

(recrudescence) + recovery

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/27712289) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/27712289>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	Gen
Fandom:	MacGyver (TV 2016)
Relationship:	Jack Dalton & Angus MacGyver (MacGyver TV 2016)
Characters:	Jack Dalton (MacGyver TV 2016) , Angus MacGyver (MacGyver TV 2016)
Additional Tags:	Hurt/Comfort , Platonic Hair Washing , Found Family , Fever , Malaria , Parental Jack Dalton
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2020-11-25 Words: 3,450 Chapters: 1/1

(recrudescence) + recovery

by [impossiblepluto](#)

Summary

Set just post my story “Recrudescence” it’s Mac’s turn to help Jack clean up post-tropical fever.

A late entry for the MacGyver Fluff Weekend.

Notes

This is set just after the ending of my fic "Recrudescence" and contains spoilers. Also contains a reference to TANGOCHARLIE's fic "Mac - Blade + Stubble"

As always, thank you for reading!

- Inspired by [Recrudescence](#) by [impossiblepluto](#)
- Inspired by [Mac - Blade + Stubble](#) by [TANGOCHARLIE](#)

The air is thick. Oppressive with humidity. Panting with exertion, Jack struggles to draw a deep breath. It's heavy in his lungs like he's breathing in soup. Despite the heat, Jack shivers. Chills wracking his body.

Muscles quiver with exhaustion. He pushes it aside. Digging deep to find hidden reserves of strength. He focuses on taking his next step, lifting each foot high enough to avoid the thick roots that coil along the jungle floor before jutting up and grabbing at his legs.

Sweat drips from his forehead into his eyes, blurring his vision. He blinks hard against the burn. There's not much to see. Endless greens and browns, dank and dark. A haze of steam entwines him.

Used to his slow-moving presence now, the chatter of monkeys and chirp of birds fill the air, deeming him no longer a threat. He'd be offended, if he could muster the energy to care. Instead, he takes another step.

Rain patters against the impenetrable canopy overhead, not reaching the jungle floor. The sound is soothing, Jack closes his eyes, turning his head skyward. Jack can't help but feel disappointed that the cloudburst can't drizzle against his overheated skin and wash away the itch of dried sweat.

The rhythmic pounding of water, perhaps a waterfall around the bend, taunts him. Though it would sap his remaining strength, he longs to soothe his aching joints in the warmth and steam he envisions.

With his next step, Jack stumbles. A serpentine tendril twists around his ankle, sending him crashing to his knees with a sharp cry. The jolt rattles through his bones.

His hands immediately latch firmly onto the body stretched across his shoulders, supporting. Protecting.

Mac cries out, "Jack!" startled and jostled.

"Shhh. Easy, hoss," Jack soothes, his voice thick, raspy. The words scraping like glass against his dry throat. He swallows hard and winces. If the rain would reach him, he'd open his mouth and catch the droplets on his tongue. He's so thirsty.

Or if he could find the elusive waterfall, he'd waste one of his last water purification tablets.

"Jack, why are we still in the jungle?"

"Just heading for ex-fil," he promises, as he's promised for days. He should lower Mac to the ground. Should rest. Give him the last few mouthfuls of water and force one of the last anti-malarial tablets down his throat.

But he can go farther. Just a little farther. If he stops now, he doesn't know if he'll be able to struggle to his feet again. Not the way his body protests. Aches. He ignores his fatigue. Mac needs him. Trusts him. Is depending on Jack to get safely to ex-fil.

And he doesn't particularly like this section of jungle for his final resting place.

The patter of rain stops.

And the pulse of the waterfall stalls.

Jack frowns.

The leafy gambrel parts, a beam of light pierces the darkness with a soft creak, and a puff of warm steam ghosts across his cheek. Instead of the heady musk of jungle, he recognizes the essence of his favorite soap.

A cool hand rests on his forehead.

Jack flops onto his back, dislodging the hand. Cracking an eyelid, he peers up.

"Morning," Mac smiles, his face twists and he shakes his head. "Or afternoon, I guess," he corrects, tossing the towel he was using on his hair back into the bathroom. Blond locks are still damp, falling across his forehead.

Jack's voice sounds like gravel as he returns a mostly unintelligible greeting. He pushes himself up on shaky arms.

"Let me help." Mac's eyes have a fine sheen of exhaustion, punctuated by purple crescents, but to Jack's relief, his cheeks are pink from health and a warm shower. He wraps an arm behind Jack's shoulder, scooping him forward, holding him steady as Jack's muscles quaver with fatigue and weakness.

The room spins. Jack's eyes slam shut. His hand closes around Mac's arm, using it to ground him, taking short measured breaths in through his nose.

Mac pauses, waiting for the dizziness to abate. When Jack opens his eyes and gives a reassuring nod, Mac's mouth is pulled into a worried frown.

The pillow crinkles as Mac positions it along the headboard and assists Jack in resting against it. Jack grimaces, the sheets are stiff with sweat. So are his boxers and t-shirt. His hair and beard itch.

"How are you feeling?"

Exhausted.

Achy.

Gamey.

Raw.

"Better," Jack mumbles. "Thanks."

Mac presses the back of his hand to Jack's forehead again. This time Jack allows it. "Fever's still gone. Want to try some water?"

"I want to try a shower."

A sharp laugh bursts from Mac's lip. "Yeah, I don't think that's a good idea. You can barely hold yourself up."

Jack scowls. "It'd make me feel better."

"Until you pass out and give yourself a concussion. And the shower chair is at the house."

"You sure?" Jack squints, thinking. "Thought I was the last one to need it."

"Yeah, but you didn't want to try stairs with your leg so you stayed with me."

Jack hums.

Mac reaches for the glass on the nightstand. "Try some of this."

Jack eyes the cup suspiciously but makes no move to reach for it.

"Real Gatorade this time," Mac promises. "Bozer dropped off supplies. And he told me I should be grateful you didn't throw my electrolyte concoction at me."

"It wasn't that bad," Jack lies, again, extending his hand, accepting the glass. It's heavier than he's expecting. Or he's weaker- no, it's heavier. His arm drifts downward and Mac's hand closes around his, supporting him as he lifts the glass to his mouth. He takes a few sips, it feels good against his dry throat.

Mac checks the time then snags the blister packet from the table. He stares at it for a moment, jaw tightening with guilt, before peeling back the foil and popping the pills into his hand and feeding them to Jack.

"What's done is done, hoss. Nothing you can do about it now. Stop tying your brain up in knots about it." Jack reads the guilt on Mac's face.

"You shouldn't have done it. If you hadn't wasted the meds on me, you might not be--"

"Hey!" Jack's voice is steady. Stronger than a moment ago. Steely. He wants Mac to hear him. "You're healthy. It wasn't a waste."

It's an argument between them that will never find closure. Neither one will ever win, both believing with absolute certainty that he is right.

"I made my choice."

With a huff that speaks of another impending argument, Mac shakes his head.

Jack catches his arm, stilling the fight in the kid with a strong grip. “I keep making the same choice,” dark eyes burrow into blue. If Mac needs to hear the words, he’ll keep saying them. Every day and twice on Sundays. Say them until they sink into that big brain that can’t understand how, why someone would choose him. Until he believes them, accepts them, and then builds up a stockpile of Jack’s promises. “Wouldn’t leave on day sixty-four. I’d still follow you to hell and back anytime you decide you want to go there. I’d always give you the meds.”

Mac’s eyes drop from Jack’s, shining faintly as his gaze focuses on Jack’s hand against his arm. He swallows hard. “Yeah, well, don’t think just because you’re getting all sappy that means I’m going to let you face plant in the shower.”

Jack doesn’t let go, but he grants Mac the emotional out that he is looking for. “Damn.”

“But, I’d run a bath.”

Jack grumbles, dropping back against the pillow.

“I’ll keep your secret.”

“You always do,” Jack sighs, flipping back the blankets. “Alright, I guess I can live with that.”

“Hold on,” Mac presses a hand against Jack’s chest. Jack stares down at it, holding him down more easily than the light touch should have been able. “Let me get things organized.”

Jack scratches the itchy scruff of his week-old beard as Mac scurries through the room collecting a fresh set of clothes before disappearing into the bathroom. Once the sound of the tub filling begins, Jack scoots his legs towards the edge of the bed, swinging them over the side, shivering as the cool air hits them. Gripping the sheets as a wave of dizziness washes over him.

An armful of fresh linens thwaps to the floor next to Jack.

“I’m good.”

“You lie.”

Jack shrugs and looks up at Mac. Concerned blue eyes stare down at him.

“You promised this morning that we wouldn’t hide things from each other.”

“I don’t know that you can scold me twice during the same illness,” Jack pouts.

“Oh, I haven’t scolded you yet.”

“Huh? Well, then, you’re right. And I’m sorry. I did promise not to hide things from you.”

“Now you’re just saying that to get out of a lecture.”

“No, I’m saying it to remind you that you promised the same thing about not hiding stuff when the roles are reversed,” Jack spins his finger in a small rotation, then closes his eyes again. “I’m alright, just a little dizzy.”

“Maybe we should wait.”

“On enforcing those honesty promises?” Jack asks hopefully looking up and Mac raises an eyebrow. “My first time up and about, I’m going to be dizzy.”

Mac smirks.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“You just gave me grief about hiding things from you and now you’re gonna pull the same stunt. That is why I was reminding you.”

“It’s not the same.”

“Seems to me like it is,” Jack crosses his arms.

"Fine." Mac gives a small amused huff and shakes his head. “You are not a passive hallucinator.”

Jack’s brow furrows.

“It’s just... it’s not your first time up. I don’t know if it’s related to the events of the first time you had malaria, but you’re very active. Trying to coerce your way out of the apartment. Trying to hide in the closet... I’m sorry *under some vines* from the mercenaries chasing us through the jungle. Trying to pick me up and carry me to ex-fil.”

“I didn’t hurt y-” Jack’s thoughts immediately fly to Mac. He’s been known to let fists fly in the midst of a nightmare.

“No!” Mac quickly confirms.

“You sure? Cause...”

“Jack, I’m fine. Now shut up and let me help you up.” Mac loops an arm around Jack.

“Oof, sorry about the stank,” Jack says as he catches a whiff of his armpit when he lifts it to use Mac as a crutch. “Bet you’re glad now that you agreed to this.”

“This isn’t even close to your worst stank.”

In the bathroom, Mac props him against the vanity, while Jack pretends that he’s not panting from exertion. He pulls off his t-shirt, sore muscles protest the action. He uses Mac for balance while he sheds his boxers, holding tighter as he kicks them off.

Jack's never been shy. High school football team, barracks living, and communal showers took care of that years ago. Residual modesty fled with years of field medicine and dressing changes, the occasional injury that prompted the need for bathing assistance. He and Mac have seen each other at their worst. Cared for the other during illnesses and convalescence.

Still, it's hard sometimes to admit the need for help.

Mac steadies him as Jack lowers himself into the tub, groaning in satisfaction. "Oh, hoss, I don't think I'm getting out. I live here now. Have my mail forwarded." He tips his head back, resting against the towel on the edge that Mac placed there for padding.

A washcloth splashes down next to him, and he doesn't stir. It's a deep soaking tub, and he's infinitely grateful. Content to languish here.

"You better get scrubbing before the water gets cold," Mac warns when he comes back a few minutes later, dumping the dirty linens in the laundry hamper.

Licking his lips, Jack admits, "a soak might be all I can manage at the moment. That walk was... that took a lot out of me."

He hears Mac pause.

"It's good though. Soak is enough. I'll rest and be ready for the jaunt back by the time the water's cold."

"I-" Mac shuffles. "I could wash your hair."

"T's okay, I can get it later."

"You would for me."

Jack cracks an eyelid, looking up at Mac in surprise.

Mac takes a breath. "Unless I did such a bad job the last time when you broke your collarbone and you'd rather go with like six-day-old, post-mission, post-fever, sweat hair rather than let me touch it."

Extending a leg out of the water, Jack uses his toes to nudge the diverter toggle on the faucet towards the flexible showerhead.

Mac kneels next to the tub, pushing up his sleeves. He turns on the water, testing the temperature of the spray on his arm. Brushing a hand over Jack's forehead he instructs, "tilt your head back."

The swell of warm water caresses Jack's scalp, and Mac's hand follows it, sliding through his hair. Jack feels goosebumps erupt on his skin as the cascade spills over his back.

"Are you cold?"

"Nah, it's ah- it's nice."

Mac shuts off the spray and reaches for Jack's shampoo.

"I don't need that much. Don't have those Rapunzel locks like you do."

Mac massages the shampoo into Jack's hair, fingernail scritchling along his scalp in a circular motion. His hair is just long enough that when it's not caked in product, it's soft, but shorter and prickly on the sides. Mac's taking his time, Jack soaking up the sensation like a kitten in a sunbeam, but it doesn't take long for the suds to cover every inch. Mac instructs him to sit forward and tip his head back again as he rinses away the soap.

He keeps rinsing, running his fingers through Jack's hair and if Jack wasn't moments away from sleep he'd call Mac on his water wasting.

His hair runs clean and the tub is so full that if Jack moves he'll slosh the bathwater over the brim. He carefully soaps up the previously ignored washcloth, skimming it across his skin before leaning back against the tub again.

"You ready to move?"

"Told ya, I'm living here now," Jack grumbles before acknowledging the water is rapidly cooling.

Mac loops one hand under Jack's arm, securing it to his bicep. His other arm around Jack's back. In a synchronized movement, Jack rises from the tub, water sluicing from his body. He snatches a towel to wrap around his waist and cover his junk as he stands. Using Mac for balance, he steps out of the tub onto the soft bath mat. He sways dangerously, eyes slamming shut.

Mac throws another towel around Jack's shoulders, using the action to disguise his steady support. Jack gives him a wry grin of thanks.

Propping Jack against the vanity, in case the dizziness returns, Mac helps Jack pull on his underwear and a favorite pair of soft sweatpants.

Turning towards the mirror, Jack swipes at the condensation before examining his reflection. Deep purple bruises marr the skin under his eyes. His towel-dried hair leaves his carefully coiffed fauxhawk falling soft against his forehead, giving him a boyband look that he teased Mac for sporting when he saw his high school yearbook. The fingers of both hands come up, scratching against the week's growth of beard on his face. He usually rocks the beard and the scruff but right now, it's long enough to be annoying. Itchy. He's had enough of being uncomfortable the last few days. He grabs the shaving cream, filling the palm of one hand and scrubbing it against his face.

Reaching out for his straight-edge razor, with the heavy, mother-of-pearl handle, he stops, making a frustrated fist when he notices the way his hand shakes. He'll slice his own throat if he attempts a shave. And now that he's feeling better, that doesn't seem like a good solution to his illness. He grabs a towel to swipe off the cream when Mac stops him, pushing him to sit on the closed lid of the toilet seat.

“I’ve gotten pretty good at shaving with a straightedge,” Mac offers, picking up the blade. He had it made for Jack, a replica of the one Jack gave him years ago that belonged to Grandpa Dalton. Passed along in a rite of passage when Jack taught him how to shave.

“Yeah? Didn’t think you’d have a lot of opportunities to practice. Probably only had to do it once or twice since I showed ya.”

Ignoring the teasing, Mac places a hand under Jack’s chin, gently turning his face towards the light for a clear view. He pulls the skin taut, holding the blade the way Jack taught him, sliding a smooth, even pass down Jack’s cheek, ridding him of his stubble. Rinsing the blade, he prepares for another stroke.

It takes longer than normal to shed his beard. Mac carefully mapping each line of Jack’s face.

Jack watches Mac's face as he works. The kid’s gaze intensely focused, like he’s got the fate of the world in his hands. Like this is the most important thing in the universe. Whatever Mac is working on, he gives it his all.

With Mac’s hand warm on his face and the prickling stretch of the blade across his skin and Jack begins relaxing into the touch, in a way he didn’t expect to be able when someone was holding a knife to his throat. Calm and at ease, his eyes sliding closed in complete trust, giving up control.

Mac turns Jack’s face this way and that until, finally, he’s satisfied with his work. He turns to the sink, concentrating on cleaning the blade.

Sliding his hand against his smooth skin, Jack praises. “You do good work, kid.”

Still focused on his task, Mac smiles softly. “Thanks, my dad taught me.”

“Must be a handsome, debonair kind of guy. Real classy fella,” Jack continues stroking his cheek.

“Debatable.”

Jack makes a wounded noise as Mac tosses him a soft t-shirt.

“But,” Mac continues slowly, as helps Jack pull the t-shirt over his head and steadies him as he stands. “He’s the best dad I could have asked for. He teaches me things that dads are supposed to teach their kids.”

Mac is carefully ignoring Jack’s gaze as they stagger into Jack’s bedroom, the clean sheets and blankets already turned down and waiting for him. “He makes sure I know that...” Mac clears his throat. “That I’m... I’m important. And that uh... that he lo- that he worries about me.”

Jack sits on the edge of the bed as Mac takes a step back. Tears brim in his brown eyes as Mac avoids his gaze and stumbles over the unfamiliar words.

“He knows what I need to hear and uh-”

“Dads... dads are... should be good at that. Telling their kids they love them.”

“Even though I’m not great at... at... saying things back...” Mac gestures broadly.

“He knows.”

“Yeah,” Mac gives a small smile. “He’s kind of a hypocrite cause he’d scold me for trying to do things on my own. Say that’s what families are for, to help and care and then not ask for help when he needs it.”

“At least you can learn from his mistakes.”

“And he risks himself to keep me safe.”

“That one though, that’s not going away, hoss. That’s what dads do. Protect their kids, at any cost.”

“Jack-”

“Nah, does it make me a hypocrite? Maybe... I don’t know, but you will always come first, Mac.”

Mac opens his mouth to protest but Jack interrupts.

“Always. Without hesitation. And that’s not debatable.” Jack’s eyes are serious as ducks his head, making sure he meets Mac’s gaze.

“I’m not worth that, Jack.”

“You are to me. You’re my boy.” Jack lets the word hang there. Sink in. Mac is right. Jack knows the words, the truths he needs to hear.

After a moment, Jack gives a small smile and reaches out, tugging Mac closer to the bed.

“Now, come on, if I was as rambunctious as you claim, and you spent the last couple of days wrangling me, I think you need another nap too.”

Mac allows himself to be dragged onto the other side of the bed. Jack ignores Mac’s token protests, that he doesn’t need to rest, or that he can sleep on the couch, tucking the blankets up around Mac’s shoulders, Jack leaves his hand resting against Mac’s chest for a moment as he snuggles deeper under the covers.

“Sleep well, son.”

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!