Seeing the Forest for the Trees

by itstimetotimetravel

Summary

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Jack and Agent Cage get off to a rough start, but it turns out she's not half bad at tracking down lost improvisational engineers.

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“Why do you insist on opening every cupboard and closet you come across?” A whispered Australian accent frazzled up his skin and burned his ears. Jack's opinion of the ex-CIA agent had plummeted since the day began.

“Because!” Jack grated, barely keeping his voice within a weak approximation of a whisper, “We are tracking Angus MacGyver and when you track people you follow their foot steps!”

Agent Cage was about to respond when the rustling of an approaching guard forced them to hide behind some kind of large, gaudy statue. This terrorist -- some kind of wannabe prince who was hardly in direct line to any throne -- didn't exactly have good taste. Jack seethed as two heavily armed men ran past.
With frustration seeping through her calm exterior, Agent Cage narrowed her eyes at her new colleague, “You think Agent MacGyver is spending some time hiding in contortionist positions?”

Jack was already storming off down the hallway. He did not turn back as he spat, “No!”

Cage rolled her eyes as she followed him. Jack continued, “Mac isn't like you or me.”

“I know. He doesn't carry a firearm. He's not much of a fighter--”

“Mac fights in his own way!” They paused at a corner and Jack used his fingers to count down from three. With raised handguns, the two rushed out into the new corridor in unison, but there was nothing there. They continued their hurried pace. “Mac builds bombs; Mac builds smoke grenades; Mac even builds bow and arrows,” Cage raised an eyebrow at that, “Mac is brilliant and resourceful and absolutely the most important part of this team, and he,” Jack almost seemed to be running out of breath at this point, his knuckles white on his gun. “He has his methods, okay, his habits, his strategies . . . and I,” He dramatically points to himself with his free hand, “Know those strategies.”

Cage, eyebrows pulled together, interjects, “He finds spare parts in the cupboards, for his inventions.”

“Yeah,” Jack nods, incrementally calmer now, “He looks for spare parts; he looks for inspiration. He leans towards junk drawers, garages, cleaning supplies. He hates minimalist design.” Cage resists a smile. “I know MacGyver, and I know he would have headed towards all these offices and bedrooms, not that giant dining room with nothing but chairs and open air. He would have opened every drawer, door, and decorative box until he found something usefull. And when we find what he found, then maybe we can figure out where he went with it.”

Cage frowned, “Maybe that's why the screws from all the sconces are missing.”

Jack gave her an incredulous look, “What? Why didn't you say anything earlier? And what the hell is a sconce?”

Cage was already staring at the nearest wall mounted light. She was hardly paying Jack any attention when she replied, “This is a sconce.” After a moment, she turned to look at the older man, “But what could he possibly be doing with dozens of screws?”

Jack, a bit steadier now that they had a lead, rubbed his hands together. “Maybe he needs a magnet to . . . grab something?”

Cage looked at him like he didn't know the Earth was round, “Screws aren't magnetic, Jack.”

Jack flung his arms in the air, “For Pete's sake, Cage, I know that much! I mean he could make a magnet!”

“I have no idea!” Jack's voice was back to slightly hysterical, “But he does it.”
“Well, even if he did make a magnet, I have no idea where he would go with it.”

Jack froze, a look of sudden realization on his face. His mouth slowly twisted into a smug look, “He’s leaving me a trail!” He turned quickly on his heel and dragged his palm over the sconces to feel for the missing screws.

“You mean leaving us a trail?” Cage muttered, following him.

Jack stumbled to a sudden stop and whipped around to look at the last light he passed. “This one still has it’s screw.”

“A code?” Cage suggested. “Morse code would be the simplest choice.”

Jack stared at the light for a few more seconds before setting off down the hall again. “Maybe,” Jack turned to look at the six lights he had just passed. There was something dark about his voice that Cage could not quite place. “Or maybe he just missed it.”

They continued like that for a few more minutes, finding a few more skipped screws. They could not detect any pattern in the screws left behind. Jack became quieter and quieter each time they found a screw remaining.

Jack longed to scream at Mac through the radio, but seeing as Mac stopped responding to his almost 20 minutes ago and both Jack and Cage had destroyed theirs during an impromptu dip in the pool, there wasn't much possibility of that.

Eventually, even though she knew it would not go over well, Cage commented, “They already know we’re here, Jack. At some point this mission becomes unsalvageable.” But before Jack could even open his mouth, the ground shook viciously and the air boomed with the sound of an explosion.

Jack and Cage stared at each other for perhaps half of a second, adrenaline and shock rushing through them. Jack was the first to move, pelting down the hallway, all concern for stealth gone.

He rounded the next corner without so much as a howdy-do. He shot two guards, center mass, and threw any last dredge of surprise they had left down the toilet. Cage rounded the corner just a moment later, barely keeping the older agent in eyesight as he ran towards an obviously damaged doorway. Perhaps doorway was too strong of a word. It was more a vaguely rectangular hole in the wall. A hole roughly the size of a four door sedan.

Not slowing a beat, Jack threw himself into the smokey abyss and shouted, “MAC!” But Jack's feet couldn't find any traction and he quickly started sliding down the terrifyingly sloped floor. His arms flailed, searching for purchase. After his stomach had thoroughly landed in his throat, he felt a terrible pain in his left shoulder and a not insignificant amount of whiplash. He squinted upward and saw a bit of blond through the haze.

He found himself being hauled up back into the hallway with the dead guards. Jack tried to hide his gut wrenching panic when he saw Samantha Cage's pinched face looking at him. Jack wasn't afraid to die, he--

“What the hell were you thinking?” She dragged him a few extra feet for good measure before dropping him unceremoniously. Jack coughed and rolled onto side, awkwardly cradling his left arm, his gun now long gone. “That is quite possibly the stupidest thing I've ever seen!”

Jack groaned, more in frustration and grief than pain. He let his left arm go and stood up, facing the smoking crater of a room. He almost didn't hear Cage when she said, “We have to go Jack, this place will be swarmed any second.” He pulled his shirt up to cover his mouth and stepped towards the
“Jack,” Cage insisted, “They spotted us nearly a half hour ago. This is insane!” She resisted the urge to comment on the likelihood of Mac still being alive. “We've been here way too long. We have to leave now if we have any chance of escape.” Jack leaned into the room and started feeling around for steady floor with his foot.

Cage stared at him for a moment, at the tense line of his shoulders, at his jutting chin and pinched lips. “Jack,” She said softly, “I know you don't want to leave without him.” She paused at the murderous glare he sent her. After a moment she had to look away. “Jack,” Her voice had lifted an octave. “I don't want to hear it, Cage!” Jack was practically vibrating with fury.

“No,” Samantha shook her head, “You don't understand, I don't want to leave without him either!” She looked him dead in the eye and smiled. “Look,” she pointed at the wall next to Jack's head, “A screw.

Jack, slack faced, turned to face to rubble one might call a wall. A whole second passed where he didn't seem to breathe at all. Transfixed on that tiny object, Jack's face suddenly lit up like a kid at Christmas, “My boy made a fragmentation grenade!”

Samantha grinned at him, her eyes a bit wide, “This is much more than just a fragmentation grenade. But it does prove that he planned this,” She gestured at the chaos in front of them. “With any luck, he planned how to survive it, too.”

“You better bet your ass he did!” Jack spun back around to the smokey abyss. His eyes were darting all around and his breathing wasn't exactly steady, but nonetheless he seemed nearly himself again. “But how do we get to him?”

Cage, who had been looking down the hall, turned back to face Jack. “The structure should be the sturdiest near the walls and door frames. If we circle the room on the edges, we may be able to stay on solid flooring. It's a pretty big 'may', but--”

“We're doing it!”

Before long they were both inside the room, shimmying along the wall. It was good timing, too, because they soon heard guards at the door. They didn't seem to being able to see Sam or Jack, though, nor did they have any interest in entering the obviously unstable room. The Phoenix agents carried on and eventually came to part of the room less damaged by the explosion. Cage guessed it must have been the terrorist / prince's private entertaining area they had heard about in their intel brief. The room was too large and too far away from the kitchens to be anything else. She was impressed that Mac seemed to have continued with the mission after they lost contact with him.

Beside her, Jack was fumbling around in the smokey darkness. Between his feet dragging on the floor and his heavy breathing, he was pretty easy to follow. They hadn't traveled more than a few yards on the more solid flooring before Cage heard a thump and groan.

“On my god,” Jack fell to the ground in front of her. She could barely see her own hand in front of her face, so she had to kneel down next to Jack before she could be sure that he was looking at.

It was Mac. It's a very bloody, very dirty Angus MacGyver. Though she hadn't known him long, she couldn't help but let out a choked laugh. The geek had survived, and had quite possibly finished their mission all by himself. When it comes to dangerous weaponry in the hands of would-be super villains, she was more than fine with destruction instead of thievery.
Beside her, Jack was locked on to Mac's face like a super magnet on a refrigerator. For once in his life, he didn't seem to know what to say. Deciding to give them a moment – though not any longer than that because it was seriously hard to breath in here – Cage slide her hands along the young man's legs, exerting only minor pressure. She hoped not to find any dangerously deep wounds.

Jack, apparently returning to his senses, moved his hands from Mac's face to his shoulders and tried to gently jostle him awake. After a few shakes, Mac blinked a few times, unfocused.

“Hey,” Jack whispers, “What the hell do you think you're doing, little man?” Mac just stared at him, confused. “You're not supposed to get hit by your own bombs, brainiac.” There was no heat behind Jack's words, only breathless relief.

Mac blinked a few more times before he seemed to come into himself. He croaked, “I built a shield.” Jack could barely hear him. “I guess I . . . forgot to hide behind it.”

Jack broke out in a nervous laughter, pulling the young man up into a deep hug. He was interrupted by a coughing fit, which Jack soon joined. “Alright, it's time to go.” Jack said, wiping his eyes, “But later I'm giving you a serious talking to about seeing the forest for the trees.” Mac just squinted at him, confused again.

But before they could start moving, Mac pulled in a quick and painful breath, swearing on the exhale. “Easy, easy,” Samantha cautioned, her hands pressing down on Mac's hip. “You've got a bit of a bleeder here.” She grimaced at Jack. They didn't have anything resembling a medical kit, but they soon tied Samantha's jacket tightly around Mac's waist, putting a decent amount of pressure on the wound.

Jack hauled the young man up. It became clear quite quickly that Mac wasn't going to be able to hold any of his own weight. After a quick glance at Samantha, Jack levered Mac up into a fireman's carry. Sam, her gun held high, led the way out of the room.

They couldn't go back the way they came, there was no way would be able to carry Mac across the narrow strip of remaining flooring along the wall. Plus, they couldn't risk being caught by guards at jagged hole in the wall one might call a door.

Fortunately, it wasn't Sam's first time sneaking around a heavily guarded mansion in a hostile foreign county. They made it outside with reasonable efficiency and made quick work of stealing a car.

Mac hadn't said a word during their entire trek out, though he coughed plenty. But laying with his back against Jack's chest in the backseat of their stolen car, he said, “I destroyed it.” If Jack hadn't been staring right at him, he wouldn't have heard it. Samantha didn't turn around. She seemed plenty occupied with the rough terrain.

Jack stared down at him, blinking away tears. “You almost destroyed yourself.” Mac, thoroughly exhausted, just stared up at him. “Buddy, I know this going to sound stupid.” Jack swallowed roughly, “I know know what kind of jobs we have. But, Mac, I have to ask you, please don't die.” He choked on hysterical laughter, “Please, please don't die.” He squeezed his arms tighter around Mac's stomach and leaned his head into Mac's hair. “I can't handle that, okay?”

They sat like that for moment, their skin warming to each other. The bumping of the car jostled them around, but they didn't seem to notice. Jack was beginning to forgive Cage for suggesting they split up.
“I . . .” Mac started, “I didn't mean to.” He scrunched his eyes up like he was confused. Jack stroked his hand along Mac's ribs, trying to soothe the younger man. “I fell off that balcony . . . when I lost contact with you.” Jack had suspected as much. He was going to be having nightmares of Mac dying in that fall soon enough. “Got a little concussed, I guess.”

Jack gave a shaky smirke, “Got a few screws loose?” His humor was quite overshadowed by the heavy emotion in his voice.

“Yeah . . .” Mac's voice sounded like he'd been given too many pain killers. If only that were true. “I collected some screws . . . for my bomb. You noticed that?”

Jack gave a little laugh, “I meant – yeah, buddy, actually Cage noticed them. We followed the path of missing screws to find you.” Jack's voice brightened, “Though I will say I was going in the right direction before we started following the screws!” Mac broke out in smile.

After a few moments, Mac seemed to remember what he had been saying. “Jack . . . when I was wandering around after that fall . . . I really could have used you by my side.”

Jack pulled his head away, grimacing. “Mac, I . . .”

“Hey, hey!” Mac called, “I don't mean . . . Jack, I mean I need you. I can't live without you either.” He paused, and his lungs took that opportunity to break out into a coughing fit. When he finished, he said, “I can't live without you either.”

A grin the size of Texas slowly spread across Jack's face. “Oh, buddy,” Jack pulled Mac in tighter. “Next time I will be there, and I will drag you behind that shield you made if I have to, and I will not let you fall off any balconies, or get noticed by any guards.” Jack took in a deep breath. “I love you, man, and I will always have your back.”

Mac weakly smiled up at him. “I love you, too, Jack.”

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