Flirting With Disaster

The phone was ringing as MacGyver fumbled with his keys at the door to his apartment. He finally opened the door, nearly tripping on the rug in his haste to get to the phone.

"Hello?"

"Mac? It's Willis," said a familiar voice on the other end of the line just as his answering machine kicked in.

"Hang on a sec while I shut the machine off..." MacGyver walked to the machine and switched it off. "So how are things?"

"Same as always," he responded. "Listen, I have something I'd like you to see."

"What is it?"

"Um, it's something you'll find…interesting," Willis said evasively.

"Ah, I see," MacGyver replied carefully. Willis had been surreptitiously digging through computer files at the Phoenix Foundation in his spare time ever since the Alliance had taken over, looking for any evidence of illegal activities. He had spent most of his career working for Phoenix and didn't like the changes in direction that activities had taken under the new management. As such, he did what he could behind the scenes, taking advantage of the fact that most people tended not to notice a quiet and unassuming scientist who spent most of his time in the lab.

Though unaccustomed to the cloak-and-dagger aspects of Phoenix work that were MacGyver's usual purview, Willis had quickly learned to take precautions after he and MacGyver had found a bugging device in his telephone. If he had found something in the files, he wouldn't want to risk discussing it over the phone. "Where and when?"

"Do you remember the Waller Building?"

"Where the old bio-labs used to be? Didn't Phoenix sell it after they built the new facility?"

"No, they just moved to the new buildings and boarded it up. It needed too much work to modernize it and make it saleable. They never bothered to change the locks, and I still have a key." Willis explained. "Can you meet me there in a half hour?"

MacGyver glanced at his watch -- six o'clock -- and eyed the bag of Chinese food he had dropped on the table longingly. "Yeah, I guess so."

"There's an auditorium in the basement. I'll meet you down there."

"See you then." MacGyver hung up the phone, intrigued by the conversation. He stowed the bag of food in the refrigerator, pulling out a couple of egg rolls to munch on as he drove toward the abandoned research building. It was an old building, one of the first that the Phoenix Foundation had built to house its growing research and development staff. MacGyver had never been inside, since they had already moved to the newer facilities by the time he had joined Phoenix. As he turned into the driveway of the old facility, he wondered just what Willis had found that required so much caution.

The parking lot was littered with trash, and grass and weeds had poked their way up through the cracks that spidered along the paved surface. Even at ten stories, the building was small compared to the new facility, which was twenty stories of modern glass and steel. MacGyver felt a pang of nostalgia as he studied the sturdy brick edifice, bemoaning the fact that most of the structures being built these days lacked the character and soul of these old buildings. The architecture, the attention to detail evident in the ornate brickwork, even the grand style of the main entrance spoke of another time, when a building was viewed not just as a utilitarian box, but as a piece of art in and of itself; a time when the outward appearance of the structure was something to be viewed with pride, not just with an eye to functionality and efficiency.

MacGyver gave a sad smile as he pictured the building in its former glory. Now just an abandoned shell, all of the windows and doors on the ground floor were boarded up, except for the main entrance in the front. MacGyver parked his jeep around the side of the building, out of sight of the main road. He was probably being paranoid, but these days it seemed wiser to be overly-cautious than to get caught with his proverbial pants down.

It was going to be dark inside, so he retrieved his a flashlight from under his seat before getting out of the jeep. MacGyver climbed the stairs to the entrance, pausing momentarily when his knee creaked in protest. He had played hockey the night before in a pick-up game with a bunch of college kids, and was now feeling all of the resulting aches and pains.

"It sucks to get old," he muttered to himself as he reached the top. He hesitated at the door, feeling a sudden sense of apprehension that made the hairs on the back of his neck stand up. Chalking it up to the eerie silence of the old building, he shrugged it off and opened the door. It was unlocked, so Willis must have already arrived, though MacGyver hadn't seen his car anywhere nearby.

The entrance opened directly onto the second floor, so he headed toward the stairs on his left. It was dark in the stairwell, so he clicked on his flashlight and proceeded slowly

down the stairs toward the basement. As he pushed open the door to the basement level, the flashlight illuminated a pair of red beady eyes attached to a furry body that quickly scurried away from the light. MacGyver shivered involuntarily. Rats were not his favorite form of wildlife.

He played the beam of the flashlight along the hallway, illuminating some footprints on the dusty floor that he then followed to a set of double doors marked 'Auditorium'. Inside, the cavernous room was dimly lit by a pair of battery-powered lanterns, similar to the type he brought on some of his camping trips. It was an old and musty room that hadn't seen any human presence for a long time, judging by the layers of dust and grime blanketing the rows of mildewed seats.

"Willis?" MacGyver called as he walked toward the lights.

"Hello MacGyver," said a voice behind him that sent a chill racing down his spine, forming an icy lump in the pit of his stomach. The voice was familiar, but it didn't belong to Willis. MacGyver knew all too well who the owner of that voice was.

"Murdoc," he acknowledged warily as he turned to face his old adversary, who was wearing a smug grin and holding a very big gun.

"Move toward the lights."

MacGyver complied, walking to the front of the auditorium next to the stage. Murdoc followed, turning to face him.

"Where's Willis?" MacGyver asked.

"Oh, he couldn't make it," Murdoc said glibly. "Meet me in the auditorium," he said in a voice that sounded exactly like the quiet scientist. "You never learn, MacGyver." Murdoc shrugged, waving the gun in front of him.

Reacting almost instinctively, MacGyver twisted his body into a spinning back kick, knocking the gun from Murdoc's grasp. "I've learned more than you think," he said pointedly as he tackled the stunned assassin. They fell to the floor, knocking aside the lanterns as each struggled to gain the upper hand.

Murdoc turned and kicked MacGyver in the side of the head before lunging for the gun, which had slid under one of the seats. MacGyver grabbed him by the back of his shirt, knocking him aside, and picked up the gun himself. He stopped and looked at the gun in his hand and then over at Murdoc, who sat watching him with a smirk on his face.

"So, are you going to shoot me, MacGyver?"

MacGyver felt an unfamiliar urge to simply pull the trigger and be done with this battle once and for all. It would be so easy. But he had never been one to take the easy way out. He shook his head. "Don't tempt me, Murdoc."

"Always the boy scout," Murdoc snorted derisively. "It's your fatal weakness." In a blur of movement, Murdoc leaped to his feet, pulled a knife from a sheath tied to his leg, and began advancing on MacGyver.

With a last look at the gun, MacGyver pitched it over his shoulder into the center of the auditorium. He had never needed to compromise his principles to defeat Murdoc before, and he wasn't about to start now.

Murdoc dove at him with a yell, the knife flashing menacingly in the dim light. MacGyver ducked to the side, shoving Murdoc as he moved, but his stiff knee impeded him and he wasn't quite fast enough to avoid the knife as it left a shallow slash in his side. He rolled to the ground and then back onto his feet, thankful that he had been practicing his karate regularly.

Murdoc turned around and came toward MacGyver slowly, brandishing the knife that was now smeared with blood. Eyes fixed on his opponent, MacGyver reached down and picked up the heavy flashlight he had dropped during the fight. Murdoc lunged again, and MacGyver blocked him with a solid blow to his arm. The two were circling each other warily, looking for an advantage, when a strange rumbling sound arose and the floor beneath them began to shake.

At first, MacGyver thought it might be an explosion of some sort, something that Murdoc had concocted as part of his latest game, but the bewildered look on the assassin's face told him otherwise. The shaking intensified and pieces of the ceiling began to fall down around them. The walls cracked and the boarded-up windows shattered as the ground undulated beneath them. Murdoc had already fallen to the floor and MacGyver was having trouble staying on his feet, when the ceiling above them caved in with a loud roar. It was like a slow-motion scene from a movie, MacGyver thought as he watched the building collapse around him. He dove to the floor and covered his head in a vain attempt to ward off the thunder of debris.

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It was pitch dark. His eyes were open -- at least he thought they were open -- it was hard to say for sure. His head felt like there was a jackhammer beating on it, and MacGyver could swear someone was sitting on his chest, pinning him to the floor. He was trapped. Panic raced through him, and he had to force himself to take a deep breath and relax.

It must have been an earthquake, MacGyver told himself. And very big one at that. He had experienced them before, and the sheer power and destructive capability of earthquakes had always amazed him. Though he knew all the scientific facts about what caused them, there was still a mystical quality about earthquakes that left him in awe. It

was as though the earth were signaling her displeasure and putting man in his place, showing him how insignificant he was in the grand scheme of things.

MacGyver tried again to move, but it was useless -- the mountain of rubble had pinned him down quite effectively. He felt a sudden pang of concern for Sam and Pete and all of his friends, hoping that they had fared better than he had. MacGyver swallowed nervously and cleared his mind. He was going to have to do some serious brainstorming to get out of this mess.

His mind drifted back to his day. It had been uncharacteristically quiet at the Phoenix Foundation, with no major crises requiring his attention and no nasty surprises intruding upon his routine. Phelps had made himself scarce, for once, and MacGyver had enjoyed the brief respite from his snide remarks and sarcasm. He had spent an enjoyable day in the lab, working on some environmental studies, and Markham had even complimented him on the report he had turned in several days earlier. All in all, it had been a pleasant day. Funny how quickly things could change.

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The car stayed in the shadows at the far side of the parking lot. Craig Phelps looked through a pair of binoculars at the old building into which MacGyver had disappeared. Nothing was happening yet, so he reached into the box of doughnuts on the seat next to him, hoping the evening would prove eventful for a change. Lately, all of his surveillance of MacGyver had been deadly dull. He had even put on a couple of pounds from all the doughnuts he had been munching out of boredom while he watched MacGyver buy groceries or visit his son or do any number of mundane tasks. But, his superiors had insisted that he keep an eye on his fellow troubleshooter to see if he was stirring up any trouble that they should be aware of. Phelps yawned and stretched. At least this location had more intriguing possibilities, since it was unlikely that MacGyver would be poking around an abandoned building for no good reason.

He had just taken a bite out of a jelly doughnut when the shaking started. Phelps inadvertently put his hand in the doughnut box as he reached out reflexively to brace himself. "Shit!" he cursed as he pulled his hand from the sticky mess. He stuck a jelly-covered finger into his mouth as he scanned the area for the source of the shaking. It was too violent and prolonged to be an explosion. An earthquake?

The building he was watching began to sway and shake in an almost surreal kind of dance. Fascinated, Phelps watched as cracks snaked their way up the sides of the building and the windows above the first floor exploded into thousands of shards that sparkled in the evening sunlight as they fell to the pavement below. The structure shuddered and groaned before finally giving up and collapsing in on itself almost as neatly as a scripted demolition job. The shaking gradually subsided, leaving him staring open-mouthed at the pile of concrete, steel and brick that had once stood ten stories high.

A smile spread slowly across his face. "Let's see Mr. Wizard get out of this one," Phelps snickered to himself. He picked up his cell phone and began to dial a number, only to find that the service was out. With a smile and a last look at the fallen building, Phelps turned and drove away. It was better to deliver good news in person, anyway.

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"Thanks, Sam," Pete said as he lifted his shopping bag. "I really appreciate the help."

"No problem, Mr. Thornton," Sam replied as they made their way to the mall exit.

"I never realized how out of touch I was with what interests teenagers these days," Pete said. "You're sure my nephew will like this computer game?"

"Are you kidding? That's the hottest game on the market right now. We were lucky to even find a copy in the store."

"Good!" Pete grinned. "I don't want to be known as old Uncle Pete who buys dumb gifts. I had an uncle like that when I was a kid. Used to buy us ugly socks and clip-on neckties." He shuddered in remembered horror.

Sam laughed. "Well this gift will assure your status as a favorite uncle."

"Tell you what," Pete said as they reached the mall entrance. "Drive us over to Mario's and I'll treat you to dinner."

"You're on," Sam said enthusiastically. Mario's was one of his favorite restaurants. He reached out a hand to open the door when Pete grabbed his arm.

"Do you hear that?"

"Hear what?"

Moments later, the rumbling started and the ground began to shake beneath their feet.

"Come on!" Sam took Pete's arm and propelled him out the door. Behind them, one of the glass doors shattered and people ran screaming from the building. Panicked drivers collided with each other in the parking lot, sending the fleeing crowd into a deeper frenzy. Sam watched in horror as the marquee outside of the mall entrance splintered and collapsed onto the crowd.

"Stay here, Mr. Thornton." Sam steered Pete away from any potential falling debris. "I'll go get the car." He didn't have far to go since Pete had a special handicap permit to allow him to park close to the entrance. He pulled the car over to where Pete stood and helped him inside. "There's some injured people over there," Sam said. "I'm going to see if I can help."

"Go," Pete nodded. "I'll be fine." Sam raced back toward the mall entrance. The ground had stopped shaking and people were lying on the ground or walking around in a daze. A teenage girl was lying unconscious in a pile of debris, bleeding from a head wound. Sam picked her up gently and headed for the car.

"Hey!" a voice behind him shouted. "Where are you going with her?" A teenaged boy, clutching his arm tightly to his chest, ran toward Sam.

"I'm taking her to the hospital," Sam explained.

"Can I come too? She's my girlfriend."

"Come on," Sam nodded toward the car. "What's your name?"

"Jeff. What's yours?"

"Sam," Sam replied. "What happened to your arm?"

"It's nothing," Jeff said, raising his chin defiantly.

Sam laid the girl on the backseat and Jeff jumped in next to her. He looked back toward the mall entrance and saw that others who had escaped unharmed were helping the remaining injured people. Reassured that there was no one else who needed his assistance, Sam climbed into the front seat and fastened his seat belt.

"There's a hospital a few blocks from here," Pete offered.

"Right," Sam agreed as he turned the car out of the parking lot, driving slowly to avoid the cars that had crashed or been crushed by falling debris during the quake.

"Half of the buildings around here are wrecked," Sam said with wonder. "What a mess!"

Pete reached over and turned on the radio. "…measured seven point six on the Richter scale. Scientists are still trying to pinpoint the epicenter. Police urge everyone to seek shelter and stay off of the streets," the announcer stated excitedly.

"A seven-point-six!" Pete exclaimed. "That's a big one."

"No joke," Sam agreed. A few minutes later, Sam slowed the car and stopped. "Uh-oh."

"What is it?" Pete asked.

"Wow, look at that!" Jeff said in an awed voice. In front of them, the road had split across all four lanes, leaving a three-foot wide crevice.

"The road is gone," Sam told Pete. "We'll have to go around." He turned onto a side street and finally made it to the hospital. The emergency room was a flurry of chaotic activity as injured people streamed inside. A burly EMT took the girl from Sam's arms as they came through the door.

"Can you handle this, Jeff?" Sam asked the boy, whose eyes were on the back of the retreating EMT.

"Sure." Jeff squared his shoulders and tried not to look as scared as he felt.

"Okay," Sam smiled encouragingly at the young man. "Here's my cell phone number." He scribbled it on a piece of paper and handed it to Jeff. "Call me if you need anything."

"Thanks," Jeff said as he turned and disappeared into the crowd of people in the waiting room.

"Come on, let's go home," Sam said to Pete once he had returned to the car.

"If I still have one," Pete said with a wry smile.

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Carefully surveying his situation, MacGyver found that he could move his left leg a little but the rest of him, from his chest down, was immobilized by the pile of debris. A jolt of pain shot up his right leg when he tried to move his foot. "Oh great," he muttered to himself. He was lying flat on his back, pinned up against the stage near where he and Murdoc had been fighting. Murdoc. MacGyver shivered, wondering whether he had survived the collapse.

Almost as though he had read his mind, Murdoc made his presence known. A flickering light suddenly illuminated the small area where MacGyver lay. Nearly ten feet away, Murdoc lay trapped under his own heap of rubble. The area between them was relatively clear, having been sheltered by an enormous slab of concrete that was leaning against the front of the stage. That same piece of concrete was the only thing that kept the crumbled remnants of the building from crushing them both.

Murdoc had one hand free and was holding a lit match, which flickered and died. "We seem to have gotten ourselves into quite a predicament here, MacGyver."

"Oh, really?" MacGyver said sarcastically. "I wouldn't have guessed."

Murdoc laughed. "That's what I like about you, MacGyver. You don't crumble under pressure. Even when there's tons of it." He laughed again at his own joke.

"Ha ha." MacGyver was not amused.

"I don't suppose you have any creative solutions to our dilemma?" Murdoc asked breezily.

"You think I'd tell *you* if I did?"

"Of course you would," Murdoc said assuredly. "You can't stand to see your fellow man suffer…even if the fellow man is me."

"Don't bet on it, Murdoc."

"Now, that isn't very nice."

"Neither are you," MacGyver retorted.

"Touche'," Murdoc laughed. "Still, of all the people to be stuck here with, I'm glad it's you. You have an enviable talent for getting yourself out of these situations."

"You should know, you got me into most of them."

"Yes, I have, haven't I," Murdoc said with undisguised glee. "So how are you going to get us out of here?"

MacGyver was perplexed as to how Murdoc could be so cavalier about their predicament. "I don't know, Murdoc, I've never had a building fall on me before. You're the expert on that, aren't you?" MacGyver said, recalling his first encounter with Murdoc and how it had ended with a building being demolished with Murdoc inside.

"Not quite," Murdoc replied. "The trick is to get out before they fall on you."

MacGyver sighed and tried again to move, but it was no use. He wasn't going anywhere without help. He could hear scratching and grunting as Murdoc tried to work himself loose, though he didn't seem to be having much better luck. If Murdoc were to escape first… MacGyver didn't want to think about it. Panic began to set in as the gravity of his situation hit home. He was trapped under tons of concrete with his mortal enemy only a few feet away -- and nobody knew he was there. It was suddenly hard to breathe.

MacGyver shook his head and forced himself to concentrate. It would do him no good to let fear paralyze him now. He turned his head to find his cheek resting against the smooth wooden surface of the stage front. Something nagged at him, dancing around the edges of his memory, but he couldn't quite put a finger on it. He closed his eyes, wishing he could open them to find that this was just a bad dream.

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"Well?" Pete asked fearfully. "How does it look?"

"It's still standing," Sam said as they stood in Pete's driveway, facing his house. "I'll go take a look around." As he waited for Sam's return, Pete could hear an almost continuous wail of sirens as emergency crews raced from crisis to crisis. The radio had announced that the National Guard had been called in to help control looting and that rescue workers were pouring in from all over the country. Pete found it interesting that disasters seemed to bring out both the best and the worst in people.

"It looks okay," Sam said. "There's a couple of broken windows and the power is out, but it seems solid enough."

"Great!" Pete said, relief evident in his voice as they went inside.

"Watch your step," Sam said as he helped Pete navigate around a fallen table. "We'd better get this stuff put back where it belongs."

"I'll start out here," Pete said as he began to feel his way along the living room.

Sam hesitated for a minute, concerned that Pete would trip on something, before he said, "Okay, I'll take the kitchen. Just yell if you need a hand with anything." He smiled and shook his head as he grabbed a broom. It was no wonder Pete and his dad were such good friends, Sam thought. They were both stubborn and independent to a fault.

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"There." Sam wiped his hand on a towel a few hours later. "All done." He plopped himself on the couch next to Pete. "It may take you a while to find everything in the kitchen, though."

Pete laughed. "It'll just make cooking more of an adventure."

"How about I do the honors tonight?" Sam suggested. "I've had just about enough adventure for today."

"No argument here." Pete raised his hands in front of him. "I guess we'd better eat the steaks I have in the fridge. There's no telling how long the power will be out."

"Great! I shut off the gas, just to be safe, so we'll have to barbecue outside," Sam said as he headed into the kitchen.

"Hey, you know your dad and I built this deck," Pete said as he opened the sliders and stepped onto the redwood deck that ran along the back of his house.

At the mentioned of his father, Sam felt a sudden twinge of concern. "I wonder how he made out in the quake?"

Pete had the same thought and took out his cellular phone. "Nothing," he said after listening for a few minutes. "The lines must be messed up."

"I'll run by his place later." Sam shrugged, but a feeling of unease remained. He shook it off and carried the steaks out to the grill.

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A small piece of plaster suddenly hit MacGyver in the cheek. The vibrations started a moment later, peppering his face with more splinters and grit. "Aftershock," he said softly as he braced himself for the tremor. The vibrations increased, sending larger chunks tumbling around his head. The concrete that trapped him shifted, increasing the pressure on his chest as the shaking reached a crescendo and the rumble turned into a roar. MacGyver let out a yell as one of his ribs gave way under the increased weight, sending a knife-like pain shooting through his chest. Something heavy dropped onto his forehead, sending him spiraling into merciful oblivion.

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Phelps gaped at the destruction that greeted him as he drove toward the Phoenix Foundation headquarters. Entire blocks had been leveled by the quake and people wandered around in a daze, staring at the mess. Some of the areas looked like they had been bombed, like something out of a war movie. Fleetingly, he wondered how his apartment had fared before shrugging it off as unimportant. His years in the military had trained him to live somewhat spartanly and there was nothing in the apartment that couldn't be easily replaced. The only possessions he cared about were safely stashed in a mountain cabin he had inherited from his great-uncle.

Looking at all the devastation, Phelps hoped that the supposedly quakeproof Phoenix buildings had survived. As he drew closer to his destination, Phelps noted with relief that most of the newer buildings were still standing and had not suffered much damage.

"The marvels of modern architecture," he said to himself. He felt a sudden, odd vibration from his car engine. He cursed and slowed the car, intending to pull over, when he realized the vibrations weren't coming from the car. It was a tremor and it was getting steadily worse. Phelps reduced his speed further, eyeing the surrounding buildings warily. It would really ruin his day if one of them fell on him.

Gazing out the side window, Phelps didn't see the dump truck that was barreling toward him head on, its driver unconscious after being hit with a brick that had fallen through the windshield. "Oh shit!" he swore and swerved fiercely when he finally spotted the oncoming truck, but there wasn't time to avoid a collision. His car crashed into a light pole before being hit broadside by the out-of-control vehicle. The horn wailed forlornly as the car came to rest, with Phelps slumped unconscious over the steering wheel.

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"Uh-oh."

"What is it?" Sam asked, as Pete sat up straighter in his chair. His question was answered when the rumbling began, knocking books off of the shelves and undoing much of their previous cleanup effort. He gripped the arms his chair tightly and looked around as the tremor shook the house. It lasted less than a minute, but managed to make a mess nonetheless.

"I guess we're back on cleanup duty," Pete said with a chuckle when the shaking had stopped.

"At least it wasn't as bad as the last one," Sam replied. "I wonder how long these are going to go on?"

"Who knows?" Pete said as he reached over and righted a fallen lamp. "At least my insurance is paid up."

Grinning, Sam stood and began putting books back onto the bookshelves.

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"MacGyver?"

MacGyver awoke to the sound of his name, then wished he hadn't as a wave of pain assaulted him. His head was killing him and he felt pain in his chest with every shallow breath he took.

"Ah good. You're still with us." The tremor had been kinder to Murdoc, who had somehow managed to free himself and was sitting near MacGyver holding one of the lanterns with a satisfied grin on his face.

"What's the matter, Murdoc…?" MacGyver whispered raggedly. "Are you afraid I'll die…before you get the chance to…kill me yourself?"

"That would be quite a pity, wouldn't it?" Murdoc said airily.

"Well, I wouldn't want to...deprive you of your fun."

Murdoc laughed. "It *would* be such a terrible waste of all of my efforts in that regard."

"Don't you ever get…tired of this?" MacGyver asked him wearily.

"Of course. Why do you think I keep trying to end it?"

"You know…we could call it a draw...and end it right here," MacGyver suggested breathlessly.

"There are no 'draws' in this business, MacGyver. You either win or lose…and I don't intend to lose."

"We're both going to lose… if we don't get out of here." MacGyver let out a breath as he strained against the concrete that imprisoned him.

"Brilliant deduction," Murdoc said sarcastically. "Is that the best your infamous brain can come up with? I'm very disappointed in you, MacGyver."

"Life is full of...disappointments, Murdoc…" MacGyver replied disgustedly. "Get used to it."

Murdoc's laugh filled the tiny space. "Getting a bit cranky, aren't we?"

"Being squashed under a building…will do that to a person," MacGyver rasped. Murdoc laughed again. "I can't believe you can find anything…funny about this."

"This entire situation is quite amusing, don't you think?"

MacGyver sighed. It was no use trying to understand how Murdoc's mind worked. He wasn't so sure he wanted to find out anyway.

Murdoc's knife glinted in the light of the lantern as he brought it close to MacGyver's face. "You know, I could just cut your throat and end it all right now."

"Aw come on, Murdoc…" He paused to take a breath. "What fun would that be?"

"Yes, it would lack that certain challenge that I so enjoy," Murdoc said as he fingered the knife lovingly. "Still, it would be almost as satisfying as watching you get slowly crushed under this building." He drew the back of the knife blade slowly along MacGyver's throat.

MacGyver suddenly felt old and tired. "If you're going ... to do it, then ... get it over with, will ya?" he said softly.

"Giving up, MacGyver?" Murdoc said with surprise. "Tsk, tsk. What would Sam say?" MacGyver felt a warm trickle of blood slide down his neck as Murdoc pressed the tip of the knife into his throat. "You know, maybe I'll look Sam up after all this and ask him myself. He might provide me a bit more sport."

"Leave him out of this!" MacGyver said with a flash of anger, coughing painfully as he strained for his next breath. "Your fight... is with me... not him."

"That's better," Murdoc said with a smile. "I knew you had some fight left in you."

"What makes you think... you'll get out of here yourself?" MacGyver gasped.

Murdoc looked around the tiny space and sighed dramatically. "I suppose you do have a point about that."

Murdoc sat silently, still pressing his blade into MacGyver's neck, and contemplated the situation. MacGyver almost wished he would use the knife. It certainly seemed preferable to waiting for the next tremor to crush the life out of him.

"We have quite a dilemma here, don't we?" Murdoc finally said. "You're right, you know. I don't have a very good chance of getting out of here by myself." Pulling the knife away from MacGyver's neck, he turned his left side toward MacGyver. His left arm was covered in blood and was bent at an odd angle, a jagged point of bone protruding through the sleeve of his shirt. "As much as it pains me to admit it, I need your help."

"Sorry, but I'm ...sort of occupied ...at the moment."

"Maybe I can do something about that." Murdoc rummaged in the rubble until he found what he wanted. With much effort, he pulled a sturdy length of steel from the debris and wedged it under the largest of the pieces of concrete that was keeping MacGyver pinned to the floor.

"You know," Murdoc said, panting heavily from the effort. "This is something I learned from you." He dragged a chunk of concrete under the steel bar, forming a crude lever. With his good arm, he pulled on the steel as hard as he could. But it didn't move. He then crawled over the end of the steel beam and leaned all of his weight onto it. The concrete moved a fraction of an inch, but it wasn't enough to free MacGyver.

"Ow," MacGyver groaned as the weight sank back onto his chest.

"Damn," Murdoc cursed. "So much for physics." He sat back and thought silently for a moment.
"There's always the brute force method, I suppose," Murdoc said as he grabbed MacGyver's shoulder with his good arm. He pulled with all his strength, but MacGyver was wedged too tightly.

"Have you got any brilliant ideas?" Murdoc asked.

"No," MacGyver answered helplessly. He closed his eyes and turned his head, wishing he could think of something, anything, that would help. Suddenly, the memory that had been eluding him came flooding back. During college, he had helped out the drama department by working with the stage crew to design sets and lighting. Every theater that he had ever seen had had an area below the stage that was used for storage and to run

wiring for lighting and sound equipment. He was lying with his body pressed against the front of the stage. If they could break through the wooden wall, he might be able to slide into the space underneath.

"The stage," he said softly.

"What?"

"Break through ...the front of the stage."

Murdoc nodded his comprehension. "It might work." He picked up the piece of steel in his hand and began beating it against the wood. MacGyver turned his head away as the splinters flew through the air. As he listened to Murdoc's efforts, he wondered again at his enemy's reasons for helping him. Self-preservation was a logical motive for most people, but Murdoc wasn't most people. He had gotten out of impossible situations before with worse injuries and no help. Why should this time be any different? MacGyver shook his head to chase those thoughts away. He would have plenty of time to worry about Murdoc's motives after he was out from under this pile of rock.

A hollow crunch sounded when Murdoc finally broke through the barrier. He dropped the piece of steel and shone the lantern through the hole. "There's a room under here," he said. "It looks intact."

"For now," MacGyver said.

Murdoc grunted and resumed beating on the wood. An hour later, he had managed to widen the hole enough so that he could slide through. MacGyver heard a muffled thump as Murdoc squirmed through the opening and into the room. As Murdoc rummaged around under the stage, MacGyver tried to stifle the claustrophobia that threatened to overwhelm him. He was totally at the mercy the one person in the world who had made killing him his life's work, and who might just take this opportunity to disappear, leaving MacGyver to his horrible fate. It was far from a comforting thought.

A squealing noise in his ear distracted MacGyver from his pessimistic thoughts. He turned his head toward the stage just as one of the boards came free with a crunch. Murdoc's grinning face appeared in the new opening. "It works much better with the proper tools," he said, waving a rusty old crowbar in front of him.

MacGyver didn't reply as Murdoc began prying away more the boards. Finally, there was enough open space for MacGyver to free his left arm and he extended it into the space beneath the stage, flexing it carefully. A few boards later, he was able to reach inside far enough to grab hold of a support beam and start working himself out from under the rubble.

Pain shot through his ribcage as he struggled to extricate himself. Just as he pulled his right arm loose, another aftershock began and the slab of concrete started to shift again.

Frantically, MacGyver pulled with all of his strength and tore his legs free, tumbling several feet to the hard concrete just as the massive pile crashed to the floor of the auditorium, obliterating the space he had been lying in just moments before.

"That was close," MacGyver groaned, clutching his aching ribs.

"Yes," Murdoc replied. "It was very nearly a crushing defeat."

MacGyver shot a dirty look toward his adversary, who sat on the floor smiling at him. He sat up carefully, wincing at the pain in his ribs and ankle. Pain or not, it felt good to be able to take a deep breath. He looked around, appraising his surroundings. It was a large, low-ceilinged room that ran the length of the stage overhead and it was full of broken furniture, folding chairs, and other odds and ends. He doubted anyone had been in there for a long time.

In the harsh glow of the fluorescent lantern light, MacGyver could see Murdoc leaning against a dusty podium, watching him. He stared back silently for a moment. "Thanks," he said simply. He knew that Murdoc hadn't helped him out of the goodness of his heart and that he would want to extract payment in some form later. But for now, MacGyver was just glad that he wasn't pancaked under the building.

Murdoc smiled at him mirthlessly, the shadows making him look even more sinister than usual.

MacGyver sighed and crawled toward him slowly. "Let me see that arm," he said when he had reached his side. Murdoc lifted his damaged arm toward him, the smile still on his face. MacGyver took his Swiss army knife out and cut away the sleeve of Murdoc's shirt. The arm appeared to be broken in several places and was still bleeding where the bone had pushed through.

"Best I can do is try to set it and wrap it up," MacGyver said with a shake of his head. "It's a mess."

"Do what you can," Murdoc said with a bored shrug.

"You might want to hold onto something," MacGyver warned. "This is going to hurt." Murdoc nodded and grasped the leg of the table that stood near him. MacGyver took hold of his arm and pulled. Murdoc inhaled sharply and gritted his teeth as the bones were jerked into place. MacGyver wrapped his arm with the remnants of the shirt sleeve.

His face pale and his breathing ragged, Murdoc asked, "Are you enjoying this?"

MacGyver stopped and looked at him. "No, I'm not."

"That's the difference between you and me," Murdoc laughed scornfully. "I would be."

"I know," MacGyver said as he continued bandaging Murdoc's arm. Using some slats from a broken chair, he fashioned a crude splint. "There," MacGyver said as he tied the last strip of fabric firmly. "Finished."

"Good." Murdoc leaned his head back and closed his eyes. "Now we're even."

MacGyver sighed. "Don't you ever stop keeping score?"

"What fun is a game if you don't keep score?"

"You think this is a game?!" MacGyver asked incredulously.

"Everything is a game," Murdoc responded with a yawn. "And everyone is an opponent."

"Doesn't sound like much fun to me," MacGyver said as he tore some strips from a canvas drop cloth. "In fact, it sounds like a lonely way to live."

Murdoc didn't answer and MacGyver paused and looked over at him, wondering if he even knew it was like to have friends. Shaking his head, he continued tearing the strips of canvas. It was too dangerous to allow himself to feel sorry for Murdoc. The only reason the man hadn't killed him yet was because he needed his help to escape this deathtrap. Once they escaped -- if they escaped -- Murdoc wouldn't hesitate to kill him and win the 'game'.

Unbuttoning his own shirt, MacGyver looped strips of canvas around his ribs, tying them tightly. It didn't help the pain much, but it kept the broken ribs from moving around. The rough fabric rubbed across the cut in his side, reminding him again of the danger his companion posed to his well-being. Finished with his ribs, he moved on to his ankle, which was throbbing fiercely. Gently, he removed his shoe and flexed his foot, stopping when the pain worsened. He couldn't tell if it was broken or just a bad sprain, so he decided to err on the side of caution and immobilize it as best he could. He took some of the strips of fabric and began to wrap it carefully.

As he finished, he eyed his nemesis, who was leaning back with his eyes closed. He was asleep, MacGyver realized when he heard Murdoc's deep and even breathing. Looking at his watch, he was surprised to discover that it was three o'clock in the morning. The impact of the ordeal seemed to hit him all at once, and exhaustion overtook him. He wouldn't do much good trying to get them out of there if he was too fatigued to move, so, with a last wary glance at Murdoc, MacGyver turned off the lantern and curled up on the floor, asleep almost instantly.

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Pete heard the stifled yawn coming from Sam's direction and smiled. They had been working on his house for hours, righting the furniture and boarding up the broken windows, and both were exhausted from the effort.

"Sam, why don't you head on home now?" Pete said. "I think I can take it from here."

"You sure?" Sam asked.

"Yes," Pete said with a smile. "I'm sure you've got enough mess of your own to clean up."

"I'm trying not to think about that," Sam said with a groan.

"Why don't you check up on your dad's place first? Get some moral support."

"Good idea," Sam said with a grin. "Maybe I can get him to help me clean up."

Pete laughed. "No doubt."

"I'll give you a call tomorrow...if the phones are working," Sam said as he took his jacket from the back of the chair where he had left it.

"Thanks, Sam," Pete said. "Say hello to Mac for me."

"Will do, Mr. Thornton," Sam said as he walked out into the night.

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People still filled the streets, even at this late hour, Sam was surprised to note. Many, it seemed, were afraid to be indoors and had set up tents and makeshift camps on their lawns and driveways. Others were still shell-shocked, walking around and staring at the devastation. The stillness of the night was punctuated every few minutes by the sound of sirens, and Sam felt his apprehension growing as he neared his father's neighborhood.

He breathed a sigh of relief when he pulled his motorcycle in front of MacGyver's apartment. The building was still standing and appeared to have suffered only minor damage, unlike some of its less-fortunate neighbors. Leave it to his dad to find the safest building on the street, Sam thought with a smile. The smile turned to a frown, though, when he realized that MacGyver's jeep wasn't in the garage, nor was it parked on the street.

Sam hurriedly climbed the stairs, knocking loudly on the door to his father's apartment. "Dad? You home?" Not waiting for an answer, Sam pulled out his keys and opened the door, flicking on the light hopefully as he entered the apartment. Luckily, the power was still working in this neighborhood and the light came on, illuminating the apartment.

It was obvious from the disarray that MacGyver hadn't been there since the quake had hit. Sam sighed as he prowled around the apartment, picking his way through the mess. Knowing his father, he was probably out helping somebody. He knew it was selfish, but

Sam wished that his father wouldn't always go running off to the rescue every time someone asked. It would have been nice to find him safe at home for a change.

With a last look around, Sam turned to leave, but stopped short when he saw the light flashing on the telephone answering machine that lay on the floor next to the sofa. He picked it up and pushed the button. An electronic voice told him there was one message and that it was received at 5:58 p.m. Then the message began to play.

"Hello?" said MacGyver's voice.

"Mac? It's Willis..."

"Hang on a sec while I shut the machine off..." There was a shuffling noise and a click as the message ended.

MacGyver had been home before the earthquake hit. Maybe he was with Willis when it struck, Sam thought as he rubbed his hand over his eyes tiredly. He sighed as he set the machine back on the floor. Wherever MacGyver was, Sam hoped he had managed to stay out of trouble, but knowing his father, he wasn't counting on it. With a last look at the apartment, Sam shut the light and locked the door behind him as he left. The mess at his own place was probably just as bad and wasn't going to get any better with time, so Sam decided to go home.

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It wasn't as bad as he had feared. Sam stepped wearily through the door to his apartment a short time later, thankful that his electricity was still on. His books and photo albums had been thrown to the floor, along with most everything else that hadn't been nailed down. Fortunately, he always kept his photography equipment locked in a trunk in his bedroom, so he wasn't concerned about its condition.

Just as he shut the door behind him, another tremor started. Sam braced himself against the wall until it passed a few moments later. It took him a minute to realize that the tremor was over, and he started to understand why all of those people were sleeping outside, but he was simply too tired to let anything deter him from his bed. Giving the ceiling a last worried glance, Sam flopped onto his bed and, despite his worries, fell asleep immediately.

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Voices. He could hear voices. Phelps moaned and opened his eyes. It was dark, everything was blurry. Something moved into his field of vision and then out again.

"He's wakin' up!"

"Quick, grab his wallet and let's get out of here!"

The two teenagers and a third friend dragged Phelps further into the alley and finished emptying his pockets, congratulating themselves loudly when they found the gun in his pocket. Phelps closed his eyes and moaned again. What was he doing lying on the ground? Why wasn't he in his car?

"He saw me, man," one of the teenagers whined.

"Take care of him then!" his friend said irritably.

The teenager took the gun they had liberated from Phelps and took aim at his head. As his finger tightened on the trigger, the little group was suddenly illuminated by the headlights of a car that had turned into the alley. Startled, the boy's hand jerked upward slightly as he fired the gun, the bullet only grazing Phelps' head. The three boys turned and ran, not looking back as they disappeared down the alley. Phelps heard the sound of their running footsteps as he sank once again into unconsciousness.

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He awoke suddenly to darkness. Momentarily forgetting where he was, MacGyver sat up quickly, but instantly regretted it when his ribs sent sharp pains of protest through his side. He blinked, blearily wondering why he was in such pain and why it was so dark in his apartment ...until he remembered what had happened. Instantly, he became aware of a shuffling sound a short distance away. MacGyver fumbled in the dark until his hand found the lantern and switched it on, flooding the room with light.

Murdoc was awake and watching him, shifting uncomfortably on the dirty floor. MacGyver stared at him for a moment, until Murdoc flashed him a grin. He turned away and began to survey the room. It was still intact, despite the two tremors that had occurred during the six hours that he had been asleep. Carefully protecting his damaged ribs, MacGyver got to his feet and limped his way slowly toward the door that was set into one wall. He tried the handle and found that the door was unlocked but wouldn't open. Running his fingers along the outline of the door, he determined that the frame had been bent during the quake, wedging the door closed.

"You didn't think it would be that easy, did you?" Murdoc commented sarcastically.

MacGyver ignored him as he hobbled across the room and picked up the old crowbar that Murdoc had used to free him earlier. Carrying it back to the door, he shoved it into the space between the door and the jamb and leaned his weight against it. The door creaked and groaned, but remained stubbornly in place.

Breathing heavily, MacGyver leaned against the wall and glared at Murdoc. "Are you going to just sit there?"

Murdoc simply smiled at him.

With a disgusted shake of his head, MacGyver turned back to the door. Ignoring the pain in his side, continued prying at the door. He was so absorbed in his task that he didn't hear Murdoc's approach until he spoke.

"Ordinarily, I would enjoy watching you struggle," Murdoc said casually as he gripped the end of the crowbar with his good hand. "But I *would* like to get out of here sometime this century."

MacGyver glowered at him, but didn't respond. Based on past experience, he knew that Murdoc was just trying to provoke him and would merely shrug and smile in response to any comment he might make. It just wasn't worth the effort to engage him in any verbal sparring. He had more important things to worry about.

After several minutes, the door finally gave way with a loud screech, opening inward to reveal what was left of a narrow hallway. In the dim light cast by the lantern, MacGyver grimly studied the jumble of debris that clogged the passage. The rubble was tightly packed, leaving only a few small openings, none of which was large enough accommodate them.

"Well, that was pointless," Murdoc said from beside him. "We can't get out that way."

"It's this or nothing," MacGyver said with a shrug. "We don't have a whole lot of options."

Murdoc stared dubiously at the tangled mess. "You call this an option?"

"You have a better idea?"

Murdoc looked at the rubble again for a moment then sighed resignedly and reached into the pile of debris and tugged a piece of drywall free, tossing it over his shoulder into the storage room. "Then we'd better get to work."

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He swept the last of the broken dishes into a trash bag and sank wearily onto his sofa, surveying his newly-cleaned apartment with a satisfied smile. Now, if he could only keep it this neat, Sam chuckled to himself. His father would probably agree, since his normal housekeeping habits were fair at best. Thinking of MacGyver, Sam picked up his cell phone and dialed his apartment hopefully, but the answering machine picked up after four rings and Sam clicked the phone off with a frown, not bothering to leave a message. The uneasy feeling he'd had the day before returned full force, and Sam toyed with the phone thoughtfully for a moment before dialing Pete Thornton's number.

"Thornton," Pete answered.

"Mr. Thornton, it's Sam."

"Hey, Sam. How did your place hold up?"

"Not bad," Sam replied. "Just some broken dishes and things."

"Good, good. Did you get in touch with Mac?"

"No," Sam sighed. "He wasn't at his place last night and he wasn't answering the phone this morning either. I think he was going to see Willis last night." He explained to Pete about the message he heard on MacGyver's answering machine.

"Maybe he's still with Willis," Pete suggested. "It was kind of difficult to get around yesterday, so they probably just stayed wherever they were."

"Yeah, that makes sense," Sam agreed. "I'm going to run by his place anyway, maybe get started on cleaning it up."

"He'll appreciate that, I'm sure," Pete said. "Make sure you let me know when he gets back."

"No problem." Sam shut off the phone, feeling slightly better about the situation.

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David Markham sighed wearily as he eyed the disaster area that was his office. Books, papers, and nearly everything else that had been on his desk were strewn all over the floor and his pictures had all fallen off of the walls. Stepping carefully through the clutter, he made his way to his desk and sat heavily in his chair. He had had to wait for clearance from the safety crews in order to enter the building, but it was hardly the beginning of his day. Since the earthquake had occurred, he had spent most of his time on the telephone checking on various Phoenix facilities and personnel. But there was still much work to be done.

He reached for the phone, only to find that it had fallen to the floor and broken into several pieces. Shaking his head in disgust, Markham opened his briefcase and retrieved his cell phone. His first call was to Craig Phelps, whom he had been unable to reach since the quake happened. The phone rang eleven times before he gave up. His next call was to MacGyver, and again, he was disappointed.

"Dammit!" Markham cursed as he shut off the phone in frustration. A situation like this was going to require the efforts of a lot of people, especially his two troubleshooters, just to get things back to normal.
Without them, things were going to be much more difficult, especially since he would have to expend resources to locate them, resources that were needed elsewhere. Feeling

the need to do something, he stood and began cleaning up the mess. This, at least, would have some concrete results, unlike his fruitless search for MacGyver and Phelps.

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For the fifth time in twenty minutes, Sam looked at his watch and then at the door to his father's apartment, which had not opened all day. The telephone as well, remained stubbornly silent, and he tried to tell himself that there was nothing to worry about, that MacGyver was fine, but it wasn't working. All day, he had tried to rationalize why his father had not returned or even called to check up on him, but had failed miserably. Repeated calls to Willis had also proved useless, since the telephone service was still apparently out in his neighborhood. Restlessly, Sam stood and straightened some books on the already-neat bookcase. He had managed to distract himself from his concerns for awhile by cleaning up the apartment, but there was nothing left to do, nothing to take his mind off of the fact that his father was missing. He was pacing the room worriedly when the phone rang.

"Hello?" he answered breathlessly, snatching up the receiver before it could ring a second time.

"MacGyver?" a voice asked hopefully.

"No, this is Sam, Mr. Markham," he replied, his hope fading when he recognized the voice of his father's boss, who had already called several times that day looking for MacGyver.

"No sign of him yet?"

"None," Sam said wearily.

"All right," Markham sighed defeatedly. "Let me know as soon as you hear from him."

"I will," Sam promised.

Hearing the strain in Sam's voice, Markham felt a pang of sympathy for the young man. "I've got all the resources I can spare looking for him and Phelps," he offered, knowing that it wasn't much help in easing Sam's mind.

"Thanks, Mr. Markham," Sam said, appreciating the man's efforts to make him feel better. It wasn't until after he had hung up that Sam finally registered all of Markham's words. Phelps was missing too? Somehow, that knowledge didn't improve his mood. The sense of dread in the pit of his stomach intensified and Sam knew that his father, wherever he happened to be, was in trouble.

Frustrated, Sam picked up the phone and dialed Pete's number. The phone had barely rung once when Pete anxiously answered, "Hello?"

"It's me, Mr. Thornton," Sam said.

"Anything?" he asked in the same hopeful tone that Sam had just heard from Markham.

"No," Sam replied. "Markham just called and he hasn't heard anything either."

"I don't like it," Pete said after a brief pause. "He should have contacted us by now."

"I know," Sam said morosely. "Markham said that Phelps is missing too."

"Really?" Pete said with surprise. "That's the first I've heard of that."

"You think it means anything?" Sam asked.

"I don't know," Pete said thoughtfully. "Probably not. They weren't working on anything together... at least, not that I know of."

"Dad told me that he thought he saw Phelps following him last week," Sam said, suddenly remembering a brief conversation he'd had with MacGyver the previous week. "He said he didn't know what Phelps hoped to gain by tailing him to the laundromat."

"There's no telling, with that sneaky bastard," Pete said disgustedly, revealing his own dislike for the other troubleshooter. "I don't think Markham even knows what he's up to, half the time."

"Yeah. I just hope he's not the reason we haven't heard from Dad." Sam didn't think much of Phelps either.

"I'm sure he isn't," Pete said, hoping he sounded more certain than he felt. Sam didn't need any additional worries right now.

"I hate just waiting around for him to show up," Sam said, frustration evident in his voice. "I've already cleaned his apartment three times. I have to do *something*!"

"Have you had any luck reaching Willis?" Pete asked, sympathizing with Sam's feelings of helplessness.

"No, his phone service is still out."

"Why don't you go see him?" Pete suggested.

"Do you have his address?" Sam asked, immediately perking up at the prospect of doing something useful. "I checked Dad's address book, but all he had was a phone number."

"Hold on a minute." Pete set down the telephone and went over to his desk, switching on his computer. Speaking briefly into the attached microphone, he was rewarded a minute later by a synthesized voice reading the address aloud.

"Did you get that?" Pete asked as he picked up the phone again.

"Yeah," Sam said with a smile. "That's a pretty cool computer system."

"It is, isn't it? Mac helped me put it together," he said. "It's just lucky that my power was restored this afternoon."

"I'll head over to see Willis now," Sam said.

"Call me later. I don't want to lose track of you, too," Pete said with concern.

"Okay," Sam promised as he hung up the phone. Not sparing the immaculate apartment another glance, Sam hurried out the door.

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"Where is he?" Markham muttered as he hung up the phone. "MacGyver should be home by now. So should Phelps."

"I'll keep trying," his secretary said.

"We need everyone we can get our hands on, especially him and MacGyver."

"I know," she said, looking at him sympathetically.

"Thank you, Alice," Markham said, giving her a tired smile. "I know this is above and beyond the call of duty."

"I'll do anything I can to help," Alice said, returning the smile as she hurried back to her desk.

Markham watched her retreating figure with gratitude, making a note to give her a good raise at her next review. She had come into the office at five o'clock that morning at his request to help get things into some sort of working order, and had spent the day tirelessly helping him coordinate the recovery efforts for the Phoenix Foundation, a task which was proving to be especially difficult without the assistance of his two troubleshooters. MacGyver, especially would have been quite an asset, since he had designed most of the disaster plans for the Foundation in the first place. Markham had already fielded several calls requesting the assistance of Phoenix -- MacGyver, in particular -- in coordinating cleanup efforts for various municipal authorities. Apparently, the troubleshooter's somewhat 'unique' perspective on things was quite useful, since disasters didn't follow the rulebooks, either.

It was an area in which the Phoenix foundation had a lot of experience, though much of that skill had been downplayed during his tenure. Markham had been surprised to learn that they had been a primary consultant to the city of San Francisco after the large earthquake there in 1989, and to many other cities worldwide after earthquakes and other disasters had struck. The new management hadn't considered it important enough to bother telling him. He had only found out when he had begun receiving requests for the Foundation's services. It made him wonder what else the 'powers that be' had neglected to tell him.

Markham swiveled his chair and looked out at the sky, reddening with the approach of sunset. More and more he was beginning to feel like he was out of the loop, merely a puppet on a string who danced to a tune he could no longer hear. It also hadn't escaped his attention that Phelps, his supposed underling, was receiving his true marching orders from elsewhere. He had noticed Phelps's recent interest in MacGyver's whereabouts and could only speculate at his motives, since no one had informed him of any new surveillance orders.

Markham rubbed his forehead tiredly. It had been a long day and it wasn't doing him any good to brood about his own situation. It certainly wasn't going to help him find his two wayward employees. With a last look out his window, he turned his chair around and picked up his phone.

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The address Pete had given him belonged to a three-story apartment building on a quiet, tree-lined street that appeared to have survived the earthquake with little obvious damage. Sam parked his motorcycle at the curb and climbed the stairs to the third floor apartment where Willis lived. After knocking several times with no response, Sam turned to leave, and ran straight into Willis, who was fumbling with his keys in one hand while carrying a bag of groceries in the other.

"Hey!" Willis said as his bag fell to the floor, strewing its contents across the hallway.

"Sorry Mr. Willis," Sam apologized as he bent to retrieve the spilled items.

"Oh, hi Sam," Willis said, recognizing his visitor. "Come on in." He gestured to Sam to follow as he unlocked his door. Sam followed him into the apartment, depositing the grocery bag on the kitchen counter.

"I was helping my Aunt Eleanor get her house cleaned up -- she lives in one of those old Victorians -- and she insisted on sending a bag full of goodies home with me," Willis grinned and gestured toward the grocery bag, which was filled with plastic containers of cookies and other baked goods. "I think she's afraid I'll starve."

"Not anymore," Sam said with a smile. "You've got enough food there for a couple of weeks."

"No kidding," Willis said when they were both seated on chairs in the living room. "So, what can I do for you?"

"I was wondering if you knew where my dad was?"

Willis shook his head. I haven't seen him since Wednesday afternoon when he came by the lab to pick up some reports."

"What about last night? Didn't you guys get together?"

"No, I was here are all night cleaning up after the quake."

"Oh," Sam said thoughtfully. "Did he say anything about going out when you talked to him on the phone?"

"I didn't talk to him at all yesterday," Willis said, giving Sam a confused look.

"You didn't call him around six o'clock last night?"

"No."

"Aw man," Sam said, his concern for his father erupting into full-blown fear. If someone had called him impersonating Willis, it could only spell trouble for MacGyver.

"What's wrong?" Willis asked, sensing that he had just told Sam something he didn't want to hear. Sam explained to him about the phone call he had supposedly made to MacGyver on the previous night.

"I think," Willis said slowly, after a brief pause, "... we'd better take a closer look at that tape."

His stomach clenched with worry, Sam gave him a tight nod. "I think you're right."

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MacGyver stopped to rest for a moment, dropping his head forward onto his outstretched arms. They had been at it all day: digging, climbing, and tunneling their way through the rubble in their quest for a way out from under the collapsed structure. With a weary sigh, MacGyver resumed his progress, pulling himself through the narrow tunnel that he and Murdoc had uncovered earlier. He had no idea what, if anything, he would find at the other end, but they had little choice, since there were no other paths through or around the rubble. MacGyver prayed that he wouldn't run into a dead end, as they had done several

times before. Crawling through the debris was difficult enough without having to do it backwards.

Luck was with him this time, though, as the tiny passage suddenly opened into a larger space. MacGyver switched on the lantern, which he had been pushing along in front of him, and illuminated a small pocket of space next to a wall that had remained standing. It wasn't large enough for him to stand up, but there was enough room for him to stretch out on the floor -- a thought which appealed to him immensely after twelve straight hours of scrambling through the ruins of the building.

"We've got some open space up here," MacGyver called into the crawlspace from which he had just emerged. A grunt was the only response from Murdoc; faint scuffling sounds the only other indicator of his progress through the tunnel.

MacGyver closed his eyes, leaning wearily against the wall. His ribs had been unrelentingly protesting the strenuous activity to which they had been subjected all day, and now the rest of his body was joining in the chorus of complaint. His muscles ached from the strain of moving heavy debris and climbing around all of the obstacles in his path, and he had added some new scrapes and bruises to his already-numerous collection. He was on the verge of falling asleep when Murdoc finally poked his head out of the debris.

"Well, isn't this cozy," Murdoc said disdainfully as he eased himself into the small space.

"Home sweet home," MacGyver muttered, watching Murdoc slide himself wearily into the opposite corner.

"I suppose it *does* have a certain ambience." Murdoc grinned and waved his good hand around the room.

MacGyver grunted and shook his head. It never ceased to amaze him how Murdoc could maintain his warped sense of humor even in the most dire of circumstances. Nothing seemed to faze him. Even now, he was lying curled up on the floor, already asleep and snoring faintly. With a sigh, MacGyver reached over and switched off the lantern, stretching himself into a reasonably comfortable position. It was going to be another fun night in the Earthquake Hotel.

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"What have we got?" The white-coated doctor hurried to greet the paramedics as they rushed through the doors to the emergency room.

"Gunshot wound to the head," the uniformed woman said briskly. "Multiple contusions and lacerations."

The doctor looked at the dark-haired man lying on the gurney, taking note of his expensive suit. "Robbery?"

"Looks that way," the paramedic said with a nod as she hurried alongside the gurney as it was pushed down the car door of the hospital. "Looters are still running wild all over the city."

"Any history?"

"None," the second paramedic said. "No wallet or other I.D."

"Great," the doctor said with a tired sigh. "He's the twelfth John Doe we've had today."

"Day's not over yet, Doc," the female paramedic said with a sardonic grin.

"Don't remind me." The doctor paused and consulted a clipboard hanging on the wall. "Put him in treatment room three." Taking a fresh patient chart, the doctor penciled in 'John Doe 12' in the space at the top before pushing through the door to take care of the injured man.

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Since Willis' phone and his own cellular service were still out of order, Sam waited until they arrived at MacGyver's apartment before calling Pete with the latest bit of unwelcome information about his father's disappearance.

"It's Sam again, Mr. Thornton," he said when Pete answered the phone.

"What's wrong?" he asked, instantly detecting the distress in Sam's voice.

Sam told him about the phone call that hadn't come from Willis.

"If Willis didn't make the call, who did?" Pete asked worriedly.

"I don't know," Sam said, running a hand through his hair distractedly, unconsciously mimicking one of MacGyver's mannerisms. "We're going to take the tape over to Willis' lab to analyze it."

"Let me know the minute you find out anything. I'm going to start calling..." Pete paused, not wanting to worry Sam anymore than he already was. "... around, see if anyone has seen him."

Sam, already beside himself with worry, didn't notice Pete's reticence. "Thanks Mr. Thornton." Not wanting to waste a minute, Sam and Willis took the tape from the answering machine and headed directly for the Phoenix Foundation.

Sitting down at his desk, Pete leaned his forehead on his folded hands as he steeled himself for his next task. It was something he had had to do before, and he found it as difficult this time as it had always been. Finally, he collected himself and began the dreaded job of calling the hospitals -- and the morgue -- to see if MacGyver had turned up. And as he had done each time before, Pete prayed that he wouldn't find what he was looking for.

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The soft rumbling beneath him and a cascade of fine grit peppering his face roused MacGyver from his slumber. "Aw man, not again," he muttered to himself as the tremor's intensity increased. The aftershock way short-lived, however, and his current shelter remained intact as his cautious inspection revealed. In the dim light of the lantern, MacGyver glanced at his watch and was surprised to find that he had been asleep for four hours, since he still felt like he hadn't slept for a week.

"Yo, Murdoc," he called out to the sleeping assassin, amazed to note that he hadn't stirred at all during the disturbance.

"What?" Murdoc grumbled sleepily.

"Nap time is over," MacGyver said as he started to examine the area for an exit. "I don't know about you, but I want to get out of here as soon as possible."

Murdoc scowled at him but joined MacGyver in his search for an escape route. It took more than an hour, but they finally uncovered a passage that looked promising under several layers of timber and metal. Murdoc peered into the opening, then turned to MacGyver. "After you." Grinning, he gestured toward the dark hole.

MacGyver had a sudden, childish urge to stick his tongue out at Murdoc, but wisely restrained himself. Crawling awkwardly into the cramped, dusty space, he decided that he had spent way too much time under this building if he was actually contemplating making faces at an armed killer who hated his guts. "How do I get myself into these situations?" he grumbled to himself as he clambered over broken drywall and concrete.

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"Here we are," Willis said, sweeping his hand around the room with a flourish. "Geek's paradise." The lab was large and brightly lit by narrow fluorescent lights overhead. Long tables lined the walls, and every surface was covered with computers and gleaming electronic equipment. It was a stark, functional room, whose only touch of personality came in the form of a row of colorful miniature dinosaurs that sat on the shelf above the large computer monitor on Willis' desk.

"Cool," Sam said with a grin, pointing at the toys, some of which had fallen onto the floor during the quake.

"Uh, yeah," Willis said sheepishly as he restored the dinosaurs to their perch. "The place needed a little character."

"I thought that's why they had you?"

"Smart alec," Willis grinned and cuffed Sam on the side of his head.

Sam rolled the chair alongside Willis as he started to type on the computer. "Have to get a few things set up..." he mumbled as he entered what Sam called his 'scientist mode'. After a few minutes, Willis turned and rolled his chair to a table behind his desk and flipped some switches on a piece of equipment.

"What's that?" Sam asked, curious about the unfamiliar device.

"This is the audio analyzer," Willis explained. "It's just a fancy tape deck that records the audio information from the tape and converts it into a digital format that the computer can deal with."

"Neat."

"Yeah," Willis agreed. "Once we have it recorded, we can run it against voice patterns in the Phoenix database and see if we find a match."

"So you can tell right away if it isn't your voice?"

"Yep." Willis put the tape into the machine and rewound it, then pressed the 'play' button. Immediately, the sound of his own voice came from the speakers. He frowned and turned to Sam. "Does that really sound like me?"

Sam nodded.

"Well, we'll find out soon enough." He punched a few more buttons then moved back to the computer. "Okay, we'll match it against mine first." He typed rapidly for minute then switched to his mouse, clicking on several points on the screen. Finally, the display changed and Sam leaned forward in anticipation.

"Well?" he asked.

"It doesn't match. Look." He pointed at the two clearly different patterns which were displayed one above the other on the screen.

"So it's not your voice?" Sam said hesitantly.

"No."

"How accurate is that thing?"

"We can match voice patterns with about ninety-nine percent confidence."

"Wow," Sam said appreciatively. "So what now?"

"Now, we'll try running it against the voice prints in the database." He turned to Sam. "It may take a while, since that database is huge. We're talking terabytes of data."

Sam wasn't exactly sure what size a terabyte was, but he knew it was really big. "What if it doesn't find a match?"

"Then we'll probably be out of luck. The only people with bigger databases are the FBI and the NSA. Maybe the CIA, too. What we have here is a subset of their data," Willis said apologetically. "If we don't get anything, I can contact some friends in those agencies, but it could take days, even weeks to get any answers."

"I don't think we have that long," Sam said gloomily.

"Come on," Willis said, trying not to betray his own fear for his friend's safety. "Let's see if we can scare up some coffee or something while we're waiting."

"Okay." Sam followed him out of the lab, hoping that they would find some answers, but at the same time dreading what those answers might be.

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"Hi-ho, hi-ho, it's off to work we go." MacGyver listened to the slightly off-key notes of the song and laughed giddily to himself as he squeezed through another impossibly narrow gap in the rubble. As he pulled himself forward, a sharp pain suddenly shot up his arm as his palm encountered a protruding nail. "Ow! Dammit!" He immediately snatched his injured appendage back, cradling it protectively against his chest. "Probably a rusty nail too," he grumbled to himself as he pressed the corner of his shirt against the wound to stop the bleeding.

Despite the pain in his hand, MacGyver had a sudden, irrepressible desire to giggle. Forgetting about his injury, he started to laugh and began crawling forward again, stopping only when he leaned his weight on his hand and felt another sharp jolt of pain. With the pain came a sudden clarity and the realization that the odd singing he had been listening to earlier had been his own. He shook his head in an attempt to banish the fuzziness that seemed to have invaded his brain, but regretted it when a wave of nausea washed over him.

MacGyver groaned, running his uninjured hand through his hair. This was *not* good. It was going to be hard enough to escape his current predicament with his faculties intact. He couldn't afford to lose it now. He took a deep breath and became aware of the stuffy,

heavy quality of the air around him. "Gas," he whispered aloud as he suddenly recognized the cause of his muddled thinking.

There had to be some gas lines running beneath the building and it was a good bet that at least one had ruptured during the earthquake. The gas was probably seeping through cracks in the ground and filling the open spaces that he and Murdoc were navigating in their search for freedom, making their predicament even more threatening. Going back wouldn't help, since the gas had most likely already inundated the areas they had already passed through, so without any other options, MacGyver resumed his forward progress, quickening his pace as much as possible.

"You'd better step on it, Murdoc," he turned to warn the other man. "This place is filling up with gas."

"That figures," Murdoc responded thickly.

MacGyver turned around and pushed his way determinedly through some more broken bits of drywall. After everything he had been through, he wasn't about to let something like a busted gas line stop him from getting out of here. He only hoped that they would find a source of fresh air soon, before the gas overwhelmed them.

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Sam lifted his head from the desk, blinking against the sudden brightness as he tried to focus on his surroundings. He turned around and spotted Willis, leaning back in his chair with his arms folded across his chest, snoring softly. With a sleepy yawn, Sam stood quietly and stretched, running his hand through his sleep-mussed hair as his memory of the lab, and why he was there, flooded back. A muted beeping noise caught his attention and he glanced at the computer monitor then froze, staring at the two words that flashed on the screen in bright red letters. "Match Found". The search had taken all night, but had apparently found an answer.

"Willis," he said softly, his voice barely a whisper that the other man didn't hear. "Willis," he tried again, louder, and this time Willis opened his eyes and sat up.

"Huh?" Willis looked around in sleepy confusion.

In response, Sam simply pointed at the computer screen. Willis straightened his glasses and reached for the mouse once the words on the screen registered.

"Okay, let's see what we've got," he said eagerly as he scanned the results of the voice analysis. His excitement, though, faded as abruptly as it had begun and he leaned back in his chair, staring grimly at the screen.

"What is it?" Sam asked hesitantly, not liking the look he saw on Willis' face.

Willis turned to him slowly and said, "Murdoc."

Sam stared at him as the bottom dropped out of his stomach. "No," he whispered as he sank defeatedly into his chair. Of all the people it could have been...

"It's an eighty-nine percent match," Willis said helplessly.

Sam leaned his elbows on the desk and covered his face with his hands. "Shit."

"Yeah," Willis agreed, the bleak tone of his voice matching Sam's.

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Markham walked down the hall toward his office, mentally composing a 'to-do' list in his head for the day's activities. At the top of that list was a renewed effort to locate MacGyver and Phelps. The previous day had ended with no sign of the two men and Markham was beginning to think that something other than the earthquake was responsible for their absence. What that something was, however, was still a mystery.

At first, he had suspected that Phelps had somehow engineered MacGyver's disappearance, possibly at the behest of their superiors, using the earthquake as a cover. But repeated calls from those same superiors inquiring about the location of both Phelps and MacGyver had made him doubt that particular theory, and knowing Phelps as well as he did, he also doubted that the man had taken it upon himself to make MacGyver disappear. Phelps was a man accustomed to taking orders and also one who was wise enough to know the consequences of not doing so. The people they both worked for did not encourage independent actions and were not known to be forgiving of disobedience.

Markham was so absorbed in his own thoughts that he nearly bumped into Pete, who was waiting by the door to his office. "Oh, hello Peter," Markham greeted him. "You're here early."

"No earlier than you, it seems," Pete said with a grin.

Markham snorted faintly. "It's the only time I'll be able to get anything done. It'll be a madhouse again in here by eight o'clock."

"Earthquakes have a way of causing pandemonium," Pete acknowledged sympathetically. "I figured I'd come in early and help out."

"Terrific. We can use all the help we can get."

As Pete took a seat in one of the visitor's chairs in Markham's office, his secretary came through the door carrying a pot of coffee and two cups. "Coffee gentlemen?"

"Alice, you're a lifesaver," Markham said gratefully as he accepted the steaming mug.

"Thanks, Alice," Pete said as she placed his cup in his hand.

Taking a sip of the aromatic brew, Markham sighed appreciatively. "This will be the first of many today, I'm sure."

"I take it you haven't had any luck in finding MacGyver or Phelps?"

"I was about to ask you the same thing," Markham said with a frown as he leaned back in his chair.

"I spent most of yesterday trying to find them," Pete told him. "I called everyone MacGyver knows, then I tried the hospitals and the morgue. It wasn't much use, though. They have hundreds of unidentified victims and they're so overwhelmed with casualties that they don't have enough staff to track anyone down."

"Damn," Markham cursed softly. "We can't spare anyone to go out hunting for them, either."

At that moment, Markham's door suddenly burst open and Willis and Sam rushed into the room.

"Sorry to barge in on you like this, Mr. Markham, but we have some news about my dad," Sam said breathlessly.

"Sam? What is it?" Pete asked.

Sam turned around, surprised by Pete's presence in the room. "Oh good, you're here. I tried to call you at home..." he trailed off.

Markham looked from Sam to Willis expectantly. "And?"

"We're fairly certain that MacGyver has met with some... foul play," Willis began.

"There was a call from Mr. Willis on my dad's answering machine... only it wasn't him," Sam added.

"What do you mean?" Markham asked.

"I analyzed the tape and found a voice print match in our database," Willis explained. "The voice belonged to Murdoc."

The silence in the room was deafening as the two older men sat, stunned at this new development.

"My God," Markham said finally, shaking his head. "What else can go wrong this week?"

"What should we do?" Sam asked, almost pleadingly.

"Any suggestions, Peter?" asked Markham. "You're the closest thing to an expert that we have on Murdoc."

"I can make a few calls, but..." Pete shook his head dispiritedly. "MacGyver's the one who's the real expert on Murdoc."

"Maybe I can help," offered Willis. "If Murdoc was impersonating me, he would have to know a lot about me in order to convince Mac."

"Like what?" Markham asked, unsure of how this would help them find his men.

"If we assume that Murdoc lured MacGyver to a meeting, it would have to be a place that both he and Willis would normally go; someplace that wouldn't arouse his suspicion," Pete explained.

"Well, Mac and I usually get together for dinner or lunch every couple of weeks." Willis scratched his chin thoughtfully.

"Wouldn't a restaurant be a bit too... public for what Murdoc probably has in mind?" Markham queried.

"Yeah," Sam said despondently. "He wouldn't want an audience when he..." Sam broke off, unable to voice what they were all thinking.

"Murdoc has tried before, Sam, and he's always failed," Pete said reassuringly.

"Yeah," said Willis, nodding in agreement. "He's just no match for MacGyver."

"I hope you're right," Sam said quietly, still sounding unconvinced.

"Sam, why don't you and Willis pursue that angle," Markham suggested. "Use whatever resources you need. Peter and I are going to have our hands full getting everything coordinated here."

"Okay," Sam agreed.

"Let's go, Sam," Willis said encouragingly. "We have a lot of work to do."

"Good luck," Pete called to them as they left.

Markham silently echoed Pete's words. He hadn't said anything to them, but he had the added hope that Willis and Sam might be able to find Phelps as well, considering how closely he had been sticking to MacGyver lately. His hope was that when they found one, they would find the other.

"So," Pete said, rousing him from his reverie. "Where do we start?"

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Pete had once jokingly told him that when God was handing out luck, he must have gotten in line about a dozen times, since he always seemed to find a way out of all of the impossible scrapes that he managed to get himself into. As he pulled himself into a small section of corridor that had somehow remained standing, MacGyver felt the welcome touch of fresh air on his face and smiled. Maybe Pete hadn't been too far off the mark after all.

The effects of the gas and his arduous journey through the rubble had left him exhausted and feeling hung over. His head still pounded in a steady rhythm, though the clean air had rapidly banished the last traces of dizziness. Shining the lantern around, MacGyver couldn't detect any obvious source of fresh air, but the mere fact that it was present told him that he was getting closer to finding a path to the outside. With a grunt, Murdoc dragged himself into the hallway and lay on the floor breathing deeply and staring disconcertedly at the partially collapsed ceiling above him.

"The air is certainly much better in here," he finally said, his voice hoarse from the prolonged exposure to gas and dust. "Any idea where it's coming from?"

"Not a clue," MacGyver croaked wearily as he attempted to massage the ache out of his head.

"I feel like I've inhaled a couple pounds of dirt," Murdoc complained tiredly, wrinkling his nose in disgust as he attempted to brush the dust off of his clothing.

"Yeah, well keep it to yourself," MacGyver coughed, waving his hand in front of his face to fan away the cloud of dust that Murdoc was stirring up.

Murdoc shot him a glare, then curled up against the wall. "I'm going to get some sleep."

MacGyver watched him silently for a minute before finding himself a spot that wasn't too uncomfortable. Switching off the lamp, he lay on his back and tried to sleep, but the pain in his head wouldn't immediately allow it. With nothing to distract him, he started pondering his predicament again. They were getting closer to the outside and sooner or later, he was going to have to deal with Murdoc. There was no doubt in his mind that Murdoc planned to kill him the moment they were free of the imprisoning debris, and MacGyver knew that he was going to have to use everything he had if he was going to

survive. With those troubling thoughts on his mind, MacGyver finally fell into an uneasy slumber.

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"Why don't we get some breakfast," said Willis, stifling a yawn. "I really need some coffee -- and not that battery acid that comes out of the vending machines, either."

"Sure," Sam said, his stomach growling at the thought of food. They left the Phoenix building and walked down the block to a small diner that claimed to be open twenty-four hours a day and was, indeed, the only restaurant open at that early hour. After they had been seated in a booth and ordered breakfast, Willis took a small notepad and pen out of his pocket and began taking notes.

"We need to make a list of places that Mac wouldn't find unusual to meet with me. I'm going to start with restaurants, since that's where we usually get together," Willis said, tapping his pen on the notepad.

"Yeah," Sam agreed. "I was thinking that we shouldn't rule them out, since Murdoc could have gotten to my dad before he even went inside."

"You're right," Willis agreed as he began making a list.

"Don't forget that Mexican place down by the pier that we all went to after I won that award for my Bosnia photos."

"Rafael's," Willis asserted, adding it to the list. "We've been there a few times recently."

By the time they had finished breakfast, the list had expanded to two pages. Sam stared at it gloomily. "This list is huge and we haven't even finished with restaurants yet."

"MacGyver is always dragging me off to try new places," Willis explained. "Trying to expand my horizons, I guess."

"What about other places?"

"We've met in the park and at the Science Museum, but only during the daytime."

"Anyplace else?"

"Well, we have met at some of the Phoenix buildings after normal business hours... usually when we need to work on a project that we don't want anyone else to know about." Willis began adding to the list, then suddenly looked up, staring past Sam distractedly.

"What?" Sam inquired, noting the faraway look in his eyes.

"All of the Phoenix buildings have surveillance cameras."

Sam shrugged. "So? It's not likely that Murdoc just waltzed into the building and then back out again with my dad."

"Maybe not, but there are cameras covering the *outside* of all the facilities, too."

Sam nodded slowly. "He wouldn't have seen anything unusual about meeting you back at Phoenix that night."

"I think it's a good place to start," Willis said. "Markham can get us access to all of the tapes and we can watch them in my lab."

"What are we waiting for?" Sam said with a smile. "Let's go."

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"I found it!" Murdoc declared, gesturing toward a hole he had uncovered in the debris that clogged the partially-collapsed hallway where they had spent the last several hours. MacGyver crawled over to him and held his hand in front of the opening, smiling at the slight movement of air he felt on his outstretched palm.

"Yep, that's it all right," he nodded, agreeing with Murdoc's assessment. For the next few hours, he and Murdoc worked furiously to widen the hole so that they could fit through it. Once it was large enough, MacGyver shone the light inside, illuminating another narrow, twisted passage, then blew out a weary breath and crawled inside. "I'm really starting to hate dark holes," he grumbled as he inched his way slowly along the tunnel, studiously avoiding the abundance of rusty nails and jagged chunks of concrete as best he could. The tunnel eventually led, with much digging and effort on his part, to another small section of intact corridor. MacGyver slid himself into it, thankful to be able to rest on a smooth surface for awhile.

The fresh air was even more abundant here, and MacGyver quickly located the source at one end of the hallway. An elevator, its doors buckled and blocked with debris, stood at what was once an intersection of two corridors. Air flowed steadily through the gap between the doors and MacGyver felt his hopes building. Elevator shafts were usually sturdy and well-reinforced and there was a good chance that this one had remained fairly intact compared to the rest of the structure. Without waiting for Murdoc, he began pulling bricks and sections of smashed drywall away from the doors with a new burst of energy fueled by the hope that this might, at last, be a way out of this nightmare.

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"Nothing," Sam said dully, staring blearily at the last of the surveillance tapes. He and Willis had been reviewing them all day and had seen no evidence that MacGyver had

been anywhere near the Phoenix Foundation facilities since he had left his office two nights ago.

"All that means is that he didn't go to any of the Phoenix buildings," Willis said encouragingly.

"Where is he?" Sam asked plaintively, not really expecting an answer.

Willis squeezed Sam's shoulder sympathetically, noting the strain in the younger man's voice. "Sam, I've known Mac a long time. He's one of the most intelligent and resourceful people I've ever met. He'll find a way out of whatever trouble he's gotten himself into. He always does."

"I'm trying to believe that, but..." Sam shook his head dispiritedly.

"Look, he's handled Murdoc before. I'm sure it's no different this time," Willis stated confidently.

"How can you be so sure?"

"Because, I've seen him do it before, and..." Willis paused for a minute then continued. "... and because we haven't heard from Murdoc."

"What do you mean?"

"Murdoc likes to... gloat about his triumphs. One of his trademarks is taking pictures of his victims as they die."

"That's sick!" Sam said disgustedly.

Willis nodded solemnly. "You can bet that if he had done anything to Mac, he would already have been in touch with us -- you and Pete especially -- to crow about it. He's been after him for so long, it would be his ultimate victory and he wouldn't be able to resist rubbing it in."

"Jesus, what a bastard," Sam swore softly.

"Yeah," Willis said quietly. "But the good news is, that we *haven't* heard from him, so your dad is probably okay."

"Probably..." Sam echoed.

"We just have to think positive and keep looking for him."

"You're right, I know," Sam acknowledged reluctantly. "But I'm just... I don't want to lose him."

"Neither do I." Willis clapped him on the shoulder. "Come on, we still have this list of places to check out. What do you say we start with one of the restaurants?" Willis gave Sam a rueful smile. "I'd really like to have a meal that didn't come wrapped in plastic."

"Yeah, me too," Sam chuckled.

"Good! We'll need the energy if we're going to make any kind of dent in this list." He waved the pages at Sam.

Sam groaned inwardly at the amount of effort that was going to be required to visit the numerous places on the list. "When we find him," Sam said with a crooked smile. "My dad is going to owe us one very large dinner... at the restaurant of our choice."

"At least," Willis laughed as they headed out the door, thankful that Sam was in better spirits. He only hoped that his confident words were proven true and they did find MacGyver alive and well.

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"Man, this sucks," MacGyver said under his breath as he clung to the damaged side of the elevator shaft. His elation at discovering the relatively intact conduit to the surface had quickly turned to dismay when he realized just how far *up* the opening to the outside world lay. It appeared that the top half of the shaft had been sheared off, but this having been a ten-story building, that still left five stories worth of treacherous climbing ahead of him. And that was about four stories too many for his liking. Looking down, he saw that Murdoc was making slow but steady progress behind him, hampered by his broken arm, but seeming to have no problem with his distance from the ground. MacGyver was glad that the feeble light from the lantern, which he had hooked through his belt, didn't reach as far as the bottom of the shaft, since he really didn't need any reminders of his altitude.

As he reached for another handhold, MacGyver spotted the faint twinkling of a star through the gap in the rubble three floors above him. That was a goal definitely worth reaching, MacGyver told himself as he determinedly hauled himself the next few feet toward the surface. Several times, he nearly lost his grip, but now that he had freedom in his sights, nothing was going to stand between him and the outside. He certainly wasn't about to give Murdoc the pleasure of watching him plunge to his death.

Concentrating only on the single star above him as he climbed, MacGyver was surprised when his next upward push brought him to the surface. A wide smile spread across his face and he quickly scrambled the rest of the way out of the hole. Careful of his footing, MacGyver slowly stood and looked out at the lights of the city.

"Yes!" he shouted triumphantly, stretching his arms out as the cool breeze ruffled his hair. The sudden sensation of the cool night air made him shiver slightly, but MacGyver couldn't remember anything that had ever felt quite that good. He was so exhilarated by

his hard-won freedom that he didn't even notice when Murdoc finally emerged from the rubble.

"Well," Murdoc commented as he, too, took in the view. "That was... interesting, though not an experience I'd care to repeat."

MacGyver turned at the sound of his voice and regarded Murdoc warily. He unhooked the lantern from his belt and set it down beside him. "Me neither," he quietly agreed. They stood silently, gazing out at the lights of the city, until Murdoc turned around to face MacGyver.

"I do believe we have some unfinished business," Murdoc said with a humorless grin.

MacGyver rolled his eyes in disbelief. "Give it a rest, Murdoc. Can't you simply be happy to be alive and out of that hell hole?"

Murdoc shrugged and nonchalantly waved his knife, which had suddenly appeared in his hand. "Game's not over yet." He tightened his grip on the knife and advanced toward MacGyver, who took a step back and then another, as Murdoc slowly approached him, a cold, almost feral, gleam in his eyes. MacGyver stepped back again, but this time the surface beneath his foot shifted and he stumbled backward, landing hard on his backside.

"Very graceful, MacGyver," Murdoc said with a disparaging smirk. "What do you call that move?"

As he tried to stand, MacGyver realized with sudden alarm that his left foot -- the uninjured one -- was wedged tightly between two pieces of concrete.

"Got yourself stuck, have you?" Murdoc said with a chuckle of amusement at MacGyver's futile efforts to free himself.

"Oh shut up, Murdoc," MacGyver growled as he searched vainly for some means of escape.

"This is almost too easy," Murdoc said as he drew even closer to MacGyver, who continued his frantic attempt to pry himself loose. "But still, I am rather tired of this game." He took a final step and stood over MacGyver with the knife.

MacGyver stopped struggling and stared helplessly as Murdoc toyed with the blade. His nemesis still had that same hard, dispassionate look on his face that MacGyver had come to know well over the years, but absent was the unbridled glee with which he had approached his task when their ordeal had begun. Maybe Murdoc had, as he said, grown tired of the 'game'. Or maybe he was simply worn out and didn't have the energy to enjoy his victory with the usual enthusiasm. MacGyver never had the opportunity to find out. The slow, familiar rumbling began again and the unstable ruins upon which they stood began to shudder and heave with increasing severity.

MacGyver cried out in pain when the blocks of cement trapping his foot shifted suddenly, increasing the pressure for a moment before dropping away abruptly, releasing him from their grip. With an angry growl, Murdoc regained his balance and dove toward MacGyver, his knife positioned for attack. Scrabbling backward blindly, MacGyver moved hurriedly out of Murdoc's reach, his hands and feet seeking purchase wherever they could on the shaking ruins.

Murdoc's lunge fell short of his moving target and he landed badly on his broken arm, eliciting a howl that was more a result of fury than of pain. His eyes never leaving his prey, Murdoc climbed stubbornly back onto his feet, preparing to attack again. He stepped forward just as the rubble opened up beneath him, the look on his face one of confusion, then of horror as he realized what was happening.

MacGyver threw himself forward, reaching for Murdoc's arm. But he was too far away. Murdoc disappeared into the hole, his cry of, "MacGyverrr...!" cut off abruptly as the debris swallowed him up.

As MacGyver stared in shock at the spot where Murdoc had been standing, a sudden, violent shift in the debris tossed him backward roughly. Flailing helplessly, MacGyver tumbled head over heels down the sloping side of the rubble.

"Oof!" All of the air left his lungs at once as MacGyver dropped off the edge of the massive pile and landed flat on his back in the parking lot. He lay there gasping for breath, gazing up at the sky as the temblor gradually tapered off.

"Ow!" he grumbled, once he was able to breathe again. Slowly, he sat up and took his first look at the wreckage that had been his prison for the past two days. Even in the moonlight, he could tell that the once-proud Waller Building had been completely demolished and he could hardly believe that he had survived such devastation. The wreckage looked like what was usually left of Tokyo after Godzilla got through stomping all over it in those cheesy old Japanese sci-fi flicks he had liked to watch as a child. The image of a giant lizard on the loose in L.A. made him laugh out loud, and even as he gripped his sides and the tears rolled down his cheeks, MacGyver knew that his reaction was due more to stress and sheer relief at being alive than to any real amusement at the situation.

His laughter soon abated and MacGyver pulled himself painfully to his feet, hobbling around to the side of the building where he had left his jeep. He couldn't wait to get out of here and back to his apartment. Rounding the corner, or what used to be the corner of the building, MacGyver stopped short and stared in shock at his jeep. He couldn't help himself; he doubled over and began to laugh again hysterically. His jeep was still parked where he had left it... except that it had been smashed nearly flat by a huge pile of concrete.

"Ah hell," he finally gasped, when the hysterics had faded into an occasional chuckle. It was such an ironically appropriate ending to his latest misadventure.

The mess that was once the Waller Building lay at the far end of an industrial park on the outskirts of the city, and MacGyver wasn't relishing the long walk he had ahead of him before he reached anyplace that might be inhabited at this late hour. There were few other buildings nearby, since most of the other businesses had, like the Phoenix Foundation, abandoned the area for newer facilities that were more accessible to the freeways or to public transportation. From what MacGyver could see, the majority of the structures that remained had fared almost as badly as the Waller Building during the earthquake. Giving his former transportation a last look, MacGyver straightened and turned away, trudging slowly toward the lights of the city.

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MacGyver stopped to rest next to a boarded-up gas station at the edge of the industrial area, the physical toll of his ordeal beginning to catch up with him. He was exhausted and dehydrated after two long days of fighting his way out from under the building without any food or water. Closing his eyes, he leaned wearily against the building, thinking about what he was going to do when he got home. Smiling dreamily at thoughts of the hot shower, good meal and soft bed waiting for him, MacGyver suddenly detected faint strains of music drifting toward him in the night air. Instantly on the alert, he pushed himself away from the wall and started walking toward the sound, which seemed to be coming from the direction he was heading anyway.

MacGyver quickened his pace as much as his aching body would allow, eager to find the source of the music, since music meant people, and that meant that help was nearby. After two days with no one but Murdoc for company, he was almost desperate for contact with someone else -- anyone else. Hell, he would even be glad to see Phelps, at this point.

The music grew louder as he proceeded and MacGyver finally identified it as some of the loud stuff that Sam liked to listen to occasionally. He actually didn't mind most of it, but he figured it was his duty as a father to make fun of his son's taste in music and he truly enjoyed the lighthearted sparring with Sam over the merits of the various artists. It was just one of the many joys of having his son in his life, and one of the best motivations he had during his grueling struggle to crawl out of the wreckage. He couldn't wait to see Sam again. With a sigh, he focused on the sound and limped steadily toward its source.

As he got closer, MacGyver determined that the music was coming from one of the old warehouses that lined the street. He stopped, debating his course of action. Most of the buildings were abandoned and covered with graffiti. Few of the streetlights remained intact and the area was know to be a haven for gangs and drug dealers -- not exactly the kind of people he wanted to run into. The dilapidated business district gave way to a more residential area further down the road, and MacGyver wondered if it might be better to just keep going. Nothing good ever seemed to happen to him in warehouses anyway.

He was still making up his mind when several figures emerged from a door in the side of the building and slowly surrounded him.

MacGyver glanced around warily, looking at the group of young men who were silently staring at him. "Uh, hi guys," he said with a crooked smile.

One of them, a tall dark-haired man wearing a black leather jacket walked up to him, looked him up and down, then met his gaze coolly. "What you want?"

"Nothing, I'm just looking for a phone," MacGyver replied calmly. Someone behind him snickered.

"We look like the phone company?" the man asked him sarcastically, poking MacGyver in the chest with his finger. His companions found this hilarious and hooted with laughter, drawing even closer to MacGyver.

"I guess not. I think I'll go look somewhere else," MacGyver said with a shrug. "Maybe that way." He pointed down the street, taking a tentative step in the direction. The last thing he needed right now was trouble with a bunch of punks.

"You do that," the man said, stepping aside and gesturing for him to pass.

MacGyver nodded and started limping down the street, keenly aware of the group following closely behind. He pretended not to notice, plodding steadily toward his destination, hoping they would get bored with him and go away.

"Hey Deke," one of the guys behind him called to the tall spokesman. "What do you suppose this guy wants with a phone? He look like he been livin' in a dumpster, man."

Deke sidled up to MacGyver. "That true? You live in a dumpster?"

Without breaking his stride, MacGyver turned his head and met his gaze evenly. "Nope."

"How come you such a mess?" Deke tugged at MacGyver's dusty sleeve with distaste.

"Wrecked my car," MacGyver said calmly. "Had to sleep on the ground last night."

"Oh yeah? So what you doin' driving around my 'hood? You a cop or something?"

"Nah, I'm selling encyclopedias." He turned to Deke and grinned. "Want some?"

"You real funny, man," Deke said. "We got us a comedian here, boys." Deke suddenly grabbed MacGyver's arm, his voice turning hard. "I don't like comedians, and I don't like strangers pokin' around where they don't belong." Another of the young men grabbed MacGyver's other arm and propelled him forward, slamming him forcefully into a utility

pole. Pain shot through his ribs and he was spun around roughly and shoved back against the hard wooden surface.

"Look, I'm just passing through. I'm not looking for any trouble," MacGyver said placatingly as he looked at the seven men surrounding him.

Deke smiled a cold smile that reminded MacGyver of a predator about to devour its prey. "Well you found it, funny man." He brought his face to within inches of MacGyver's. "We don't like strangers in our 'hood. 'Specially disrespectful strangers." He took a step back, then smiled again as he launched his fist toward MacGyver's face.

There was an audible crack as MacGyver's head snapped back and smacked against the pole. The stars were still dancing across his vision when Deke followed up with a solid blow to his stomach. He clutched his abdomen and felt his knees begin to buckle. Deke shoved him sideways and MacGyver tumbled into the street landing in an ungraceful heap on the asphalt. In his weakened state, he was no match for even one of the men, let alone seven of them -- though, the other six seemed to be content to watch Deke pound on him, clearly enjoying the show.

As the tall thug approached him again, MacGyver felt a sudden surge of anger. He had just survived two days in hell, and he was not about to let these punks get the best of him. Slowly, with painful determination, he started to stand, only to be knocked down again by a hard kick to his side. MacGyver rolled away and lay dazedly on his back while Deke moved in on him again.

"Yo, Deke," one of the other men called out. "Look out!" Deke jumped out of the way just as a battered car barreled around the corner and skidded to a halt between him and MacGyver.

"Get in!" The driver yelled to MacGyver through the open window.

Not needing to be told twice, MacGyver jerked himself unsteadily to his feet and jumped into the backseat of the car as it sped away, accompanied by the sound of screeching tires and the smell of burning rubber.

"Aw man," MacGyver closed his eyes and groaned as he slowly righted himself and leaned back against the seat.

"I don't believe it!" a voice exclaimed from the front seat. "MacGyver?"

MacGyver opened one eye and grinned at the man who was staring at him incredulously from the front passenger seat. "Hey Garrett," he greeted dark-skinned man. "Boy, am I glad to see you."

Garrett snorted. "Yeah, I'll bet." Turning to the driver of the car, he said, "Mike, this sorry-looking dude is MacGyver. He helps us out at the Challenger's Club."

"Nice to meet you... I think," Mike said.

MacGyver saw the amusement in the eyes reflected in the rear-view mirror. "You too," he replied, then said to Garrett with mock indignance, "... and I am *not* sorry-looking."

Garrett laughed. "You obviously haven't taken a good look at yourself lately." He turned to MacGyver, concern written plainly on his face. "What the hell happened to you, anyway?"

MacGyver shook his head tiredly. "You wouldn't believe it."

"With you, Mac, I'd believe anything."

MacGyver shot him a dirty look. "Well, if you must know, a building fell on me."

"What?!" Mike and Garrett exclaimed simultaneously.

MacGyver chuckled at the reaction then launched into an explanation, editing out the part about Murdoc and his true reason for being at the Waller Building.

"So you were stuck under there since the quake hit?"

"Yep."

"Damn!" Garrett marveled. "Leave it to you to try to inspect a building during an earthquake."

"Who knew?" MacGyver gestured helplessly.

"So what did you do to piss off the T-Boyz?" Mike asked.

"T-Boyz?" MacGyver looked at Garrett, eyebrow arched inquisitively.

"You know, those lovely gentlemen who were kicking your ass all over the street."

"Oh, them," MacGyver winced. "They didn't like me being in their neighborhood, even accused me of being a cop. I told them I was selling encyclopedias, but they didn't buy that either."

"You didn't!" Garrett stared at him, aghast.

"Yeah, I did," he said with a shrug. "I was getting tired of their attitude."

"Oh man," Mike whispered. "You're nuts."

"You've got that right," Garrett agreed. "The T-Boyz are one nasty bunch of badasses, Mac. Nobody messes with them, not even the other gangs. You picked the wrong bunch of guys to mouth off to."

"Oops," MacGyver said sheepishly.

"'Oops' is right. You're lucky we came along when we did," Garrett said.

"What were you doing out there at..." MacGyver looked at his watch, and noticed for the first time that it was broken. "What time is it, anyway?"

"It's 2:00 a.m." Mike said.

"We were helping some of the local merchants board up their shops. A lot of them have been getting hit by looters after dark so we volunteered to give them a hand."

"Lucky for me you did," MacGyver said just as his stomach let loose a ferocious growl.

"Hungry?" Garrett asked innocently, unsuccessfully hiding a grin.

"You could say that," MacGyver replied dryly.

"I've got just the thing." Garrett leaned forward, then handed a paper bag and a bottle of water into the backseat. "Me and Mike stopped at Mickey D's right before we ran into you. I think you need this more than I do."

MacGyver opened the bag hesitantly. Normally, he didn't eat red meat, but his hunger won out over his health concerns and he unwrapped the package gratefully. After a couple of days without food, he figured his arteries would forgive him for eating one hamburger. "Thanks," he said as he took a swallow of water.

"Take a left up here, Mike," Garrett directed. "It's the fastest way to Mercy Hospital."

MacGyver's head snapped up. "Hospital?! No way, man! Just drop me near a phone or something."

"Sorry Mac, but you're a mess. You need a doctor."

"Garrett..." MacGyver protested.

"Forget about it, Mac. You're going if I have to carry you in there myself." He gave MacGyver an evil grin. "And don't think I won't."

"Gee thanks," MacGyver grumped, making a face at him because he knew the big man could, and *would*, do just that.

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MacGyver had just finished eating the last of his hamburger, when he got that strange, tingling feeling in the back of his neck that told him something was amiss. Craning his neck, he looked out the back window and spotted a pair of headlights approaching fast. "Uh, guys," he said, turning to the men in the front seat.

"I see them," Mike said with a frown.

Garrett turned around to look. "Guess the T-Boyz were more ticked off than I thought."

"Sorry," MacGyver said glumly, feeling guilty about causing trouble for his friends.

"Not your fault, MacGyver," Garrett said dismissively. "They would have gone after you even if you hadn't been a smartass."

"Yeah," Mike agreed with a grin. "I'm sure they're just as annoyed with us for interrupting their evening's entertainment."

"They're catching up," Garrett warned. "Can't this heap go any faster?"

"I've got my foot on the floor already," Mike replied tersely.

"Look out!" Garrett yelled, spotting a car entering the intersection they were approaching.

"Hang on!" Mike shouted. MacGyver and Garrett braced themselves as he turned the wheel sharply and slammed on the brakes. The car skidded and spun around, crashing sideways into a parked pickup truck.

"You guys all right?" Mike asked breathlessly.

"I'm fine," Garrett replied. "Mac?"

"Just peachy," MacGyver replied with a grimace as he picked himself up off of the floor. "You really need some seat belts back here."

Mike turned the key, trying to restart the car, but it turned over once then sputtered and died, refusing all further efforts to rouse it to life.

"Uh-oh," Garrett said. "We're gonna have some company." He pointed out the front window, which now faced in the opposite direction, at the approaching vehicles. "I think we'd better..."

"Get the hell out of here," Mike finished as he pulled the trunk release. The driver's side of the car was pressed against the parked pickup that they had hit, so the three men

scrambled out of the passenger side doors. Mike detoured to the trunk of his car before following Garrett and MacGyver as they ducked behind the truck.

"Where did that come from?" Garrett asked, indicating the shotgun and box of shells that Mike was carrying.

"I have a cabin in the mountains and I bring this along to scare away the bears. It's only birdshot, but it makes a lot of noise."

"Somehow I don't think that noise is going to scare these guys away," Garrett said.

"It's better than nothing," Mike shrugged. "I'm just glad that I forgot to put it away after I went up there last week."

"No offense, but I'd rather have a telephone," MacGyver said.

"Here they come," Garrett said as the two pursuing vehicles squealed to a stop next to their abandoned car. The doors opened and the gang members poured out, quickly taking positions behind their cars.

"I count nine of them," Mike said grimly.

"Most of them are carrying automatic weapons, too," MacGyver added, echoing Mike's dark tone.

"Man, I hope someone called the cops," Garrett whispered.

Deke's voice suddenly rang out. "Hey, funny man. You and your pals better come on out of there."

"Yeah, right," Garrett snorted sarcastically. "So they can blast us to kingdom come."

"Last chance," Deke called, followed by the ominous sound of weapons being loaded.

"Keep your heads down guys," Mike warned.

A minute later, the night exploded with gunfire, bullets smashing into the cars in front of them and the buildings behind them.

"Damn!" Garrett cursed as he brushed broken glass from his clothing. At the first pause in the shooting, Mike popped up briefly from behind the truck and fired his shotgun. The gang members, who had been standing brazenly in full view, scattered and dove for cover.

"That'll give them something to think about," Garrett said with a tight smile. "I don't think they were expecting a fight."

The next volley of gunfire struck, and MacGyver stayed down, trying to think of some way out of this standoff. There was nothing but a brick wall behind them and only a couple of parked cars next to the truck that was providing them cover. Beyond that was only open space, which was far too exposed to the large number of bullets being fired in their direction. On a scale of one to ten, his chances of getting out of this with all of his body parts intact looked to be about negative four.

"Uh-oh. They're spreading out," Mike said after chancing a quick peek during a lull in the shooting.

"They're probably going to try to close in around us," MacGyver determined. "They know they have us outnumbered."

"And out-gunned," added Garrett.

"Maybe I can discourage them a bit," Mike said as he fired another shot, this time off to one side, where the thugs were attempting to circle them. A howl of pain was the response as one of the men fell to the ground clutching his backside.

"I guess birdshot in the ass stings a little," Garrett chuckled.

MacGyver grinned. "Oh yeah."

The gunfire resumed again, turning Mike's car into even more Swiss cheese as they ducked lower behind their shelter. Over the loud barrage, MacGyver suddenly heard the welcome sound of approaching sirens. "You hear that?" he asked his companions, as Mike loosed another blast from his shotgun.

Garrett tilted his head to the side, listening, then broke out in a wide smile. "I do believe the cavalry is coming."

The T-Boyz seemed to have heard it as well, since the shooting stopped abruptly and they began racing back to their vehicles. The police arrived from both directions simultaneously, effectively blocking their retreat, and faced with superior number of police officers, they reluctantly surrendered.

"All right!" Garrett high-fived Mike just as several officers stepped into view, pointing guns at them.

"Drop your weapons! Now!" one of the officers barked at them.

"Hey, chill man," Garrett said soothingly as he raised his hands in the air. "We're the good guys."

"We'll see about that, " the cop said humorlessly. "Up!" He waved his hand, indicating that they should stand. As soon as they got to their feet, the officers converged on them, shoving them against the truck as they searched for weapons.

"Hey, take it easy!" Garrett demanded when he heard MacGyver groan after being pushed down over the hood of the truck. "He's hurt." The officer ignored him as they handcuffed the three men and squeezed them into the back seat of the cruiser for the ride to the police station.

"Are we having fun yet?" MacGyver asked as he leaned his head back and closed his eyes, trying to ignore all the aches and pains that were clamoring for his attention.

"How am I going to explain this to my insurance company?" Mike asked, as he gazed forlornly through the window of the police car as it drove past his bullet-ridden car.

"Maybe you'll get lucky and they'll total that junker," Garrett retorted.

"Hey," Mike protested. "That car is a classic."

"A classic *what*?" Garrett shot back.

"They don't make them like that anymore," Mike said in an offended tone. "Right MacGyver?"

Without opening his eyes, MacGyver said, "Leave me out of this. I'm still trying to figure out how to tell my own insurance company that my jeep is now a four-wheel-drive pancake."

Garrett stared at him for a moment, then burst out laughing -- a deep, hearty sound that soon had MacGyver and Mike joining in.

"You guys on drugs or something?" The cop in the passenger seat turned and gave his laughing prisoners a baleful glare.

They looked at each other for a moment, then laughed even harder.

"No," Mike finally gasped. "We're just happy to be breathing."

"Yeah," Garrett agreed. "Before you guys showed up, we were about to be blown into tiny little pieces by that bunch of pissed-off gangbangers."

"So what did you do to get them so mad at you?" the cop asked skeptically.

Garrett grinned and nodded toward MacGyver. "He tried to sell them Girl Scout cookies."

"It was encyclopedias," MacGyver said with a smile.

"Oh yeah," Garrett shrugged. "Guess they weren't interested in educational materials."

The officer rolled his eyes and pointed his finger at his head, making small circles. His partner nodded and decided that he was going to recommend his prisoners for a psychological evaluation, since they were obviously a few cards short of a full deck.

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Sam opened one eye and gazed sleepily at the glowing red numbers on his clock radio. He started to wonder why he had awakened at five a.m., especially since he had been out checking restaurants with Willis until after two, when the shrill chirping of his cell phone sounded close to his ear.

"H'lo," he answered, muffling a yawn.

"Sam... it's Pete," the familiar voice of Pete Thornton stated from the other end of the phone.

Sam sat up, instantly awake. From the subdued tone of his voice and the early hour, he knew that Pete wasn't calling him with good news. "What is it?" he asked hoarsely, clutching the phone in a white-knuckled grip.

"We found Mac's jeep," Pete said without preamble.

"Where?"

"One of our teams was checking on some properties that Phoenix owns, and they found his jeep near one of the buildings."

"What else?" Sam asked tersely.

"Sam... the building where they found it collapsed during the quake. The jeep was crushed under some debris."

"Was he...?"

"He wasn't in the jeep," Pete added quickly. "There wasn't any sign of him, but if he was inside the building..." Pete took a ragged breath, unable to finish.

"Where is it?" Sam demanded softly.

"Sam..."

"I have to see," Sam interrupted. "Please."

"I know," Pete sighed resignedly. "But will you at least wait for the rest of us? I haven't called Willis yet and I still need to get a search team coordinated. Okay?"

"Okay," Sam agreed after a moment's hesitation. He knew Pete was right, but he could hardly bear the thought of waiting any longer when his father was in trouble.

"I'll call you as soon as everything's arranged."

"Mr. Thornton...," Sam began. "He's all right. I know he is."

"Hang in there, Sam. We'll find him," Pete said sincerely.

Sam switched off the phone and slowly uncurled his fingers from their death-grip on the device.

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The squad car pulled up behind the police station and MacGyver, Garrett and Mike were herded inside to be booked. The inside of the station was gray; the walls were gray, the floors were gray, and even the ceiling, which had once been white, was now a dingy shade of gray from years of cigarette smoke and neglect. The place was also in chaos.

"Geez, what a zoo," Mike said as he took in the commotion around them.

"Must be all the looting," Garrett suggested.

The two officers escorted them to a counter, where their handcuffs were removed and they were quickly fingerprinted.

"Empty your pockets," the female officer behind the desk ordered brusquely.

Garrett and Mike took out their wallets, keys, and spare change and placed them on the counter. MacGyver reached for his wallet only to find that his back pocket was gone, torn off sometime during his ordeal under the building. His Swiss army knife had already been taken by the police officers when they searched him, and all that he had left was a handful of change, his keys, a few paper clips and some string.

"No ID?" The woman looked at MacGyver sternly.

"I lost it," MacGyver shrugged and showed her his missing pocket.

"Name?"

"MacGyver."

"First name?" She looked at him expectantly, frowning when he didn't immediately answer.

MacGyver waited until Mike and Garrett had been escorted away before he said, in a low voice, "Angus." The officer scrawled his name into the proper spot on the form then nodded to the officer standing behind him, who took MacGyver's arm and led him through the maze-like station into a crowded cell, where Mike and Garrett were waiting.

"Hey, man," Garrett said to the officer. "Can't you see that he needs a doctor?" He gestured angrily toward MacGyver, who was swaying unsteadily on his feet.

The cop gave MacGyver a hard look then shoved him into the cell. "Looks drunk to me."

Garrett caught MacGyver before he fell down. "What about our phone calls?"

"You'll get your turn." He locked the cell door and walked away, ignoring the jeers and catcalls of the other prisoners.

"Looks like we get to enjoy the hospitality of the police department for awhile," Mike sighed.

Garrett drew himself to his full six-foot-six and glared menacingly at the group of men who currently occupied the hard bench along one wall of the cell. They took one look at the tall, muscular man and quickly scurried to the other side of the cell.

"Works every time." Garrett grinned broadly and gestured to Mike and MacGyver to sit. "Have a seat."

"Thanks, big guy," Mike said as he and MacGyver sank gratefully onto the bench.

"What are you so happy about?" Garrett asked MacGyver, who was leaning against the wall, smiling contentedly. "We *are* in jail, you know."

"This place is paradise compared to where I've spent the last couple of days," MacGyver replied sleepily.

Garrett grunted as he joined his friends on the bench. "The sooner we can get out of this 'paradise', the better I'll like it."

It was nearly four hours later when Garrett nudged him awake. "What?" MacGyver said with a yawn.

"Time for our phone calls," Garrett said, indicating the police officer waiting impatiently by the cell door.

"One at a time," the officer said when the three men approached the door.

"You go first, Mac," Mike offered.

"Yeah, you need to get out of here more than we do," Garrett said.

"Thanks," MacGyver told them as the officer escorted him to a phone. He dialed Pete's number, sighing when there was no answer. "Nobody home," he said to the cop as he broke the connection.

The officer looked at his watch and frowned. "Okay, one more... but you'd better make it count."

MacGyver nodded, his mind racing over the possibilities. Pete and Sam were probably out looking for him, something that hadn't occurred to him earlier, so it would have to be someone else, someone with enough clout to get him out of there. He finally decided on the best choice, and dialed what he hoped was the correct number. The phone rang several times and MacGyver felt his hopes sinking when a harried voice finally answered. "Fourteenth precinct. How can I help you?"

"Lieutenant Kate Murphy, please," he politely requested.

"She hasn't arrived yet. Can I take a message?"

"Yes," MacGyver replied. "Tell her that MacGyver called, and that I'm at the 53rd precinct and I need to see her as soon as possible."

"Will that be all?"

"Yes, thank you." He hung up and was escorted back to the cell. Kate was a morning person and he knew that she was usually in her office early on most workdays, so with any luck, she would get his message soon. Unless the earthquake had altered her normal schedule. MacGyver shook his head to banish that thought. His situation was depressing enough without manufacturing something else to worry about. Stifling a yawn, MacGyver returned to his seat and settled himself back against the wall and was soon sound asleep.

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"Holy shit!" Willis exclaimed when he saw the Waller Building... or what was left of it. Pete turned to him, stunned at hearing the good-natured scientist curse with such vehemence. In all the years he had known him, Pete couldn't remember hearing Willis utter anything stronger than "oh darn", so he knew the scene had to be pretty awful to shock him into using such harsh language.

Sam, on the other hand, barely reacted. "It's gone," he whispered as he stared at the pile of bricks and concrete.

"Mr. Thornton!" A short, stocky man wearing a hard hat approached the small group as they climbed out of their car.

"Matthews," Pete greeted the man with a firm handshake.

"We've started setting up the equipment around the perimeter," Matthews began. "My guys are dropping the sound probes anyplace they find a nice, deep opening and the search dogs will be here any minute." He paused, then said more quietly, "If anyone's under there... well, it doesn't look too good."

"If anyone could survive *that*," Willis gestured toward the grim scene. "... it's MacGyver."

"What about the jeep?" Pete asked.

"Over here," Matthews said, pointing toward one side of the ruined building. Pete, Willis and Sam followed as he led them to the spot where the jeep sat, crushed under a pile of debris.

Sam stood, rigid with tension, and stared numbly at what had once been his father's vehicle. "No," he said softly.

Willis cast a worried glance at the young man, concerned by the sudden pallor of his face. "Sam, why don't we go wait in the car?" he suggested quietly. "We'll only be in the way out here."

"He's not in there, " Sam said, his voice breaking as he tore his gaze away from the destruction and focused on Willis. "I know he isn't."

"Come on." Willis led Sam to the car, quietly brushing away the tears that suddenly filled his own eyes.

Pete listened to them, trying valiantly to rein in his own emotions. It broke his heart that Sam was so upset and he was glad that, in this one case, he couldn't see the wreckage that had brought such distress to both of his friends. He took a deep breath, then turned his attention back to Matthews, who was detailing the search efforts for him. Pete fervently hoped that it didn't turn from a search and rescue mission to a body recovery.

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"MacGyver!" The sound of his name being spoken sharply jolted MacGyver from his slumber and he sat up with a start, scanning the area for the source of the interruption. A slow grin spread across his face when he spied Kate Murphy staring at him through the bars.

"'Bout time you got here, Kate," MacGyver drawled.

"Where the hell have you been?!" Kate put her hands on her hips and frowned at him. "And why do you look like an ad for laundry detergent?"

Garrett and Mike chuckled next him as MacGyver cringed under Kate's scrutiny.

"Well?" she said impatiently.

Mike and Garrett looked at each other, then at Kate, and said simultaneously, "A building fell on him."

"What?!" Kate said incredulously as she looked from them to MacGyver.

"Yeah," Garrett said, warming to his topic. "But that was before he got beat up by the gang for trying to sell Girl Scout cookies on their turf."

"Encyclopedias," MacGyver corrected automatically.

"Don't forget the car chase and the shoot out," Mike added.

"MacGyver?!"

"Thanks a lot, guys," MacGyver said, tossing them a dirty look as he climbed to his feet and walked over to Kate.

"Who's the comedy act?" Kate asked him, nodding toward Garrett and Mike.

"This is Garrett Ross and Michael Kearns." MacGyver gestured to each of them in turn. "They do a lot of work with the Challenger's Club."

"Pleasure to meet you, Lieutenant," Garrett said with a smile.

"They, uh, gave me a lift."

Garrett snorted. "Rescued your ass is more like it." Turning to Kate, he said, "Mac here was in the process of getting his butt kicked by some of the T-Boyz when we came along."

Kate laughed and shook her head. "Mac, I swear you are a magnet for trouble."

MacGyver shrugged sheepishly and scuffed his toe on the floor.

Taking pity on him, Kate sighed and gestured to the sergeant seated at the end of the hall to open the door. "Okay, guys. Come on out here. We need room for the real bad guys."

"Thanks, Kate," MacGyver said as he, Garrett and Mike gratefully left the crowded holding cell.

"Don't thank me yet," Kate warned. "First stop after we get you signed out is the hospital."

"Kate..." MacGyver groaned, while Garrett and Mike snickered behind him.

"Don't even think about it, Mac," Kate said sternly. "Pete and Sam will have my hide if I don't take good care of you."

"Have you talked to them?" MacGyver asked, brightening at the prospect of seeing them again.

"Not since Pete called me two days ago looking for you," Kate said with a shake of her head. "He sounded pretty worried."

"Damn," MacGyver said, chagrined at causing them to worry.

"I tried calling before I came down here, but he and Sam were both out -- probably looking for you."

"Kate, can you just take me home?"

"No way, Mac..."

"I promise I'll go see the doctor -- after I see Sam and Pete, okay? Please?"

Kate was about to argue, but gave in when she saw the pleading look on his face. "Oh, all right," she said with an exasperated sigh. "But I'll be checking in with them to make sure you do."

"Okay," MacGyver grinned.

"Damned puppy dog eyes," Kate muttered to herself as she signed the paperwork to release the three men. "You two need a ride?" she asked Mike and Garrett when she had finished.

"Nah, we'll take a cab, thanks," Garrett said. "Come on, Mike. We'd better go check out what's left of your car."

"You had to remind me, didn't you?" Mike groaned as he slouched after his big friend.

"What's wrong with his car?" Kate asked MacGyver as they walked toward her unmarked police sedan.

"It's full of bullet holes," MacGyver replied casually.

She arched an eyebrow skeptically. "I think you'd better tell me the whole story."

And he did. By the time they pulled up in front of his apartment, Kate was again shaking her head in disbelief. "Assassins, earthquakes and gang shootouts? All in the same week?"

"In less than three days, actually," MacGyver corrected.

"Smartass," Kate growled at him.

"Hey, you asked for the whole story," MacGyver protested.

Kate rolled her eyes. "Only you, Mac."

"Yeah, but that's why you like me." He gave her a lopsided grin.

"Don't push your luck, tough guy," she grumbled as MacGyver eased himself out of the car.

"Thanks, Kate."

"Yeah, yeah. You take care of yourself, okay? I'm going to be checking up on you."

"Yes, ma'am." He gave her a sloppy salute, then turned and wearily climbed the stairs. He let himself into his apartment and headed directly for the kitchen, not thinking to wonder why the place showed no signs of having suffered through an earthquake. After pouring himself a big glass of orange juice, MacGyver picked up the phone and dialed both Sam and Pete's numbers, frowning when he got no answer at either place. He left a brief message on their answering machines then made a beeline for the bathroom, where he peeled off his filthy clothes and stepped eagerly into the shower.

The hot spray felt wonderful and he stood under it blissfully until it started to turn cold. Reluctantly, he switched the water off and wrapped himself in a towel, pausing only long enough to put on a pair of sweat pants before he crawled into bed. Feeling better than he had in days, MacGyver sank immediately into a deep and much-needed sleep.

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Sam parked his motorcycle and looked up at the darkened windows of his father's apartment. They hadn't found him -- not yet, anyway. After a whole day's work, the only evidence they had that MacGyver had been anywhere near the Waller Building was his flattened jeep. Sam tried to look at the positive side -- they hadn't found his body, either -- but it didn't make him feel any better. Pete and Willis tried to be encouraging, but Sam knew they were as afraid as he was of what they would find under that building. He had

left Pete's house intending to go straight home, but found himself inexplicably drawn to his father's place instead. He stared up at the building again then decided he might as well stay there, as he had the previous night.

Sam switched on the light and tossed his keys on the kitchen counter as he entered the apartment. He started to remove his jacket then froze when he spotted the empty glass on the counter next to the telephone. It hadn't been there when he left that morning and, to his knowledge, no one else had been in the apartment. Instantly alert, Sam walked softly toward the bedroom, grabbing MacGyver's hockey stick from its spot next to the bookshelf as he passed. Gripping the stick tightly, he edged toward the half-open bedroom door. In one swift move, Sam rushed through the door and clicked on the light, ready to bash any intruder who might be lurking in the dark.

Instead of an intruder, though, he found his father lying in bed, mumbling softly in his sleep. Sam gaped at the sight, the hockey stick clattering noisily to the wooden floor as it slipped, forgotten, from his fingers.

The noise woke MacGyver and he opened his eyes, squinting against the light. "Sam?"

"Dad!" Sam rushed to his father. "Where have you been? Are you all right?" The words tumbled out in a rush as he gripped MacGyver in a fierce hug.

"Ow! Take it easy," MacGyver said with a gasp as his broken ribs reminded him of their presence.

"What's wrong?" Worry lines creased his forehead as Sam eyed his father critically, taking note of the bruises and scratches that decorated his face and torso.

MacGyver shrugged. "Just a couple of cracked ribs."

"Just?" Sam folded his arms and scowled at him.

"Geez, you're as bad as Murphy," MacGyver grumbled.

"Kate Murphy?"

"Yeah, she drove me home from the police station."

"What were you doing in the police station?"

MacGyver grimaced as he realized his mistake. "It's a long story."

"It usually is," Sam said with a smile. He was about to press for more details of this 'long story' when he was interrupted by the ringing of the telephone.

"Saved by the bell," MacGyver whispered to himself as Sam picked up the extension on the night stand.

"It's Mr. Thornton," Sam said, holding the phone out to him.

"Hey Pete," MacGyver said, then held the phone away from his ear as Pete barraged him with questions.

"Pete... Pete... Pete!" He finally managed to interrupt his friend's tirade. "I'll tell you all about it in the morning, okay?"

The older man finally agreed, reluctantly, and MacGyver hung up with a smile. "He's going to call Willis and let him know that I'm still breathing."

"Good," Sam said as he started rummaging through the dresser drawers.

"What are you doing?"

"Getting you some clothes so we can go to the hospital."

"I'm fine, Sam."

"No, you're not," Sam stated firmly.

MacGyver opened his mouth to protest, then thought better of it. He had lost this particular argument twice already and didn't feel like trying it a third time. Besides, his ribs *did* hurt a lot and he knew that Sam was too stubborn to give up -- a trait he had inherited from both of his parents. A smile twitched on his lips as his son fussed over him.

"What?" Sam asked when he saw the look on MacGyver's face.

"Nothing," MacGyver shrugged. "Just glad to be home."

"I'm glad too," Sam said with a smile. "You really scared the crap out of us this time, you know. After we found your jeep..." Sam shook his head. "We thought you were in that building that collapsed."

"Um, actually, I *was* inside the building when the quake hit," MacGyver said nonchalantly. "With Murdoc."

"No way!" Sam stared at him in disbelief. "How did you get out?"

MacGyver held out his damaged hands and grinned. "Lots of digging."

"Geez, Dad," Sam chastised him. "You're going to give me gray hair."

"Sorry."

"What about Murdoc?"

MacGyver grimaced. "He got buried under the building again."

Sam held up a flannel shirt. "You can tell me about it on the way to the hospital."

"You really don't want to know," MacGyver said as he reluctantly put the shirt on.

"Probably not," Sam agreed. "But I want to hear it anyway."

"Okay, but don't say I didn't warn you," MacGyver said as he followed his son out the door.

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Sam entered the apartment and shut the door behind him softly, not wanting to wake his father. He placed the grocery bag he was carrying on the counter and began to quietly put the items away. It had been late when they had returned from the hospital the previous night and Sam had decided to stay over again. When he had gotten up that morning, he had found a distinct lack of anything edible -- he didn't count tofu and protein shakes as food -- in the house, so he had made a quick trip to the store. Grinning at what his father would have to say about his choice of breakfast food, he started a pot of coffee brewing then opened a package of Pop-Tarts and dropped them into the toaster.

Sam had just started to pour himself a cup of coffee when the door to the apartment suddenly opened. Startled, he turned around to see MacGyver coming through the door with a grocery bag of his own.

"Dad!" Sam said with a frown. "You're supposed to be resting. Doctor's orders, remember?"

MacGyver shrugged and sent a guilty smile in Sam's direction. "Pete called after you left. He and Willis are coming by in a while, so I figured I'd go get some food."

"Go sit down," Sam ordered as he reached for the bag. "I'll take care of this."

"I'll do it," MacGyver insisted as he pulled the bag out of Sam's reach.

Sam followed him into the kitchen, peering curiously into the bag after MacGyver had set it on the counter. "Twinkies?" Sam's eyebrows arched in surprise as he pulled out the box. "These aren't very good for you."

"Harry used to give me these when I was a kid," MacGyver said with a embarrassed shrug. "I was feeling nostalgic."

"Lame excuse, Dad," Sam shook his head and grinned. "Really lame."

"So sue me," MacGyver said. "Now give 'em back."

"Come and get them," Sam retorted, his eyes twinkling with merriment as he waved the box in the air.

MacGyver reached for the box, but Sam ducked away from him, dancing around the apartment. "Getting slow, Dad," he taunted.

"I'll show you slow," MacGyver growled as he raced after Sam with surprising speed, considering his sprained ankle.

Sam let out a yell as his father nearly caught him. They were still laughing and chasing around the apartment when the door burst open and Pete and Willis rushed, wide-eyed, into the living room. Startled by their arrival, MacGyver and Sam stopped in their tracks, relaxing once they saw who it was.

"Hey Willis, Pete. Come on in," MacGyver greeted them with a smile.

"Mac? What's going on? It sounded like you were being attacked in here," Pete said worriedly.

"We're fine, Pete," MacGyver replied. "I'm just trying to rescue my Twinkies."

Willis laughed as Sam waved the box in the air playfully.

"Twinkies?" Pete said dubiously as a smile creased his face. "In this house?"

"He claims he's feeling nostalgic," Sam said, rolling his eyes.

"Give me a break," MacGyver said with mock offense. "I'm wounded over here."

"You can't be feeling too bad if you can chase after those Twinkies," Pete observed.

"I give up." MacGyver threw his hands up in surrender, then winced at the twinge in his ribs that the action caused.

Recognizing the flash of pain in his father's face, Sam frowned and took him by the arm. "Sit," he directed. "Before you hurt yourself."

"Yeah, Mac," Willis agreed before MacGyver could argue. "You do look a little rough around the edges."

"Okay, okay. I know when I'm outnumbered," MacGyver admitted as he sat down on the sofa.

After joining him on the couch, Pete reached over and took MacGyver's hand, frowning at the bandage he encountered. "Are you really okay, Mac?"

"I've had worse," MacGyver said reassuringly. "But I certainly wouldn't want to do it again."

"What exactly happened, anyway?" Willis asked.

MacGyver gave him a pained smile as he launched into the tale of how he had spent the past few days.

"I can't believe you got through all of that in one piece," Willis said in amazement when MacGyver had finished his story.

"MacGyver luck strikes again," Pete agreed. "And I'm glad it did."

"So am I," MacGyver smiled.

"I wonder if that's finally the last of Murdoc?" Willis said.

"Last I heard, there was still no sign of a body," Pete said.

"What else is new?" MacGyver said disgustedly.

Attempting to lighten the mood, Sam stood and asked, "Anyone want a turkey sandwich? I'm starving."

"Sure," said Willis. "I'll give you hand."

"I guess you'll be looking for a new jeep," Pete said to MacGyver while Willis and Sam worked in the kitchen. "Considering the condition yours is in."

"Flat as a pancake," MacGyver said with a chuckle.

"Yeah, but it's a good excuse for getting a new one," Pete grinned.

"Here, Mr. Thornton," Sam said as he put a plate on the coffee table in front of Pete.

"Thanks, Sam."

Sam started to sit, then jumped back up and headed for the kitchen. "I almost forgot... I rented a video."

"What did you get?" Willis asked as Sam popped the cassette into the VCR.

"Watch," Sam said with a sly smile.

As the movie began, Pete suddenly sat up and groaned. "Sam, you didn't."

"Yeah, he did," MacGyver said, chuckling as the opening scenes of 'Earthquake' played across the screen.

"I thought it suited the occasion," Sam said innocently.

MacGyver threw a sofa cushion at him. "Not funny, Junior."

As they settled in to watch the Irwin Allen classic, Willis asked, "Is there any word on Phelps yet?"

"Markham said they found his car wrecked about a half-mile from Phoenix headquarters, but there was no sign of him anywhere," Pete said.

"I wonder where he is?" Sam asked.

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The beeping and humming was getting really annoying and Phelps reluctantly opened his eyes. He was lying in a darkened room full of electronic equipment -- a hospital room. He started to sit up, then sank back into the pillow as the throbbing in his head intensified. What the hell was he doing in the hospital?

As he lay there wondering, the door to his room opened and a nurse came in carrying a basin. After she checked his chart, she set the basin down and began checking the monitors, finally noticing that he was awake when she checked his intravenous lines.

"You're awake," she stated. "It's about time."

"What am I doing here?" he demanded crossly.

"Don't take that tone with me, young man." She put her hands on her ample hips and frowned at him. She was a big, solid woman with iron gray hair and Phelps squirmed under the look she was giving him. "The doctor will be by to talk to you soon... after you've had your sponge bath." She smiled at him and picked up a sponge.

Phelps stared at her in horror. His cry of, "Get me out of here!!" echoed down the halls of the hospital.

The End