

## **After the Wall**

**By Rocket**

**Episode 9.6**

**Part One**

*This story is the next instalment in a series. If you haven't read 'War Stories' and 'Supply and Demand', I'd recommend reading those first and then coming back. Up to you ??*

**Rocket**

"Come in, Mac," Pete smiled and beckoned, waiting until he heard MacGyver sit down.

"How did..." MacGyver shook his head, "Never mind, I'm sure you've got spider-sense, Pete." He turned to the man sitting in the other chair. "Hi, name's MacGyver."

"Gunther Schmidt." The old man reached out and shook MacGyver's hand, his grip firm. He sat back, watching Pete.

"Gunther, MacGyver is going to accompany you back to Berlin tomorrow." Pete glanced in MacGyver's direction, smiling again. "He's been there before, though not for a while."

"More recently than I, I am sure." Gunther inclined his head as MacGyver nodded.

"I think you'll find it very different now. When were you last there?" MacGyver watched Gunther look down, his expression angry.

"A long time ago." The anger remained in Gunther's eyes when he looked up again, but his voice was calm. "With your permission, Mr. Thornton, I will go and collect my things." He stood, stiff from sitting, and walked to the door. Pete tracked his footsteps, frowning.

"That man is NOT enjoying our California sunshine!" MacGyver watched him go. He turned back to Pete and raised his eyebrows. "What's eating him?"

"He's a retired asset and he wants to go home." Pete shook his head. "He's been here for a lot of years and he's decided he wants to go back to Germany. Now that he's been granted permission to go, it can't happen fast enough for him." He felt for a folder on his desk, ran his finger across the braille label and passed it across to MacGyver. "Here's his file - he was quite a big shot in his time, so don't underestimate him!"

"Thanks." MacGyver took the file and flipped through it. "Berlin, pretty well up in the... Oh." He shifted in his chair and turned the page. "Aha. OK." He looked at Pete over the top of the papers. "Now I understand. Is he really sure he wants to go home? I'm not sure he's going to like the welcome he gets."

"I know." Pete shrugged, holding up his hands. "I've been over this with him, but he insists. And, whatever he's done in the past, he's not actually a prisoner here. As a former asset he's had to get approval from the right people, but-" Pete sighed. "They've decided he can go."

"And that's where we come in. OK." MacGyver put the file back on Pete's desk and sat back in his chair, one ankle hooked over the opposite knee. He drummed his fingers on the side of his sneaker. "How much of a welcoming committee do you expect him to get?"

"Hopefully none." Pete rubbed his eyes, looking tired. "He's been out of the game a long time and the official opinion is that anyone interested in him has probably long since retired too."

"Hope you're right..." MacGyver stood up and glanced through the open door to where Gunther was sitting in Helen's office, his back very straight. "I'll get him buttoned up and I'll see you when I get back, OK?"

"Sure." Pete smiled up at MacGyver, but his voice was worried. "Take care, Mac."

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The hotel was nice enough. Anonymous, unobtrusive and

bland, but clean and quiet. MacGyver glanced at Gunther waiting behind him, and decided the hotel matched him very well. MacGyver checked himself and Gunther in, carried their luggage up to their connecting rooms and checked the rooms before allowing Gunther to come in. The older man thanked him, went through the connecting door and MacGyver heard water running in the small bathroom. He pulled the curtains, shutting out the lights of LAX airport and sat down on the couch.

For someone leaving the country for good, Gunther had very little luggage. One small suitcase held everything he wanted to take to his new life, and MacGyver found this sad. As much as he liked travelling light and working with whatever he found along the way, he hoped that if he ever came to move from Los Angeles, his life would amount to more than one small suitcase. He glanced across at the connecting door. Maybe Gunther saw America purely as his place of work, and that leaving forever was no different from leaving the office for the day. MacGyver shrugged, unable to guess.

He ordered food from room service, guessing what Gunther might like, and switched on the television, flipping the channels until he found a John Wayne classic. He considered going through the Western Precision Electricals files that Nikki had given him on his way out, then decided to read them on the plane in the morning.

The water shut off and then Gunther came through the connecting door, his sparse hair damp and combed back. He lifted the dish covers on the room service trolley, chose a sandwich and poured himself some coffee. He sat down opposite MacGyver and watched the western for a minute. He shook his head at the television and took a bite of his sandwich.

"You're not a John Wayne fan?" MacGyver stretched and picked up a sandwich for himself. Gunther shook his head, chewed and swallowed.

"I have seen enough violence to last a lifetime, Mr. MacGyver." He sipped his coffee, frowning at the taste.

"Uh huh." MacGyver waved his sandwich in the direction of the television. "Makes a good story, though." They watched John Wayne galloping across the desert, black-hatted bandits in pursuit. Gunther sipped his coffee again, then set it aside.

"Mr. Thornton told me you have visited Berlin recently, Mr. MacGyver." Gunther watched MacGyver finish his sandwich and make a rocking gesture with his hand.

"Not that recently. About five years ago, couple of years after the wall came down." MacGyver picked up a glass of fruit juice and drank.

"And what was it like?" Gunther's eyes slid back to the television.

"Uh... It was kind of a mess, you want the truth. I was there chasing a missing persons case, a favour for a friend, and I would up looking through Stasi HQ for records and travelling round East Berlin a lot." MacGyver took another sip of juice, watching Gunther over the rim of his glass. "It was a weird time to be there - kind of an odd mix of jubilation and destruction, people laughing as they tore up anything from before the wall came down." He shook his head at the memory.

"And did you find the person you were looking for?" Gunther's tone was even, no emotion showing at MacGyver's description of his home city.

"Yes and no." MacGyver ran a hand through his hair and reached for another sandwich.

"Ah." Gunther nodded but didn't take his eyes off the screen. "Not everything was as it seemed, yes?"

"Something like that." MacGyver blinked, seeing Maria Romberg drinking root beer in the airport, stacking toys and chattering about her wonderful new life in America, giving him innocent eyes while the body of a Stasi agent lay crumpled at the bottom of the stairs.

"It was ever the case in Germany." Gunther nodded again, watching John Wayne sneak around the back of a Wild West saloon with his gun held high. "Secrets within secrets."

"Well, you'd know." MacGyver finished his sandwich and stood, brushing crumbs off his jeans. Gunther turned to face him, a flash of anger in his eyes. MacGyver met his gaze calmly and, after a long moment, Gunther nodded.

"Mr. Thornton gave you my file. Of course." He turned back to the television. John Wayne burst into the saloon, ready to shoot the baddies, but the saloon was empty.

"He sure did, Gunther. You got up to some pretty hair-raising stuff back there." MacGyver hooked his thumbs in his jeans pockets, unconsciously mirroring the unnamed bandit on the screen. "Are you sure you want to go back? The welcoming committee might not be all that welcoming, y'know!"

"It is my home." In the light from the television, Gunther's face was blue. He looked as though his thoughts were far away. He glanced at MacGyver, opened his mouth to speak and then shook his head, turning away again. "Besides, most of those who would wish me harm are dead."

"You sure?" MacGyver shook his head, convinced that Gunther had been about to say something else. "Man, I hope you're right!" The film ended and white credits rolled up the black screen.

In the changed light, Gunther's face was all shadows and hard angles, his eyes dark. MacGyver could see the ghost of the man Gunther had been, and he fought the impulse to take a step back when Gunther turned to face him.

"I am sure."

\* \* \* \*

In the dark, MacGyver stared at the hotel room ceiling and listened to aeroplanes taking off from LAX. He had read Gunther's file and, at the time, had found it difficult to reconcile the old man in his slightly-too-big suit with the asset who had shot his way out of East Berlin. Gunther had also poisoned a number of British and American agents and delivered several more into the hands of the Stasi before having a change of heart, deciding the government there was too corrupt to tolerate, and making his exit through a tunnel from an East Berlin basement to a West Berlin sewer.

MacGyver turned over in bed, punched his pillow to reshape it and shut his eyes. Gunther had allowed himself to be captured when the ship he'd stowed away on had arrived in New York, and had cut a deal with the American government on the understanding that he would tell everything he knew about the dealings of the Russian government in East Germany. His knowledge had bought him a new life in America and he'd been passed around a number of shady government departments before being settled in California.

MacGyver shivered and pulled the quilt up around his shoulders. Some of what Gunther had known had been chilling. Some of what he'd done had been worse. The list the DXS had compiled of who might not be pleased to see Gunther return had not made good bedtime reading. A large number of the names on the list had 'deceased' typed next to them, but enough were still alive that MacGyver was worried. He'd encountered enough trouble during and after his last trip to Berlin to know that ex-Stasi agents were still present and watchful, and he doubted that their departure from LA had gone unnoticed.

He turned over again and sighed, watching the aeroplane lights slide across the ceiling. In the bathroom, a glass tinkled against the tap as the aeroplane's engines made everything in the room vibrate.

Maybe Pete was right. Maybe no one cared any more about a washed-up, long retired Stasi hitman.

By the time MacGyver drifted off to sleep, the sun was rising in the east.

## **Part Two**

The flight to Berlin was long, with turbulence over the mountains and again as they crossed the edge of the Atlantic and flew over Europe. Rain splattered against the thick windows and clouds scudded past the tips of the wings.

MacGyver shifted, reflecting that aeroplanes were designed only with short people in mind and trying to stretch his cramped legs. Beside him, Gunther snored. MacGyver opened the file Nikki had thrust into his hands on his way out of the Phoenix building and started to read.

Western Precision Electricals, Nikki had discovered, made a wide variety of electrical components and specialised machine parts. Most of them were sold to the military, but some went into aeroplanes or agricultural machinery and some into medical equipment. As far as Nikki could tell, the company was above board and hadn't been involved in any scandals. They had experienced problems with theft, according to the police reports she'd accessed, including the recent loss of a large number of

gas delivery systems and components used in detonators. Their investigation was ongoing.

The note of the big engines changed and Gunther stirred, opening his eyes and sitting up in his seat. He fastened his seatbelt at MacGyver's insistence and watched Germany slide past the windows far below. He ignored the stewardess leaning in to fold up his tray table, smiling at MacGyver as he thanked her. He ignored MacGyver telling him how long it would be before they arrived, and watched Berlin tilt and spin as the plane banked, spiralling down towards the airport. He took a deep breath as they touched down, engines roaring as they slowed the plane, watching the sunlight glint in the puddles on the wet runway.

Gunther felt MacGyver touch his arm and looked round to see the American was standing in the narrow gangway, signalling him to get up. He rose and walked to the exit as though in a dream, pausing at the steps to take another deep breath. Not the air he had breathed so long ago, this had the scent of freedom to it.

MacGyver stood in the low doorway with his head cocked to the side, waiting for Gunther to walk down the steps. Behind him, passengers crowded forwards and someone said something in German. MacGyver didn't understand the words, but the impatience in the tone was clear.

"You OK, Gunther?" MacGyver watched Gunther jump as he spoke, lost in his first view of his homeland. Gunther nodded and walked down the steps, without holding onto the handrail. MacGyver followed him down, the sunlight making him squint.

To MacGyver, Berlin Schonefeld Airport looked a bit of a dump. Graffitied slogans about freedom and progress marked its grey walls and the inside of the building had a neglected look, with scuffed floors and paintwork. It was cold and smelled of disinfectant, and they waited a long time for their luggage to arrive on the squeaky carousel.

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They climbed aboard the train to Berlin and Gunther stared out of the window, answering MacGyver's attempts to make conversation with only a nod or shake of his head. MacGyver gave up and studied his fellow passengers and the passing scenery.

Former East Germany was starting to lose the greyness it had had on his last visit, he thought. The people on the train talked to each other instead of sitting in silence, and wore brighter colours. The sunshine warmed the blank-faced, grey buildings and melted the snow in the grassed areas and on the cars parked in the communist-designed housing developments. There were more cars than last time, and MacGyver smiled and waved back as a small child waiting at a crossing waved to him.

MacGyver looked around the station as he and Gunther stepped off the train, scanning the faces of the travellers for anything suspicious - someone staring at them for a heartbeat too long, following them through the station or hurrying to make a phone call from one of the new-looking booths on the street outside. Gunther regarded him with amusement.

"You are a little too obvious, Mr. MacGyver. You look around and around as though you expect trouble to leap out at you from every doorway!" Gunther put his free hand in his pocket and raised his face to the sunshine.

"Yeah, well..." MacGyver hitched up his rucksack and put his own hands in his jacket pockets. "Trouble's been known to do just that, so..." he shrugged and caught hold of his rucksack as it threatened to slide off his shoulder.

"Relax." Gunther looked up at him. "If the black hats were waiting for us, we would already be dead." He smiled and turned, stepping out into the street.

"That makes me feel so much better!" MacGyver looked around again and then hurried to catch up with Gunther.

\* \* \* \*

The man watched the tall American and the old traitor turn the corner and disappear. Feeling in his pocket, he took out a mobile phone and dialled. He spoke rapid, Dresden-accented German into the phone, listened to the reply, nodded and hung up. Hurrying to the corner of the street, he glanced round just in time to see the American with the long hair turn, looking at everyone in the street. The man kept walking, his expression neutral. The American's gaze passed over him and he carried on, following them through the bright morning.

\* \* \* \*

MacGyver swung into the bus seat next to Gunther and stowed his bag between his knees. The old bus creaked on its springs as passengers took their seats. A man in a blue overcoat pushed his way past everyone to sit in the back seat and MacGyver leaned towards Gunther to make room for him to pass. He watched the city roll past, noticing damage to some of the old buildings that had been badly patched and repaired. Gunther glanced at him, following his gaze.

"After the war, there was no money to repair the damage." His mouth twisted and his voice was bitter. "The Soviets, they took everything worth taking and then they left. We did our best, but..." he shrugged, looking at a cracked building with boarded up windows.

They rode past empty areas of scattered rubble, housing projects, shops with odd selections of goods in the windows and a school that reminded MacGyver of Maria's cover identity in Leipzig. They got off the bus and Gunther led the way through a maze of streets and out onto a main road.

"Checkpoint Charlie?" MacGyver looked at the small, shabby building in the middle of the busy road.

"Very good." Gunther frowned at the building, no larger than a tollbooth, then turned away. "The gateway to freedom, and the people drive and walk around it as though it was not there." He shook his head, looking furious. He took a deep breath, controlling his anger. When he looked up at MacGyver again, his eyes were calm. "Shall we go and get a cup of coffee? You look cold, Mr. MacGyver." Without waiting for an answer, Gunther moved away along the pavement.

MacGyver followed, hurrying to keep up. For an old man, Gunther moved fast and light. A movement made him turn, and he saw a man in a blue overcoat disappear into the alley between two buildings. He watched for a moment longer but the man didn't come out. He shrugged and turned to catch up with Gunther. Probably half the population of Berlin had a blue overcoat, he thought.

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The man counted to five, then risked a glance out of the alley mouth. The American, a head taller than the people around him, was easy to track. He followed the down the street, pausing at each corner to make sure he hadn't been seen. The American kept glancing back and the man

frowned. Clearly he suspected that he was being followed. He watched them order coffee and cake, then slid his phone out of his pocket and made another call. Hanging up again, he went into a rival café across the street, chose a table in the window and sat down to wait.

\* \* \* \*

So what made you decide to leave here?" MacGyver wrapped his hands around his mug, watching the steam curl up into the air. Berlin was much colder than LA and the warmth seeping through his mug was welcome. Gunther stirred sugar into his coffee, taking a long time before answering.

"You understand that I had been a loyal servant of my country, yes?" he waited for MacGyver to nod before continuing. "I love Germany, even if those in power have made some... ill-advised decisions in the past. I worked hard to make sure the interests of Germany were well protected even as the Communist regime stripped my country, and then as it began to crumble." His voice was calm, attracting no interest from the other people in the café. He watched MacGyver struggle to avoid commenting and waited for him to subside. "I see you have read the whole of my file, that you are aware of my... employment history." He nodded. "Alright." He laid down the spoon, lining it up exactly with the edge of the table. "So when I tell you that I became aware of a project that even I could not reconcile, you understand the depths of depravity to which I must be referring, yes?" he clasped his hands on the table and leaned forward. "Mr. MacGyver, I am going to tell you a story..."

\* \* \* \*

A middle sized, unremarkable woman carrying a fishing bag pushed open the door to the café opposite. She went to the counter and spoke to the owner, who paled and backed away. The woman spoke again, then nodded to the man in the blue overcoat sitting at the window table. He got up and bolted the door, turning the hanging sign to read 'closed'. The woman spoke to him, nodded and went up the back stairs, taking the fishing bag with her.

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You understand how many enemies I made when I left Berlin?" Gunther raised his coffee mug, but the coffee had cooled. He put the mug down again and looked at

MacGyver. Nodding at his disapproving frown. "I see that you do."

"I read your file, Gunther, I know all this." MacGyver kept his voice even, attracting no attention. "What I don't understand is what you could possibly have been involved in that was too much even for you!"

"You don't like me very much, Mr. MacGyver." Gunther shook his head. "You think I am a cruel man, that I am capable of any atrocity."

"Pretty much. You want to get to the point?" MacGyver glanced through the window, seeing nothing suspicious.

\* \* \* \*

The woman took a long, bolt action rifle out of her bag. She fitted a cylinder on top of the barrel and set the gun on a small stand in the upstairs window. Kneeling down, she looked through the scope, the crosshairs first on the scruffy American in the café, then on his companion. She adjusted the focus, seeing Gunther sharp and clear with the crosshairs centred just above his right ear. She concentrated, reading his lips through the powerful scope.

The woman took a long rifle out of her bag. She fitted a cylinder on top of the barrel and set the gun on a small stand in the upstairs window. Kneeling down, she looked through the scope, the crosshairs first on the scruffy American in the café, then on his companion. She adjusted the focus, seeing Gunther sharp and clear with the crosshairs centred just above his right ear. She concentrated, reading his lips through the powerful scope.

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"Have you heard of something called 'Project Atlas'?" Gunther lowered his voice, staring intently at MacGyver.

"No." MacGyver sat back, not wanting to be any closer to Gunther than he had to.

"It was a terrible thing. It was begun in 1942, an investigation into ways in which groups of undesirables could be neutralised without the inconvenience of... housing them first." Gunther watched MacGyver flush with anger, watched his hands ball into fists, watched him pack his anger away a piece at a time until he could control his voice.

"You mean because concentration camps were just too much trouble?" There was a dangerous gleam in his eyes and for a long moment Gunther wondered whether MacGyver intended on killing him.

"Just so." Gunther decided that MacGyver probably wasn't a killer after all, and relaxed a fraction. "The research carried on after the war ended, but was eventually shelved some time in the 1960s." He shrugged. "I had distanced myself from it and moved on to other projects by then, but the concepts involved disturbed me and I kept up to date with progress as far as I was able."

\* \* \* \*

In the café opposite, the woman blinked and refocussed, watching Gunther speak. She knew who he was, but hadn't known of his involvement in Project Atlas. Interesting..

\* \* \* \*

"I have done things I am ashamed of, yes." Gunther nodded, reading MacGyver's expression. "But the more I found out about Atlas, the more I became convinced that mass extermination was wrong." He sighed, turning his coffee mug in his hands. "I lived amongst the people I had helped to exterminate, you see."

"Right..." MacGyver rolled his eyes. "Gunther, you did some terrible, terrible things and nothing you say, no deed you can do, can redeem that." He stood, his chair scraping across the tiled floor. "I'm glad you're sorry for what you've done, but if you're hoping for forgiveness here, you're plum out of luck!" He dug in his pocket and dropped some money on the table. Gunther shot out a hand and grabbed his wrist. MacGyver frowned down at Gunther, who stared back intently.

"Mr. MacGyver, I decided to return to Germany when I found out that someone is planning to start up Project Atlas in America. I escaped my past once, and now it has followed me across the ocean. I did not choose this café by chance. I am here because my colleague here in Berlin has told me the original leader of Project Atlas will also be here shortly, and then I will kill him. I will not allow his knowledge to be used in America! I will not be forced to use my own knowledge in that way again!" Gunther's fingers tightened on MacGyver's wrist, his knuckles white and his grip surprisingly strong. "I cannot allow this, and if I die in the act of stopping it, then perhaps it will make up in some small way for all

the evil that I have done. Mr. MacGyver, I thank you for accompanying me back to Berlin, but now you must leave." Gunther released MacGyver's arm, sitting up very straight.

\* \* \* \*

The woman's finger tightened on the trigger and she exhaled. A straightforward shot, one she had made a hundred times before. Auf wiederseh'n, Verräter, auf wiederseh'n...

\* \* \* \*

MacGyver stood up straight, frowning down at Gunther.

"Dammit Gunther, what is this?! I can't just let you—" MacGyver gasped and threw himself to the floor as the café window exploded into a cloud of shards. A flat crack echoed across the street as Gunther slumped to the floor beside him. MacGyver looked sideways at him, seeing the sharp eyes open and lifeless. A single drop of blood trailed down Gunther's forehead to join the spreading pool beneath the old man's head.

MacGyver dived behind the counter and hid, his heartbeat loud in his ears. Around him he could hear the people from the café screaming and fleeing. Behind him, a door banged and the footsteps faded. MacGyver glanced up, working out the angle of the shot from the break in the window, Gunther's position on the floor and the bullet buried in the floorboard near the counter base. He picked up a spoon and poked it up above the counter edge, but no second shot followed.

"Only one target..." MacGyver looked at Gunther, lying so still. "Not me..." A drop of hot water landed on his head, making him jump. MacGyver looked up and the coffee machine on the counter dripped on him again. MacGyver glanced at the front of the café, then reached up and spun every knob on the coffee machine. Steam hissed out of the pipes, filling the café with a warm fog. "Can't be too careful..." MacGyver waited for the steam to thicken, then ran out from behind the counter and dived through the back door. A pistol shot splintered the doorframe as he crashed onto a pile of rubbish bags. Scrambling up, he ducked through the door and into the alley behind the café.

Behind him, the café door banged open and the man in the blue overcoat raced through the café and emerged into the alley, a pistol in his hand. He fired a shot and MacGyver

ducked left into another alley, skidding around the corner to hide behind a dumpster. He crouched down and pulled a cardboard box into the gap between the dumpster and the wall. He heard footsteps turn into the alley and saw a flash of blue coat through a tear in the cardboard. The footsteps came closer and MacGyver tensed, laying his hands flat against the side of the dumpster.

The man took another step, gun raised, and MacGyver sprang forwards, pushing the dumpster hard. Nearly empty, the dumpster rocketed across the alley and hit the man with a resounding clang! The man swore and tried to push the dumpster back, but the momentum carried him into the opposite wall. The back of his head hit the bricks, his eyes rolled up and he slumped to the ground. The gun tumbled out of his hand and landed in a puddle.

MacGyver heaved a sigh of relief and scooped up the gun. Emptying out the bullets, he took the gun apart and threw the pieces into three different dumpsters. He frowned down at the unconscious man. Had he been the one who shot Gunther? It seemed unlikely with the small pistol. If there was a second shooter, they'd probably got a good look at him talking with Gunther...

He reached down and pulled off the unconscious man's coat, bundling it on over his jacket. He fished in his jacket pockets and pulled out a hair tie and a pair of glasses. He put them on and straightened up, pulling the overcoat straight. He grinned at his changed reflection in a dusty window.

"Berlin, meet Dexter Fillmore!"

Hunching over to make himself seem shorter, MacGyver joined the crowd getting off a bus. His priority now was to escape from Berlin alive and get back to the States to tell Pete what had happened. But to do that, he had to get the bus and the train back to the airport without getting shot on the way. He burrowed deeper into the overcoat and tried to will himself invisible.

\* \* \* \*

Upstairs in the café opposite, the sniper packed her rifle away. Her orders were to kill the traitor but hadn't covered his companion. Mission accomplished, she zipped up the bag, walked down the stairs and disappeared into the crowd outside.

\* \* \* \*

In the alley behind, the man stirred and groaned. He sat up, holding his head in his hands, then shaking it to clear his vision. Swearing, he got to his feet and lurched back into the café. The cold wind blowing through the broken glass chilled him, and he swore again. The verdammt American had even stolen his coat! He crossed to the door, fanning at the steam still billowing out of the coffee machine. A breeze blew the steam away and, just for a moment, he spotted the American hurrying along. The man smiled. The American's attempt at disguise was good, but trying to hide from a man when you are wearing his coat would never work...

\* \* \* \*

MacGyver hurried along the busy street, aware that the second shooter could be anywhere. With no way of recognising them, he figured his best chance at survival was to flee as fast and as far as he could.

He turned off the main street, heading back to the bus stop, and was almost run down by an ancient and overloaded motorbike. Spinning out of the way, he stepped back onto the pavement and locked eyes with overcoat-man staring at him. The man's eyes narrowed and he quickened his pace, reaching a hand into his trouser pocket...

#### **Part Four**

The assassin drew a knife from his pocket and advanced. MacGyver's eyes widened behind his glasses and he looked around as he backed away, reaching down to lift a dustbin lid off its bin.

"I'm sure this isn't necessary!" MacGyver dodged as the man stabbed at him with the knife. "Whatever your problem with Gunther was -" another stab made him dance sideways, "- it has nothing to do with me!" He held up the bin lid as an improvised shield and the knife screeched across it. The assassin swore in German and spat at him over the bin lid.

MacGyver pushed the bin lid with all his strength, hoping to rush the man backwards as he had before, but the assassin slipped past his guard and kicked him behind the knee. MacGyver fell to his knees with a yell, and rolled just in time to catch the knife on the bin lid as the man slashed at his neck. MacGyver kicked out, knocking the assassin over backwards, but the man sprang straight up and leapt onto him. His knife caught in the folds of

MacGyver's overcoat and the assassin tugged at it, breathing hard.

MacGyver twisted his hips to dislodge him and smacked the man's head with the bin lid, but the assassin just shook his head and lunged for MacGyver again with blood running down his face. MacGyver lost his grip on the bin lid and it rolled away, landing beside some sacks of coal propped against the wall.

The assassin grabbed him by the hair and poked his thumb at MacGyver's eye, only to come up against the lens of his glasses. The edge of the frames cut into MacGyver's nose but the assassin lost concentration for a moment and MacGyver rolled them over, kneeling on the assassin's chest. He looked around for a weapon but saw nothing he could use.

The assassin slashed at his face and MacGyver grabbed the hand holding the knife, banging it against the edge of a hatch in the street. One door of the hatch had been left open and the knife flew out of the assassin's hand and bounced off the open door, clattering down into the darkness of the coal chute below.

The assassin bucked underneath MacGyver's weight, driving a knee into his ribs. MacGyver coughed, winded, and grabbed the assassin by the back of his collar, dragging him to the hatch and stuffing him in head first. For a moment he braced his arms and legs inside the chute, but MacGyver upended a bag of coal over him and then slammed the hatch shut, dragging another sack on top to hold it shut.

MacGyver stood up, looking down at the coal chute and breathing hard. Furious German echoed up out of the chute and MacGyver shook his head, glad for once that he didn't understand. Turning up his collar, he hurried away.

\* \* \* \*

He caught the bus and the train without incident, and ignored the stares of his fellow passengers until he caught sight of his reflection in the train window. He hurriedly combed his hair with his fingers and scrubbed at the blood on his neck with spit and a handkerchief he found in the pocket of the overcoat. As he pulled the handkerchief out, a hard-edged object came out too, falling to the floor of the train. MacGyver reached down, picking up a mobile phone. He pressed a button and the screen lit up. The call history showed the assassin had

made a call shortly before Gunther had been shot. MacGyver stowed the phone in his jacket, and zipped the pocket shut. Willis could take a look at it when he got back.

\* \* \* \*

Sitting back in the aeroplane seat, MacGyver breathed a sigh of relief and allowed himself to relax. The scrape on his neck stung, his ribs ached and his hand was sore where he'd picked out the splinters of broken glass. He took off his glasses to wipe a smudge off one lens, but then frowned, holding the glasses up to the overhead light. What had looked like a smudge up close was actually the assassin's thumbprint. MacGyver folded the glasses and stowed them in an airsickness bag, placing the bag in the inside pocket of his jacket. He pulled the band from his hair, stuffed the overcoat under the seat and, without meaning to, drifted off to sleep.

\* \* \* \*

The following day, MacGyver typed the last of his report and sent it to Pete. He leaned back in his chair, stretching his back and rubbing the bruises on his ribs. He'd given the glasses and phone to Willis, who'd been amused at MacGyver's unorthodox fingerprint collection method, and promised to find out all he could. He was considering going out for a sandwich when Seeley came into his office.

"Hey Mac, welcome home!" Seeley took a good look at MacGyver, at the cut on his nose and the knife-mark on his neck.

"Don't say anything!" MacGyver frowned as Seeley grinned and shook his head in mock sorrow.

"Get some training in, man - that's embarrassing!" Seeley chuckled.

"Eh, I've had worse playing hockey." MacGyver shrugged.

"Your Vietnam guy, Hawkins -" Seeley sat down and handed MacGyver a file. "He turned up dead this morning. Official story is a disagreement between prisoners that got out of hand, but..." Seeley tailed off, shaking his head. "I dunno. The way the report reads, I don't like it."

"Damn," MacGyver picked up the file, flipping to the warden's report. "Hawkins is - was - a nasty piece of work, but even so... Oh. Yuck." He read the rest of the report. "No, even he didn't deserve that." He closed the file and put it back on the desk. "You're right, there's no way that was just a fight." He shook his head.

"No way." Seeley drummed his fingers on the file. "Talking of dead guys, any idea who did Gunther?"

"Not so far, but Willis is on it." MacGyver leaned forwards, tapping at his keyboard. "Although..." The computer whirred and clicked. "He was telling me about something called 'Project Atlas' when it happened. Maybe the sniper heard or saw what he was saying and shot him because of it. I dunno."

"Maybe." Seeley moved his chair to MacGyver's side of the desk and waited for the computer to finish searching for the information. Or maybe they just shoot returning traitors on general principles. OK, here we go:" They leaned forwards, reading the information on the screen.

Project Atlas had investigated the possibility of spreading chemical weapons and airborne diseases onto target populations by air, using small planes to deliver the payload in spray form. At the time, materials limitations had made delivery of chemicals too difficult, and biological weapons too hard to contain, and the idea had been shelved.

"Gunther reckoned someone here was picking up where Atlas left off." MacGyver shrugged. "He pretty much told me he still had a network of friends in low places, so I guess he could have been right."

"Maybe." Seeley looked doubtful. "Mac, this is a nasty idea and all, but it's not exactly breaking news. In the 1940s, bio-weapons were pure science fiction, but now? Every tinpot government on the planet's got a stash of them in the basement."

"True." MacGyver sat back. "Terrible, but true. Gunther was sure enough to go back to Germany intending to kill the original project leader over it though, and now Hawkins - who got caught stealing weapons delivery components - gets killed. Maybe there's something in it after all."

"Got'em!" Willis stuck his head round the door and waved a sheet of paper. "The last call he made was to the

sniper, and the one before that was to someone we can't trace. His boss, most likely. Your sniper is Olga Schneider - an ex-Stasi agent now working as a gun for hire - and your knife-man is Klaus Muller. He's ex-Stasi too, but he hasn't hit the headlines recently."

"I wonder who hired the guns this time?" Seeley frowned.

"No way to tell." Willis shrugged. "Note on Olga's file says she's only for hire if she agrees with you that the target deserves killing, so I guess Gunther was into something she hates."

"Or knew about something she'd been told must stay hidden." MacGyver tapped his pen on the table, thinking. He looked from Seeley to Willis and back again. "I don't like this."

"What's to like?" Seeley folded his arms. "Is Muller dead now?" He caught MacGyver's indignant look and nodded. "Of course he's not dead. What was I thinking..." He studied the computer screen. "Let's hope they don't come after you again. After all, they know you know about Project Atlas now."

"That sounds bad." Willis looked over his shoulder as though he expected to see an assassin creeping up the corridor towards him.

"Yeah..." MacGyver frowned, looking at Olga Schneider's grainy image and then at the Project Atlas information on the screen. "Yeah, it does..."

*THIS STORY WILL CONTINUE IN 'MEAN STREETS', AIRING IN  
APRIL 2018*

The End for now...