

GORDON KORMAN

# KIDNAPPED



BOOK THREE

THE  
RESCUE

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AN  
**APPLE**  
PAPERBACK

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## *For Leo*

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# PROLOGUE

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE: WASHINGTON, D.C.

10:53 P.M. E.D.T.

BLIZZARD WARNING

A MAJOR WINTER STORM SYSTEM WILL MOVE THROUGH THE APPALACHIAN AND BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAINS OF WESTERN VIRGINIA TONIGHT THROUGH MIDDAY TUESDAY . . . LIGHT SNOW WILL BECOME HEAVY . . . ACCOMPANIED BY POWERFUL WIND GUSTS OF 40–50 MILES PER HOUR TO CREATE BLIZZARD CONDITIONS . . . 18–24 INCHES EXPECTED AT ELEVATIONS ABOVE 2,000 FEET . . . ALONG WITH WHITEOUT AND NEAR-ZERO VISIBILITY. . . .

A BLIZZARD WARNING MEANS SEVERE WINTER WEATHER CONDITIONS ARE EXPECTED OR OCCURRING . . . ONLY TRAVEL IN AN EMERGENCY . . . WITH AN EXTRA FLASHLIGHT . . . FOOD . . . AND WATER IN YOUR VEHICLE . . . UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES VENTURE OUTDOORS ON FOOT. . . .

**S**now.

It was the last thing Meg Falconer wanted to see.

She was lost in the woods. In the mountains. In the dark. Every limping step brought a fresh detonation of pain from her sprained ankle. Her one possession besides the clothes on her back was the pocket nail file she had used to saw through the ropes that had bound her to a chair.

Her thoughts turned to her three kidnappers. They were probably searching for her — two of them, anyway. So she was lost *and* hunted.

It was pitch-dark — was there such a thing as pitch-white? All she could see was the snow, blowing and swirling around her.

She had tried to bed down for the night in a hollow under a fallen tree. But a toxic mixture of pain, cold, and fear had made sleep impossible. The snow had been the last straw. She had to put as much distance as possible between herself and her captors before the white coating on the forest floor created tracks for them to follow.

She looked down. Her sneaker prints were unmistakable in the inch of powder that already covered the ground. If the kidnappers picked up her trail, she was doomed. With her twisted ankle, she couldn't stay ahead of them for long.

She plodded through the trees, the furious racing of her mind every bit as turbulent as the roiling snow.

*Come on, one foot in front of the other . . .*

She'd been hooded when her captors had carried her to the cabin hideout. But the direction had definitely been *up*. Down, then, was the way to go. It wasn't exactly a map, or even a compass, but it was the only point of reference she had.

*When is this lousy snow going to stop?*

Suddenly—without warning—the forest was *gone*!

She couldn't see it; she *felt* it. The stronger wind, unblocked by trees; the absence of branches scratching at her skin.

*I'm in the open!*

Had she made it out of the woods and back to civilization? No—in civilization there would be lights. It was just as black as before. Only the dim disk of the moon glowed through the snowy overcast above.

She closed her eyes in a concerted effort to boost her night vision. It was only ten seconds, but it felt like forever—lids squeezed shut, counting patiently. When she

opened them at last, she could *see* again. It was still dead dark, but she could distinguish the different textures of black on black.

She had not left the forest; it was still all around her. This was some kind of clearing—a stripe about thirty feet wide, cut straight through the woods.

*A firebreak?*

Maybe, but weren't fires more of a problem out west, where it was drier? Her gaze fixed on a tall, vertical shadow in the center of the opening. She frowned. Why would they take the trouble to clear-cut a stripe through dense forest and then leave one tree standing right in the middle?

She squinted at the ramrod-straight trunk. It did not bend or taper and had no branches.

*That's not a tree; it's a telephone pole!*

*That* was the purpose of this clearing—to run power and phone lines through to the other side of the mountains.

When the plan came to her, it was already fully formed. It wasn't actually her idea; its source was a book by her father.

In addition to his career as a criminologist, Dr. John Falconer was the author of a series of detective novels. In *Murder in the Mojave*, the hero, Mac Mulvey, has been stranded in the desert and left to die. Lost, snakebit, and

parched beyond endurance, Mulvey stumbles across a line of electrical wires. With the nearest human being dozens of miles away, the intrepid detective finds a way to send out a distress call.

As Meg began to climb the pole, she couldn't help reflecting that Mulvey didn't have to do this in the dark. He had no trouble telling the harmless telephone cables from the deadly high-voltage lines that would electrocute her on contact.

The wood was wet from snow. She pressed the rubber soles of her sneakers against the pole to keep from sliding. The wind nipped harder—she was making progress, even though she couldn't see the ground below.

*That's a good thing*, she reminded herself. Meg didn't like heights. She was grateful that the darkness made it impossible to look down.

All at once, a barrage of ice-cold needles assailed her face, as a monster gust threatened to tear her loose and fling her into the night. She pressed her body against the wood and hung on.

*Just keep climbing . . .*

When the cold cable touched her face, she cried out in shock and nearly jumped off the pole.

*Calm down*, she scolded herself. *If it was live, you'd be dead already!*

Struggling to control her gasping breath and the

runaway pounding of her heart, Meg rallied her night vision once again. She could see the power lines, still a few feet above her. This was the telephone wire. Perfect.

In *Murder in the Mojave*, Mac Mulvey cuts the cable with a Swiss Army knife. But all Meg had was the nail file. Tightening her legs' grip on the pole, she held on with her left arm and began sawing at the wire with her right.

As the file cut into the plastic insulation, she wondered if the stress of the kidnapping had caused her to lose her mind. Why was she wasting precious time on a stunt from Dad's cheesy novel? Mac Mulvey was a made-up detective, and this moment was very, very real.

Yet—crazy but true—Mac Mulvey's tactics sometimes worked. His wild antics had saved her on more occasions than she cared to remember—especially back when she and her brother, Aiden, had been fugitives.

The file was already through the coating. She could feel it biting into the wire.

Her left leg was falling asleep. She shifted her position but didn't dare risk losing her purchase on the pole. She blinked the ice crystals out of her eyes. Was it snowing harder?

*Concentrate!* she ordered herself.

The wire was tough, but she could feel the metallic



filaments separating under the sawing action. At last, the cable broke in two.

She fought off the urge to cheer. This wasn't over yet. In *Murder in the Mojave*, Mulvey didn't just cut the telephone line; he used the severed ends to transmit a distress call in Morse code.

With the file, she carved away a few inches of insulation from each of the broken pieces, exposing the shiny wire inside. Then she began to tap the tips together, spelling out the code for SOS.

*Dot-dot-dot . . . dash-dash-dash . . . dot-dot-dot . . .*

She breathed a silent apology to anybody who might be trying to dial 911 along the line.

*Like anybody else's emergency is bigger than mine right now!*

A thought nagged at her. Dad himself had admitted that the adventures of his detective hero had never been tested. She ought to feel like an idiot thirty feet up a pole in the middle of the night in a snowstorm.

*Dot-dot-dot . . . dash-dash-dash . . . dot-dot-dot . . .*

She prayed that Mac Mulvey had one more miracle left for her.