

Hold Tight

Chapter One

MacGyver concentrated on guiding his bike over the rough trail, weaving around holes and tree roots. Sam followed his Dad's lead, enjoying the warmth of the September sun on his back.

They pulled up in a clearing and Sam turned off his engine, listening to the stream and the birdsong.

"It's really beautiful here." He turned, seeing the potential for some fantastic photographs in the wilderness around them.

MacGyver pulled off his helmet and ruffled his unruly hair. Hanging the helmet on the handlebars, he stepped off the bike and looked around, breathing in the pine scented air.

"Sure is. Pete was right – I do like Oregon."

Sam grinned.

"Remind you of home?" MacGyver started, unloading his gear from the back of his bike.

"A little." He dropped a heavy bag and a bedroll on the grass. "Where do you want to pitch camp?"

"Over here." Sam took another look around and then turned his attention to his own luggage. "Out from under the trees but not too close to the water. OK with you, Dad?" MacGyver nodded, unrolling his tent. He hadn't been camping for a while and was looking forward to it. A vacation was just what he needed after dealing with bombs, runaway cars and, once again, Sam getting caught up in the kind of danger MacGyver wished he could protect him from. When Sam had expressed an interest in photographing up in the Northwest, it had seemed like an ideal opportunity for a road trip together. He hammered in the last tent peg and stood up, shaking the stiffness out of his hand.

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By nightfall, they were sitting beside a crackling campfire and watching their stew bubble. MacGyver leaned forward to stir it and, as his t-shirt sleeve rode up, the firelight caught on an old scar. "I never noticed that before." Sam frowned.

MacGyver looked up, following Sam's gaze.

"Oh. Yeah..." He tugged his sleeve down as he sat back. "Little souvenir from Murdoc." He stared at the fire, lost in thought.

"What happened?" Sam leaned forwards, picking up a spoon.

"What do you know about Murdoc, Sam?" MacGyver sighed, poking at the fire with a stick.

"Well," Sam dipped the spoon into the pot and tasted the stew, moving it to the edge of the fire. "I know he's equal parts crazy and clever and that he's really fascinated with you. Other than that, not much."

MacGyver nodded.

"He's crazy alright, though I don't think he's as crazy as he used to be. He's also got nine lives like a cat, far as I can tell, 'cause he's survived stuff that would have killed your ordinary man. This," MacGyver indicated the scar, "is the result of Murdoc trying to kill me halfway up a cliff face. He

slashed at me with a knife, but then he ended up falling off the cliff himself.” He shook his head and helped himself to the stew. “Fall would have killed anyone else.” He looked into the fire again, his expression suddenly sad.

“So how did he survive? Sam frowned, wondering what memories the story had stirred. “How high up were you?”

“High enough.” MacGyver ate a bite of stew. “I don’t know how he survived the fall. He was pretty messed up, though – he didn’t surface for a while after that and he was in bad shape even then.”

Sam finished his bowl and dug into the pot for seconds.

“You know, this is pretty good to say it’s vegetarian!” MacGyver shot him an amused glance. Sam grinned back around a mouthful of stew. “I hope Murdoc’s learned his lesson, Dad, the last thing we need is a knife wielding maniac on the loose when we go climbing Williamson Cliffs tomorrow!”

“I think we’re pretty safe. Last time I saw Murdoc, he was kind of on my side.” MacGyver grinned, shaking his head. “Still trying to work that one out, actually.”

“The bomb thing?” Sam stood up and stretched.

“The bomb thing.” MacGyver leaned back against a boulder and looked up at the star-filled sky.

“Well, I’m gonna turn in, Dad. Don’t stay up all night stargazing, will you? Can’t have you falling asleep halfway up tomorrow and ‘doing a Murdoc’ off the cliff!” He stooped and gave his father a hug, then walked across the clearing to his tent.

MacGyver put more wood on the fire and settled back against the boulder, watching the flames. The warm light glowed on the empty pots, on the climbing gear heaped nearby and on MacGyver, staring into the fire and seeing memories there of another climbing trip, another fall. His hand strayed to the scar on his arm and he sighed.

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MacGyver was up with the dawn, and by the time Sam crawled out of his tent, he had breakfast frying and coffee boiling.

Sam looked blearily at the array of climbing gear MacGyver was packing into his rucksack, then up at his father’s cheery grin and disappeared back into his tent with a mug of coffee. MacGyver watched him go, shaking his head.

“You’re just like your Mom, Sam, she wasn’t a morning person either!” Sam muttered something MacGyver didn’t catch and zipped the tent door shut behind him.

The morning was beautiful, with blue sky and sun that promised to be warm later on. MacGyver had slept well and felt ready for anything, though he had woken suddenly in the small hours. The campsite had been eerily silent, but the pots they’d left stacked up had been tumbled over. Some nocturnal animal, perhaps. MacGyver had looked for tracks, curious about their night-time visitor, but found none.

Half an hour later, Sam joined him. This time he looked much more his usual self. He grinned down at MacGyver and refilled his mug.

“Ahh... The power of coffee!” He sat down, savouring the smell. “So, Dad – what’s the plan?”

MacGyver finished folding the map he'd been studying and zipped it into his bag.

"Well, Williamson Cliffs are about a half an hour from here. I say we pack up and head off pretty soon, so we get as much time there as possible. You should get some good pictures of the cliffs, they're spectacular. And there are a lot of Native American sites in the area too."

Sam nodded, swallowing coffee.

"Any places we shouldn't go? Some of this area's pretty special to the local tribes, I know."

"Yeah." MacGyver leaned back, stretching his arm and rubbing his hand. "We shouldn't upset anyone if we stay on the main trails, though this whole area's a bit of a sensitive subject right now." He flexed his fingers thoughtfully. "I think the whole of Williamson Cliffs will get shut down and given back to the tribes eventually."

"I guess I should get my pictures while I can, then." Sam went to the stream to rinse out his mug, wrinkled his nose at how gritty the water seemed this morning and set about packing his gear.

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Leaving no sign at the campsite that they'd been there, MacGyver and Sam rode carefully back through the woods. As they rode, all the birds flew up at once, squawking and flapping out of the trees. Sam glanced up, momentarily spooked, but almost immediately caught his front wheel on a rock and had to fight for control of his bike. By the time he'd got back on track, everything was still and calm again.

Chapter 2

"Wow." Sam took off his helmet and rested it in front of him on the bike, staring up at the cliffs in front of them. "That's pretty high."

"Uh-huh." MacGyver left his bike on the stand and carefully locked the two bikes together. They unloaded their climbing equipment and rechecked every piece before packing it in rucksacks. Sam hefted his bag over his shoulder, feeling the weight of it drag at him.

"Do we really need all this, Dad? I must be carrying enough pitons and ropes to scale Everest!"

MacGyver nodded, shouldering his own heavy bag.

"Safety first, Sam – it'll be no good finding out we need some extra rope when we're halfway up the cliffs, will it? Besides, good climbers always take spares of everything." Sam nodded glumly, tightening the straps on his bag. He held out his arms, grimacing at the bright yellow jacket his Dad had insisted he wear.

"And you're sure about the jacket...?" He looked across at MacGyver, zipping up his own brilliant red one. MacGyver grinned and nodded, and Sam shook his head in disgust. "I look like a Golden Gopher..."

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Standing at the base of the cliffs, they seemed even bigger. MacGyver walked along the path looking up at the rocks and planning the ascent in his head. Sam stared up at two birds of prey circling lazily overhead, wondering if they'd stay there long enough for him to get a photo. He could see two possible ways up the rock face, but MacGyver had walked further down the path, studying what looked like a much more difficult route up the cliff.

"Up there?" The birds banked and disappeared behind the rocks and Sam walked over to join his father, viewing the steep face with horror. "We'd need suckers on our feet like flies!"

"Hairs, Sam." MacGyver sounded distant, his attention focussed on the challenge ahead of them.

"Come again?"

"Eh? Oh. Hairs. Not suckers. It's what flies have on their feet to help them climb up vertical... Never mind." He passed Sam a coil of rope. "Hold this, would you?"

Sam took the rope, surprised to see his father's hands shaking.

"Dad? You OK?"

"Fine, Sam." But MacGyver didn't meet Sam's eyes. "Clip in."

"Belay on." Sam gave his rope a tug to make sure it was held firm.

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The first part of the ascent was easy enough. Other climbers had left pitons in the rock and the route was easy to follow. Sam followed his father up the face, chatting about photo opportunities, camera angles and exposures, climbing attempts he'd made as a kid and the pleasure of being out of the L.A smog and up here in the clean air. MacGyver talked too, but the higher they got, the shorter his answers became. Eventually Sam was doing almost all the talking, with just a 'yes' or 'no' in the right places from MacGyver. They navigated a difficult overhang in silence. They were almost past it and onto the broad ledge beyond when MacGyver's foot slipped.

MacGyver felt the loose soil crumble and he lost his toehold. Fear flooded sharp and hot through him as his foot shot off the rock. For a desperate moment he was falling, then he gripped the rock tight with both hands and flattened himself to the cliff. The rope snapped taut as Sam hauled on it and MacGyver jerked to a halt, his face pressed against the stone.

His breath came in gasps, tasting of earth and grit. His eyes were screwed shut and, when he opened them again, the scenery swung crazily around him. Even the rock face in front of him heaved and spun as vertigo overwhelmed him. He could hear Sam yelling at him, but he sounded distant, and MacGyver couldn't make out the words against the heartbeat pounding in his ears.

"Dad!" Sam checked his ropes and inched along the rock face. They were too high up to risk the lunge and scramble that would get him to his Dad quickly – a fall from this height would likely be fatal. Ahead, MacGyver was clinging motionless to the smallest of hand and footholds, his face pressed to the rock.

"Dad!" This time MacGyver looked round, one inch at a time as if even the smallest of movements might send him spinning off the cliff. He blinked hard, trying to focus.

“Dad! Are you OK?” Sam pulled himself along, toes wedged into a crevice, hands on a tiny ledge high above him. Not for the first time, he wished he had his Dad’s height – he’d watched MacGyver work his way along here with ease only minutes before.

“Sam?” MacGyver’s voice was strained. “Sam? I’m OK. Stay where you are.” MacGyver coughed, sending grit flying up. He spat to clear it from his mouth. The world still spun around him, but it seemed to be slowing and his heartbeat wasn’t so loud. He concentrated, feeling along the rock with his boot until he found a toehold. Unclenching one hand took all the courage he had, and he reached up, still shaking as he found a new place to hold on. He took a shaky breath, unclenching his right hand and feeling his way along.

The handhold he found was at an angle and as he fitted his fingers in and shifted his weight, pain shot through his hand. MacGyver gasped but managed to keep his hold, shuffling his feet along the crevice until he reached the ledge. He took a deep breath and let go his handhold, rolling onto the ledge until his back touched the cliff face.

MacGyver sat up, hands pressed flat to the rock, eyes shut.

“OK Sam, you now. Watch that last section, there’s some loose dirt there.” He took another deep breath, lay flat on the ledge and looked over the edge. He watched Sam climb carefully up and roll onto the ledge beside him. Keeping his eyes off the drop, MacGyver shuffled back and passed Sam a water bottle with shaking hands.

“Why do you do it, Dad?” Sam studied MacGyver as he drank.

“Do what?” MacGyver looked up, pushing dusty hair out of his eyes.

“Climb. You hate heights, so why do it?”

“Ah, that.” MacGyver drank some water. “I do it partly BECAUSE I hate heights.”

“That doesn’t make any sense.” Sam shook his head.

“Sure it does.” MacGyver smiled. “I’m scared of being up here, and heights make me dizzy, but if I stop climbing, the fear wins. This way, I win.”

“OK, I get that.” Sam nodded. “So what’s the rest of the reason?”

MacGyver sighed, looking up at the sky.

“I used to climb with a friend, Sam. My good friend Mike. She and Jack and I were like the Three Musketeers.” He smiled again, remembering. “Mike just loved to climb, said she never felt as alive as when she was up high. She could never persuade Jack to come along, but I used to go. And yes, before you ask, I hated heights even back then.”

“But you did it for Mike?”

MacGyver nodded.

“Were you two together?”

MacGyver’s smile faded.

“No... Mike wanted to be, but I was...” He sighed and shook his head. “I don’t know what I was. Anyway, we went up to The Widowmaker to climb and she... she fell. It was an accident, though for the longest time I didn’t see it that way. I didn’t... I was... I couldn’t even go to her funeral, Sam.”

Sam sat perfectly still and silent, shocked.

“So I climb for Mike. I climb all these places that she would have loved to see. I climb for both of us.” MacGyver took a deep breath and gave Sam a watery smile. “Guess that wasn’t the answer you were expecting.”

“Dad, I-“ Sam shook his head, stunned.

“It’s OK. But... yeah. That’s why I climb.” MacGyver started gathering up their ropes, dropping a coil suddenly with a gasp.

“Dad?”

“Just a cramp.” MacGyver shook his right hand, stretching his fingers.

“Is that the one you broke?”

“I’m fine, Sam. Seriously.” MacGyver stowed the rest of his things and checked his ropes again, trying to ignore the ache in his hand. He smiled. “Climbing.”

“Climb on.” Sam paid out the rope and watched his father start the ascent.

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The sun warmed their backs as they climbed. The birds of prey came back, riding the thermals above the rocks with effortless grace. Sam found the second part of the climb easier, getting used to the rhythm of the movement and enjoying the view from up high. He stopped for a moment, leaning back on the rope and reaching for his camera. He snapped the birds, but by the time he’d put his camera away again, they’d gone.

Now that he’d stopped, something seemed different. Sam looked all around, listened carefully and frowned, unable to work out what had changed. The air was still, almost oppressive. The gentle breeze that had blown all morning had dropped and the air felt thick and sticky.

There were no other climbers on this section of the cliffs, and everything was quiet. Sam opened his mouth to ask his Dad if he’d noticed anything odd, but then thought better of it. Having good reasons to climb didn’t make heights any less frightening for MacGyver, and Sam decided not to bother him.

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Up above, MacGyver was struggling. The vertigo hadn’t really gone, although it was manageable if he was careful not to look down, and the constant grip-and-release of climbing was making his hand hurt. In his mind, he could hear Mike telling him off for coming up here when he wasn’t fully fit, how he was putting them both in danger. He shifted his grip again, reaching for a higher ledge and pulling himself up. He clipped onto the next piton and took a breather.

“Sam? How’re you doing?”

“I’m good, Dad. Hey – we’re almost there!”

“Almost! You ready to go on?” MacGyver held on tight and risked a glance up. The top of the cliff was close, one more push should see them at the top.

“Ready.” Sam took another look around. Why was it so quiet? Then he realised what was missing – the birdsong that had surrounded them all morning had stopped. Why would the birds go away?

He shook his head, deciding he could ask his Dad when they got to the top. He looked up at the next section, deciding on his route.

MacGyver reached up again, on tiptoes on a narrow ledge, and grasped the rock above him. A heave and a scramble and he was on the top of the cliff. He rolled over onto his back and stared at the sky, breathing hard.

“Sam! I’m up! You’re nearly there!” He grinned at the sky and then rolled back over, inching carefully back to the edge and holding tight as he peered down at Sam below. Sam grinned up at him.

“Be there in a minute,” He reached up for the next handhold and his expression changed abruptly.

MacGyver felt it too – a tremor running through the rock. The shaking grew, along with a rumbling that hummed in his bones. The cliff bucked underneath him and he hung on.

“Sam! Earthquake! Hold tight!”

Chapter Three

“Sam! Earthquake! Hold tight!”

“Dad!” Sam scrambled frantically for purchase on the rock face, but his rope slipped free as the piton was shaken loose. He lunged up as MacGyver leant dangerously far over the edge of the cliff. Sam felt the rock under his feet crumble and slide. He lunged up and his fingers just caught his Dad’s as the rock gave way completely.

MacGyver gripped Sam’s hand, willing the earthquake to stop. Below him, Sam swung crazily as he tried to find a foothold on the shaking cliff. MacGyver felt their combined weight dragging him over the edge. He wrapped his arm around a jutting rock, holding Sam tight with his right hand.

The earth heaved and shuddered and Sam swung back the other way, twisting and scrabbling for a grip on the rock with his feet and free hand. MacGyver gripped even tighter as Sam turned. Sam kicked and twisted again, and pain lanced up MacGyver’s arm.

“Hold on to me. Sam! Hold tight!” MacGyver tried to clench his fingers, but they wouldn’t move and his grip slipped. For a moment, he saw Sam staring up at him, then the rock under him shook again and dust billowed up. He felt Sam’s hand slipping through his, heard a muffled yell and Sam was gone.

“SAM!” The earth kicked and rumbled again, and MacGyver felt himself sliding over the edge as he reached for his son. He pulled back and hung onto the rock. How could he have let go? How could he have failed to save his son? He’d tried so hard to hold on...

“SAM!” MacGyver tucked his head under his arm and coughed. The cliffs shivered once more and then settled. All around him, MacGyver could hear falling rocks bouncing down the cliffs. He couldn’t see anything for the dust. He coughed again. He’d lost Sam. He’d lost the person who meant most to him in the world and it was his own stupid fault for bringing him up here.

“SAM! Please don’t let him have fallen. Please let him be hanging on.” MacGyver listened, but heard no reply. He lay down flat again and looked over the edge. The dust below was clearing, but

he couldn't see all the way down. He'd been the more expert climber here. He should have made sure he was fit before taking responsibility for Sam's life up here. And now...

"SAM!" MacGyver hung over as far as he could. Tears streaked the dirt on his face. Wind swirled the dust away, and then MacGyver could see down to the ground. The path was strewn with fallen rocks and dirt, but he couldn't see Sam's bright coat. MacGyver breathed a sigh of relief, hoping that meant Sam was clinging onto the rock face somewhere...

"SAM! ARE YOU OK?"

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Consciousness returned a bit at a time. Smell came first, dust acrid in his nostrils. Then hearing, the rattle of pebbles and a far-off rumbling. Another sound too, a voice. A familiar voice...

"Dad?" Sam coughed and tried again. "Dad!" He opened his eyes, seeing only rock in front of him. He put his hand to his aching head and his fingers came away bloody. He sat up slowly, feeling drunk and sick, his vision blurred. The world went dark and echoing, and Sam took a deep breath, fighting to stay conscious.

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MacGyver sat up, pulling his ropes towards him. He tested the pitons nearby and decided he didn't trust them after all the shaking around. He looped the rope around a boulder, jamming the loop underneath and leaning back on it to wedge it tight. Clipping the other end of the rope onto his harness, MacGyver backed towards the edge of the cliff and stepped over.

Feeding the rope out with shaking hands, MacGyver 'walked' his way down the first section of the cliff. Every few steps, he looked down for Sam's yellow coat. Working his way around a collapsed section of rock, MacGyver's hand cramped and the rope slipped through his fingers. He gasped and swore, his foot slipping on some loose pebbles and sending them tumbling down the cliff. He froze, pressed flat to the rock and breathing hard. He could feel vertigo lurking, waiting to pounce if he were to look down. Gritting his teeth, he forced his hands to unclench and pay out a little more rope.

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The patter of pebbles and dirt on his cheek woke Sam again. He heard a scrape and a curse, more dirt followed and then he heard his name.

"SAM! HANG ON, I'M COMING FOR YOU!"

He made another, more successful attempt to sit up, dirt cascading off him as he moved. The world lurched under him and he gripped the rock hard. He hawked and spat out dust and blood, pulled his feet up under him and blinked to clear his vision. Everything was blurred and doubled and he felt as though his head might explode.

“Dad?” It came out as little more than a croak. “DAD!” Sam clapped both hands to his head as yelling threatened to split it on two.

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MacGyver froze as he heard the answering yell. He waited until he heard Sam again, listening to pinpoint his direction. He scrambled sideways, heading for the ledge they’d sat on earlier. His grip slipped again and he forced himself to slow down. Slithering down the overhang, he saw a flash of yellow on the ledge below. He swung away from the rock and, for a heart-stopping moment, he was suspended over the drop by a single rope. He let himself down, feeling his hand shake and slip as his weight shifted, and then he was down and crawling across the ledge to Sam.

MacGyver hugged his son fiercely, then brushed Sam’s hair out of his eyes and studied him. Sam looked bad, his eyes unfocussed and his face bloody.

“Sam? Can you hear me?” MacGyver watched as Sam thought about this and then nodded. Sam’s face drained of colour as he moved and as he turned aside, he was sick. MacGyver held him, familiar with the after effects of a bang on the head. He waited until Sam had finished, handed him a rag to wipe his mouth and then helped him to sit back against the rock.

“Think you got yourself a concussion there, kid.” MacGyver checked the cut still oozing sluggishly on Sam’s head, looked into his eyes and felt his pulse. “You hurtin’ anywhere else?”

“No.” Sam thought about this, took a swift internal inventory and managed to stop himself from shaking his head. “No, I’m OK.” He put both hands to his head. “Wow...”

“Easy, now.” MacGyver squeezed Sam’s shoulder and took a shaky breath. “Thought I’d lost you there, kid.” He reached into his backpack, pulling out a first aid kit and dabbing at the cut.

“Ow.” Sam reached up to his head. “Damn, that hurts.”

“Uh-huh.” MacGyver finished cleaning the cut and taped gauze across it. “How dizzy are you?”

“Um...” Sam looked up and tried to focus, bracing his hands on the rock beside him. “Like I just got off a tilt-a-whirl.”

“Can you stand? As nice as it is here, we probably ought to get going.” MacGyver forced a smile, studying Sam’s pale face and shaking hands. He watched Sam get to his knees, breathing hard, then wobble back down. He sighed as he held Sam again, waited until he’d finished retching and sat him back carefully against the rock. He looked up sharply as pebbles rained down off the overhang and a low rumbling echoed through the cliffs. MacGyver curled himself over Sam and screwed his eyes shut.

“Hold on, kid - here comes the roller!”

Chapter 4

“Hold on, kid - here comes the roller!” Dirt and stones rained down as the world groaned and shook once again. A cracking noise echoed loudly around them. The aftershock rumbled away into the distance and MacGyver uncurled, shaking grit out of his hair.

“You OK, son?” Sam coughed and nodded carefully. MacGyver sat back on his heels and glanced at his watch. He frowned, watching Sam make another attempt at standing up. This time he made it to one knee before dizziness overtook him and he lost his balance. MacGyver stretched out and looked over the ledge. Vertigo made the scene below dip and swim, and he rolled back, closing his eyes and waiting for the dizziness to fade. He opened his eyes to find Sam watching him, the ghost of a smile on his face.

“We make a pair, Dad!” MacGyver grinned back, fighting a sense of desperation. They were running out of daylight, they were a long way from the ground and Sam was in no shape for climbing. An ominous new crack in the overhang meant they couldn’t stay up there for very long, and rescue services would have their hands too full dealing with casualties to worry about a couple of out-of-town climbers who, quite probably, no-one had missed.

What could he do?

“Empty your pack, Sam. Let’s see what we’ve got.” MacGyver emptied his bag onto the ledge, sorting the contents into piles. He watched Sam do the same, thinking hard. The final equipment count, including the contents of their pockets, came to:

Two coils of rope, a handful of carabiners, three and a half sandwiches, a first aid kit, two canteens of water, one camera in a hard case and a Swiss Army knife.

Another aftershock hit as MacGyver was sorting the equipment, this one more violent. MacGyver scrambled away from the edge, bracing his back against the rock as everything shook. The pile of gear shifted and slid towards the edge. MacGyver shot out a foot, but was too late to save one of the coils of rope and Sam’s backpack from slipping over the edge.

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Once the shock had passed. MacGyver pulled their equipment back to a safer spot. One coil of rope meant they didn’t have enough to safely climb down and, with Sam concussed, he daren’t chance free-climbing the rest of the way. So they’d have to make their way back to the top and try to attract attention from there. Re-coiling their remaining rope, MacGyver frowned at the rock above them. Getting round the overhang was tricky at the best of times, but with Sam dizzy and unable to balance, it would be impossible.

In the distance MacGyver heard the distinctive sound of a helicopter. At least the rescue services were in the area and probably looking for climbers. The helicopter flew at an angle towards them, but banked away before it was close enough to signal. Their ledge was shadowed in the late afternoon light and, even in their bright coats, they’d be impossible to see.

“Stay here. I’m going to climb up and work out a way to get us back up to the top.”

Sam frowned.

“We’re not going down?”

“No, we’re too high up already. Wait here, OK?” MacGyver looped the coil of rope across his shoulders and set his boot in a crack.

Sam watched his father climb up. He blinked hard, vertigo making his world swim again. When MacGyver's boots disappeared up out of sight, he felt very alone.

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The climb back up felt very different. New cracks had appeared, pitons couldn't be trusted and debris made the climb treacherous. By the time MacGyver reached the top, he was white and shaking. Looking around made vertigo crawl at the edges of his vision, but from this angle he could see the helicopter circling. A glance at the sky told him they didn't have much time left before it grew dark and the search would be called off for the night. Whatever they were going to do, they'd have to do it quickly.

The top of the cliff was relatively unchanged, apart from a deep new crack in the middle. A boulder had wedged itself in the crack and MacGyver studied it carefully, feeling all around it. He looped the rope around the boulder and leant his full weight on it, but the boulder didn't shift. Would it hold Sam's weight? He thought it would. Knotting the rope securely around the boulder, MacGyver took off his bright coat and weighted it down with loose rocks as an indicator to the helicopter that someone was here, then climbed back down.

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Sam woke with a jump when MacGyver's boot scraped on the rock above him. He hadn't realised that he'd drifted off again, and that scared him. He still saw everything doubled and his head ached, but at least he didn't feel sick. MacGyver swung around the overhang on a rope, looking cheerful.

"Hey, Sam. How're you doing?"

"Better, I think." Sam smiled back.

"Good. I got a rope secured to help us climb back up, we just need to figure out a way to get you up there." MacGyver checked Sam's pulse, stared into his eyes and brushed the hair gently off his forehead. "How dizzy are you now? Honestly, Sam – this is no time for heroics."

"Honestly? Not good." Sam rolled onto his knees, but couldn't balance enough to stay on his feet. MacGyver watched him, frowning.

"If we can make you a harness, maybe I can haul you up around the overhang. After that, you don't need to balance so much because you'll be leaning forward onto the rock."

"Yeah." Sam looked at their pile of equipment. Nothing looked like it could be repurposed to make a harness. Suddenly feeling hot, he unzipped his coat and shrugged it off, pushing it down around his waist. Then his hands stilled and he looked up at his Dad. "Dad, we could..."

"I'll just bet we could!" MacGyver grinned and nodded.

Reaching for the coat, MacGyver knotted the sleeves around Sam's waist and then pulled the body of the coat up, tying it in place with the strap from the camera case. Attaching a carabiner on each side, MacGyver stood back to admire his handiwork. The makeshift harness seemed serviceable, even if it did make Sam look like he was wearing a giant yellow diaper.

MacGyver pulled in the loose end of the rope, passing it through the carabiners and around Sam's back. He packed the remains of their gear into his own backpack, wrapped Sam's arm over his shoulders and helped him to stand. They shuffled to the edge, Sam dizzy and unable to walk on his own. He positioned Sam at the edge of the drop, made sure he had a firm grip on the rock and then stepped back.

"OK, son. I'm going to climb back up to the top now. Wait until I call you, then gently let go. The rope'll catch you and then I can haul you up the first part." Sam took a deep breath and nodded. The plan made sense, but he'd already fallen once today and he wasn't sure he could bear to let go of the rock again.

MacGyver climbed quickly back up, less dizzy now that he was familiar with the route and had a clear plan to put into action. Distraction, as Nikki had noted, did seem to push the fear and the vertigo into the background. Reaching the top, he turned and called back down.

"Now, Sam! Let go and let the rope catch you!"

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Down below, Sam took a deep breath and tried to unclench his fingers. Visions of falling, spiralling away into the air, flashed through his head and he gasped, fingers tightening on the rock. This must be how his Dad felt, he decided.

"SAM? YOU OK DOWN THERE?"

It took Sam three attempts to find his voice. He had his eyes squeezed shut to avoid seeing the drop.

"Gimme a minute, Dad..." Sam took a deep breath, telling himself that his Dad's inventions always worked. Hadn't they invented a water-powered rocket pack from a couple of fire hoses and a handful of scrap? This was far less mad than that... Wasn't it? He screwed up his face, held his breath and let go.

For a moment he fell, then the rope was taut under his hands and he was dangling in mid-air. The ground swung underneath him and Sam shut his eyes again as a wave of nausea hit.

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"THAT'S GOOD, SAM!" MacGyver watched his son step away from the ledge. He wasn't sure he'd have had the courage to let go if their roles had been reversed. He gripped the rope, leaning back and pulling hard. He'd collected his coat and padded the edge of the rock so that the rope wouldn't fray as he hauled Sam up. Sam was heavy and MacGyver could only haul him up a few inches at a time. His gloves saved him from the worst of the rope burns, but the pulling made his hand ache fiercely. Refusing to give in and risk dropping Sam, MacGyver wrapped the rope around his back, braced his feet against the rock and pulled harder than ever.

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Sam spun gently as he inched up past the overhang. As soon as he could, he reached for hand and footholds, trying to take some of his own weight and ease the load on his Dad and on the single rope that supported him. He couldn't judge distance that well and this, combined with his double vision, meant that he couldn't help as much as he wanted. Still, he got to the top sooner than he expected, his Dad's strong arms reaching down and pulling him up onto the top of the cliffs.

MacGyver pulled Sam to the centre of the summit, as far away from the edges as he could. The sun had set while they'd worked their way to the top and now it was getting dark. MacGyver could still hear the helicopter, but it wouldn't be searching for much longer. In theory they could stay here until morning, but he really wanted to get Sam to a doctor and he didn't trust that there wouldn't be any more aftershocks. How could they attract the attention of the helicopter?

"Dad? I got an idea..." MacGyver turned to see Sam rummaging in the rucksack. "My camera's in here, right?"

"Yeah... What are you thinking?"

"I spend a lot of time photographing in remote places." Sam stilled for a moment, waiting for a wave of dizziness to pass. "I've got a really good flash on here, and the battery lasts for ages. We could signal to the helicopter!" He pulled out the camera and detached the flash from the top. "Here."

"Son, you have no idea how proud I am of you!" MacGyver took the flash and pointed it towards the circling helicopter. He flashed out 'S...O...S' again and again until the flash battery died. The helicopter changed direction, sweeping its searchlight towards them. MacGyver and Sam waved hard and then Sam pulled off his coat/harness and held it up high. The searchlight stopped and swung back, lighting up the bright yellow coat, and the helicopter came to hover overhead. A figure swung down on a rope, landing beside them. The paramedic pushed back a heavy hood and her dark hair spilled out. She turned and MacGyver did a double take.

"You OK, Sir?" She looked so familiar in the half-light that MacGyver couldn't find his voice. "Sir?" Her voice sounded hauntingly familiar too.

He nodded, overcome.

"Sir? You're safe now. We've got you."

The paramedic turned to attend to Sam, checking his head and asking him questions. MacGyver shivered, watching her hook Sam up to a harness and signal for him to be winched up to safety. He didn't really believe in ghosts or reincarnation or any of that stuff, but right now he could almost believe he was wrong...

MacGyver caught the harness as it was lowered back down to him. He put it on and gripped the rope as he was pulled up, the paramedic riding another line beside him.

"Thanks for hanging onto me." He unclipped the harness and stowed it under the seat.

"No problem." The paramedic turned, smiling at him from behind her wavy hair. "I've spent half my life hanging onto people just like you." She turned and tapped the pilot on the shoulder, leaving MacGyver to stare open-mouthed at her as the helicopter rose and flew away into the night.