

Trick or Treat

Pequot Lakes

Minnesota

27th October 1993

Sally Carmel wasn't scared of anything. At least, that was what she liked everyone in high school to think. After all, it paid to be the one everyone else looked up to, didn't it?

Except right now, as she walked home from a get together with some of her friends, she didn't feel so brave. Her watch read ten after midnight, and she was alone.

It was all Arnie Kinmont's fault – he'd promised to walk her and then decided to stay back with some of his football buddies instead.

Typical man, Sally huffed silently.

Of course, there was no real reason to be afraid. She was in a pretty safe suburban area where mostly the “older generation” lived.

No reason to feel jittery, and yet Sally *did* feel jittery.

She felt chills running down her back and her throat was becoming suddenly very dry.

Stop it! She chided herself. *There's only one block to go now...*

But the edgy feeling wouldn't go away, no matter how much she internally scolded. In fact, the sensation had grown to the point where Sally was convinced she was being followed.

She could hear her footfalls echoing on the concrete and feel her own chest rising and falling far too quickly as she panicked.

Stop being such a wuss! Sally spun around, handbag at the ready to assault any would-be attacker, but the street was empty save for a lone black and white cat pawing at a trash can that's lid had been left off.

Sally chuckled and took a deep breath. Boy, her friends would have the last laugh if they could see her now. Even so, as she focused back on her journey, she quickened her step just a little. There was no harm in getting home a few minutes faster, after all.

The houses around her were in darkness, every last one of them, and that did little to quell the fear in the pit of her stomach. Mostly seniors lived here, and Sally guessed they were all in bed already.

Not good if I AM being followed...

Behind her, the cat she'd seen suddenly shrieked, and as Sally whirled around again, she saw it skittering off into the night, its tail between its legs like it had seen a Hellhound.

Sally's hands began to shake, and she dropped her bag. A bright pink purse and various makeup items tumbled out onto the pavement, and she was forced to drop down to her knees to retrieve them.

Why had she stayed so late? Why was she so dang scared of a creepy cat anyway..?

A long, misshaped shadow fell over her and Sally froze. It looked odd, like it had lumpy, sticky out pieces on the head. She swallowed hard, daring herself to look up at the person standing over her.

The face that stared back wasn't human – it had sack cloth for a head, with glowing red demon eyes sunk back into the material and little bits of straw sticking out from every orifice.

The head was cocked at an odd angle, as if it found Sally to be intriguing.

The scarecrow's body was just as scruffy. Dirty, torn clothing with more straw protrusions, and where the arms finished, there were old tan leather gloves. In the right hand, there was some kind of strange tool – a slightly curved blade with a hooked end.

The sight of the thing was such a surprise, Sally fell flat on her bottom, and then burst out into a fit of giggles, sudden relief making her laugh.

“Billy Young, you're fooling no one! Everyone in town knows you've been working on that dang scarecrow costume for Halloween for the past six months!” Sally scowled at the thing and then stumbled to her feet, scooping her purse back into her bag along with the makeup.

The scarecrow's head straightened, and it looked at Sally for one second longer before lunging at her with the blade in its hand.

Sally screamed, her lungs expelling every ounce of air until they felt raw. And then she ducked, just in time for the blade to narrowly miss her throat.

Sally dropped her bag again, and this time she didn't stop to retrieve it, she simply ran. Her legs felt like Jell-O and her mind couldn't focus, but she moved anyway. This wasn't Billy, and it wasn't a joke.

Behind her, she could hear the slithery steps as the scarecrow gave chase. And once, she was sure she felt the waft of the blade as it was swung at her again and narrowly missed the back of her left shoulder.

Ahead there were more trash cans, and Sally decided she was going to use them. As she raced past, she grabbed the nearest can with her left hand and spun it around behind her.

There was a crash as the metal hit the footpath and the can's contents spilled out into the road, but Sally didn't look to see if it had tripped her assailant, instead she kept up the ridiculous pace until the muscles in her legs begged for mercy.

Sally ultimately slowed as pain and cramp crept into every sinew of her body, and eventually, when her ears could no longer discern someone following, she stopped, just for a second and looked back.

The street was empty.

No scarecrow, no stray cat, no nothing.

Sally sucked down fast, painful breaths until the burning in her chest waned. Her eyes darted from street corner to front door and back again as she decided her next move.

There was a mist starting to form over the low ground, and in the waxing moonlight it frightened her almost as much as the scarecrow had. This was all wrong, all so very wrong.

This can't be happening! It can't! I need a phone, I need the police...

Sally pushed her tired limbs to jog to the nearest door, and she began to pound on it until she felt splinters of wood stick into her fist. She ignored them.

"Hey! I need help! *Anybody!* Somebody, please *just answer the door!*"

Eventually, an upstairs window creaked laboriously open and an old lady with a bright red hair net poked her head through. She looked annoyed, her nose wrinkling up in disgust. "Will you dang trick or treat people just scoot? Don't ya'll know it's not even Halloween yet?"

Before Sally could respond the woman vanished back inside and the window was slammed firmly shut.

Sally's stomach lurched and she abruptly hated herself for all the tricks she'd played on the elderly over the years. Ironic, now, that those pranks were hitting her right back in the face.

But it wasn't over yet.

The scarecrow still hadn't reappeared, and Sally's taxed brain screamed at her to run for the callbox on the corner of the adjoining street. It wasn't far, but to her legs and her terrified psyche it may as well have been the other side the world.

The box was cold inside, like a refrigerator, but Sally was welcome of the sanctuary it seemed to offer. She grabbed the handset, her hands still trembling and began to dial.

She'd half put in the number to her parents house when the shadow from earlier returned across the battle-scarred glass of the booth.

And there was only one way in or out.

Sally dropped the phone and reflexively turned just in time to see the scarecrow step from the still forming fog.

And damned if it didn't seem to be smiling.

That was the very last thought Sally Carmel ever experienced.

The scarecrow brought the sharpened tool in its hand up in a thrusting movement straight into Sally's chest. Her eyes bulged, and she slowly slid down the back of the booth, leaving a streak of blood on the glass panels as she slumped to the floor.

Above her, the scarecrow cocked its head again in morbid curiosity, its radiant ruby eyes watching every last dying breath until the girl was no more.

Mission City P.D.
Crow Wing County
Minnesota
29th October 1993

MacGyver pulled the Jeep into an empty parking spot and killed the engine. Instead of stepping straight out, he sighed and looked around at the bustling place that had once been his home.

It was good to be back, and he really should come more often, but then this time wasn't exactly his own idea.

Neil Ryder, his old school buddy had called the previous day saying he had a problem Mac's "unique talents" might be able to solve. When Mac had pushed for more details, Neil had been pretty elusive saying that it was police business he couldn't discuss on the phone.

For a while MacGyver had considered whether it was just a ruse to get him back to Mission City, but the strange tone in Neil's voice had convinced him otherwise. After Sam's recent climbing accident, it had still been a pull to come out here and leave his son behind. He hoped Neil's mystery was worth it.

Mac ran a hand through his hair, took out his keys and hopped out of the Jeep. It was a short walk into the police station and up to the duty sergeant's counter.

He leaned on the desk and smiled. "Hi, name's MacGyver, I'm here to see Sgt. Ryder?"

The cop the other side eyed him warily, and then sauntered into a back room without speaking. Two minutes later, Neil appeared in his place, a wane smile on his face. "About time we saw you around these parts again," he teased.

MacGyver rolled his eyes. “C’mon, Neil, you know my work keeps me busy. And now that Sam’s around too...”

Neil nodded and gestured that they go outside into the police lot. “Yeah, you need to bring the kid over more often. We should all go camping together, a father and son kinda deal.” He reached a police cruiser and opened the driver’s door. “Get in, I want you to meet someone. I’ll explain on the way.”

MacGyver raised a brow – all this secrecy wasn’t like Neil at all, and that meant it must be something pretty big. He climbed into the passenger seat and waited until Neil was out onto the local highway before looking at his friend expectantly.

They appeared to be heading out of town, and that meant out of Neil’s jurisdiction if they carried on.

“So?” Mac finally asked. “What are you up to, and why do you need me?”

Neil pulled up at a red light and glanced over. When his eyes met MacGyver’s they were filled with something akin to dread. “Two nights ago a young high school kid named Sally Carmel was killed in a neighboring town, and then last night another from the same school was murdered in exactly the same way.”

Mac rubbed at his neck. The long drive had made him stiff and sore, but he pushed it aside. “Sounds nasty, but how do I fit in? I’m not exactly a cop, and by the sounds of things it’s not your jurisdiction either?”

Neil nodded. “It’s not, but a friend of mine, Sgt. Steffi Webber was working on the first killing. We’ve known one another awhile and we try to help one another when we can. You know, cross border intel and so on...”

“You said she *was* working on the first killing? Something happen to change that?”

The lights changed to green and Ryder pulled the cruiser away and into a right lane. “You could say that.” He grimaced. “Steffi went over to interview the dead girl’s high school friends and was actually there when the second kid, Tom Klein was killed. She actually saw the killer and...”

Mac’s interest was suddenly piqued by how Neil’s voice had petered out, like he didn’t want to tell the rest of the tale. “And?” He pushed.

“Well, it was someone dressed as a Halloween scarecrow, with some kinda weird blade we haven’t been able to identify yet. Webber tried to stop the creep when she saw what was going down – fired three shots into it, and it still kept coming at her.” Neil pulled into a vast parking lot and took the nearest available bay.

Mac waited for his friend to kill the cruiser’s engine before pointing out the obvious. “You don’t need me to suggest the guy was probably wearing a bulletproof vest, right? Amazing what a piece of Kevlar will do.”

Ryder squirmed in his seat, his hands clasping and unclasping on the car's steering wheel before he got up the nerve to serve up the next piece of his story. "No, I don't need you to tell me that," he conceded. "What I need you to tell me is how come Steffi fired two more shots point blank into the thing's head and it didn't flinch? In fact, it sliced her pretty good. If she hadn't fallen back down some stairs, it probably would have finished her." He pointed to a large building at the back of the lot. "That's why I want you to meet her."

Mac squinted at the building, finally realizing it was a small out of town hospital. He swallowed hard, trying to take all the information in, as crazy as it sounded. It was Halloween, yeah, but no way was he buying that anything creepy was going down. "She's sure she hit the guy twice in the head? I mean, c'mon, couldn't she have been scared enough to have missed?"

Neil shook his head. "I trust Steffi's judgment, Mac. I've known her for over ten years, and if she says she hit the thing I believe her. That's why I asked you to come down. If anyone can think outside the box and figure out how that goon defied two slugs in the skull, then it's you."

MacGyver stared out at the stark hospital in the distance, and swallowed. If the killer really had taken two bullets to the head without flinching, he wasn't sure even he could explain it.

***St. Joseph's Medical Center
Brainerd
Minnesota***

MacGyver wasn't keen on hospitals. Heck, he'd spent far too much time in them to ever want to walk the white, sterile halls of one ever again. And yet, here he was following Neil down yet another antiseptic smelling corridor to Steffi Webber's room.

According to Neil, the surgery to Steffi's slashed arm had gone well and she was due for release later in the day, so that was something, but it did little to quell the queasiness Mac always felt in these places.

They reached a teak colored door and Neil paused, rapping lightly on the wood with his knuckles.

As they entered, a petite brunette sporting a sling on her right arm glanced up from reading a typed report and smiled. She looked tired, small bags under her eyes giving away lack of sleep. "Neil! I wasn't expecting you just yet!"

Neil nodded and motioned to MacGyver with his thumb. "This is the friend I was telling you about..."

"Pleased to meet you, ma'am." Mac bobbed his head. "Name's MacGyver."

Steffi's smile widened. "Neil's told me all about you. He thinks you can help me out with my *little problem*? I can't exactly file it in my report or my colleagues will think I'm going nuts."

Mac pulled out a chair and sat down at the side of Webber's bed. Neil took a seat the opposite side.

"I'm sure willing to try, but I'm gonna need a few more details..." Mac raised a brow in anticipation.

Steffi shrugged, holding her injured arm as if speaking of the event actually made it hurt more. "There's not much I can tell you that Neil probably hasn't already. But I think we need to hurry. I have this gut feeling there might be more killings."

"What makes you say that?" Neil asked, looking slightly surprised.

Steffi sighed. "When I interviewed the friends of Sally and Tom, the two dead kids, they reluctantly admitted to a practical joke, and I can't help but think it may be what's started all this."

"What kind of joke?" Mac pushed, knowing all-too-well what kind of pranks high school kids could get up to.

"Well, it's near Halloween and they'd all been drinking," Steffi explained. "It seems they thought it would be hilarious to go into a local fruit farmer's field and do a few 'pagan rituals.' They lit a fire, wore some old robes and were out there chanting. Apparently they imagined it might freak out some of the more local yokels, as they put it." She looked out of the window into the distance, as if she could see the field from her room. "I'm scared they've offended someone in a big way..."

Mac wasn't convinced. "C'mon, would someone really dress up as a scarecrow and kill like this just to get back at a few kids? That's kinda a big stretch." He tapped his fingers on the end of the bed as his mind started to turn things over. "What about the murder weapon? Neil says it's some kinda strange blade? Can you describe it?"

Steffi cocked her head as she apparently tried to remember. "It wasn't a knife," she began. "In fact it looked more like a tool of some sort. The blade was curved, and the end was hooked. It was about this long," she indicated the thing's length with her good hand.

Mac mulled over the description, biting on his bottom lip as he deliberated. "I think I've seen something like that before. In fact I think my grandpa Harry had one."

"So put us out of our misery!" Neil demanded. "What the heck is it?"

"I think it's a turnip knife – an old farming tool, and I mean *old*." MacGyver let out a long frustrated breath. "'Course, that doesn't get us one bit closer to solving anything, though." He looked at his watch. "I think I'm gonna go over to the high school and take a peek where the second kid was killed."

Neil shook his head apologetically. “Well, I wish I could stay and help but I have a shift back in Mission City I can’t miss.”

Mac nodded. “No worries, I’ll take a cab...”

***Pequot Lakes high School
30805 Olson St.***

It had taken MacGyver longer than he’d expected to actually get a cab and get to the high school. By the time he’d laid foot on the campus, the October sun was fading into oblivion, dull grey clouds interspersed with scarlet banded hues filling the evening sky.

Mac took off his sunglasses and slid them into his pocket, taking short strides to a line of yellow police tape where the second kid had been killed, and where Steffi had been attacked.

Every few minutes, a student would pass by, stop, look and then move on with an expression akin to either curiosity, or terror. Mac didn’t envy them, while the killer was out there, and the motive was unknown, anyone was fair game.

He bobbed under the yellow lines and dropped down to examine the area.

There were dark stains on the concrete that had also been marked off with small numbered labels. MacGyver knew the crime scene people had left these behind after photographing for any potential clues.

He winced as he kneeled closer to the marks he knew had been caused by blood pooling. There had been a lot of it – the killer had been ruthless in the attack. The stains alone did little to help his plight, and he stood up, intent on checking out where Steffi had been slashed.

“Excuse me, young man, but just what do you think you’re doing? Those police markers are there for a reason!”

Mac spun around to see a middle-aged woman staring at him with intense blue eyes that seemed to burn like a laser. She was dressed like someone from a fifties B movie and her attitude was far from pleasant.

“Well don’t just stand there,” she growled. “I want an explanation, or I’m calling the police!”

The woman’s brash tone rendered MacGyver speechless, at least for a couple of seconds. *Shouldn’t she be more cautious? I could be the dang killer for all she knows, and she confronts me on a rapidly emptying campus?*

He slowly reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out his Phoenix I.D. card. “I’m here at the request of a friend in the local police department,” he explained as he slid his credentials under her nose.

The woman took the card, scrutinized it for far too long and then handed it brusquely back. "I'm Professor Wilson," she offered, appearing to relax just a little. "I teach history here and I...well, I thought you were one of those ghoulish individuals who get a kick out of seeing where people died."

MacGyver grimaced. "No, ma'am, I'm just here to help." He nodded back to the dark, discolored concrete. "Do you know anything about what happened?"

Wilson's face screwed up until she looked like a wizened fruit. "Everyone knows Billy Young is the one messing around with a scarecrow outfit. Why he hasn't been arrested already is beyond me!"

Mac smiled. "You know, anyone can get a Halloween outfit. Owning one that looks like a scarecrow isn't exactly an exclusive."

The professor's nose creased up and her eyes rolled skywards as if she was talking to someone of lesser intellect. "*Really?*" She offered with more than a hint of sarcasm. "Well, if you'll excuse me Mr. MacDriver, I have to go, papers to mark and so on."

Wilson skittered away with a folder under her arm and a definite bee in her bonnet.

"It's *MacGyver*." Mac corrected to no one in particular as the teacher vanished into the ether. *Boy she was a tough cookie...*

He stuck his hands in his jeans pockets and sighed. There was nothing here to give him any clues as to what had really happened, or how the scarecrow had performed its magic trick with the head shots.

Mac stole a glance at his watch. It was getting late, he hadn't even arranged a place to stay, and his Jeep was still back in Mission City.

He'd noticed a motel on the way into town that would serve his needs, but he was going to need another cab to get there, and a phone to call one.

Feeling somewhat inadequate in his plight to help Steffi and Neil, Mac began to amble back towards the school buildings, hoping to catch campus security to let him use a phone. He was about halfway when he finally noticed he was ankle deep in a swirling white mist. It seemed to pool around his legs like it had a purpose and mind of its own.

Mac frowned. Yes, it was close to Halloween, and it was October, but still...

Something ahead made a scuffling noise and MacGyver instantly forgot the fog. He looked up; searching the shadows for whatever had caught his attention.

And there it was, looking back at him with shimmering red eyes, its head cocked to one side in morbid fascination.

Mac didn't move. He simply stared back, almost mesmerized by the scarecrow's gruesome features. If this was a costume, it was no "off the shelf" offering.

The scarecrow seemed to appreciate his lack of fear and took a tentative step forwards, its gait stiff and mechanical. In fact, it was almost slithering.

And in its right hand, was exactly what Mac had expected, a recently sharpened turnip knife that normally would have reflected the muted moonlight.

Except tonight, this one still dripped with a scarlet residue that MacGyver could only imagine was fresh blood.

Part Two

Any normal person would have run – but MacGyver was far from ordinary. This was a puzzle, and solving it would lead to the capture of a cold blooded killer. So, instead of turning tail, Mac decided a full on sprint after the scarecrow was the only way to get his answers.

"Hey!" Mac shouted after the thing, and it twitched as if startled by his full-frontal approach.

For a moment, the scarecrow seemed to pause for thought, and then it spun around, making a dash for the edge of the campus.

MacGyver gave chase, bounding over a wall and two short fences before realizing that somehow, the scarecrow had vanished into thin air.

It was as if the mist swirling at his feet had swallowed the farmyard creature up.

Mac stopped and caught his breath, realizing that his opponent was not only extremely ugly, but also extremely lithe. *You're getting old if you can't keep up with something made of straw!* He half-joked to himself.

But of course, the scarecrow wasn't really straw, it was human, and that meant it had returned to the scene of the crime, like so many other killers before it. *I need to call the police, it could still be hanging around, and there are plenty of kids it could attack next...*

And why the heck am I calling it an "it" when I know dang well it has to be a person?

MacGyver sucked down another breath and then began to jog back to the nearest building. He'd gotten half way when a familiar face appeared.

"Steffi?" Mac's brow furrowed in surprise. "What are you doing out here?"

Webber managed to shrug despite the sling on her arm. "I got out of the hospital an hour or so ago and called Neil. He was feeling pretty bad for driving off and forgetting you had no transport, so I said I'd come over and see if you needed a ride?"

MacGyver smiled wanly. “I am kinda sick of grabbing cabs already, but that’s the least of my worries.” He grew more serious. “I just saw your scarecrow and it was carrying the turnip knife again. What if its here for another kid?”

Steffi’s mood seemed to instantly darken and the spark of amusement in her eyes from moments earlier vanished. “I’ll call in and get some uniforms out here. I’m not officially on the case anymore because of my arm, but I guess they can’t argue.”

They headed for the main building together and Steffi made the call. About twenty minutes later, the campus was awash with uniforms and lots of worried students, but there was no sign of the scarecrow.

“You must have scared the guy off,” Steffi mused as she guided MacGyver to her Volkswagen Beetle.

Mac shook his head as he grabbed the chromed door handle and climbed inside the ancient motor. “I have a feeling the person we’re dealing with doesn’t scare *at all*.” He waited for Steffi to drop behind the wheel and then looked at her with a frown. “Just how are you going to drive with that arm?”

Webber popped her arm from the sling, flexed her fingers, and then grimaced. “With great difficulty,” she admitted. “But I’d rather suffer than walk.”

“I could drive?” Mac was about to climb back out and swap places, but Steffi put a hand on his arm.

“I can manage,” Steffi’s tone said there would be no negotiation. “All I need to know now is where the heck to? I’m not ready to go home and sleep just yet.”

MacGyver looked at her intently and decided he was dealing with one stubborn lady. He didn’t, however, plan on arguing that point with her. Women invariably beat him at that game.

“I was thinking maybe we should pay Billy Young a visit. Apparently he’s quite famous for making a really good scarecrow costume.”

Steffi nodded, turning the ignition key and letting the engine turn over and over before it finally caught. “Sounds like a plan,” she agreed, wincing as she tugged at the huge steering wheel. “And the good news is he only lives two blocks from here...”

* * * *

True to Steffi’s word, Billy Young only lived five minutes from the high school. Not only that, but his parents owned a rather large house, that reminded MacGyver of Lisa Woodman’s home. In other words, they were pretty wealthy.

That fact had also led to Billy being one very cocky young teenager, despite his gangly frame and spotty façade.

“Would you mind us seeing your costume?” Steffi appeared to be trying to be polite, even though Billy hadn’t stopped scowling since his mother had let Mac and the injured cop in.

“Give me one good reason why I should?” Billy shot back the retort as he slumped down on a chair, one leg dangling over the arm. “You’re not on duty, and I don’t see any kinda search warrant?”

Mac tried his hand. “Look, Billy, people are dying, people you know and go to school with.”

“People who I don’t like and generally don’t like me,” Billy spat as he scooped up the T.V. remote and started fiddling. “But then I guess that’s why you’re here?”

Steffi put her good hand on her hip in obvious frustration. “We know you do have a costume, and you just admitted your own motive.”

Billy’s jaw seemed to set and then he suddenly grinned until it looked like his spectacles would pop off. “Yeah, but I also have an alibi. I was home at the time those goofballs bought it, and my mom can confirm it.” He focused on the television, turning the sound up as far as it would apparently go to signal the conversation was over.

Steffi stared at him, her eyes popping with anger and MacGyver was forced to grab her good arm and steer her out into the gargantuan hallway. “He’s one cocky teenager, but I don’t think he would have the actual guts to hurt anyone.”

“You read people that well?” Steffi demanded as the Young’s maid showed them back out of the entrance.

Mac smiled. “Oh, I’ve been known to on occasion.” He jogged down the steps back to Steffi’s Beetle and opened the door for her. “Besides, his costume was hanging in the study and it didn’t look anything like the one I saw earlier.”

Webber gaped. “You *saw* in the study? How’d I miss that?”

“Because you let your anger take control,” MacGyver pointed out. “That’s how you can miss things. And…”

“And?”

“And,” Mac chuckled as he dropped into the Volkswagen. “I asked the maid where it was while you were grilling the kid when we first arrived.”

Steffi swatted him with her good hand and then guided the Beetle out back onto the main road. “You know his mom could be covering for him? I’ve known parents take a murder rap for their kids before.”

Mac shook his head. “I don’t buy it. There’s something much deeper going on here.” He glanced over at the Beetle’s clock. It was almost a quarter past eleven, but he

didn't feel one bit like sleeping. "How about we call at the field where those kids did the ritual? Maybe we can find something?"

Steffi nodded and tried to make fourth gear with her injured arm. She almost missed and a horrid crunching sound came from the car's gearbox. She winced. "Okay...but it might take awhile," she smiled apologetically, and Mac couldn't help but smile back.

*Irwin's Fruit Farm
Near Mayo Lake*

MacGyver trudged across the fruit field using just the moonlight to navigate. Without his Jeep he had no flashlights or other tools to hand save his knife and a few oddments in his pockets, and he felt lost.

Eventually, even without a light, he spotted what he was looking for – a dark black patch of ground where the high school kids had lit their fire and performed their joke ritual.

It looked innocent enough, just a scorched piece of earth and a few discarded beer bottles.

Mac kneeled and ran his fingers through the charred remnants of grass and soil and wondered if this could really be the motive for the killings.

Behind him, he heard Steffi's slow approach. Even though she'd denied it emphatically, he knew she was getting tired, and he could sense her arm was hurting more than she was willing to admit.

Mac felt her legs brush past him, and then heard a small gasp that made him straighten up and instinctively grab the injured cop like a guardian angel. "What's wrong?" he asked in all-but a whisper.

Steffi swallowed and pointed, and her expression said she was momentarily terrified. "It's there, watching us!"

MacGyver followed her gaze to see a scarecrow watching over them. He blinked, but it didn't move, it didn't crook its neck, and it definitely didn't have a turnip knife in its right hand.

He tried to stifle a small chuckle and failed. "It's just an ordinary scarecrow," he explained, spinning Steffi around to face him. "It can't hurt us," he assured, squeezing her shoulders.

Steffi smiled wanly, but then a metallic click behind them melted away any further mirth. It was the sound of someone cocking a shotgun.

Mac turned first, followed swiftly by Webber.

Facing them was an old man with short grey stubble and a frown that surpassed anything Harry Jackson could have mustered.

“Whoa,” MacGyver tried to calm the situation. “We’re not here for any trouble…”

“Damn right you ain’t,” the old timer spat back. “I’m done playing with you dang Halloween freaks messing in my fields. You can come back to my place and explain yourselves to the cops.” He eyed them warily, as if he expected them to run.

Steffi stepped forwards, her good hand held out in front of her. “We *are* the local cops. Well, at least I am,” she said haughtily. “And if you’ll let me reach into my jacket I can show you some I.D.”

The old man nodded, but kept his finger firmly on the Browning’s trigger.

Steffi slid a hand inside her jacket and pulled out her badge.

MacGyver followed by offering up his Phoenix credentials. “Now would you mind lowering the twelve gauge?”

“Sorry, but I’m fed up of those kids hanging around making fires and such.” He lowered the gun and offered his hand. “Name’s Herb Irwin. I own this farm, have done some twenty years now.”

Mac took Herb’s hand and shook it, making sure his grip was firm and reassuring. “We’re here about the kids that got murdered,” he clarified. “I don’t suppose you saw anything that might help?”

Herb huffed. “Ain’t seen nothing, but after the way they was carrying on I wouldn’t be surprised if it ain’t the ghost of old Mr. Richardson himself that done ‘em.”

“Who?” Both Mac and Steffi chimed simultaneously.

Irwin smirked and then spat something onto the ground Mac could only imagine was chewing tobacco. “I guess neither of you two are from around these parts then, huh?”

Mac shrugged. “I’m a Mission City kid.”

“I moved here from Bristol County about ten years ago,” Steffi also confessed.

Herb nodded knowingly. “What I’m talkin’ about was some twenty-six years ago now, just before I bought this place. Old Mr. Richardson was out Halloween night of ’67 in this very field, working on some piece of machinery. The story goes that some high school kids came here and played a prank, just like the ones now who are being killed.”

“And something bad happened?” Mac pushed.

“Yeah, back in ’67 the fire they started spread to the machine Richardson was working on, went right on to the fuel tank. It exploded, turning the whole field into

one huge fireball. Poor old Richardson was seen screaming as he burned trying to escape the flames. Some folks said he looked like a human scarecrow as he flayed around. They also say it took him two weeks to die of his injuries. Horrific, painful injuries..." Herb let the words trail to seemingly add more effect, and Mac pondered that the man could go into narrating horror stories if the fruit business ever gave out.

"That's pretty gruesome," Steffi conceded, "but I doubt Richardson's the one we're after. I'm inclined to look for a more earthly answer."

Irwin scratched absently at the end of his nose. "Suit yourself, ma'am. I'm off to check my other fields." He tipped his head, holding the tip of his grimy cap for a second before ambling off.

"Quite a character," Mac observed as they picked their way back to the Beetle. "But I doubt Richardson is our motive. Surely the murderer would realize the kids they're killing aren't the ones from '67?"

Steffi stopped and looked across the darkness. Her eyes were glazed, as if her mind was elsewhere. Eventually, she looked back straight at MacGyver. "Well, a human killer would know..."

For a moment, Mac was stunned the cop would even consider a supernatural option, even if the scarecrow had taken two slugs to the head. He wanted to tell Webber that, but some inner part of him was also yelling that he should keep an open mind.

"What say we meet up at the local library tomorrow and do some more digging?" Was all he could eventually think to say.

Steffi nodded, but from the way she was biting into her bottom lip, Mac knew her thoughts were still firmly with the scarecrow.

***Pequot Lakes Community Library
31069 County Rd. 112
30th October 1993***

MacGyver walked into the library to see Steffi already sitting at a table, engrossed in a pile of old newspapers. He waved at her as she heard his soft footfalls from across the room and looked up.

"Hey," she mouthed, attempting to obey the "Please be Quiet" sign that adorned every library across the land.

Mac nodded and slid into a seat beside her.

The journey here had thankfully been taxi free, as Neil Ryder had finally gotten MacGyver's Jeep sent over from Mission City, so Mac had made good time from his motel and was feeling ready for a challenge.

“Find anything without me?” Mac asked, his eyes searching the top newspaper on the desk.

Steffi pulled out the center of the paper and pointed to a small article. “There’s not as much on this as I expected, but yeah, I think it’s a start.” She tapped with her finger and Mac began to read out loud, albeit somewhat mutedly.

“...Richardson is survived by one daughter, fifteen-year-old Teresa. Local authorities have been unable to find any living relative in the immediate area, and Miss Richardson is to now live with her Aunt in Chicago once the final court hearing has taken place...”

“There’s another item from a later date saying Teresa showed signs of mental instability after the hearing and would require counseling after what she’d witnessed.” Steffi raised a brow. “This sounds like a motive to me, and if Teresa was unstable...”

“Then maybe she might kill today, for something that happened all those years ago,” MacGyver agreed. “But none of this tells us where to find her now,” he pointed out with a sigh.

Steffi chewed on her bottom lip. “I can probably find her. I’ll make a call to Briscoe, he’s a friend, and he just got put on this case in my absence.” She pushed up from her seat and sauntered over to the librarian’s counter at the far end of the room. After a brief conversation, the librarian passed Steffi a phone and she dialed out.

Two minutes later, she was back at the table where Mac had found her, and she was grinning.

“I take it Briscoe is on the case as we speak to find Teresa Richardson?” MacGyver exited his chair as he spoke.

Steffi nodded. “Uh huh, so now all we have to do is wait. I know a great coffee shop just around the corner from here. I told him to call us there. C’mon, I’ll buy you a drink and we can talk.”

Mac didn’t know why, but he liked that idea. “A tea would be wonderful,” he conceded. “And the chat sounds even better.”

* * * *

The coffee shop was much smaller than MacGyver had imagined, but what it lacked for in size, it oozed in personality. Lanterns and all kinds of Halloween décor filled the tiny seated area, and a special seasonal menu was on offer with some ghoulish sounding treats.

Mac opted to stick to his tea, but Steffi couldn’t apparently resist a slice of pumpkin pie.

“Nice town you have here,” Mac offered as Steffi ate. “Kinda reminds me of Mission City a lot.”

Steffi swallowed then looked around as if she was suddenly looking at Pequot Lakes through new eyes. “I guess...I suppose they’ll cancel the party now, though, seeing as we have a killer on the loose.”

MacGyver fiddled with the fine porcelain cup he’d been given. “Party?”

“Yeah, we have a big Halloween bash every year. It was supposed to have been on the Lakes Nature Reserve tomorrow night. The whole town has decked the place out, everyone would have been there – the kids from the high school, parents, shop owners – *everyone*.” Webber abruptly turned glum. “I even had a fancy dress outfit all ready to go, my pumpkin was carved and I was locked and loaded to trick or treat! You know we even had a band to play out by the lake?”

MacGyver smiled. “Sounds like you’d have had fun. I’m not really into parties myself...” His thoughts turned to the birthday party Pete had once organized back at Phoenix. It hadn’t been so bad, really, but they just weren’t his thing.

Steffi’s expression turned from confused to disappointed. “That’s a real shame...” She put her free hand on top of Mac’s where it had settled by his tea cup, and MacGyver realized if the party wasn’t cancelled, he’d probably have been getting an invite.

Maybe that wouldn’t be such a bad thing...

“Excuse me, are you Sgt Stephanie Webber?” The little old lady who had originally served them was back in front of their table, and Mac hadn’t even seen her approach. She was stealthier than a ninja.

“That’s me,” Steffi admitted. “How can I help?”

The old lady pulled a scrawled note from her apron that had apple pie smudged on the corner. She handed it to Steffi, and then skittered off without saying another word.

Steffi read it with a frown. “It’s from Briscoe. It says Teresa Richardson married a few years ago and her name is now Wilson. And get this, she teaches out at the high school! Briscoe spoke to her on the phone and she has no alibi for the nights of the murders. He’s going to take her in for questioning as soon as he gets the go ahead from the officer in charge of the investigation.”

“I’ve met her!” Mac’s mind flashed back to the school campus. “She was right there when I saw the scarecrow. In fact, right *before* I saw the scarecrow.” He pondered the details for a moment. “What I don’t get is why she didn’t attack me with the turnip knife instead of just running?”

Steffi shrugged. “Maybe we’ll find out once Briscoe takes her in and starts asking questions.” Her face abruptly changed back into a smile. “And maybe, just maybe then the town can still have its Halloween party too!”

Mac smiled back, even if he really had no intention of going to the party if it happened. “Well, I guess you don’t need my help anymore. I don’t think you and Neil ever did.” He pushed up from his chair. “I’m gonna head back to my motel. Promise me one thing, though? If Wilson ever tells how she got around being shot in the head, I’d love to know? It’s the one thing I’ve encountered that’s really got me stumped,” he admitted.

Steffi nodded, her face wearing a very odd expression even Mac couldn’t fathom. “Trust me,” she pledged, “you’ll be the first to know...”

All Tucked Inn

Room 33

8.32p.m.

30th October 1993

MacGyver ran until his lungs decided they didn’t want to work anymore. The exercise did much for his body, but little for his beleaguered mind. Running usually cleared Mac’s head and helped him think more productively, but tonight, it seemed to only make things worse.

He slowed, coming to a halt outside his motel room and stretching. Something was gnawing at him, but it wasn’t his aching muscles. Maybe he could mull it all over one more time as he packed to leave?

Mac reached to slip the key into his room’s lock when a tired voice made him pause.

“Um, Mr. MacGyver?”

Mac looked up to see the elderly motel owner looking at him strangely. “How can I help?”

The man’s hand quivered slightly as he offered up a note. Was he scared of MacGyver, or just unsure what to make of him? “This is from the duty sergeant over at Mission City P.D.”

MacGyver took the message and the old-timer vanished into the evening like a wraith. *Sheesh, talk about Norman Bates...*

Mac read the note and all his previous mirth was consumed by something he didn’t even know how to describe. Was it fear?

The note was from Neil, but what it asked was wrong on so many levels MacGyver had to stand and close his eyes to compose himself before he could even consider it.

Mac

Meet me at the hideaway as soon as you can, its really important.

Neil

Mac took a calming breath and finally allowed his subconscious back into that dark place. “The Hideaway” had been the name he and his friends had given to an old mine shaft they’d once used as a den.

Like the gun that had eventually killed Jesse, they’d all known the mine was a “No Go Area,” but kids being kids, they’d gone anyway.

MacGyver and the others had never been back there since Jesse’s death, and right now, he was having a hard time imagining why Neil would be asking him to reopen old wounds.

He closed his eyes again as images filtered into his brain – images of Jesse, and Neil with old blankets and food, trying to make the place their own. And there he was, fashioning things with his penknife oblivious of what their future would soon hold.

MacGyver could smell the dank, musty aroma of wet timbers and mold, he could see the shadows and silhouettes the candles they’d used had made dance in the cool evening air.

And Mac could see Jesse, alive, happy, and playful.

Mac’s eyes snapped back open and he jogged over to his Jeep without even changing out of his t-shirt and sweat pants.

Heading back out onto the highway, it didn’t take long to reach the sign for Mission City, and from there it was only minutes to the dirt track that eventually led to the mine.

The turn off came to an end in front of a recently erected metal gate, and MacGyver was forced to exit the Jeep and walk the rest of the way into the woods until he found the ancient warning sign.

It was just as he’d remembered it, the once vibrant red paint now faded, and in places worn away altogether. He ignored the portent of doom and walked up to the boarded mine entrance.

It was like the maw of a mythical being, and it seemed to want to consume his soul – or at least, that was how it felt.

MacGyver pushed away the feelings of dread erupting in his mind, and in his stomach, and fished out a small flashlight he’d brought along from the pocket of his pants.

Flicking on the light, Mac washed it over the boards, remembering the gaps he and the other kids had sneaked through many moons ago.

The holes were still present, and just wide enough for him to still push his way through – if he dared.

Mac swallowed, and in the back of his subconscious he heard the others goading him to go inside, but this wasn't ghostly voices he was hearing, it was a memory from his childhood.

MacGyver fought the recollection and began to squeeze through the boarding. The nearest plank was so rotten it gave with a snap, giving him free access to inside the mine.

Mac shone the beam of his light around in an arc, but as he as he'd expected, there was no sign of Neil Ryder. The light began to quiver and he realized his hand was trembling just a touch.

C'mon Mac, you weren't scared of a knife wielding scarecrow, but you're afraid of an old den?

He moved his feet, forcing them to trudge just a tad deeper into the shaft. And there, right in the center, just as he remembered it, was the tiny wooden table they'd played on.

Cobwebs and dust adorned the table's surface, but there were items on it that didn't belong. A pumpkin leered at him, the candle inside flickering and bobbing in the dim light casting bizarre shadows MacGyver would rather not have seen.

Neil wouldn't do this...

And yet *someone* had been in the mine.

Morbid curiosity pushed him on, and MacGyver couldn't help but walk up to the table.

As his eyes finally met the other item that had been placed for him, his stomach lurched.

It was the time capsule he and the other boys had buried, and more recently as adults, dug up. It was open, but instead of the things they'd put in it all those years ago, there was a gun.

But not any gun – this was the weapon that had killed Jesse.

That can't be, it's still in police evidence! And yet MacGyver knew what he was looking at. Its evil form was etched into his psyche forever.

A scratching sound from the mine entrance caught his attention and he spun around, glad not to have to look at the gun a second longer.

Standing by the boarding he had entered through, was the scarecrow.

It was watching him again, those huge red orbs dazzlingly bright in the darkness. As before, its head was cocked, but it didn't attack.

I guess we were wrong about Teresa Wilson then, Mac admitted to himself. She must be in custody by now...

The scarecrow seemed to sense his thoughts and dived through the wooden laths to the outside, shattering the decayed timbers with the weight of its escape.

MacGyver kicked into a sprint, intent on catching up with his farmyard nemesis. It had just made things personal on a level even he couldn't ignore. *How did it/he get the gun?*

But there would be no answers tonight.

As Mac neared the shattered entrance he heard an all-too familiar click – in his haste to catch the killer, he'd missed one vital part of his surroundings – a concealed trigger.

Before he could react, the explosion engulfed the mouth of the shaft, bringing down the support beams, and several tones of soil with it.

Part Three

MacGyver moved and was surprised when nothing hurt. He blinked, realized he was under a thin layer of soil and dust and gingerly sat up. Apart from his pride, and some very dirty clothes, he'd somehow escaped the blast unscathed.

Luckily, the pumpkin lantern had also survived the explosion and was still dimly illuminating the scene.

Mac retrieved the small flashlight he'd come with from the floor, tapped it back on and stood up, brushing loose earth and debris off his t-shirt, jacket and sweat pants.

Taking tentative steps, he edged to the point of the detonation and examined the carnage. His experience told him he hadn't been just lucky – this explosion had been very carefully planned to only take out the mine entrance.

The scarecrow was clearly toying with him, first the time capsule and gun, and now this. Maybe it didn't want him dead just yet, not while it could play sadistic mind games.

In a way, this kind of psychological contest was even worse than the ones Zito played.

But how does it know about what happened when we were kids, and the gun? How the heck did it get the gun? Mac realized he was calling the killer an "it" again and paused, reflecting on what had happened.

He turned back to the table and slumped down in front of it, trying not to look at the box it held.

But his eyes wouldn't listen to his brain, and no matter how hard he tried, they kept turning back to the gun. Beneath the cold hard killing machine, he noticed cuttings of old newspaper articles. Without pulling them out, he could tell they were all about Jesse's tragic accident.

MacGyver closed his eyes, forcing them not to look at the table any longer, but then his mind filled in the pictures that his eyes could not, and he was back in the den as a kid with Neil, Chuck, and Jesse.

Jesse was laughing, but then he was always laughing.

Snap out of it, Mac! You need to get out of here! The Halloween party will go ahead now they think Teresa is the killer and in custody. You're the only one that can tell them different...

MacGyver opened his eyes and took down a breath. How much air did he have? It already tasted stale and dusty, but there were other passageways, other tunnels. In reality, he would probably run out of water and food long before he did oxygen.

A more sobering thought hit him – just who would even know about the den apart from Neil and Chuck? And no way was he ready to believe the scarecrow was either of them.

Maybe this was fate telling him this was the death he deserved? Maybe it was his comeuppance after what had happened to Jesse? Was this the one time he wasn't going to get away with it and survive?

Mac pinched the bridge of his nose and reflexively closed his eyes again. Within seconds, he was back in the past, haunted by something he no longer had the ability to change.

Jesse was there, calling to him...

MacGyver squinted and his view refocused to see Jesse in the den, just as it was all those years ago. Jesse was grumbling, because he wanted to explore the mine's tunnels, and as always MacGyver's younger self was being a spoil sport, pointing out that it was way too dangerous.

Chuck and Neil joined in the conversation, uncertain which friend to agree with. Eventually, Mac put forward the better argument, and all four exited the mine to go and play in the nearby woods.

As Jesse vanished from the mine entrance, complaining about the others being scaredy cats, the scene faded and Mac was back to reality, to here, and to now.

He rubbed at his eyes and his fingers came away moist from the painful memories of his dead friend.

MacGyver shook himself and got to his feet. Reliving the past wasn't helping his situation, and he needed to stop and refocus. He grabbed the light again and swung it around. There had to be something here he could use.

In the corner, near an old rusted oil lamp was a pile of rocks. But these weren't from the cave in; they had been placed very specifically a very long time ago.

This was Jesse's secret place, where he'd hidden things. They'd all had one here down the mine.

MacGyver swallowed hard. Being trapped down here was one of the toughest things he'd had to face.

"Go on, look! You know you wanna, MacGyver!"

It was Jesse's voice goading him, and even though Mac was sure it was all in his head, the sound seemed to come from all around him.

"Go on, Mac..."

MacGyver couldn't ignore Jesse any longer. He reached down and carefully took away the top layer of chalky stones to reveal a small tin, not unlike the time capsule. The paint on it was faded, and in places the metal was rusted.

He brushed off loose dirt and carefully opened it.

Inside were a few baseball cards and an age-tanned piece of folded paper.

MacGyver opened up the sheet to reveal a hand-drawn map of the mines in Jesse's writing. Mac couldn't help but smile, just a little. Jesse had gone back all those years ago and defied them all to explore.

Or had he? Wasn't this just all-too easy?

The scarecrow could have put this here, just another trick or treat prank within his sick game!

And yet, MacGyver knew deep down that this was Jesse's writing, and that the map showed another way out. Part of him wished this was some ghostly form of forgiveness from his friend, but he didn't really believe that.

He looked back to the lantern he'd spotted earlier and decided to try and light it. If the batteries gave out in his Maglite, then he'd still have something to show the way.

The lamp still held kerosene from when they'd been here as kids, and after all the years that had passed, somehow it still lit up.

Mac put the flashlight in his jacket and held the lamp high as he began to follow Jesse's directions.

The tunnels were narrow, dark, and in places foreboding even to MacGyver. Water trickled from the roof timbers, and in places pooled on the ground. Every now and again, a bat would flutter past, making the experience even more surreal. Could this even be happening so close to Halloween?

Mac shook his head at the irony as he pushed on deeper into the mountain. He was trapped down a long-forgotten mine, in almost total darkness, and he was following a map that shouldn't even be here, written by a dead kid.

The thought brought an involuntary shudder, and to add to the ghostly sensation, Mac felt something brush against his shoulder. Another bat, perhaps?

He spun around, keeping the lantern high. What had touched him wasn't anything living. It was more water, flowing quite quickly here through the shaft ceiling. Not a good sign.

MacGyver pushed on, keeping a close eye on the water level beneath his feet. His sneakers squelched in it now, but it wasn't over his feet yet.

Eventually, he spotted an opening ahead that was marked as the exit on Jesse's diagram. There was no light from the hole and Mac abruptly felt his stomach tighten. *The scarecrow...*

Ignoring the idea that it could be a trap, he moved on until he was standing where "X" literally marked the spot. The opening led into a large area that held old, corroded mine carts, lots of track and mostly rubble. In the old days, Mac guessed this was the part of the mine where whatever was being extracted was moved outside for shipping.

The only problem was that on the far side of the man-made cavity there had been another large cave-in.

MacGyver walked carefully over to it, ever-mindful that the roof over his head, and the walls all around were being held up by timbers that were probably very rotten, and very weak.

He wafted the lamp across the edge of the cave in and noted that it wasn't a recent event. That at least meant it wasn't the work of the scarecrow.

The rocks, soil and debris didn't appear to be very deep, but it was definitely beyond digging out with his bare hands. Maybe if he had food, water, and an endless supply of light, but as it was, he was stumped.

MacGyver sighed and ran his free hand through the front of his hair. "You almost saved me, Jesse, *almost...*"

An image of the gun in the time capsule flashed across his subconscious and he couldn't help but wonder if he actually deserved saving.

For a moment, it was as if a voice answered him – no, not a voice, a giggle – Jesse's unmistakable chuckle.

Mac quickly spun around to face the tunnel behind him, but the laughter was just a trick of nature. The wind on the hillside was whistling through the mine shafts and echoing down the empty tunnels.

“Aww, c’mon, MacGyver, will ya stop being such a quitter?”

This time the voice was in his head, a long forgotten memory of Jesse that he could no longer suppress. At least, that was what Mac told himself.

Taking the advice literally, because there really was no other choice, MacGyver moved back into the tunnels and began searching for anything that might help him break through the cave-in.

The darkness was all-consuming, and seemed to suck him further into some abyss with every turn he took. It wasn’t like Mac to feel helpless, but as he checked his watch and realized he’d been stranded hours already, he couldn’t help but consider his fate.

Eventually, he came back to the point where his sneakers squelched in the water from the roof. He paused and twisted around in a full circle with the lamp. There was something here he’d missed before, a very narrow crevice that had once been another shaft.

Whether it had been abandoned and blocked on purpose, or partially sealed by another collapse was anyone’s guess, but with a little maneuvering, Mac thought he could make it through.

He put the lamp down and pulled the smaller, more easily handled Maglite out of his pocket and flicked it on. Pushing carefully against the rock wall to his left, he squeezed tentatively through the gap, feeling sharp stone edges tease at the back of his leather jacket.

In a couple of minutes, he was through into another chamber. Panning his light around, he paused on a pile of crates marked dynamite. They were old and decrepit, and he almost feared going near them.

Water had almost engulfed the bottom box, and the top one was completely empty. MacGyver put the Maglite between his teeth, flexed his fingers and then carefully removed the top crate. The one below it was empty too.

Mac held his breath, and moved on to the final crate. The lid was still tacked down, and he had to use the edge of his penknife blade to very cautiously tease it open.

Inside were just a few sticks of explosive, and they were so old they’d been leaking, just like the ones he and his buddy Bill had once used to stop a burning oil rig. In places, the nitro-glycerin had leaked into the corners of the box, making it very unstable.

Not only that, but there didn’t appear to be anything left around to use as a detonator.

Great, every time I find a solution, I come up with another obstacle...

Mac took a moment to think, perching himself on the two empty crates he'd moved. Throwing the dynamite at the cave-in wasn't an option. It *might* explode on impact in its current condition, but it also might blow his hand off while he was attempting to toss it.

Shipping the sticks to the exit would require some careful thought and very slow movements anyway, but there was no point if he couldn't come up with a detonator first.

In its current volatile condition, it wouldn't take much – maybe just something impacting with it pretty hard.

Mac used his flashlight to check out every corner of the mine section he was in. There were a few corroded lanterns, and the remains of a shovel.

The shovel piqued his interest, and he ambled over to it and retrieved it from the center of a large, and very creepy spider's web.

The shaft was pretty rotten, but he had an idea forming that didn't need that part anyway. With a swift kick from his sneaker, Mac broke away the rotting wood to leave the metal handle. The top part of that was also wood, and not required for his plan.

Using his penknife and a little more brute force, the wooden section was removed and discarded, leaving a crude iron "Y" shape.

This just might work...

The next item on MacGyver's shopping list was something stretchy. He looked down and realized he would have had a couple of rubber bands in his pockets if he'd changed back into his jeans, but right now he still had his sweat pants on from jogging.

Mac pulled at the waistband and smiled, a piece of elastic strip should do just fine for what he required. Taking out his penknife once again, he cut out two small sections of the elastic and secured them to either side of the shovel handle through the holes left by the wooden top section. Now all he needed was a middle section for his sling.

Rummaging in his jacket it took two seconds to retrieve a flattened roll of duct tape, and a further minute to double over a few sections to make a wad for the center of his crude sling shot.

Now it was time for a test fire.

MacGyver rummaged on the mine floor until he found a few stones the correct size and fired them off into an empty corner. It wasn't the most powerful sling he'd ever made, but he believed it had enough force to set off the already volatile explosives.

Now all he had to do was move the sticks to the cave-in without blowing himself up, and he just might have an escape plan.

* * * *

Moving nitro-glycerin that was older than Methuselah wasn't exactly on Mac's bucket list, and as he finally set down the last stick at the mine exit, he promised himself he would never try it again.

It had taken hours to slide through the fissure, one stick at a time without jostling the explosives, and even longer to virtually tiptoe through the tunnels with it.

Now that it was in place, he took a moment to wipe the sweat from his brow and pull up his sweat pants for the hundredth time. Stealing the elastic had been a great idea, but it had also left him with some very unruly pants that wanted to now live at his ankles instead of his waist.

MacGyver smiled at the irony just as the oil in his lamp finally ran out, plunging him into darkness.

Remind me never to come home at Halloween again, not ever...

He stuck a hand in his pocket and retrieved the Maglite. How much longer would its batteries last if the escape plan didn't work?

Mac tried not to think about it as he hunkered down behind one of the huge rotting metal carts for cover, and began sifting through the rubble on the floor for ammunition.

Selecting several medium sized stones, he rolled them over in his palm, assessing their weight, and hoping that coupled with momentum, it would be enough to cause the nitro to blow.

Sucking down a breath, MacGyver aimed the sling and sent off the first projectile. It bounced harmlessly against the rubble of the cave-in and settled back down on the floor with a tapping sound that reverberated through the mine.

Mac tried again, compensating for his first mistake.

The stone caught the edge of the top stick of dynamite, slamming the explosive hard against the remains of the mine wall. It responded with a blast that rocked the ancient complex, making the cart MacGyver was hiding behind move on its rusted rails.

Rocks, stones, earth and anything too close to the mine exit were sent spiraling into the air, filling the room with dust, debris, and in some places timbers that had given way with age.

Mac remained huddled as close to the cart as he dare until the air began to settle, and then risked peeking out at the devastation he'd caused. Part of the roof had given way,

blocking off the tunnel he'd used to get here, but thankfully, that didn't matter anymore.

The exit for the cart's that had been filled with rubble was now partially clear – the makeshift slingshot had done its job.

Mac scrambled to his feet, mindful that further cave-ins could be imminent, and couldn't help but cough as he drew down air still filled with dust and dirt.

He jogged to the exit and carefully pushed through the hole he'd made back into the outside world. Looking back just once at the mine, he said a silent thank you to Jesse and his long-hidden map for saving the day and then began to sprint back to the Jeep.

The only problem now, was how he was going to keep his sweat pants up long enough to get there.

* * * *

Lakes Nature Reserve Project
7.45p.m. 31st October

It wasn't until he got back to the Jeep that MacGyver realized how long he'd been down the mine. Not only was it the next day, it was the next evening – Halloween.

The thought normally conjured up pictures in his mind of kids having fun, adults having parties he'd rather not go to, and of lots of decorations and costumes. Tonight, all it conjured was images of a very real, very evil scarecrow.

Daring to take time to change his damaged pants to jeans that he thankfully had in the 4x4, he'd then headed right back into Pequot Lakes hoping the party was still cancelled.

From the crowds already lining the streets and milling around, he guessed rightly that it wasn't. Most were heading out in the direction Steffi had mentioned, and that meant the police, and general public had no idea a killer was still at large.

Mac shook his head and spun the Jeep towards the Halloween bash, noting that a lot of the people in fancy dress appeared to be high school kids. *The scarecrow's favorite prey.*

He gunned the gas just a little harder, keeping the Jeep at a fast, but safe speed as trick or treaters crossed the roads.

Steffi will be there, she was looking forward to it...

The thought brought a shiver along MacGyver's spine and he reached for the phone in the center of the Jeep. First, he made a quick call to the local police, followed by one to Neil Ryder.

The whole affair was out of Neil's jurisdiction, but somehow, after everything that had happened in the mine, Mac needed a friend here, one who would understand.

Luckily, Neil was home and more than sympathetic after hearing what was going down. Steffi was a friend of his too, and Mac, well, he'd never let Mac down.

MacGyver pulled into the reserve's temporary car lot just as he'd finished the call. The place was awash with people, mostly in fancy dress, and that was going to make things pretty tough.

The townsfolk were oblivious to what might happen and were laughing and joking – basically having fun, but tonight, Halloween was anything but fun to Mac.

To add to the confusion, there was construction work going on at the reserve. It looked like a new car parking area was being made. For tonight, it was taped off and secure, but it would make a very interesting hiding place for the killer.

MacGyver winced as he climbed from the Jeep and began pushing through the crowds. The scarecrow could be anyone, and anywhere, and if it truly was fixated with the thought of pagan rituals and Halloween, then it would surely be here.

His eyes darted through the throngs, searching for something, anything. To his left and back from the main body of people he spotted a skeleton sporting a sling. Wasn't Steffi wearing a skeleton costume?

Mac began to head for her when he realized she was talking to a scarecrow – not the red-eyed one he'd recently had the pleasure of toying with, but the outfit was familiar. He took a moment to recall that it was Billy, the teen who'd been the first suspect.

A cold harsh thought hit MacGyver, and he quickened his pace.

Could Billy still be the killer?

A large group of high school kids appeared from nowhere, shouting, laughing, and generally pushing in front of everyone else, including MacGyver.

He kept moving, his heart beginning to race in his chest as he reached the edge of the woods where Billy and Steffi had been chatting.

But the pair had vanished.

The lake was to Mac's left, and the woods were to the right. He spun around, unsure which way to go. The noise from the party was masking any possible sounds, and the ground was too dry here for any obvious tracks.

After a second to deliberate he launched himself into the trees, his eyes hugging the ground for clues. It didn't take long to find what he was looking for.

Steffi's sling was hanging from a tree branch, ripped and torn, like it had been left there to taunt him.

Mac stopped dead and touched it as if the tactile contact would kick his mind into overdrive and give him answers.

It didn't, but the guttural scream that came next did.

It was so loud, so pitiful, *and so* desperate, that even the revelers at the edge of the party stopped dead and stared into the woods.

Part Four

MacGyver dived further into the undergrowth, trying to follow the brief and curdling scream. Behind him, some of the party-goers began to join him – not to help – but because they thought this was actually part of the fun and games.

Several of the high school kids were already joking about it being better than any slasher movie, but Mac didn't have time to try and correct them. Not that he would have expected them to believe him anyway.

Kids their age tended to enjoy this kind of excitement just a little too much, at least until it became all-too real.

Mac tried not to worry about the people following and pushed on, hoping the police would arrive soon enough to be of assistance. He saw something flash ahead like a blade and made a beeline for it, crashing through the bushes until he came to a small clearing.

Steffi and Billy lay on the ground in the center, and neither moved.

MacGyver almost didn't want to approach them. They both lay on their stomachs, and at first he couldn't see any signs of injury, but then as he grew closer, he finally spotted a blood pool beneath Billy's torso.

He checked the teen first, and when he found no pulse rolled him over.

Billy had been stabbed several times, and Mac guessed it was the scarecrow's turnip knife that had caused the damage.

I guess he isn't the killer then...

He moved on quickly to Steffi, and was relieved to find her breathing but unconscious. Her injured arm appeared to be bleeding through the bandages, but apart from that he couldn't see any further wounds save a bump on her temple.

She groaned softly as he rolled her over and gently put his jacket under her head.

In the distance, he finally heard the sirens he'd been so hoping for moments earlier, and as he looked up in their direction, he noted that a small crowd was already forming.

“You need to go tell the police we need an ambulance out here.” Mac chose the person who looked most senior, at least from what he could see through the costumes, and asked them for help. “And tell them to get this crowd outta the woods. The scarecrow’s here...”

There was mumbling and indecision among the assembly, as if people weren’t sure if it was still all a prank or not.

MacGyver wasn’t ready to deal with explaining. He was angry at what he’d allowed to happen, and he didn’t intend to let the killer get away this time. Not like he had back at the mine.

“This *isn’t* a trick, and that kid is *really* dead. No will you folks all get back to the lake and stick together until the police take charge?” His voice said he wasn’t to be tangled with, and finally the group stopped mumbling and turned tail.

A few stragglers milled around seconds longer until the true horror of what was happening took hold, and then they too vanished back towards the now defunct party.

Mac sighed with relief that he wasn’t responsible for them anymore. Now he could try and follow the scarecrow.

He kneeled again to search for tracks, but instantly found something tugging at the back of his t-shirt. Standing back up, he turned to face a teenager in the midst of pulling off a Grim Reaper hood.

What it revealed was a short, spotty and very nervous young man with a stammer and dark-rimmed spectacles far too large for his face. “There...th...there’s a couple of kids out here th...that don’t know what’s happening.” He looked terrified.

MacGyver wanted to growl back a response, but he just couldn’t do it. The kid was asking for his help. He sighed. “What the heck are they doing out here?”

The kid turned red and winced. “W...well, there’s this cabin you see, and Chrissie and Steve decided to go out there f...for some fun...”

“Right,” MacGyver rolled his eyes. “That kinda fun, huh?” Finally the penny dropped.

The teenager nodded helpfully.

“Didn’t they know about the scarecrow attacks?”

“W...well, yeah, but after the professor was arrested w...we all kinda thought we were safe. I mean I know we kinda played that prank in the f...fruit field, but...”

Mac held up a hand, stopping the youth in mid-sentence. He was incredulous. “You and this Steve and Chrissie were the ones that set that fire and started this whole mess? And you still came out here?”

The kid's face screwed up into an expression that reminded him of Dexter Filmore. "W...well, yeah," he apologized with a squirm. "I'm D...Dean by the way."

"Okay, Dean, you better show me where this cabin is."

Dean nodded but didn't look happy about it. He pushed his glasses further up his nose and pointed to a path that led from the south side of the clearing. "It's down there. Not far..."

Mac realized the kid was shaking and quickly took point. Once he was sure where he was heading, he would send Dean back to the remains of the party, into the safekeeping of the local cops.

They'd not gone far when Dean tugged at Mac's tee again. "W...we need to leave the path here and push through the bushes."

MacGyver followed the directions until the trees, and indeed the bushes thinned. The area wasn't exactly a clearing, but there was enough room for a cabin between some of the smaller aspens.

There were no lights in any window, and the scene was made all the more eerie by an ankle deep mist coming in off the nearby water.

The cabin itself had seen better days, and MacGyver guessed it had been derelict for at least a decade. Brown faded curtains hung limp in the windows, and the porch steps were rotten and deformed with termites.

He felt something brush against his arm and realized it was Dean, and he was shaking again.

"N...no lights, huh? C...Chrissie and Steve must be having *a real* good time..." A scream broke Dean from any lurid thoughts he might be about to have and he plastered himself to a nearby trunk like an age-old lichen.

On any other day, Mac might have found the kid's likeness to Dexter Filmore amusing, but for now, everyone's survival muted that thought. "Wait here," he commanded, knowing the kid wasn't likely to move a muscle anyway.

Dean nodded but didn't speak and Mac instantly headed for the cabin.

The yell had definitely come from the second floor, but as MacGyver reached the porch steps he realized he had a problem. His Maglite was in his jacket pocket, and his jacket was under Steffi's head.

He sucked down a breath and cautiously scrambled over several broken timbers to reach the cabin door. It was ajar, and what lay beyond was hidden by a blanket of darkness.

There was no time to let the scene get to his already jangling nerves, and MacGyver entered the small living area, trying to be as quiet as he could on the creaking and rotted flooring.

Above, he thought he heard movement, like something sliding across the boarding, and the sound immediately reminded him of the scarecrow's shuffle.

Mac's eyes searched through the gloom, looking for stairs, but the upper storey was really nothing more than a loft, and the only way up to it was via a ladder.

Noting several missing rungs, he headed for it anyway and was rewarded with something large and unmoving blocking his path.

In the dim light, he almost fell over the body before he saw it.

It was a young teenager with vivid blond hair and deep blue eyes – eyes that now stared into an empty void they could never return from.

Even before he checked for a pulse, MacGyver knew Steve was dead. There were wide puncture marks down the center of his back that suggested another vicious attack with the turnip knife.

Mac cringed. How could anyone do this, even if they had issues?

Remembering there was a girl still unaccounted for, he resumed his path to the ladder. Testing the bottom rung with his weight, he surmised it was relatively safe enough to climb and began to quickly scramble into the loft.

As his head cleared the opening, he realized it was lighter here where the moonlight cascaded through gaps in the woodwork.

Mac hoisted the rest of his body through the opening and almost silently spun around.

What he was looking for was by the far wall nearest the window.

The scarecrow had Chrissie backed into the corner, and it had the familiar turnip knife in its hand. The blade twirled between gloved fingers, like the killer was getting impatient.

It hadn't seemed to notice MacGyver's presence, but Chrissie had. The girl's eyes widened with relief and her expression changed from terror to hope.

The transformation didn't go unnoticed by the scarecrow, and it whirled round, red orbs dancing and gyrating in the soft light.

Mac expected it to pause, to cock its head like before, but in a surprise move, the scarecrow simply tossed the knife at him like it was some bizarre circus act it had been practicing all its life.

The troubleshooter was caught unawares, and only narrowly dodged the blade, its tip almost catching his right ear before the spiked end embedded itself into the wall.

MacGyver's eyes widened but he didn't pause for thought. Instead, now that it was unarmed, he made a dive at the scarecrow.

The killer wasn't impressed, and made a full-frontal attack of its own, reaching out its spidery, gloved hands to try and grab Mac's throat.

For a moment, it looked like the scarecrow would succeed, but then Chrissie joined in the fray and picked up a piece of loose timber, which she brought down hard on the scarecrow's head.

The wood shattered like it was a movie prop, but from age and termites, or something else? MacGyver shuddered at the thought as he remembered how Steffi had described shooting the thing in the skull.

The wood was just rotten. Don't let it spook you, that's just what this guy thrives on, superstition and fear...

The scarecrow turned its attention back on the girl, had she angered it/him more?

MacGyver didn't care; it gave him the chance to swing a punch right at the thing, catching it just below the jaw.

Surprisingly, the scarecrow flew backwards much faster and harder than Mac could have hoped for, and he realized for the first time in his life he'd actually hit someone without it feeling like he'd broken his knuckles.

It was almost as light as a feather. *Or as light as straw...*

Mac tried to push away the niggling thought. This was a person, not a supernatural being. He moved forwards, hoping to grab it while it was down, but as quickly as it had fallen, the scarecrow was on its feet again, and fighting didn't appear to be on its itinerary.

The shutters on the upper storey window were damaged, and dangled wide open. The glass had long gone, replaced by the odd cobweb.

The scarecrow seemed to view this as an open opportunity for escape, and threw itself lithely through the empty frame like a rag doll.

MacGyver made it to the window in time to see the killer roll across the porch roof and vanish as it jumped the rest of the way down to the ground below. It was a mad move, but an effective one.

"Is it gone?"

Mac turned back to see Chrissie looking over his shoulder. She was far from the stereotypical blonde in distress, but now that it was all over he could see the fear taking hold in her eyes.

Did she know Steve was dead? Had she witnessed it?

“For now,” he admitted the truth as he took her by the shoulders. “But we need to get you someplace safe.”

Chrissie swallowed and almost sagged into his arms, but then she seemed to draw strength from somewhere, maybe even from the firmness of his grip and the depth of his stare.

Eventually, she pulled away, heading for the ladder, but her voice still quivered as she spoke. “Anywhere, as long it’s far away from here.”

MacGyver wanted to agree with her, but his priority lay with catching the killer, and as he climbed down the rungs two at a time, he couldn’t help but wonder just how far the scarecrow had actually gone.

* * * *

Mac managed to get Chrissie away from the cabin without her seeing Steve’s body. Somehow, he had a feeling she already knew about his death, and exactly where the corpse was, but she didn’t mention it, as if by blocking the thought, she could block the death itself.

Maybe tomorrow she would confront what had happened, but for tonight she seemed content in her own little world. How many years of counseling would it take to fix her?

MacGyver didn’t like to think about it. For now, he steered her to the trees, and to the spot where he’d left Dean.

Except, Dean was gone, and the police obviously hadn’t gotten this far yet.

Has he run, or has the scarecrow taken another victim? Mac didn’t think it likely that the kid had moved under his own steam, and that didn’t bode well for his chances.

The thought somehow made MacGyver even angrier than before. Dean was just a naive youngster who had a lot to learn about the world and people in general. Heck, all the kids who’d played the prank were. None of them deserved what was happening.

Chrissie seemed to sense something was wrong and for a moment came out of her daze. “Why have we stopped?” She whispered like a child playing hide and seek.

“I left a friend of yours here. A kid named Dean?” MacGyver was honest. She deserved at least that.

Chrissie shrugged and simply mouthed. “Oh…”

Mac took a second to think and then headed back through the increasing mist to the cabin. As he grew closer, he realized he was almost having to drag the girl to get her to follow.

“I don’t want to go back there,” she whimpered, clutching at his hand so tightly his fingers tingled.

MacGyver stopped in front of the crumbling porch and found a loose board. He kicked at it with his right foot without letting go of Chrissie. Eventually the board dropped away and he urged her through it into the impromptu hideaway.

“Wait here. I need to go find Dean. Do you understand?” Mac hated leaving her in her current state, and the thought that he had left Dean to the scarecrow’s bidding was a constant niggle in the back of his mind, but somehow, the killing had to stop tonight.

Chrissie bobbed her head in understanding and slid further into the gloom, but she didn’t speak. Instead she started to rock backwards and forwards, her limbs trembling as Mac was forced to turn around and leave her.

I won’t be long, he mouthed silently, hoping that he wasn’t lying.

The truth was, though, that he really didn’t have much to go on.

There was a trail to the side of the cabin, but the mist was making it hard to distinguish, especially as the trees overhead were blocking out most of the moonlight. MacGyver used it as a starting point anyway, and hunkered down to feel at the ground beneath the mist.

It was quite soft here, and there were definitely recent prints in the soil. There was no way to be sure, but Mac guessed he was looking at boots and sneakers – the scarecrow and the kid?

A lump formed in his throat, Dean wasn’t dead yet, so was this a trap?

Ignoring the obvious, he pulled up from his crouched position and followed the trail until it petered out completely. Replacing the track was the remnants of an actual concrete path, and that led to an old water mill.

The mill was in worse repair than the cabin, and parts of the main stone and wooden structure had collapsed completely.

MacGyver noted that the chase had taken him almost full circle. Across the other side of the stream that once powered the wheel was the new parking lot and visitors area where he’d set out from.

At the far end, he could just make out the swirling red and blues of the police cruisers that he called for, and for a second he deliberated whether to go call the cavalry.

But then he noticed something else.

There were pumpkin lanterns set out around the water wheel, and they were lit. Not only that, but they were carved in the exact same pattern as the one down the mine shaft.

Party goers hadn't set these as decorations. These pumpkins were the work of the scarecrow.

As if to confirm his fears, a muffled yelp came from the bottom of the water wheel, and as MacGyver squinted and blinked in the darkness, he was finally able to make out Dean's spread-eagled form tied to it.

And the wheel was moving.

Within seconds, Dean's head vanished beneath the stream, leaving a myriad of air bubbles in his wake.

Mac ran to the stone embankment and looked down, his mind racing as he realized that the wheel had stopped moving and Dean was literally drowning before his eyes.

A malevolent chuckle brought his gaze back up to the wheel's mechanism in time to see the scarecrow jamming it tight with a steel bar.

"No!"

The scarecrow turned as Mac shouted, but its cloth face was expressionless. Its head cocked sideways mockingly, and then it gave a small salute.

MacGyver knew instantly what the silent message was. It was an insane version of trick or treat, and Mac had two simple choices, catch the scarecrow, or save the kid.

The scarecrow's eyes flashed red, and then the color drained away like a fading strobe as it slipped away into the darkness of the night.

Mac's limbs wanted to give chase, but instead he forced them to run back to the edge of the stream.

The bubbles from beneath the surface were slowing as the air in Dean's lungs began to run out.

MacGyver dived into the stream and quickly swam beneath the huge wheel until he came to the kid. Dean's eyes were wide with terror and he was struggling not to panic more and exhale what little air he had left. His arms yanked desperately at his bonds, but there was no way to pull free.

Mac tugged out his knife and moved to cut Dean away, but as he grew closer, even through the murky water he could see the kid was handcuffed, not tied.

And in such terrible visibility, even if he had the right tools, there was no way he could manage to pick the locks on the cuffs.

Mac surfaced and sucked down fresh gulps of air while he tried to think of a solution. What he needed was time, and if he couldn't get Dean out of the water into the night air, then he would temporarily have to get the air to Dean somehow instead.

He circled around in the water until he spotted what he was looking for. The side of the bank where the new parking lot was being built had recently been cleared and cleaned, but the other side of the stream was still pretty overgrown – and that meant reeds.

MacGyver swam quickly over, found one a suitable length and cut it down. Sucking in one last, large breath, he dived once again back to the submerged section of wheel.

Dean wasn't struggling anymore, and as Mac offered up the reed to use as a breathing tube, for a moment it looked like he was too disorientated to understand. MacGyver demonstrated, and when Dean finally nodded, he carefully placed it in the kid's mouth and hoped he'd be able to keep it there without the use of his hands.

Turning tail, MacGyver surfaced and pulled himself up the stone wall next to the wheel. His dripping t-shirt and jeans left a trail of water behind him, but he didn't even notice as he headed for the water mill's mechanism.

The steel bar the scarecrow had used was still sticking out from the wheel's gearing, and Mac grabbed a pumpkin lantern, bringing it closer to get a better look at the damage.

Without a lot of tools, and a lot of leverage, the gears weren't going to move anytime soon.

Mac turned back to look at the wheel as its wet, static form glistened with algae in the moonlight. The snarled gears wouldn't allow the water to move it, and no human's strength alone was going to do the trick, so what other options did he have?

The Jeep was the other side the stream, and even if it wasn't, he doubted he could drum up any kind of leverage with it or the winch it carried, that would work.

He ran a hand through his drenched hair and turned to look if there was anything left in the mill. Safe for a few planks, a few mice, and a family of bats, there was nothing.

He jogged outside, but on this side of the water there was nothing but trees and foliage.

And then it hit him – on this side of the water there was nothing, but on the other, there was a whole multitude of tools and machinery that was being used to put in the reserve's new lot.

MacGyver paused and stared across to the cordoned off work zone. An excavator sat innocently looking back at him like a metallic dinosaur – a very *strong* dinosaur.

The only problem was, the stream sat between them, and while the nearest side wall was easy to climb up, the bank the other side was steep and pretty muddy where it had recently been cleared.

Mac was still willing to try and swim across, when an idea struck him. He ran to the wheel, and using its wooden laths like a ladder began to clamber up and over it.

The surface was wet, and slippery with green age-old slime, but he clung on, reminding himself every time his grip loosened of the kid below the water.

Once he reached the far side, he licked his lips and took a moment to judge the height between the top of the wheel and the ground the other side. It wasn't impossible, but if he didn't land right he could easily break an ankle or worse.

He stepped back, balancing carefully, and then dived for the muddy shore that waited. As he landed, he tucked and rolled like a paratrooper and was quickly back on his feet in seconds.

The excavator sat waiting, its huge yellow body brightening the otherwise gloomy construction area.

MacGyver slid into the open cab and checked for keys. Of course, it wouldn't be that simple. Fishing his knife back out of his still soggy pocket, he quickly opened up the panel next to the key slot and slid his fingers through the wires until he found the right two colors.

Slicing through the insulation to bare the wires, he then touched them together until the engine kicked into life.

The next part would be the trickiest maneuver. He needed to position the excavator as close to the edge of the stream as possible without it actually sliding into the water off the mud.

Mac teased the behemoth along the embankment as quickly as he dared until it sat just in front of the water wheel the other side, then with a flick of a lever he extended the boom, wedging the bucket under one of the upper paddles on the wheel.

Once the bucket was in position, Mac moved another lever to pull out the boom further, which in turn began to lift the water wheel.

He swallowed as he watched the wooden giant slowly turn, hoping that the ancient timbers wouldn't give way under the force of the excavator's strength, and praying that the full extension of the boom would give enough movement to free the kid.

It took ten laborious seconds for Dean's prone form to be dragged from the depths back into the cool night breeze. He coughed out the reed and began to choke out water, but the relief and gratitude on his face was clearly evident.

MacGyver didn't waste time thinking about it. He jumped back down from the excavator and swiftly traversed the wheel again back to the other side.

The problem of the handcuffs still remained, and he began to drag out his jeans' pocket linings looking for a clip. All that came out was a soggy section of duct tape and his knife.

Would it be worth looking in the mill again?

“What are you doing?”

Mac whirled around his heart pounding, and then relaxed a little when he realized it was just Chrissie. She still seemed stunned by what had happened, but some color had returned to her cheeks.

“I thought I told you to stay put until the police came?” He scolded, and then added, “I need something to pick those cuffs and get Dean off the wheel fast...”

Chrissie looked over the edge and finally seemed to understand what had happened. Her face paled again and MacGyver thought she would retreat back into her own world, but instead she gathered herself and plucked a clip from her hair.

“How about this?”

Mac took it gratefully with a smile. “That should do just fine.” He stuck it between his teeth and carefully climbed out onto wheel, this time moving down instead of across until he reached Dean.

The kid was shivering and most probably in shock, but as MacGyver worked on the locks Dean couldn't help but grin at his savior.

“Y...you should do t...this saving people thing for a living,” Dean stammered.

Mac smiled softly back. “Who says I don't?”

* * * *

MacGyver felt physically and mentally drained as he walked towards the array of police cruisers and ambulances dotted across the reserve's parking lot. He was wet, bruised, and mostly frustrated about how the last forty-eight hours had panned out.

Beside him, Dean and Chrissie walked in silence, their own traumatic experiences scarring their minds far more than any real wounds they'd sustained.

And still, for Mac, at least, the night wasn't over.

The scarecrow had won the previous battle, but MacGyver wasn't about to let it win the war.

He spotted Neil Ryder among the milling crowd, and after depositing the two teenagers with a uniformed officer, he headed for his long-time friend.

Neil turned and smiled as MacGyver called his name.

“You had me worried after your call, and then I got here to find this mess and no sign of you...” Neil looked Mac over, assessing him.

Mac brushed off the concerned gaze. “I’m fine, but the scarecrow is still out there. Once I’ve checked in on Steffi at the hospital I need to talk to you about our old hideaway.”

Neil looked puzzled and his brow furrowed. “The old mine? I haven’t been out there since...”

Mac nodded, remembering Jesse again, along with his recent experience. “Yeah, well I have, and it wasn’t pretty.”

A patrol cop breezed over and appeared apologetic at butting in on their conversation. He looked to MacGyver first. “Excuse me, sir, but I couldn’t help hear you ask about Sgt. Webber?”

MacGyver instantly became attentive. He’d left Steffi to go after the scarecrow, and if anything had happened to her, well, he wasn’t sure he could bear another death on his conscience. “Did she get to the hospital okay?”

The cop squirmed. “Um, no sir, she insisted on not letting the paramedics look at her. Said something about knowing who the scarecrow was, but she had to be sure.”

MacGyver’s heart almost jumped out of his chest. “Did she say where she was going?” he demanded, all the exhaustion he’d felt instantly falling away as adrenalin kicked in.

The cop shrugged. “Ah, I think she mentioned something about going home...”

Mac looked at Neil almost pleadingly. “I need to get over there, and fast! Do you know where she lives?”

Neil nodded. “I know,” he assured. “And I’ll drive – I have my cruiser, and I’m darn well gonna use my lights and sirens, my jurisdiction or not!” He pointed to a Mission City P.D. car parked away from the other cruisers and Mac joined him in running for it.

MacGyver may have grown close to Steffi, but he knew Neil had been a friend of hers for almost ten years. Things were about to either get resolved, or get real messy.

* * * *

Neil pulled the car up just short of Steffi’s drive and moved to grab the police issue shotgun where it sat innocently in its cradle.

MacGyver reached out without saying a word and placed a hand to stop him.

“Mac, I know how you feel about guns. You know I have my own reservations, but we can’t face the scarecrow with your Swiss army knife and expect to come out on top. We have to think about Steffi.” Neil’s expression said he didn’t want to have to wait for an answer, and his hand managed to touch the stock of the twelve gauge before MacGyver’s own hand stopped him.

“We don’t need it,” Mac offered cryptically. “I’ve finally figured this whole thing out, including how the scarecrow took two slugs to the head and survived.” He moved his hand away from the pump action and climbed from the cruiser.

Steffi’s house was a small unassuming wooden structure painted in pastel blue and white. It was in darkness, just like the cabin in the woods had been.

Neil joined MacGyver minus the shotgun and sucked down a breath. “Yeah, well have you figured how to stop the thing? ‘Cause I’d sure feel better going in there armed.”

Mac wanted to say he had all the answers, but he hadn’t. All he knew right now was that it was one minute to midnight, and before this Halloween was over, the scarecrow had to be dealt with once and for all.

He shrugged and started to scramble down a small grassy incline that led to Steffi’s porch. “I guess we’re about to find out...”

From the look on Neil’s face as he gave chase, the sentiment didn’t exactly fill him with confidence.

Part Five

MacGyver reached the front porch and paused, listening for any sounds from inside. Neil joined him, and his expression said he wasn’t happy.

“See anything?” The cop asked as Mac peered through a small side window.

The troubleshooter shook his head. It was far too dark to even see any shadows. He tried the front door, and it swung open with a small and very evident creak.

Neil winced, but MacGyver ignored his friend and the sound, instead opting to cautiously enter the house.

The porch led directly into a hall, with other rooms off-shooting from its central core.

Mac stopped and listened again, but all he could hear was the sound of his own blood pumping in his ears, and the squeak of Neil’s shoes on the linoleum. He was about to turn and whisper a comment, but the click of a safety made him stop and swallow.

Had Neil defied him and brought a weapon?

A hail of bullets erupting from further down the hallway suggested otherwise, and both men instinctively dived through the nearest door, which seemed to take them into a spacious kitchen.

Mac let his hands search the walls until he found a switch, and threw it, engulfing the room in a warm and inviting light.

At the back of the kitchen, Steffi was standing by an open side door, pointing a revolver out into the night. Her eyes bulged with terror, and her forefinger pulled back relentlessly on the trigger, even though the barrel was empty.

Neil stepped in front of MacGyver, holding out a hand. “Steffi, it’s empty. Put the gun down and tell us what happened?”

Steffi didn’t take her eyes off the open door, and her voice was several octaves higher than normal – like she was almost screaming out the words. “It’s here! Can’t you see it?” She stepped backwards until she bumped into the wall. “I shot it. I shot it six times and it still kept coming at me! *Please*, just make it stop...” Tears began to stream down her face as if she’d given in. “It has the knife. *Damn it, it has the knife!*”

Mac moved into the doorway and glanced out onto the yard, but there was nothing. He turned back to Steffi, keeping his tone low and neutral. “It’s gone,” he soothed. “You’re safe now.”

But Steffi’s eyes seemed to see on a whole new level that MacGyver’s and Neil’s didn’t. She screamed out again and slumped to the floor, dropping the empty gun.

As she hit the tiles, she began to writhe, like someone, or something was slashing at her. She held out her arms defensively, yelped in apparent pain, and then became still.

Neil appeared to be so surprised and confused he simply stared at the girl and then to MacGyver. “What the..? I don’t understand?”

“You will...” Mac held out a hand to stop him saying anything else, just as Steffi began to move again.

She jerked into a standing position, like a marionette being controlled by invisible strings. And somehow her face had changed, like her eyes had become soulless and her stare filled with hatred.

Steffi cocked her head to one side, mimicking the scarecrow – or was it something more?

Mac moved a little closer to her, keeping his gaze locked with her in some unseen mental battle. “Where’s Steffi?” He demanded, already knowing the answer.

“Steffi’s dead. I just killed her. About time too! She kept me out of the way, stifled my needs...”

Steffi's head cocked further, and she smiled innocently. "I'm death. The one certainty in life." She didn't wait for a reaction, instead barreling at both men as if she could simply toss them out of the way.

Neil took the brunt of her first attack, taking a brutal punch to the nose from Steffi's good arm that resulted in the sickening sound of his nose breaking. He tumbled backwards, clutching at his face, and MacGyver stepped into his place.

Mac made a grab for Steffi's arm, trying to pull her away from his injured friend, but Steffi seemed to have the strength of a whole army behind her.

She grabbed at a chair, slamming it against MacGyver's right shoulder until he was forced to let her go. Steffi grinned manically and began to toss anything that wasn't nailed down at her foes.

Mac dodged a tea pot, a mug, and ducked just as a toaster flew too close to his head for comfort. By this time, Neil had recovered enough to circle around as Steffi kept up her barrage. His nose was bleeding, and his right eye was already turning a garish purple, but somehow he managed to wrap both arms around Steffi and hold her until MacGyver was able to use the cord from the kitchen phone to subdue her further without actually causing any harm.

Steffi continued to struggle, spitting and seething as they led her out to Neil's cruiser and called in the local police.

After stowing her on the back of the car with his cuffs, Neil finally looked to MacGyver for answers.

"I still don't get it," he admitted, holding a tissue under his nose. "It's like she's not even the person I've known all these years."

Mac peered into the cruiser. Steffi was yanking at the cuffs until red welts were forming on her wrists, and she didn't even seem to notice the pain or harm she was doing to herself. "Maybe that's the point," he suggested. "I guess in a real sense, she isn't that person anymore..."

Crow Wing Mental Health Clinic Minnesota

MacGyver watched through the two-way mirror as Steffi talked to her therapist. She appeared calm, even subdued to the untrained eye, but underneath there was an anger that just wouldn't go away.

Mac felt sorry he hadn't seen it sooner – not just for Steffi, but for her victims.

"I'm still not sure I get it?" Neil Ryder was standing close by, watching Steffi too, but the confusion on his bruised face said he was still having a hard time believing the cop was also a killer.

MacGyver turned to face his friend, uncertain if he actually had the skills to explain it all properly, but he tried anyway. “According to the doc in there, Steffi has Dissociative Identity Disorder.”

Neil shrugged. “Which in English means what? And don’t say plain whacko – Steffi deserves more than that. She hasn’t always been this way.”

“It’s sometimes better known as Multiple Personality Disorder?” MacGyver raised a brow and this time Neil bobbed his head in understanding. “Basically, Steffi has two distinct personalities, her own, and the scarecrow.”

“Okay, so all the time I’ve known Steffi, *she’s* been the dominant personality?” Neil still looked uncertain. “And now the scarecrow has slowly taken over until that side of her thinks it’s “killed” Steffi?”

MacGyver nodded and looked back through the glass. “Basically yeah. That’s how the scarecrow survived the two bullets to the head – because that never really happened. It was all only ever in her mind. There were no actual witnesses. She must have cut her own arm too with the turnip knife to make her story more credible.”

Neil turned away, his already damaged face turning crimson. “I’m so sorry,” he apologized. “I would never have told her if I’d known...”

“Sorry for what?” Mac met Neil’s rueful gaze.

“Well, this all explains how the scarecrow knew about us, the gun that killed Jesse, our hiding place...” Neil’s eyes dropped to the floor. “She was a fellow cop, a colleague, we talked about things, and I guess I inadvertently said too much.”

MacGyver brushed it off. “It doesn’t matter, it’s over now.” He stuffed his hands in his pockets and moved back to watch Steffi “pretend” to be normal. She was good, but the therapist seemed to know how to make her slip back into her true character. “It does explain how the scarecrow got into the police evidence room to get the gun, though...”

“But why?” Neil shook his head. “Why has this happened to her? There has to be more to it than just a breakdown.”

“I asked Pete back at Phoenix to do some digging, and he’s passed it all on to the staff here.” MacGyver still watched Steffi as he spoke. He’d really liked her, and even now it was hard to accept what she truly was. “Apparently she saw her dad, a farmer killed at a pretty young age. The experience left her needing counseling.”

Neil’s face quirked at the mention of farming, as if it was all coming together in his head. “So that explains the turnip knife!”

“Well, everything seemed to be fine until eleven years ago, just before Steffi moved out here. Pete discovered her husband was killed by a group of thugs, and Steffi, the local cop wasn’t around to do anything.” MacGyver’s face saddened as he told the

tale. Sometimes life threw out some pretty bad luck, and Steffi had gotten more than her fair share of it.

“So that’s when she cracked?” Neil shook his head.

“According to her colleagues she didn’t seem to react to her husband’s death at all. At least not on the outside, but the doc in there thinks that was what caused her to “break” and her mind split into two personalities. One normal, and one that thinks of nothing but death, because it’s seen so much of it.” Mac moved away from the window and slowly, hands in pockets headed for the corridor. He couldn’t watch Steffi any longer.

Neil followed. “So let me get this straight – the scarecrow has been around all those years – at least in her head, but it didn’t cross the line until those kids played the prank in the farmer’s field?”

Mac slipped his visitor’s keycard into a security door and moved through, ushering Neil along with him. “That’s pretty much it. The “scarecrow” part of her couldn’t differentiate between past and present, and considered the kids to be the same ones who caused Richardson’s death all those years ago. She decided to deal with it her way. I don’t think it was about revenge, it was simply a reaction to a certain set of events.”

“So no real motive.” Neil sighed. “Steffi must be pretty broken. I’m not sure if I’ll ever really get my head around all this.”

“I know,” Mac answered solemnly. “I didn’t even put it all together until the water wheel. The kid wasn’t tied, he was handcuffed with police issue no less, that coupled with the impossibility of the two head shots led me to the only real conclusion – Steffi was lying, or worse delusional.”

They paused at the exit to the clinic and MacGyver handed in his pass along with Neil’s. The security man on duty nodded to them and pressed a button to release the main doors.

Mac strode out first, letting the fresh November air reinvigorate his senses after the harshness of the mental facility. Neil followed, taking the lead towards Mac’s Jeep.

“So now what?” The Mission City police sergeant asked with a deep breath. “I mean, can they treat her?”

MacGyver climbed into his car and sat staring out across the Minnesota countryside. When Neil joined him, he shook his head dejectedly. “When I spoke to Doctor Harris this morning she wasn’t all that optimistic. D.I.D. is pretty hard to treat, even when they know the traumatic cause. It’s a long term thing, maybe years, maybe never...”

Neil touched his broken nose cautiously, his mind seemingly recalling the moment it had happened. “And the deaths?” he questioned.

Mac shrugged, suddenly feeling a chill, but whether it was from the weather, or his subconscious, he wasn't sure. "They can't send Steffi to trial for murder; she's mentally unfit to stand." He paused, wishing there was better news. "Given what's happened, I have a feeling she'll spend the rest of her life here."

He reached to the ignition and fired up the Jeep, but didn't pull away. He couldn't, because something was eating at him.

The person back in the padded interview room, with the two-way mirror could so easily have been him, given the whole traumatic experience he'd gone through with Jesse.

Just one little twist of fate, one change here and there, and he could have turned out just as psychotic as Steffi. Heck, anyone of his friends could have.

"Something wrong?" Neil appeared to sense his friend's guilt.

"I was just thinkin' how easily it could be me or you, or Chuck back in that room. Seeing Jesse die as kids was no different to Steffi seeing her dad killed. Heck, it's been messing with my head for how many years?" Mac's voice was low, but the hurt in it was still evident. Maybe he'd never forgive himself for Jesse's death. Maybe that was his punishment for allowing it to happen.

Neil shook his head. "Mac, there's a massive difference between you and Steffi! You used your bad experience in a positive way. You *changed*, just like Steffi did, but for the better. You help people, you always try and do the right thing, and without using a gun. Not many could or would try and do that in this day and age. What happened when we were kids, it shouldn't have happened, and I know that, we all do, but it shaped us into something better, not killers."

The cab of the Jeep grew silent as both men seemed to want to stare at the floor rather than one another. Eventually, Neil looked up, smiled and abruptly slapped Mac on the back playfully.

"Hey, enough of this dark mood, okay? We hardly ever see one another, now we've finally got you back here, its time we did something positive!" Neil's moustache twitched as if he was about to get mischievous. "How about I call Chuck and we go do something fun for a change?"

MacGyver finally cranked the 4x4's ignition and slid on his sunglasses, which he promptly looked over the top of in suspicion and curiosity. "Maybe..." he answered warily as he pulled out of the parking lot. "If Pete doesn't have an assignment lined up."

Neil rolled his eyes as if he'd been expecting the excuse. "Okay, so if not now, what about Christmas? You know you have to bring Sam over for that, right?"

Mac squirmed as he spun the Jeep out of the lot and out onto the highway with just one hand. "Are you kidding?" He teased. "If this is how you guys celebrate Halloween, I so don't want to be around for Christmas. I mean, c'mon, what next,

demonic Santa?” He chuckled as he pulled past a Chevy that was piloted by an octogenarian at the very least.

Neil wasn't taking no for an answer. “You'll be fine,” he pushed. “Just as long as you do something with your hair...” His lips curled into a cheeky grin.

“What's wrong with my hair?” MacGyver feigned a hurt expression, expecting his friend to bring up the “mullet”.

Neil apparently had other ideas. “You do know you're going grey, right?”

“Am not!” Mac almost choked out.

Neil chuckled. “Oh yeah, you so are old buddy. Let's see you “MacGyver” your way out of that one!”

Mac scowled, but couldn't come up with a suitable retort. “You do realize this is not the way to get me back to Mission City any time soon?”

“Who says I'm letting you leave?” Neil waved his handcuffs in the air lightheartedly and Mac finally gave on.

“Okay,” Mac conceded. “I'll stay for dinner, how's that sound?” He thought about it for a second. “As long as you're not doing the cooking...”

As MacGyver headed back to his home town, the Jeep was filled with laughter, and for a moment both men could be in one another's presence without thinking about Jesse, or how things might have been different.

The 4x4 vanished over the horizon, Mac and Neil locked in a verbal battle of wit and humor that would last until they reached Mission City.

And MacGyver didn't mind one bit.

The End