

Water's Edge

Part One

MacGyver left the Phoenix Foundation building with a backpack slung over his shoulder and the morning sun shining down on his skin. He and Pete had finally managed to finish up the entire mound of paperwork that had needed to be filled out after the fiasco with Murdoc from the previous month, and Mac couldn't wait to get away from it all. It seemed that with every signed statement or detailed report, the memories of his many brushes with death broke through his mind like a jagged cut that never had the chance to heal. Well, hopefully, a nice and quiet fishing trip would change all of that.

Mac tossed his backpack into the passenger seat of the Jeep before jumping into the car himself. He'd loaded up the fishing gear in the back the night before, so now all that was left to do was pick up Sam and they'd be on their way. With his sunglasses and the radio on, it didn't seem that life could get much better as he parallel parked in front of his son's home. Sam was already waiting on the sidewalk, camera in hand. Grinning at his father, Sam shoved Mac's backpack out of the way and climbed in.

"Ready to go?" Sam asked.

MacGyver nodded, starting the car. "I was ready a month ago. I can't tell you how glad I am to finally get a break. Between the DXS questioning me for details and the Phoenix board trying to get all the legal stuff figured out, you wouldn't believe how high Pete's blood pressure has gotten... And mine too, to be honest."

Sam chuckled. "Don't worry, Dad. I don't think the fish in Minnesota are going to care if all your I's are dotted and all your T's are crossed."

"I sure hope not!" Mac shook his head slightly. "In a way, though, I kinda feel bad about leaving Pete behind."

Sam looked at him curiously. "I thought you said you'd gotten all those reports and stuff finished."

"Well, *almost* finished. Everything's pretty much done on my end, but Pete still has a ways to go, since he's the one who got the Phoenix board to approve the partnership with the DXS. For a little while, I helped him fill some of that stuff out, but he said that he was comfortable with just dictating the rest to his secretary, so he set me free a little early."

"Maybe you could do something nice for him later, then. Pick him up a souvenir from Minnesota," Sam suggested.

MacGyver smiled. "Good idea. I think he'd like that."

Three days later, and father and son were rolling into Mission City. Watching Sam around his old hometown always made Mac smile; despite the many things Sam had seen on his travels around the world, he never lost his sense of wonder, snapping pictures of anything that struck his fancy. MacGyver could practically see the gears in Sam's head turning as he chatted with

people at the bait shop about the small-town life, and Mac wouldn't at all be surprised to see some kind of feature article cropping up in the near future. After dropping in to visit Neil, they drove the Jeep down to Lower Mission Lake, looking forward to a quiet day's fishing.

MacGyver assembled the poles and baited the hooks pretty much by himself, as Sam was busy exploring their chosen fishing site. Large rocks and sparse grass gave way to sand and smooth stones closer to the water's edge, and fallen logs and forest debris surrounded them. The waves lapped lazily at the bank, pushed along by a gentle and unobtrusive wind. For MacGyver, their surroundings meant that fish would have lots of places to hide---and therefore, to bite---but for Sam, the scenery seemed to be almost magical. Every time Mac looked around for his son, he spotted Sam with his head in a clump of wildflowers or lifting up a tree branch to see what was underneath. He couldn't help but grin. "Nice to know that you approve of my favorite spot."

"Approve?" Sam replied, looking up from a patch of vervain. "Dad, this is *great*. I can see why you like to come here."

MacGyver smiled. "Think you can take a break from exploring to cast your line?"

"Sure!" Sam flopped down onto the ground beside MacGyver with a smile and grabbed his fishing rod. "Uh, Dad?"

"Yeah?"

Sam gestured to the reel and glanced up at him. "What is this, and how exactly do I use it?"

"Oh. It's called a spinning reel. It's easy once you get the hang of it. Here, I'll show you."

Of course, Sam was casting like a pro within five minutes.

MacGyver beamed. "You're a fast learner. The fish had better keep an eye out for you! You're a natural."

Sam smiled and reached for the tackle box. "Runs in the family, right?"

"Right."

The two of them settled into comfortable silence as they watched their lines and the ever-present waves. MacGyver's mind drifted, floating away until he was thinking of nothing at all, just enjoying the feel of the breeze and the sounds of the lake and the sight of the two floaters dipping up and down in the water.

That is, until he felt Sam starting to get restless.

It started with a leg twitch. As someone who sometimes needed to stretch his legs himself, MacGyver didn't give Sam's movements much thought, content to still be thinking of absolutely nothing. But then the leg twitch was joined by foot-tapping, which led to fingers tapping, which led to outright squirming, and finally, Sam just flopped backwards onto the ground and stared at the clouds.

MacGyver inched his eyes away from his fishing line and looked at his son. "All right, why don't you go ahead and take a break? We've got the sandwiches in the Jeep, or you could go back to exploring for a while. I'll keep an eye on your line for ya while you're gone."

Instantly, Sam bolted upright and grabbed Mac in a one-armed hug. "Thanks, Dad!" He snagged his camera and away he went.

MacGyver sighed and shook his head as Sam cheerfully traipsed off through the weeds. Then his gaze settled back onto the serene lake and his mind went back to emptying itself of everything but *fishing*.

Sam, on the other hand, couldn't be more delighted to fill his mind with every detail of the lake area. The air was warm but the shade was cool, and the trees seemed to branch out in every direction, lush and green with summer growth. Even though he hadn't mentioned anything to his father, Sam wanted to take a vacation just as much as MacGyver did. He loved the thrill of chasing down leads and the discovery of visiting new people and new places, but honestly, the fast-paced photojournalist lifestyle could be tiring...if not downright exhausting. He was enjoying the opportunity to just relax and spend some time in a beautiful locale without the pressure of a looming deadline or an editor's orders.

He knew that if he took many more pictures of yellow-striped butterflies or purple coneflowers or expansive lake views, he was going to burn up his entire roll of film, but he honestly didn't care. It was worth it to him to absorb the entire experience and preserve the memories in a tangible form---a beautiful form that he hoped other people would appreciate, too.

Sam trekked a little farther through the woods, pushing his way through shrubs and brush, until he found a big flat rock jutting out into the water. He grinned.

Perfect.

He clambered up on top of the rock and stood as close to the edge as he dared. From that vantage point, he was clear of the twisting maple branches, and the sun was reflecting on the surface of the lake in the most exquisite view. *This will make for a perfect shot, just perfect*, he thought, holding up the camera and pressing his eye against the viewfinder. He snapped the best photo he'd taken all day, lingered there for a moment to take everything in, and carefully slid his way off of the rock.

With a splash, his left foot slipped into the shallows as he miscalculated his landing. "Awww! Now I'm all wet." He frowned at the large damp spots soaking through his blue jeans as he took a step back onto the lakeshore. Then, his frown deepened as he noticed something else in the water that he'd just disrupted.

Thick, slimy swirls of bright green were roiling about in the shallow lakewater like an oil slick. Puzzled, Sam knelt down to get a better look. "What the heck is *that*?" He grabbed a nearby stick and pushed it into the water, swishing the green stuff around a little. It stuck to the bark almost like a foam. The light breeze caught up and drifted over the surface of the water, ruffling Sam's brown hair.

The scent that the wind carried with it made him want to gag. He jumped up and stepped away from the water, holding his arm in front of his nose. Whatever the green stuff was, it smelled like a sewer. He dropped the stick like it was on fire, fervently hoping that the green stuff hadn't *actually* come from a sewer.

Then, he darted back through the woods, heading straight for his father and the special fishing spot. If *anybody* knew what that nasty substance could be, it would be MacGyver.

Sam hadn't been gone for more than twenty minutes by MacGyver's estimate when Mac heard the sound of his approach as he raced through the trees. The loud crunching of last year's dry leaves and the snapping of loose twigs heralded the young man's return. MacGyver glanced up as Sam skidded to a stop a couple feet away from him. "Back for more?"

"Yeah, I don't know," Sam said uncomfortably, trying to sort out in his mind exactly how to describe the green stuff to MacGyver, trying to remember all the pertinent details.

"Hang on, I think I finally got a bite!" Mac said with a grin as he set the hook and reeled in his line. A few moments later, and he was holding a large and wriggling fish aloft. "Looks like a walleye," he said triumphantly, but his smile faded as he took a good look at his catch. Hesitantly, Sam stepped closer. "Is there something wrong with it?"

"I think so," Mac said slowly. "Here, help me hold it while I get it off the hook. We need to take a closer look at it."

Sam grabbed the fish around the middle, one hand clamped on its writhing tail, as MacGyver gently removed the hook and began to poke and prod the fish in various places around its body. Mac stared at the walleye, visage serious as he finished his examination.

"What do you think?" Sam said, fighting to hold the fish still.

"It's not moving right. Something's just *off* about it. And here, look at the way its skin looks, especially around the gills."

Sam shrugged a little. "It looks almost, I don't know, like it's got a sunburn or a rash or something."

"It's a chemical burn, I think. Or something similar. But that usually only happens when there's a high pH in the water. Sam, put it back in the water. Don't let go of it, but put it back in. I want to see how it moves when it swims."

Sam *tried* not to glare at his dad as he dunked the struggling fish under the waves. He really did. "Dad, it's getting really hard to hold this fish."

"It's okay, Sam, you can let it go now. Watch it!"

As the walleye flopped around and disappeared into the depths of the lake, Sam exclaimed, "It's lopsided! You were right, it's not swimming the way it should."

“Probably because its air bladder isn’t inflating right. It can’t get its balance,” Mac said thoughtfully.

Sam blinked. “Huh?”

“Fish are able to stay afloat when they swim because they have a pouch of air inside their bodies that they can inflate. If there’s something wrong with that pouch, they can’t move through the water the way they’re supposed to.”

“So---so what causes that to happen? Is the fish sick?”

Mac shrugged. “Maybe. It could be anything. There’s no way to know.”

Sam glanced back at the direction of the woods and the rock that he’d come running from. “Hey, Dad? I saw some really weird green stuff floating around in the water back there. Do you think that could have something to do with it?”

“Could be. What did it look like?”

Quickly, Sam gave MacGyver the rundown on what he’d seen.

“Show me,” MacGyver commanded.

Without another word, Sam raced off through the woods.

“Aw, Sam! Wait up!”

When Sam reached the big rock and the shoreline that he’d traversed just minutes ago, everything seemed to be exactly the way he’d left it. He pointed at the edge of the water and the green slick on the surface. “See, Dad? ...Dad?” He waited patiently for MacGyver, and just a second later, his dad burst through the brush.

“You know, Sam, a little advance warning before you just take off would be nice.”

Sam shrugged. “Sorry, Dad. I keep forgetting how old you are.”

MacGyver shot him a glare. “Okay, okay. So what was it you wanted to show me?”

Sam pointed to the water and the slime. “Over there.”

Forehead creased, MacGyver grabbed Sam’s stick from the ground and knelt on the bank, peering down into the water. Just as Sam had done earlier, he poked the stick into the water and swirled the green substance around. Then he jumped up and began searching other places along the edge of the lake.

“Dad?” Sam said, “What are you looking for?”

“This,” MacGyver called from the other side of the big rock. “C’mere for a minute.”

Sam picked his way over to his dad’s position, stepping over driftwood and fallen branches.

“What is it?”

MacGyver pushed the stick into the water and dragged it back up, pulling up a tangled mat of long brownish strands---something thick and filamentous and slimy.

Sam covered his nose. “Ugh, Dad, that’s disgusting! What *is* that stuff?”

Mac’s nose wrinkled as he answered. “This is what that green stuff on the other side of the rock is gonna turn into when it grows up a little more. It’s called blue-green algae.”

“*Algae*? That’s what that is? I thought algae was that green stuff on the inside of fish tanks.”

Mac shook his head. “Algae comes in all different species.” He dropped the stick back into the water and stepped over to the rock. “Actually, this stuff is a type of bacteria. Cyanobacteria.

When it grows out of control in blooms like this, it releases toxins into the water, and the byproducts of photosynthesis change the pH and nutrient levels in the ecosystem.”

Sam lifted up his camera and snapped a few pictures of the bacteria blooms, trying to breathe through his mouth. “This is what hurt the fish?”

“That’s right.” MacGyver paced the shoreline with a frown. “It’s toxic for dogs and people, too. You didn’t touch it, did you?”

“No.” Sam backed well away from the water and leaned back against a tree. “But I did get my leg in the water.” His forehead creased, unconsciously mirroring his dad’s expression. “It’s not gonna kill me, is it, Dad?”

MacGyver shook his head gently. “No, you’ll be fine. Just make sure not to touch your jeans and then put your hands on your face, and wash yourself off when we get back to the motel.”

Sam nodded, still frowning. “What can we do about this? I mean, we can’t just leave this stuff here in the water if it’s dangerous.”

“I agree. The first step is figuring out what started the bloom. We won’t know how to fix the problem if we don’t know what’s causing it. Why don’t we run back into town and check out the bait shop again? If anyone here’s going to know what’s happening with the lake, it’ll be the local fishermen.”

“Good idea, Dad,” Sam said with a grin. “Race you back to the Jeep!”

“Sam!”

Part Two

The bait shop was a small wooden building next to a gas station just outside of the Mission City limits. The bell dangling from the rickety screen door jangled when MacGyver pushed it open, but no one inside gave him and Sam a second glance. The shelves inside were cram-packed with lures, tackle boxes, spare reels, rolls of fishing line, artificial bait, baseball caps, snacks, and anything else a person ready for a fishing trip could ever need. Large coolers along the back wall held soft drinks along with plastic containers of live bait ready for a hook, and the buckets of crickets on the front counter filled the room with almost as much noise as the clusters of old-timers who were gathered around to buy lunch and chat about the weather.

MacGyver lifted his hand in greeting to a few of them, who nodded back politely.

Sam followed behind him, eyes and ears open for any sign of a clue. When he noticed something behind the counter, he tugged at Mac’s shirtsleeve urgently. “Dad, look! See on that bulletin board over there? It’s a flyer about that algae stuff.”

The two of them stepped up to the counter for a closer look. “This flyer is dated from three months ago,” Mac observed. “How long exactly has this been going on?”

“How long has what been going on?” asked the cashier, who was walking behind the counter as they were looking at the board.

"The blue-green algae blooms," MacGyver replied. "There's one in Lower Mission Lake right now."

She nodded, bleached-blond ponytail bobbing up and down. "Yeah, Lower Mission's been getting hit pretty hard, but then, a lot of the other lakes in the county have, too. It's been off and on for the past, I don't know, four months or so."

"Four months?!" Sam exclaimed. "That long? Why hasn't anybody done something about it?" The woman shrugged. "We talked to the Department of Fish & Wildlife about it, but they said there isn't much to do. Said it was probably a combination of the warm weather and fertilizer runoff from some of the local farms."

"There aren't *that* many farms around here," Mac said thoughtfully.

"There's got to be *something* we can do!" protested Sam.

The blonde cashier shrugged. "Don't know. Just be real careful when you decide whether or not to eat the fish. And don't drink the water. Get some water bottles and don't take a swim with your mouth open. They treat the stuff that comes out of the reservoir---even though it tastes like dirt---but the lake water's no good. I know I stay far away from all the lakes when they've got that algae stuff in them."

As she turned to help another customer, Sam turned to MacGyver. "C'mon, Dad, it's in the *drinking water*, for crying out loud! We've gotta help somehow."

"Maybe we can try talking to the Fish & Wildlife guys ourselves," MacGyver suggested. "Get a few more details. If agricultural runoff is really causing this much trouble, then there might be a couple of temporary fixes we could work on until they find a permanent solution."

"Whatever you say, Dad. As long as we're trying. I don't know how everyone else around here can just sit still when the lakes are in trouble."

"Not everyone," came a voice from behind MacGyver.

MacGyver turned to see a teenaged boy in a bright green ball cap peeking at them from behind a rack of fishing rods. The kid couldn't have been more than sixteen, and he skittishly glanced around the store before slipping over to Mac and Sam.

"I'm sorry for listening in on your conversation, but---it was kinda hard not to," the kid said.

"Sorry," Sam said sheepishly. "I guess I got a little carried away."

"No, it's not that, it's just that I heard you asking about the cyanobacteria. I'm really upset about it, too. My name's Jake. Hi."

"My name's MacGyver, and this is my son Sam. What do you know about the blooms?"

"Uh---" Jake frowned and glanced around the store again. "You wanna talk about this later? I have some friends who're gonna meet me in the park later. They're concerned about this stuff, too. Will you guys meet up with us there? I can give you directions if you need it."

Mac smiled. "Nah, I grew up here---I know where the park is. Who exactly are your friends?"

Jake straightened up and folded his arms. "Only the premier scientific organization for young people in Mission City today!"

MacGyver lifted an eyebrow. "You mean the high school astronomy club?"

Jake deflated. "Yeah. How'd you know?"

"Because I'm the one who first came up with all that 'premier scientific organization' stuff back when I went to school here. Nice to see that I'm still remembered."

Sam stifled a laugh. "Dad, you're such a geek."

"Well, anyway, we're the *Earth and Space Club* now," Jake replied loftily. "Astronomy wasn't a broad enough term for all the projects we wanted to do, so we changed it up a little."

"And you guys want one of your projects to be cleaning up the cyanobacteria?" MacGyver said.

"That's a great goal, but I'm warning you now: it won't be easy."

"Trust me, we know," Jake answered nervously. "Just meet us at the pavilion in the park after school---four o'clock, okay?"

"Okay," MacGyver said, watching as Jake stuffed his hands in his pockets and hurried from the store.

"That was weird. Did it seem weird to you?" Sam said.

"He seemed anxious about something," Mac observed. "Wonder what it is that has him so on edge?"

"We're gonna check it out, right?"

"Of course." MacGyver bumped his shoulder against Sam's. "C'mon, let's get out of here."

The pavilion in the Mission City Community Park was just a small wooden structure set on a concrete foundation. The roof slats let water leak through onto the picnic tables when it rained, but the beams were sturdy enough, so no one bothered to fix it. Except for MacGyver, who made a mental note to volunteer to reinforce the old roof before he left town.

As he and Sam approached the pavilion, they could see a cluster of ten or twelve high school kids hanging out, backpacks on the table and skateboards propped up beside them.

"Do you think they're actually going to be able to help us?" Sam asked.

"Only one way to find out," MacGyver replied. "Just like when you're chasing down a lead for your articles---you've got to check out every possible source, right?"

Sam grinned. "Right!"

As they walked closer, Jake noticed them and waved, jumping to his feet and meeting them halfway. "I told everyone that you were coming," he said. "I knew you would. I'll get Alix, our club president."

As the teen raced back to his friends---chartreuse cap bouncing every step of the way---and started talking to a pretty brunette girl in a softball t-shirt, Sam looked at MacGyver.

Alix? he mouthed.

MacGyver shrugged. "Maybe it's short for something."

The athletic brunette was standing in front of them within seconds, with several other kids clustering around to listen in.

"I'm Alix. Hi. Nice to meet you."

Sam nodded politely. "Nice to meet you guys, too. I'm Sam. This is my dad. He goes by MacGyver."

Alix watched the two of them carefully. "Jake said you guys were asking about the algae in the lakes around here?"

"That's right," Mac replied, silently impressed by the way the other teens fell silent when the young girl spoke. "We went down to Lower Mission for some fishing earlier today and came across a pretty serious bloom. Do you know anything about what might be causing it?"

Alix folded her arms neatly across her chest. "Maybe. Why do you want to know? Nobody else around here cares about why it's happening or what we think about it. Why should you?"

"I grew up here," Mac answered. "I used to go fishing in these lakes with my grandpa Harry. Mission City is important to me. Not to mention that fixing this problem is the right thing to do. Isn't that reason enough?"

Sam glanced around at the group of teens as many of them murmured their approval. One of them, a particularly tall boy, nudged Alix in the shoulder and said, "They sound all right to me. Maybe they can get the city council to listen to us. It'll help to have some older adults on our side."

Sam smirked and glanced sideways at MacGyver. "Hear that, Dad?" he muttered teasingly. "It helps to have *older* adults on their side."

"They mean you, too, ya know," Mac said pointedly before fixing his attention on the teens again. "We'll be happy to help you in any way we can, but you've got to help us first. What do you know about all this? Have you found anything out?"

"Yes and no," Alix said. "Fish & Wildlife say it's an agricultural thing, but we've figured out that there aren't enough farms around here for the fertilizer to be causing it. Besides, the blooms started way too early in the season for the runoff to be that bad."

"That's what I thought, too," MacGyver said thoughtfully. "There's got to be a secondary factor."

"We think there might be," said the tall boy who'd backed them up earlier. "But we don't have any proof."

"Well, what is it?" Sam demanded.

The tall boy hesitated, and several of the teens looked at each other silently. "It's kind of a big accusation."

"We think it's the fish hatchery," Jake blurted. "The new one that they built on Wolf Creek Road. Two months after they showed up, the Cyanobacteria showed up, too."

"But like we said, we have no proof," Alix said. "All we know is that we volunteered there a whole lot, and we saw some kinda weird stuff."

“What kind of weird stuff?” Sam asked, intently focused on the teens.

MacGyver had to smile. Leaning forward like that, with his shoulders hunched and his mouth set into a determined line, Mac could easily envision Sam as a hardboiled reporter from the 1950s, chasing down leads with a notepad and a camera until there was nothing left to learn.

Alix shrugged. “I mean, everything was okay for the first few weeks or so, but then sometimes when we cleaned out the tanks, we started noticing that there were more dead fish than there used to be.”

“And fewer fry to start out with,” the tall boy added. “It’s like the fish just stopped having as many eggs, or that the eggs just stopped hatching.”

Another girl in the group nodded. “And some of the fish got sick. Like, really sick, not just from being in close quarters with lots of other animals. I know, because I was charting their behavior over the first three months for my AP Biology project.”

Sam tapped his chin, rolling the information around in his mind. “So you’re thinking that the fish got sick or contaminated or whatever while they were still in the hatchery?”

“And then the contaminated fish spread the bacteria into the river and lake waters where they were stocked,” Mac finished. “The continual influx of fish would explain why the blooms keep recurring. After one bloom dies off, there are more bacteria to replace it, and the existing environmental factors keep feeding them.”

“Exactly,” Alix said. “That’s our theory, anyway. But there’s no proof, and we have no way to get it. Especially since the hatchery doesn’t let us volunteer very much anymore.”

“They don’t?” Sam frowned.

Jake nodded. “The head biologist said that they just didn’t need us, but we think that he was catching on to us getting suspicious.”

“Could be,” MacGyver said slowly. “We’ve got to think of something.”

“Later,” Alix said. “Right now, we’ve got work to do. We volunteered to replace this sucky roof.” She pointed upwards towards the ramshackle pavilion.

MacGyver smiled. “Sounds like you read my mind. Need a hand?”

The sun was starting to dip beneath the western half of the sky by the time the pavilion roof was fixed and MacGyver’s Jeep pulled into the fish hatchery parking lot. Sam was the first to roll out of the car, drinking in his surroundings with a practiced eye. He wasn’t really sure what he’d expected a fish hatchery to be like, but he hadn’t counted on it being a cheerful-looking stone building with budding flower beds out front.

He heard MacGyver’s car door slam behind him and scratched his head, looking up at the fresh-painted sign. “I guess it’s still open. I didn’t think it would be so...nice.”

Mac shrugged. “Sometimes appearances can be deceiving. Other times, not. Only one way to find out.” He gestured toward the glass front doors.

Sam nodded and took the lead, peeking into the wide lobby and catching the eye of the uniformed woman at the front desk.

“Hello! Can I help you?” she asked as she plucked a stray thread from her green polo shirt.

“We’d like a tour,” Mac said, gesturing to the billboard behind her.

“Oh! I’m sorry. The last tour stopped fifteen minutes ago.”

“Awww, that’s too bad,” Sam said sadly, flashing her with his patented puppy dog eyes. “I was really hoping that we could take a look around and see some of the fish. My dad just *loves* fish. He wanted to be an ichthyologist, back before he hit his head and got that traumatic brain injury. He forgot everything he learned in college and had to become a janitor instead. It would’ve broken his heart, if he could’ve remembered what his dream had been in the first place.”

The woman blinked and glanced furtively at MacGyver, who was struggling to keep an impassive look on his face. “Well, you can still feel free to look around the visitor’s center and the fish tanks, even without a tour guide. The younger fish are inside, and the rest are outside. Just follow the signs.” She pointed and shuffled some brochures on the desk, obviously pretending to be busy.

“I’m gonna get you for that, Sam,” Mac muttered as soon as they were out of earshot.

Sam grinned. “Aw, c’mon, Dad, you know it was all in good fun.”

“Sure I do, but don’t go wishing my life away yet! Head injuries aren’t anything to joke about.

After all, I’m probably only a couple of concussions away from having to retire or something, and then you’d be stuck taking care of me.”

Nonplussed, Sam shook his head, idly examining some of the informative posters on the life cycle of fish. “Don’t worry, I think you’ve still got a few good years left in you.”

“Sure.” MacGyver paused for dramatic effect. “But now I’ve got to get revenge on ya.”

“Do your worst, Dad!” Sam’s laugh trailed off when he crossed from the visitor’s center into a large warehouse-like area. The cinderblock walls were painted a mint green, and long concrete troughs full of filtered water were arranged in rows that filled the entire room. “Are all of these tanks filled with baby fish? Every single one of them?!” He darted from trough to trough, peeking down into the running water. “There are so many of them! Fish eggs, little fries... Is ‘fries’ the plural for baby fish, or is it just ‘fry?’”

“I have no idea,” MacGyver replied, watching with amusement.

Sam hesitated for a moment. “Fry,” he said firmly after thinking it over. “Fries sounds too much like fast food.” He shook his head. “Look at all of them! And they’re *orange!*”

“Pretty cute, huh?” Mac said, looking down into one of the tanks. “I don’t see anything out of the ordinary so far. We should go check the outside part to be sure.”

“Huh?” Sam’s head popped up. “Oh, right. Let’s go.”

MacGyver led his son out another set of glass doors to the outdoor tanks. Set in a wide concrete courtyard, more rows of trough-like tanks held hundreds of growing trout and walleye.

"Wow. I never knew that places like this kept so many fish here," Sam said.

MacGyver nodded. "A lot of them won't survive to adulthood, and the ones that do will likely end up as food for a predator, like a bird of prey."

"Ouch."

"It's part of life, Sam."

"I don't see anything weird yet. Except for the fish moving towards me whenever I get close. They probably want food."

MacGyver leaned over the tanks, inspecting the fish carefully. "They seem all right to me so far. Let's check the ones on the far end." The closer he got to the far rows of tanks, the more his heart sank. He could see from far away that some of the tanks were covered with a thick, gelatinous slime. "Six tanks. Looks like the bacteria found its way into six tanks."

Sam hovered by his father's elbow, a worried frown marring his face. "Do you think it could get into the tanks with the healthy fish?"

"It probably already has," Mac said grimly. "We need to find out if the biologists in charge know about this---and if they do, what they plan to do about it."

"Where do you think we'll find them?"

Wordlessly, MacGyver paced back inside the hatchery, past the troughs of newborn fish, and through a whitewashed door marked "Employees Only."

"Uh, Dad?" Sam hurried to follow him.

After a quick survey of the short corridor, Mac spotted what he was looking for: an office door. The nameplate read "Dr. Will Phelps, Biologist," but MacGyver barely had time to read it before he tested the knob. The door opened and he marched inside.

There was a sandy-haired man with a thick beard sitting at the desk, and he peered up from his computer when MacGyver and Sam walked in. He stared at them in confusion from behind his horn-rimmed glasses.

"I'm terribly sorry," the biologist said, "but visiting hours are almost over. If you'll just go back to the front lobby, the receptionist will---"

"We're not here because of that," MacGyver replied, trying to sound non-threatening but firm.

"We're actually here to talk to you and maybe ask for help."

"Help?" Phelps echoed. "What do you need?"

"Are you aware that infestations of Cyanobacteria have been repeatedly showing up in Mission City's water supply?" MacGyver said.

Phelps stared at them a moment longer before coughing and saying, "Of course I'm aware. Everybody knows about it." After a beat, he added, "And it makes my job more difficult. Hard to keep the lakes stocked when there are so many fish kills out there."

"What about the fish kills that are happening inside this facility?" MacGyver asked quietly.

His question was a bluff and he knew it; he still had no hard evidence that the scientists were in any way involved with the Cyanobacteria problem, and Phelps could easily deny any involvement with the issue. But over the years, Mac had gotten to be a pretty good judge of body language and an even better judge of character. Unless Phelps was *very* good at hiding things, his reaction would tell Mac the truth.

The biologist shifted in his chair, adjusting the lapels of his starched white lab coat. "To tell you the truth, our population numbers fluctuate from year to year. That's normal for a facility of this size. The Cyanobacteria blooms have no effect on---"

"The bacteria blooms have affected six of your tanks outside, and those are the ones that are large enough to be visible," Mac argued. "If there's a problem preventing contamination, maybe we can help."

"We *don't* have a problem here," Phelps said, getting to his feet and crossing his arms. "There aren't any issues at all. This facility runs perfectly. Now please---visiting hours are over and we're *closed*. Please make your way to the front lobby. Official personnel only are allowed back here."

As MacGyver filed out of the building with Sam in tow, he mulled over the details of the conversation in his mind.

"What are you thinking about, Dad?" Sam asked hesitantly.

"He's hiding something," MacGyver replied, deep in thought. "I'm sure of it."

"I think so, too. But what?"

"I have no idea." He unlocked the Jeep and the two of them got inside.

"We need to get back in there," Sam said. "Find out what it is."

"I want to do that, too, but something tells me they won't be allowing us in there again."

Sam shrugged. "So we'll find another way in. We can pick locks. Security should be pretty easy here. After all, who in their right mind would break into a bunch of big fish tanks?"

MacGyver dropped his keys and stared at his son, appalled. "Sam, we can't just break in! That's illegal!"

"So we'll do it through the proper channels. You introduced me to your friend with the police. You can ask him to help investigate."

Mac retrieved his keys and shook his head. "I have no doubt that Neil would do that for me, but I'm not going to ask him to. Not when he won't have enough probable cause for a search warrant. After all, what can I tell him? That I think a biologist is hiding something about bacteria

in the water, but I have no physical evidence? I'm just as upset about this as you are, Sam, but the most we could do would be to accuse them of not maintaining their tanks properly, and even if that's wrong, it's not against any laws."

"What about public endangerment or something?"

"We can't prove that they're doing anything intentionally. They could easily claim that the lakes infected their facility instead of the other way around---even if that *is* pretty unlikely. We just need more proof!" Frustrated, Mac banged his fist against the steering wheel.

"My gut says that whatever they're up to with that bacteria, it *is* intentional," Sam said. "And my gut is *never* wrong. There's a story here, and I'm going to find out what it is."

MacGyver sighed. "You're right, Sam. But whatever that story is, it's got to wait until tomorrow. We're out of leads and out of daylight. We'll get some rest and in the morning, we can look at this problem with fresh eyes."

Sam nodded reluctantly. "Yeah. Fresh eyes."

Part Three

When the telephone first rang, MacGyver was sure it was part of his dream. But when the persistent ringing didn't let up, he dragged himself to sit up. He could hear Sam groaning on the other side of the room.

"Did you order a wake-up call?"

"No," Sam muttered. "Did you?"

"Guess I better answer it, then," MacGyver replied, picking up the phone as Sam clamped a pillow down over his ears. "Hello?"

"Hey, MacGyver, this is Neil."

MacGyver's throat went dry. Neil wouldn't call him at 4:30 in the morning without a good reason; so what could it be?

"Hey, Neil," he replied calmly. "What's going on?"

"I just brought in three teenagers who broke into the local fish hatchery, of all places. They won't tell me why they did it---senior prank, I guess---but I've got a young lady here who wants to use her phone call to talk to you." Neil paused. "You don't happen to know anything about what's going on, do you? It'd be a big help to me if you did."

"I might have an idea," MacGyver replied. "I'll see what I can find out and get back to you. I promise."

"Thanks, MacGyver. I appreciate it."

For a second, the only sound was a background rustle, and then Alix's crystal voice came over the line. "MacGyver?"

"Alix! What were you thinking, breaking into the fish hatchery like that?"

"I was *thinking* that we could find something that you and Sam could take to the city council or something. Any kind of proof or something. Damien's dad is the town locksmith and he taught Damien how to pick a lock, so he and Jake and I went in there together. And then we got caught."

"Did you find anything out?"

"Well, we found a locked room right past the offices. It had a padlock on it---a really big one, and too complicated for Damien to get open. Jake brought bolt cutters just in case, but I wasn't gonna use those on it because that would've been a dead giveaway, so instead, we snuck into Dr. Phelps' office to look for the key. He really sucks at hiding things, but right after we got the key, we heard voices coming back into the building. Dr. Phelps and Dr. Owens were arguing over whether or not to continue with some kind of experiment. Things got heated, and then Dr. Phelps barged into his office and found us. That's when he turned us in to the police."

MacGyver ran a hand through his hair and frowned. "Sam and I met Phelps yesterday after we left the park. We knew that he was hiding something, and that experiment is probably it. Do you have any idea what they could be working on?"

"No clue. But *you* can find out for us. Phelps doesn't know that we took the key. I still have it. Officer Ryder says that we'll be released to our parents later today because they're not pressing charges, but the school's still suspending us for three days, so Jake's mom is going to take him by there around noon to pick up our homework and stuff. Jake told me that you went to school here too, so you ought to know where all the outdoor lunch tables are. He's going to leave the key---" Abruptly, her tone changed. "Yeah, I knew you wouldn't be able to get me off the hook with my mom, but thanks anyway."

"Alix? Everything okay?" MacGyver said before realizing why she'd changed her tune. "Did Neil come back?"

"Yeah. Thanks anyway. Goodbye, MacGyver." Then the line went dead.

"Sam? You still up?"

"Wide awake," came the journalist's voice from beneath his pillow.

By the time Mac had finished giving Sam the rundown on their early morning telephone call, Sam was bright-eyed and sitting up straight with an intense look on his face. "So, what are we going to do now?"

MacGyver smiled at his son affectionately. "Well, you've been pretty eager to take the lead so far. What do *you* think we should do?"

Sam beamed with pride. "I think we should get that key, break into the hatchery tonight, and find out for sure what those scientists are up to."

Mac's smile grew wider. "Then that's what we'll do."

MacGyver had an eerie feeling up his spine as he stared up at the burnt-red bricks of his alma mater. A feeling of nostalgia and foreboding at the same time. He and Sam had arrived at the school around half past three, just after school was out and the buses had left for the day. The wide parking lot and grassy grounds were deserted.

"C'mon, Sam," he said finally. "The picnic tables used to be around back, and Alix made it sound like not much has changed." He led Sam to the back of the school, to the cluster of wooden tables haphazardly arranged around a looming, gnarled oak tree.

"There's got to be ten, fifteen different tables out here," Sam said. "How are we going to find this stupid key? Looking for it will take us all day!"

"Oh, I don't know about that. Think about it, Sam: you're not so far away from being a teenager yourself. If you were going to hide something, where would you put it?"

Sam considered it for a moment. "My favorite backpack has a secret pocket inside. I used to hide my stash of Twinkies in there."

"*Twinkies?*"

"Sometimes field notes and stuff too," Sam said defensively. "What about the tree? I bet a tree as old and as big as that must have all kinds of good hiding places."

MacGyver grinned. "Exactly. When I was a kid, there was a big knothole on the right side of the trunk. I used to leave notes that things in there for my friends. It'd be a perfect place for Jake to hide the key."

Sam bounded over to the tree to check. "Uh-oh."

Mac's smile faded and he went to look at the tree for himself. Someone---likely a well-meaning custodian---had plugged up the hole. "I guess we'll just have to look for it, then."

"Hey, Dad!" Sam called excitedly. MacGyver moved to the other side of the tree to see Sam grinning like the Cheshire Cat. Sam pointed down to where a root protruded from the ground and the rain-washed soil had eroded away from the bark. "Found it."

Mac squatted down to look and, sure enough, the key was stuck to the underside of the root with a piece of duct tape. MacGyver smiled. "Good work, Sam."

They waited until nightfall before sneaking to the fish hatchery.

"We should go in the service door on the side," MacGyver said, leading Sam along the right wall. "It's darker over there, and there'll probably be less security."

"I can get the lock," Sam offered.

Mac hesitated. "Are you sure you want to do this, Sam? There's a pretty big risk if we get caught."

"It's not the first time I've done something risky for a story. Besides, I think that doing the right thing is worth it."

MacGyver smiled. "I guess the apple doesn't fall far from the tree, huh?"

"Sure doesn't," Sam replied as he picked the lock and the two of them slipped inside.

The facility was empty and quiet, and it took a lot of effort to keep their footsteps from echoing on the concrete. The "Employees Only" door swung open noiselessly. Finding the locked room was all too easy---at the end of the hall, one door was padlocked right in plain sight. MacGyver did a cursory check for booby traps as a precaution, but it was unnecessary. He glanced at Sam, shrugged, and unlocked the door.

Part Four

The door clicked shut behind MacGyver and Sam as they stared up at...*something*.

"Dad?" Sam said, perplexed. "What exactly am I looking at?"

"I'm not entirely sure," MacGyver admitted as he circled the apparatus in the center of the room.

Two big, industrial plastic barrels swarming with heavy-duty plastic pipes and tubes flanked a metal rack almost as tall as MacGyver. Suspended from the rack was what looked like a giant plastic bag filled with water---and a colony of bright green algae so vivid that it seemed to glow beneath the powerful UV lights shining from the ceiling. Cautiously, MacGyver leaned over one of the plastic barrels, and Sam joined him, peering down at the liquid collected in the bottom.

Sam wrinkled his nose. "Ugh, what *is* that? It reeks. Smells like alcohol."

"Not alcohol," Mac said as he stepped back to take a second look. "Ethanol."

"Huh?"

"This *thing* that they've got in here is an ethanol generator!"

Puzzled, Sam looked from the contraption to his father and back. "I don't get it."

MacGyver paced around as he talked, gesturing animatedly. "There are some strains of Cyanobacteria that produce ethanol as a byproduct of photosynthesis and cellular respiration. These biologists here at the hatchery must have found this particular strain, cultivated it, and figured out a way to harvest the ethanol that the bacteria give off as waste---and then they set up this big generator to produce the stuff in larger amounts."

"Wait a second. You're telling me that they're growing this deadly algae stuff *on purpose* because it poops out alcohol?!"

Mac rolled his eyes. "Biofuel, technically. But yeah. Something like that."

Sam unscrewed the lens cap from the camera hanging around his neck. "Well, whatever this generator thing is, I'm taking some photos of it. Could you step back just a little, so you won't be in the shot?"

"Sure." MacGyver took just a couple steps back into the shadows, but as the camera flashed, something heavy hit the back of his head and everything went dark.

"Sam?" MacGyver said groggily, looking around in the darkness and hoping that his eyes would adjust. "Sam, where are you?"

"I'm right here, Dad," Sam groaned, fumbling around until he found Mac's hand. "I think they must've hit us while we were distracted by the algae thing. And my camera's gone."

Quickly, Mac checked his pocket. "So is my knife. Where are we? See if you can feel for a light switch anywhere."

The two of them stood and ran their hands along the cinderblock walls until MacGyver found the switch and flipped it on, illuminating the room with as much light as a dim incandescent bulb can give.

"File cabinets," Sam said, examining the small space they were confined in, which housed only two file cabinets and the circuit breaker panel---and a lot of dust. "We must be in their records closet or something."

"While we're in here, this looks like a good opportunity to start hunting for some answers."

Sam agreed as he tugged open a file cabinet drawer and started digging through. "This stuff is no help. It's just all about the fish."

"There's nothing in this one either," MacGyver replied. But then he caught sight of an olive-colored folder attached to the bottom of the drawer with plastic zip ties. Quickly, he dumped out all the other files in the drawer, dropping the stack of Manila files onto the floor. Then he reached for his knife---only to grit his teeth when he remembered that it was missing. But still...he felt almost as if his pocket wasn't quite empty...

He reached for the very bottom of the pocket, just to be sure...and his fingers touched warm metal.

The padlock key!

Whoever had taken his knife must have overlooked the key nestled deep in the bottom of his jeans pocket. MacGyver used the edge of the key to cut the zip ties before grabbing the folder and flipping through its contents.

"You found something!" Sam exclaimed, looking over Mac's shoulder.

“Lab reports, design sketches... Phelps and Owens have been working on this ethanol generator for a long time. They’ve even written up a proposal for expanding the project if their prototype turns out to be viable.”

“Hang on, Dad, go back a couple pages. One of them looked different than the rest.”

MacGyver skimmed the page of numbers, eyes widening. “This is it, Sam---the smoking gun. This is what they were trying so hard to hide---why they had to keep their experiments a secret. They’ve been siphoning their state funding for hatchery operations and using the money for their experiments instead.”

“And they forged their ledgers and expense reports to cover it up,” Sam finished.

MacGyver carefully closed the folder, tucking all the papers inside and handing it to Sam. “Hang on to this. I’m going to get us out of this closet.”

He reached into his back pocket and grabbed his wallet. Apparently, unlike the Swiss Army knife, his would-be captors hadn’t seen the wallet as a threat.

Clearly, they didn’t know MacGyver.

He slid his library card out and slipped the corner into the narrow gap between the door and the strike plate, shimmying it against the slanted bolt. A little bending and one good shove, and the door lurched free with a satisfying click.

“Dad: 1. Door: Zero!” Sam said.

“Now let’s get out of here,” said Mac, already stepping towards the hallway that would lead them out.

“Wait a minute, Dad. Do you hear those voices?”

MacGyver froze, listening carefully. “Sounds like the scientists are arguing again. That’s good; it means they won’t be looking for us while we escape with our evidence.”

Sam looked from his father to the other end of the hallway and back. “No way. We’ve got to find out what it is they’re saying. If we want answers---*real* answers---then this is the only way we’re going to get them. C’mon. Let’s go check it out.”

MacGyver shook his head. “No. It’s not safe. They already attacked us once, and for all we know, they could be arguing over what to do with us. We have what we came for, so now let’s get out. This is a problem for the police.”

“No, this is a *lead*,” Sam said stubbornly. “We still don’t have enough to go on---not really. What happens if they dismantle that generator thing, and say that the stuff in this folder is just hypothetical or something? It’d be our word against theirs. We need to find out what they’re arguing over, and I need the film that’s in my camera.” Sam hesitated. “Please, Dad? I want to see this through.”

MacGyver scrutinized his son for a long moment. Then he sighed. “Okay. Okay, we’ll go listen in on them. But at the first sign of danger, you run out of here and get to the police as fast as you can. Okay?”

“Okay,” Sam agreed. “Let’s go!”

The two of them followed the sound of the voices until they were able to make out clear pieces of the conversation:

"It's over, Tyler! We can't hide this anymore. We *have* to come clean. Can't you see how crazy this has all gotten?"

"Come on, Will, we can't give up now! Not when we're so close! Our work can change history. You know that. I know it. We can't let two small-town busybodies stick their noses in where they don't belong and destroy everything we've worked so hard for!"

"We assaulted them, Tyler!"

"Self-defense! They broke in first, remember? We'll call the police on 'em, just like we did for those high school kids. Those guys probably have concussions---if they saw anything, they probably have no idea what it was. They'll dismiss it as a dream. And even if they don't, nobody will believe their story! We'll move the generator out of here tonight, and no one will be the wiser."

"See, I told you," Sam hissed. "I've *got* to get my camera!"

"Sam, you can't just rush in there with no plan!" Mac grabbed his son by the shoulder before he could get to the door. "We don't know if they're armed and we need the element of surprise. We need to take a second to think this through."

"Fine," Sam huffed. "What do you think we should do?"

"Well..." MacGyver licked his lips and scanned their surroundings, hoping for an idea. "Grab that fire extinguisher from the wall over there."

"Okay. Now what?"

MacGyver lifted the fire extinguisher out of Sam's hands, hefting it. "Good, it's brand-new. That means it's full. Now, you go back into the file room. The circuit breakers are in there, right behind the door."

"I saw it."

"Go in there and flip the breaker for this part of the hatchery. When Phelps and Owens run through here to check the breaker---I'll be waiting for them."

Sam grinned. "That's a great idea! Just be careful, Dad."

"I will. Now, hurry!"

MacGyver readied the fire extinguisher as Sam raced off. After a moment or two, the light shining from beneath the door went dark. The only light came in from the streetlights that shone eerily through the plate glass hallway windows.

"The lights went out! What's going on?" Phelps' voice carried through the darkness.

"Probably the breaker. I'll get it."

"I'll come with you---this conversation isn't over!"

As soon as they stepped through the door, MacGyver aimed the nozzle of the fire extinguisher at them and let it loose on full blast. Whether it was the force of the spray or the sheer surprise that got to them, the result was the same: both scientists fell flat on their rear ends, scrambling to stand and slipping on the messy foam.

Sam made it back just as the lights flickered back on, and he grinned when he saw MacGyver standing over them. "Great job, Dad!"

"Has everyone gone insane? I can't do this anymore!" Phelps cried.

"Shut *up*, Will!" Owens snapped. "What's going on here? What's the meaning of this? Who are you people anyway?"

"We're the people who are gonna make sure that you're held responsible for contaminating Mission City's water supply," Sam said. "And we've got proof. I'm a journalist, and a good one, and I can make sure that this story makes headlines."

"Please don't," Phelps said, panicked face slicked with sweat. "We--- We---"

"We don't believe you!" Owens interjected. "You don't have anything!"

MacGyver confidently tapped the folder in Sam's hand. "Really? Then what's this? It sure looks like evidence to me."

"Not to mention that eventually, I *will* find that camera, and my photos will tell the whole story about the way you've been misusing your funding," Sam added. "Just give it up and turn yourselves in, and there won't be any more problems with this fire extinguisher."

Phelps nodded vigorously. "Yes. I'll do it. I'll confess. Just get me out of this---please! I'm in over my head."

"Will!"

"No, Tyler! They're right. This is the end of the line. We have to turn ourselves in." Phelps glanced at MacGyver, hands spread wide in surrender.

"You *can't*, I'm telling you!"

"No," Phelps said. "No, you can't tell me *anything* anymore. We cheated the system, and now we're paying the price. I can't live with this secrecy and risk! I can't let this go any farther."

"And I can't let you waste *my* years of work!" Owens launched himself at Phelps, tackling the younger man in a surprising show of strength. His thick fingers wrapped themselves tight around his fellow scientist's throat.

MacGyver immediately dropped the fire extinguisher, joining Sam in trying to pull the grappling scientists apart, but to no avail. Phelps thrashed on the foam-covered concrete, frantically

struggling to tear himself from Owens' grasp. His motions were growing weaker by the second as Owens threatened to choke the life out of him.

Thinking fast, MacGyver grabbed the fire extinguisher again and smacked Owens in the side. Yelping in pain, the biologist slackened his grip enough for Sam to pull him away and wrestle him to the floor until he gave up the fight.

Mac knelt next to Phelps, checking the man over as he coughed and sucked in lungfuls of air.

"I'll tell... Anything you...want to know," Phelps rasped between shaky gasps. MacGyver nodded slowly. "I have a friend at the police who'd love to hear everything you have to say. He can call a doctor to give you the once-over, too."

Phelps nodded and focused on breathing until he was able to speak normally. "You have to understand---we weren't trying to hurt anyone, certainly not the local ecosystem. The bacteria contamination was a complete accident, and we just couldn't control it. It's difficult to keep such large colonies contained. We were only trying to make things better. Just think of it! Ten years from now, or twenty or thirty, commercial airplanes could fly with ethanol-based jet fuel, cheaper and more sustainable than oil. The world's freshwater supply, conserved because unlike corn, algae can be grown even in the desert. We were just trying to *help!* ...Even if we couldn't convince anyone to give us official funding. But when Tyler proposed the experiment, I never thought it would go this far. You have to understand."

"I *do* understand," MacGyver answered, "but scientific research has to go through the proper channels. Accidents like what's happening to the lakes in Mission City right now are the direct result of cheating the system like you did---the system that's in place *because* of people like you. Don't *you* understand?"

"Yes," Phelps said finally. "I do now."

"Well, MacGyver, I have to say, I'm really impressed with this one," Neil Ryder said as he leaned against the door of the black-and-white parked in front of the police station next to Mac's Jeep. "One of the biggest cases that we've ever had here in Mission City, and it was right underneath us all this time. And nobody ever knew about it except you. Now how about that?"

"Well, we had some pretty good help this time," Mac replied, slipping on his shades to block the glare of the morning sun. "You know, some of those teenagers are pretty sharp. They've really got their fingers on the pulse around here. Especially the seniors on the softball team."

Neil smiled. "Is that so? Well, I guess I'll have to keep a closer eye on them, then. No telling what kind of leads they might turn up. Who knows? Maybe one of them will even turn out to be as good as you are, MacGyver."

“No way!” Sam said stubbornly. “Nobody will ever be as good as my dad.”

Mac smiled. “I wouldn’t say that, Sam. You really held your own out here. I’m proud of you.”

Sam grinned. “Thanks.” Then he added, “And I guess I’ve got a long time before I have to catch up to you.”

“Is that another comment about my age?”

“Not this time,” Sam laughed.

“Well, MacGyver, how are you two planning to finish up your vacation?” Neil asked. “Think you’re going to give fishing another shot?”

“Nah, probably not,” Mac said with shrug. “But I think we do have a special visit to make before we go.”

Neil raised an eyebrow. “Oh, yeah? Well, don’t let me keep you. Besides, I have to get busy myself. You know how it is---with great cases come great mounds of paperwork.”

MacGyver sighed. “Tell me about it.”

MacGyver pulled his Jeep into the gravel driveway of their last vacation stop and parked the car. He led Sam up to the bright red door and knocked loudly.

A tanned, middle-aged woman with cropped brown hair and no wedding band answered the door. “Can I help you?”

“Hello, Mrs...?”

“Crawford,” she answered suspiciously.

“Mrs. Crawford,” Mac continued, “my name’s MacGyver. I’m from the Phoenix Foundation.”

“The what?”

“The Phoenix Foundation. It’s a non-profit organization.”

“Never heard of it.”

“We’re based in California.”

She frowned, fixing him with an intimidating stare for such a small woman. “Then what are you doing all the way out here in Minnesota?”

He sucked in a breath. Telling this woman that he wanted to thank her daughter for her help in solving a dangerous problem---and in the process explaining that he’d inadvertently encouraged the behaviors that caused her daughter to get arrested---would likely be a challenge, but since it was the truth, MacGyver was prepared to bite the bullet.

Until Sam jumped in: “We’re actually here to talk to your daughter, ma’am. We’d like to offer her an opportunity for a college scholarship. Is she home?”

Immediately, Mrs. Crawford's face brightened and her entire demeanor changed. "Please, come in. Alissandra! Come downstairs! There's someone here to see you!"

As the two of them stepped inside, MacGyver glanced at Sam, mouthing, *Alissandra?*

Sam shrugged. "You did say you thought 'Alix' could be short for something."

Mac nodded. "Either way, we need to work on getting our stories straight *before* we walk in somewhere and you surprise me!"

"You were *struggling*, Dad. What'd you want me to do, let you tell the poor lady your whole life story? You've got a lot to learn about journalism."

"And you've got a lot to learn about honest troubleshooting."

"And you've both got a lot to learn about not bickering where other people can hear you," Alix interrupted, bounding down the stairs as she twisted her long brunette ponytail into a pink baseball cap. "What'd you find out? Did you figure out what Dr. Phelps and Dr. Owens were doing? Tell me *everything*."

As the three of them settled in on the floral-print couch, MacGyver gave Alix a detailed description of everything that had happened to the fish hatchery, the ethanol generator, and the two biologists.

When he was finished, Alix just shook her head. "Wow. I knew they had to have been doing something big, but---biofuel out of algae? And with stolen money? Wow. That's some heavy stuff. So they're going to jail now? What's gonna happen to them?"

"Hard to say," MacGyver replied. "They might get a plea deal, or appeal for a lighter sentence. Only time will tell."

"What about the research?" she asked urgently. "What will happen to all their designs and prototypes and stuff?"

MacGyver shook his head. "To be honest, I don't know. It's possible that another scientist could pick it up and start the project going again under better circumstances. You never know."

Alix eyed him pointedly. "Maybe your Phoenix Foundation could start working on it, huh?"

MacGyver smiled. "Maybe, but I hate to ask Pete for too many favors at once."

"Who?"

"Pete Thornton, my boss. It's just a little something that I'm working on. Sam started it, actually. I'll tell you about it, if you want to call your mom in here for a minute to listen."

Alix shrugged and poked her head into the other room. "Mama! MacGyver wants to talk to you!"

Mrs. Crawford walked into the room and sat beside her daughter. "Yes?"

MacGyver grinned. "Ma'am, we've talked it over and I think that, with your daughter's intelligence and tenacity, the Phoenix Foundation would just love to offer her a full college scholarship."

Mrs. Crawford's hands flew to her mouth. "Are you sure? I--- Well, after Alissandra's father--- things haven't been--- Well, I just don't know what to say. A scholarship. That would be---a miracle!"

MacGyver fished a scrap of paper from his jacket pocket and wrote out a telephone number. "You just call this number anytime. Ask for Pete Thornton and tell him that MacGyver sent you."

Alix beamed and threw her arms around MacGyver first and then Sam. "Are you for real?!"

"Yup, but it comes on one condition," Mac warned.

"Name it!"

Mac smiled. "Now that the influx of Cyanobacteria has been taken care of, you and your Earth and Space Club need to work on cleaning up what's left over."

Alix grinned. "No problem. I've already called the others to talk about planting some trees as a natural runoff barrier."

"Alissandra, you know that part of being grounded means no telephone!" Mrs. Crawford said sharply.

Alix groaned. "But, Mama, I'm already eighteen, and nobody pressed charges, and everything worked out okay! It's not fair to ground me for life!"

Mrs. Crawford's expression softened slightly. "Maybe just until you go to college," she teased. "But no more sneaking around at night. Or any other problems, for that matter."

MacGyver grinned at the pretty, middle-aged brunette. "Maybe I should give you my personal number too, just in case," he said with a wink.

Alix and Sam groaned.

"C'mon, Dad, we should get going," Sam insisted, tugging at Mac's jacket sleeve.

MacGyver nodded, taking the hint. "I guess Sam's right. It's a long way back to Los Angeles. Thanks for everything, ladies."

As they walked out to the Jeep, MacGyver heaved a sigh. "You know, Sam, I don't know how I let you get me into these things."

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"Well, *you* gave me the scholarship idea."

"So?"

"You know that scholarships are paperwork, right?"

"Yeah, so?"

"Pete's gonna kill me."