Banker's Hours

MacGyver stood at the window holding a mug of coffee. A smile crossed his face as he watched the sky turn pink then orange then gray as the sun began its daily journey across the sky. It looked like it was going to be a fine Saturday, the kind of day that made the stresses of everyday life seem insignificant and far away. It was the kind of day he had learned to treasure over the years, since it served to remind him of why he did the kind of work he did, thankless as it was. With a last look at the dawn sky, MacGyver turned away from the window, sipping his coffee as he ambled toward the sofa.

Sam would be pleased that the weather was going to be nice, but MacGyver wasn't quite as thrilled. As much as he loved spending time with his son, they didn't always agree on the choice of activity, and today's itinerary was one he would have avoided had he not lost the last coin toss. He clicked on the television to find the local weatherman confirming his own forecast of good weather. With a sigh of resignation, MacGyver leaned back on the couch to watch the rest of the news while he waited for Sam.

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"Hey Dad!" Sam said brightly as he breezed through the door to MacGyver's apartment three hours later. "You ready?"

MacGyver peered at him over the rim of his third cup of coffee. "I was ready three hours ago."

"Hey, what good is the weekend if you can't sleep in a little?"

MacGyver rolled his eyes at his son as he stood and carried his coffee cup into the kitchen. "You sure you wouldn't rather go fishing?"

"Dad!" Sam shot him an exasperated glare.

"Just asking," MacGyver said, lifting his hands in a gesture of defeat.

"Good," Sam replied as he dropped his duffel bag on the floor. "I don't know what you have against waterskiing anyway. It's nowhere near as dangerous as hang gliding or rock climbing...," he looked at MacGyver and grinned, "...or hockey."

"Maybe ...but I never got a fractured skull doing any of those things."

"How did you manage that?" Sam asked skeptically.

"I hit a submerged log and did a really amazing double flip with a half-twist ...and hit my head on one of the skis," MacGyver shrugged. "Dislocated both shoulders, broke my right arm and left wrist, too."

"Ouch!" Sam winced sympathetically.

"No kidding."

"Since when do you let a little mishap stop you from doing anything?"

"Ever try to go to the bathroom with casts on both arms?" MacGyver retorted dryly.

Sam stared at him for a moment before he burst out laughing.

"It isn't funny," MacGyver growled.

"Yes it is!" Sam spluttered between fits of laughter.

Despite his best efforts, MacGyver felt his lips twitching with the beginnings of a smile. "Well, it wasn't funny at the time," he said, allowing the smile to escape. He supposed it *was* kind of humorous, in retrospect.

"Still, it sounds like it was a freak accident. I doubt it will happen again," Sam said innocently, still chuckling.

"It had better not," MacGyver warned with mock severity. "Come on, let's go get some breakfast."

Sam grinned and shook his head as he and his father picked up their bags and made for the door. They stowed their gear in MacGyver's jeep and headed for their favorite diner.

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"Hey," Sam said as they waited for their breakfast. "I almost forgot to tell you ... I finally got paid for that magazine spread that I did in February!"

"The bikini thing?" MacGyver raised his eyebrows quizzically. "I thought you said you'd do that one for free?"

"Figure of speech," Sam said, reddening slightly. "And they *did* pay, so breakfast is on me."

"Well there's a switch," MacGyver teased.

Sam shot him a dirty look. "Yeah, well, I want to stop at the bank to deposit the check before we take off for the lake."

"No problem," MacGyver said as their meals arrived. They made short work of their pancakes and were soon on their way.

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At the bank, they were not surprised to find that there was a long line. Many people who worked during the week had no time to do their banking other than the few hours on Saturday mornings that most banks were open for business. To pass the time while Sam filled out his deposit slip, MacGyver stood to the side and studied the people in line.

Standing at the head of the line was a young man with spiky blond hair wearing jeans and a T-shirt and stifling a yawn as though he would rather be home sleeping on this weekend morning. A college student, MacGyver determined, remembering fondly his own penchant for staying up late when he was in school. Behind him, were several burly men dressed in jeans and paint-splattered denim work shirts. Construction workers, if the leather tool belt being carried by one of them was any indication. Further back in line a portly man in a business suit tapped his foot impatiently and looked at his watch with a frown, while the two women behind him stared out the window, looking bored.

A woman with a small boy brought up the rear of the line. The child was restless, tugging on his mother's arm while she tried to keep hold of her paperwork. He quickly lost interest in that and started looking at all of the other people in the bank. MacGyver smiled and waggled his fingers in a wave when the boy looked in his direction. The boy smiled shyly and hid behind his mother's legs.

Sam had finished filling out his deposit slip and had taken his place at the end of the line, when MacGyver saw something that made the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end. A man had entered the bank wearing a hat, sunglasses and a long black coat that was far too warm for this day. Minutes later a second man, similarly dressed, came through the door. MacGyver watched unobtrusively as two more men followed after a short interval. A surge of adrenaline shot through him as he watched them take up strategic positions inside the bank lobby.

Once again, he seemed to have stumbled into the midst of a crisis. MacGyver closed his eyes, wondering for the hundredth time why these things always seemed to happen to him. He blew out a short breath, and opened his eyes, a plan already forming in his head. Casually, he took a credit card application from the display rack in front of him and sauntered toward the left side of the bank, where a woman sat at the customer service desk busily working on her computer. He sat in the chair directly in front of the desk.

"I'm sorry sir, but you'll have to take a seat over there and wait your turn." She pointed to a row chairs against the wall, several of which were already occupied.

"Listen carefully," MacGyver said quietly, leaning forward so as not to be overheard. "This bank is about to be robbed."

The woman stopped typing and looked at him fearfully. "W-what do you want?"

"Not by me," he said with a sigh. Her eyes widened and she immediately looked over at the teller windows. "Don't look!" MacGyver hissed softly. "Very calmly," he looked at her nameplate, "...Barbara, pick up the phone and dial 911."

Taking a deep breath, Barbara smiled and did as he asked. She spoke calmly, alerting the police to the situation. "How many are there?" she asked him.

"Four. They're taking up positions now."

She related the information then listened for moment, letting her eyes scan the room. "Nineteen that I can see, including myself," she said into the phone, apparently in response to a request for a count of the people present in the bank.

MacGyver saw some movement from the corner of his eye as one of the men began to walk toward the windows. "They're making their move," he said quickly. "Can you put them on speakerphone?"

Barbara nodded as she related the new information to the police. "They understand," she said breathlessly. "They'll be here in five minutes."

MacGyver reached over and pushed the volume lever on her phone all the way down. "We don't want the bad guys to know the police are listening," he whispered in response to her quizzical look.

"Now what?"

"Now we stay calm and wait for the cavalry," MacGyver told her as he scanned her desk for anything useful. He scooped a handful of paper clips he found piled in a red plastic tray and secreted them in his pockets.

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Standing patiently in line, Sam glanced toward his father and noted instantly the change his demeanor. He had adopted what Sam called his 'alert mode'. Anyone who didn't know MacGyver wouldn't recognize it, but Sam had seen that particular look before and he knew all too well what it meant. Trouble.

Following his father's gaze, he spotted one of the suspicious men and quickly deduced his intentions. "Damn!" he muttered under his breath. So much for a fun Saturday. Sam's eyes followed his father as he strolled toward the woman at the desk. Though he had seen it before, he was still impressed by the easy nonchalance his father was able to affect during a crisis. When Sam had asked him once how he managed to stay calm and

function when things were falling apart around him, MacGyver had simply shrugged and said with a self-deprecating smile, "Practice."

Looking up, he locked gaze with his father, who flicked his eyes toward the man in the long coat and then back to him. Sam nodded once, almost imperceptibly, to signal that he understood. He gave an exaggerated yawn and looked around as though he was bored and trying to pass the time while he waited in line. It didn't take him long to single out the other three men, one of whom was lounging watchfully near the door, while the other two joined the first man in converging on the teller windows.

Okay. He knew what was going on now, but the question was, what could he do about it? Sam looked around thoughtfully, frowning when he noticed the child in line in front of him. He glanced toward MacGyver again and saw from the look on his face that they shared the same concern for the boy's safety. Nodding briefly, Sam acknowledged his intention to look out for him, almost smiling at the ease at which he and his father were conducting this nonverbal conversation.

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With one eye on the bank robbers, MacGyver was thinking the same thing. He sent a supportive smile in Sam's direction, thankful that they knew each other well enough to communicate without words. They were still in danger, but at least Sam was aware of it, and MacGyver knew that he would do whatever he could to help.

As MacGyver and Sam watched the would-be bank robbers, neither noticed bank's security guard suddenly become aware of the oddly-dressed men heading for the teller windows. A retired police officer, he had immediately realized what the men had in mind. Rushing to the center of the lobby, he pulled his gun and shouted, "Freeze!"

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"What have we got?" Lieutenant Kate Murphy strode into the conference room, slightly breathless from running up three flights of stairs. Three other officers were already in the room, listening intently to the speakerphone that sat in the center of the long conference table. Frank Connelly, a stocky sergeant in his fifties, was the first to speak.

"911 dispatch patched this through a few minutes ago, Lieutenant. We have a robbery in progress at First Federal Bank on Delaney St."

"Delaney St.? That's just a few blocks away! What kind of idiots rob a bank so close to a police station?" Kate said incredulously. "Who called it in?"

"A bank employee named Barbara Sutton," Connelly said quietly. "She left the line open on her speakerphone."

"We've got units on the way," whispered Detective Marlon Sanchez from his seat at her left. Kate took her seat and listened in silence to the faint sounds of activity coming from the speaker.

"Doesn't sound much like a robbery," Detective Dave Perry said doubtfully.

"Not yet anyway," said Connelly.

"What do you mean?" Kate asked with a puzzled frown. "I thought this was confirmed?"

Connelly shook his head. "The Sutton woman said a customer told her the bank was going to be robbed."

"Think it's a scam?" Perry asked.

Connelly shrugged. "Possibly, but I don't think so. The woman sounded very tense and we could hear the guy she was talking to in the background."

The group fell silent again, listening intently for any sign of trouble. But all they heard were the normal sounds of bank business.

Kate scratched her head thoughtfully as she listened, going over the scenario in her head. How had the customer known that the bank was going to be robbed? Could it be someone's idea of a joke? Her mouth tightened into a hard line. If it turned out to be a false alarm, this 'customer' was going to regret it. While she was pondering this, a sound came through the speaker that sent a jolt through her and made her stomach tighten with dread.

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"Aw man," MacGyver muttered with dismay when he saw the guard draw his gun. From the guard's vantage point near the rear of the bank, he hadn't been able to see the fourth man, who had taken position in the corner by the door, behind a leafy six-foot potted plant. Time seemed to stand still after the guard shouted and pointed his gun at the three men near the counter. The man by the door moved forward, pulling a gun from beneath his long coat. The hard expression on his face didn't change as he raised the gun and fired. The guard crumpled to the floor without ever knowing what hit him, while panicked customers screamed and scattered, diving out of the line of fire.

Taking advantage of the chaos, Sam grabbed the little boy and his mother. Frightened, the woman tried to pull away from him. "Come on!" he said. "You have to get out of here!"

"Okay", she said with sudden comprehension. She took her son's other hand and together, they ran toward the door. Sam shoved them outside, pausing for a moment to search for his father's face in the crowd of people inside. The moment's hesitation was all

it took for the man who had killed the guard to catch up with him and knock him to the floor.

"Try that again and you're dead," the man snarled as he dragged Sam away from the doors. Sam glared at him but said nothing. He could feel the heat radiating from the barrel of the gun that was pressed against his neck.

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The four police officers looked up simultaneously, identical grim expressions on their faces. They all recognized the sound.

"Shit!" Connelly cursed as they heard the panicked screams following the gunshot.

"Guess it's not a hoax," Sanchez said glumly.

"Dave, get on the horn to Henderson," Kate directed. "Tell him I want a SWAT team on alert. This could get ugly."

"Gotcha," Perry said as he raced out the door.

"Marlon, have dispatch tell the units on approach to go in silent and stay out of sight," Kate continued. "We don't want to spook them." The young detective nodded and hurried out of the room.

"What now?" asked Connelly.

Kate tapped her finger on her chin thoughtfully for a moment before answering. "Think we can get this," she pointed to the speakerphone, "patched into the radio?"

Connelly shrugged. "I suppose."

"See what you can do. I want to get on the scene right away." She met the sergeant's gaze. "I've got a bad feeling about this one."

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"All right, everybody on the floor!" All four of the men were now brandishing guns and one, seemingly the leader, was directing the action from a position on top of the teller's counter. Quickly, they herded all of the customers to one side of the bank, forcing them to sit on the floor against the wall.

"You!" The leader pointed his shotgun at the teller nearest his position. "Go lock the doors."

"I-I ...don't have the keys," the pale and frightened young woman said nervously.

"Well who does?!" the man bellowed at her. The woman flinched and pointed a shaking finger toward her supervisor, who stood near the open vault.

Shifting his attention to the gray-haired woman, he gestured toward the front door with his gun. "Do it!" The woman frowned at him but complied, casting a somber glance at the body of the security guard before securely locking the front door.

"Del," the leader called to the man near the door.

"Got it, Carl," Del replied. He took the keys from the woman and ushered her back toward the group of customers against the far wall.

"Get the blinds," Carl directed. Del nodded and closed the blinds that hung in the large glass windows that fronted the bank.

"You ladies come out here and join the rest." Carl waved his gun at the three female tellers, who were standing at their stations, frozen in fear. Nervously, they hurried to obey.

"Fill 'em up boys!" Carl tossed several duffel bags to the other two men, who grinned at him and moved behind the counter.

Pointing his weapon at the group of people sitting against the wall, Carl said, "You all just sit here quietly and everything will be fine. Understand?" Some of the group nodded, eyeing his gun with frightened eyes. "Good," he said cheerfully.

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"You okay?" MacGyver whispered to Sam, who had crawled over to sit next to him.

"Yeah."

"Nice job getting the kid out."

Sam grimaced. "Hell of a way to start the weekend, isn't it?"

"I'd rather be waterskiing," MacGyver said with a wry smile. Sam sighed and surveyed the scene. Waterskiing sounded good to him, too.

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"Anything?" asked Connelly.

Kate dropped the binoculars from her eyes and turned away from the window. "I don't see any movement, but they've got the blinds drawn." Connelly grunted and picked up a

set of headphones and sat in front of the console that took up most of one side of the van. The telephone connection to the bank was still open and had been patched into a secure police radio frequency that was currently being monitored by both Connelly and Sanchez. The van, a mobile surveillance unit, contained audio, video, and other electronic equipment that would allow them to monitor everything that was happening at the bank more than a block away.

"Henderson's here," announced Perry from the driver's seat.

Kate saw the outline of the black SWAT van as it pulled in behind them. She handed her binoculars to Perry and moved to the rear of the van. "Keep your eyes on the building, Dave," she said as she opened the door. "Let me know the second anything changes. I'm going to talk to Henderson, get his people up to speed."

The commander of the SWAT team greeted her as she exited the van. "Lieutenant," he nodded his head cordially. "What do we have?"

Kate eyed Lieutenant Henderson thoughtfully. He was tall, in contrast to her own petite stature, and solidly built, cutting an imposing figure in the all-black uniform that denoted members of this special unit. A fifteen-year veteran of the force, he had experience with these kinds of situations, and Kate was grateful for his assistance. "So far, it looks like a bank robbery, with shots fired inside."

"Any casualties?"

"Unknown," Kate said. "We suspect at least one, from what we've heard over the phone line, but we haven't got any visuals yet."

"How good is the intel we're getting from inside?"

"Fair," Kate said. "We're catching bits and pieces of conversation. Obviously, the gunshots came through clear as a bell."

Gazing at the building, Henderson frowned and scratched his chin. "I think our first priority ought to be getting a look inside. I can have some of my people move in close and take a look through the windows."

"Can they do it without being seen? We don't want to provoke them into any desperate actions."

"It shouldn't be too hard. There's a lot of cover between here and the bank."

Kate joined him in staring at the building. "Okay, go ahead."

Henderson nodded and rejoined the rest of his team where they stood behind the black van.

"Lieutenant?"

"Yes?" Kate turned to the patrol officer who had addressed her.

"This woman says she was inside the bank when the shot was fired." He indicated the young woman who stood next to him holding the hand of a small child who looked to be about five years old.

"Oh?" Kate looked at her expectantly. "Can you tell me what happened in there Ms. ...?"

"Hoffman, Marcy Hoffman," the woman replied. "Um, well, I was waiting in line to make a deposit when all of a sudden there was this loud noise. The guy behind me grabbed Tyler and me," she gestured to the small boy holding tightly to her hand, staring up at them with wide, frightened eyes. "...and dragged us toward the door. He said we had to get out of there."

"Did you see what was happening?"

Marcy closed her eyes. "There were people running around and screaming, and I saw a guy waving a gun around." She opened her eyes. "That's all I remember seeing. I was concentrating on getting Tyler out the door."

"Any idea how many bad guys there were?"

"I only saw the one man with a gun."

"What about the person who helped you? Did he get out too?"

"No. He pushed us out the door but I didn't see him come out."

"If you wouldn't mind, I'd like you to go with Officer Martinez and tell him everything you can remember."

Marcy nodded earnestly. "I'll do what I can."

"See if you can get one of the art guys to come up with a composite," Kate told Martinez.

"Sure thing, Lieutenant."

"You've been a big help Ms. Hoffman," Kate said with a smile.

"I hope those people will be all right," Marcy said hopefully.

"We'll do our best," Kate reassured her. She watched Martinez lead them to his patrol car, thankful to the person who had had the presence of mind to get the child out of harm's way. It was one small bright spot in what was turning out to be a very bad day.

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MacGyver watched the men closely, his expression neutral while he tried to memorize their faces. It was difficult to make out their features behind the sunglasses and baseball hats, but he wanted to be able to provide reasonably accurate descriptions if they somehow got out of the bank and eluded the police. Glancing to his right, he noticed that Sam was doing the same.

Sam caught the look and smiled as he realized that, once again, he and his dad were on the same wavelength. "Great minds think alike," he whispered. MacGyver snorted faintly in response then turned his attention toward the vault, where the two robbers who entered earlier were now exiting with four fully-loaded duffel bags.

The first of the two men grinned triumphantly and lifted his two duffels into the air. "Let's go!" Carl said, turning toward the front door. The group was halfway across the lobby when Del, who was standing behind the security desk, yelled, "Shit! Carl, we got cops out here!"

"What?! How' d they get here so fast?" Carl asked angrily as he ran to join Del in looking at the security monitors. "We haven't been here more than ten minutes!"

"Somebody must've called them," one of the other men said worriedly.

"I bet it was the lady with the kid," Del said, shooting an angry glare at Sam, who returned the look defensively.

"This is not good, man. We're toast!" the fourth man said, shaking his head nervously.

"What are we going to do now?" the third man whined.

"Shut up, Barry, and let me think!" Carl roared at his associate. He stormed toward the front of the bank to look for himself, cursing loudly and slamming his fist against the wall when he could see little through the glass doors.

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MacGyver watched the group of thieves with growing dismay. The arrival of the police had rattled them, and he knew from experience that upset and agitated bad guys were the most dangerous. The police apparently had not known that they would be visible to the security cameras near the front door, and now that the element of surprise was gone, they were facing a hostage situation in addition to armed robbery. MacGyver leaned his head back against the wall and closed his eyes. Things had just gone from bad to worse.

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"Lieutenant!"

Kate turned to find Sanchez beckoning to her urgently from inside the open door of the van. She quickly ran to meet him. "What is it?"

"The phone," he said excitedly. "They know we're here!"

Immediately, Kate spun around and headed in the opposite direction. "Henderson!" she shouted at the SWAT officer, who looked up instantly at the urgent tone of her voice. "We've been made. Get your people in place, ASAP!" Without comment, Henderson dispatched several of his men to cover the bank.

"I've got a couple of guys near the front of the bank already," Henderson said when Kate had caught up with him.

"They must have been spotted somehow," Kate replied.

"Damn," Henderson cursed, then lifted his radio. "Myers, Jeffries, cover the back." He turned to Kate. "If they saw my guys in the front, they'll probably try for the back door."

"That's what I'd do," Kate agreed.

"Think they'll come quietly?"

"We should be so lucky," Kate snorted sardonically.

"Well, we're ready for them."

Kate watched the SWAT officers as they hurried down the block. "I hope so."

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"I don't see anything," Carl growled.

"They're out there," Del said. "I saw them on the monitors."

"How d'ya know it's cops?" asked Barry.

"They had guns, idiot!" Del sneered.

"What about the back door?" Barry asked, pointedly ignoring his ill-tempered associate.

"J. J., go take a look," Carl directed the fourth man.

J. J. hurried to the rear door, cracking it open slightly and peering nervously outside. "Nobody out here," he called to the other men, relief apparent in his voice.

"Let's get out of here," Barry said. "The car's just around the corner."

Carl looked over at Del, who shrugged. "Worth a shot."

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"Murphy, we've got movement at the rear door!"

Kate's head snapped up at the shout from Henderson. She shut off the tape of the bank activity she had been listening to and jumped from the van. "What's happening?"

"One of my guys spotted someone poking his head out the back door," Henderson explained.

"You think they're going to try for it?"

"That's my guess."

"Are your people in position?"

"Yep." He sketched a rough diagram on the notepad he was holding. "I've got men on both corners, here and here." He pointed at the rear corners of the building on his sketch. "...and one guy on the roof, here," he indicated the building across the street from the bank. "He's the one who's watching the front door. I've got the rest of my people out of sight on the other side of the building, plus one on the roof here, covering the back door."

Kate studied the diagram thoughtfully. "They should be able to surround them no matter which way they run."

Henderson nodded in agreement. "They'll be boxed in."

"Okay. Tell them to wait until all of the perps are outside before moving in. They might have hostages with them."

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While the thieves were talking among themselves, MacGyver nudged Barbara. "Do you have keys to the doors?"

"No, but there's a spare set at the security desk," she offered quietly.

MacGyver pursed his lips and silently gauged the distance to the desk on the opposite end of the bank.

"Dad?" Sam recognized the faraway look in MacGyver's eyes and could almost see the gears turning in his head as he worked out some kind of plan.

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Addressing the hostages, Carl smiled broadly and said, "It's been nice doing business with you." To his three companions, "Let's do it!" Carl picked up one of the bags of money and headed for the door. The others did likewise, hefting their own duffel bags and following him.

As he reached the door, Del turned around, pointing his gun at the terrified hostages. "Don't even think about moving for at least ten minutes," he warned. "Or you might just get the same thing he got." He waved the gun casually in the direction of the dead security guard. Wide-eyed, the hostages watched them go.

As the last of the four robbers ducked out of the back door, MacGyver got to his feet, shooting a quick smile toward his son. "Stay here," he said over his shoulder as he sprinted toward the security desk.

"What the hell is he doing?" Sam muttered, frustrated at his unsuccessful attempt to keep up with his father's quicksilver leaps of logic.

"I think he's going to try to lock them out," whispered Barbara, who had overheard Sam's comment. "There's another set of door keys over there."

Sam frowned, moving his eyes from the door to his father and back again. If the bad guys decided to come back inside, they wouldn't be too happy to find MacGyver at the security desk. "Hurry up, Dad," he whispered, hoping for his father's sake that they had seen the last of them.

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"Lieutenant!" called Connelly from inside the van. "They're heading out the back!"

Henderson relayed commands to his team. Almost as soon as he had finished, his radio crackled to life as his men reported that the bank robbers were leaving the building. "Are they alone?"

"Affirmative," came the voice over the radio. "We're moving in..." The transmission was cut off by the sound of gunfire. Kate and Henderson looked at each other, startled.

"What's happening?" Henderson barked into the radio.

"Don't know! I think they spotted us and panicked and started shooting!" came the response.

The gunfire stopped, and Kate froze, waiting to see if it would start again. When it didn't, she let out a breath she hadn't realized she was holding.

"Is everyone okay?" Henderson said tersely into his radio.

"Affirmative. Targets are all back inside."

"Roger," Henderson sighed. "Maintain your positions and keep us informed."

"I doubt they'll try that again," Kate said dispiritedly.

"That's what worries me." The grim look on Henderson's face echoed this sentiment.

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Reaching the security station, MacGyver began frantically searching the desk for the keys. "Come on, come on. Where are they?" he mumbled to himself. Finally, he found the elusive keys in the top drawer, underneath the late guard's lunch. Snatching them up, he began to make his way toward the rear exit, when the staccato sound of gunfire erupted from outside. MacGyver froze mid-step and pocketed the keys. There wasn't time to return to the others, so he beat a hasty retreat back to the desk, stuffing a small notepad and pencil in his pocket just as the rear door flew open and the four gunmen burst inside.

Propping his feet on the desk, MacGyver leaned back in the chair casually and watched the thieves scramble for cover on either side of the door.

"Del, lock the damned door!" Carl commanded, still breathing heavily from the aborted attempt to leave the building.

Del complied, quickly securing the lock with the keys he had taken from the head teller earlier. The four men then returned to the lobby, catching sight of MacGyver at the security desk. Del stormed toward him, his face flushed red with anger. "What the hell do you think you're doing?!" He grabbed MacGyver by the front of his shirt, hauling him to his feet. "Are you deaf or something? I thought I said not to move?!"

"Hey, chill out!" MacGyver said, raising his hands in what he hoped was a placating gesture. "I wasn't going anywhere, I just didn't feel like sitting on the floor anymore."

Unappeased, Del balled his free hand into a fist and planted it solidly in MacGyver's midsection, shoving him roughly to the floor. After landing an additional kick in his ribs, Del pointed his gun at him and ordered, "Get your butt back over there with the rest of them!"

Clutching his stomach, MacGyver coughed and got to his feet slowly. "Sure, no problem," he gasped, concentrating on trying to breathe as he made his way toward the rest of the hostages, who were watching the exchange apprehensively. With a sigh, he dropped down beside Sam, rubbing his aching ribcage gingerly.

"You okay?" Sam asked, his brow furrowed with concern.

"Ow," MacGyver replied softly, favoring his son with a rueful grin. "Well that didn't go quite the way I planned."

"No kidding. You had me worried there for a minute." Sam's features relaxed with relief. The gunman's anger had been obvious, and he had felt a stab of genuine fear for his father's life.

"I was a little worried myself." MacGyver smiled reassuringly at his son. "But at least I got the keys."

"Yeah, well try not to do that again, okay?"

"Can't make any promises," MacGyver shrugged. "We're not out of the woods yet."

Sam frowned, not wanting to think about what other unpleasantness might befall them. Unfortunately, he knew that MacGyver would continue to take risks, heedless of his own safety, until everyone was safe. It was the one thing he both admired and hated about his father. For most of his life, Sam had been without any family, completely independent, having no one to rely upon but himself. But now that he had found his father, he knew what he had been missing all those years, and he had no desire to be alone again. Unfortunately, his father's heroic tendencies made that a definite possibility. Selfishly, Sam wished that he would put his own safety first, but he knew it would never happen. It simply wasn't in his nature. Sam cast a sidelong glance at MacGyver, who was leaning against the wall with his eyes closed, and sighed, knowing that he really wouldn't want it any other way.

As though he sensed he was being watched, MacGyver opened one eye and lifted his eyebrow inquiringly. "What?"

"Nothing, just thinking."

"Oh." MacGyver hesitated, disconcerted by the look he had seen on Sam's face, then shrugged and leaned his head back against the wall.

"So, you have any ideas about how to get us out of here?"

"Not yet," MacGyver replied without opening his eyes, "but I'm working on it."

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"What are we gonna do now?" J. J. implored. "The place is surrounded by cops!"

"I don't know." Carl began to pace next to the security monitors. "We've got to come up with a plan."

"Why don't we just grab a couple of them," Del pointed to the frightened group, "and make a run for it? The cops won't shoot at hostages."

"Yeah, but we'd have to ditch them eventually. All the cops would have to do is follow us and wait," Carl said.

"But what else can we do?"

"I don't know!" Carl slammed his fist on the desk. "I need to think!"

The phone on the security desk started to ring. Del reached for it, but Carl stopped him. "Don't! That's gotta be the cops. They're just going to try to get us to give up ...and I'm not about to do that."

"Me neither," Del said with a grin as he unplugged the cord from the phone.

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"They're not answering," Kate said with a frown as she listened to the eleventh ring of the telephone.

"Worse," said Connelly from his seat by the communications console in the van, which, since there was no longer any reason to hide their presence at the scene, now sat across the street from the bank. "They turned the phone off completely. I can't hear it ringing anymore."

"Shit!" Kate swore and clicked off the cell phone.

"What now?" Sanchez asked.

"We can try talking to them with the bullhorn," Kate said with a shrug. "Other than that, we wait."

"My guys are still in position," added Henderson. "If those dirtbags so much as sneeze, we'll know about it."

"It might be time to start thinking about ways to get inside," Kate suggested. "It doesn't seem like they're open to negotiations right now."

"I'll see if I can get us a set of plans for the building," Dave offered.

"Good," Henderson nodded. "I have a feeling we may have no other choice than to go in and get them."

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They paced. They argued. They paced some more. For nearly three hours, MacGyver watched as the thieves became increasingly restless. The hostages, too, were anxious and fidgety as the hours ticked slowly by.

"Any ideas yet, Dad?" Sam asked quietly.

MacGyver shook his head, sympathizing with Sam's impatience. It was against his own nature to just sit and do nothing, but he had little choice. "They'll get tired of waiting soon. We just need to wait for the right opportunity."

Almost as if on cue, Barry suddenly piped up. "I'm hungry, Carl. Can't we tell them to bring us some pizza or something?"

"Shut up, Barry," Del growled.

"I'm hungry, too," Carl said, shooting Del a dirty look.

Del ignored the look and shrugged. "So how do we get food?"

"We could call," Barry suggested, picking up the handset of the phone.

"Right, Barry," Del snorted. "The cops'll never let them through to deliver."

"Unless we tell them to," Carl said, breaking into a grin. "Barry, make the call. I'll take care of the cops."

"Hey, how many pizzas?" Barry asked. "You want enough for them, too?" He nodded his head toward the hostages.

"Sure, why not?" Del gestured expansively. "The cops are paying for it."

Barry snickered and began speaking into the phone, while Carl picked up another phone behind the teller's counter and dialed 911.

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"Lieutenant, we have contact," Connelly called from the van.

Kate hurried over and climbed inside. "What's up?"

"I just got a call from dispatch. Seems our bank robbers are hungry and ordered some pizza and beer. They called 911 to 'request' that we pay for it." Connelly's face told her what he thought of that.

"Damn," Kate said with a frown. "I don't want them getting any alcohol."

"They threatened to kill someone if we don't deliver everything," Connelly warned.

"If they get drunk, they might get more violent."

"Or more careless," intoned Henderson from the doorway. "They don't have any other way to kill time ...it might just give us an advantage."

"We can't take that chance," Kate objected. "No, we'll give them their food, but no beer."

Ten minutes later, a pizza delivery van pulled up, and a confused teenager climbed out. Kate sent several officers over, who relieved him of his pizza. The boy gave them a dazed look as he accepted the money for the food and drove away.

"Drop them by the door," Kate directed the two officers carrying the large boxes. They nodded and made their way carefully toward the front door of the bank.

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"It's here!" Barry called excitedly from his position by the door.

"You." Carl pointed to the blond college student. "Go get it."

The young man complied, hurrying nervously toward door. He quickly retrieved the pizza boxes and the cases of soda that the police had left there.

"What the hell is this?" Carl said angrily when he saw the soda.

"It ain't beer," J. J. said sarcastically.

"I can see that, dumbass." Carl glared at him. "We told them we wanted beer, dammit!"

"I guess they don't listen too good," said Barry.

"Then we'll just have to show them that we mean business." Del calmly raised his gun, pointed it at the group of hostages, and fired. One of the construction workers clutched at his chest and toppled over, while the rest of the hostages screamed and dove for cover.

"You two," Del said, indicating Barry and J. J., "Take him outside."

"Geez, Del. Take a pill or something," J. J. grumbled as he and Barry dragged the injured man to the door.

Carl smiled and picked up the phone. "I think they'll give us the beer now."

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"We've got gunshots!" Sanchez yelled as he leaned out of the back of the van.

"I heard," Kate shouted back as she hurried toward the van.

"Sounds like they shot someone," Connelly said grimly.

"I guess they're pissed about the beer," commented Dave.

"Murphy!"

Kate turned in alarm at Henderson's shout.

"Look!" He pointed toward the bank.

"Oh no!" She watched in horror as the door opened and a body was shoved outside. At Henderson's direction, two officers rushed over and dragged the body away.

"Want to bet we'll be getting another call from 911 dispatch?" Henderson said with a shake of his head.

Kate opened her mouth to reply, but was interrupted by shout from the officers who had retrieved the victim.

"He's still alive!" A flurry of activity erupted around the injured man as paramedics rushed to his aid. Kate joined them, hoping that the man would be able to tell them something, but was disappointed to find that he was unconscious.

"I'll send someone along with them to the hospital," said Connelly as he arrived at her side. "Maybe he'll wake up in time to tell us something."

"I hope so."

"They called 911 again. They're threatening to kill more hostages unless we give them three cases of beer."

"They'll do it, too," Kate muttered angrily.

"So, what do we do?" Connelly asked.

"We give them what they want," Kate said resignedly.

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"This is bad," Sam whispered. "They just killed a guy to get some booze."

"I know," MacGyver said grimly.

"Cold-blooded bastards," Sam muttered angrily. "Isn't there anything we can do?"

"Not yet," MacGyver replied. "I don't want to risk anyone else getting killed."

"This sucks."

Seeing the look of frustration on his son's face, MacGyver squeezed his arm supportively. "That it does."

There was a whoop of joy from their captors as the beer was finally delivered. Barry tore one of the cases opened eagerly and tossed some cans toward his companions, keeping one for himself. Beer in hand, J. J. walked toward the frightened group of people with a stack of pizza boxes, which he dropped unceremoniously on the floor in front of them. Barry followed behind with the two cases of soda that the police had given them earlier.

"Enjoy," J. J. said with a grin. He took a long pull from his beer and headed back to his associates, who were already tearing into their own pizzas.

The other hostages were afraid to move, so MacGyver reached for the food and began handing the boxes around, while Sam distributed the drinks. "Dig in, guys," MacGyver said to the group as he opened one of the pizza boxes. "It might be the last chance we get for awhile."

"I'm starving," Sam said as he reached into the box in front of him.

"You're always starving," MacGyver teased.

"Hey, I'm a growing boy," Sam said with a grin.

Several of the hostages smiled faintly at the lighthearted banter, and it seemed to have a calming effect on the entire group. They relaxed visibly as they passed around the pizza and soda, talking softly among themselves.

"What are you doing?" Sam asked MacGyver when he noticed him writing unobtrusively on a notepad.

"Writing up their descriptions," MacGyver whispered, pausing briefly to take a bite of some pizza. "Couldn't take a chance on their seeing me do this earlier."

"Ah," Sam said, realizing that his father was using the 'dinner break' to camouflage his activities. His brow furrowed with confusion, though, when he thought about it some more. "How do you expect to get that to anyone?"

MacGyver shrugged. "You never know. I just want to ..."

"...be prepared." Sam finished the sentence and gave him a smile. "I should have known."

His father grinned in response, keeping one eye on the robbers as he continued scribbling. It was unlikely he would be able to pass it along to the police in time to be useful, but it didn't hurt to have it ready in case the opportunity presented itself.

"Man, I have to go to the bathroom," one of the construction workers grumbled softly.

MacGyver scanned the rest of the group, noting several of the other hostages nodding in sympathy. They had been there for nearly five hours already, with no signs that the siege would end anytime soon, so it was not an unexpected sentiment. With a sigh, MacGyver raised his hand in the air and waved at the four criminals. "Hey guys, do you think it would be possible for us to use the, um, 'facilities'?"

Carl walked toward him slowly, giving him a thoughtful stare, before turning to one of the tellers. "Where's the restroom in this place?" She pointed to the hallway to the left the teller's counter. He entered the short hallway and checked each of the several doors along the left side, finally discovering the bathroom at the end of the hall. He inspected it carefully before returning to the lobby.

"Okay, one at a time. Anybody tries anything ...," he waved his gun menacingly. "Got it?" Turning toward his partners, Carl said, "J. J., get over here!"

"What do you want, Carl?" J. J. popped open another can of beer and sauntered in their direction.

"Keep an eye on them."

"Yeah, yeah," J. J. said reluctantly as he hopped up onto the teller's counter to watch the hallway.

"You first, Mr. Spokesman." Carl gestured toward MacGyver with his gun.

With a shrug, MacGyver got to his feet and headed for the door, keenly aware of Carl following closely behind. At the door to the restroom, he froze as he felt the barrel of Carl's gun pressing against the back of his head.

"I've got my eye on you, pal," Carl whispered threateningly. "I know trouble when I see it, and I think I'm looking at some right now." He shoved the gun forward roughly. "You so much as twitch the wrong way and you and all those people out there are going to regret it. Clear?"

"Crystal," MacGyver said evenly without turning around.

"Good."

The pressure on the back of his head abruptly ceased as Carl pulled his gun away and retreated down the hall. MacGyver breathed a sigh of relief as he pushed through the door into the restroom. He was going to have to watch his step and avoid making them suspicious of his activities. Shutting the door, he immediately began a thorough search of the room, but came up empty-handed.

It was a small room without any windows or so much as picture on the wall. Though even if there had been a window, he wouldn't have dared to use it. Not yet, anyway. Looking at his reflection in the mirror, MacGyver shrugged and decided that as long as he was there, he might as well make use of the facilities.

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"Anything happening?" Henderson stuck his head inside of the van inquiringly.

"They're eating the pizza and drinking the beer," Kate replied with a shrug, toying absently with a pencil. "And they're letting the hostages use the bathroom."

"At least they aren't shooting anyone," Henderson said.

"But for how long?"

"They have to come out sometime."

Kate tossed the pencil down in frustration. "I hate just sitting here, waiting for them to make the next move."

"There isn't much else we can do. They won't answer the phone or respond to any of our other attempts to contact them, so it's kind of difficult to negotiate," Henderson said sympathetically. "Maybe when we get our hands on the blueprints, we can find a way to get them out of there."

"I was hoping to avoid that," Kate said glumly. "I don't want to lose any more hostages."

"We may lose more if we don't act."

"I know. But I would rather negotiate."

"You and me both, Murphy," Henderson said sincerely.

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Another hour passed as the bank robbers continued enjoying their beer and pizza. J. J. hopped down from the counter when the last of the hostages returned from the bathroom. As the young woman walked back to the rest of the group, J. J. grabbed her arm and pulled her aside.

"Hey honey, why don't you come over here and talk to me for awhile?" He rubbed his finger over her cheek and gave her a half-drunken grin.

"Please," she said tremulously. "Leave me alone."

"That's not very friendly," he said with a frown. "I just want to talk to you. Come on, let's go back into that office over there and have us a little party." He took her arm and started pulling her toward the back.

"No! Let me go!" She began struggling to escape his grip.

"I said you're coming with me!" J. J. commanded angrily as he tightened his grip and began to roughly drag her away.

"Hey, leave her alone!" Sam shouted as he got to his feet.

"You sit down!" J. J. yelled at him.

Ignoring him, Sam took the girl's hand and pulled her out of J. J.'s grasp. The other three men suddenly took notice of the commotion and began running toward them. His face turning red, J. J. swung his fist around clumsily toward Sam, who ducked away from the blow.

Sam whirled around, pushing the girl out of the way, and punched J. J. in the stomach. He stepped back, preparing to hit him again, not noticing the other men behind him.

"Sam!" MacGyver called to his son in warning as Del dropped into a firing stance. Seeing the look on his father's face, Sam turned around just as Del raised his gun and fired.

"Nooooo...!" MacGyver screamed in horror as he scrambled to get to his son. But it was too late. Sam's head snapped back from the impact of the bullet and he seemed to hang in midair for a moment, like a puppet suspended by invisible strings, before dropping silently to the floor.

"Sam...," MacGyver croaked, his voice an anguished whisper, as he crouched next to his son. His heart pounding wildly, he was oblivious to everything but Sam's still form lying in an ever-widening pool of blood.

"Sit down!" Carl yelled. But MacGyver didn't hear him, intent solely upon helping his son.

"Hey! He said, *sit down*!" Del stepped in front of MacGyver and clubbed him in the face with the butt of his gun.

MacGyver fell backward, stunned by the force of the blow. Unable to resist, he was dragged back toward the rest of the hostages. He lay dazedly on the floor, gazing helplessly at Sam.

"Geez, Del, who pissed in your Cheerios this morning?" Carl shook his head and grinned as he nudged Sam's leg with his foot. Crouching next to the fallen man, he reached out and touched a hand to his neck. With a grunt, he stood, shaking his head. "He's a goner."

Through the haze of his fading consciousness, MacGyver barely registered his words. Sam was dead? But that wasn't possible, was it? He didn't believe it. He wouldn't believe it. "No," he whispered aloud before slipping finally into the welcoming darkness.

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"We've got another gunshot, Lieutenant!" Connelly's voice barked loudly from hand-held radio clipped to Kate's belt. Simultaneously, voices erupted from Henderson's radio as his team near the building reported the shot.

"I'll be right there, Connelly," Kate said, already halfway toward the van.

"Listen to this," Connelly said without preamble as Kate stepped through the door. He punched a button on the console, and a woman's screams issued from the speaker, followed by the sound of male voices, raised in argument. Moments later, there was an anguished cry, then a gunshot. There was more yelling as the bank robbers screamed at, and apparently attacked, someone else. In the background, Kate could hear the cries and whimpers of the frightened hostages. There was something familiar about one of the voices, but she couldn't put her finger on it. Frowning, she shook her head as the elusive thought escaped her.

"I don't like it," Connelly said. "They're getting more violent."

"And there's nothing we can do until they answer the damned phone!" Frustrated, Kate ran her hand through her short blonde hair and pinched the bridge of her nose. "Shit."

"You got that right," echoed Henderson from the doorway. "Any word on a negotiator?"

Sanchez shook his head. "None. Nobody downtown seems to be able to find him."

"That's just great," Henderson said disgustedly.

"It doesn't matter," Kate said tiredly. "They're not talking to us anyway."

"Not yet," said Connelly.

"Sooner or later they're going to realize that they can't just walk out of here," Henderson stated. "They'll have to talk to us eventually."

"Yeah, but how many more people are they going to kill before that happens?" Kate demanded angrily.

Nobody had an answer.

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His awareness returned slowly, unlike the pain in his head, which struck up an immediate and unremitting chorus in his temples. MacGyver moaned and turned his head, grateful that he was lying on something soft. Or some*one* soft. His eyes snapped open.

'Pretty' was the first thought that crossed his mind as he looked up into Barbara's blue eyes. He hadn't noticed before, but she was a very attractive woman. From the touch of gray in her upswept blond hair and the faint laugh lines around her eyes, he guessed her to be in her late thirties or early forties. He had certainly awakened to worse sights.

Looking at her, it suddenly occurred to him to wonder why he was lying with his head in her lap. Frowning, MacGyver closed his eyes and tried to concentrate.

"You've been unconscious for twenty minutes," Barbara said in a hesitant whisper. "How do you feel?" He opened his eyes and looked at her again, noticing for the first time the concern etched on her features.

"I don't know. You'll have to ask the guy who's playing drums on my head," MacGyver groaned and sat up slowly, holding his head in his hands. The room tilted and spun for a moment before righting itself. When MacGyver lifted his head, the first thing he saw was Sam's body lying on the floor. His stomach lurched, and a tide of grief and self-recrimination washed over him as the recollection of what had happened flooded his senses. "Sam," he whispered as a tear slid silently down his face. His son was dead, and he had simply sat there and watched. What kind of father was he? What kind of man would let his son be killed without doing anything to stop it?

"I'm sorry about your friend," Barbara said quietly. "He was very brave."

"He's not my friend," MacGyver said softly. "He's ... he was ...my son." He could hardly bring himself to refer to Sam in the past tense. He looked at Barbara, and though his eyes were focused on her face, he was seeing something else entirely, reliving the horrifying, bloody scene again and again, like a bad movie on an endless loop.

"I'm sorry," Barbara put a hand supportively on his arm. "Don't blame yourself. There was nothing you could have done."

"I'm his father. I'm supposed to protect him." He absently fingered the bloodstains on the front of his shirt -- Sam's blood.

"If you want to blame someone, blame them," she said vehemently, nodding in the direction of the four criminals clustered around the security monitors.

Staring at the men, MacGyver felt his grief slowly turn to anger. Barbara was right. They had taken his son -- the most important thing in his life -- away from him. MacGyver let his gaze travel slowly across the faces of his fellow hostages. They were terrified, with good reason, and huddled together in groups for comfort. Any one of them could end up being the next target. Like Sam had been. Sitting here wallowing in self-pity certainly wasn't going to bring his son back. Nothing was. But there was no way in hell he was going to let them get away with it. He owed that much to Sam.

"Thank you," he whispered to Barbara, who smiled and squeezed his hand reassuringly.

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"Dammit, why don't they shut up already!" Del shouted angrily, referring to the sound of the police speaking to them over a bullhorn. "It's giving me a headache."

"Hey Carl, why don't we just tell them to get us a car or something so we can get out of here?" Barry whined as he cracked open another can of beer. "I'm sick of hanging around."

"Shut up, Barry," Del said testily.

"No, wait a minute Del," Carl said, scratching his chin thoughtfully. "He's right."

"What are you talking about? He's an idiot!" Del shouted.

"Well, we can't just walk out the door, now can we?" Carl glared at him impatiently. "We need to have them get us some transportation ...but not a car. Too easy to follow." He started to pace behind the desk, then stopped, a smug grin spreading across his face. "A chopper! We'll tell them to bring us a chopper!"

Del's frown vanished and he began to chuckle. "Perfect!"

"Of course, they'll try to give us a cop as a pilot, but we can ditch him and let J. J. fly us out of here."

"Excellent!" Del said. "They won't be expecting that!"

"You want me to call 911 again?" Barry asked, a goofy grin on his own face.

"No, I have a better idea." Carl sat down at the desk and began scribbling on a piece of paper. When he finished, he handed it to Del, who nodded in agreement before handing it back.

"Why not just call them?" Barry asked, perplexed.

"Because they'll try to stall us and 'negotiate' and I'd rather not give them the opportunity," Carl replied.

"So how do we give it to them?" Del asked. "They'll start shooting the minute we open the door. They probably have those sharpshooters out there waiting for us."

"We don't," Carl said mysteriously as he started toward the other side of the bank. Curious, Barry and Del followed.

"What's going on Carl?" asked J. J., who sat on the counter, keeping watch over the hostages.

Carl ignored him and walked up to MacGyver. "You. Get up."

MacGyver glared at him coldly as he got to his feet. His head didn't appreciate the sudden change in altitude, spots dancing briefly at the edges of his vision as a wave of dizziness washed over him. He closed his eyes for a moment until it cleared, then kept his eyes focused on the man in front of him, not wanting to look again at the bloody sight on the floor. He wasn't sure he would be able to restrain himself if he caught another glimpse of his son's body.

"I have a little job for you." Carl pointed toward the front door. "Move."

MacGyver bit back an angry retort, wanting more than anything to give the man a piece of his mind, but well aware of the potential consequences of that kind of action. He clenched his fists tightly and stared straight ahead as he walked across the lobby, feeling Carl's gun firmly pressed in the center of his back. As they passed the body of the security guard, Carl tripped over the man's foot.

"Barry, will you and Del get this mess out of here please! Put them in one of the offices or something." He waved a hand dismissively at the two bodies on the floor. His two associates reluctantly complied, grunting with effort as they dragged Sam and the guard away, leaving a bloody trail across the floor. MacGyver closed his eyes and swallowed

against the bile he felt rising in his throat. If it was the last thing he did on this earth, these maniacs were going to pay. Oh they were definitely going to pay.

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"Someone's coming out!" The voice of one of the SWAT men came over the radio Kate held in her hand.

"Is he armed?" she asked Connelly, sitting to her left inside the van.

"Nope," he replied after peering through his binoculars.

"I'm going out," she said as she slid open the door of the van and stepped into the street. Keeping low, she hurried toward Henderson, who was standing by the SWAT van opposite the bank entrance. "What's happening?" she asked him.

"I don't see a weapon," Henderson began. "Could be one of the hostages."

"Oh my god!" Kate whispered. "I don't believe it!" Earlier, she had thought one of the voices she heard over the phone line had sounded familiar. Now she knew why.

Henderson turned toward the lieutenant, puzzled by what he thought was her odd response to his assessment of the situation. She was staring, wide-eyed, at the man in question as he walked slowly toward their position with his hands in the air.

"Damn!" Kate cursed, then turned to Henderson. "Tell your people to hold their fire. I know this guy. He's no bank robber."

Henderson looked back at MacGyver once more before nodding his agreement and passing the order along to his team. "So who is he?"

"His name's MacGyver."

Recognizing the name, Henderson's eyebrows lifted in surprise. "Isn't he the one who helped you in the thing with that nutcase, Zito?"

"That's him," Kate confirmed.

He had been working in another division at the time, but Henderson remembered hearing about the Zito cases and being impressed with what MacGyver had done to help, even though he was a civilian. "You think he can help us here?"

"I think he already has."

"The phone?"

She nodded. "It's the sort of thing he would do."

"Pretty fast thinking."

"Fast thinking is his trademark," Kate said with a smile. "I'd better go talk to him." She removed her weapon from its holster and laid it on the hood of the squad car in front of her. Raising her hands, she stepped around the car and began walking slowly toward MacGyver. They met in the middle, halfway between the entrance to the bank and the row of police vehicles in the street.

"Hello Mac." Kate greeted him quietly, noting with concern the angry-looking bruise that discolored the left side of his face and the rust-colored splatters on his shirt that could only be blood. He looked more haggard and worn than she had ever seen him. "Are you all right?"

"Kate," MacGyver said grimly. "It might be best if you don't know me," he whispered, nodding his head slightly toward the building behind him.

"Okay," she agreed, knowing that he might be in more danger if the bank robbers thought he was too friendly with the police.

"They have a list of demands." MacGyver carefully removed a folded piece of paper from his shirt pocket, grasping it by a corner. "Prints," he whispered.

She took the paper gingerly, holding it as he had done, and tucked it into the pocket of her blazer. "They wrote it themselves?" she asked.

MacGyver nodded in response and handed her a second piece of paper, keeping it hidden in the palm of his hand. Kate took the paper, careful to keep it out of sight, and lifted an eyebrow curiously.

"I wrote up some descriptions," he said softly.

She pocketed the paper and nodded. "Is everyone all right in there? We heard shots...," she stopped speaking as an agonized expression crossed his face.

"They killed the security guard and ...you already know about the other guy, and ...," MacGyver closed his eyes and swayed slightly. For a moment, Kate thought he was going to pass out, but he steadied himself and continued. "...Sam. They ...they killed Sam." This last came out as a strangled whisper. He lifted his head and stared at her with tormented, unseeing eyes. "I couldn't ..." He drew a ragged breath, "...couldn't stop them. All I could do was ...watch."

Kate felt like she had just been kicked in the stomach by an angry mule. Make that ten angry mules. Clenching her jaw, she fought to keep her expression neutral, but the raw pain on MacGyver's face made it nearly impossible. Anguish emanated from him in

palpable waves, like heat rising from an asphalt highway on a summer day, as he struggled to maintain his composure.

"Aw hell, Mac," she whispered. "I'm so sorry." It was all she could do to refrain from wrapping her arms around him to offer some measure of comfort and support. Not that anything could possibly make this less painful for him.

MacGyver nodded and lowered his head, staring intently at his shoes.

"What can you tell me?" Kate asked as she pushed her emotions aside with difficulty, and forced herself to return to the business at hand.

Grateful for the change of subject, MacGyver looked up and forced a tight, mirthless smile onto his face. "There's four of them, armed with handguns. The guy running the show is named Carl -- he's got a shotgun as well. The trigger-happy one is Del." MacGyver's voice broke for a moment, and he took a breath and ran his hand through his hair before continuing. "He's dangerous. He'll kill everyone in there rather than give up. He's also got the gun they took off of the security guard." MacGyver's eyes had turned hard and there was an intensity, a rage, in them that Kate had never seen before. "The other two are Barry and J. J. -- they pretty much do as they're told. Carl seems to be the brains of the bunch." He shook his head. "They're smart, but they're amateurs."

"Okay, that's enough! Get back here!" A voice called from behind the partly-opened door to the bank.

"They're keeping the hostages against the left wall," MacGyver added quickly as he turned around.

"Hang in there," Kate said supportively, "...and thanks for the phone."

He nodded slightly and headed back toward the bank, shoulders hunched as though he were carrying a great weight.

Kate watched him go with a heavy heart. She wasn't a very religious person. The daily horrors she saw in her job had made her cynical and she had stopped practicing her faith a long time ago. But the sight of her friend heading back into the clutches of the men who had killed his son before his eyes tore at her heart, and she sent a silent prayer in his direction.

She waited until MacGyver had disappeared inside the bank before returning to her position behind the police line. Kate stood behind the squad car, lost in thought, until a nudge on her arm roused her from her reverie. "What?" she asked blankly.

Henderson gave her an odd look. "I asked if they had anything to say."

Almost mechanically, Kate slipped on a latex glove and withdrew the folded sheet of paper from her jacket pocket. "Bag this and get it to the lab right away," she told him. "We'll probably be able to get some prints off of it."

"Prints?" He raised an eyebrow skeptically.

"They're amateurs. Mac said they wrote out this list themselves. Not too smart, unless they don't have any prints on file -- which I sincerely doubt."

"How many are there?"

"Four, same as the initial report."

"Four amateurs," Henderson scratched his chin thoughtfully. "I've seen worse."

Kate rubbed her hand on her forehead and sighed. "Unfortunately, it's more complicated than that. They've already killed two people in addition to the guy they shot over the beer."

"Damn! Then they don't have much to lose, do they?"

"No," Kate said softly. "No they don't."

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"Are you okay?" Barbara asked MacGyver anxiously as Del shoved him back to the floor.

"Yeah," he answered, wincing as his elbow banged off of the tiled surface.

"What was that all about?" One of the construction workers, with the name 'Bill' stenciled on his pocket, whispered.

"They had a list of demands for the police. They think they're going to get a helicopter ride out of here." MacGyver gave a derisive snort.

"Won't the police give them what they want?" Barbara asked nervously. "I mean, they've already killed three people."

"Unlikely. They'll want to take some of us with them, and the police aren't going to allow that."

"How do you know that?" asked Bill.

"It's standard policy," MacGyver explained.

"You a cop or something?"

"...or something," MacGyver shrugged. "Let's just say that I've been involved in this kind of situation before."

"So what do we do?" Bill asked. "I don't want these guys to get away with killing my friend."

"We can't do anything yet. Not until we know what the police have planned."

"How will we know what they're going to do?" Barbara asked quietly.

"They're probably going to send me out there again, so I'll be able to find out then. The officer in charge out there is a friend of mine."

"You need any help, just say the word." Bill looked at him confidently. "Me and John here have a score to settle with these bozos." He jerked a thumb in the direction of his companion, who gave him a tight nod.

"Hey! Shut up over there!" J. J. yelled at them from his perch on the counter.

MacGyver nodded, exchanging a silent agreement with his new allies, confident that they would come through when needed.

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"So here's the deal," Kate said to the group of officers assembled around her. "We've got four armed perps, one of whom has already killed two hostages and wounded one other. They're obviously not shy about hurting people to get what they want."

"Do we know anything about the setup?" asked Sanchez.

"Apparently, the hostages are being held near the left side of the lobby. Probably against the wall," Kate replied.

"Any idea what they're packing?" queried Connelly.

"Our friend inside counted five handguns and one shotgun. There could be more, we don't know," Henderson supplied.

"Is this 'friend' going to be able to help us?" asked one of the SWAT men. They had been told that there was someone inside who had experience with hostage situations and terrorists, but most police officers were loathe to place their trust in strangers. Especially civilian strangers.

"I don't know," Kate sighed. "Normally, I'd give you an unequivocal 'yes'. But this man just saw his only son gunned down right in front of him." Kate paused as murmurs of outrage swept through the group. "I know he'll try his best. He's already helped us tremendously by getting us that open phone line so we can listen in. We'll just have to play it by ear."

"So what do we do now?" Perry asked.

"We've got some names. They're being checked out as we speak, along with some fingerprints from the list of demands we were given. They haven't given us any deadlines yet, so we still have some time," Kate informed them.

"What are they asking for?" Sanchez asked.

"They want a helicopter, fully fueled, with room for eight people," stated Henderson. "And no interference from us as they leave."

Connelly snorted. "In their dreams."

"They're probably going to want to take some of the hostages along with them," Kate said. "Our job is to make sure that that doesn't happen."

"Shouldn't we have a hostage negotiator here?" a uniformed officer asked.

"We would if he hadn't been sent to Washington D.C. for special FBI training classes. There are no others available," Kate said, disgust evident in her voice.

"Damn budget cuts," muttered Connelly, echoing her sentiment.

"I've made a few calls to see if I can't find us an available negotiator," Kate continued. "But I wouldn't get your hopes up. They aren't exactly listed in the Yellow Pages."

"Those jerks haven't given us any opportunities to negotiate anyway," Sanchez added.

"What you want us to do?" asked Perry.

"Dave, you and Marlon keep monitoring that open phone line. We'll switch teams every hour. That phone is our best source of information, so I want fresh ears on it. Harris." Kate turned toward one of the uniformed officers. "You go with them. I want to be informed the minute there's any new information."

"Gotcha boss," Sanchez said as he, Harris, and Perry hurried toward the van containing the communications equipment.

"Henderson, you and your team scout out the building. See if you can find us a way in there," Kate directed the SWAT commander. "The building plans should be here any minute."

Henderson nodded and quickly gathered his team, dispatching them on their individual tasks. The black-clad officers spread out, intent upon their reconnaissance. If anyone could find a way inside the building, it was these men.

"Frank." Kate directed her attention to the gray-haired sergeant at her side. "I need you to keep everyone coordinated. We can't afford any miscommunications."

"Neither can they," Connelly said grimly, nodding his head toward the bank as he made his way toward the communications van.

"The rest of you, maintain the line and keep the crowds back."

"What about the media?" asked a young officer, pointing toward a group of television and newspaper reporters standing behind the yellow police barriers.

"Keep them as far away as possible," Kate said sternly.

"With pleasure, Lieutenant," the young woman said with a grin.

Kate sagged against the bumper of a patrol car and watched her officers disperse. They were good people. She only hoped that they were good enough. With a weary sigh, she pushed away from the car and walked to a quiet spot behind the SWAT van. There was one task that remained, one she could not delegate to anyone else. Unfortunately, it was also the one task she dreaded the most. Reluctantly, she drew her cell phone out of her pocket and dialed.

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It was a beautiful, sunny afternoon. Pete Thornton smiled and turned his face up toward the sun. Although he couldn't really see it, he knew there wasn't a cloud in the sky. A perfect Saturday. He stretched out in his deck chair, and turned on his CD player. It had been a very stressful week at the Phoenix Foundation -- something that was far from uncommon these days -- and Pete was determined to do nothing more strenuous today than sipping iced tea and listening to an audio novel.

His idyll was shattered by the ringing of his telephone. Pete pointedly ignored it, letting the answering machine pick up. But when he heard the familiar voice of Kate Murphy drifting outside through the screen door, he decided to answer after all.

"Hello, Kate," Pete said as he picked up the phone.

"Pete," Kate said with relief. "I'm glad I caught you."

"Is something wrong?" Pete had detected an edge to her voice that was not normally present and felt a faint stirring of alarm ripple through his stomach.

"I have a ...situation," she said hesitantly.

When she didn't continue, Pete forced himself to ask, though he had a feeling he wasn't going to like what he heard. "What's going on?"

"I've got a bank robbery that's turned into a hostage situation," Kate began. "And MacGyver is right in the middle of it."

"That figures," Pete sighed and rubbed a hand over his eyes. "What can I do to help?"

"I don't suppose you have a negotiator on staff at Phoenix, do you?" she asked hopefully. "Ours is on the East Coast getting some training at the FBI academy."

"I'll see what I can do," Pete said earnestly. "Is Mac all right?"

"He's been better, Pete." Kate paused, unsure of how to tell him the rest. "There's more ...it's ..." She paused again and took a deep breath. "Pete, the bank robbers killed Sam."

"God, no!" Pete gasped in horror. "Why?! How?!"

"We don't know. Everyone's still inside."

"How do you know he's ...?" Pete couldn't bring himself to say the words.

"Mac told me," Kate said sadly. "The bank robbers seem to have appointed him to be their go-between with the police. He wasn't able to say much." She explained what they knew of the situation to Pete. He listened silently, feeling invisible fingers of grief, anger, and disbelief close around his heart, squeezing until it seemed he could hardly breathe.

"Dammit, hasn't the man seen enough tragedy in his life?!" Pete fumed and began cursing the bank robbers and every other kind of evil in the world.

Kate didn't answer. She felt as angry and helpless as he did, and silently joined him in railing against the injustice of it all, wishing with all her might that things could be different.

Pete finally expended his anger and fell silent.

"We're doing everything that we can," Kate said sympathetically.

"I know. I'll get you whatever help I can from my end."

"I'll call you as soon as I know anything."

"You'd better call my cell phone," Pete said, giving her the number. "I'm coming down there as soon as I can. Mac's going to need all the support he can get."

"You won't get any arguments from me," Kate replied. "I'll make sure my people let you through."

"Thanks for calling me, Kate."

"I just wish I had better news for you," Kate said as she clicked her phone off.

Pete replaced the telephone handset in the cradle slowly. The day that had seemed so perfect had suddenly turned into a nightmare. A wave of grief overcame him, and he felt hot tears stinging his eyelids as he thought about his friends. In the years that he had known him, Pete had become something of a surrogate uncle to Sam. The thought that he would never see the young man again made his blood run cold. He could only imagine what MacGyver was going through. This was going to devastate him, if it hadn't already.

Wiping his eyes, Pete determinedly picked up the telephone. Savagely punching in the numbers, he started making calls. If there was ever a time to call in favors, it was now.

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"I think we found a way in."

"Hmm?" Reluctantly, Kate tore her gaze gaze away from the front of the bank, which she had been contemplating gloomily.

"Look," Henderson said impatiently as he spread open the set of blueprints for the bank on the trunk of the car. "I spoke to the bank president when he brought these plans over. The top two floors of the building are offices, completely separate from the branch operation on the main floor. They even have separate entrances." He pointed to a network of lines running between the floors of the building. "But the ventilation system is shared. I can get some of my people inside via the ventilation ducts on the second floor."

"Are they big enough for someone to fit inside?" Kate asked skeptically.

"Barely, but I think it will work." Henderson pointed to several squares on the diagram. "There are air vents that open directly into the offices that run along both sides of the building. We can have them surrounded before they ever know what hit them."

"I don't know." Kate ran a hand through her hair. "I don't want the hostages getting caught in the crossfire."

"What do you suggest?"

"We need to wait until we can get word inside. I think Mac can help us with the hostages if we can let him know what's going down."

"You sure about that?" Henderson eyed her doubtfully. "You said yourself that he might not be up for this."

"Maybe, but he's the best chance those people have got."

"It's your call."

Kate nodded. "Have your guys get into place. Tell them to wait for our signal before they move in."

"Will do." Henderson trotted off toward his black SWAT van, rapidly barking orders into his radio.

Kate cast a pensive glance toward the front of the building. MacGyver had more inner strength and fortitude than anyone she knew, but even he couldn't keep it together forever. "Hang in there for me, Mac. Just a little while longer," she said softly.

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As hard as he tried, MacGyver couldn't seem to stop his eyes from drifting toward the trail of blood that stained the floor. It was like trying to drive past a car accident without looking. But every time he looked, the image of his son lying lifeless and bloody on the floor flashed before his eyes and sent fresh stab of pain through him. Tearing his gaze away, he leaned his head back against the wall and closed his eyes, trying desperately to keep his emotions at bay. There would be time enough for that later, but right now, he didn't have the luxury of falling apart. Too many lives, his own included, depended on him.

The police were running out of options and sooner or later they were going to have to take some action. MacGyver knew that any move the police made would put the hostages at great risk. They were an untrained group of frightened people who would likely panic if the police stormed the bank, as MacGyver suspected they would, and there would almost certainly be casualties unless he could do something to help. His presence there had provided the police with the option not usually available to them. An experienced and knowledgeable person on the inside would allow them to take more drastic action, since they knew that he could help protect the hostages. For that reason, MacGyver pushed his grief back into a corner of his mind and focused instead on finding a way to keep the hostages safe.

"How long do you think it will be before they send you out there again?" Bill asked softly.

"I don't know," MacGyver said. "The police are going to stall for as long as possible."

"Be quiet!" The stocky man in the business suit hissed at them. "You're going to make them mad."

Bill glared at the man. "Mind your own business, pal."

"It is my business," the man said haughtily. "I plan on getting out of here alive."

"Look, just stay calm and do what you're told and that might just happen," MacGyver said patiently.

"Who put you in charge?" The man looked at MacGyver disdainfully.

"I did," Bill said threateningly. "The man knows what he's talking about. If you're smart, you'll listen to him."

The man snorted contemptuously and started to say more, but closed his mouth and frowned when he saw the glares of the other hostages directed at him.

"Putz," Bill muttered under his breath.

MacGyver smiled faintly, but the scene had him worried. Business Suit might be a problem if they didn't watch out. One loose cannon was all it would take to make the already-volatile situation worse. He was going to have to be careful.

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The sounds of frantic activity assaulted Pete's ears as soon as he opened the car door. The murmurs of the crowd mingled with the shouted commands and crackling radios of the police as he made his way toward the center of the action. It was a sound that was altogether too familiar, and Pete wished, not for the first time, that he didn't have to hear it again, especially not with MacGyver involved.

"I'm sorry, sir, but you'll have to stay back," a woman's voice said as Pete attempted to walk around the wooden barrier.

"My name is Pete Thornton. Lt. Murphy is expecting me," Pete explained.

"Oh yes. Right this way sir."

He heard Kate almost immediately, giving orders with crisp efficiency. But Pete could hear the underlying frustration in her voice, the same frustration he was feeling at his own helplessness. "Kate." He greeted her when she had stopped speaking.

"Pete!" Kate rushed over and gave him a quick hug. "I'm glad you're here."

"Anything happening?"

"Not yet, but we do expect to hear from them soon."

"I haven't got any better news," Pete said regretfully. "Both of our hostage negotiators are out of the country. There's no way we could get them here in time to do any good."

"With the way things have been going, I'm not surprised," Kate said tiredly.

"Is it that bad?"

"Yeah, it is. They're not leaving us much choice. We're going to have to go in after them."

"Does Mac know?"

"I haven't told him, but I'm sure he realizes what we're going to do."

"No doubt," Pete said assuredly.

"I'll give him the details next time they send him out," Kate explained. "I'm hoping he can help us out with the hostages."

"Good idea."

"God, Pete. I hate having to ask anything more of him," Kate said regretfully. "This has got to be tearing him apart."

"I know," Pete said sympathetically. "But it doesn't sound like there are a lot of other options."

"No, there aren't," Kate said defeatedly. "These sickos have killed two people already. They shot another guy because we didn't give them the beer they asked for, and it looks like they've been beating on Mac and maybe some of the other hostages."

"Jesus," Pete swore softly.

"They're a violent bunch, all right. I just don't know how much more Mac can take."

"MacGyver's tough. If there's a way to keep the rest of the hostages safe, you can count on him to find it."

"I just don't want him to get himself killed in the process, Pete," Kate said worriedly.

"I know." Pete put a hand on her shoulder and the two of them stood together silently, not wanting to give voice to the distress they felt about the situation.

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Pain. It was the first thing he became aware of as consciousness gradually returned. Slowly, he opened his eyes and tried to focus through the red haze that clouded his vision. The fuzzy shape he was looking at eventually resolved itself into a file cabinet, and Sam realized he was in an office of some sort. And he was lying on the floor, if the itchy feeling of rough carpeting pressing into his cheek was any indication. He lifted his head carefully, wincing at the sharp pain that the motion produced. With slow, deliberate movements, he finally managed to push himself into a sitting position. Leaning against the file cabinet, Sam closed his eyes and waited for the room to stop spinning.

Gingerly, he reached up and touched the side of his head that hurt the worst, grimacing when his fingers brushed through hair that was stiff with dried blood along the deep furrow that ran from his temple to the back of his head. His hand came away streaked with blood, but the wound didn't seem to be bleeding too badly. Sam sighed and let his eyes roam the small office where he sat, stopping when he saw the body of the security guard on the floor next to the desk. Puzzled, he stared for a moment before the memory of what had happened floated back into his consciousness.

But what was he doing in here? Sam frowned and touched his head again, then suddenly realized that the bank robbers must have thought he was dead, like the guard -- why else would they have dragged him into this office? They must have gotten tired of looking at their handiwork, Sam concluded disgustedly. Then another terrible thought struck him. If the bad guys thought he was dead, then so did everyone else, including his father ...if he was still alive himself. Sam felt a sudden chill as he remembered seeing his father heading toward him right before he was shot. If they turned the gun on him too...

Sam crawled toward the front of the office quietly, careful not to move too quickly, lest the nausea overcome him. It would be difficult to keep his non-deceased status a secret if they overheard him barfing his guts out. He finally made it to the front of the office where he peeked carefully around the edge of the blinds that hung in the glassed-in upper portion of the wall.

The situation didn't appear to have changed. The office he was in was on the right side of the lobby, giving him a clear view of the hostages, who were still clustered against the wall on the leftmost side of the building. Three of the bad guys were sitting around the security station, drinking beer and watching the monitors, while the fourth was guarding the hostages. Sam smiled with relief when he located MacGyver sitting on one side of

the group of captives. But the smile faded when he saw the dark bruise on his father's face and the haunted look in his eyes as he sat staring blankly toward the front door.

"Aw man," Sam whispered. He hated seeing that look on his father's face, not to mention the bruises. With a sigh, he sank back down to the floor and stared morosely at the dead man next to the desk, realizing how lucky he was to still be breathing. If the bullet had hit him a fraction of an inch closer... Sam shook his head to chase that depressing thought away, but instantly regretted it when the room flipped upside down and his stomach threatened to do the same. Shutting his eyes tightly, he took deep breaths until the queasiness subsided.

His head was pounding mercilessly and Sam wanted nothing more than to crawl into a corner and go to sleep, but he forced his eyes open, determined to find some way, any way, to help get his father and everyone else out of this mess. The first order of business, though, was to see if he could find some way to subdue the relentless throbbing in his head. Quietly, he crept on his hands and knees toward the desk, grimly skirting the body on the floor. A glint of metal suddenly caught his eye and he paused, reaching toward it curiously.

Peeking from beneath the edge of the security guard's pant leg was a small metal buckle. Sam pushed the fabric back to reveal an ankle holster containing the man's backup weapon. He hesitated only a moment before removing the gun and tucking it into the waistband of his pants, tugging the guard's pant leg back into place to conceal the empty holster. His father might not approve of guns, but under the circumstances, Sam figured it was better that the weapon was in his hands instead of the bank robbers'.

He continued moving silently across the floor until he was behind the desk. With excruciating care, he opened each of the desk drawers, searching them until he found a small bottle of aspirin. Thankfully, Sam shook several into his hand and swallowed them dry. While he waited for the aspirin to take effect, Sam contemplated his next course of action. Alone and in his present condition, he couldn't do a whole lot to help. He could try to call the police, but he doubted that they would be able to do anything more than they were already. The office had no window to the outside, only a narrow section of glass block on the outside wall to provide some natural light, so escaping the building was out of the question. His only real option was to wait until the police crashed the party or the gunmen made a move. With a sigh of resignation, Sam made his way back to his post by the interior window to watch and wait.

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"Uh-oh." Bill nudged MacGyver's arm, rousing him from his gloomy reverie. "Bad guys at twelve o'clock."

MacGyver looked up to see Carl and Del approaching. Carl stopped in front of him and kicked his foot. "Okay, on your feet. You're going to talk to the cops again, find out when we're getting our chopper," Carl stated as he ushered MacGyver toward the door.

"Quit dragging your feet!" Del said as he jammed his gun into MacGyver's back. "We don't have all day."

MacGyver stifled an angry remark and followed Carl silently to the door. "Anything else you want me to tell them?" he asked, unable to keep the tired sarcasm out of his voice, as Del unlocked the door.

"Keep it up, smartass, and I'll send you to join your pal in the other room." Carl said menacingly as he pressed the barrel of his gun under MacGyver's chin. MacGyver stared at him with empty, emotionless eyes as he was pushed out the door. Outside, he scanned the crowd carefully as he walked slowly toward the large contingent of police with his hands in the air.

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"He's coming out again, Murphy," Henderson's voice called over the radio.

"I see him," Kate replied into her handset. "Pete!" She jumped out of the back of the communications van and hurried around to the front, where Pete was standing, listening to the activity that swirled around him. "They're sending Mac out again. I'm going to talk to him now."

"Tell him...," Pete paused. "Just tell him I'm here."

"Come with me." Kate took his arm and led him up to the police line in front of the bank. "He'll be able to see you from here."

"Thanks."

Kate stepped between the patrol cars and out into the street, holding her hands out to her sides as she moved to meet up with MacGyver. As before, they stopped in the center of the street.

"How are you doing, Mac?" She studied her friend, noting with concern the lines of strain etched in his face. When he looked up to meet her gaze, Kate was shocked at the dull, dispirited look in his eyes.

"I'm fine," he said with a shrug as he looked into Kate's gray-blue eyes, which were now clouded with concern for him. "They want to know when the chopper's going to get here." MacGyver rolled his eyes with disgust, knowing that the police weren't going to deliver any helicopter.

"You know the answer to that as well as I do," Kate said. "We couldn't land a chopper near here anyway, even if we did intend to get them one."

"When are you moving in?"

Kate smiled weakly. "I told Pete that you would figure it out."

"Pete?"

"Behind me," Kate said, tilting her head slightly.

MacGyver looked over Kate's shoulder and saw his friend standing next to a police car. "What's he doing here?"

"I called him. I thought he should know."

"Thanks," MacGyver said softly. It meant a lot to him to have the support of his friends. "So what's the plan?"

"I need your help, Mac," Kate said, knowing their time was limited. "We're going to try to take them. Do you think you can get the hostages clear?"

"I can try," he said soberly. "If you can signal me before you move in, I can have them ready to take cover when the fun starts."

"Okay. Barring any complications, we'll page you five minutes before we hit them." Kate waved her hands in an exaggerated shrug, using the movement as a distraction while she surreptitiously slipped a tiny pager into his hand. "It's set on vibration mode."

MacGyver nodded and tucked the small device into his pocket. "What do I tell them?"

"Tell them we can't bring a helicopter in here, so we'll be getting them a van to take them to the park in an hour. There's lots of open space there where we can land a chopper."

"I hope they buy it," MacGyver said grimly.

"They only have to believe it for a little while." Kate regarded him soberly. "Be careful, Mac. And good luck."

MacGyver gave Pete and Kate one last look, before turning back toward the bank. He used the short walk to regain the tentative hold he had on his emotions. Distress for him had been plainly evident on his friends' faces, and the strength of those emotions threatened to shatter his fragile self-control. But by the time he reached the front door of the bank, he had managed to shove his feelings aside and restore the mask of calm that he would need to get through this crisis. Taking a deep breath, MacGyver pulled the door open and stepped once more into the lion's den.

"Well?" Carl and the other three bank robbers glared at him expectantly.

"They said they can't land a helicopter near here, so they're bringing a van to take you to the park. They're going to land the chopper in one of the open areas."

"That's bullshit!" Del exploded. "What kind of games are they trying to play?!"

"What did you tell them?" Carl asked, stepping closer to MacGyver.

"I told them what you said to tell them," MacGyver said with a shrug.

"It might be the truth, Carl," said J. J. "They can't land it in the street, and their probably isn't a helipad nearby. It's only the big buildings downtown that have those."

"Dammit," Carl said angrily. "This complicates things."

"They'll probably try to get us while we're in the van," Del griped.

"Not if we take some of them along and keep our guns to their heads," Carl retorted.

"Yeah," Barry agreed.

"I still don't like it," Del complained.

"Neither do I, but it's our only option." Carl jabbed MacGyver in the side with his gun. "Go sit down."

Wordlessly, MacGyver did as he was directed, calmly returning to his seat on the floor with the other hostages. The four gunmen continued their heated discussion, all but ignoring them. MacGyver took advantage of the opportunity and turned to the rest of the hostages.

"Okay everyone, listen up," he said softly. "The police are going to try to get us out of here."

"What do you mean?" asked Barbara.

"That means, they are going to bust in here and try to take them by surprise," MacGyver explained, causing a soft murmur of fear to ripple through the group. "Don't worry. All we have to do is to be ready to move when the police rush them ."

"Move where?" Bill asked.

"When I tell you, I want everyone to move behind the teller's counter as quickly as you can," MacGyver said soberly. "There's going to be bullets flying everywhere so you need to keep your heads down and get yourselves out of the line of fire. Okay?" The hostages nodded and whispered their assent nervously.

"You sure about this?" asked John.

"Yes."

John nodded his understanding, exchanging a grim look with his friend Bill. The rest of the hostages, as well, seemed to understand the gravity of their situation, and MacGyver was confident that they would do as they were told. Pleased with their cooperation, he didn't notice the sly expression that settled on Business Suit's face, and was taken by surprise when the man suddenly jumped up and ran toward the bank robbers.

"Hey!" Bill hissed at him, attempting and failing to grab the man's jacket as he passed.

"Aw man," MacGyver said with dread as the four felons converged on the fleeing man. "The best laid plans of mice and men...," he muttered under his breath, shaking his head ruefully. He was in big trouble. Turning to Bill, he whispered in a low voice that only the construction worker could hear. "Remember what I said." He pressed the pager into his hand. "When this thing starts to vibrate, you've got five minutes. Wait until cops start to make their move and then get everyone out of the way. Got it?"

"What about you?" Bill looked at him, a worried frown creasing his face.

"Don't worry about me. I'll manage," MacGyver assured him, hoping he sounded more confident than he felt. Bill looked unconvinced, but nodded his agreement anyway. MacGyver cringed inwardly as he heard the self-serving businessman begin to speak, knowing that the proverbial other shoe was about to drop.

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"Hey! I need to talk to you," Business Suit called to the four gunmen, who were still clustered around the security station.

"Get back over there!" Del shouted, waving his gun threateningly.

"I have some information you'll be interested in."

Carl eyed him contemptuously. "Oh? And what information might that be?"

"I want to make a deal first," Business Suit said brazenly.

"You're not in any kind of position to be making deals," Del said menacingly.

Carl raised his hand to silence Del. "Just a minute. I want to hear when he has to say." Turning to the businessman, he said, "What kind of deal are we talking about?"

"I want to walk out of here," Business Suit said simply.

"You think your information is worth that much?" Carl sneered.

"Yes I do," the businessman huffed.

"Okay, you have a deal," Carl stated. "But it had better be worth it."

"Carl...," Del began, but stopped when Carl shot him a warning look.

"So?" Carl waited expectantly.

Business Suit puffed himself up importantly. "Well, it seems that the police are planning to storm this place."

"Oh yeah?" Carl lifted his eyebrows questioningly. "And how would you know that?"

"That's what your messenger boy over there is telling everyone," Business Suit said with a smug grin.

Carl looked at Del then turned back to their informer. "Is that so?"

"It sure is." The man bobbed his head up and down vigorously. "He told everyone to be ready to hide when the police bust in."

"Isn't that interesting?" Del asked sarcastically.

"Yes it is," Carl said thoughtfully. "Thank you for that information, sir."

"So, can I go now?" Business Suit asked eagerly.

Del glanced at Carl, who nodded almost imperceptibly. "Sure, you can go," Del said with a grin.

Business Suit smiled with relief and swaggered triumphantly toward the door. When he was halfway there, Carl raised his shotgun and fired, hitting the businessman square in the back. The man toppled forward, hitting the floor with an audible thump, his face frozen in an expression of permanent surprise.

"I hate squealers," Carl said to his grinning companions.

"I think we need to have a chat with our friend, don't you?" Del said.

"Go get him," Carl commanded icily.

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"What now?" Kate grumbled as the sound of the blast issued from inside the bank.

"Take a look, Murphy." Henderson handed her a pair of binoculars.

Kate groaned with dismay when she saw the body lying on the floor just inside the glass doors. The bloom of red on the back of the man's suit jacket left no doubt as to his condition.

"Another one bites the dust," Henderson said disgustedly.

Kate arched an eyebrow at him but didn't comment, knowing that Henderson, like many other police officers, had resorted to dark humor to keep himself sane in the face of tremendous stress. It was a habit in which she herself sometimes indulged. But not this time. This time it was too personal.

"Connelly," she spoke into her radio. "Did you get anything from the phone?"

"Not much," Connelly said. "It sounds like one of the hostages was trying to negotiate his way out."

"Stupid," Kate muttered. "Keep your ears on it, Frank."

"Will do, Lieutenant."

"You think your guy might have been compromised?" Henderson asked quietly, having overheard her conversation with Connelly.

"I hope not, but it's possible. He was supposed to prepare the hostages for our assault. One of them might have tried to buy his freedom with that information."

"That puts a definite kink in our plan, wouldn't you say?"

"I know," Kate said glumly.

"What do you propose we do?"

Kate thought about it for minute and was about to reply, when Connelly's gravelly voice broke into her train of thought.

"Lieutenant, you better come listen to this."

Kate didn't bother to respond, but simply hurried over to the communications van, Henderson close on her heels.

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"All right, pal." Del beckoned to MacGyver with his gun. "Get up. Now."

MacGyver climbed to his feet silently and walked toward the gunman, who grabbed him by the shirt and shoved him roughly forward. He walked quickly across the lobby, acutely conscious of the gun at his back. An icy knot formed in the pit of the stomach as he got closer and closer to the rest of the bank robbers, and to the unpleasantness that he knew was coming. Del gave him a final shove when they reached the security station, knocking him into Barry, who pushed him back toward Del. Carl stepped in front of MacGyver, staring intently into his eyes. The bank robber was shorter than he was, so MacGyver had to look down slightly to meet his gaze.

"I hear you have some interesting things to say about the police," Carl said casually.

"Nothing special," MacGyver replied with a shrug.

"That's not what the weasel told me." He pointed to the dead man by the door.

"He was desperate. He'd say anything to get out of here."

Carl laughed, but it was a cheerless sound. "You're going to have to do better than that." He nodded at Del who spun MacGyver around and punched him solidly in the stomach.

His breath left him in one great rush, and MacGyver doubled over, wrapping his arms around himself protectively. But Del wasn't finished yet, following his initial blow with a solid uppercut to the chin that knocked MacGyver off his feet.

Carl leaned over and grasped the front of MacGyver's shirt, lifting him slightly off of the floor. "Now. What did the police tell you?"

"Nothing," MacGyver croaked, still trying to catch his breath.

"Try again," Carl snarled menacingly, shoving MacGyver backward so hard that his head bounced off the floor.

MacGyver blinked, trying to clear the swirling stars out of his vision. "They didn't tell me anything."

"Bull!" Del punctuated his commentary with a hard kick.

MacGyver rolled onto his side with a groan, casting a glance at the hostages, who were sitting silently, frozen with fear. Barbara had her hand over her mouth and a stricken look on her face, while Bill was staring with tight-lipped fury at the scene that was unfolding before him. MacGyver quirked his lips in a crooked smile as Carl and Del grabbed him again and pulled him to his feet.

"Wait," MacGyver said, hoping to forestall the next punch, which Del was already pulling back to deliver. "Listen, why would the cops trust me with any information? For all they know, I could be working with you guys."

"Not likely," Del said, slamming his fist once again into MacGyver's stomach.

"Why did you tell everyone that the police were going to attack us?" Carl inquired irritably.

"I just told them that they should get out of the way if the cops decided to crash your little party," MacGyver gasped, still feeling the ill effects of Del's last punch. "I mean, that's what they always do in the movies. You know, charging through the door, guns blazing and all that." He smiled at them guilelessly, hoping they believed him. The repeated blows to his stomach were making him nauseous, and he didn't want to think about what would happen if he suddenly threw up on their shoes.

Carl contemplated him silently for a moment then grinned at him broadly. "Movies, huh? You're a real piece of work, you know that?" He started to chuckle.

Del eyed him quizzically. "You believe this crap?"

"Del, the cops aren't about to tell anyone what they're up to," Carl explained, rolling his eyes as though it was an obvious conclusion. "They won't risk anyone telling us -- like the squealer over there."

"I'm not so sure about that," Del muttered, glaring at MacGyver suspiciously.

"Don't worry about it, Del. The cops know better than to try anything," Carl assured him.

"What about him?" Del jabbed MacGyver in the ribs with his gun.

"He *is* a pain in the ass," Carl commented thoughtfully, placing the business end of his gun squarely in the center of MacGyver's forehead. "Maybe we should put him out of our misery."

A slow grin spread across Del's face. "Sounds good to me."

MacGyver glared defensively at Carl but then dropped his gaze, realizing that his best chance for survival was to appear as non-threatening as possible. He pasted a fearful look on his face -- which, under the circumstances, wasn't too difficult to do -- and hoped for the best.

"Still, he might be useful," Carl said with a sigh. He pulled his gun away for a moment, then returned it to its position, easing the hammer back.

MacGyver closed his eyes, expecting the worst.

Carl pulled the trigger.

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"What is it, Frank?" Kate asked as she climbed into the van.

"Listen." He flipped the switch that activated the speaker. Immediately, the sound of angry voices was heard. While they couldn't make out all of the words, it was apparent that the bank robbers were angry, and when Kate heard MacGyver's voice, it became clear what was happening.

"I wish we could see what was going on in there," Connelly said longingly.

"Me too," Kate agreed, though in this case she wasn't sure she would want to see what was happening to MacGyver as she heard more yelling intermingled with what sounded like grunts of pain. She clenched her jaw tightly as she listened to her friend being battered. Outside, she appeared to be the epitome of a calm, cool, and collected professional, but inside she seethed with rage, and wasn't sure how long she could keep that particular volcano from erupting.

"What's happening, Kate?" asked Pete quietly from the doorway. He recognized the sounds coming from the speaker, and hoped that MacGyver had nothing to do with them. But from Kate's silence, it appeared that he wasn't going to be that lucky.

"Mac's in trouble," Kate said finally.

"I figured as much," Pete said grimly. "How bad?"

Kate frowned and told him about the other hostage who had been shot. "From what we've been able to piece together, we think that Mac alerted the other hostages about our planned assault like we asked him to. Only some bozo decided to trade that information for a free ticket out."

"He got out, all right," Connelly snorted in disgust. "All the way out."

"So now they're taking it out on Mac," Pete supplied.

Kate nodded. "Yeah. I only hope he can talk his way out of this one."

* * * * * * * * * *

Click.

MacGyver flinched, then opened his eyes when he realized that the gun had not fired.

Carl threw his head back and started to laugh. "That was priceless, man." Del and the other two men started to laugh as well. "Did you see the look on his face?"

MacGyver let out a breath that he hadn't realized he was holding. A shiver of relief raced through him. His legs felt like jello, and he still felt like he would retch at any moment, but at least he was alive.

"Sit down," Carl commanded when he finally stopped laughing.

MacGyver took a step away from the security desk, but was stopped by Carl's fist crashing into his face. The impact sent him sprawling to the floor again.

"Not over there, stupid!" Carl said heatedly. "I want you to stay right here where I can keep my eye on you."

"I still think we should waste him," Del complained.

"Don't worry," Carl said. "If the cops do make like the movies, our troublesome friend here will be right in the line of fire."

"Do you think they're going to come in after us?" Barry asked uncertainly.

"Nah. They know we'll kill more of them ...," Carl waved towards the hostages. "... if we don't get what we want."

"Yeah, starting with him." Del pointed his gun at MacGyver and smiled malevolently as he pretended to shoot him.

"Save it for later, Del," Carl warned.

"Later," he said softly to MacGyver, his eyes confirming the deadly promise. Laughing, Del shrugged and turned back to his companions.

MacGyver sighed and lay quietly on the floor, not wanting to draw any additional attention to himself, while the gunmen discussed their situation. Gently fingering his split lip, he wiped the trickle of blood from his chin, wincing slightly at the pain the action produced. He looked over toward the hostages again, flashing them a painful grin and a covert thumbs-up when he determined that their captors weren't looking. Barbara responded with a tremulous smile. Bill gave him a short nod, but still looked worried, as did most of the other hostages. Holding his aching ribs, MacGyver slowly shifted himself into a seated position, leaning wearily against the front of the security station. He hoped the police would make their move soon, so that this horrible day would finally end.

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He flinched as though he felt the pain himself when one of the thugs punched MacGyver. It had been bad enough when they had shot the guy in the suit, but now they were beating on his father, and that worried him even more. Sam stared coldly at the body on the floor in front of the bank entrance. He had heard enough of the man's conversation with the bank robbers to know that he was responsible for their anger towards his father. Those goons would probably kill him because of that selfish bastard's actions, and Sam found he could feel little sympathy at the man's fate.

Tensely, he watched as the men continued pounding on his father, clenching his fists tightly until his knuckles whitened under the strain. MacGyver had been in many tough situations before, and had always managed to get himself out of them, but it wasn't looking very good this time. Sam's heart suddenly leaped into his throat when Carl pointed his gun at his father's head. "Oh shit," he whispered. He closed his eyes, afraid to watch what was going to happen next. When he heard no shot after a couple of minutes, Sam cautiously opened his eyes and saw his father still standing, while the four goons stood around him, laughing. He breathed a sigh of relief, but tensed again suddenly when Carl punched MacGyver in the face and knocked him down.

When the bank robbers showed no more signs of hurting his father further, Sam finally allowed himself to relax. The strain of sitting there, waiting and watching helplessly, had caused his head to throb with renewed vigor. He gently kneaded the muscles in his neck, gradually working out some of the knots of tension. From what he had been able to decipher of the muffled conversation he heard, it sounded like the police might be ready to force an end to this siege -- and none too soon, in his opinion. He looked at MacGyver, half-hidden from his view by the bank robbers, and determinedly hefted the handgun he had appropriated from the guard. Whatever happened, he planned to be ready.

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"So what now?" Pete asked once it was apparent that MacGyver was out of immediate danger.

"We're still going in," Kate replied. "Mac did his part. We'll just have to hope that the hostages do theirs."

"You think he's all right?"

"Well, they didn't shoot him," offered Henderson. "With these guys, that's about as 'all right' as it gets."

"When do you go?"

"We'll wait until the end of the hour, then we'll park a van in front of the bank where they can see it. With any luck, that will distract them for a minute or two while the SWAT team moves in," Kate said confidently.

"Are you going in too, Kate?" Pete asked.

Kate heard the worry and frustration that Pete was trying so valiantly to hide, and smiled warmly at her friend. "Just try to stop me." These were good men that she had with her, but she couldn't simply wait on the sidelines. Not with her friend's life at stake.

Pete smiled faintly, relaxing slightly with the knowledge that Kate would be looking out for MacGyver personally, though he wished with all his heart that he was the one handling that duty. But his role would come later, after they got Mac out of there. He was going to need all the help he could get then.

"Don't worry, Pete. Mac has dealt with worse kinds of terrorists," Kate said comfortingly.

"Yeah, but so had Sam," Pete reminded her grimly.

Kate could find nothing to say in response to that. Giving his shoulder a supportive pat, she said, "I'd better go check with my team, make sure everything is ready."

Pete nodded, and picked up a set of headphones. "I'll stay here and give these guys a hand."

"Good idea, Pete. You've got better ears than most people I know." Kate turned and jumped from the van, heading for the assembled police personnel near the SWAT van. She didn't notice Henderson was following until he spoke.

"You aren't seriously considering going in with us, are you?"

Kate stopped short and turned to glare at the tall lieutenant. "Why not?"

"You know damned well why not," Henderson said sternly. "You're personally involved, and that makes your participation dangerous."

"I know my job, Henderson," Kate said heatedly. "I'd be going in whether MacGyver was in there or not." In a softer tone, she said, "Look, I'll be going in with the second team, after your guys inside make their move. Okay?"

Henderson frowned, but knew better than to argue with her. "Okay, okay, just let my people do their jobs."

"I wouldn't have it otherwise."

"Murphy, has anyone ever told you that you're exceptionally stubborn?"

"All the time, Henderson," she said with a grin. "All the time."

Henderson grunted and gave an exasperated shake of his head as they walked toward the group of officers awaiting their final orders. Kate was laughing quietly to herself about his reluctant capitulation when Sanchez came running, skidding to a stop beside her.

"Lieutenant! We got a make on those prints." He handed her several sheets of paper.

"Thanks, Marlon." Kate took the papers and quickly scanned them. With a frown, she hurried toward Henderson and the rest of the SWAT team. "New info, guys."

Henderson eyed the papers in her hand speculatively. "Rap sheets?"

"You got it." Kate spread the papers out on the hood of a squad car. "We got two sets of prints, belonging to a Carl Fredericks and Delbert Waxman."

"A couple of regular Boy Scouts," Henderson snorted sarcastically as he read through the documents.

"Yeah, especially Waxman. He's got an arrest record going back to his days in juvenile hall. He did five years for manslaughter, and is suspected of being involved with at least four other murders. There are two warrants out on him right now for armed robbery, three for assault and one for attempted murder."

"Fredericks isn't much better," Henderson added. "Armed robbery, assault, car theft, fraud, attempted murder." Henderson shook his head. "And the list goes on."

"What about the other two?" asked David Perry, who had joined them at the car.

"We didn't get a match on anyone named Barry, but we did come up with one James Johnson, also known as J. J., on the known associates list for Waxman," Kate said. "This guy is strictly small-time; petty theft, a couple of minor assaults, that's about it."

"Says here he's a pilot," Perry pointed out.

"That's probably why they asked for a chopper," Kate replied.

"Waxman is the one that worries me," Henderson said. "He's got too much to lose if he gets caught."

"I agree," Kate said seriously. "Mac told me that he's the one who killed his son and the guard."

"I'll make sure that everyone gets a look at these mug shots before going in," Henderson stated.

"Make sure you pass along descriptions to the guys that are already inside," added Kate. "Waxman and Fredericks are our primary targets. I don't think the other two will be much trouble."

"Okay, then. We go in ten minutes." Henderson looked to Kate, who nodded her approval. "I'll go brief my team."

Kate watched him stride away confidently, and wished she felt as assured of their eventual success as he did.

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The waiting was starting to get on his nerves. Sam closed his eyes and rested his forehead on the cool metal frame that surrounded the interior window through which he was watching the bank lobby. His father was still sitting quietly on the floor, as were the rest of the hostages. Their murderous captors had started on the last case of beer, and were growing more impatient and agitated as time passed.

Sam grunted and massaged his aching head. The aspirin he had taken earlier had only slightly dulled the hammering in his head, and it already felt like it was wearing off. Things were quiet, so he backed away from the window slowly and headed back to the desk, where he had left the bottle of pills. He was halfway there when he heard the noise -- a faint scratching sound coming from somewhere overhead that reminded him of an apartment he had once lived in that had had squirrels in the attic. Only he knew that this time it wasn't any furry creature crawling around up there. Sam sagged with relief, knowing that it had to be the police sneaking into the building through the air ducts.

"About time, guys," he whispered to himself. His headache forgotten, Sam moved back to his position by the window, determined to be ready the minute the police made their presence known.

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When Bill's head jerked up suddenly and his eyes immediately searched him out, it was instantly obvious to MacGyver that the police had signaled their five-minute warning. He dipped his head slightly once he met Bill's eyes, to let him know that he understood, and Bill nodded once in acknowledgement before turning toward Barbara and whispering in her ear. Her eyes widened and she cast a nervous glance toward the bank robbers, who were too busy drinking beer and complaining to spare any attention for the hostages. MacGyver watched with satisfaction as she and Bill quietly spread the word through the rest of the frightened group. They were as prepared as they were going to get -- he only hoped that it would be enough. With one eye on the clock, MacGyver leaned back and waited.

A few minutes later, a shout of joy erupted from behind the security desk as Barry spotted the van being delivered by the police.

"Look! They're bringing the van!" Barry exclaimed.

The other three bank robbers crowded behind the security monitors to see for themselves, while the hostages stared watchfully, poised to move at any moment. MacGyver tensed, knowing that this was a distraction to help the police catch them off guard. Reaching into his pockets, he grabbed a fistful of paper clips in one hand, and the purloined door keys in the other. Moments later, all hell broke loose.

In a blur of motion, police officers dressed in black burst into the room from several of the offices that surrounded the bank lobby. The hostages were on their feet scrambling to safety almost immediately, while the bank robbers shouted and started running, firing their guns at anything that moved. MacGyver jumped to his feet and started heading for the hostages, to make sure they were all safe. But he was stopped short by an arm wrapped around his neck and a gun pressed to his side.

"Don't move!" Del hissed in his ear as he dragged him toward the front door.

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A surge of adrenaline shot through him when he saw police burst onto the scene. Sam reached for the door, but paused when he saw Carl heading straight for him. He stepped behind the door just as it opened, and waited silently while Carl ducked inside the office to hide. The man had no sooner shut the door behind him, when Sam stepped out and confronted him.

"Surprise!" Sam said with a humorless grin as he brought the barrel of the gun down on the startled bank robber's head. Sam felt no small measure of gratification as the man slumped unconscious to the floor. He contemplated dispensing a few well-placed kicks in retribution for what had been done to his father as he stepped over the prone bank robber, but reluctantly refrained. They were going to get what was coming to them at the hands of the police, and anything he did would simply be lowering himself to their level. They just weren't worth it.

Keeping low, Sam eased himself slowly through the door and into the lobby, taking care to stay out of the line of fire. He slid the guns he had taken from Carl across the floor and into the corner, out of reach of any of the bad guys. From behind the tall plant near the doorway to the office where he had been hiding, Sam could see that the last of the hostages was diving behind the teller's counter and the other three bank robbers were exchanging fire with the police. One of the robbers suddenly made a break for the back door, followed closely by several SWAT officers. Sam ducked back into the office, out of the way as the fleeing felon ran past.

When he again ventured out, J. J. was being led out the back door in handcuffs, and Barry was crouched behind the customer service desk having a shoot out with some of the other police officers. Sam scanned the scene carefully to see if there was anyway he could

help, but froze when his gaze came to rest on Del. The vicious thug had his back to Sam, and he was holding MacGyver in a death grip, using him as a human shield as he moved toward the front door.

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Using the keys they had gotten from the bank manager, Kate and her team pushed through the front door and into the lobby, stopping short when they were confronted by Del.

"Get out of here or he's history!!" Del screamed, tightening his grip on MacGyver's throat.

Judging by the bank robber's previous actions, Kate knew that this was no idle threat, but she also knew that if she did as he asked, MacGyver would still probably end up dead. "Hold it, guys," she said to her team, gesturing for them to halt their progress.

"Why don't you just give it up?" Kate said, favoring Del with a frosty glare. "There's nowhere to go."

"Oh, but there is," Del sneered menacingly. "Me and my friend here are going to walk out to that van and drive away. And all you cops are going to stay out of my way or he eats a bullet. Got it?"

Kate glanced at MacGyver, noting the bluish tint to his lips as he gasped for breath under the crushing force of Del's arm. Catching her eye, he mouthed the word "go", flicking his eyes toward the door. Kate only hesitated for a moment before nodding to him. "All right," she said for Del's benefit. "But you hurt him and there'll be fifty cops on you so fast it will make your head spin."

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Sam watched the exchange, his anger growing exponentially. He had had just about enough of these losers. It was time for action. Sam moved out of the office doorway, determined to help his father. He had only taken two steps into the lobby when he suddenly became aware of motion behind him. Whirling around, he saw that Carl had awakened and was staggering to his feet.

"Oh no you don't," Sam muttered, closing the distance to the bank robber quickly. He lifted the gun and placed it against Carl's head. "Freeze, sucker!" Sam gave him an evil grin. "I always wanted to say that."

Carl looked up at Sam, doing a double-take when he recognized him. "But y-you're dead?!"

"Not hardly," Sam snorted as he motioned for Carl to stand up. Prodding him with the gun, Sam escorted Carl down the hall to the back door, where he had seen the police disappear with J. J.

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Del rolled his eyes disdainfully at Kate as she led her people back out the door. "Dumb cop," he muttered, glancing around warily to see if there were any police officers still in the bank. Satisfied that they had all left, he dragged MacGyver back toward the security desk. "Pick 'em up," he hissed to MacGyver, indicating a pair of duffel bags on the floor. "I'm not leaving without my money." He jabbed his gun roughly into MacGyver's side to emphasize his point, but loosened his arm enough to allow him to breathe.

As he bent to retrieve the bags, MacGyver removed his hands from his pockets and in one fluid motion, tossed the paper clips and the keys into Del's face, and jammed his elbows back into his rib cage. Grabbing Del's arm, he pulled hard and flipped the hapless bank robber over his shoulder. Del landed flat on his back, his gun dropping from his hand to land at MacGyver's feet.

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After shoving Carl outside into the waiting arms of the police, Sam made his way quietly back down the hall to the bank lobby. He arrived just in time to see Del sail through the air and land on the floor. "Way to go, Dad," Sam said softly, breaking into a grin. The smile faded, though, when he saw his father reach down and pick up the gun and point it at Del's head.

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Almost as though he were on auto pilot, MacGyver picked up Del's gun and leveled it at a spot between the man's eyes. All the rage and anguish he had been holding in for the last few hours suddenly exploded from the corner of his mind where he had hidden it. The world seemed to shrink around him like a dark tunnel, filling his head with a strange buzzing, until it seemed that no one else existed but himself and the murderous bank robber. The gun felt heavy and awkward in his shaking hand but he paid it no mind as he stared numbly at the man on the floor.

Del glared back at him defiantly, his lips curling in an arrogant sneer. "You'd better give me that gun."

"No." MacGyver continued to stare unflinchingly.

Del laughed. "Oh, so you're going to *shoot* me."

"Yes."

Del's laugh died on his lips when he saw the cold fury in MacGyver's eyes. "Hey man, you can't shoot me!"

"Can't I?" MacGyver rasped.

"Come on, man. You can have half of the money." The arrogance in his eyes had been replaced by fear now that the tables were turned.

MacGyver remained silent.

"Okay, all the money. Come on, man," Del pleaded.

"You killed my son," MacGyver said simply, lifting his other hand to the gun to steady his shaky aim.

Del's eyes widened in horror as he realized that his former hostage was not going to make any deals.

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"Dad?" Sam said, taking a step toward his father. "What are you doing?" But MacGyver didn't move, didn't even acknowledge that he had heard him. He simply stood there, holding the gun in trembling hands, unaware of everything but the man on the floor. Sam continued walking, slowly drawing closer to his father, hoping he could get through to him before he did something he would later regret.

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Kate peered cautiously through the front door. There had been no more gunshots and very little conversation coming through the telephone line. They had been expecting Del to come out shortly after he had ordered the police to leave, but he and MacGyver were still inside. When she saw what was happening inside, Kate suddenly knew why. Slowly, she opened the door and went inside.

"Mac?" Kate called to her friend. "What's going on?" She asked the question even though she knew exactly what was happening. MacGyver had seen his son killed, and now had the killer at his mercy. Kate could see the rage and anguish in his face, warring for dominance with his innate sense of justice and fair play.

"Come on, Mac. Give me the gun," Kate said soothingly. "You don't want to do this."

"Yes I do," MacGyver said, his voice a hoarse whisper.

"Listen to the lady," Del said from the floor.

"Shut up!" Kate said to him harshly. Then, to MacGyver, "He's not worth it, Mac."

"Go away, Kate," MacGyver said softly.

Kate step closer and was about to speak again when she caught sight of someone moving in their direction. Her jaw dropped in astonishment when she recognized who it was. "Sam?"

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There were voices filtering through the static in his head, hollow-sounding, like echoes bouncing off of a canyon wall. One of them even sounded like Sam, but that was impossible. Sam was dead. MacGyver recognized another one as belonging to Kate Murphy, and that was okay, because she wasn't dead. The voices were arguing with him, and he shook his head to clear them away. But it didn't work. If anything, he heard Sam's voice even more insistently than before.

"Put the gun down, Dad," Sam's voice said clearly from somewhere behind him.

"Sam's dead," MacGyver declared in a tired whisper. "He killed him." He jerked the gun toward Del, who recoiled in fear.

"Mac." It was Kate's voice this time. "Sam's not dead. He's standing right beside you."

"No." The gun in his hand began to shake even more violently as MacGyver struggled to keep his focus on the murderer at his feet.

"Dad, look at me."

A hand reached in front of him and gently touched his face. MacGyver turned slowly, reluctant to see who was there, afraid that it might be just a hallucination of his weary mind. In front of him stood an apparition that looked suspiciously like his son. "Sam?"

"It's me, Dad," Sam said with a smile.

Everything else was forgotten as MacGyver stared at his son. His living, breathing son. He lowered the gun, not even noticing when Kate took it from his hand, and enveloped Sam in a fierce hug. "Sam," he whispered, hardly daring to believe that his son was alive.

A cheer erupted from behind the teller's counter as the hostages, who had been watching quietly from their hiding place, saw the happy resolution to the standoff.

"Hey Officer!" Bill shouted to Kate. "We got another one for you." He and John emerged from behind the counter, dragging a subdued Barry between them. "Caught him trying to head for the back door."

"Well, bring him over here," Kate said with a grin.

MacGyver pulled away from Sam, studying him critically, still scarcely believing that he wasn't dead. "So what happened?"

"The guy's a lousy shot," Sam shrugged, touching the side of his head self-consciously.

"Not lousy enough," MacGyver said with a frown, eyeing Sam's blood-soaked hair and clothing. "I thought I had lost you." His voice wavered and he gripped Sam's shoulders tightly, protectively.

"Ditto. I saw what those guys did to you. When they put that gun to your head ..." Sam shuddered and wrapped his hand around his father's arm, seeking his own reassurances.

"Hey, you guys going to stand here all night?" Kate interrupted, putting her arms around both of them. "Let's go. I've had just about enough of this place." She ushered them, along with the rest of the hostages, out the door.

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"Kate?" Pete called anxiously when he heard her directing some officers into the bank.

"Right here, Pete," Kate said breathlessly as she latched onto his arm. "Come on."

"Is it over?"

"It sure is!" Kate said brightly.

"How is Mac doing?"

"He's doing great!"

"What do you mean?" Pete asked, puzzled by her exuberance. "I thought ..."

"I'll let Mac explain," Kate said mysteriously, not allowing him to finish what he had started to say.

Pete followed along until they came upon a throng of people. Almost immediately, he heard MacGyver's voice among the group. He sounded a bit of hoarse, but the voice was unmistakable. "Mac?"

"Pete!" MacGyver greeted him cheerily.

"Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," MacGyver said, clapping Pete on the back. "Right Sam?"

"Well, except for that lovely pair of shiners and that fat lip, you're just great," Sam said with a chuckle.

"Look who's talking," MacGyver retorted. "At least I don't have any dents in my skull."

"Sam?!" Pete exclaimed. "You're alive!"

"I certainly hope so," Sam laughed.

"What happened?" asked Pete.

"My son has a hard head," MacGyver said proudly. "Bullets bounce right off."

"Just like his father," Pete said deftly. "I seem to remember bullets bouncing off of your head a time or two."

"Oh really?" Sam quirked an eyebrow at his father. "I don't remember hearing about that."

"Thanks a lot, Pete," MacGyver groaned.

"You'll have to tell me all about these bullet-bouncing incidents sometime, Mr. Thornton," Sam said mischievously.

"Of course, Sam. Anytime," Pete said with a grin.

MacGyver rolled his eyes skyward and groaned again.

"Okay, boys. There's an ambulance over there with your name on it," Kate said sternly.

"I'm fine," Sam and MacGyver said in unison.

"Sure, you are," Kate said, patting each of them on the arm while Pete stood by, trying not to laugh.

"Kate ...," MacGyver implored.

"Don't whine, Mac," Kate commanded. "It's for your own good."

"But ..."

"That's an *order*, guys. Besides, you both look like hell."

"She's got us there," Sam said defeatedly.

"Okay, okay. We're going," MacGyver said with a sigh. He draped his arm around Sam's shoulders and started toward the ambulance.

"We'll meet you at the hospital," Kate called after them.

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"I guess this day wasn't *all* bad," MacGyver said to Sam. "I didn't have to go waterskiing."

"There's always next time," Sam warned.

"Don't remind me," MacGyver groaned.

"Hey, at least you didn't break your arms this time."

MacGyver shot his son a dirty look. "Very funny, smartass."

"Well this smartass got a phone number." Sam pulled a folded piece of paper from his pocket and waved it in front of his father's face.

"Oh?" MacGyver eyed him skeptically.

"Uh-huh," Sam nodded happily. "The girl I, uh, helped wants to show me her gratitude."

"Right," MacGyver snorted teasingly.

"At least *I* got a phone number," Sam said smugly. "What did *you* get, besides those black eyes?"

"Hey, don't sell your old man short, Junior." MacGyver took a piece of paper from his own pocket and showed it to Sam. "I got a phone number, too."

"Barbara?"

"Yep."

"Cool. Maybe we can double-date?" Sam suggested, an amused twinkle in his eyes.

MacGyver rolled his eyes and grunted. "Don't push your luck, kiddo."

Sam laughed as they reached the ambulance and climbed inside. "Wouldn't dream of it, Dad."

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As she watched the ambulance drive away, Kate found that she couldn't stop smiling. The day had turned out better than she could have possibly hoped. Sam and Mac were both alive, if a little banged up, and all of the bad guys were in custody. Turning to Pete, who stood beside her, she saw the same expression on his face.

"Looks like Mac pulled it off again," she commented.

"Yeah," Pete agreed. "Sam must have inherited Mac's luck."

"You know what they say," Kate said. "Like father, like son."

"Good thing, too."

"They do have a knack for finding trouble, don't they?"

"That they do."

"You know, Pete," Kate said wearily. "After a day like today, I may even have to start going to church again."

"I know what you mean," Pete said with a sigh, grateful to whatever cosmic forces had seen fit to keep his friends safe that day.

"Maybe they'll even stay out of trouble for awhile," Kate said laughingly.

"Yeah, until next time," Pete said with a shake of his head. If he had learned nothing else over the years it was that MacGyver attracted trouble like a magnet.

"Well, that's why they have us, Pete," Kate said encouragingly. "Come on. Let's get to the hospital before they con the doctors into letting them out."

Pete laughed. "Lead on, Murphy." As they walked to her car, Pete reflected on the day, on the emotional rollercoaster ride he had been on. This was the kind of thing that got his adrenalin going. It was one of the reasons why he would probably never completely retire. Not as long as MacGyver kept getting himself into these messes. He needed to be there to help get him out of trouble the next time. And with MacGyver, there was always a next time. Always.

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