

GORDON KORMAN

KIDNAPPED



BOOK TWO

THE
SEARCH

AN
APPLE
PAPERBACK

SCHOLASTIC INC.

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For Daisy

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PROLOGUE

Welcome to the Blog Hog
News, Opinions, and Whatnot
www.bloghog.usa

When the FBI wrongly imprisoned Doctors John and Louise Falconer for treason last year, they made a terrible mistake. But that was only the beginning. After the couple was released, no one even considered that a family denounced and defamed as the worst traitors in fifty years might be at risk.

Now we see the result. Four days ago, eleven-year-old Margaret Falconer was kidnapped and is being held for two million dollars' ransom. And the FBI's botched rescue attempt yesterday only places her in greater danger.

When is the Bureau going to stop jerking these poor people around? They were found innocent and deserve protection as much as any other citizen. Why is Emmanuel Harris, the man who arrested the Falconers in

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the first place, still the lead agent in this case? It's time for the authorities to get serious before that little girl winds up dead. . . .

The trunk of the kidnappers' car. Location: unknown. Destination: unknown. Time: unknown.

Meg bounced around, trying not to hit her head on the trunk lid each time the vehicle went over a bump. She felt like one big muscle cramp. The pain was bad enough to make her forget what was happening to her—that she was at the mercy of ruthless criminals who might decide to kill her at any minute. She had, after all, seen their faces.

How long had she been locked in here? Too long. It had to be at least fifteen hours. The first light of dawn was beginning to filter in through the airholes drilled into the trunk lid. In all that time, she'd had no food, no water, and no opportunity to get out and stretch. If she didn't find a bathroom soon, she was going to explode.

No, she thought. Bathrooms can wait.

Now that she could see again, she had to take stock of what was in the trunk—anything she might use to escape from her captors.

The most obvious weapon was a metal tire iron. A crude plan took shape in her mind. She could bash at the trunk lock until the lid popped. Of course her captors would probably hear the banging and put a stop to it. Then she'd lose her tire iron and her chance. Bad idea.

She rolled onto her side to investigate what, if anything, was deep in the back of the trunk. There was a set of broken jumper cables, an ice scraper, a dried-out sponge, an empty yogurt container, and—what was this? A small box of ammunition for a pistol, .38 caliber. She overturned it, and two bullets dropped into her hand. She sighed. Useless by themselves. Unless—

In addition to his career as a noted criminologist, her father, Dr. John Falconer, was the author of a series of detective novels. In *The Gun That Never Was*, the hero, Mac Mulvey, solved the mystery of a shooting with no firearm and no ballistics markings. Mulvey realized that a sharp blow on the back of a shell casing had the same effect as the hammer of a gun. It ignited the gunpowder, which set off the bullet.

She could fire these shells if she could hit them hard enough with the tire iron.

She struggled to recall the details of the book. Dad's writing was on the cheesy side—all wild action, not very memorable. One thing stood out, though, in Meg's

memory: It was impossible to aim precisely when you were shooting this way. If she tried, she could end up doing herself far more harm than good.

But as the wave of disappointment washed over her, her eyes fell on the wheel wells that made the trunk so tight and uncomfortable. If she could shoot out a tire, her captors would suspect nothing more than a blowout. And then . . .

She took one of the bullets and held it like a nail against the rounded wheel well on the driver's side. She hefted the tire iron—and immediately chickened out.

I'll probably blow my hand off!

If she couldn't keep it steady, she'd never be able to hit in the right spot.

Then the morning outside brightened, and a shaft of light from one of the airholes drew her attention to the sponge. Excitedly, she pressed the bullet into it, leaving the back of the shell exposed. To her delight, it stood firmly on the wheel well.

Gingerly, Meg got to her knees so that her back was pressed up against the underside of the trunk lid. A tremor of fear ran through her as she raised the tire iron. She always felt this way before trying something from Dad's books. Mac Mulvey was fiction, and this was all too real. If she somehow put this bullet into the gas tank, it would be curtains for all of them.

Maybe I shouldn't . . .

It was the hesitation that convinced her. Meg's brother, Aiden, was the timid one in the family. He thought fifty times before brushing his teeth. Meg's strength was action.

Do it!

The edge of the tire iron slammed against the shell. She felt the impact all the way up to her shoulder. The bullet did not fire.

Come on, Dad! Tell me you didn't make it up!

She was aware of raised voices inside the car. That meant they'd heard the noise. With any luck, her captors had put it down to the tires kicking up a rock against the undercarriage. But she couldn't expect to get away with twenty tries at this. There weren't that many rocks on any road.

This has to work—fast!

She raised the tire iron once more and concentrated on the target like a karate master about to split a stack of boards.

Pow!!

The smell of gunpowder filled the trunk, choking her and burning in her nostrils. The bullet tore down through the wheel well and ripped into the tire. The blowout made an even bigger explosion. A split second

later, the car was reeling all over the road as the driver fought for control.

Meg was knocked violently around the confined space.

What have I done?

Just when she thought they'd either swerve off the road or into oncoming traffic, the driver regained control and the sedan limped to a halt on the soft shoulder.

Behind the wheel was a burly, bearded man with a gruff voice and a personality to match. Meg had dubbed him Spidey because of the Spider-Man mask he'd worn on the day she'd been taken.

"What next?" he roared. "A flat tire! Why doesn't anything ever go right?"

"Is there a spare?" the kidnapper Meg called Mickey asked nervously. At twenty, he was the youngest of Meg's captors, nicknamed for his own disguise, a Mickey Mouse head.

"There'd better be," intoned the third occupant of the car, the only woman. She had also been incognito during Meg's abduction—in a Tiger Woods mask. Meg called her Tiger.

Spidey, Mickey, and Tiger. The Three Animals.

They didn't bother to hide their faces any longer. By now, their captive knew them all too well. It was just an-

other foul-up in an operation that had seen more than a few.

And now this blowout . . .

Mickey got to the trunk first. He popped the latch and peered inside.

The tire iron swung up and slammed into the side of his head.