionally with chatter meant for other flights.

MacGyver changed the radio frequency and tried again – still nothing. He repeated the procedure, but it appeared that signals were coming in, but none were going out.

Whoever had hijacked the plane had jammed outgoing radio transmissions too.

Mac let out a breath and took the headset back off. In his mind, he tried to assess the situation, and it wasn't looking good.

He was on a plane with around two hundred other passengers, the pilot was dead, the co-pilot unconscious, and probably every system on board had been tampered with by some unknown bad guy.

To make matters worse, Grant was outside the flight deck ranting at Dana about how he'd been trained to deal with real threats, real people he could see and disarm, not invisible electronic enemies.

That was all they needed – Grant mouthing off in front of already panicking passengers.

Mac turned to go talk some sense into the marshal when he heard a familiar voice already asking Grant to shut up.

And not all that politely.

It appeared Sam had finally awoken from his nap and had joined in the fray.

“Dad, what’s going on?” Sam was looking between the downed co-pilot, Dana, and Grant with a very puzzled expression.

A rather plump black man in the nearest seat had the same question. “That’s what I’d like to know! We weren’t born yesterday, and it’s pretty obvious this plane is in trouble.”

Mac winced, it was time to tell everyone and hope he didn’t have a Boeing full of screamers at the end of it. He moved to stand in the centre of the aisle, and Sam moved to stand beside him.

“Okay folks, can I have your attention,” Mac raised his voice, hoping it would carry enough for everyone to hear first time. “We have a situation here, but I’m confident we can resolve it if we all stay nice and calm.”

“What kind of situation?” A sweet looking elderly lady that reminded MacGyver of Jessica Fletcher was eyeing him expectantly.

But, she wasn’t panicking, and so far neither were any of the others.

Mac continued, careful with his wording. “The crew has been ...*incapacitated*, but the plane is on autopilot. There’s no immediate danger. *But*, there has been a suggestion that there is a terrorist on board, or at least behind this.”

The black man stood up, he looked angry more than anything. “Yeah, well you say incapacitated, I say out cold.” He pointed to Sheckley. “I’m guessing the pilot is the same? So if they don’t wake up, who’s gonna fly the plane?”

There was a lot of murmuring among the other passengers, but Mac got the general consensus was that they all had the same question.

*Good job they don’t know the pilot is actually dead, then...*

Mac held up a hand to try and keep things calm. “I will,” he said much more confidently than he felt. “I’m not going to lie, I’ve never flown anything this big before, but if I have to I will. I’m a qualified pilot.”

Sam had been listening, taking it all in, and now he pushed past his dad to address the crowd. “Maybe we can all help. If there really is a terrorist on board, maybe we can spot him or her? Has anyone been acting suspiciously for instance? Have you seen anyone with something that looked odd sitting near you? Just think about it...”

MacGyver could see passengers looking at one another, and he had to admit Sam's idea might work – maybe it wouldn't expose a bad guy, but it could get everyone working together, and focused instead of panicking.

"Nice work," he said in a low voice.

Sam smiled. "I wasn't just saying it to give them something to do. I think this actually might work. Remember that expose on radicals and extremists I told you I did awhile back? Well who knows, maybe the guy behind this was part of that group. I might even recognize him!"

"That's one titanic-sized long shot."

Sam shrugged. "It's not like I have anything better to do."

Mac considered it. In the end, what did they have to lose?

On the other hand, he *did* have something better to do. He needed to find out just how much of the Boeing had been tampered with.

"I want to check out avionics," he eventually whispered to Sam. "I think we need to come at this from separate angles, in case we can't find the bad guy in time. If you can, take that guy with you. He's an air marshal with just a little too much attitude." He jerked a thumb at Grant. "I don't want him getting in my way when there could potentially be a bomb on board."

Sam nodded. "I think I can manage that. I'll convince him to get the passengers from the lower deck up here and then we can check everyone out. It shouldn't be too hard to ruffle his feathers into helping."

MacGyver raised a brow. "Do you wanna to bet?"

Grant had finally noticed he was being talked about and barreled over as if he was going to get nasty. His demeanor from earlier hadn't improved. "Doing a little plotting behind my back?"

He stared at Mac, but the troubleshooter simply ignored him and made his way down the aisle to the stairs and the lower level. From behind, he could still hear Grant cussing, but Mac had no doubt Sam could handle him.

For now, Mac had to concentrate on the plane.

At the bottom of the stairs, he took a look around at the passengers.

Thankfully, the Boeing was far from being at capacity. That fact would make his job, and Sam's, a lot easier.

Trying not to look too conspicuous, Mac found an emergency flashlight, and then opened the hatch in the floor that led below to avionics. He carefully lowered himself down, his eyes scanning all the while for triggers or remote devices.

When his feet hit the metal floor, he hunkered down and flicked on the flashlight. Around him, he could hear the thrum of electronics as the thousands of circuits on the plane did their job.

Metal plates covered up the circuitry he needed to check out, and MacGyver knew it was going to be risky removing anything, but it had to be done. He tugged his knife from his pocket and using the screwdriver tool, very slowly began to work off the nearest panel.

It took two minutes to be sure there were no little extras he needed to worry about. At least – no extras to stop him getting inside the bird's electronic brain.

Once he was inside, though, well, that was a whole different story.

MacGyver sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose in frustration. Some of the circuitry was beyond him, and he didn't actually know which parts of the Boeing it controlled.

But one thing he did know was that almost every chip, board or circuit had been compromised and wired into an alien-looking device nestled in the right hand corner of the bay.

The device was illuminated, and active, but it didn't appear to be an outright bomb.

No, this was something way more complicated.

MacGyver took the light in his hand and traced the wiring from and to the little black box. Whoever had done this wasn't just a bomb expert; they were a Boeing expert too.

And for all his knowledge, that was something one Angus MacGyver was not.

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Sam was finding working with Grant to be just as frustrating as he'd expected. The man didn't seem to have once iota of common sense, despite somehow being cleared to marshal for the airline.

All Grant actually seemed to do was grumble, grouse, and generally instill fear and dread in the hearts of everyone he encountered.

Right now, he was ushering the lower deck passengers all up into first class. Or maybe herding was a better word, given how he was barking and yelling most of the time.

Sam tried to resist the urge to punch the guy out, simply because his dad wouldn't condone the idea, but it was getting harder and harder every second he spent with the man.

"Can't you shut him up?" It was the black man who'd spoken to MacGyver earlier, and he was scowling at Grant. "He's scaring my kid!"

Sam looked at the little guy huddled next to his dad, his eyes darting to Grant and then back up at his father. He wished he had memories to look back on like that, but finding MacGyver now, rather than not at all was at least one small grace. "I'll do my best," he promised.

"Thanks." The guy held out his hand. "My name's Marvin, by the way, and this is Travis..."

The kid, who didn't look a day older than six, smiled at Sam shyly.

Sam nodded back. "Pleased to meet you folks." He leaned over to Travis. "Now remember, keep an eye out for anything strange, and if you see something, tell me or Mr. Grant over there."

Travis nodded, his eyes narrowing as he began to scour the cabin for something to report back, his woes suddenly forgotten in favor of detective work.

Grant was back again, pushing his herd further into the cabin, seating people in empty seats he could find and grumbling as he worked.

Sam turned to watch and examine all the newcomers. There were lots of nervous faces, but none that he recognized.

Grant pushed an Asian man roughly down by his shoulders next to the woman his dad had affectionately named "Jessica Fletcher."

She sniffed, and then after looking over her glasses at the man for about five seconds, started to scream blue murder.

"Don't put him next to me! He's *the terrorist!* I saw him on national T.V. He makes bombs!" She continued to shout all kinds of accusations that Sam suspected were probably only half true at best.

The problem was, Grant believed her.

As Sam moved to calm the situation, Grant was already pulling his gun.

The marshal waved it around at the so called “terrorist” instead of steadily pointing the weapon.

In turn, the Asian man appeared to panic and grabbed for the barrel, somehow managing to connect with it despite Grant’s erratic behavior.

It was an insane moment as the marshal and his target tussled with the gun, yanking it back to and fro like some manic puppet show.

“Let go or I’ll fire!” Grant’s eyes were popping from his skull with rage and his cheeks were turning a bright crimson.

The other man looked too frightened to actually follow Grant’s command, and instead, reaffirmed his grip on the firearm almost tearing it from his assailant.

Sam watched the scene play out in what seemed like vivid slow motion. He could see Grant’s gung-ho style about to cause a death, and he could see the Asian man’s fear pushing him to take actions he probably had never even thought of moments before.

And through all of that, the realization hit Sam that Grant’s trigger finger was ticking back on the lever, and if the gun were to go off, the bullet was going in one direction only.

Right towards the innocent little boy named Travis.

And Sam couldn’t let that happen.

Sam made a conscious move to put his body between that of the kid and Grant’s gun. It wasn’t a pretty maneuver, more of a dive and hope for the best kind of deal.

But somehow, it worked, with only milliseconds to spare.

Grant seemingly wanted his man, and when the situation started to get away from him, he did the only thing his kind knew how – he pulled back all the way on the trigger.

The gun kicked back in his hand, and Grant finally stopped tousling with his opponent to look what damage he had caused.

Except the little Asian man hadn’t been shot, injured, or even stunned. He simply stared in disbelief as someone else hit the deck for him.

And that someone was one Sean Angus Malloy.

Grant didn't seem to even care. His eyes grew even wider in his skull, and ignoring the young kid now bleeding in the aisle, he launched out at his enemy once again, and this time he planned on getting his man.

## **Part Two**

MacGyver was just slotting the hatch cover back into place when he heard the sound of the gunshot. It was a noise that never ceased to grate on his ears, and in a confined environment like the Boeing, it also meant double the danger – yes, bullets could kill if they hit a person, but they could also kill everyone on board if the outer skin of the plane was ruptured causing decompression.

Mac's heart leapt in his chest as he jogged two steps at a time up the stairs to the upper level. There were raised voices shouting, but at least no screaming, so he guessed there probably wasn't a gaping hole in the side of the plane to worry about.

On the top step, he paused, just poking his head out enough to see what was happening before diving into the situation.

What he saw made his blood run cold.

Grant was fighting with one of the passengers, and he still held a gun in his right hand. He seemed not to care that his incompetence had already shot someone – but not just anyone – Sam.

Somehow, MacGyver resisted the urge to rush to his son. He couldn't think about one life, he had to think about the many souls on board.

Right now, the most important thing was to stop Grant.

Mac moved lithely from the stairs and into the aisle. None of the other passengers moved to stop him. Most were cowering, terrified in their seats.

That was good. There was less chance of someone walking into another stray slug.

*Be alive Sam, please be alive...*

Two seconds before Mac was upon him, Grant finally realized he had company and whirled around.

As his eyes met MacGyver's, he just had enough time to register the anger in them before Mac's fist hit him square on the jaw, dropping him with just the one blow.

Mac leaned over, quickly grabbing the gun from the marshal's hand before anyone else could take possession. He dropped the clip and tucked it in his belt, wishing he could toss the thing out of an open window.

Around him, the other passengers were daring to move, and two of them had grabbed the so called "terrorist". For now, that situation was under control, and Mac could finally get to his son.

Dana, the flight attendant was already with Sam, and a first aid kit lay open on the next empty seat. She shook her head, though, obviously not really knowing what to do with a gunshot wound.

Sam was awake, but shaking. He looked apologetically at his dad as MacGyver hunkered down next to him. "I couldn't let the little kid take a bullet..."

Mac glanced over and realized what Sam had done. He should have been proud of that at least, but he didn't have time to be. "It's okay. We'll fix you up in no time. Just sit back and let me take a look."

Sam glanced down at the crimson stain already soaking through his shirt. "I can't feel anything," he admitted.

Mac nodded, he'd taken enough bullets in his time to know how it generally played out. You didn't feel anything for maybe fifteen or twenty minutes sometimes, but then the pain would kick in so bad you wanted to pass out, and sometimes did. "Trust me, it'll hurt later," he assured, cutting away Sam's shirt with his knife to take a closer look.

The bullet had passed through Sam's right shoulder and exited, and while people tended to think that wasn't too serious a wound, MacGyver knew different. You had to be very lucky for any gunshot not to be dangerous, and in that area of the human body, there was lots of major blood vessels, bone, and nerves you could easily damage.

Sam seemed to read his dad's expression a little too well. "Bad, huh?" He coughed.

"We just need to stop you bleeding is all." Mac smiled wanly and tried to sound way more confident than he actually was.

He didn't think the bullet had hit an artery, that was one good thing, but there was very little chance it had missed Sam's shoulder blade. And that meant all kinds of trouble, including shattered bone and maybe severed nerves.

Trying not to think about odds, and how long Sam could go without real medical attention, he took a couple of dressings Dana had offered up and pressed down hard front and back on the entry and exit holes.



Sam let out a little gasp, but to his credit, he didn't pass out. He coughed again, and then tried to smile. "You know how I said I couldn't feel anything? Well I felt *that*," he hissed through gritted teeth. "Feels like something grinding together in my shoulder."

Mac bit into his bottom lip just a little. *Shattered bone, then? And how long before infection sets in? Blood loss?* He didn't want to think about all the complications Sam faced without a hospital, but his mind was offering them up anyway.

He looked over to Dana. "Can you keep pressure on these?" He motioned to the dressings. "If they start to soak through, put more on top. Don't take these off."

Dana nodded and slid her hands into place as MacGyver moved his away.

Mac stared down at the blood covering his palms and fingers.

Sam's blood.

Why did this have to happen now? Why couldn't it have been him taking the bullet, not Sam?

Mac had long since learned that life wasn't fair, and it never played out the way you expected or wanted, but this was plain cruel. They'd spent so little time together.

He couldn't, wouldn't lose Sam like this, not when it should have been their first Christmas together.

A shriek from the back of the cabin shook him from any further melancholy thoughts, and MacGyver fully expected to have to punch someone else out or worse.

Instead, as he glanced up, he realized the cry had come from a little man that appeared absolutely terrified. The very geeky looking gent had just exited the toilet compartment, briefcase in hand, and his eyes were almost popping out at the sight of Sam's blood on Mac's hands.

With another yelp of alarm, the geek turned tail right on back into the toilet and slammed the door, locking it for good measure.

"Jessica Fletcher" huffed, putting down a bunch of knitting to eye MacGyver uncertainly. "He locked himself in there when the trouble first began," she offered sagely. "Silly little man is obviously a wuss!"

Mac almost gaped at her brusque attitude, but then couldn't help a small smile when she looked over her glasses at him like an old school teacher.

“At least he’s outta the way in there,” he agreed. “People who panic like that can make these situations worse.”

“Jessica” nodded, knowingly. “And right now, you’ve more on your mind than the likes of him.” She looked over to where Sam was propped, Dana still at his side.

“Yes, ma’am, *a lot* more.” MacGyver turned to look at Sam, watching him try to chat to the flight attendant. For now, he was conscious and talking. That meant Mac needed to turn his attention to saving the plane again.

*He’s going to make it. We’re all going to make it.*

Mac ignored the drying blood on his hands and moved back to where the passengers held both Grant and the suspect.

The Asian didn’t appear to be scared of the people around him, despite some of them making veiled threats as MacGyver approached. Mac didn’t blame them, they were afraid, and this man might be the cause.

“Who’s in charge here?” The so called “terrorist” stared at Mac expectantly.

“That would be me, if only you bozos would listen. I’m employed by the airline and my title makes me *a federal* air marshal.” Grant tried to get up, but a passenger pushed him back down again. He grunted.

MacGyver wanted to punch Grant again, just for the hell of it, but he resisted the temptation. He was a better man than that. “I think you’ve done enough damage, Grant.” He looked to the Asian man. “You mind telling us why the lady over there thinks she’s seen you on T.V.? As a bomb maker, no less?”

The man shrugged. “Because its’ true, I was featured on a documentary for shall we say, having *certain beliefs*. But I’m on this flight for the same reason as everyone else. To get to L.A.”

“And we’re supposed to buy that?” Marvin huffed.

“I wouldn’t,” the Asian admitted. “But it’s the truth. My wife has just had our first son, and I was on my way to see him when this happened. Believe me, I’ve no wish to die without seeing my firstborn.”

MacGyver eyed the man, and for some unknown reason, actually trusted what he was saying. Maybe it was because he’d only just found his own son, and he knew what that felt like.

Maybe it was the sincerity in the man's face as he spoke about the child. There was love there, Mac was sure, and a father's pride.

But if that was true, then where did that leave them with the plane?

Not to mention, Mac doubted the other passengers would so easily buy the Asian's story.

He was right about that, too.

"Jessica" poked the man with the tip of her knitting needle just enough to make him jump. She apparently still didn't like sitting near him. "I saw what you did on that show, and I still think you're at the bottom of this..."

"And you're within your rights to suspect me," the man sighed. "Do with me what you will, but it won't solve any of our problems."

"How about I punch you out anyway," Grant growled. "It would sure solve one of *my* problems..."

Mac held up a hand. "Look, folks, whether this man is responsible or not, we still need to focus on what we do next."

Fighting amongst themselves wasn't going to get the Boeing on the ground or Sam to a hospital.

And besides, he was starting to form another possible scenario in his mind – what if this whole thing revolved around him? Or at the very least whatever Pete had wanted him so urgently about?

After all, Sam's bike being stolen, and then the mysterious message and tickets from Pete, it just didn't add up.

Then a name flicked into Mac's mind, and he instantly wished it hadn't.

*Murdoc.*

This whole mad situation just stank of his zany M.O.

The thought tumbled around in MacGyver's head until he felt almost dizzy. But there was no time for conjecture, not while Sam lay bleeding.

Mac turned to Marvin, thinking he might at least have some common sense. "Just watch him," he pointed to the Asian. "No fighting, no taking revenge – we don't know that he's done anything for sure."

Marvin looked a little taken aback, but nodded. “He’s going nowhere.”

“Right, now I need to find a way to talk to the authorities...” Mac was about to head back up to the cockpit, but “Jessica’s” voice stopped him.

“Can’t you just use a phone?”

Mac stopped mid-stride. The Boeing had the customary Airfones built into the back of the first class seats, but the bad guy was far too clever to have overlooked those, wasn’t he?

Mac had to try anyway; it might be their only hope.

He moved to the nearest Airfone and quickly examined it for more booby traps. There didn’t appear to be any outward signs of danger, but then the bad guy they were dealing with was quite capable of rewiring things internally.

That was the risk he had to take.

Sucking in a deep breath, Mac tugged the phone from its slot and was relieved when he didn’t immediately fry. He put the unit to his ear and was surprised to find it still active.

But would it dial out, and who should he try first?

There were two options, the authorities at LAX, or Pete Thornton.

After a moment’s consideration, he chose Pete.

The whole Airfone system was known for not being reliable and having drop outs, and if he spoke to Pete, then he could kill two birds with one stone, as Pete would in turn talk to the authorities.

Not to mention, he’d finally get to know what Pete had wanted him for, and if it was connected to what was happening.

*Never mind that, why is this phone working at all? The guy who rigged this plane isn’t that stupid to have overlooked this...*

Mac ignored the alarm bells singing out in his brain and dialed Pete’s office at Phoenix, hoping his old friend was in despite the late hour.

After three rings, Pete answered without it even going through to his secretary.

Mac didn’t give him chance to say anything more than his name.

“Pete, thank heavens...” The line hissed with static as MacGyver spoke, and for a second he thought it was going to be cut.

“MacGyver? I thought you were still doing your whole born to be wild thing with Sam?” There was mirth in Pete’s voice – he hadn’t a clue that Mac wasn’t still on his road trip.

“Pete, you didn’t leave a message at our motel that you needed help? No plane tickets?” Mac already knew the answer, but he had to ask anyway.

“No...why would I? Mac, is everything okay?”

MacGyver sighed, waiting for more static to clear before trying to explain everything as fast as he could. “No, we’re not okay, Pete. We took the flight back to LAX that was on the tickets, except it never arrived. We’re still on it headed out to sea. The pilot’s dead, co-pilot’s out cold, and...” He couldn’t quite bring himself to say it.

“*And?*” There was real concern in Pete’s voice now.

“Sam’s hurt. There’s an air marshal on board and he got a little too gun happy with one of the passengers. Sam took the bullet,” Mac’s voice cracked as the last word left his lips.

“How bad?”

Silence filled the line.

MacGyver didn’t want to answer. He didn’t want to admit that Sam could actually die if they didn’t turn the plane around soon.

Pete understood the lack of an answer implicitly and didn’t push further. “Do you know why? Who is behind this?”

“At first I thought maybe just your run of the mill hijacking, but if you add in the fake message and tickets, this all has to be aimed at me somehow.” MacGyver paused, thinking of all the times his arch nemesis had played these silly games. “Pete, what if it’s Murdoc? If he’s discovered I have a son, it would make Sam a prime target.”

“The problem is you’ve ticked off way more than Murdoc in your time. Mac, the list of possible people behind this could be endless.” Pete sounded frustrated. “Look, the best thing we can do is for me to liaise right away with the authorities on this. I’ll deal with the airport, police and anyone else I need to. You just look after Sam, and watch your back.”

“I need a passenger manifest.” MacGyver was still thinking, working out every possible angle. Somebody somewhere knew what was going on, and he was running out of time

to find out who. “And any information you can get about the people on that manifest, Pete. Any skeletons in the closet, right down to parking tickets.”

“I hear you...”

“And one more thing – I need an avionics expert for a Boeing 747 on the line as soon as you can.” Mac took a second, thinking about the device he’d seen. He hadn’t mentioned it to the passengers, and they might be listening now. He still didn’t want to panic them. Not yet. “I have some questions.”

“Understood. I’ll get to work on it all right away.”

“Just keep the line open, Pete. I don’t know if I can get a connection again if we lose it.” Mac ushered Dana over as he spoke. “Can you hold the phone and keep the line?” He asked, putting a hand over the mike even though he didn’t need to.

Dana nodded and took the Airfone, but she looked worried.

Mac noticed instantly. “What’s wrong?”

“Well, two things...” Dana seemed almost reluctant to answer. “First, Dean is awake.” She pointed over to where they’d left the co-pilot and he was sitting up on the chair, rubbing his head like he had a hangover.

“And that’s bad?” *Great, I don’t have to land this bird on my own after all.*

Dana looked almost apologetic as her gaze shifted to another seat. “No...but it’s Sam. He’s not doing so well.”

MacGyver didn’t need her to say anything else. Leaving the phone in her capable care, he scooted to Sam’s side, trying to keep a smile on his face.

Sam looked up as he approached, and Mac could see fear in his son’s eyes. And why wouldn’t there be? This was the first time Sam had taken a bullet, and hopefully the last.

Mac had taken a few in the line of duty over the years, and it wasn’t an experience he wished on his son. The irony, though, was that somehow MacGyver had always gotten away with it. Most had been flesh wounds, and those that hadn’t had always managed to miss anything vital.

Why couldn’t Sam have been so lucky?

“Do I look *that* bad?” Sam pulled a face as Mac kneeled by his side. “I feel that bad,” he admitted. “And...I can’t feel my arm so much...”

“The bullet probably damaged some nerves,” Mac replied honestly.

What he wasn't so honest about was what his own experience was telling him.

Sam was pale, and every now and then he slurred his words. He was getting sleepy, and keeping awake was going to get harder and harder.

The bleeding appeared to have stopped, but it was the amount Sam had already lost that was causing the problem. He was going into shock, and no duct tape or pen knife was going to fix him.

*This is my fault. Someone has a grudge against me, and Sam has had to pay the price.*

“I'm kinda cold.” Sam shivered and then blinked like he was trying to keep focused.

*Anyone I ever get close to gets hurt or worse...*

Mac reached up and pulled out a blanket from the overhead locker, laying it gently over his son. “You just stay awake for me, okay? I might need your help later, so no snoozing.”

Sam swallowed and even that seemed an effort. “I already snoozed earlier, remember?”

“Like Sleeping Beauty, except for the extra snoring,” Mac tried to tease, to make Sam forget all the pain and fear for a moment, but his mind still screamed that this was going to end badly.

A voice thankfully broke him from that thought.

“Mr. MacGyver?” It was Dana, and she was holding out the Airfone. “Your friend needs to speak to you.”

Mac laid hand on Sam's good shoulder for a second reassuringly. “I'll be back soon.”

“Just go save the plane, dad,” Sam whispered as MacGyver moved away. “Just do what you always do...”

Mac took the phone from Dana and was relieved to hear Pete's voice once again. It was funny how a portly blind man with very little hair and a penchant for junk food could be so comforting, but Pete was all that and more.

MacGyver had looked up to Pete for years, and that would never change.

“Pete, what ya got for me?”

“I have your avionics expert as promised.” There was a click on the line as Pete pressed the conference button, letting everyone join in the conversation despite being in different locations.

The ex-Boeing employee didn’t waste time on small talk. “How can I help?” His question was simple, but that was all it needed to be.

Explaining what was in the avionics bay wasn’t going to be so easy.

Mac took a second to bring the picture back into his head before beginning his description of what had been tampered with.

“There’s a small black box in the corner that almost every system has been wired into,” he recounted after giving a few more details. “It seems to cycle through those systems every few minutes, but I have no idea what each one does, or what we’d lose if I tried to disarm it.”

The expert took a breath so deep even Mac heard it down the line. “From what you’re describing, your terrorist has rigged the plane’s systems into a bomb that plays Russian roulette. I think it’s running random sequences and if anyone tries to disarm it or its maker activates it, then whatever sequence it’s on at the time is what systems it takes out.”

MacGyver had suspected as much, but that didn’t tell him *what* it would take out. “Any ideas what we’d lose if it’s activated?” he asked.

“Going on the information you’ve given; I’d say it’ll take out three vital functions in any one sequence. Trim control, cabin pressure, landing gear, fuel management, throttle control...”

“I get the picture,” MacGyver cut in. “Any way of telling which three will go together?”

“Maybe if you could watch it for awhile and tell me what system lights are going on and off as it goes through the various sequences?” The expert didn’t sound all that confident.

Mac rubbed at his temple. “So, basically, if I try to diffuse this thing or disengage the autopilot and it activates, we won’t even know what systems are going to go down until it happens. That’s just great...”

Pete joined in the conversation, his tone suggesting he was getting annoyed by both the device, and its maker. “This has to be the weirdest bomb ever. It doesn’t actually kill outright, unless its maker presses a trigger.”



“No, but it causes massive avionics malfunctions that will bring us down anyway,” Mac pointed out. “It’s like whoever is behind this wants to torment us before he makes the kill.”

“You’re still thinking Murdoc?” Pete asked.

“I don’t know.” MacGyver shook his head. “What I do know is that its one device my skills in bomb disposal won’t work on. I can’t beat it, Pete.”

“No, but maybe we can cheat it.” The Boeing guy offered. “It’s a massive risk, and I think we should still attempt to find the person who built it to try and get them to disarm it first.”

“And if we can’t?” Pete didn’t sound happy.

Mac suspected he knew where the expert was going. “I think he means we cut off the autopilot and let it activate the device, Pete, but hopefully on the right sequence that won’t make us explode in midair.” He looked over to Sam’s pallid form huddled under the blanket. “All I know is whatever we’re going to try, it has to be fast. I don’t think our bad guy has finished playing with us yet. And Sam isn’t doing so good.”

There was a slight pause and MacGyver thought he heard the rustling of paper coupled with a very familiar voice. He waited, hoping it was good news at last.

Eventually, Pete spoke again. “I think we might be able to help with finding your man. Nikki’s been working hard on this since you got in touch, and she’s dug up some interesting information from the manifest.”

Mac was surprised to hear Nikki was back at head office, but was glad she’d been there for Pete in his own absence. In fact, he was glad she was there right now, probably about to save his hide along with two hundred other passengers.

“What ya got, Pete?”

“It seems that one of the passengers on board – one Roger Mariotte has served time for fraud. But listen to this, not just any fraud. He was running an electronics company making sub-standard circuits that were in turn going to be sold as "A" grade to Boeing. If they’d actually have been fitted, those parts could easily have malfunctioned and caused a crash.”

“So this guy would know all the systems on board this plane and how to mess with them.” MacGyver theorized. “He has all the right credentials, and maybe a motive. Except for one thing.”

“Oh?” Pete sounded puzzled.

Mac explained. “I don’t know the man, and I’ve never even heard of this case. Why would I be a target? I mean, c’mon, this has to be linked to me, or why those tickets for this flight and the phony note from you?”

There was a pause while Pete obviously thought about it. “You’re right. It doesn’t make sense. I get that Mariotte might think Boeing is a target in some warped way because of the time he served in jail. But why pick on you?”

“Well, I think we’ve already accused the wrong man once already, maybe Mariotte isn’t our guy either? Having a motive is one thing, but there’s no evidence. All we have is a plane flying itself and two hundred passengers on borrowed time.”

“So, *now what?*” Frustration was creeping back into Pete’s voice, and MacGyver could just picture him sitting in his office feeling helpless.

But that wasn’t going to help them. Only one thing was – direct action.

“We find Mariotte,” Mac sighed. “And then we confront him, and hope he doesn’t have a gun or the bomb trigger in his hand...”

### **Part Three**

MacGyver handed the Airfone back to Dana and quickly strode over to where Dean Sheckley was sitting. The co-pilot looked slightly pale from his earlier ordeal, but he smiled as he saw Mac approaching.

“I hear I owe you my life?” Sheckley asked whilst rubbing at his neck absently.

Mac wasn’t interested in being hailed a hero. “Anyone would have done the same,” he suggested. “Right now, though, it’s your help I need. We think we know who is behind this, and it looks like the guy is onboard.”

Sheckley appeared surprised. “So it’s a real whacko then? Hijacking a plane is one thing, but to have the nerve to go down with it, now that’s something else.”

“Yeah, well, you and me need to do a head count. We’re looking for a passenger named Roger Mariotte. He should have been downstairs, but since we’ve moved everyone up here, and I doubt he’s going to just come forward...”

Sheckley nodded as if he got the picture. “And we don’t know what he looks like?”

Mac shook his head. “Afraid not.”

The co-pilot grudgingly pulled himself up from his seat and took a look around at all the passengers.

“If you gentlemen don’t mind, I have a suggestion for finding your man.” It was the little old lady again, and she was knitting away quite ferociously as she spoke.

Mac guessed it probably helped calm her nerves.

“Oh?” He asked, knowing “Jessica” had been right about quite a few things so far. Maybe she would be again.

“Well...” She pondered. “What about the wuss hiding in the toilet? Surely he should have come out by now unless he’s up to something no good?”

Realization hit MacGyver.

Why couldn’t he have seen this before?

If the little man they’d seen earlier was Mariotte, it all made perfect sense.

Mariotte wasn’t scared in there; he was probably using whatever he had in the briefcase to “remote hijack” the plane.

Mac nodded to Sheckley. “I think she has a point. Wanna help me check the guy out?”

“You got it!” Dean loosened his tie and began heading to the rear of the plane as if he expected to be in a fight.

MacGyver brought up the rear, his pulse pounding in his veins. Was he about to confront the man that had ultimately caused Sam’s injury?

*And why?*

Maybe he’d know soon enough.

They reached the door and Mac quietly checked the latch. It was still locked from the inside.

“Hey Mariotte, you mind coming out for a while? We got people out here bursting for the toilet...” It was a ruse that he didn’t expect to work, but it never hurt to try your luck.

Mariotte answered with silence.

*Okay, you wanna play it the hard way?*

“Mariotte, open up this door, or we’ll kick it down.” MacGyver tried the tougher approach. Perhaps the guy really was a wuss.

Still nothing.

“I say we kick it down now!” Sheckley stood back ready and Mac nodded in agreement.

Taking a step back himself, the troubleshooter raised his boot and put his full weight behind the kick.

The door held onto its hinges stubbornly, and he was forced to lash out again. This time it gave with a sickening yelp of metal being warped and bent.

Mariotte was cowering as far back as he could, his wiry hands clinging to his briefcase like it held a treasure.

Sheckley grabbed him by the collar and dragged him into the aisle. The co-pilot’s face was a masque of uncontrolled rage. “I should take you up front and make you sit in the pilot’s chair,” he spat. “Maybe a dose of your own medicine is just what you need!”

MacGyver stepped between them, taking Sheckley’s shaking arm and prying it gently away from the other man’s neck. “We’re better than that. We’re better than *him*.”

Sheckley eyed Mariotte but moved back, his hands still trembling with anger. “Tell that to my dead friend back there.”

Mac understood just how the co-pilot felt. He had the same anger burning into him every time he thought about Sam. But harming Mariotte was never an option.

There was still a chance they could get information, or technology from him to safely land the flight, and that had to be their priority.

MacGyver turned back to Mariotte and yanked the briefcase from his hands. With a flick of his wrist it surprisingly opened, but then, considering what was left inside, it didn’t need to be locked.

Mariotte had destroyed every piece of equipment he’d been carrying, even down to an obvious trigger for the device in avionics. Now, all that remained was a case full of wires, circuits and other electrical components even MacGyver didn’t recognize.

Nothing was going to be repairable, not even if they had a lab – which they didn’t.

“Jessica” noted the look on Mac’s face and put down her knitting. “I take it that means we’re still in trouble?”

There was no time for lies. Not here, not now.

“Yes, ma’am,” MacGyver admitted honestly.

Grant huffed and stood up from his seat. This time, none of the passengers moved to stop him. Maybe they felt like his brand of justice was what they needed now. Although Mac hoped that wasn’t the case. He still needed these people on his side.

“Let me deal with this little runt,” Grant barked. “Then we’ll see who’s in trouble!”

Several of the people sitting nearest to the marshal began to bob their heads, agreeing with him.

The situation could get out of hand quickly if Mac didn’t get control back. He held up a hand. “Violence and the love of it is what started this whole thing. This man, for whatever reason, has rigged this plane to be under his control, and I think we all know what his intentions are. Hitting him isn’t going to change a dang thing.”

Mariotte watched with beady eyes, but didn’t comment. He seemed totally at peace with what he was doing.

MacGyver looked at him. “Why?” He asked, scowling at the little man as he tried to understand his reasoning. “I get your crazy logic behind picking on the plane, but why me? How do I fit into all this? And why make all these people suffer?”

Mariotte still didn’t answer. He folded his arms stubbornly and looked away.

That left MacGyver with only one option – but it wasn’t one he could take without asking the passengers first. He turned to face them, with the co-pilot at his side.

“Okay, folks, you might want to listen up...” Mac cleared his throat. Suddenly it had become very dry. “This man has taken control of the plane, and he’s also rigged it so that if we try and take control back we lose some vital systems.”

“Jessica” raised a knitting needle in the air. “Excuse me young man, but are you trying to tell us politely that there is a bomb on board?”

Mac thought about it, and in real sense he guessed he was. “Yes, and no,” he admitted. “You see the thing isn’t rigged to explode if we touch it, it’s designed to randomly destroy circuits down in avionics.”

“Which in turn could make this bird explode in midair?” Marvin looked scared as he asked the question, and he held tightly onto his son as if it might somehow put an invisible shield around the boy.

“I’m hoping we can make it choose a less destructive option than that,” MacGyver rubbed at his temple. “But I have to admit it could happen. That’s why I’m giving you all the choice before I try anything.”

“And what makes *you* qualified to go touching anything?” Typically, it was Grant who once again had a lack of trust.

Mac smiled. “Oh, I’d say the number of devices I managed to deactivate over in ‘Nam makes me a pretty good choice.”

The passengers mumbled among themselves for a moment and then “Jessica” poked her needle in the air again. “I say we let this young fella try!”

“Me too,” Marvin agreed.

Around them, the consensus seemed to be the same.

Mac let out a sigh of relief.

They had a chance – it was only a small one, but he’d take those odds.

Walking quickly back over to Dana, he once again took the Airfone and was reassured when Pete was still on the line.” Pete, is the Boeing guy still with you? I think we’re gonna need him.”

“He’s here,” Pete confirmed. “No luck with Mariotte then?”

“Nope, he’s not talking.” Mac glanced across to where Mariotte was sitting. The man was actually grinning at the passengers. “There’s only one option now, Pete. I need your man to talk me through cutting the autopilot, and I need to know exactly how each system is laid out so I can try and figure out what we’re going to lose when this thing pops.”

“We’re ready,” Pete offered. “But, Mac...I have some more news about Mariotte. Nikki’s managed to dig into the case some more, and it turns out this whole vendetta thing was never about you.”

“I could have told you that!”

Pete sounded apologetic. “Mac, it’s Sam. He was the target all along, not you.”

MacGyver did a double take. “*Say what?*”

“Nikki’s discovered that Sam uncovered what Mariotte was up to whilst working on a story about aviation safety. He was the one that turned Mariotte in after he took photos of

the guy making a payoff. You didn't cause this Mac, so stop beating yourself up about it."

There was a pause as if Pete was going to say something else, but had been interrupted somehow. Muffled voices followed, and then his old friend was back on the line.

And it wasn't good news.

"Mac, Nikki just relayed your plan to the authorities..."

"And they're going to have the police and emergency crews standing by, right?" MacGyver suspected that wasn't going to be the case, and he was correct.

"Not exactly. The powers that be don't want that plane anywhere near L.A. while there's a possibility it could explode in midair or crash. The debris alone falling on houses..."

MacGyver got the picture. It made perfect sense.

But it still wasn't fair.

"And if we try it anyway?" He pretty much knew what the authorities' next move would be.

"They're saying if you try and bring the plane anywhere near the city, they'll be forced to instruct the air force to bring you down. They think it's an acceptable loss compared to the possible alternatives." Pete was obviously pained to be saying any of this, and MacGyver felt sorry to be putting his old friend through so much.

Pete continued with what he'd been told. "We've been checking for a landing strip in a less populated area, but so far we haven't found anything big enough for a 747 close enough given what fuel you have."

"So basically, we're all dead." Frustration was creeping into Mac's tone. He didn't really blame the authorities. Heck, if he had to make a choice, he'd probably have done the same.

But giving in now, well that just wasn't in his nature.

MacGyver took a long deep breath and let his mind clear. There was always an option if you looked hard enough for it. Always something that had been overlooked, or perhaps not considered at all.

Mac put the phone back to his ear. "Listen, Pete, I need to drop the line to make another call. I think I know someone who might have the answer to this."

“You do?”

Mac didn't waste time responding. He hung up, and quickly redialed.

The only issue now, was if the person he was calling would even be there. It wasn't as if he had a very reliable reputation.

Seconds ticked away and Mac could feel himself willing his old friend Jack Dalton to answer.

Eventually, the line clicked and buzzed, before a far too jovial voice announced, “Jack Dalton's Flying Circus at your service, no stunt too large, no party too small...”

MacGyver didn't have time to let Dalton blather. “Jack, will you just shut up!”

“Mac, how could you? It took me two days to write that speech...I may even patent it.”

“I think you mean copyright.”

“That too!”

MacGyver almost hung up. Almost. “Jack listen, I need your help, and I'm serious when I say there's no time for fun stuff. Sam's life, my life, *two hundred lives*, are all in your hands...”

Jack seemed to actually like that idea. “Well why didn't you say so, kemo sabe? What can I do you for?” he still didn't think MacGyver was serious.

“Jack, I'm on a hijacked plane, and the only way to get back control is to deactivate the autopilot, which will possibly set off a bomb. The authorities can't risk us flying into L.A. like this.”

Dalton finally took on the gravity of the situation. “You're not joking, are you?” He swallowed hard. “What do you need me for?”

“We need an airstrip outside the city big enough for a 747. Preferably in an area where no one lives.” MacGyver sounded just as desperate as he was. His nerves jangled as he said the words.

Jack thought about it so long Mac wasn't sure if the line had gone dead, or if Dalton just didn't have an answer.

“Okay, Mac, the only place I can think of is an old strip I used to use back in my um...well, less informed years. It's in the Mojave Desert. The only problem is, it's so



ancient and overgrown at one end, I really don't know if you'd get a Boeing down there...I mean, the plane I used for my "dealing" was a heck of a lot smaller."

"Jack, I'll take what I can get. I'm gonna hand you over to the co-pilot. Tell him the co-ordinates and anything else you can about the place that might help." MacGyver handed the Airfone to Sheckley as quickly as he could.

While the co-pilot talked to Jack, MacGyver plucked another phone from its slot and redialed Pete. Realizing seconds later that he really should have checked for traps – and yet, there were none.

*This isn't right. Mariotte isn't dumb enough not to have thought of these things.*

Reflexively, he turned to stare at Mariotte.

The little man was manically grinning back, his almost mad expression suggesting he'd lost his mind. Or, that even now, the game wasn't over.

MacGyver didn't like the latter option, but had no choice to go with whatever blows fate dealt next.

For now, he put his attention back on the Airfone.

He waited, a lump in his throat as the line too forever to connect. Just how far out *could* an Airfone work, anyway?

After a few nervy moments, Pete answered.

"Pete, I think we've got something. Jack knows of an old abandoned airfield that just might work out in the Mojave Desert. Do you think you can get us the green light to at least try without being shot down?"

"How much time do you have left before you reach the point of no return?" Pete sounded tense, but then, who wouldn't.

"Not long," MacGyver answered honestly. "And if the device causes a fuel dump..."

"Mac, just try it. I'll sort out the details this end. As long as you're nowhere near any populated areas you should be okay. Can you get me the co-ordinates? I'll try my best to get some lights out there for you and the emergency services."

Mac almost relaxed. They had a chance, however small. "I'll get the co-pilot to relay them to you once he has all the details from Jack. Can you get your Boeing guy back on the line? I'm going to need him one last time."

“Will do.”

MacGyver kept the Airfone in his hand, but before he went anywhere near avionics again, he had to see Sam. They might both be about to die anyway, so he had to make his peace with the son he had only known for such a short while.

As Mac approached where Sam was propped, the terrible thought that he might already be too late crept into his mind.

Sam was still under the blanket his father had given him, but his eyes were now closed and he looked far too still, too ashen.

For a moment, MacGyver was too scared to even touch his son.

Not now. *Not NOW!*

Mac dared himself to feel for the throb of blood at his son’s neck, willing it to be there, and was more than relieved when he found the weak and thready thrum of Sam’s pulse.

How long Sam had was anyone’s guess, but then, how long they all had right now was pretty much down to what MacGyver did next.

He hunkered down and looked at Sam, suddenly speechless, even if his son had been conscious.

Eventually, the only thing he could bear to say were four simple words, whispered almost under his breath. “I love you, son.”

MacGyver stood then, determined that it would not be the last thing he ever got to say Sam.

Focusing on the Boeing’s plight, he scooted down the stairs and opened the avionics access hatch back up. Lowering himself down, he dropped the final foot or so and then used the light he’d had from earlier to find his way back to the correct panel.

“Pete, you guys ready?”

“We’re here.”

Mac took down a long calming breath. “Okay, let’s do this. Firstly, we need to try and figure out what these sequences control...” He watched, looking for any clues.

The device seemed to have three colored LED’s which illuminated at random. One red, one amber and one green. These were the three sequences they needed to figure out. As

they blinked, Mac watched to see what systems seemed to react. Each time, he relayed anything he thought was relevant to the Boeing expert on the line.

The whole thing cycled every two minutes – not long at all, unless your life happened to depend on the outcome.

“Does that give you any clue what systems we might lose for each color?” MacGyver asked hopefully.

“The red phase isn’t giving up any secrets from what you’ve told me,” the Boeing man admitted. “I have no idea what it will affect if you cut the autopilot on that run. The amber phase will most probably take out landing gear, cabin pressure and I think you’re going to dump fuel. The green phase is throttle control, trim control, and one other we can’t identify...”

MacGyver scowled. “Not the greatest options I’ve ever been given, but I guess it’s better than an out an out explosion in mid-air. Unless we get that when the fuel dumps...”

He watched the sequence of lights changing one last time, wondering if he could even cut the autopilot to land on a specific color. Was he that fast?

Behind him, Mac heard someone drop down into the bay with him. He looked over his shoulder to see Sheckley joining him.

“Everything set up topside?” Mac asked.

Sheckley nodded. “I’m as ready as I’ll ever be. Did you manage to figure the device out?”

“Some.” MacGyver bit his lip. “We have one sequence with no answers, one we pretty much lose control of the plane, and one were we lose fuel, cabin pressure and landing gear.”

Color seemed to drain from the co-pilot’s face as he was given the news. What he had expected was anyone’s guess, but it obviously was something better than what they’d ended up with.

The Boeing guy came back on. His tone was low and somewhat somber, as if he didn’t think they really had an option that would work. “It’s not my call, but, if I were you, I’d take the amber phase.”

Mac nodded to himself, and the man he couldn’t see the other end of the line. “Yeah, I was thinking that.” He looked to Sheckley. “You better go tell the passengers to expect the oxygen masks to drop once the cabin pressure falls. Make sure they know what to do, then get in the cockpit ready to take control once I get the autopilot off.”

Sheckley bobbed his head in affirmation and then vanished into the darkness and out of avionics.

Mac watched him go and then turned back to the device, and all the systems it was attached to. He tugged out his penknife and several other items from his pocket, including a paperclip, some gum, and a small flattened roll of duct tape.

Even if he didn't need them, the items were somehow familiar and comforting in these situations.

“Okay, let's take out the autopilot and set this thing in motion...” MacGyver spoke into the Airfone, and then placed it on the floor ready to work.

The Boeing expert quickly launched into his instructions, pointing out the correct circuits to remove and which wires to cut. “...once the board is slotted out, you'll see three wires behind it. You'll need to cut the brown one and then join it to the red the other side...”

MacGyver examined everything he needed to do. “And the final part?” He asked.

“There are two connections you'll need to bridge somehow – this is the point where you'll need to time your move with the device sequence being on amber.”

Mac looked at his goodies, deliberating. Should he go for the paperclip, or the gum paper? In the end, he chose the clip. He was now ready to start the “procedure”.

“Right, this is it. I'm going for it.” MacGyver began by slotting out the boards he'd been told, his palms warm and sweaty.

Then he took his knife and quickly sliced through the brown and red wires, joining them. Somewhere, he could have sworn he heard a clicking. He swallowed hard, hoping the device hadn't already been triggered.

Tense seconds passed, but the plane didn't alter course, or the cabin pressure change. He nodded to himself.

Time to watch the sequence and make his move.

The colors seemed to linger on each far longer than he'd remembered, and it seemed like amber would never take its turn. The device ran through red and green three times, as if it knew it was about to be beaten.

Then, finally the amber LED illuminated, and MacGyver pounced, bridging the connections with his impromptu tool.

From somewhere in the cabinet, there was a pop and a hiss, followed by the smell of something overloading.

To confirm it, the Boeing suddenly banked to the right and MacGyver was forced to grab the fuselage lagging to stop himself from falling.

Someone in the cabin above let out a small yelp of fear, galvanizing Mac into action.

He needed to get topside before all the air was gone.

Mac scrambled to the hatch, grabbed the edges and hauled his body through the hole.

Around him, people had grabbed the oxygen masks from the ceiling and were clutching them to their faces in blind panic.

MacGyver snatched one of the masks and took several deep breaths before moving lithely back up the stairs. As he raced down the aisle, his eyes locked onto Sam's seat.

Dana had taken the one next to Sam and had done her best to make him secure and safe. Even now, she held an arm across him, making sure he didn't roll as the plane lurched.

MacGyver nodded his thanks to her, and it was all he could do not to stop and be with his son as he moved past.

The overhead cabin lighting flickered as he reached the cockpit, and then, after a moment's pause it dulled into emergency lighting mode.

The muted glow made the cabin seem surreal somehow, like it was all a dream he would soon wake from.

Then the Boeing yawed again, reminding MacGyver that Sheckley was upfront, and probably desperately needed his help to fly the plane.

The security door had been left open, and Mac dived straight into the cockpit to find Sheckley in his seat, doing his best with the controls.

He moved to pull the dead pilot from his perch to try and help, but Sheckley quickly pulled off his own mask and gestured to the base of the seat. It was still electrified. Killing the autopilot and engaging the device had done nothing to quell its deadly legacy.

"You need to find a way to disable that thing," Sheckley looked between his controls and MacGyver. "I can't fly this bird on my own if we lose the engines!"

Mac nodded. If the fuel dumped fast enough, they'd be out before they reached the landing site, but if they could keep enough altitude they still might be able to glide the thing in "dead stick" like shuttle pilots did after re-entry.

But that would only work if he could actually climb in and help.

And right now, he couldn't even touch the pilot's prone form without frying too...

#### **Part Four**

As MacGyver leaned down to attack the booby trap, he chided himself mentally for not thinking about the seat before. It had been foolish to simply think it would deactivate when he took out the autopilot, and now that had come back to haunt him.

He grabbed the overhead oxygen mask and slid it on before trying to work. He would be good to no one if he hit the deck from hypoxia.

Tracing the wires from the pilot's seat, Mac, realized he had no idea what they were wired into. He could simply cut them and hope for the best, but was that another trap in itself?

A picture of Mariotte's grinning face filled his head as he worked, and no matter how hard he tried he couldn't push it away.

Mac glanced at Sheckley as he tussled with the yoke, readjusting the throttles as he attempted to get the Boeing to an optimum airspeed to reserve fuel.

There was no time to worry about another trick from Mariotte. Pulling out his knife, he sliced through the power feed and then dropped his knife against the metal frame of the chair, looking for any signs of sparks or current in case their bad guy had a backup.

The seat appeared to be safe.

Mac clambered back up and grabbed the pilot's body, prying the dead man from where he'd fallen and gently placing him on the floor behind.

His mind screamed that this could be Sam soon, but he wouldn't think like that.

*Sam's gonna make it.*

He dropped into the now empty seat and examined the controls in front of him.

MacGyver had flown an air force jet over Afghanistan and a Cessna with no front wheel, but this was far from either of them, and frankly, if he'd had time, he'd have been intimidated.

Instead, he looked across to Sheckley. "Okay, what do we do?"

Sheckley pointed to the altimeter. It was reading 35,000 feet. "We need to maintain as much height as we can. The more altitude we put between us and the ground, the better if we have to glide her in."

"But if we stay at this height, we can't come off oxygen, either," Mac concluded. "What about fuel?"

Sheckley shook his head. "I don't know. We have a tail wind which is helping, but at the rate we're dumping it, added to the actual burn rate...it's going to be close." He nodded towards the switch for the landing gear. "Do you think it's worth even trying once we get closer?"

Mac considered it. The thing was, once again, Mariotte could have added another little surprise for them if they hit the button. "Honestly," he admitted. "I don't know..."

As if to taunt them further, the overhead lights flickered, and for a second, all the dials and clocks in the cockpit dimmed.

MacGyver held his breath, waiting for something to happen.

"What was that?" he eventually asked, hoping the co-pilot had some rational explanation. "Some kind of power surge?"

Sheckley shook his head and tapped the fuel gauges as if he thought they might be malfunctioning. "The rate we're dumping fuel just increased," he said glumly.

Mac's eyes moved to the gauges and seemed transfixed by them as the Boeing moved on through the night. Everything hinged on that one factor now, and for once, there was no miracle up his sleeve to improve their odds.

He moved his gaze to look out across the heavens. They were flying above a cloud bank that seemed to ripple innocently below like a white carpet in the darkness.

On any other night, it would have been beautiful, but tonight it was a reminder of just how far they could all fall.

MacGyver checked his watch and realized he'd been staring at the sky for almost twenty minutes. Funny, how time played tricks on the mind in situations like this.

A sudden beeping brought the troubleshooter back to the moment, and his eyes locked onto the console section creating the sound. It was the low fuel warning indicator.

Instinctively he took the yoke in front of him, knowing that he'd soon be needed by the co-pilot to hold the plane in position.

“How long until we reach the strip?” Mac dared to ask.

Sheckley appeared to do a mental calculation. “I'd guess another twenty minutes...”

“And the fuel?”

The co-pilot looked at the gauges one last time as if he could magic them to read higher. “We'll lose the engines in about ten.”

That meant they had several thousand feet of gliding and praying.

The warning continued to wail as two red lights illuminated on the flight deck until the inevitable happened.

One at a time, the four Rolls Royce turbines began to shutdown.

“We just lost number four...” Sheckley made the announcement, even though Mac was well aware of what was going on.

The controls became heavy in MacGyver's hands, the altimeter began to show a decent, and worse still, the onboard systems started to shutdown.

The plane's engines were also its generators. They provided the power for all of the systems including hydraulics, the cockpit controls – *basically everything*.

Without them, the Boeing was dead.

MacGyver closed his eyes, just for a second, and was relieved when he finally felt the emergency generator kick in. It was designed for situations just like theirs, but until it had fired up, there was always the possibility that too had been sabotaged.

The dull glow from the instrument clusters grew bright again, and they were at least in some kind of control.

Mac checked the altimeter, 25,000 feet and dropping. They weren't exactly going down like a stone, but it wasn't a pretty decent, either.

The Boeing hit a bank of thin cirrus cloud and instantly began to shake as it dropped into a pocket of turbulence.



That was all they needed with so little control.

The yoke started to tremble in Mac's hands, and as he glanced over, he could see Sheckley struggling with his controls too.

They had to keep the nose up and the plane on course, but nature wasn't making it easy.

The cabin felt like it belonged on a rollercoaster as the Boeing bucked in the rapidly moving pockets of air.

And then, as suddenly as it had begun, they were through the turbulence, and through the last of the clouds.

Below, was a simple blackness that was as frightening as looking into the maw of Hell.

They were over an uninhabited section of the Mojave Desert – no lights, no traffic, just a blank nothingness that seemed to beckon the plane into the ground.

“How long until we reach the strip?” MacGyver was pulling back on the controls until his arms ached and sweat dripped from his brow. But it wasn't his strength giving up that was worrying him. If Pete had actually had time to get help out here, then shouldn't they be seeing the landing site by now?

Sheckley's answer echoed his thoughts. “We should see it, if they've managed to get out here. And if they haven't, there isn't a hope in hell we'll get down without lights to guide us.”

MacGyver instantly began scanning the fast approaching ground from his side window as well as ahead. If they were a little out with course calculations, they needed to know now in time to make some corrections.

Sheckley did much the same from his side of the flight deck.

Seconds ticked by, and the plane lost even more altitude while they searched.

“There!” Finally MacGyver spotted what they were looking for. At this height, it was impossible to tell what Pete Thornton had managed to get jury-rigged to guide them in, but something was lighting up the ground ahead and to their left.

Sheckley instantly made a course correction, which Mac followed to the letter. Then, once they were lined up for the impromptu runway, the co-pilot yanked off his oxygen mask, allowing the intensity of his expression to finally be seen.

Mac checked the altimeter again. They were below 10,000 feet now, so perfectly safe to lose his mask too. He dared to let a hand leave the controls for just a second to remove it, and then focused back on the juddering yoke and the fast approaching earth.

Sheckley adjusted the flaps, and stared longingly at the landing gear controls. He looked over to MacGyver, his eyes apologizing for what he was about to do, and then he hit the button that should have brought the gear down and lock it.

Mac's heart leapt as he waited for an explosion or loss of another system, but nothing happened.

Including the landing gear lowering.

The co-pilot shrugged. "I had to try..."

The move could have been disastrous, but there was no time to argue about that now.

They were low enough now for MacGyver to see the huge search lights guiding them down. He could see a white river of foam that fire crews had spread across the ancient strip to try and stop any sparks igniting either fuel, or their bomb.

And somehow, even though his mind was concentrating on a million other things, Mac's eyes spotted a LifeFlight air ambulance sitting at the very far edge of the strip.

*Sam...*

It looked like Pete had thought of everything, and more.

As long as the Boeing didn't break up or explode on impact.

And that was what they were about to find out.

"We need to get the nose up!" Sheckley yelled as he realized they still had too much airspeed considering their angle of decent.

Both men yanked back hard on the controls, but the Boeing didn't want to play ball. It stubbornly held its course until the last possible second before leveling out just as it hit the ground.

The dead engines hit the concrete first, sliding on the recently laid foam just enough not to cause sparks.

Mac felt the sensation of metal grinding as the Boeing bounced slightly, its momentum pushing it forwards towards the end of the runway at alarming speed.

And without wheels, that meant no brakes.

There was nothing MacGyver or Sheckley could do now, and yet both bizarrely felt compelled to keep hold of the controls as if they could will the plane to a halt.

Mac saw the blur of emergency vehicle lights racing after them, some attempting to douse the jet in more fire suppressing foam even as it slid.

A metallic groan from the left side made MacGyver stare from the window, only to see the outboard engine begin to split from the wing. They were lucky there wasn't a drop of fuel left, or the foam may not have been enough to stop a fireball.

Ahead, the runway was petering out into a mass of brush, and beyond that simple desert sand. They were out of concrete.

Instinctively, Mac and the co-pilot finally let go of the yokes and raised their hands in front of their faces, fully expecting the Boeing to come to a stop with a nasty jolt, possibly showering them with shattered glass.

The plane seemed to bounce again as it left the strip, and then abruptly it was over.

They weren't moving anymore.

MacGyver shook himself. He felt dazed, but was surprisingly in one piece, as was the cockpit screen.

He unbuckled himself, noting his hands were shaking. After all the situations he'd been in, that didn't happen too often.

Sheckley was out of his seat first and was popping the emergency exit and inflatable chutes to get people off.

As the huge "balloon" expanded and rolled to the ground, MacGyver could already see fire crews and E.M.T.'s waiting to grab the first of the escaping passengers.

Apart from the noise from outside and the odd comment from the flight crew the Boeing was eerily silent. It was like some weird portent that even now they were not safe.

Mac carefully pushed past the fleeing crowd and into the rear of the plane. His priority now was Sam.

Dana was still with him, but as she saw Mac approach she rose to leave and help Sheckley with the other passengers.

Sam was as still as ever, but MacGyver noted the slow rise and fall of his chest and knew he was still in the land of the living. Being cautious not to jostle his son, he gently lifted Sam from the seat, and then paused.

In everyone's haste to get off the plane, they'd completely forgotten Mariotte. He was still tied up in his seat, and he was still as calm as ever.

But then, why wouldn't the passengers and crew leave him behind? There was still the possibility of a bomb on the aircraft – a bomb Mariotte had planted.

MacGyver considered getting Sam to the chute and safety and then returning to free Mariotte, but then the expression on Mariotte's face made him pause.

Mariotte was grinning wildly, his eyes locked to MacGyver's. "I still win," he whispered cryptically.

*Is he nuts? The plane is down; the cops are outside, how the heck does he still win?*

Then Mac realized he could hear something.

Something he shouldn't expect to hear right here, right now.

The Airfone in the back of Mariotte's seat was *ringing*.

Normally, Airfones couldn't take incoming calls, but MacGyver had been reading an article earlier in his tech magazine about a new system being trialed called Genstar – and that was capable of incoming calls and more. It wasn't scheduled to go public until '93, but the system on this flight was obviously part of the trial.

*This is why Mariotte didn't disable the phones. He needed them...*

Mariotte saw the look on the troubleshooter's face and seemed to realize the penny had dropped. He laughed. "I was never going to go to all this trouble and not have a backup trigger for my device."

Mac's eyes shot to the ringing Airfone as his mind fathomed out exactly what was happening.

The incoming call was most likely set on a timer. If the Boeing hadn't already been destroyed, then the call would trigger the bomb. It was Mariotte's own little failsafe to make sure that by a given time, Flight LA4177 was wiped from the planet.

*And that's exactly what's about to happen!*

There was no time to try and disarm anything, probably not even enough time to escape, but for Sam's sake, he had to try.

Spinning around with Sam, MacGyver was relieved to see the emergency exit now empty. That meant everyone else was off.

He made a dive for the doorway, virtually dragging Sam's unconscious form. It felt cruel and unfair, and his mind screamed that he was probably hurting Sam even more by the crude handling.

But it was better than the alternative.

Seconds seemed to last minutes, but eventually he felt the cold rush of air from outside on his face as he stood in front of the chute.

There was no time to be graceful, and no time to be gentle. Mac lowered Sam onto the huge inflatable and just pushed.

He turned then, just for a split second. Should he try to save Mariotte?

But there simply was no time left.

The Airfone suddenly stopped ringing. It clicked as if someone had lifted the receiver on the carefully rigged phone.

And then, all hell broke loose.

An explosion erupted from somewhere in avionics that ripped up the metal plate floor above it, and then tore straight on through into the upper first class level.

The 747 rocked with the severity of the blast, and windows burst from their sealed units to shower the desert with thousands of crystalline particles.

MacGyver jumped then, just as a second detonation shredded parts of the fuselage.

He was pushed forwards with the release of energy, and instead of sliding down the chute he flew outwards from the plane, only landing on the tube halfway down.

Mac grunted as the air was knocked from his lungs, and he came to a halt in a disheveled heap as the whole area was showered with debris.

He lay there for a moment, dazed, before being hauled to his feet and yanked to safety by a grateful passenger.

It was Marvin, eyes wide with both relief, and disbelief at what he'd just been through.

“Thanks,” Mac managed to mutter as he was ushered behind a safety cordon by a young police officer.

“I think I owe you more than just a helping hand off the ground,” Marvin insisted. “We all do...”

Mac wanted to say more, to tell everyone they owed him nothing, and that he’d done nothing special. But right now, his mind was screaming for something else.

Sam.

He looked around, but there were people everywhere. It was complete chaos.

Throngs of passengers, medics, cops and people in suits he could only assume were from Phoenix, or were feds.

Fire crews were trying to put out the blazing Boeing, and siren after siren wailed through the night air like yelping banshees.

It was like a scene from a “Die Hard” movie, complete with Christmas setting.

And somewhere, amongst this mess, was Sam.

“MacGyver!”

Mac’s eyes searched through the mayhem until he pinpointed the voice. It was Nikki, and she had Pete Thornton at her side.

She waved when she realized he’d spotted her, and Mac jogged over, hoping the pair had news about his son.

*Please tell me the medics are working on him...*

“Sam?” MacGyver could think of nothing else.

“They’re loading him onto the chopper,” Pete explained. “I’ve already made sure the local hospital are informed and have all his medical records.”

“I need to go be with him.”

Pete nodded, and from his expression it was obvious he could feel MacGyver’s pain, even if he couldn’t see it. “I have a car waiting to take us. The feds will probably want to debrief you, but that can wait.”

*Dang straight it can wait...*

Nikki appeared to read MacGyver's mind and gestured through the crowds beyond a yellow police tape. "C'mon, the car's this way."

Mac was through the barricade and into the limo before anyone could say more.

***Antelope Valley Hospital  
Lancaster  
California***

The journey in the car had been unbearable. Pete and Nikki had been as supportive as they knew how, but it wasn't enough. Time had seemed to stand still until MacGyver felt like he'd traveled to another dimension.

Now, sitting in the hospital waiting room, things hadn't improved any.

A huge Christmas tree complete with trimmings reminded him that this should be a joyous time, and instead every minute was agony.

Mac glanced at his watch for the fifteenth time and then began to get up to go to the duty station.

Pete called him back. "You do realize you've pestered that nurse eight times already?"

MacGyver knew he had, and flopped back onto the rather uncomfortable orange plastic chair. "Pete, this is taking too long. Something is wrong, I just know it."

Pete patted Mac's arm. "You're just thinking like a father. And I guess, that's pretty new to you. You have to give them time. I'm sure the doctors are doing their best. But they can't just wave a magic wand. You of all people should know that – the amount of bumps, scrapes and bullets you've taken."

Of course, Pete was right. MacGyver knew he was right.

That didn't make the knot in his stomach go away, though, did it?

A doctor still in green scrubs pushed through the double doors that led to the E.R. and ventured up to the duty station. She was talking pretty low, but Mac's ears had pricked the minute she'd entered, and he heard every word.

"We lost him in the O.R. the family will have to be informed..."

MacGyver was on his feet in an instant, but then he suddenly found he was lost for words. His mouth opened and he knew he should be approaching the doctor for answers. But he just couldn't make a sound.

He was numb.

The doctor appeared not to see him and scooted back through the doors where she'd entered before he could compose himself.

"Mac, it might not be Sam. She didn't give any details." Apparently, Pete had overheard the conversation too.

Before either could say more, another doctor entered from the E.R. and this time she approached MacGyver directly. It was crunch time.

"Mr. MacGyver?"

"That's me." Mac nodded, feeling the knot in his stomach suddenly come alive and do back-flips.

The brunette smiled reassuringly. "Your son, Sean is in recovery. Once we'd gotten him stabilized we had to take him down for emergency surgery. We needed to remove some bone fragments and take a look at some nerve damage caused by the bullet."

MacGyver was hearing the good news, but he wasn't taking it in. "He's..?"

"Going to be fine," the doctor concluded for him. "We don't expect any permanent problems, but he will need physical therapy once he's healed sufficiently."

Mac blinked. It was what he'd wanted to hear – had prayed for, and now he couldn't believe it. "Can I see him?"

"Once we move him to a room, yes. But we're not expecting him to be awake tonight." She smiled again and turned to leave. Then, on an apparent whim, she turned back and looked at MacGyver with a small flash of concern in her eyes. "You know, it's none of my business, but you look like hell. Why don't you go home, or to a motel? Get a shower, get some sleep, and come back in the morning. I promise you'll both look better by then."

And with that she was gone, padding back into the E.R. before MacGyver could argue.

"She's right, you know?" Pete offered. "I'm blind, and even I know you look like hell. I've sent Nikki to find a hotel. Why don't you come back and get cleaned up with us?"



Mac shook his head. "I wasn't there for him all his childhood. The least I can do is be here now."

Pete sighed. "He'd want you get some sleep, is what Sam would want."

A phone at the duty station began to ring and the nurse seated there picked it up. After a brief conversation she glanced over to both men. "Is there a Pete Thornton here?"

Pete frowned as if he wasn't expecting any messages, but headed towards the sound of the nurse's voice anyway. When he reached the counter, she passed the handset over to him.

Pete put it to his ear. "Hello." There was a brief silence while someone spoke the other end. "And you're absolutely sure?" His brow furrowed. "Your men have searched twice?" Pete bobbed his head and hung up.

When he turned to face MacGyver, he didn't look happy.

"What's up?" Mac knew his old friend too well to think this wasn't bad news.

"That was the feds," Pete admitted. "The fire crews have managed to put out the Boeing, but there's no sign of Mariotte's body. They've redone the search twice, still nothing."

"But he couldn't have lived through that!" Mac couldn't believe his ears. "I was lucky to get off myself. He has to be dead."

"Yeah, well that's what we used to say about Murdoc. Now we know better." Pete sat back down on one of the waiting room chairs. "Don't worry, once things are quieter and he thinks he's safe, he'll surface. Then we'll get him."

MacGyver wasn't happy. He anxiously paced back and forth needing answers. "What if he surfaces here tonight to finish off what he started? Sam can't exactly defend himself."

"I already have Atkins on it. He's outside recovery, and he'll be posted outside Sam's room once he's moved. He's our best man...at least, after you left." Pete seemed to stare at MacGyver, even though his eyes saw nothing. "We miss you, you know? *I miss you.*"

Mac couldn't resist a small smile. Truth be told, he'd missed Pete and the foundation more than he cared to admit. Life was a little "average" without Phoenix assignments to spice it up. "I've kinda missed you too."

Pete feigned offence. "*Kinda?* Is that all you can say?" He chuckled and then grew a little more serious. "I don't suppose there's anyway I could tempt you back? Even just the odd freelance job now and again?"

“I’m starting fresh, Pete, you know that. I have a son to think about now.”

“A *grown* son who has a life and job of his own,” Pete pointed out. “And besides, if you’re working for Phoenix, that means all our resources are at your fingertips. Resources that might help you find one Roger Mariotte...”

“That’s blackmail, Pete, you know that, right?” Mac flopped down onto the seat next to his old friend with a smirk. “You’re starting to sound as devious as Jack Dalton, and that’s saying something.”

Pete couldn’t resist another chuckle. “And is my cunning plan working?”

MacGyver considered it.

Once Sam was well again he’d be off reporting, and that would leave Mac looking for something to do with his life.

Yes, he’d originally planned on going it alone, doing conservation work and generally enjoying life now he was getting older.

But, he had to admit he’d missed Phoenix and all his friends there already.

“I’ll come and see you tomorrow, after I’ve cleaned up and we can discuss it.” Mac eventually conceded.

“What about tonight? Can’t I talk you into coming back with me and Nikki to the hotel?” Pete sighed as if he already knew the answer. “Atkins is watching Sam...”

“I’ll be staying,” MacGyver offered.

“*Why?*” Pete was obviously exasperated, but also resigned to the fact Mac wasn’t leaving.

“Because,” MacGyver teased. “You’ve already admitted Atkins is your *second* best.”

“Is that your warped way of accepting a job offer?”

MacGyver’s mouth ticked up at the edges, but he resisted a full-on smile. “We’ll see,” he said cryptically. “We’ll see...”

The End