

## Mean Streets

### Part One

Leonard pulled his sleeping bag higher, trying to close the gap between the bag and the scarf he'd wound around his neck. Even in California, the small hours of an April night were chilly. He burrowed down into the bag, the plastic sheeting underneath him rustling and prompting a muttered complaint from Jose, sharing his space under the bridge for the night.

Footsteps echoing off the broken pavement made him open his eyes, peering through the small space between scarf and hat. Footsteps meant danger to homeless people such as himself – gangs out for a bit of fun, police keen to move him on or junkies high on whatever they could get their hands on. Junkies were the worst, unpredictable, often violent. Only last week he'd encountered one who was convinced he was an angel, meting out justice on anyone his addled brain deemed unworthy. Leonard had run, but he'd later heard the junkie had smashed through the temporary camp some of his friends had set up, throwing everyone's belongings into the river before turning on one unfortunate and beating her so badly that she ended up in the hospital. Leonard shivered and pushed back the edge of his sleeping bag to get a better look as the footsteps grew closer.

Not the junkie back for another round of mayhem, but three dangerous looking gangers. Sensing trouble, and glad that he had chosen a dark corner, Leonard unzipped his sleeping bag as quietly as he could. The gangers were poking the piles of rubbish that had accumulated under the bridge. What could they be looking for? He stuffed his sleeping bag into an old sack and took a firm grip on his precious carrier bag of possessions, ready to make a fast getaway.

One of the gangers poked a long stick into a heap of cardboard boxes. There was a yell, and someone Leonard didn't know erupted out of the heap, fists swinging. The ganger clubbed him with the stick, sending the homeless man reeling. The ganger zip-tied the man's hands and started dragging him away.

All around Leonard, homeless people were waking up, gathering their things and preparing to flee. One young girl simply left everything behind, running on sparrow-thin legs for the relative safety of the lit streets. The second ganger caught her easily, clamping a hand over her face and kicking her feet out from under her.

Leonard saw Jose throw something at the first ganger's back, limping after him to try and rescue his victim. A third ganger stepped out of the shadows and flipped something around Jose's neck, turning and hoisting the old man up, making him cough and choke. Leonard stuffed his fist into this mouth to keep from screaming. He huddled down, willing himself to become invisible, and watched with tears in his eyes as the three homeless people were dragged away and loaded into a van parked at the end of the alley. Only when the van had rattled into life and roared away did he allow himself to cry.

What could he do? He couldn't chase the van, but he had to try and rescue Jose somehow. He felt anger at himself. He should have gone to help Jose the way Jose had gone to help the other man, but his courage had failed him. He looked around, his gaze lighting on a torn and rain-soaked pamphlet lodged behind an oil drum. He picked it up, mouthing the words written on it: Santa Luisa Mission.

Doc.

Doc would know what to do.

Leonard gathered his things and set off through the grey dawn towards the Mission.

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MacGyver hitched his rucksack on his shoulder and walked up the steps to the Mission. Sunlight slanted through the high windows of the old building, shining on the polished floor, the boxes of donated books and on the dust motes dancing in the air. He paused, breathing in the coffee-and-laundry smell of the mission, and nodded to Doc, kneeling in a sea of half-sorted books.

“How’re you doing?” MacGyver smiled, pleased to see his friend looking so well. He crouched down and unloaded his bag of books onto the floor. “A few more for your collection, here.”

“I’m well, and thank you for these.” Doc picked up the top two books and smiled. “Zane Grey? These will be popular, I’m sure of it.” The mission had been a lifesaver for Doc, providing him with a place to live and a job, one which allowed him to use his teaching skills and give something back to the community. He’d started a reading program for those of the local homeless who had slipped through the cracks in the school system, and his collection of books was always in need of new titles. A roof over his head and a steady income had improved Doc’s health, and MacGyver reflected that Doc looked younger now than when they’d first met.

The door banged open and a dishevelled figure burst through, falling full length into the pile of books. The carrier bag he’d been holding split open on impact, sending the contents shooting under the racks of donated clothing against the wall. A filthy sleeping bag in a sack rolled away under the stairwell. Doc and MacGyver scrambled up to help the fallen man.

“Leonard? Is that you?” Doc kneeled down, pushing back the matted curtain of hair. “What on earth is wrong?” MacGyver listened, but couldn’t make out the words in Leonard’s panicked speech. Doc seemed to understand, for he nodded and helped Leonard to his feet, leading him into the office. MacGyver gathered as many of Leonard’s scattered possessions as he could find, and followed.

Doc had sat Leonard down at the desk and given him a cup of coffee, which Leonard held in shaking hands. He looked at MacGyver over Leonard’s head and shook his head.

It took Doc half an hour to calm Leonard down enough to get the full story, by which time MacGyver had tidied the books, unblocked the kitchen sink and mended the window catch, making a mental note to fix his own hall window that evening. He came back to the office, waited for Doc to beckon him in, and sat down next to Leonard, making an effort not to lean away from the man’s smell. Leonard nodded his thanks as MacGyver gave him his bag, now repaired with duct tape, but wouldn’t meet his eye.

“So what’s going on?” MacGyver looked at Leonard, who started to speak, then faltered and shrank away from him. Doc nodded at Leonard’s panicked glance and took over.

“Someone is kidnapping homeless people.” He held up a hand to indicate to MacGyver that he had more to say. “Leonard was under the bridge last night – the same bridge where I met you, remember?” Doc smiled, remembering MacGyver’s ‘Grazer’ disguise.

“I remember.” MacGyver grinned back.

“Three gangers drew up in a van and kidnapped some of the street people sharing the bridge space. Leonard doesn’t think they were looking for anyone in particular, they just grabbed the first people they found and then drove away.” Doc looked across at Leonard, who nodded vigorously. “One of Leonard’s friends was taken – an older gentleman named Jose. He’s worried that Jose and the others are going to be harmed, and he wants us to help.”

“Wow.” MacGyver stood up and walked to the window, running a hand through his shaggy hair. “I can call Kate, but I don’t know if she’ll be able to help.” He turned to Leonard. “Kate is a detective, and she’s also my friend. Did you get the licence plate on the van, or anything she could use to identify the kidnappers?”

Leonard shook his head, his eyes filling with tears again.

"Would you know them if you saw them again?" MacGyver sat down and looked at Leonard across the desk. "Maybe if you saw a photo?" He watched Leonard think about this, then sigh and shrug.

"Maybe." Leonard's voice was hoarse. He coughed, wiped his mouth with his sleeve and scratched his beard. "I didn't stay." He sniffed, and a tear splashed onto the desk.

"Were they wearing gang colours? Do you remember anything about them?" MacGyver watched Leonard shake his head. "How about the van? Colour or make, maybe?" He stood up and shrugged helplessly at Doc as Leonard shook his head again.

"OK, have you heard about them kidnapping anyone before?" Doc leaned forward, placing one hand on Leonard's sleeve. "Leonard, if we're going to help, we have to have a place to start."

"I know." Leonard coughed again and nodded. "Maybe. There's always someone got it in for us, someone who wants to make us disappear. But this was different. It was like they were taking them for a reason, not just gangers doing shi-" He glanced at Doc and swallowed his next word. "Like you'd round up cattle, y'know?"

"Could you ask around? See if they've been anywhere else?" MacGyver frowned. "I could come with you if you like." He shook his head at Leonard's incredulous stare. "No, really! I've done this before, right Doc?"

"It's true, he has." Doc nodded, but Leonard shook his head.

"No way. No-one talks to a stranger, they don't have to." Leonard swallowed hard, gathering his courage. "I got this." He stood up, squaring his shoulders under his tattered coat. "I owe it to Jose!" He picked up his bag, slung his sack over his shoulder and marched out without another word.

It was night before Leonard returned, carrying the weight of bad news on his shoulders. Doc pulled out a chair for him and placed a sandwich on the desk next to the fresh coffee.

"I talked to everyone I could find." Leonard sighed and picked up the sandwich. "They've been around for about two weeks, picking people up pretty much at random. They do come back to the same sites though, especially if they know there'll be more people there." He took a bite of the sandwich.

"OK, we can work with that." MacGyver nodded. "Any idea when they might be back at the bridge again?"

"Next few nights, most likely." Leonard took another large bite and reached for the mug of coffee.

"Do you know all the people under the bridge?" MacGyver made a note on the back of an envelope, looking up to see Leonard making a rocking gesture with his hand.

"Mostly. But there's new people in all the time, y'know?" He swallowed and wiped his mouth with his hand. "I didn't know the other two who they took, not really. Only Jose."

"No problem. Leonard, I need you to get everyone you can find to meet me under the bridge tomorrow night. Can you do that?" MacGyver smiled at Leonard, who nodded.

"I can try. You got a plan?" he pushed back his hair, wondering what Doc's strange friend had in mind.

"Maybe." MacGyver grinned, and Leonard found himself smiling back. "I just need to make a couple phone calls, get some friends to help. That OK with you?"

"Yes." Leonard nodded. "If it means Jose will be safe, it's OK."

## Part Two

“You know there’s nothing I can act on here, right?” Kate Murphy sounded harassed. She balanced her coffee mug on a pile of LAPD files and reached for a pen. “No. I need at least the licence plate of the van and a description of the gangers. You know that, Mac.” She scribbled a note on a pad. “I can have a car swing by there a little more often, but more than that and I have to answer to the Chief.” She listened again, shaking her head and waving away a junior detective who tried to add another file to her crowded desk.

“The Chief says, ‘Now’.” The junior detective shrugged apologetically as Kate rolled her eyes.

“Mac, I gotta go.” Kate listened again and her eyes widened. “No! Absolutely not! You can’t just go chasing after... No. OK.” She looked at the receiver in disbelief. “That is hands down the dumbest smart guy I know!” She hurried away to her meeting, shooing the junior detective in front and hoping MacGyver wasn’t about to land himself – and a lot of homeless people – in a heap of trouble.

“I didn’t think she’d be able to help.” MacGyver sighed and put down the phone. “We don’t have enough evidence, do we?” Doc looked worried and MacGyver gave him a reassuring smile.

“No problem. We just go about finding the kidnappers another way.” He picked up the receiver again. “I don’t suppose you have any spray bottles round here, do you?”

Maybe some plant sprayers left over from the Community Garden project.” Doc got up from the desk. “You want me to go look?”

“Please.” MacGyver dialled a number and listened to the phone ring. “Billy? That you? I know, right? Been a while.” He listened, nodded and smiled. “Good to hear you too. Listen, are you busy? I got a favour to ask you. Well, really it’s a favour I need from Frog...”

“And you reckon this’ll work?” Leonard sniffed at the spray bottle, wrinkling his nose. “It doesn’t smell that strong to me.” MacGyver nodded, wondering how likely it was that Leonard would be able to smell anything over himself.

“Frog there will be able to track that scent for miles.” MacGyver indicated the bulldog, collapsed in a wrinkled heap at Billy Colton’s feet. Frog sat up, hearing his name, and Billy patted his head.

“He’s right. Frog here, he can track anything. Best nose in the business, right Boy?” Billy scratched behind Frog’s ears and the dog leaned into his touch.

“What business are you in?” Leonard looked at Billy, unable to decide whether he was looking at one of the good guys, or just a different kind of ganger.

“Uh... Retrievals.” MacGyver cut in before Billy could answer. Finding out that Billy was a bounty hunter might spook Leonard, and he didn’t want that. “Relax, Leonard. Billy’s a friend.”

“What are you using, anyway?” Billy picked up a plant sprayer and sniffed, careful not to get any on himself.

“Aniseed. Shake it up in water and bingo – instant scent trail for Frog to follow.” MacGyver picked up two of the sprayers and put them into a bag. “Want to give me a hand here?”

“Let me see if I have this right.” Billy picked up two of the sprayers, handing them to MacGyver. “We go down

to Leonard's bridge, tool up the street army with these-" he held up a sprayer as though aiming a gun and cracked off an imaginary shot. "Lie in wait disguised as street people and hope the kidnapppers show up. I miss anything?"

"That's about the size of it." MacGyver zipped the bag shut.

"What if they don't show?" Billy folded his arms.

"We do it all again tomorrow." MacGyver smiled.

"Your plan stinks." Billy shook his head in disgust.

"That's the idea!" MacGyver sniffed his fingers, where the aniseed lingered.

"Unbelievable." Billy picked up the armful of old clothes that would be his disguise and whistled to Frog. "I'll see you later, guys."

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Night came early under the bridge. Outside the evening sun still shone, though the warmth of the day had gone, but under the bridge it was dark enough that the oil drum fire provided much needed light. The heat it gave off was welcome too.

Billy looked around at the faces in the firelight. MacGyver, dressed in his 'Grazer' disguise, could pass for one of them, but Billy felt out of place in his borrowed clothes. Frog had picked up on his discomfort and sat pressed against his leg. No-one had tried to stroke him. In this world, dogs were almost always unfriendly and treated with caution.

Two of the group remembered 'Grazer' from before, having lived under the bridge and in the area for years. The rest of the group had been keen to take part in the plan and now each person had a plant sprayer hidden in a pocket or bag. MacGyver thanked them for their help and the group dispersed to their assigned places, to watch and wait.

Leonard stayed with MacGyver and Billy, warming his gloved hands at the fire.

"I want them to come back, so we can find Jose." Leonard shifted and sighed. He'd spent every spare minute looking for the van and asking anyone who would talk to him about the kidnappings. "But what if this doesn't work? What then?"

"It'll work." Billy added some more wood to the fire. "My man here, he comes up with some of the craziest plans I have ever heard, but his kind of crazy is the kind that works." He grinned at Leonard. "Even impressed my Momma, and believe me, that ain't easy to do!" Leonard nodded, returning the grin with a tiny smile. Then his head snapped around as he heard a vehicle slow down and come to a halt.

The homeless woman on lookout stood up and shook out her blanket, their prearranged signal.

"Ok, here we go." MacGyver stood up and Billy stood with him, leaving Frog's lead in Leonard's hand. "Keep them busy long enough for the others to tag them and the van with aniseed, OK? No knockout punches, at least not right away."

"Right." Billy felt adrenaline fizz in his stomach. "Just an ordinary night, playing decoy for a bunch of kidnapppers. Probably armed and dangerous." He took a deep breath and glanced at MacGyver. "And me with no gun. You take me to all the best parties, Mac!" Around him, Billy could hear the rustle of the homeless readying their improvised scent markers.

"Time to look like a victim, Billy." MacGyver nodded to him and then turned, shuffling across the open space towards the van, muttering to himself. He seemed to shrink, making himself look small and vulnerable. Billy took another deep breath and followed him, pretending to be drunk. He staggered out, weaving his way towards the end of the bridge and the van full of kidnapers.

"They'll do." The ganger hefted his baseball bat and opened the van door.

"No junkies. You heard the man." A second ganger jumped down. "And no-one who's sick."

"What's that about?" The first ganger pulled on leather gloves and glanced at his partner.

"Not our problem, is it?" the second ganger checked his pockets for zip ties. "Come on."

MacGyver shuffled over to a pile of boxes, pretending to rummage through them. The homeless man hiding behind them brandished his sprayer and nodded. MacGyver waited until he heard the gangers' footsteps right behind him before he turned around.

"Hey! What do you guys want? This is my patch!" He faked a backwards stagger, so that the gangers had to turn around to face him. Behind them, the homeless man rose silently up and sprayed the back of the first ganger's leather jacket. The other ganger swung the bat, aiming for MacGyver's head.

"Hey! Penalty for high sticking!" MacGyver dodged under the bat and scooted backwards, leading the pair away from the heap of boxes. He pulled off his scarf, winding it around his hands. "Two minutes in the sin bin for you, pal!" He caught the second blow with the scarf, twisting it around the bat. He pulled hard, yanking the ganger off balance and tumbling him into Billy, who had crept quietly up behind them. The ganger threw his elbow backwards, hitting Billy in the face. Billy stumbled backwards, yelling.

"Billy!" MacGyver was distracted just long enough for the first ganger to drive a fist into his gut, doubling him up. MacGyver dropped to his knees, winded, and the ganger turned to help his partner.

MacGyver lunged, grabbing the ganger's ankle and tripping him up. The ganger crashed into a pile of garbage bags and a homeless girl popped up from behind them, sprayed the ganger's jeans and disappeared at a run.

Billy wiped blood from his nose and roared with anger. He charged the ganger, tackling him and dumping him on his back behind the oil drum fire. A hand in a tattered glove reached out from behind a stack of firewood and sprayed the fallen ganger's long ponytail.

MacGyver looked up, seeing Leonard and another man spraying the last of their aniseed onto the van's wheels and bumpers. Leonard gave him a thumbs-up, grabbed his friend's sleeve and scuttled away to hide.

"Scatter!" MacGyver yelled. The homeless army erupted out of their hiding places, dropped their sprayers and ran, each taking a different route back to the Santa Luisa mission. Behind them, the gangers swore. Blaming each other and kicking at the garbage, they got back into the van and drove away.

MacGyver and Billy ran a short distance and ducked into an alley. Billy took Frog's lead from Leonard, waiting there for them, and clapped a hand on his shoulder.

"Thanks, man. Now go!" Leonard looked surprised at the contact, gave Billy a tentative smile and raced away.

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"Right, Frog." MacGyver bent down to the dog and sprayed a little aniseed on the ground in front of him. "Time to go to work. Can you follow it?" Frog panted up at him, but made no move to smell the aniseed.

“Smell it, Frog!” Frog sighed and scratched with his back foot. MacGyver shook his head and turned to Billy. “Little help here?”

“Watch and learn, Mac.” Billy bent down to Frog, taking his wrinkly face in both hands. “Frog, if you follow this trail –” He tapped the aniseed with his fingers, “- I will give you some chicken. Chicken, Frog! All you can eat!” Frog’s ears pricked up and he licked his lips. He dropped his snout to the scent, then pattered out of the alley. Billy followed, letting the leash hang loose.

Frog stopped, nose quivering. He gave a loud bark and set off, almost pulling Billy over.

“Got it! Come on!” Billy ran after him, with MacGyver a pace behind.

“Don’t let go of that leash!” MacGyver shed his long, flapping ‘Grazer’ coat and ran.

### **Part Three**

Frog stopped, nose quivering. He gave a loud bark and set off, almost pulling Billy over.

“Got it! Come on!” Billy ran after him, with MacGyver a pace behind.

“Don’t let go of that leash!” MacGyver shed his long, flapping ‘Grazer’ coat and ran.

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Frog led them through an industrial area, past a train yard and then on into a suburb MacGyver wasn’t familiar with. He lost the trail on a side road where a burst water pipe cascaded across the street, but picked it up again on the far side of the flood. Billy puffed along behind, keeping a firm grip on Frog’s lead. If he got away now, they might not find him again.

Frog stopped outside a house halfway down a row of identical ones, sniffed around and came back to the same spot before sitting down. The van was parked in the driveway. Coaxing Frog to his feet again, Billy and MacGyver continued down the street, doubling back down an alley and stopping at the back of the house’s yard.

From the shelter of some overgrown bushes, they watched the house. The faint sound of a television reached them, but all the curtains were drawn and no-one came out or went in. They were just about to leave when the van pulled in to the driveway and the two gangers got out. Their angry voices were loud, and Billy and MacGyver ducked down low as they came around to the back of the house. The gangers climbed up the back steps and the door swung shut behind them, muffling their voices. MacGyver and Billy exchanged a nod and crept away.

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“Start over.” Detective Kate put her coffee mug down exactly on top of a previous coffee ring and stared at MacGyver.

“That’s the whole story.” On the other side of the desk, MacGyver resisted the temptation to move his chair back, away from her steely gaze.

“I heard it. I’m still working on believing it.” Kate picked up a pen and opened her notebook. “Start over. You heard about homeless people being kidnapped, you told me about it, there wasn’t enough for me to go on, and I very clearly told you not to go playing vigilante with a bunch of street people. Then what?”

“Then I came up with a plan to track the kidnapers with minimum risk to the street people living under the bridge.” MacGyver leaned back in his chair and folded his arms.

“But you didn’t know if the kidnapers were armed, did you?” Kate leaned forwards.

“They’re kidnapers, not killers, Kate.” MacGyver ran a hand through his shaggy hair. “They want the street people alive.”

“But you didn’t know for sure.” Kate watched MacGyver shake his head. “And you do understand that your little aniseed trick could have gone badly wrong if they had been armed, right?”

“Yes, I do.” MacGyver nodded, holding up his hands. “But I directed the kidnapers’ attention away from the homeless people and on to me and Billy.”

“Billy?” Kate poised her pen over the paper.

“Billy Colton. He’s a friend and he can look after himself.” MacGyver watched Kate’s eyes narrow.

“Some friend. I’m familiar with the name.” She made a note on the pad and then put the pen down. “So now we have a bounty hunter in the mix. Beautiful.” She rubbed her eyes, looking tired, and rested her elbows on her desk. “What am I going to do with you, Mac? You ignore my orders, you put yourself – and others – in danger and-“ She held up a finger as MacGyver opened his mouth to protest, “- And every now and again, you come to me with some far-fetched story that leads to a major bust for LAPD.” She closed her eyes and shook her head. “One day your crazy luck is going to run out, Mac, but I guess it isn’t today.” She opened her eyes again and picked up her pen. “Tell me again where these scumbags are?”

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“You two – stay in the van!” Kate’s expression dared MacGyver to argue, but he nodded meekly. Beside him, Leonard nodded too. He’d been allowed to use the showers at the police station and, dressed in some spares from the station lost property box, full of police canteen food and with his long hair combed out and tied back, he looked completely different. He’d been brave enough to give Kate an account of MacGyver’s plan to track the kidnapers, pointing out how MacGyver had tried really hard to keep the street people safe, and when MacGyver had wanted him to stay with Billy and Doc at the Mission, he’d refused, telling them he owed it to Jose to go with the police and rescue him. He stuffed his hands into the pockets of his new coat and wondered what else he might be brave enough to do.

MacGyver looked at the house. It looked too ordinary to be the centre of a kidnap ring. The curtains were still drawn, but otherwise the house was identical to its neighbours.

“They’ve been in there a long time.” Leonard joined MacGyver in looking out of the van windows.

“Yeah, they have.” MacGyver checked his watch and glanced at the house again, his expression betraying his desire to go and check.

“She told us to stay here.” Leonard cast a nervous look at the van’s driver. The police radio crackled into life and the driver bent towards it, listening.

“They’re making their entry now.” The driver turned in his seat. “Come up here and listen if you like.” MacGyver and Leonard came to the front of the van, crowding close behind the driver to hear the voices in the hiss of static.

“On three.”

“Roger.”

“One. Go! Go! Go!”

A cacophony of shouting followed, and Leonard flinched away from the radio.

“Kitchen cleared.”

“Roger.”

More shouting and the sound of a shot.

“Tango down.”

“Roger. Going to the stairs.”

For a moment the radio was quiet, then there was more shouting and gunfire. Leonard retreated to the back of the van, but MacGyver leaned closer, trying to hear everything.

“Officer down! Officer down!”

“He’s going out the back! O’Leary, he’s coming to you!”

“Officer down? Who?” MacGyver reached out for the radio but the driver stopped him.

“Mac, they got this. Let them do their job, OK?” He turned further in the seat to meet MacGyver’s eye.

“Unless they ask for an ambulance, we don’t do anything. Got it? He waited until MacGyver nodded before settling back in his seat. MacGyver continued to watch out of the window, saw a flash of movement between the houses and leaped out before the driver could stop him. He raced across the road, skidding to a halt and ducking behind a car as a shot rang out. Just for a moment, he saw the shooter’s face, and then the man was gone. He waited another moment, then looked around the end of the car, but the street was empty. Frustrated, he returned to the police van.

“Damnit, you’re supposed to stay in here! I’m responsible for you!” The driver frowned at him as he pulled the doors shut.

“I lost him.” MacGyver ignored the frown. “What’s happening?” Muttering under his breath, the driver sat back down and turned the radio up.

“Secured. One more upstairs.”

“Dammit, he’s gone!”

“Found them!”

“Upstairs cleared. Is that locked?”

“Yeah. Breach it.”

“Kate, you OK?”

“Fine. Scumbag just grazed me.” She sounded more angry than hurt.

MacGyver let out the breath he hadn’t realised he was holding.

“Clear the door!” there was a thump, and the sound of splintering wood.

“Six in here. Five standing, one injured.”

“Jose? Is he alive?” Leonard reappeared at MacGyver’s shoulder.

“Sure sounds like it.” MacGyver moved over to give him more room.

“Jones, get us a stretcher in here, would you?” The radio crackled into life again.

“That’s our cue.” The driver unbuckled his seatbelt.

“We got this.” Without waiting for permission, Leonard grabbed a roll of canvas from under the front seat and leaped out of the back of the van, with MacGyver right behind him.

“Get back here!” Officer Jones stepped out of the van, but Leonard and MacGyver were already running for the house. Jones got back into the van, shaking his head. “Boy, am I going to catch it hot off Murphy!” he thumbed the radio mic. “Two coming in with a stretcher – it’s Mac and his sidekick...” he took his thumb off the button, screwed his face up and waited for Kate to reply.

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From the shadows between two nearby houses, one escaped kidnapper watched the drama unfold. He had shot at the blonde officer and then dived out of the open door, rolling on landing and plunging into the shrubbery with police bullets whining around him. He’d been leaving the scene as stealthily as possible, but the tall guy who’d chased him had seen him, so he’d have to either lie low or leave town for a while. It would be too chancy to continue rounding up warm bodies for his boss too, which was a shame. Grabbing bums off the street had been lucrative and easy, but he wasn’t stupid, and to carry on now would be to take a big risk on getting caught.

He flattened himself against the house wall and chanced a look around the corner. One bum was being carried out on a stretcher by officers and... by two civilians, one of whom was the man who’d chased him. Not good.

The officer he’d shot came out next, holding a bloodied cloth to her arm. She looked like she’d be OK, which was a pity. She strode up to the taller of the two civilians and appeared to be telling him off, though he was too far away to hear her words.

He decided to go to his contact straight away, pull out of this agreement and use the money he’d already earned to take a vacation somewhere, to allow the heat to die down. It didn’t occur to him to be concerned about the other gangers captured today, sure that they were too much in awe of his reputation, of what he might do to them and their families to give him up. The other gangs collecting bums would take his share of the action, but that couldn’t be helped.

His contact would be mad, but he’d get over it.

Hopefully...

He watched for a moment longer, seeing the other civilian fussing over the man on the stretcher, seeing the

blonde officer talking to the tall man and seeing the rest of the officers helping the bums into the van. They drove away, leaving an officer on guard over the scene, and the street was quiet again.

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“No.” The man in the suit frowned. “No, I say when you stop. We had an agreement, Mr. Sundance.” His voice conveyed his contempt for the ganger’s choice of name. He looked out of place in the nightclub in his designer suit and handmade shoes. “You will continue to supply what I want.”

“I can’t, I...” Sundance swallowed. His plan had sounded so good, so easy, but the Suit scared the life out of him and now he felt as though he was drowning.

“You’ll what? The Suit shook his head, sounding amused. “Mr. Sundance, what you should be concerned about is the possibility of a worse fate.” He walked across the room, his hands folded behind his back. The gangers in the club watched him pace, turn and lean his hands on the table in front of Sundance. “This world is divided into two kinds of people, Sundance. Predators, like me, and prey, like those you supply to me. If you no longer have the heart of a predator for me, then you are prey. And I always have a use for more prey.” He patted Sundance on the cheek and then turned away. “If the civilian saw you, you must deal with him.” The Suit’s voice was patient, as if explaining something to a small child. “That’s not so hard, is it?”

“No.” Sundance could feel sweat trickling down his back.

“Do you know where he is now?” the Suit asked.

“No.” Sundance licked dry lips.

“Do you know who he is?” Now the suit turned to face him.

“No, but he’s real tall, like six foot three, and he’s got real messy hair. Kind of like a blond version of Dr Webber from General Hospital.” Sundance took a deep breath, trying to stop his voice from shaking.

“The miracle of television. Anyone?” the Suit raised his eyebrows as Sundance showed the picture round the room.

“I know him.” An older ganger in greasy leathers got up off his bar stool. “That’s MacGvyer. Damn fool do-gooder. He’s gotten in the way of a few things over the last few years.”

“There you are.” The Suit nodded to Sundance. “I believe you and your new friend have some business to discuss.” The gentle tone dropped from his voice and Sundance found himself looking into pitiless, dark eyes. “Call me when it’s done.”

#### **Part Four**

“And so then me and Frog, we raced off round the dumpster and nearly got taken out by a pizza guy on a little bitty scooter!” Billy laughed and clapped his hands, miming the scooter driver’s expression. “I thought he was going to end up in the river!” He shook his head, remembering the tirade of abuse the delivery guy had unleashed at them, and looked at Frog, asleep and snoring under the table.

“You guys have all the fun!” Nikki picked up another slice of pizza and sat back, tucking her feet under her on the couch. “So what happens to your homeless friend now?”

“Leonard?” MacGvyer grinned. “Doc found out that he used to have a gardening business before he got ill and lost it. He’s put him in charge of the Community Garden Project and found him a room at the YMCA, so I think

he'll be just fine. His friend Jose will be OK too."

"That's great. I do like a happy ending." Nikki grinned. "What happens to the scumbags who kidnapped him?"

"Now we see what Kate and the police can get out of them and hopefully the street people are safe for a bit." MacGyver put down a pot of coffee and a pitcher of juice. "Or as safe as street people ever are, anyway." He sat down, helping himself to juice and pizza.

Outside MacGyver's house, the street lights started to come on. The fairy lights on Mama Lorraine's front porch came on too, twinkling in the gloom. Across the street, a shadowy figure hid in the darkness under a tree and watched. The tall civilian, another man with a dog and a dark-haired woman shared a meal and settled down to watch the television. He'd been there since the afternoon – first in the street, then around the back of the yard, now watching from a safe distance. The tall man's house would be easy to enter, with old style window catches and locks. He'd wedged the hall window already, so that it didn't quite close. All he had to do was wait here until the man's guests left and he went to bed.

Murder wasn't really his thing. He'd killed when necessary but never enjoyed it as some of his fellow gangers did. Preying on the homeless had been a means to earn serious amounts of money, rather than an opportunity for mayhem. One day he aspired to be a Suit himself, giving the orders and the threats, watching the others jump to do his bidding.

Sundance leaned back against the tree and waited.

"Well, it's been good to catch up, and to meet you, Billy." Nikki stood up and reached for her coat. "But unlike some people, I have to be at work in the morning. How'd you end up with so much leave, anyway?" She shook her head at MacGyver's grin. "Never mind, I don't think I want to know!" She reached down to pat Frog, who sighed and turned over without waking up, fished her car keys out of her pocket and jingled them. "Need a lift, Billy?"

"No, but thank you." Billy sat up on the couch. "We're staying over with Mac tonight, gonna head back in the morning." He nudged Frog gently out of the way and pulled on his boots, not bothering to lace them up. "I'm gonna get my stuff out of the truck, Mac. Back in a minute."

Across the street, Sundance watched the woman put on her coat and the unknown man get up. The woman came out of the front door, gave the tall civilian a hug and waved to him as she drove away. The unknown man disappeared into the house, but a moment later Sundance heard another car start up, backfire and drive away down a side street nearby. Perhaps he had parked behind the yard. The tall civilian came back into the front room alone and started picking up dishes and glasses. Sundance left his shadows and strolled across the street, to disappear into the overgrown garden of the house next door.

"Man, that neighbour of yours has the worst sounding car I have ever heard!" Billy came in through the back door and dumped his bag in MacGyver's guest room.

"I know – every car he gets sounds like that. I have no idea what he does to them!" MacGyver shook his head. "He's only had that one a short while; the last one wound up in the harbour."

"In the harbour. Right..." Billy folded his arms, leaning on the kitchen doorframe. "I don't suppose you had anything to do with that, did you?"

"Um..." MacGyver rinsed the last plate and set it on the rack. "Yeah, I might have had a little something to do with it!" He dried his hands and yawned. "He only has to have them a little while and they get all sorts of faults no-one else has ever heard of. I keep patching them up, but it's a losing battle."

"Yeah, by the smell of it, it's leaking all kinds of—" Billy broke off, turning to look towards the window. "You hear that?"

"Probably a raccoon." MacGyver shrugged. "They're pretty bold and they love to get into the trash."

Sundance crouched down under the window, cursing inwardly. His foot had crunched on a dry leaf and he was sure it had been heard from inside the house. He waited until the kitchen light went out and the bedroom light came on before he moved again. He sneaked around to the hall window and waited again. He heard water run in the bathroom, then the bedroom light went out. He waited another half hour and then eased the window open.

MacGyver turned over, half waking at an unexpected sound. Hearing nothing further, he went back to sleep.

In the next room, Billy and Frog snored. Used to sleeping through each other's noise, neither woke at the small squeak from the hall window.

Sundance let himself down onto the hall carpet, his feet making no sound. He drew his gun and padded down the hall to the bedroom, finding the door slightly ajar. Looking through the gap, he saw the tall civilian asleep on his back, one arm behind his head and with a shaft of moonlight striping the quilt. He moved the door to get a better angle for his shot and the door creaked...

Frog snuffled in his sleep, smelling a familiar scent. He sniffed, his sleepy mind working to place the smell... Then he woke up with a startled bark! He leaped off Billy's bed and raced into the hall, barking madly. He grabbed hold of something in the shadows with his powerful jaws and reversed into the hall, growling and pulling a black-clad figure with him.

"Frog! What the...?!" Billy followed him, half a pace behind and still mostly asleep.

MacGyver woke with a start, just in time to see Frog pulling someone out of his bedroom! Picking up the hockey stick that leaned on the wall beside him, MacGyver scrambled out of bed and swung the stick at the intruder.

Coming up from behind, Billy ducked under the stick and punched the intruder hard in the side of the head. The man snarled, firing the gun wildly. MacGyver grabbed the intruder's gun hand, wrestling with the man as Frog let go of the trouser leg and sank his teeth into the intruder's leg. The intruder yelled, kicked out and lost his balance, pulling Billy, MacGyver and Frog with him. MacGyver banged the intruder's hand against the floor until he let go of the gun, then grabbed the intruder's shirt front, landing a punch in his face. The intruder's eyes rolled up and he went limp.

"That's some raccoon!" Billy sat back on his heels, breathing hard. "Any idea who our mystery guest is?"

"Ow. Not sure..." MacGyver got up, shook out his punching hand and padded barefoot into the kitchen, returning with a roll of duct tape. "I've seen him somewhere before, though." He propped up the unconscious man and taped his wrists and ankles together.

Frog growled and strained at his collar as Billy pulled him off the man's ankle. Frog continued to sniff at the man's leather jacket, whining.

"What's he smelling?" Billy eased his hold on Frog's collar to stop the dog from choking himself, and Frog shot forwards, sniffing the man all over. MacGyver leaned in for a sniff too.

"That's it!" MacGyver snapped his fingers. "He's smelling aniseed on him! This guy is one of our kidnappers, I'm sure of it." He frowned down at the ganger, who was starting to regain consciousness. "I guess I'd better call and wake up Kate..."

"Nice catch, Mac." Kate looked through the bars at the captured ganger, sitting with his elbows on his knees and staring at the floor. "Aloysius Caesar Jones, also known as Sundance."

"Aloysius?" MacGyver shook his head. "Wow, I thought my name was bad enough!" He leaned on the bars, earning a nasty look from Sundance. "What happens to him now?"

"Well," Kate rubbed at her arm, where a bandage could be seen beneath her short sleeve. "At the very least he goes down for shooting a police officer, but I'm pretty sure the gang squad will have some other things they'll want to ask him about." She glanced at her watch. "I gotta get back to work. Don't stay too long, OK?" With a nod to the custody officer at the end of the row of cells, she disappeared back into the depths of the station.

As soon as she had gone, Sundance raised his head, looking at MacGyver.

"Why did you do it?" MacGyver frowned at Sundance. "Why kidnap homeless people? What was going to happen to them?"

"Money." Sundance shrugged. If he was concerned at being behind bars, he hid it well. "What happens to them? Who cares. Money in my pocket, man." He rubbed his fingers together as though feeling banknotes and smiled, showing a gold tooth at the front. He laughed softly, shaking his head at MacGyver. "You think I'm the one in trouble here? Man, you have no idea what trouble is. You a known face, my friend. The boss, he knows who you are now. You *recognised*. You *marked*." He sat back, leaning against the wall of the cell. "You better watch your back, man. Just because I didn't get you, don't mean the next one won't." He closed his eyes and tipped his head back. "See you around, Mac..."

MacGyver frowned, not knowing what to say. He was almost certain the ganger was bluffing, but Sundance did seem very confident.

Maybe he should watch his back after all.

"This man." A picture was pushed across the table, picked up by a manicured hand and studied.

"Who is he?" the voice was smooth and cultured, with no accent to place it.

"Angus MacGyver. Serial do-gooder, works for the Phoenix Foundation. He's responsible for the downfall of friend Sundance and he was involved with that unfortunate Hawkins affair. He was also picked up in Germany recently, interfering with our well-laid plans. He's becoming a nuisance."

"How much of a nuisance?" The second voice came from the shadows on the far side of the polished table, it's

owner indistinct in the dim light.

“Enough of a nuisance.” The first voice sighed, as though at the prospect of a tiresome task. “Deal with him, would you?”

“Of course. Does it need to look like an accident?” the second voice was calm.

“Without question. Do not draw attention to ourselves, clear?” the manicured fingers flicked the photograph back across the table. “Especially as we’ll be using Phoenix shortly.”

“No indeed.” The owner of the second voice got up and straightened his jacket. “Consider it done.”