

Safe Haven

MacGyver watched as the Pennsylvania sky began to change from the glow of the warm sun towards a soft twilight. Fields of young crops stretched away over the horizon, the land looking as it had done for centuries. He closed his eyes and for a moment he almost drifted off to sleep in the passenger seat of the Jeep. It had been the week from hell, culminating in a hit-and-run that had almost cost him his life.

He was sure the attempt had been made by his new nemesis – the leader of the clandestine group resurrecting Project Atlas. Hopefully, his bloodied form crumpled in the ditch had convinced them that he was dead. For a moment, Seeley had thought he had been. MacGyver shook his head, remembering Seeley's panicked shout filtering through the haze of concussion and shock, and the pain of being hauled out of the ditch. He had a badly broken ankle, bruised ribs, a concussion, butterfly clips across his right brow, and stitches in his right leg.

MacGyver rubbed at his thigh absently as he remembered coming into contact with asphalt at an insane rate of knots that most definitely should have killed him. In the week since the attack, the concussion had eased, but his injuries made him vulnerable to another attempt, should Atlas find out that they hadn't killed him after all. For now, he hoped they thought he was a dead man, and he needed to stay off their radar while he healed. Pete, Seeley, Nikki and Willis were going to keep after Atlas, but MacGyver was on a different journey.

He looked at the scenery passing by, realizing after a moment exactly where he was. He glanced across at Nikki who was behind the wheel, and after a moment she sensed him looking at her.

“Something wrong?” She asked, tapping the brakes lightly as they rounded a bend.

“Yeah, the last time I was here I kinda parted company with the highway right about now...” MacGyver winced at the memory.

“Huh?” Nikki's brow furrowed.

“I crashed my Jeep here after a tire blew a few years back, that's how I got to know the Millers, where we're headed.” He brushed a hand through the front of his hair and winced when it hurt more than he'd expected. “I thought you knew all about it.”

“Pete mentioned it, but I didn't know details.” Nikki shrugged. “Are you sure you'll be okay out here. Atlas ...”

“Won't find me,” MacGyver confirmed. “Elizabeth and her father-in-law are good people, and being Amish, they're completely off the grid. Even if Atlas knew I was alive -which they don't - this would be the last place they'd look.”

Nikki grimaced as she pulled off road, brought the Jeep to a halt and then killed the ignition. “Mac, you've got to be right about this, there are no second chances.”

“Yes ma’am, I know.” He smiled. “That’s why you guys need to keep working on this while I recover. I’m no good in the fight looking like Long John Silver and feeling like I’ve been hit by a semi.” He raised his right leg and scratched at the cast on his ankle. “Man, this thing itches,” he complained, swinging around in his seat and grabbing a pair of crutches from the back of the Jeep.

“Just where do you think you’re going?” Nikki asked looking confused. “There’s no one here, and you can’t exactly walk!”

MacGyver beamed and pointed to a horse and trap in the distance, heading their way. There was a teenager at the reins of about fifteen wearing a straw hat and a smile from ear-to-ear. “My ride’s here.” He hopped out of the 4x4 on his good leg, sliding the crutches under his arms in a well-honed balancing act.

“You’re way too good at that!” Nikki teased.

“Yeah, well, one too many skiing accidents,” MacGyver grinned back.

“How do we keep in touch?” Nikki tossed his holdall out after him.

“We don’t...no phones out here, which means they can’t tap any lines, it’s for the best. There’s a payphone in the nearest town though, about ten miles away.” MacGyver looked down at his bag, knowing Nikki was just daring him to come up with an ingenious way of picking it up without falling on his behind. He pondered for a moment, not wanting to disappoint, and then hooked the strap with the end of his crutch.

“Now what? There’s no way to lift that now you’ve hooked it,” Nikki watched, restarting her engine and sliding into reverse.

“It’s called a fulcrum,” MacGyver laid his crutch over a boulder without taking any weight on his arm. “You’d know all about them if you’d taken engineering one-oh-one.” Then he slowly leaned back onto the rock, sitting on the crutch at its central point, and watched as his weight lifted the holdall up within reach of his left hand. He grabbed it, and placed it on his knee. “Now I wait for my driver,” he beamed and nodded as Jacob Miller grew closer.

Nikki flicked her hair, shook her head and laughed before hitting the gas and spinning the Jeep around. “I think I’ll leave the heavy lifting to you, I’ll stick with finding Atlas.” Her smile faded. “Watch your back, okay?”

MacGyver gave a little salute, and Nikki pulled away, churning up just enough dirt in her wake to make the approaching horse pause and snort.

“Hey big fella, long time no see!” MacGyver shuffled to his feet and rubbed Thunder’s nose as the horse came to a stop in front of him. It nuzzled him back in a friendly way.

“MacGyver!”

MacGyver turned and realized the little Amish boy he had once known was rapidly turning into a man. “Whoa Jacob, you’re almost as tall as your uncle William!” He couldn’t help but grin.

Jacob shrugged. “I think I will be taller! Mother says William did not stop growing until he was twenty!”

MacGyver closed his eyes for a second and remembered Elizabeth. Even with all the simple, plain attire the Amish wore and the lack of any makeup, she was still a very beautiful woman. “How is your mom?” He asked as Jacob took his bag and lifted into the back of the buggy.

“She is well, as is grandfather.” Jacob offered MacGyver a hand up, and he took it gratefully, positioning his bad leg half out of the buggy. Jacob frowned at it, and at the cuts and bruises on MacGyver’s face. “It would seem you always come to us broken,” he mused, taking the reins and tugging on them for Thunder to turn around.

“Yeah,” MacGyver sighed.. “I get broken a little too often lately...”

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The Millers’ farm was just as MacGyver had remembered it – like something from another time. Somewhere that reality was on hold, and life had returned to a better, simpler way of existing.

A patch of grass grew darker than the rest, and MacGyver sighed as he recalled it was where the old well had once stood – a well that had brought a broken community together after a little girl had fallen down it. “How’s Christy?” He asked, watching Jacob for a reaction. Could two worlds still co-exist? Could they still be friends now, or even something more?

“She is away at college. I miss her terribly.” Jacob screwed up his face in sadness.

“Are you two..?” MacGyver wasn’t sure how to ask, settling for diplomacy “...still friends?”

“Yes...grandfather and the elders...” Jacob searched for the right words, “...mellowed somewhat, after your last visit.”

“Oh yeah?” MacGyver patted him on the back and grinned. “I tend to have that calming effect on folks.”

Jacob pulled on the reins again, and Thunder stopped outside the main barn. John and Elizabeth were waiting to great them.

“It is good to see you again, MacGyver.” Grandpa John nodded, his grey wispy beard sticking out like he had recently preened it. He offered up a hand and MacGyver shook it, climbing carefully down with a wince as the cart moved.

Jacob passed over his crutches, and then climbed down, leading Thunder away inside the barn to unhitch the carriage and remove his harness.

Elizabeth smiled, looking MacGyver over as if assessing the damage. “You will recover well, without the distractions of the outside world.” She nodded to John whose head bobbed in agreement before he silently turned and headed for the house. “He likes you, you know?” Elizabeth murmured.

“Yeah, he’s just not big with words. I know a few other folks like that.” MacGyver stuck the crutches under his arms and hobbled after the old man with Elizabeth at his side. Somehow, it felt right to be here, and in his mind he could see himself one day enjoying a simple life similar to the Amish.

At least if project Atlas and its allies didn’t kill him first...

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MacGyver enjoyed supper with the Millers, talking about how he might be able to help design a more efficient plowing rig without anything considered to be modern or vain. The challenge of engineering for such a simple community intrigued him, and he excused himself early, tired from the journey, but eager to pencil down some ideas before turning in.

His room was at the top of the stairs, and it took three times as long to climb the steps than usual with his bad leg. By the time he reached his bed, he collapsed on it, puffing with the effort it had taken. His ankle throbbed in time with his heartbeat, his ribs ached, and every other muscle and bone in his body seemed to have joined in. MacGyver closed his eyes, trying to will away the pain.

Eventually, he pulled over his holdall and unzipped a side pocket to tug out a pill bottle. He hated taking meds, especially painkillers, but he needed to sleep and rest to be able to get back into the war with the bad guys. Reluctantly, he slipped two of the capsules into his mouth and swallowed them dry.

He looked at the oil lamp on the bedside table, and with a quick puff blew it out, before rolling back onto the hand-sewn bedspread and exhaling. He threw his left arm over his eyes, blocking out a bright shaft of moonlight, and after awhile, he drifted off, dreaming of an ice-hockey match, good guys against bad. His team consisted of Pete, Jack, Willis, Nikki, and Sam, while Murdoc headed up his side with Zito, Mariotte, and three men in masks that his subconscious probably had created to be facsimiles of Atlas.

Images of the game bounced around in his head faster than the puck, and he tossed and turned as “Murdoc’s Marauders” scored goal after goal. He lashed out with his stick, trying to regain control of the game, but somehow he knew that in reality he was trying to regain control of the Atlas situation, and that he was losing. MacGyver looked down, seeing that he was trying to skate on thin ice with a cast still on his ankle. As realization hit, the ice beneath him gave way, and he sank deep into the darkness below.

MacGyver awoke with a start, rolling over and up into a sitting position. He rubbed at his eyes, careful of the cut on his forehead, and then checked his watch. It was after midnight – he'd been asleep almost four hours.

He wobbled to his feet and used just one crutch to hobble over to his dresser to pour a glass of water from the antique pottery pitcher there. He gulped down the ice-cold liquid, and then paused when he thought he heard something. The sound came again, like someone trying to yell out, but not quite making it. He shook his head and, picking up the second crutch on his way, shuffled over to the window. It was open, letting in the cool night air and making sounds from the outside more audible. MacGyver squinted, allowing his eyes to adjust to the muted moonlight.

Something in the darkness moved out by the perimeter fence, close to where the old well used to be. Shadows shifted until eventually, MacGyver could make out two figures, and it looked like they were fighting. He leaned forwards, opening the window wide and popping his head out as far as he dared.

There were two men scuffling, or rather, one man overpowering another with a choke hold. The second man lashed out with his arms in retaliation, and the pair dropped to the ground in a ball of limbs, disappearing into the bushes. An Amish straw hat rolled across the grass and came to rest by the gate, and then there was the all-too-familiar crack as a gun fired not once, but twice.

One figure rose from the melee and brushed himself down.

“Hey!” MacGyver leaned further out of the window, yelling. “Hold it right there!”

The shadowy figure spun around at the shout, then turned tail and ran away into the nearby trees. There was a yell, and the sounds of a further struggle, then silence.

MacGyver turned, his bruised ribs protesting the movement, hobbled onto the landing and began hopping down the stairs as fast as he could go, somehow balancing the crutches as well, until his left foot slipped and he crashed down the last few steps onto the floor below. He caught hold of the banisters, just saving himself from another fall.

As if by magic, and super-fast for someone of his age, John appeared in a long white Dickensian nightshirt. He held up a small lantern containing a candle, his features creased with curiosity in the dim light.

“MacGyver? Is there something wrong?” His beard twitched, his eyes sharp and young in his old face.

“I woke up and thought I heard something. When I looked out of the window there were two guys fighting, and...I thought I heard a gun being fired...” Suddenly, MacGyver realized how unlikely it sounded. Amish people no more used firearms than they did zippers. Could he have been dreaming? It had seemed so real...

“MacGyver, you know we don't hold with guns here, not like you English!” John shook his head.

“I know,” Mac countered, “But I think only one of them was Amish. The clothes were different. Can we at least check outside?”

“MacGyver, I heard nothing...” John’s left brow quirked upwards, and his eyes rolled skywards too, as if he was sure it was a waste of time, but he moved to get his coat from a hook near the door anyway, passing the lamp to Mac to hold for a second. “You should wait here,” his accent was stronger as he spoke, as if it was an order. “Your leg...”

“No, I need to see!” MacGyver shook his head, giving John back the lantern and gesturing for the older man to go first. He followed, limping across the cold, damp grass on his crutches.

“Here, you say?” John stopped by the fence. He wafted the lantern across the ground, but there was nothing to see, just a muddy patch of earth and a few cart tracks. “I see nothing.” He turned to MacGyver holding up the lantern, “Except two men out in the cold night who should know better!”

“But I saw them...” MacGyver leaned over, examining the ground. It was true – if there had been an altercation here, there was no sign of it. He balanced on one crutch and ran a hand through his hair. “This is crazy,” he said softly.

“Perhaps...in your head? Have you been taking pills? The English painkillers? I have heard they can do this.” John nodded.

“I took some earlier, yes, but I know I saw those men.” MacGyver frowned. He had slept pretty deeply after taking the capsules, but he was almost sure that what he’d seen had been while he was very much awake. Hadn’t it?

“We should go back. It will soon be time for breakfast.” John pulled his coat tighter around him and turned, ambling back across to the house in the grey light of dawn.

MacGyver checked his watch, and then remembered the Amish rose early – real early. He groaned. He really wasn’t ready for breakfast, but maybe after some food, he could come back in daylight and figure things out.

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The sky was still nearly dark when they said grace and then tucked in to a hearty meal – all fresh produce from the land they worked. It never ceased to amaze MacGyver how a family in the 90’s could get away without needing anything from the modern world. He sipped a glass of milk, fresh from a cow, and pondered why the rest of the planet couldn’t be so simple and peaceful.

“How’s William these days?” MacGyver smiled at Elizabeth, remembering her huge brother as he toyed with the tumbler in his hand.

“He’s well,” she answered, wiping her hands on her apron as she collected the pots. “He is out on the south field, working the plough. Jacob tells me you plan to design us a new one?”

MacGyver nodded. Any other time he would have offered to help on the farm, but with a broken ankle he'd be more of a hindrance.

"I wish I could do more than sit around," he admitted. He stretched out his leg, aching again after his hurried trip outside.

"There are jobs that can be done with just hands," Elizabeth smiled, and then vanished into the next room. Two minutes later, she reappeared with a sewing basket, and a pile of clothes. "These need repairs, you have hands, you can sew!" She almost giggled as MacGyver balked.

"You really don't want to let me loose with those." MacGyver pointed to the basket and grimaced, but he was saved further embarrassment as William appeared in the doorway. He bobbed his head, acknowledging MacGyver, but focused on his elder, John.

"There is an emergency meeting of the elders," William's voice was worried and he spoke quickly. "Robert Beiler did not go home last night, and no one has seen him since raising the Yoders' barn yesterday. His wife is gravely worried."

MacGyver blinked. He hoped he was wrong, but could Robert have been the man being attacked outside in the middle of the night? Why would someone want to harm him?

John appeared to sense his thoughts and set a wizened hand on MacGyver's forearm. He swallowed hard. "Perhaps...you were right after all..."

MacGyver bit his lip. "I hope not, because the gunshots and your friend not returning home would probably mean..." he petered off, not wanting to finish.

"John, we need to go." William's face was serious.

John stood from the table and grabbed his coat, turning to follow his towering relative.

"Say, would you mind if Jacob took me back out by the fence, and to speak with Mrs. Beiler? Maybe I can help figure this out? It's the one thing I'm good at." MacGyver glanced at the window, seeing Jacob looking in.

John paused at the door, swallowed, and then turned. "This is Amish business. Alles ist en Ordnung." He nodded, sure of what he was saying, and vanished after William.

"I can help, you know that." MacGyver watched him go, then looked at Elizabeth.

She thought for a moment, then moved to open the door. "Jacob, can I see you a moment please?"

"Is there something I can do for MacGyver?" Jacob was inside the kitchen within seconds, his face a mask of curiosity, and eager to please. His eyes lit up as he spoke, and it was obvious he had been listening in.

“Jacob, Robert Beiler didn’t go home last night. He is missing. Grandpa has gone to a meeting of the elders. I would like it if you would help Mr. MacGyver by taking him to see Mrs. Beiler and ask if there is anything we can do for her.” Elizabeth’s voice was firm. MacGyver raised an eyebrow. He hadn’t been expecting Elizabeth to disobey her father-in-law quite so quickly.

“I don’t want to get Jacob in trouble,” he began, but Elizabeth cut him off.

“John is set in the old ways, and usually I would agree with him, but sometimes the old ways don’t work in a new world. I think you know what I mean? Sometimes we need help from someone who can see the situation through modern eyes.” Elizabeth sat down on a wooden dining chair and looked deep into MacGyver’s gaze, as if sizing up his thoughts, his intentions. She nodded, as if she approved of what she saw.

“I’ll go look around and ask a few questions. Polite, respectful questions,” MacGyver promised as he pushed himself up with a groan. “And if you folks think I’m going too far, you can always take away my crutches,” he teased as Jacob helped him to the door.

Thunder and the cart were already hitched up outside, and Elizabeth frowned as she watched them go. “Jacob? Were you eavesdropping before?”

“I was prepared for any eventuality.” Jacob smiled as he took the reins. MacGyver wanted to smile too, but stifled it. It was better for Jacob if MacGyver’s outsider habits didn’t rub off.

“Can you just pull up by the fence before we see Mrs. Beiler? I want to take a look at the ground in daylight.” MacGyver pointed to the spot. Jacob nodded and gently brought his gargantuan horse to a halt. Thunder snorted and pawed the ground with his left hoof, as if he sensed something was amiss.

Mac leaned down out of his seat, hanging onto the buggy with one hand. His eyes scoured the mud, and in daylight it was apparent someone had tried to brush over the marks of the scuffle he’d seen. And then he saw it: A thin line of blood that trailed off to the road. He winced. That wasn’t a good omen for Robert Beiler.

“Okay, let’s go see Mrs. Beiler.” He pulled himself back up into the seat, stretching out his bad leg.

“You saw something bad?” Jacob stuck his hat in place and chewed on a piece of straw absently as he spoke. He wasn’t shocked, but definitely saddened. “Mother told me what you saw last night,” He explained as he took a right at a fork in the track and headed for a small farmhouse in the distance.

“Blood, or what looked like it,” Mac admitted, rubbing at his injured leg absently. “But sometimes appearances can be deceptive. Just last week I could easily have been taken for dead...”

“And yet here you are.” Jacob nodded. “Let’s hope Mr. Beiler is so lucky.” He sighed. “I thought living this way was meant to protect us, but it doesn’t. I sometimes wish I could go away, like Christy and study to be something more important.”

MacGyver licked his lips. He wanted to tell the kid that he should aspire to be whatever he wanted, and if that meant leaving here, then he should do it. But meddling in Amish affairs was not why he was here, and it wouldn’t be fair to John or Elizabeth. He hoped one day if Jacob really wanted to leave, they would see it and eventually give their blessing.

“The outside world isn’t always so great, either,” MacGyver countered instead. “Look what it got me!” He patted Jacob on the shoulder. “Just remember, the grass isn’t always greener on the other side.”

“No, it is usually greener here!” Jacob nodded. “You English use too many chemicals to fertilize your ground!”

MacGyver looked at Jacob, but wasn’t sure if Jacob was serious, or if he had just heard his first Amish joke.

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Irene Beiler’s home was just like all the other Amish houses in the community, and yet as soon as MacGyver hobbled through the door he realized it felt different – as though the house and the people in it were unsettled and unhappy.

“I...I don’t see how you can help...Mr?” Irene looked scared as she welcomed Jacob and ushered MacGyver to a plain wooden dining chair that hadn’t been stained or varnished. She was wringing her hands as she moved to fill a kettle and place it on a wood burning stove.

“MacGyver, ma’am, but folks just tend to call me Mac.” MacGyver chose his words carefully. “I’m a friend of the Millers, of this whole community, and I think I might have seen something last night that involved your husband.”

Irene’s head lifted, and she stopped what she was doing, still looking scared. Her eyes darted to the door, then to a vase on the mantelpiece. “I... I doubt it, our land is nowhere near the Millers,” she also hesitated before speaking, but MacGyver suspected she had different reasons, and it wasn’t because she was scared of offending him.

“I saw two men fighting,” MacGyver continued, his voice gentle.

“We’re simple people; we have no cause for violence.” Irene gulped and turned away, as if something in her eyes might give her away.

“You know something about what’s happened, don’t you, ma’am?” MacGyver said softly, hoping she would relent, not withdraw from him.

Irene stood suddenly and she moved to the vase. Slipping a hand inside, she pulled out a wad of notes and shook her head.

“English money, and for all I know blood money.” She sat down and exhaled, putting the money down on the table. “Our farm hasn’t been doing so well. Our crops yielded barely enough to sustain us, and we have nothing left for the local market. We need the market money for other essential supplies we cannot make ourselves.”

“So someone made you an offer,” MacGyver asked. “What was the money for?”

“For the use of some of our land.” Irene saw Jacob watching her, and her expression turned to one of guilt. “A man came and offered cash to rent our lower pastures for a year. My husband knew it was against the rules, he knew the elders would shun us if they found out, but it was a lot of money, and we were desperate.” She watched as Jacob nodded.

“Maybe the men genuinely just needed land to rent?” Jacob suggested, his voice worried but not angry. “Don’t worry, I won’t tell...”

“No...my husband discovered something bad in the bottom field yesterday morning.” Irene shook her head. “He came home angry; I have never seen him like that before. He rushed back out, said he was going to confront them and demand they leave...”

“And you never saw him again?” MacGyver finished for her.

“No. He’s dead, isn’t he?” Irene started to cry, and tried in vain to blink away the tears. MacGyver looked at Jacob. If he had to put money on it, then he would have said yes, but that wasn’t what Irene needed to hear, not yet, until they knew more. “We’re going to find out.” He nodded to Jacob. “We’ll take the buggy down to the bottom field and have a look around.” He looked at Irene. “With your permission?”

“Anything if it helps find Robert.” She nodded and wiped at her eyes with her apron.

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The bottom field wasn’t exactly what MacGyver had expected. As Jacob pulled the buggy to a halt, all that could be seen was corn – plain old stalks blowing in the light breeze straight out of a promotional brochure for the state. It looked a good healthy crop.

“I don’t understand? I thought...” Jacob pushed back his hat and scratched his head.

“You thought we were going to find something sinister down here,” MacGyver finished for him. “If it’s any consolation, so did I. Ow.” He winced as he slid down out of the buggy, grabbing his crutches as he went. Jacob quickly followed, and they began walking the perimeter of the field.

It was a nice day, high broken cloud with filtered warm sunlight breaking through and warming their bones. MacGyver breathed in the air, closing his eyes for a second to

enjoy the scent of growing plants. When he re-opened them, Jacob had moved ahead, and had stopped at a corner of the crop.

As MacGyver hobbled to catch up, Jacob turned, his face shocked. For a second, MacGyver thought he must have found Robert's body. He hurried to Jacob, ignoring the pain from his broken ankle.

He stopped as he saw what was wrong. A cow had broken through a weak section of the fence from the adjoining pasture. The cow now lay dead at the edge of the corn, fresh stalks still in her mouth. Flies buzzed around the corpse and, in the warm Spring sun, it was already beginning to smell.

"This must be what Robert found and argued about with the people renting the land," MacGyver leaned on his crutches, taking the weight off his leg.

"But why would simple corn kill the cow?" Jacob pondered, his face screwing up in distaste. "Something isn't right here, MacGyver."

"You've got that right." MacGyver nodded, taking out his penknife and carefully cutting some of the corn, gathering samples. Around the base of the stalks, he saw blue granules scattered on the soil, which he guessed to be chemical fertilizers or pesticides. He sniffed the cut stalks, pulling a face at the bitter smell. "This is no ordinary corn, it smells like chemicals. What's going on here? And who is behind it?" He passed the samples to Jacob. "C'mon, we need to find out what this stuff actually does..."

"Bad idea." A new voice, deep and guttural joined them, and as MacGyver and Jacob instinctively turned, a short stocky man with a beard came into view. His eyes were bright and attentive, watching their every move, and in his left hand he held an automatic pistol.

Part two

"Who are you?" Jacob demanded, seemingly unafraid of the weapon. "This is Amish land – private property." He moved to step forwards, naivety of the weapon's destructive power making him too fearless for his own good.

"Jacob, no!" MacGyver quickly pulled him back, balancing with just one crutch as he did so. "I think this man has already taken one life."

"Correct," The man's smile held no warmth. "But you can call me 'Roy' if you like, just like Bruce Willis. I did like that film..." He trailed off, looking at Jacob. "You have heard of Bruce Willis, right?"

"No," Jacob growled. MacGyver ignored him, focusing on the bad guy.

"As I assume you're planning to kill us anyway, mind telling us what you're doing here?" MacGyver flicked his head back towards the crop, ignoring Jacob's shocked stare. "Killer corn?"

“Let’s call it an effective weapon, and we’re simply perfecting it here for future use.” ‘Roy’ shifted his grip on the gun. “Imagine selling the seed to communities, countries, anyone we get paid to, and in just a few short months they’d be consuming it and killing themselves.”

“You want to wipe out the Amish? Why?” Jacob started forwards again, but MacGyver still had hold of his sleeve. “We keep ourselves private from the English, we do you no harm!” His face reddened as he spoke, and ‘Roy’ began to chuckle.

“Don’t flatter yourself,” ‘Roy’ laughed. “We used your land as it was out of the way of the authorities. What Fed in his right mind would look here for dark deeds? You’re just a pawn in a much larger game.”

“You’re either a terrorist, or an arms dealer,” MacGyver shook his head in disgust. “Either way, you’re in it for money or power, or both.”

“Correct,” ‘Roy’ nodded. “And right now, you’re wasting my valuable time.” He gestured with the gun for them to start moving.

“You’re going to kill us.” Jacob shuddered, but he didn’t look afraid.

“Right again! You’re pretty smart for a religious freak,” ‘Roy’ said sarcastically. “But don’t worry, I’ve no intention of doing it here, can’t have your community folks finding bodies just yet, and I don’t feel in the mood to be dragging your sorry dead asses across the countryside. So start moving – over to the path, and down the hill to my truck,” he instructed.

MacGyver nodded to Jacob and they moved off down the hill. It was slow going for MacGyver, and ‘Roy’ jabbed him impatiently in the back with the gun, but eventually they reached a sorry looking Ford flatbed. Roy popped the tailgate and ushered them in with his gun. “Sorry about the dirt,” he apologized sarcastically. “But I just don’t have a housemaid for my truck right now.”

Jacob helped MacGyver onto the grimy bed and then followed. Roy tucked his weapon into his belt, obviously not afraid they’d try to overpower him, and used a piece of old tow rope to bind their hands in front of them. “A gimp and a preacher,” he chuckled. “Hardly the cavalry, you two, huh?” When neither responded, he shook his head, closed the tailgate and swung into the driver’s seat.

“Now what?” Jacob whispered. “Once we’re away from here he’ll kill us!”

MacGyver bit his bottom lip and began looking around as the countryside began to flash by. He shuffled into the corner of the flatbed, bracing himself as the truck bounced over potholes and jarred his leg.

“We improvise,” he nodded to an old screwdriver and a small adjustable wrench rusting on the floor. “For starters, we grab those.”

“You have a plan? Already?” Jacob looked impressed.

“Nope,” Mac answered honestly, “but I find collecting things usually helps formulate one later...”

Phoenix Foundation, California

“So what’s Carmichael up to today?” Seeley put his coffee down on his desk and hung up his jacket.

“Hard to say.” Nikki scrolled through her emails. “He’s due to open a fundraiser for an orphanage in Nebraska at the weekend, but as far as we can tell, he’s home today.” She shook her head at the handsome man on the screen. “He sure doesn’t look like a scumbag.”

“The worst ones never do.” Seeley waited for his computer to boot up, blowing on his coffee and taking a sip. “Willis’s long range super-bug seems to be holding up, which is good. At least we know who he’s talking to.”

“Please don’t even say ‘super-bug’ in connection with that man!” Nikki shuddered. “How can anyone do such a terrible thing? He could wipe out everybody in the country if that thing gets loose!”

“I know.” Seeley leaned forwards, tapping at his keyboard and reading Willis’s bug transcript from the previous night. “That’s interesting. Why would he be talking to..?” He stood, grabbed his jacket and strode to the door. “I’ll be back in a while.”

“Where are you going? Nikki stood, reaching for her own coat. “I’ll come too.”

“Going to check out a hunch.” Seeley held up a hand. “And no, not this time. I need to lean on one of my friends in low places for information and last time you came with me, you scared the crap out of him so badly that we didn’t learn a thing!”

“Huh. Well, call me if you need a pick up, OK?” Nikki turned back to her computer as Seeley left the building.

* * * *

Pennsylvania

Despite their speed, it took twenty minutes for ‘Roy’ to reach his destination. MacGyver had no idea where they’d traveled to, but Jacob cringed as he saw a large grain silo looming before them. “We are at the edge of the community, on Eli Yoder’s farm, or what’s left of it. He past away last Fall, and we have not been able to trace any relatives.”

“So no one around to see what the bad guys are doing.” MacGyver nodded as the Ford skidded to a halt on loose gravel.

“Kinda lonely out here, huh?” ‘Roy’ reappeared, and he was grinning again. “But not as lonely as y’all gonna be in a few seconds.” He grabbed MacGyver’s left arm and dragged him roughly from the truck. Struggling to balance without a crutch, MacGyver rolled onto the floor in a heap, and the “acquired” screwdriver and wrench fell from his jacket.

“Now just what did you expect to do with these?” ‘Roy’ picked them up and toyed with them in his hands, then shrugged and dragged MacGyver to his feet, holding him by the scruff of his jacket. MacGyver struggled, balancing on one foot and trying not to lean on his injured ankle.

“Oh you know, a little home improvement maybe?” MacGyver tensed, ready for a punch, but none came. He hopped, leaning against the side of the truck for balance.

“You can have these.” ‘Roy’ let go of MacGyver’s collar, and instead stuffed the tools back into his jacket. He cut MacGyver’s bonds with a penknife and sniffed. “’Cause where you’re going, they ain’t gonna be one iota of use to you.” He gestured with the gun for Jacob to climb down, and then pointed to a metal hatch on the silo. “Guess what? That thing is full of our first harvest of genetically altered poison crop, and you’re going in there.” ‘Roy’ wiped his forearm over his sweating brow. “And let me tell you, breathing that stuff for awhile is just as deadly as eatin’ it, but I reckoned you’d like the experience, given how nosy you were back in that field...”

MacGyver took his crutches from the flatbed and nodded to Jacob to do as ‘Roy’ asked. They moved to the silo slowly, MacGyver thinking hard, and watching ‘Roy’ for any opportunity to escape. But their captor made no mistakes, and MacGyver wasn’t in any condition to tackle him anyway.

And there was no chance Jacob would resort to violence.

‘Roy’ cut Jacob’s bonds, opened the hatch, and jerked a thumb, signaling they should climb inside. Jacob helped MacGyver slide in complete with crutches, and then followed; flinching as his feet slid into the soft crop and the grains shifted under him like quicksand. ‘Roy’ raised an eyebrow, smiled, and then slammed the metal hatch closed with an echoing clank.

“We’re dead men,” Jacob said slowly, no panic in his voice. “Perhaps we should pray...”

“It won’t hurt,” MacGyver agreed, “But I’m not counting on divine intervention just yet, so its time to start thinking.” He reached out a hand as Jacob began to squirm, causing him to sink. “No sudden moves, no thrashing, or you’ll drown in this stuff before it poisons you. Now listen, tear off your shirt sleeves...we’re going to use them as masks. He winced as he tried to tear his own shirt sleeve, and then stopped as the pain in his ribs became unbearable.

Jacob did as he was told, tearing the cotton easily and passing over a strip. The pair bound them around their faces.

“Now what?” Jacob asked, his voice suddenly muffled.

MacGyver looked around. There was always something to be done, if you searched hard enough. His eyes locked on the metal hatch. The hinges were on the inside, and were the simple type with a metal pin down the middle. After all, this was no jail; it hadn't been made to be escape-proof.

MacGyver tried to “swim” over to it without sinking, and it proved harder than he'd imagined. It reminded him of the time he's almost been buried alive on a trip with Professor Atticus. Once he reached the doorway, he examined the hinges closer and nodded.

“If we can get the pins out, I think we could squeeze through the gap!”

“With what?” Jacob asked. “We have no hammer, nothing, and the screwdriver and wrench you stole are no help here.”

“Oh?” MacGyver raised an eyebrow and smiled. “You need to start thinking outside the box, use your imagination!” He pulled out the two small tools, studying the hinges. After a moment, he reached out a hand and grabbed one of the crutches he'd brought and dragged it across the grain.

As Jacob watched, MacGyver started to undo the two wing nuts that allowed the handle height to be adjusted. He removed them completely, followed by the handle. For once, he was thankful of getting the older style wooden crutches that had now mostly been replaced with metal. Inside the handle was a metal bar with threads. He placed it in the jaws of the adjustable wrench, tightened and then removed it slowly with a to and fro motion.

Jacob watched, his face a mask of curiosity and wonder. “I think you can fix my plough any time,” he teased. “What are you doing?”

“We need to get the pins out of the hinges. I've done it lots before; you just need to find the right tools. This screwdriver is about the same diameter as the pins. We'll use it to force them out.” MacGyver held up the screwdriver, smiling.

“But we have no hammer, nothing to strike it with to free the pins?” Jacob screwed his face up, as moving made him begin to sink.

“We place the bar and wing nuts from my crutch over the hinge, and over the screwdriver, and then tighten the nuts! As the distance between them decreases, the screwdriver has no place to go but down, forcing out the hinge pin!” MacGyver began to work as he explained.

“You'll never work those wing nuts with your fingers when they start to get tight,” Jacob pointed out.

“Nope, but I can use this!” MacGyver waved the small adjustable wrench. He started to work as he talked, first with his fingers and then with the wrench. Sweat trickled

down his face and into his makeshift mask, sticking his hair to the cut on his forehead, but the pin in the top hinge in the top was definitely moving.

After ten more minutes, it dropped from its place, and MacGyver began to work on the second hinge. Jacob remained silent, watching in awe.

Ten minutes more work, and the right side of the hatch dropped slightly as the hinges holding it gave way. On the outside, only the latch now held it in place, but the gap between the hatch and frame was still too narrow for either man to squeeze through.

MacGyver took the remnants of his crutch and pushed it through the open space, using the wide end to carefully dislodge the latch. With a groan and a pop the metal door clanged to the ground outside with one kick from his good leg, and Mac tumbled out of the opening with a cascade of grain. His remaining crutch followed him out, clattering onto the ground nearby.

Jacob slithered out seconds later, kicking and squirming on the ground. He pulled his mask off and gulped down fresh air.

“I thought...well, let’s just say I had begun to pray for forgiveness for my sins!”

“Me too,” MacGyver admitted. “And I suspect I have a few more than you.”

“But you are a good man, MacGyver!” Jacob looked surprised.

“I got up to my share of bad behavior, in my younger days,” Mac chuckled, struggling to get up. “If you know what I mean?” He winked, and Jacob turned a little red.

“Now what do we do?” Jacob changed the subject, brushing grain from his clothes. “We have no way to get into town for the police.”

MacGyver wasn’t listening. Instead, he was looking at the horizon and watching a plume of fresh smoke spiraling into the sky. It was thick and black, and he didn’t like the direction the wind was blowing it – it suggested the epicenter of the blaze was somewhere familiar.

“Jacob – your community’s school is over there, right?”

The teenager followed MacGyver’s gaze and his expression suddenly became panicked. “Yes! It is where the elders were having the meeting this morning! Half the community will be there!” He broke into a run.

“Hey, you’re never gonna run there in time to be of any use!” MacGyver called him back. “We need to find a quicker way.”

“How?” Jacob hesitated, then stopped and spun around, “How?” He raised his arms in frustration. “There is no cart here, no horses, not even an automobile you English like so much!”

“Hang on, I’m thinking...” MacGyver bit his lip and looked around. There was a broken-down barn behind the grain silo. He cocked his head towards it. “Let’s go take a look in there...”

Limping as fast as he could on his remaining crutch, MacGyver led Jacob over to the barn. The door creaked, and dust and cobwebs drifted down as they went inside. The barn had not been used in a very long time. MacGyver looked around, noting everything that had been left behind: A coil of rope, two wheelbarrows leaning against the wall, some barrels and a stack of barrel lids, a long-handled hoe and some new plastic containers looking very out of place at the far end of the old building, full of blue granules.

“Right.” MacGyver bent down and picked up the rope. “Jacob, would you bring both the barrows over here, please? I have an idea...”

*

“Are you sure this will work?” Jacob wheeled MacGyver’s contraption out of the barn and held it steady.

“Pretty sure.” MacGyver glanced back to the village, where the plume of smoke had thickened. “Ready to give it a go?” He smiled as Jacob nodded and climbed carefully into the front barrow. Jacob climbed into the back one, now securely lashed to the first one with rope, and held up the hoe, now balanced with a barrel lid at each end.

“I balance us by touching the lids to the ground if we start to tip, yes?” He waggled the hoe, testing its balance.

“Right.” MacGyver leaned over the side and used his crutch to push the barrows along, crouching low once they were moving. “Here we go!”

*

“Mind out! MacGyver’s shout was frantic as the chariot raced downhill and skidded into the village.

“FIRE! FIRE!” Jacob leaned over, dipping his makeshift paddle and dragging the barrel-lid stabilizers to help them around the turn. “FIRE IN THE SCHOOL!”

Doors opened and people stepped out into the street. MacGyver pointed towards the school, where the smoke rose thick and black. Children watched open-mouthed as the chariot bumped over a rock and careered off down the hill, the two inside it yelling as loud as they could.

The cry of ‘FIRE!’ spread, and the villagers raced towards the school carrying buckets. Jacob and MacGyver hurtled into the village square, one wheel clipped the water trough and the chariot flipped, dumping them both out onto the ground. For a moment they lay, winded, then Jacob jumped up and ran to the well, letting the bucket down with a splash.

The first of the Amish arrived, setting up a bucket chain. Two of the men soaked sacks in the trough, threw them over their heads and ran into the school to rescue the elders.

MacGyver sat up, his head spinning. Added to last week's concussion, the spill from the chariot had made him dizzy and disorientated. Strong hands grabbed him and pulled him out of the way, propping him up against a nearby building. MacGyver blinked, seeing Irene Beiler hurrying back to help with the bucket chain.

Two men reappeared, each half-carrying one of the elders. MacGyver turned to see Jacob soaking a sack and hurrying after them. He shouted to Jacob, to come back, but his voice was lost in the noise. He struggled to get up, falling back when pain and dizziness overcame him. He watched with his heart in his mouth until he saw Jacob stagger out, pulling John with him. John fell to his knees, coughing, and Jacob knelt beside him, one arm around his grandfather.

MacGyver tucked his foot underneath him and used the wall to help him stand. The black smoke had largely been replaced with steam as the villagers got the fire under control. The elders sat on the grass in front of the school, being patched up and fussed over. John rose unsteadily to his feet and, with Jacob's help, wobbled over to MacGyver.

"My grandson tells me I have you to thank for raising the alarm." John stuck out a smoke-stained hand. Thank you – we owe you our lives." He looked hard at MacGyver, taking in the new scuffs and scrapes, the blood trickling from the reopened cut on his forehead and the way he clung to the wall. "You must allow us to help you now. Elizabeth!" John turned and shouted over his shoulder, voice hoarse from the smoke.

Elizabeth hurried over, carrying a basket of first aid supplies and picking up MacGyver's crutch as she crossed the square.

"How do you feel?" She dabbed at the cut with a damp cloth. "Did you hit your head?"

"Not hard." MacGyver lifted his chin as Elizabeth cleaned a scrape on his jaw, frowning as he caught a flash of light. He squinted, seeing the glint again.

"What are you looking at?" Elizabeth followed his gaze, seeing a movement in the bushes up on the ridge, and a flash of red as someone moved.

"Someone with binoculars, I think." MacGyver frowned, not wanting to worry her. "Or maybe just a hiker. It's too far off to tell."

*

Up on the ridge, Roy watched the rescue. Damn-fool do-gooder and his damn-fool makeshift wagon had spoiled his plans. Now it looked like the village elders had all got out alive. So much for making it look like an accidental tragedy. Now he'd have to think up a new way to persuade the Amish to move away from the area. Or

perhaps he could use what had happened in a different way, like the stranger using the wheelbarrows to make a wagon...

Maybe he could threaten to torch the rest of the community if they went to the police, or if they refused to keep renting him the land. Or maybe he needed a completely different threat...

Roy stared through his binoculars, watching the stranger wobble to his feet, off balance and not putting his bad foot to the ground at all. One of the women hurried over to him, wiping blood off his forehead. He watched them turn and scan the hillside.

Roy put down his binoculars, letting them swing on their strap, and eased out of the bushes, creeping away to plan his next move.

*

The next morning dawned grey and overcast. While Jacob and Elizabeth were up as early as usual, MacGyver slept late, the pain from his ankle having woken him several times during the night. He limped downstairs, expecting to find the house empty, but instead found John breathing steam from a bowl of hot water. John coughed as MacGyver hobbled into the room, deep and rattling. MacGyver eased himself down into the seat opposite him, breathing in the sharp scent of pine oil in the steam.

“How’re you doing?” MacGyver watched John wipe his mouth and waited for him to catch his breath.

“I am full of smoke, but I will be fine, thank you.” John indicated the bowl. “Elizabeth tells me this will help to get it out. She was very insistent that I stay here!” John shook his head in mock fear. “My daughter, she can be very strong-willed!” He looked MacGyver over. “Were you hurt, when you fell from the barrow yesterday?”

“Nothing new,” MacGyver waved a dismissive hand, not about to admit he was hurting to a man who had nearly been killed the day before. “How did the fire get started, anyway?”

“Some of the children saw strangers when they were playing in the woods. English strangers. None of the children saw who started the fire, but...” John shrugged. “I do not want to believe that another of God’s creatures would do this deliberately, but I do not think it could have been an accident.” He shook his head and then leaned over the steaming bowl again as another coughing fit overcame him.

“Mind if I take a look?” MacGyver leaned on the table and stood up. John nodded, still coughing, and MacGyver limped out of the house.

*

The smoke smell still clung to the school. One end was badly burned but the building looked as though it could be salvaged. MacGyver leaned on his crutch and surveyed

the room, feeling his ankle throb inside the cast. He looked around, decided where the fire must have been set, and hobbled outside again.

Though the ground had been well trampled in the rescue, he did find a footprint made by someone wearing trainers rather than boots under a scorched bush. He knelt down, one hand on the ground to take the weight off his leg, and looked closer, his nose almost touching the soil. Pressed into the mud underneath the trainer print were fine blue grains. MacGyver opened up his Swiss Army Knife and used the blade to dig them out of the print. He dusted the dirt off them and held them up to the light, recognizing them as the same chemicals used on the poison crops in the Beilers' field.

"MacGyver?" Jacob shouted from nearby, and MacGyver turned.

"Over here!" MacGyver struggled to his feet. "Are you OK?"

"MacGyver, something terrible has happened!" Jacob rounded the corner of the school with three younger boys right behind him. "They found Robert Beiler-" Jacob sniffed and swallowed hard. "He's dead!"

*

It took the rest of the morning to retrieve Robert Beiler's body and bring him back to the village. After being shot, he must have chased his assailant as far as he could and then passed out, falling into the fast-flowing creek and being pulled under. He had washed up some two miles downstream at a calm, deep pool and become wedged under the roots of an overhanging tree, to be discovered by three boys who had been sent to catch fish.

He was brought home and laid out in the living room of his house, attended to by his widow and the elder women of the village.

The whole community was in shock. The necessary work on the farms continued, carried out by silent adults and solemn-faced children, but the elders gathered at the Millers' house. MacGyver stayed outside and out of the way until Jacob came to find him.

"They want to talk to you." Jacob helped MacGyver to his feet and walked slowly beside him as he limped through the kitchen, where Elizabeth wouldn't meet his eye, and on into the living room.

"Sit down, please." John indicated a seat and MacGyver sat down, Jacob sliding into the seat beside him. John looked as though he had aged ten years in a morning, and MacGyver was shocked at his appearance. The other elders looked just as shocked and MacGyver, acknowledging each in turn, was surprised to see Irene Beiler among them, dressed in black and with her gaze fixed on her folded hands. Her face was expressionless and pale, tears running unheeded down her face.

One of the elders cleared his throat, his voice still hoarse from the smoke.

"Mr. MacGyver, this is a tragic day for us. Nevertheless, we must find out what is going on, so that we can decide how best to prevent further loss to our community."

He folded his hands, bringing his fingers together. “We do not usually invite strangers into our community, especially English ones whose ways are foreign to us. But John Miller tells us that you are a good man and no threat to the peace of our village. On the strength of his word and the way in which you helped us before, we agreed that you could stay here. Since you have arrived, our village has seen a fight in which one of our brethren was shot, our school has been set on fire, one of our children was kidnapped along with you and left to die, and now it seems that our Robert’s wounds at the hands of an English man were in fact mortal. He was found by children, Mr. MacGyver!” The elder paused for breath, noticed for the first time that he was standing up, and sat down hurriedly. “We are a peaceful people, asking nothing more than to tend our land and raise our families in our own way. I do not believe that you are the cause of our troubles, but trouble seems to have followed you here. Mr. MacGyver – what is going on?”

“With respect, Sir, I think it might be the other way around.” MacGyver laid his hands flat on the table. “I think trouble was already here when I arrived.”
“Explain.” The oldest of the elders fixed MacGyver with a steely glare.

This time, when MacGyver looked at Irene Beiler, she looked up to meet his gaze. She took a deep breath and sat up straight.

“It is my fault.” She gripped the handkerchief in her hand tight, and her knuckled whitened. “Everything is my fault!” Her face crumpled and she hid her face in her hands, sobbing. Elizabeth appeared in the kitchen doorway and, at a nod from John, gently helped Irene to her feet and led her away. The elders watched them leave, and then turned back to MacGyver.

“Robert Beiler rented some land to some... outsiders.” MacGyver waited for the murmur of the elders’ conversation to die down before continuing. “The Beilers knew you wouldn’t approve, but their crops hadn’t produced enough to live on and they were desperate.” MacGyver caught Jacob nodding beside him and nudged him with his foot, warning him not to interfere and get into trouble as well. “The men they rented the field to, used it to grow some... experimental crops.” He looked around the table, reluctant to explain. “Robert changed his mind when he found out the crops they were growing were poisonous, but the men refused to give the land back, and shot him when he tried to insist.”

“Who would grow poisonous crops?” John frowned.

“Someone who wants to use them to kill people.” MacGyver shook his head.

“Pah! English!” The oldest elder hunched down in his seat, glaring at MacGyver.

“Jacob agreed to help me to investigate what was happening and was spotted by one of the men.” MacGyver spoke directly to John, ignoring the elder’s glare. “We were captured, but we escaped just in time to see the fire starting up in the school. We came back to warn you and, when I went up to the school this morning, I found traces of the chemical fertilizer used on the poison corn.” MacGyver took a deep breath, moving his leg to ease the pain in his ankle.

“So, the fire was set by these English men?” Another elder shook his head in disgust at MacGyver’s nod.

“I think they wanted to make the community leave, or maybe be so scared of them that you’d continue renting your land to them to avoid more fires, more deaths, more...” MacGyver broke off, sickened.

“We will not.” John’s hoarse voice was firm. “This is our home and our land. God put us here and we will not be chased away or bullied by these men.”

“They will try again.” MacGyver sighed, shifting his leg again. “You need to defend yourselves. And call the police. Definitely call the police.”

Outside, the rain that had been threatening all day began to fall. Elizabeth came in, lit the oil lamps and left again. In the changed light, the elders looked ancient and strange, relics of another time.

“What would we tell them?” John shook his head. “A wild-sounding story about poison crops and kidnappings? Jacob tells me the dead cow is gone and the grain silo has been emptied. We have no proof that Robert wasn’t shot accidentally by an English hunter. No, the police will not be able to help us here.”

“They will try again!” Fear made MacGyver’s voice loud in the dim room. “You have to do something – they’re not going to go away!”

“We will pray for forgiveness for them.” The oldest elder nodded.

“With respect, Sir, I don’t think praying alone is going to cut it this time.” MacGyver met the elder’s blistering glare calmly. Beside him, Jacob fidgeted, nudging MacGyver’s foot in a warning of his own.

“Mr. MacGyver, you do not understand because you are not one of us. It is not our way to fight back, to resort to violence in the English way. We will pray and we will turn the other cheek, and we will trust that our ways will deliver us from this evil. Alles ist en Ordnung.” The oldest elder lifted his chin, his gaze imperious. “Please leave us now.”

MacGyver opened his mouth, saw John shake his head almost imperceptibly, and closed it again. He got to his feet, collected his crutch and limped out of the room. He hobbled through the kitchen where Elizabeth and Irene Beiler sat, opened the door and went outside, closing it quietly behind him. The rain bounced off the puddles and ran in streams off the roof. MacGyver turned up his collar and limped off across the wet yard, heading for the barn.

*

In a café in a nearby town, Roy picked up his coffee and watched the rain sliding down the windows. The meeting with his associates had gone well. The grain had been moved to a new location, the dead cow buried at a construction site owned by a man who owed him a favor, and he had a plan for removing the community for good.

He watched a truck splash along the flooded road, windshield wipers working double-time. So much water, such a basic commodity, so easy to take for granted, but if you poison a community's water supply, the community dies. Smiling at the efficiency of his plan, Roy finished his coffee and left.

*

"Mac?" Jacob's face appeared around the door, wet hair plastered to his head. He held up the lantern, searching the dim barn.

"Over here." MacGyver put down the wrench he'd been using and wiped his hands on a rag.

"What are you doing?" Jacob set down the lantern and examined the plough MacGyver had been working on.

"Trying to help." MacGyver gestured towards the plough, then ran his hand through his hair. "I don't seem to be having much luck with that lately." He shook his head, looking up at Jacob. "How much trouble are you in over all this?"

"Some." Jacob shrugged. "Doesn't matter. I know you didn't bring trouble with you, I know were helping and I'm glad I could help too, but the elders don't see it that way." He picked up the wrench and tightened a bolt. "Some of them anyway. Grandpa's not mad with me, just sad about Robert." Jacob sniffed and rubbed a hand across his nose, leaving a grimy mark. "What did you do to the plough?"

"Oh, that." MacGyver pointed, moving the lantern to give a better light. "I changed the angle on the blades and moved the horse's harness connections. It'll bite into the soil better and be easier for Thunder to pull." He held up the lantern to see Jacob's face. "What happens now?"

"Well, Grandpa will tell you properly, but..." Jacob looked up, his face sad. "You can stay with us until your leg is better, but you have to promise to stay out of Amish affairs, including anything to do with Roy and the other English." Jacob picked a stalk of hay out of Thunder's manger and chewed it, frowning. "I know I should trust the elders and turn the other cheek, but what if Roy doesn't stop? I don't want anything else to happen, Mac!"

"I know, kid." MacGyver reached out for his crutch and stood, testing his weight on his broken ankle. "Neither do I."

*

Robert Beiler was buried the following day.

MacGyver watched the funeral preparations first from his bedroom and, later, through the open door of the barn. He had been asked politely not to attend and, though no one was rude or unpleasant, hardly anyone in the community would meet his eye or talk to him beyond the minimum. MacGyver worked on the plough and stayed out of the way, the tone of his thoughts mirrored in the lowering sky overhead. As the

community gathered at Irene Beiler's house for the funeral, a thin, cold rain began to fall.

MacGyver sighed and sat back on a bale of straw, rubbing his leg where the damp made it hurt. At the other end of the barn, Thunder watched him, chewing hay in his stall.

"I can't help them, can I?" MacGyver rose and hobbled over to the big horse, stroking his neck. "Roy's going to come back and he's going to hurt the people here and there's not a damn thing I can do about it!" He made a fist, but resisted the temptation to punch the wall. Beside him, Thunder shook his head and tugged another mouthful of hay out of the manger.

"I'm doing no good here." MacGyver shook his head and patted the horse, warm and sleek under his hand. "Maybe I should leave." Thunder blinked at him, his dark eyes kind. MacGyver patted him once more and hobbled back to the plough, fixing the last blade in place. He sighed, feeling tears prick his eyes. He hadn't known Robert Beiler, but the senseless death of one of these peaceful people tore at him. He tidied away his tools and nodded to himself, his decision made. He looked up at Thunder, who was watching him.

"Gonna need your help here, fella." MacGyver got up, taking Thunder's harness from its peg and limping across to the horse.

*

Getting Thunder ready and backing him into the buggy was easier than MacGyver had feared, as Thunder was both obliging and well trained. MacGyver buckled his harness into place, stowed his crutch behind the seat and pulled himself up into the buggy.

"OK, Thunder, let's you and me take a little trip." MacGyver clicked to the horse, which started forwards, plodding out into the wet yard.

The rain had stopped and, once out onto the road, MacGyver urged Thunder into a trot. The rough ride jarred MacGyver's ankle but he didn't slow down, wanting to get out and back before Robert Beiler's funeral finished. He drove the five miles to the nearest town and pulled up outside a public phone booth. Leaving the buggy parked and Thunder eating a nearby bush, he hobbled across to the phone and dialed a number from memory.

"Hello?" Nikki sounded busy and, for a moment, MacGyver considered hanging up. "Hello?"

"Nikki, it's me." MacGyver leaned against the wall of the booth.

"Mac! How are you?" In the background, MacGyver could hear the sounds of the Phoenix office.

“Not so good. Would you be able to come get me?” MacGyver scrubbed a hand through his hair and glanced across to where Thunder waited.

“Well, sure, but I thought you were staying at least another week.” Nikki sounded worried. “Did something happen? Did they find you?”

“Atlas? No.” MacGyver sighed. “No, this is something different.”

“Different, huh?” MacGyver heard Nikki tapping at the computer keyboard and the faint whirr of a disk drive. “Mac, what’s happened? You sound terrible…”

“Yeah. Nikki, I –” MacGyver swallowed, feeling tears prick again. He opened his mouth to continue, but then couldn’t find the right words.

“Mac?” Nikki sounded really concerned. “Mac, what is it? Talk to me.”

“They won’t let me help!” Once MacGyver started to speak, the words came in a rush. “One of the Amish men was killed, and their land is being used to grow weaponized crops, and they tried to kill us, and they won’t go to the police, and dammit, Nikki, *they won’t let me help!*”

“Mac, slow down. You’re not making any sense.” Back in the Phoenix office, Nikki shook her head. As she listened to MacGyver tell the story, her eyebrows rose and then she frowned. When he had finished, she let out a low whistle.

“Boy, you jumped straight out of the pan and into the fire here, didn’t you!” Nikki shook her head. “And the Amish won’t go to the police?”

“No, they’re sure there’s not enough evidence.” MacGyver watched Thunder browse the hedgerow.

“Well, they may be right – all the evidence has gone.” Nikki tapped her pen against her notebook, thinking. “And they won’t let you help at all?”

“No.” MacGyver shook his head. “I have to stay out of Amish business, and maybe they’re right. Modern ways seem to have brought them nothing but trouble lately.”

“You can’t give up.” Nikki’s voice was certain. “You know damn well those guys will be back, so you have to find a way to help them that doesn’t go against their ways.”

“There isn’t one.” MacGyver shifted his weight again, his ankle protesting at being stood on for so long.

“There must be. I’ve never known you beat yet!” Nikki doodled on the notebook, running down ideas in her head. “What did you do last time?”

“Um…” MacGyver scratched his neck, watching Thunder cropping the grass. “When the construction guys came with the bulldozers, we lined up hand in hand and just stood in the way. Peaceful protest, and I reckon they’d have let the bulldozers run

right over them before they'd have given up their home." He sighed. "Maybe if I knew what Roy was going to do next..?"

"Well," Nikki smiled, hearing the bleak note leave MacGyver's voice, "I guess you'll just have to keep your eyes and ears open, and make a plan to deal with him peacefully once you've found out what Roy's next move will be."

"Yeah." MacGyver stood up straight in the phone box. "Yeah, I guess I will!"

Part Four

As MacGyver guided Thunder between the buildings and back into the barn, he was aware of being watched. Robert Beiler's funeral had finished and everyone was getting back to work, but he felt more of an outsider than ever. One of the younger kids waved to him, but was hurried away by her mother.

MacGyver un-tacked Thunder and gave him some hay. He settled himself back on his straw bale and set to work fine tuning his adjustments to the plough. When it grew too dark to see, he tidies away his tools and, taking a deep breath, headed for the farmhouse.

Dinner was quiet, none of the Millers keen to talk after the sadness of the funeral. MacGyver excused himself as soon as was polite and went up to his room. He lit the oil lamp and read by the soft light until he heard the rest of the household go to bed. He was brushing his teeth and preparing to go to bed himself when he heard a quiet knock on his door. Outside on the landing was Jacob, still dressed and shielding the light of a candle with his hand.

"Mac, may I come in?" Jacob whispered.

"Won't you get in trouble?" MacGyver opened the door and Jacob darted in, putting his candle down on a chest and sitting down beside it.

"Not if I don't get caught!" Jacob smiled, but his eyes were sad.

MacGyver hobbled back across the room and sat on the bed, propping his crutch beside him.

"Was it very bad today?" MacGyver watched Jacob shrug, picking at a thread on his trousers. Then the boy nodded.

"Funerals are always sad, but this was worse because he didn't die because he was old or sick, he died because someone killed him!" In the candlelight Jacob's eyes shone, but he blinked back the tears. "The sermon was very long, all about how God doesn't want us to be violent like the rest of the world, and about how our ways are better, more peaceful." He pulled at the thread again and it snapped. "And about how we should forgive Roy for killing Robert. I'm not sure I can do that, no matter how hard I pray..." Jacob glanced up, looking ashamed.

“Yeah, I think I’d find that hard too.” MacGyver sighed. “Give it time, Jacob.” He leaned forwards. “Jacob – I know I’m not exactly the elders’ favorite person at the moment, but I hope you and your family aren’t in trouble along with me?”

“A bit.” Jacob shrugged again. “We’re supposed to discourage you from getting involved with stuff and be really careful about following all the rules while you’re here.” He grinned at MacGyver. “Most of the kids think you’re great, by the way!”

“Good to know!” MacGyver grinned back. “Listen, Jacob – I don’t want you to get in any more trouble, but if Roy comes back I’d like you to tell me, OK? I don’t want you guys to try and face him without me.”

“Agreed.” Jacob stuck out his hand and MacGyver shook it. Jacob turned and picked up his candle. “I’d better get to bed before anyone notices I’m missing. Goodnight, MacGyver.”

“Goodnight, Jacob.” MacGyver watched him go, and then lay back on the bed, lifting up his aching leg and propping it over his other ankle. He smiled in the darkness. Maybe Nikki was right. Maybe he could still help, as long as he was careful about how he went about it...

*

“So I’ll see you there at eight.” Roy drained his coffee cup and set it down, meeting the gaze of each of the men opposite him in turn. One shifted, looking doubtful.

“You sure this’ll work?” The man shook his head. “What if it all just washes away?”

“It ain’t gonna wash away!” Roy shook his head. “You don’t know the first thing about wells, do you?” He stared at the man, who shrugged. “It’ll work, believe me.” Roy stood up, sliding out of the booth and putting on his red coat. “Eight pm. Be there.”

The three men nodded, left some money on the table and departed, getting into their separate trucks.

From behind the corner booth’s high seat back, a head rose, scanned the diner and disappeared back into the booth. There was a whispered conversation, then three teenagers emerged, donning their straw hats. Thanking the waitress, they got back into their buggy and set off at a fast trot in the direction of the village.

*

After helping Elizabeth to peel potatoes and hang out washing, MacGyver had gone back to the barn to tinker with the plough. He felt much more hopeful today, that he might be able to help his friends after all. He kept one eye on the hillsides, visible through the open door, but saw no flash of a red coat or battered pick-up truck up there.

He'd finished with the plough and was brushing Thunder when a shadow fell across the doorway.

"Mr. MacGyver?" A teenager MacGyver didn't recognize slid in through the door, casting a glance backwards as though hoping he hadn't been seen.

"Hi." MacGyver stopped brushing and leaned against Thunder's warm side. The teenager beckoned and MacGyver ducked under the railing, limping across to the other side of the barn. "You're going to get in trouble for being here, aren't you?"

"This is important!" The teenager shook his head. "I'm Samuel, I'm Jacob's friend. He told us what happened, and we know about the elders' decision that you shouldn't get involved, but we think you should know about this."

MacGyver listened as Samuel explained what he and his friends had overheard in the diner.

"Do you know what they were planning to put into the well?" MacGyver shook his head. "It could be pretty much anything. A lot of modern agricultural chemicals are stuff you wouldn't want in your drinking water."

"They didn't say." Samuel frowned, trying to remember. "They said they were going to bring three sacks of it, though, so it wasn't a liquid."

"Hmm." MacGyver rubbed his leg. "Well, I guess now we wait, and keep a good watch on the well. Can you help me to do that?"

"Sure." Samuel nodded and got up, dusting hay off himself. "I'd better go. I have jobs to do." He smiled at MacGyver and walked to the door.

"Hey, Samuel?" A thought struck MacGyver just as Samuel reached the door. "How come you were in the diner anyway? I thought you didn't..."

"Oh, that." Samuel shrugged. "Rumspringa." He smiled as though that explained everything and left the barn, whistling.

"Rumspringa?" MacGyver mouthed, forehead creased in confusion. He shook his head, making a mental note to ask Jacob about it when he saw him. Giving Thunder a pat, he picked up his crutch and limped back to the house.

*

"No." John helped himself to mashed potatoes and shook his head. "Absolutely not." He put the spoon back in the bowl and looked at MacGyver. "MacGyver, I believe you have our best interests at heart, but I will hear no more about plans to capture these men." He held up a hand as MacGyver opened his mouth. "We have lived here peacefully for a very long time. We have defended our land without resorting to violence before, as you know, and, if necessary, we will do so again." He picked up his fork and speared a carrot. "We will not be persuaded to change our ways out of

fear for what someone else may do to us.” He waited until MacGyver nodded before putting the carrot into his mouth.

Beside MacGyver, Jacob glanced sideways and gave a tiny shrug. MacGyver nodded back, then concentrated on his dinner, his mind turning over the problem of defending a people who refused to defend themselves.

*

MacGyver spent the afternoon helping in the Millers’ garden, weeding vegetables and thinking.

“You look better.” Elizabeth came outside to feed leftovers to the chickens.

“I feel better.” MacGyver stood up and dumped the weeds into a bucket. His ankle was hurting much less today and he was sure he was on the mend. He looked across to John, talking with another elder and leaning on a long hay fork. “Elizabeth, I’m worried about what Roy’s going to do. He didn’t strike me as the type to give up easily, so I’m sure we haven’t seen the last of him.” He dusted soil off his hands.

“Will you at least ask William to be ready in case they come this evening?”

“I can’t.” Elizabeth looked away, scraping the last of the food out of her bucket. “You heard what the elders said.”

“I did.” MacGyver nodded. “But Elizabeth, if they poison your well, you’re all in real trouble. If there’s no clean water, you will have to leave unless you can dig another one really, really fast. Assuming that whatever they put in the well doesn’t poison all the ground water!”

“I know.” Elizabeth bit her lip, glancing at her father. “Promise me you won’t do anything violent, MacGyver. Promise me!”

“I promise to do my best to avoid it.” MacGyver tilted his head, catching her eye. “But these men – violence is what they know, maybe all they understand.” He sighed as Elizabeth shook her head. “I’ll do my best, OK?”

“Alright.” Elizabeth took a deep breath and squared her shoulders. “If they come, William and I will help you as much as we can.” She picked up her bucket and hurried indoors.

*

No further mention was made of Roy or the threat he posed that day. John mentioned Robert Beiler in his prayers before the family started their evening meal and MacGyver, not normally a religious man, found himself echoing ‘amen’ at John’s humble request for God to watch over Robert’s family.

MacGyver saw Jacob shooting glances through the window facing the well, and resisted the temptation to do the same.

He helped Elizabeth to clear away and wash up after the meal, then accused himself and headed for the barn. As he crossed the yard, he saw Jacob and two teenagers talking. Jacob turned to him and shook his head, just once. MacGyver nodded in acknowledgement and carried on, leaving the barn door propped open behind him.

He'd been in the barn for an hour or so, fussing the horses and doing small jobs with one eye on his watch, waiting for eight o'clock to arrive, when a small girl padded in.

"Mr. MacGyver?" She took a step closer to him. "I think I saw the bad man. Jacob said I should come tell you." He twisted her bonnet string around her finger and looked up at him, too shy to say more.

"Where did you see him, honey?" MacGyver dropped awkwardly onto one knee to get closer to her height.

"In the woods, out behind Katie's Dad's barn." She pointed in the general direction of the woods on the other side of the village.

"What did he look like?" MacGyver felt adrenaline fizz in his stomach.

"English." The little girl shrugged.

"What was he wearing?" MacGyver reached for his crutch, ready to stand up.

"A red coat and a blue hat!" The little girl mimed a baseball hat with a big peak on the front.

"OK honey, that sounds like him." MacGyver levered himself to his feet. "Was he on his own?"

"No." The bonnet strings swished as the girl shook her head. "He had one, two, three men with him." She counted on her fingers twice to be sure.

"Good girl, well done for spotting him." MacGyver smiled down at the girl and she beamed back up at him. "You run along home now, honey. Go straight there and stay inside, OK?" He watched the little girl nod and scamper away, her bare feet quiet on the earth floor of the barn.

"OK Thunder, I guess this is it!" MacGyver gave the horse a pat in passing, and limped out into the yard.

As he passed between the buildings, MacGyver noticed the teenagers again, behind the school. Then he spotted a trio of smaller boys crouched in some bushes, and Jacob loitering behind a tree. Jacob nodded to him and MacGyver nodded back. He could see the Millers' house from his position in the shadow of a house, and Elizabeth and William visible in the windows.

The village square was empty, the well casting a long shadow across the hard-packed earth. MacGyver found himself thinking back, to rescuing Jacob and Christy from the old well, the tunnel they dug collapsing and the moment of real fear when he'd been

sure he was about to be buried alive. Then, through the rain of dirt and stones, he'd seen William bracing his back against the roof of the tunnel and he'd pushed the children out ahead of him into the light and the air.

A movement caught his eye and MacGyver's attention snapped back to the present. In the deep shadows at the edge of the square, two men eased a sack to the ground and looked around. MacGyver pressed himself against the wall, trying not to be seen.

Two more men emerged from the trees, each carrying a sack, and scuttled across the road to join the first two. There was a brief, whispered conversation that carried in the still air, and then Roy stepped forwards with his sack.

"No!" MacGyver took a step out from the shadows, facing Roy and his gang. "I won't let you harm these people any more. He limped forwards, putting himself between Roy and the well. Behind him, he heard the barn door creak, the rustle of straw and, out of the corner of his eye, he saw Jacob lead Thunder out of the back of the barn, leap onto his bare back and turn the mighty horse onto the road. His hooves thumped dully on the grass verge and MacGyver spoke to cover the sound.

"You're not going to poison the well here. This land is not yours, and you should leave these people alone." MacGyver felt a small hand slide into his and looked down to see three small boys standing next to him. The teenagers joined him, then Elizabeth and Irene Beiler, who nodded to him, looking nervous. They stood in a line, holding hands, and then Samuel pulled his end of the line around and linked hands with Elizabeth, so that they were circling the well.

"So what have we here? A cripple and a handful of barefoot kids." Roy grinned and pushed back his greasy baseball cap to scratch his head. "How are you going to stop me?" Behind him, his cronies laughed.

"Would you really poison children?" MacGyver looked Roy in the eye, seeing greed and scorn there. Behind Roy's crony, in the distance, MacGyver spotted Thunder, galloping along the side of the road towards town, with Jacob clinging to his broad back.

"You have no idea what this land is worth, do you?" Roy shook his head. "We tried to move these people on last year, offered to pay them well, but they wouldn't shift. Then we rented some land from them, but the damn fool changed his mind on us and look how far it got him!"

"Right!" One of Roy's cronies shook his head in disgust, and another spat on the ground.

MacGyver felt Irene Beiler tense beside him and glanced across, seeing her white faced and angry.

"Go away!" Her voice was all the more chilling for being quiet. "Go away from here and never come back, you murderer!"

“Murderer?” Roy shook his head, laughing softly. “What can you prove, exactly? Accidents happen all the time.” He turned away from her and back to MacGyver. “Accidents like the one that’s clearly happened to you, yes? Accidents like THIS!”

He rocked back and swung his fist, punching MacGyver in the mouth. MacGyver pulled his hand free from the child next to him, and tried to pull away from Elizabeth too, but she held on, pleading silently with him not to be violent in return. Beside her, Roy grinned and spread his hands. “Well? Nothing to say?”

“Violence is wrong.” MacGyver squeezed Elizabeth’s fingers and took the child’s hand again. “These people are peaceful, and I will not bring fighting into their community as well as all the violence you’ve brought them recently”. He licked blood from his lip. “This ends. Now.” Behind Roy, William stepped quietly into the square, with a group of Amish adults behind him. They too linked hands, trapping Roy and his three cronies inside a circle. One of them launched a punch at William, but he turned his shoulder and the blow glanced off.

More people came to join the circle, three and four deep in places, linking hands. John Miller ducked under William’s arm and took his place in the centre, right in front of Roy. MacGyver looked around the ring, seeing the other elders there along with the rest. The whole village had joined in, trapping the men in the centre.

The whoop of a police siren made them all jump, and MacGyver saw a squad car turn into the yard. Policemen got out, and the circle parted to let them through, closing up again afterwards. One of them grabbed a sack and opened it, wrinkling his face at the smell of the contents.

“I wouldn’t breathe too much of that if I were you!” MacGyver saw the blue granules spill out and called over to the police. “It’s pesticide – poisonous!” The policeman shut the sack and backed away, calling for back-up on his radio.

“What’s happening here?” The senior officer walked over to MacGyver, looking him up and down.

“These people are crazy!” Roy turned to the policeman. His hands rose. “I came here to see about buying a quilt for my wife and they all ganged up on me!” He shook his head. “Crazy, the lot of them. But I’m glad you’re here now to make them see sense, so I’ll just be leaving.” He took a step towards the edge of the circle, and the villagers closed ranks silently.

“No.” The policemen turned at Irene Beiler’s voice. “No. This is not true. He killed my husband and came here to poison our well with chemicals. He is an evil man.”

There was a murmur of agreement from the crowd. Behind Roy, the policeman who had opened the sack of pesticide got out his handcuffs and stepped quietly to wards him. The senior officer rubbed his chin.

“And where do you fit into this?” He turned back to MacGyver, and then shook his head. “You know what? We’re gonna sort this out at the station.” He nodded to the

other officer, who snapped the handcuffs onto Roy and led him, protesting, to the squad car. He pointed first to Irene, then to MacGyver. "You two as well, please."

A second squad car crunched across the gravel in the yard. Roy's three cronies, subdued by a circle of stern-faced Amish, were collected and handcuffed by the newly arrived officers and led away.

The senior officer turned to walk back to the squad car and was almost run down by a giant, ginger horse, as Thunder came cantering across the yard and skidded to a halt. Jacob slid from his back, apologizing to the policeman in German as well as English. Elizabeth grabbed Thunder's reins, while John grabbed Jacob.

MacGyver, now in the first squad car with Irene riding in the front seat, gave Jacob a thumbs up. The policemen got back into their cars and MacGyver watched the Millers slide out of sight as his car pulled away.

*

"I am so pleased they believed you!" Elizabeth poured coffee for herself and Irene, and tea for MacGyver. "It sounded such a wild story when I thought it through again!"

"It really did!" MacGyver blew on his tea to cool it and took a sip. "Irene was brilliant, she was so calm!" He smiled across at Irene, who smiled back shyly.

"Everyone else has gone to bed, it's very late." Elizabeth cupped her hands around her mug. "Irene, William will take you home in the morning. The children are asleep upstairs, so you can all go back together." She reached out a hand, squeezing Irene's arm gently. "It will be alright, we will all look after you."

Irene nodded her thanks, finished her drink and headed upstairs to bed.

MacGyver leaned back in his chair, stretching his leg out under the table.

"The elders were here most of the afternoon, you know." Elizabeth took a sip of her coffee, looking at MacGyver over the rim of the mug.

"What did they say?" MacGyver tensed, ready for another vote of no-confidence from the village leaders.

"That you're a good man and, even if you're not one of us, you respect our ways and you try to uphold them. They were impressed that you didn't resort to violence, and that you turned the other cheek." She smiled, indicating his bruised face. "Literally, this time!"

"Yeah..." MacGyver touched his split lip. "You'll never know how close I came to hitting that lowlife right back!"

“But you didn’t, and that’s the important part.” Elizabeth got up, rinsed her mug and dried it. “I’m going to bed, MacGyver. I’ll see you in the morning.” She crossed to the door, and then turned back. “Thank you.”

“Any time.” MacGyver raised the mug in salute and watched Elizabeth smile, then turn away. Only when he heard her feet on the stairs did he allow weariness to show on his face.

He stayed in the kitchen for another half hour, watching the fire die down and thinking about how strong and dedicated the Amish had to be, to stick to beliefs so much at odds with the way the rest of the modern world worked. Men like Roy were everywhere, and MacGyver was glad he’d been able to help to stop this man from visiting more harm on the community than he already had. He made a silent toast to Robert Beiler with the last of the tea, rubbed a hand across his tired eyes and limped off to bed.

*

“So when will you be visiting us again?” Jacob guided his borrowed brown mare around a hole in the road and the buggy swayed.

“As soon as I can,” MacGyver grabbed his crutch as it rolled with the buggy’s motion, “But I have to see to some things first.”

“Work things? Or stopping men like Roy?” Jacob glanced at MacGyver, and then returned his attention to the road.

“Bit of both.” MacGyver frowned, wondering how much to explain to Jacob. “I’ve stumbled across a group of people at least as bad as Roy, as a result of doing my work. They’re the reason this happened –” He tapped his plastered leg, “- but even so, I still have to stop them.”

“Be careful, MacGyver.” Jacob’s voice was worried. “I would hate for anything bad to happen to you. Anything else bad, I mean!”

“I’ll be careful.” MacGyver laughed at Jacob’s incredulous expression. “More careful than usual, OK?” He leaned out of the buggy to wave, seeing Nikki sitting on the hood of her car at the side of the road ahead.

“Hey, you look much better!” Nikki slid off the hood and stood in front of the buggy, stroking the horse’s nose.

“I feel better.” MacGyver smiled as Nikki reached out a hand to help him down from the high seat. “Thanks.” He pulled his bag out from under the seat and limped across to the car, throwing the bag into the trunk and then returning to his friends.

“Jacob here tells me that you’ve been keeping busy,” Nikki’s eyes sparkled and she exchanged a wink with Jacob, who grinned. “I’ll expect to hear all about it on the way back!” She stroked the horse again. “But I have to say – I was expecting a horse

called Thunder to be bigger than this!” She frowned as MacGyver and Jacob both burst out laughing. “What did I say?”

“This isn’t Thunder! This is Maisie, she belongs to Mrs. Beiler.” Jacob shook his head, still laughing. “Thunder’s got another job today – pulling MacGyver’s new plough.” He shaded his eyes, gazing into the distance, and then pointed. Nikki followed his finger, squinting against the sun and seeing a massive, ginger horse leaning into his harness and pulling a plough easily across a field. The plough turned up rich, brown earth, ploughing in the stubble of what had until recently been a field of deadly corn. Behind him, the men following looked tiny.

“Oh, I got him. Nikki whistled. “Wow, he really is big, isn’t he?”

“He sure is.” MacGyver turned to Jacob. “Jacob, thank you for everything. I hope I’ll be back to visit soon, but you keep everyone safe until I do, OK?”

“OK.” Jacob reached down a hand and MacGyver shook it. “You be careful too, Mac.”

“Always.” MacGyver and Nikki got into the car, and Jacob watched them leave, waving until they were out of sight.

He watched for a moment longer, then sighed. He spoke quietly to Maisie, turned the buggy around and headed for home.