

# **The Abduction Study Guide**

## **The Abduction by Gordon Korman**

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# Plot Summary

**Kidnapped: Book One The Abduction** by Gordon Korman is a coming-of-age story set against a classic kidnap scenario. Aiden Falconer, a junior high school student, watches in terror as Meg, his younger sister, is abducted in broad daylight by three brazen but masked individuals. Aiden must convince the reluctant FBI to believe him when he uncovers a major clue as to where Meg is being held by her captors, but the federal law agency is reluctant to put faith in a young person who is not trained.

When the book begins, Aiden and Meg Falconer are not strangers to notoriety. Earlier, they have been on the run from the FBI and nationwide police authorities when their parents were wrongly accused of aiding terrorists in a spoiled plot. Despite the fact that the Falconers were all labeled traitors, that his parents were held for a long time in prison, and that Aiden and his sister have been ostracized at school, Aiden knows as well as the rest of his family the sad perception by most of the American public. Most viewers of television feel the family is still guilty of treason to the United States, despite the fact they were dutifully cleared of all charges and accusations.

Agent Harris from the FBI is the main reason the original Falconer case was bungled. As a result, he carries a guilt complex about the family. When Meg is abducted in broad daylight by three masked individuals, Agent Harris sees an opportunity to right himself with the Falconers. However, Mr. and Mrs. Falconer are understandably reluctant to trust him. But when it becomes clear he is their only hope to seeing their daughter alive again, they agree.

Meg never gives up and fights constantly for her freedom. Eventually a note she leaves is discovered by an FBI agent who searches for her in an industrial warehouse. The agent actually frees her from captivity, but Meg conks him on the head, believing him one of her abductors. She escapes, only to be forcibly grabbed by two of her actual kidnappers. Meanwhile, Aiden acts as the "bag man" and carries the ransom money to an arranged location. He receives instructions there to ride a bus to a street carnival in progress. A clown grabs the ransom money bag. It is the third kidnapper in clown makeup!

Aiden and his friend Richie chase down the clown and recover the ransom, but the clown escapes in the melee. The book ends with Aiden uselessly trying to comfort his parents and vowing to do whatever it takes to help the FBI find and rescue his kidnapped sister.



# Chapter One

## Chapter One Summary

The book begins with the main protagonists fifteen-year-old Aiden Falconer and his eleven-year-old sister Meg who have just recently survived an ordeal in which their parents, John and Louise Falconer, were falsely accused of aiding and abetting terrorists. Because the parents were imprisoned before a fair trial, Aiden and Meg were forced to go on the run from state and federal authorities for several months. Because they cleverly eluded capture for so long, the FBI has a begrudging admiration for the two youngsters. It is not everyone, after all, who can outwit the FBI for weeks on end and succeed at it.

Eventually, the reader learns, John and Louise were cleared of their non-existent crimes and Aiden and Meg were reunited with their parents. In this back story, all of which occurs before the book even begins in the terse Prologue, one quickly learns that both Aiden and Meg are true survivor types. That is, they both know how to exist from moment-to-moment, think on their feet, maintain their wits when in danger and trust their instincts. These qualities will aid them in the book as the plot unfolds and they are faced yet again as a sibling pair with a terrible ordeal.

As Chapter One begins properly, Meg is playing baseball with her school friends. She cannot concentrate, her mind distracted by thoughts of her previous ordeal. She is particularly bothered by the students who taunt her as being a "traitor to her country" and the like, forgetting as they do that her parents (and, therefore, herself and her brother Aiden) were cleared by the government of any and all wrongdoing. It seems many believe that once an accused traitor, forever an accused traitor. Meg slams a baseball bat into a flag pole, enraged by the latest insults made by rude students, and sends the American flag hurtling to the ground. She is sent to the principal's office to be punished for her outburst. Meg dejectedly considers how insulting her life has become, especially when it becomes apparent the principal blames her and believes she's a traitor, too.

Meanwhile, Aiden rides the bus home with friend Richie Pembleton. Aiden is annoyed that his only elective class is for macrame. But Richie's constant attempts to help Aiden blend back into the banalities of school life are even more annoying to Aiden. While he appreciates Richie's earnest attempts to demonstrate loyalty, Aiden just wants to be left alone to sort out his complicated feelings. He is relieved when Meg boards the bus. They share their anxiety at having to go back to school post their recent ordeal, and lament that many believe them terrorists without fair evidence.

Aiden mulls over how difficult it is to find peace after one's life is so challenged while lying on his bed that night. He is just about to drift off to sleep when the sound of smashing glass sounds loudly from downstairs in the family's living room.



## Chapter One Analysis

The themes of *Kidnapped: The Abduction Book One* are very universally accessible to most readers. Despite the intrigue of the plots, which features abductions and terrorists as background elements, the actual themes most present throughout this book relate to the deeply-held bonds of family and how some lucky families endure tragedy to emerge afterwards stronger and more loving of one another than before their ordeal. The stresses that the Falconers endure as a family such as kidnappings, wrongful accusations and even imprisonment are perhaps exotic to most readers' lives, but the conflicts and dramas present in the Falconers as a household are merely those of most homes, magnified by events which make the Falconers reluctant household names via the ever-present media.

The fast-paced narrative drive that characterizes the book is presented in the opening Prologue. Here a press release issued by Falconers after they have recently been pardoned from the erroneous crimes of treason and freed from wrongful imprisonment is introduced to the reader. It makes for an effective way for the writer to introduce the themes mentioned above in terms of subtle foreshadowing. For example, the Prologue press release states that the Falconers are depleted as a family by their ordeal and only want to withdraw from the public eye to heal together. After all, they have been separated from one another because of a mistake the FBI has made, and so they deserve the chance to reconnect without having to explain their every move to the media, they reason.

Herein, the major themes have been sounded before the story proper even unfolds. The family has been through a living hell. They have been split apart for months on end. The children have had to become fugitives and forced to survive on their own together for weeks. The parents have been imprisoned as traitors to their country. And though the family has been officially cleared of all wrongdoing by the time the story begins, one has been told in no uncertain terms by the Falconers themselves that they only want to be left alone. This of course is the very wish that will be shattered by Meg's kidnapping in the opening chapters of the book.

Note the writer's spare but effective use of symbolism in his storytelling. Meg is angry at her classmates who taunt her for being a traitor to America even though she's innocent. She slings her baseball bat into a flag pole. Her action inadvertently causes the American flag to fall to the ground, an effective taboo in flag-handling etiquette. This is richly potent imagery if the reader looks beneath the surface. Meg is called un-American, in essence, and using a very common symbol of America, the baseball bat, accidentally brings down the very symbol of America itself. The writer is showing how when one questions the loyalty of another citizen unjustly, one is actually bringing down democracy as well. Mockery and derision are not worthy values for believers in liberty and justice for all, the author subtly implies.

Likewise, notice how Aiden is introduced on the bus, reflectively moody. He is particularly angry that he has been forced to take macrame as his elective study course.



He tries to untangle the knots of his latest project, but he cannot do so. This is another good metaphor for the conflicts Aiden is experiencing when the story begins. He is literally tied up in knots emotionally himself. This is a good way of externalizing the conflict he feels by the writer.



# Chapter Two

## Chapter Two Summary

Police Officer Kincannin examines the rock some irate citizen has tossed through the window of the Falconer's home. He believes it is merely vandalism, but the Falconers believe it is something more ominous. They feel threatened, and request additional security. Kincannin is less sympathetic, explaining the threat level is probably low and his force is definitely undermanned. He promises to send a squad car around on occasional patrol and then leaves.

Afterwards John and Louise debate whether or not they should take further action in the face of the local police authorities seeming indifference to their plight. They remember that Agent Harris from the FBI has given them his card and told them to call should they need his assistance. The only problem is that it was Agent Harris who initially charged the family with aiding terrorists. As the charges were later proven to be false, the Falconers are understandably angry at Agent Harris. However, they remember that towards the end of their ordeal, it was Harris who having realized the error of his ways, actually helped insure John and Louise were freed from prison. The embarrassment to the FBI and Harris had been enormous, but Harris had not balked at taking his share of the blame and responsibility.

No conclusion is drawn. Just the mentioning of Agent Harris sends the family to their respective bedrooms, unsettled at the thought of having to ever see the man in person again, even if he may be their only hope.

## Chapter Two Analysis

The vigilantism implicit in having someone cowardly throw a rock through the Falconers' living room window is an underlying tension throughout *Kidnapped: The Abduction*. This echoes the intolerance often experienced by those who are of outsider status in the United States. Some examples in history include the Mormons, Africans imported as slaves and the native Americans encountered by European settlers to North America. Because the media has branded the Falconers as traitors, many in their community believe it. They refuse to listen to reason or even their own government, the latter of which has publicly admitted the FBI was wrong about the Falconers' patriotism and that they were innocent of all charges of being traitors. Again, this is not unlike Muslim Americans today who face lingering suspicions from less tolerant members of American society who view all Muslims in such a way after the events of 9/11.

The writer is skillful in establishing a mood of open hostility just beneath the surface of everything being otherwise normal in these early chapters. He focuses the reader's attention on the mundane aspects of the family's life together in order to lower their emotional guard. And then, when the reader least expects it, the author introduces a





sinister act of terror in and of itself. Only this act is not imaginary, as the one the Falconers were falsely accused of doing, but an actual assault on their home at night, however benign the outcome. The Falconers' fears herein again remind more astute readers of such terrors as felt by early civil rights workers and activists in the American South in the 1960s. Such groups were often targeted in their homes at night to induce a state of terror.

The irony is not lost on the family itself. They are innocent but have been previously accused of being terrorists. And yet, someone in their community of supposedly innocent civilians has committed an act of terror against the Falconers without provocation. The Falconers feel with some justification like they are still under assault even before Meg's abduction, in other words. This is an effective technique used by the writer. It heightens the dramatic tension, as the reader feels the family has been so stressed by previous events that they can not possibly summon the strength necessary to survive the coming ordeal, too.



# Chapter Three

## Chapter Three Summary

On the bus ride home the next day from school, Aiden gloomily reviews the status of his friendship with Richie. Richie's still making Aiden's re-adjustment back to civilian life difficult. Meg is feeling equally negative about her own prospects of fitting in with her peers again. She and her family are so notorious no one will approach her to be a friend, afraid of the consequences of association. They share their blues with one another as they exit the bus.

A van marked as a commercial exterminator's vehicle squeals to a halt near them. Two masked kidnapers leap out. One wearing a Spiderman mask grabs Meg and uses chloroform gas to render her unconscious. Another kidnapper masked as Mickey Mouse attempts the same maneuver on Aiden. Aiden's fast reflexes allow him to overpower Mickey Mouse and attempt to rescue Meg. But Spiderman drags her into the van before Aiden can do anything to help.

A woman wearing a Tiger Woods mask who is driving the van screams for them to leave Aiden. Spiderman and Mickey Mouse dive into the van. Tiger Woods drives away, tires squealing. Aiden stares in horror, realizing he has just witnessed the abduction of his sister.

## Chapter Three Analysis

Aiden's inability to put his recent adventures as a fugitive from justice behind him is personified in his friendship with Richie. Richie wants nothing more than to be a friend to Aiden in Aiden's supposed time of need. The problem for Aiden is that he has learned how to stand on his own two feet during his survival stand. He feels mature and able to handle the situations life throws at one much more adeptly than the less-experienced Richie. This makes Aiden uncomfortable when he is around Richie for too long. Richie's puppy-dog enthusiasm is simply too much for Aiden to handle in his current nervous state of being.

The kidnapers are introduced as wearing rubber character masks. The biggest, strongest male is masked as Spiderman. The fact that Spiderman, a supposed super hero, is shown as brutally chloroforming a little girl and then tossing her into a van is very dark irony. Likewise, the fact the younger kidnapper who is slender in build is masked as Mickey Mouse is black comedy of sorts. The driver is a female who wears a Tiger Woods mask. Given Woods' very public troubles with his wife and other women, this is again intentional black comedy on the writer's part. It plays against the very sinister nature of what the kidnapers are actually doing and lessens the horrific nature of their actions, albeit only slightly in overall tone. Evil or morally repugnant acts are sometimes made less so for readers with such bleak but gallows-oriented humor.



# Chapter Four

## Chapter Four Summary

Aiden snaps to, realizing the kidnapers are getting away with Meg. He chases after them on foot, screaming for bystanders to help. He finds a scooter and hops on it, using it to gain on the fleeing kidnapers, who must weave in and out of traffic. Just when Aiden thinks he may have them, he slams into a stack of boxes sitting on a street side and lands hard on his back. As he blacks out, he mutters for anyone who can hear him to call the police for help.

Agent Emmanuel Harris receives the word in his FBI office that Meg has been abducted. He grimly sips the terrible coffee the FBI is known for serving and realizes his life has just taken a turn for the worse. The only reason the Falconers have suffered this latest trauma to their family, Harris realizes, is because he erroneously had them convicted of crimes they did not commit in the back story. Had he not made his initial error, in summation, the Falconers would not now be targets of a kidnapping and likely extortion plot to follow.

Determined to make good on his earlier mistake, Harris commits to helping the Falconers get Meg back alive, safe and sound. But he realizes that convincing the distraught family to trust him to do so may be even more difficult than solving the case itself.

## Chapter Four Analysis

The author of *Kidnapped: The Abduction* is very adroit in writing action and suspense sequences. The stretch wherein Aiden attempts to follow after Meg's kidnapers by using a found scooter is both comical and yet oddly touching. The reader is forced to root for Aiden despite the long odds against his quest simply because he is the only character taking action to prevent her predicament.

This demonstrates the very powerful effect having a lead character in the process of taking action has in good fiction writing. Such writing allows the characters' internal states of conflict to be visually externalized in exciting, intriguing action scenes. While dialogue and interior monologues can be equally effective at creating such states of anxiety and suspense, lean action written with sparing detail allows the reader to become caught up in the rapid pace of unfolding events and producing a breathless, page-turning experience.

Agent Harris' major character themes of guilt and redemption are introduced in Chapter Four. It is again an ironic reversal that the agent/detective character is the one who is guilty while the Falconers, who are the nominal suspects of the former investigation against them, are truly innocent. Harris has promised himself and the Falconers redemption before the story begins. When he receives the telex message that Meg has

been kidnapped, Harris realizes his moment to achieve the redemption he has sworn for himself and the besieged family.



# Chapter Five

## Chapter Five Summary

Blindfolded so she cannot see, Meg awakens in the back seat of the fleeing kidnapper's van. She gathers her wits, realizing she is seated next to Mickey Mouse. Because of his slender build and obviously youthful voice, Meg deduces he is the youngest of her abductors. But she senses that just because he is nearer to her in age, it does not necessarily mean he will be anything but kinder to her during her ordeal. Her ultimate fate should she trust him, Meg unhappily concludes, is still in doubt.

She remembers some of the cheesy thriller novels her father John has written and had published from time to time. They are routinely standard, but they do feature a hero who uses his wits to get himself out of bad predicaments, rather than his fists or a gun like most bad t.v. shows. Meg appreciates her father's writing with new respect as she attempts to emulate the fictional protagonist and survive her own ordeal.

Meg feels the door handle with her foot. When the van next stops at a light, Meg kicks open the door and runs, screaming for help. She is slowed because she cannot see, still blindfolded. Her kidnappers quickly catch up with her. Tiger Woods yells that they were sloppy and that they must be more careful. Spiderman uses the chloroform on Meg and she again blacks out.

## Chapter Five Analysis

Meg will spend a lot of her time during the book first being subdued, and then drugged into unconsciousness. This repeating motif creates a sense of a ticking clock within the narrative. A classical suspense device of writers, the ticking clock is the idea that a bomb is shown to the reader alone as being under the seat of the lead characters, ticking away, while they obliviously sit atop the explosive device, unaware their moments are limited.

For Meg, the idea that her captors will grab her after each escape attempt and chloroform her into sleep over and over is like a waking nightmare from which she cannot escape. The cyclic nature of this series of events is truly like a bad dream. Meg uses her logic and calmness to effect a plan of escape, only to find it leads her to repeatedly escalating encounters with her increasingly irate kidnappers. While each attempt strengthens her resolve to survive by any means, they also weigh heavily on Meg's conscience. She begins to realize that each escape attempt may be her last should she exceed the trio's already strained tolerance.



# Chapter Six

## Chapter Six Summary

Distraught when the media appears at their doorstep yet again, the Falconers debate what course of action to take. Should they attempt to ignore the throngs of t.v. reporters and cameras? Or should they make a statement about their kidnapped daughter? The local police have urged the Falconers to make a statement, believing the sympathy will help tips and informants come forward to help find Meg. But Aiden is dead set against it, wanting no part of the media nor trusting the outcome. He is overruled by his father.

Before they can speak to the whirring cameras, however, Agent Harris arrives and takes control of the situation. He orders the Falconers back inside and the media types to back off into the public streets and off the Falconers' private residential yard. They comply, grumbling. Inside, Agent Harris tries to convince the Falconers he is indeed their best hope of ever seeing Meg alive again. No one wants to trust him, but given the dire circumstances, no one feels the family has a better option. They reluctantly agree to allow Agent Harris to guide their efforts to rescue Meg and capture her abductors for punishment.

A blog writer named Rufus Sehorn sits uninvited in their kitchen. Agent Harris wants to kick him out. But because Seford's blog, called "BlogHog.com," is empathetic towards the Falconers instead of labeling them as traitors as most of the media has done, the Falconers elect to have Seford cover their ordeal. The Bloghog.com becomes the official voice of the Falconers to the rest of the world over Agent Harris' objections.

## Chapter Six Analysis

The treatment of the media in general is not very favorable in *Kidnapped: The Abduction*. The reporters are shown to be a disrespectful lot in general, full of deceit and trickery at the Falconers' expense, including stoking the anti-Falconer hysteria the Falconers must encounter in their daily existences. The comedic nature of Rufus and his Blog Hog is designed by the author to at once offer a skeptical commentary on the dubious ethics of online journalists, and, at the same time, create a sense in the story that is contemporary and using the latest in social media trends to avoid feeling dated and predictable to the reader.



# Chapter Seven

## Chapter Seven Summary

Meg awakens. This time, she is not blindfolded. But she is in a very difficult predicament. She has been left in an abandoned warehouse. Worse, Meg is in a dank basement with no seeming way out. The lone, dirty light overhead offers little comfort from the cold, gray walls encasing her. She groggily shakes off the after effects of the chloroform and tries to gain her bearings, realizing she must act quickly before her kidnappers return to check on her if she wants to escape.

Meg notices there is a window high at the top of the basement's walls. She surveys the basement. There are wooden pallets haphazardly scattered around the inside. She realizes that if she can lean them against the wall at the precisely correct angles, she can construct a makeshift ladder leading up to the window and possible freedom.

## Chapter Seven Analysis

Meg is very resourceful throughout the book. In Chapter Seven, she vividly demonstrates why she has previously survived living in the wilderness and eluding capture by the FBI. Using nothing more than the abandoned materials around her and her reasoning skills, Meg figures out a possible escape plan and puts it into action. Though she will ultimately be unsuccessful in her attempt, her actions indirectly lead to the next escape opportunity.

Here the writer is underscoring the resolute nature that runs throughout the Falconers as a bloodline. While Meg's actions to escape produce failure immediately, the fact that she took positive action in the face of a negative situation produces a secondary chance for escape that ultimately will be successful. Meg has not sat around and given in to despair. She has taken actions based on using her intellect. The writer shows that although we may never know the outcome of our actions, when we plan ahead and attempt our best, we often create our own luck.



# Chapter Eight

## Chapter Eight Summary

Debate rages within the Falconer household as the effectiveness of Agent Harris' strategy of calming waiting for the kidnappers to contact the family. After all, what if they only took Meg because they are one of a growing number of kooks who openly post on the Internet of their desire to "rid America" of the Falconers as traitors? And even if they are kidnappers out for a ransom, what if the trail grows cold while they play the cat and mouse waiting game?

Meanwhile, Harris informs Louise Falconer that her quote to the BlogHog.com site was inappropriate. Louise defends her choice of words, but Harris points out that Louise has mentioned Meg as having an excellent memory for cards. Harris gently points out that the kidnappers might read this and deduce that Meg has an equally fine recall for their faces. If this is the case? The kidnappers might decide to kill Meg rather than risk having her live to be able to identify them later.

Sobered, Louise agrees to redact her comment to the blog. Word arrives from the FBI that the kidnappers' van has been recovered in Bethesda, Maryland. There are no fingerprints except for Meg's, however, so the lead is cold. Tire tracks near the abandoned van indicate the kidnappers fled the scene in a car, but otherwise, Meg has vanished without a clue.

## Chapter Eight Analysis

The claustrophobia of the Falconers being secluded within their own home while the reporters from international news media outlets fill the streets outside is keenly evoked by the writer in Chapter Eight. The tensions of sharing a small space so long under difficult situations leads the family to bicker and resent the intruders who are trying to help, however ineffectively so. This is very realistic and true to the familial dynamics many readers will find in their own histories.

The precarious nature of having one's family member at the mercy of strangers is underscored by Agent Harris' telling Louise she should edit her Blog Hog comments before they are released to the public to read. Although Harris has a long way to go to regain the trust and therefore forgiveness of the Falconers, his patient counsel and ultimately correct insight into the mistake Louise has innocently made in touting Meg's intelligence online does go a long way towards earning their tacit ability to at least believe Harris is sincere. At every turn, Harris will attempt to remain a calm, controlling force in their chaotic lives. This is part of his character's desire to earn redemption.





# Chapter Nine

## Chapter Nine Summary

Meg has finished stacking the wooden crates against the wall of her basement captivity. She totters on them, gently climbing higher. She reaches the window. The crates wobble and crash down below her. Meg hangs on to the filthy window, but finds to her despair it has security bars outside the broken glass window which prevent her from escaping. She loses her grip and falls to the floor. She smashes into the wooden crates and loses consciousness.

Aiden cannot sleep. Alone in his bedroom, he tosses and turns, unable to get the image of Meg all alone and terrified out of his mind. Just then, commotion from outside. The FBI have seemingly apprehended an intruder. Aiden rushes outside to see his friend Richie pinned to the lawn, struggling as he's read his rights. Aiden tells them Richie is his friend and the surprised FBI agents release the shaken Richie.

As they head upstairs to Aiden's bedroom for a late night visit, Aiden listens to Richie mumble about how he had to come over just as soon as he saw the news on t.v. Richie offers to get Aiden's homework for him from school. Aiden feels overwhelmed. While he appreciates Richie's display of friendship, all Aiden wants is to figure out the best way to help Meg, not lean on Richie's shoulder for support.

## Chapter Nine Analysis

Aiden is experiencing a form of survivor's guilt during the kidnapping of his sister. This is a common psychological reaction one often experiences when one's loved ones are harmed or killed, but the person is left alive and unharmed himself. The survivor often fantasizes that he or she should have been the one harmed or killed instead, experiencing an intense sense of unworthiness and guilt. This is close to how Aiden views himself and the fact that Meg, not himself, is being held by the kidnappers. He wishes against hope that he could be in her place instead, as he feels she is too young to withstand the strains of being the victim instead of him.

Richie stumbles into the plot at this moment as a kind of comic fool. Though he is not played over the top, Richie's inability to even slip into his friend's house without being noisily captured by the agents is indicative of just how hopelessly naive Richie's belief he can help Aiden in this situation truly is when viewed from a larger perspective. Richie means well, it is true, but lacks the life experience to back up the offer of help he so desperately desires to extend to Aiden. Aiden cannot help but experience resentment that he must not only deal with Meg's kidnapping, but also act as a nursemaid to Richie rather than vice versa as Richie believes he offers.

# Chapter Ten

## Chapter Ten Summary

Meg awakens, her head aching from the blow of having landed on the wooden pallets. She looks around, dazed. The ceiling now has a hole in it. She looks beside her. The ceiling lamp. Meg remembers that she grabbed for the ceiling light as she fell from the basement's window. She must have pulled it free when she fell. When the light once resided, there is now a gaping hole. The hole leads into a hallway and just beyond, freedom for Meg.

She stacks the fallen crates again. She climbs up to the window. She leaps from the window to the ceiling hole. At first, her grip is tenuous. She begins to slip and fall. At the last second, she grabs a support beam and hoists herself into the room above. She finds she is in an old warehouse ground floor office. She races through the hallway, looking for a way out. After opening the doors to a few dead ends, she loudly throws open the last door and unexpectedly finds herself facing her sleeping captives.

## Chapter Ten Analysis

Resilience of character is a major component of Meg's traits as a person. She does not believe that failure is a dead-end. Rather, she absorbs her mistakes and uses the lessons from each previous failure to better her next attempt. This is a very attractive character strength. All of us wish that we will be heroic and clever if confronted with a life-threatening situation or series of situations. Meg is not a passive dreamer, but an experienced survivor who is able to use her imagination and willpower to get what she wants in life. For an 11-year old, this is unusual and part of the reason that Meg is such an interesting character.



# Chapter Eleven

## Chapter Eleven Summary

Meg's sudden entrance awakens her startled captors. They shout to awaken one another. Meg panics and realizes she must take desperate action. She hurls herself into a closed window and smashes through the boards, landing outside the building in a narrow alleyway. Meg sees an electrical generator line leading into the warehouse. Realizing this is the source of light and power for her kidnappers in the otherwise dark building, Meg yanks the cord out. The kidnappers scream and curse in the darkness.

Meg races into the nearest street. To her disappointment, the entire neighborhood is abandoned, an industrial no man's land. There is no one around to hear her cries for help. She sees a closed gas station. Two flags still fly from its flag poles. Meg has a sudden idea. She races over and knocks the flags down. They crash down to the ground, just the same as she has earlier accidentally sent the American flag crashing to her school's ground while playing baseball. Meg hopes that someone will see this sign and seek to rescue her.

She is quickly overtaken by her captors. Meg realizes she has made a bad mistake. She has now seen her kidnappers' faces without their masks. Now they know she can identify them by face. Her life expectancy, Meg realizes, may have just been drastically shortened by her escape attempt.

## Chapter Eleven Analysis

The author uses many clever plot twists and sudden reversals to keep the suspense high throughout this book. Having Meg escape from her basement captivity only to wind up running into a room filled with her formerly sleeping kidnappers is an ironic twist. It forces Meg to resort to immediate action rather than longer term planning. She successfully lives up to the challenge, improvising a solution when she hurls herself through a boarded window and escapes outside.

Likewise, Meg is a fast thinker. She knows she will be caught again by her captors after she bursts free. Rather than panic and waste her brief moments of opportunity, Meg instead devises a hurried "smoke signal" to send to her family. By mirroring the flags at the closed gas station with her own earlier mistake with the baseball bat and the school's flag, the author is showing how the earlier flag scene has actually foreshadowed this later sequence, as well. Foreshadowing is a good technique for writers to use because it economically recycles earlier images and situations to allow the reader to bring such ideas into the future repetition and later literary echoing of the foreshadowed events. In effect, it acts as a kind of dramatic shorthand.



# Chapter Twelve

## Chapter Twelve Summary

Aiden cannot believe his ears. His parents and Agent Harris believe Aiden should return to school and pretend nothing is amiss. Aiden argues the idea is preposterous, but his father is adamant. Realizing he has no choice, Aiden goes along. He is accompanied to classes by an FBI agent acting as a bodyguard. In every class he attends that day, Aiden must sit and pretend along with his fellow students that a hulking, sunglasses-wearing FBI agent is not also present, silently glaring at every student who moves suddenly or has to sharpen his or her pencil.

As the day wears on, many parents drop by the school to retrieve their children. Some do not want to have their kids exposed to risks because Aiden Falconer is at school, as they view the family as a whole as a magnet for troubles. Some believe the Falconers are traitors and want to make a statement to the school that they are not happy the Falconers have not been asked to leave their school district. The latter cite the events of the day as the very reason the Falconers should be required to vacate.

Glumly sitting in a cafeteria and watching a television news report featuring an irate editorial about flags being vandalized in Virginia, Aiden suddenly snaps awake. The report he has just seen has clearly indicated the flags were sent to the ground in precisely the same manner, Aiden realizes, as Meg inadvertently sent the American flag crashing to their school's grounds. Aiden yells to his startled FBI bodyguard that he needs to be taken home to see Agent Harris right away.

## Chapter Twelve Analysis

The earlier sense of being ostracized from their own community comes to the narrative forefront in Chapter Twelve. Aiden endures a long, lonely day at school, lamely attempting to pretend that Meg's disappearance and having a bodyguard at his side is normal series of events. Alas, the prejudice against the Falconers comes to a head in this chapter as some parents decide to remove their children from school rather than have them attend any institution that would allow the likes of the Falconers as members. Again, this form of "soft bigotry" is commonly experienced by many in real-life situations in which minorities and politically oppressed individuals or groups are discriminated against not for their actions or even beliefs, but because of the actions and beliefs of others reacting harshly and in error against them.

While the Falconers are fictional and therefore not representative of any actual living persons, it is very effective of the author to echo these past situations and historical contexts within his story. It helps elevate the Falconers sense of peril as characters because the reader can easily believe based on historical similarities to past events that the Falconers' well-being is always in jeopardy. Ironically, not the least of the Falconers

worries is that their fellow citizens will turn against them, even though they are innocent and in dire need of their help to rescue Meg.



# Chapter Thirteen

## Chapter Thirteen Summary

Agent Harris listens patiently to Aiden's theory and then dismisses it as chance vandalism. Aiden insists it is precisely the same pattern as the school yard flag downing Meg earlier committed, right down to using the broken flag cleats that held the flags aloft. Harris refuses to budge, but does agree to call the Alexandria Police Department and ask for them to send a patrol car into the area to see if they see anything suspicious. Aiden is upset. He tells Harris that unless someone checks out the area on foot, there can be no possible help for Meg. Aiden leaves, shaken and angry, vowing to do something to help Meg and act on her clue despite Harris.

After Aiden has gone to bed, Harris decides to call on a vacationing FBI agent he knows who owes him a favor. Agent Brajansky will gladly drive over to the abandoned warehouse area and follow up on the long-shot and only possible clue of the broken flags. Harris is doubtful anything will come of it, but refuses to follow any lead, however remote.

## Chapter Thirteen Analysis

Throughout the book, there is a power struggle going on between authority figures and the Falconers, both as a family and individual members of the family. Agent Harris is mistrusted by all Falconers, especially Aiden. Whenever Aiden proposes an idea or strategy, Harris seems to be the first to quash it. Their confrontation in Chapter Thirteen is the climax of their long-simmering conflict. While Harris has maturely refused to rise to Aiden's emotionally-laden charges, Aiden refuses to relent in his very outspoken criticism of Harris' nearly every move.

Nothing makes their conflict worse, however, than Harris' immediate refusal to act on Aiden's hunch about Meg's flag signals. Aiden argues very convincingly to Harris that he knows his sister from their past survival episode. He argues Meg is too precise in her actions to have the flags in the empty gas station be merely a sheer coincidence. Harris is swayed enough to contact a fellow FBI agent who is on vacation.

But he leaves Aiden with doubt about his own hypothesis. Agent Harris' calm, logical dismissal of much of Aiden's deeply-felt but emotional hunches leaves Aiden alone and frightened. One of Aiden's character struggles throughout *Kidnapped: The Abduction* is Aiden's inability to control his own self-doubts as to the course of action he should take in regards to his kidnapped sister. On the one hand, his survival skills have taught him how to be independent. On the other, without the FBI's help, his sister is as good as dead. This puts Aiden into a very uncomfortable and unresolved inner conflict.



# Chapter Fourteen

## Chapter Fourteen Summary

Meg fashions a rescue help note by using an old piece of paper she finds inside the warehouse and some old cigarette butts. By grinding the leftover tobacco out of the cigarette ends, Meg creates a small pile of dirty filings. She scratches a help note using a dull point into the paper and then sprinkles the dirty powder of tobacco dust onto the paper. She blows away the tobacco dust, leaving a perfect negative letter written in reverse for any would-be helper to read.

She has a conversation while alone with Mickey Mouse. She senses Mickey is very naive. She tells him from her own experience in dealing with the law and being in jail? Mickey wouldn't last ten minutes in jail. She basically intones Mickey should give up his kidnapping of her while he still has a chance to avoid doing hard time for it. He grows annoyed with her. She prods him. Why is he doing this? He snaps, telling her for the money.

Meg cannot fully believe all of this effort has been made strictly for money. After all, her parents are not only not wealthy, but have lost what little middle class lifestyle they had enjoyed as modest college professors when they were falsely imprisoned. While they have been reinstated at their respective colleges at their former salaries, they have yet to see or sue for monies for wrongful imprisonment by the FBI. In a word, the family is broke. What money could the kidnapers possibly believe the Falconers capable of delivering, even if under threat of killing Meg if they do not?

## Chapter Fourteen Analysis

The other quality inherent in Meg's character that makes her an exceptional 11-year old is her ability to craftily take advantage of very minimal resources to produce outstanding results. For example, when she finds some old paper flyers for a defunct business and a scattering of old cigarette butts, she puts the items together and comes up with a ransom note. Not only is the clever use of a negative image to make the letters on the note stand-out imaginative, it actually alters the outcome of Meg's fate. For when Agent Brajansky finds the note and opens the formerly locked door imprisoning Meg, Meg has literally set herself free with her ingenuity, however briefly her freedom lasts.

She is also clever enough to extract information from Mickey and actually manipulate him into allowing her to gain access to the larger warehouse area. By doing so, she creates her own opportunity. She then finds a hole in the wall through which she tosses her note. This action is what saves her later. Again, Meg does not passively await her fate. She intervenes, keeps her deducting powers sharply focused, and takes advantage of every opportunity that arises with swift, determined action. It is hard not to

like such a strong protagonist, especially when they are only fighting to save their own lives as is Meg.





# Chapter Fifteen

## Chapter Fifteen Summary

Aiden stumbles out of bed. He tries to go through his normal routine of readying for school, even if life is anything but normal for him and his family. Downstairs, he is surprised when his father informs him there has been a break in the case. A woman in a nearby town has reported seeing a girl matching Meg's description being carried into a home by a middle-aged male. This is the break Agent Harris and the Falconers have been waiting to happen.

The Falconers ride to the scene of the FBI raid on the suspect who is holding Meg. They break into the home. They find that the man who has been reported by the neighbor is nothing more than the girl's father. The FBI have raided an innocent family's home! Embarrassed, the federal officials retreat in disgrace, wounded that they have not only failed to solve the kidnapping, but wasted valuable time and resources on a false lead.

## Chapter Fifteen Analysis

Suspense stories often will utilize what is called a "red herring" or a misdirection. This literary device is used by the author to keep the reader off-kilter in terms of knowing precisely what events will next unfold. Because the writer does not foreshadow the botched raid as being a false tip but rather writes the scenes with the impending feeling that Meg is about to be successfully liberated from her captivity, the reader is left feeling slightly cheated when the situation's reality is revealed to all.

But accompanying the slight sense of narrative disappointment is also a sense of thrill, in that the story has proven itself to be temporarily untrustworthy. In other words, the author has momentarily made the reader feel as if the narrative may at any point deliberately mislead into a false conclusion or dead-end scenario. This creates a genuine sense of suspense in the astute reader, which is how the narrative creates tension. Will the events again lead to an unexpected conclusion? Probably so. In which case, the reader must remain slightly on-guard against such a possibility.

This awareness is a way that the author has of keeping reader interest. Why bother with the false narrative as a writer? It also re-involves the reader afresh. While it can become a tiresome literary device if overly-utilized, in small doses it is quite effective. Just when the reader believes the outcome is certain, the writer introduces a fresh wrinkle. The reader is forced to re-imagine and recapitulate past events in the story. This is a classical good storytelling technique.



# Chapter Sixteen

## Chapter Sixteen Summary

Meg realizes she must somehow get her rescue note outside the warehouse so that anyone looking for her can see it. She folds several sheets of paper into paper airplanes. She sails them past the amused and bored Mickey Mouse. He helps her by building more paper airplanes. They sail them together in the warehouse's large interior space. Mickey is distracted by the activity. Meg uses the moment to sail her paper airplane near an open vent and then shove it through the crack in the wall. It flutters to the ground outside the warehouse.

Soon, Tiger Woods, and Spiderman return. They bark at Mickey for taking a stupid chance by letting Meg distract him with paper airplanes. They force Meg to hold a copy of the latest edition of USA Today. They take a digital picture of her with the date and cover clearly visible, along with Meg's horrified look of terror. Spiderman tells her this picture will be sent to Meg's parents so that they know Meg is okay as of today's date.

## Chapter Sixteen Analysis

Just when it appears Meg is gaining the upper hand on her captors through her cunning, they turn the tables on her as they have so frequently in the book. By placing the copy of the newspaper in her hands and forcing her to pose with it as they take her digital image, her captors reverse the power balance. They now have the power over her again. They do not explain why they ask her to hold the paper, for example, until after they've taken her photo with it. Meg is forced to blindly do what they say if she wants to live.

The writer is very crafty. By taking away Meg's sense of confidence and replacing it with fear, he also does the same to the reader's sense of Meg's well-being. Whereas the reader may have felt hopeful and even elated by Meg's momentary triumph, they suddenly feel she is back in worse danger than ever before in the following scene. This rapid reversal of events is often devastatingly effective on the reader. It is part of the narrative storytelling technique that involves constantly placing the protagonist into ever-worsening series of dangers in order to keep reader interest at its maximum.



# Chapter Seventeen

## Chapter Seventeen Summary

Aiden is saddened to see his parents take the false alarm of Meg's rescue so hard to heart. Louise cries non-stop while John seems unable to offer much in the way of comfort or words. He is equally dismayed to see news vans from such organizations as CNN and other major media outlets suddenly arriving yet again outside his constantly besieged home. How on Earth did anyone get word of the rescue turned debacle so soon?

One of the arrivals is none other than Rufus from the Blog Hog. At first, Agent Harris wants to have Rufus tossed out with the other media types. But when Rufus shows them his laptop computer and indicates he has received an email from Meg's kidnappers, Harris and his fellow agents are attentive. The note outlines how the kidnappers will collect their demanded \$2 million ransom. The carrier of the money will arrive at a street address. There will be a nearby pay phone. It will ring. The ransom carrier will answer. Further instructions will be forthcoming.

An argument ensues amongst the agents and the Falconers. Harris believes the best "bag man" or ransom delivery person would be Aiden, as he is the best way to offer enough bait for the kidnappers to make a mistake and attempt to kidnap him along with the ransom money. The Falconers are outraged. How dare Agent Harris risk another of their children when the first one is still in harm's way because of Harris' earlier prosecution of them? But Harris tells them the FBI will be willing to risk the \$2 million ransom on their behalf if they go through with it. Otherwise, how will the Falconers come up with so much money in such a short amount of time?

The Falconers resist despite the logic. But Aiden overhears. He makes the decision. He tells them he will be the bag man. They reluctantly agree. It is their only hope. Harris consoles them. He tells them Aiden will be covertly covered by a team of expert, undercover agents at every turn.

## Chapter Seventeen Analysis

Rufus and his Blog Hog are both comically and seriously utilized in the book. In Chapter Seventeen, the reader sees the serious side of Rufus' character and the narrative reason he has been placed into the story from the beginning. Formerly, Rufus offered comic relief as a goofy but sincere newshound out to restore justice and honor to the Falconer's name. But now he offers them their first contact with the kidnappers, thus making his character important to the story's plot.

In a strange way, this also makes Rufus the "doppelganger" or double of Agent Harris. While Harris is described as being over six feet, six inches in height, Rufus is diminutive in stature. Harris represents the law, and Rufus represents the citizen. But both men

reflect one another as literary doppelgangers because each share the same story function. They are on hand to argue and fight for the Falconers' best interests. This kind of mirroring with characters is very common in storytelling. It allows the author to echo earlier themes and ideas by having a new character introduce them again.



# Chapter Eighteen

## Chapter Eighteen Summary

Richie attempts to visit Aiden and offer comfort as a friend. Agent Ortiz makes Richie wait in the living room. Ortiz visits with Aiden in Aiden's bedroom upstairs. Does Aiden want to see Richie? Aiden declines. He is too preoccupied with Meg's kidnapping to want to spend time with Richie. Agent Ortiz informs Richie of Aiden's decision. Richie leaves, hurt by Aiden's decision to go it alone.

Outside, Richie overhears two FBI agents discussing the case. One of them talks about the ransom note and how Aiden will be the one delivering the money tomorrow. The other agent discloses the location in his response. Richie cannot believe his friend has to face this pressure alone. Richie vows to show up under cover and help his friend.

## Chapter Eighteen Analysis

Aiden's inner conflict is not resolved even this late into Chapter Eighteen. While he appreciates Richie's investment in their friendship, the truth is that Aiden is in no emotional state to be a very good friend in return. He is already fragile and in shock when the story's events begin. The abduction of his sister and his being thrust back into the national media spotlight with his distraught parents are the worst possible cases for him to endure in terms of his emotions.

In a way, Aiden views friendship as a two-way street. He feels that unless he can contribute equally, he is not really being a friend. However, Richie reminds him through his constant presence this is not true. In truth, friends often rely on one another temporarily, with the idea present that the roles will soon be reversed when necessary. Aiden is understandably reluctant to share his pain with Richie because it is too raw and too unresolved.

However, Aiden will begin to see that it is okay to allow oneself to rely on others when it becomes necessary. He struggles with this decision by putting off having to deal with it at all in Chapter Eighteen. However, even Aiden realizes he will one day have to confront his friend and level about how he really feels about their relationship.

Finally, the author uses foreshadowing again by having Richie overhear the precise plot details for the ransom money exchange that Aiden will be participating in with the FBI's help. Richie clearly intends to intervene as soon as he hears the information. This creates a sense of dread in the reader as the odds of any outcome involving the kidnappers and Richie interjecting himself will likely be negative.



# Chapter Nineteen

## Chapter Nineteen Summary

Aiden is outfitted with a transmitter under his clothes. This keeps him constantly available on the FBI's GPS system. Wherever Aiden goes, they can silently track him. He climbs into the Mobile Command Center, or MCC, as it is called by the FBI. Inside is a mobile high-tech command center wherein the agents can conduct secret field operations. Aiden feels disoriented by the sudden change of events. A few days previously? He was struggling to adapt back into the school system after months of adventure and survival. And now? Now he faces having to help rescue his kidnapped sister while holding \$2 million in cash in a bag as he walks through the streets of Baltimore, Maryland.

Aiden arrives at the prescribed location. He awaits by the phone booth, nervously reviewing all that could wrong. The phone rings.

## Chapter Nineteen Analysis

In terms of narrative construction, Chapter Nineteen largely exists to set the stage for the story's finale. In order to do so, the author must shift locales, characters and even the sense of narrative urgency. To lessen the tedium of exposition, the writer heightens the anxiety. He has the characters having to rush from one location to the next, always being escorted in official vehicles with whirling emergency lights.

Having the characters breathlessly hurry in such a manner gives the story a sense of urgency. Events take on added significance and meaning because characters are forced to take action rather than have time to reflect before they do so. This places the reader in the middle of events as they unfold, which further aligns their sense of participation. It also helps them maintain identification with the characters because they have seen some events through their eyes and through their perspectives.



# Chapter Twenty

## Chapter Twenty Summary

FBI Agent Brajansky does the favor as called in to him by FBI Agent Harris, but is very angry. This turns out to be the second vacation that Harris has interrupted Brajansky was having to ask a favor. Brajansky scours the area of Alexandria, Virginia, known as the Quincy district. It is full of decrepit warehouses and empty neighborhoods. To play it safe because it is a rough area, Brajansky brings along his recently retired partner Hoag. Hoag is so bored in retirement he is happy to tag along with Brajansky.

To Brajansky's own amazement, he finds a note at his feet outside one particularly ugly warehouse. It is the one Meg has sneaked past her captors. Brajansky only has to read a little of the note to realize it is from Meg and that she is in danger. He rushes inside to find her. Meanwhile, Aiden answers the ringing pay phone. The kidnappers tell him to wander down the street. There he will find a red shoe box. Take what is inside. Mystified, Aiden does as told.

Inside the shoe box, he finds a text message device. It sends him a series of messages telling him how to proceed. He is told to take a city bus that is just pulling up behind him. He does so, realizing this means the FBI cannot possibly follow him.

## Chapter Twenty Analysis

As mentioned previously, irony plays a heavy hand in *Kidnapped: The Abduction*. In Chapter Twenty, this is shown by having Agent Brajansky being the first agent who finds Meg's hostage note. The irony is that Brajansky isn't even officially on duty but has interrupted his vacation to investigate the warehouses.

Further irony stacks on top of this when Meg hits Brajansky on the head in Chapter Twenty-One after Brajansky opens the door leading to the closet holding Meg hostage. Meg of course believes Brajansky is one of the kidnappers. Only after Brajansky lies unconscious on the floor and Meg rifles through his pockets does she discover he is an FBI agent! Again, in an ironic reversal of the young princess being rescued, Meg has unwittingly knocked out her would-be hero.

When Aiden is given a text messaging device to receive further directions of how to proceed with dropping off the ransom, the story takes another turn into fresh territory through its use of technology. Older stories in the kidnapping genre often used such devices as notes, pay phones and the like. The use of GPS and text message pads makes the story feel much more contemporary to modern readers.



# Chapter Twenty-One

## Chapter Twenty-One Summary

Inside the MCC, Agent Harris begins to lose control of his temper. There is no visual sign of Aiden and the flashing GPS tracking unit only shows him moving rapidly through the streets. They slowly begin to realize he has been forced to take a city bus by the kidnapers and adjust their strategy on-the-fly.

Brajansky and Hoag search the outside perimeter of the abandoned warehouse where Brajansky has located Meg's hostage note. They decide to split up and search inside the warehouse, hoping to find another clue or even Meg herself. They take out their guns and slowly, silent proceed, losing sight of one another in the gloomy darkness.

Inside her windowless closet room where she is being held, Meg worries that her actions, though logical at the time, have only further jeopardized her tenuous status with her captors. She feels desperate, as if she is certain they will now kill her. She hears a noise. The door handle begins to turn. Meg grabs a weapon. As the person enters, she smashes the object against his head, intent on escaping her kidnapers. To her surprise, Agent Brajansky crumbles to her feet, unconscious from her blow to his head.

## Chapter Twenty-One Analysis

By showing Agent Harris losing his temper, the writer makes the reader worry. If Harris, who has shown nothing but resolute control and calmness throughout the book, suddenly becomes irate, how bad must events be to warrant such an outburst? It shows how varying a character's typical emotional state can create unease in the reader, especially if they have become comfortable with their assumption of how said character will normally react in a scene.





# Chapter Twenty-Two

## Chapter Twenty-Two Summary

Meg searches Agent Brajansky's pockets until she finds his FBI badge. She realizes she has made a terrible error. But the door is now free, opened by Brajansky from the outside where it had been locked. Meg takes advantage of her window of opportunity, despite feeling badly about her mistake. She races outside only to run into the kidnappers as they return from running an errand. Meg tries to outrun them, but they gun their engine and gently bump into her from behind. Meg tumbles to the street. They jump out, overtaking her while she is stunned.

FBI Agent Hoag hears commotion. He runs to the front of the warehouse. Outside in the street, he witnesses Meg as she struggles and is tossed into the trunk of the sedan by the masked Spiderman and Mickey Mouse. They drive away just as he attempts to shoot out their tires. They escape, leaving him with nothing but confirmation that Aiden's hunch Meg has sent a signal with the flags was indeed correct.

Aiden finds himself directed by his kidnappers to a crowded street festival. It is filled with jugglers, clowns and other performers, plus the curious crowds who watch them. Aiden is told in his ear piece by Agent Harris that the ransom exchange is off. Harris says that word has reached them from Agent Hoag and that the FBI no longer believe the kidnappers will go through with the ransom exchange.

Before Aiden can agree or not, a clown slips up and grabs the \$2 million in cash. It is actually Tiger Woods, the female abductor, in white-faced greasepaint! She disappears with the money into the sea of other clowns, invisible in the throngs of fellow baggy pants performers.

## Chapter Twenty-Two Analysis

Chapter Twenty-Two plays upon a sense of split-second timing making the crucial difference in the outcome of events. While this is not normally the case, in a situation involving armed conflict or escaping kidnapped victims, the reader is thrust into a world wherein anything is suddenly possible. This heightened sense of urgency is what gives action thrillers like *Kidnapped: The Abduction* their impact as literature and why readers so eagerly read them as a genre. It is a very enticing form of literate escapism.

The surprise twist is equally at use herein. Just when Aiden believes the ransom exchange has been called off, the female abductor grabs the ransom money from him, dressed as a street clown. Her audacious disguise and the ingenuous setting of a street carnival filled with dozens of other clowns gives the sequence a sense of visual excitement. Likewise, as there is a nearly universal dread experienced by many of any and all encounters with clowns, having the kidnapper use a brilliant disguise creates the

feeling that no one and no situation can be fully trusted. The latter is a motif that repeats throughout the story.



# Chapter Twenty-Three

## Chapter Twenty-Three Summary

Aiden races after the Tiger Woods clown, attempting to stop her and recover the \$2 million. Because she is wearing skates, Tiger Woods finds she cannot get away as quickly as she had planned. Richie appears beside Aiden and asks him how he can help. Surprised but glad to have any help he can get, Aiden describes the woman clown who stole the drop bag of money. Richie spots her and points her out. They catch up to Tiger Woods and a tug of war for the bag ensues. When cops see the fight and make their way over, Tiger Woods releases the money and races away, intent on escaping. She narrowly does so.

## Chapter Twenty-Three Analysis

The conflict between Aiden and Richie is resolved in Chapter Twenty-Three. And is often the case in such internal struggles, the climatic resolution is externalized into action, not words. Here Richie literally appears from nowhere when he is most needed and offers aid to his friend. While the Greeks often criticized such devices in their plays as being "Deus ex Machina" or a convenient ending arranged by a power on high, modern writers still often employ remnants of it in their works.

Here Richie is not a God-like figure as much as a member of the classical Greek Chorus, who steps forward from the background and offers assistance at a crucial moment of the narrative. It does feel a bit contrived, but it offers a way for the reader to experience the catharsis or resolution of conflict between Richie and Aiden in an active, dynamic fashion, rather than merely reading about it as an internal mood or thought.

In many ways, *Kidnapped: The Abduction* is a classical melodrama. It even ends on cliffhanger-styled notes in which the outcome of Meg is far from certain and the ability of the FBI to further help her very much in doubt. Such melodramatic structures typically favor using tragic rather than happy endings, and indeed, this book is no exception to the formula.



# Chapter Twenty-Four

## Chapter Twenty-Four Summary

Aiden is treated at the emergency room for his blow to the head suffered while fighting it out with Tiger Woods. He is fine. He brags about how Richie's assistance truly helped Aiden prevent the female clown from getting away with \$2 million as well as Meg as her captive. While it is true Meg is still held captive, at least her clever rescue note left beside the warehouse shows to Aiden that she is alive, well and using her wits to try and escape her confinement whenever she can do so. He draws some comfort from this news.

Meg finds herself held for hours on end in the back of a new car's trunk. Her captors have shot holes in the trunk before forcing Meg to climb inside so that at least she will not die from carbon monoxide poisoning while she is endlessly driven around the countryside. Her captors are now very edgy, realizing how close they have come to being captured themselves. Without the money, Spiderman grows risible, insisting he will personally make Aiden Falconer suffer for the humiliation they have all suffered today. Meg is scared for her brother, but proud that he has so angered the kidnappers they want to personally seek revenge. She feels better, but realizes she have already blown the only opportunities she will ever get to achieve freedom and survive her ordeal.

## Chapter Twenty-Four Analysis

Aiden is forced to realize that in many ways at the conclusion of this book, his sister is a much stronger individual than even he believed was possible. Meg is too concerned with her very survival to have the luxury of such emotional conclusions, however, and so remains very much an actively-conflicted protagonist at the conclusion of *Kidnapped: The Abduction*. While her wits have kept her alive, they have equally left her in increasing peril. When the story ends, she has been reduced to being ferried about in the trunk of a car filled with bullet holes so that she won't die from carbon monoxide poisoning. Indeed, her situation could not be worse.

The book ends on a controversial note. Why end on such an unresolved conclusion? Simply because this is Book One and the author wants the reader to continue reading more deeply into the series of books available, of course. But without such narrative "tricks" and plot machinations? Readers tend to abandon fictional series rather than follow them. Like the Harry Potter series, in essence, leaving an open door at the story's conclusion forces the reader to imagine what will next happen in the following adventure. It is a timeless but nonetheless effective storytelling tradition.



# Characters

## Aiden Falconer

Fifteen-year-old Aiden Falcone is a typical high school student except for recent events. A year before *Kidnapped: The Abduction* begins, his parents have been imprisoned after being falsely accused of aiding a terrorist group. Forced to go on the run to avoid being thrown in jail as well, Aiden and Meg, 11, his sister, survived for months on their own eluding federal authorities. They were eventually caught but all charges were dropped when the FBI admitted its mistake. When the story begins, Aiden has been forced back into high school without any counselling or advice as how he should blend back into the student population when he is notorious worldwide. Many even still call him and his family traitors, even though they were cleared of all wrongdoing by the government.

Aiden has a strong attachment to his friend Richie, but Richie is unable to give Aiden the distance Aiden needs to recover from the trauma of being a fugitive as well as the sudden reintegration back into society. Aiden wants to tell Richie as much, but the events unfold so fast, he doesn't have time to tell his friend the truth. Eventually Richie forces the issue with Aiden, and this in turn makes Aiden examine how he has been treating Richie. Before Aiden can act to repair his relationship with Richie, however, Richie actually saves the day by helping Aiden retrieve the stolen ransom money. As a result of Richie's risking his very life to help Aiden, Aiden decides that he indeed owes Richie a huge debt of gratitude. Not only has Richie stayed by his side, but he has also helped save Aiden's hide. Thus Aiden learns to understand that while he will always remain guarded as a result of his earlier fugitive status, he can equally learn to let down his guard and trust his true friends, perhaps even more than ever. Aiden's character arc goes from annoyed with Richie to resolved entirely to be a better friend to Richie.

Aiden also has to look at his own relationship to the world a little more intensely during the story. Presumptions that the local police and that his school administrators would look out for Aiden's and Meg's best interest have been shockingly violated, at least from Aiden's point of view. He no longer blindly trusts the government, the police or even his school officials. This lack of trust is understandable, but not a healthy state of affairs for Aiden. He struggles to put his mistrust behind him, but the abduction of his sister in broad daylight by total strangers makes Aiden uneasily realize his troubled past is far from actually being his past. It is his present ordeal, too.

## Meg Falconer

Eleven-year-old Meg Falconer is Aiden's sister and has likewise been challenged from an early age to stand on her own two feet and face life's challenges. Meg's integration back into school has not been any easier than Aiden's. In fact, Meg has had to deal with an intense anger she feels towards all who still persecute her over what was proven to



be a false accusation. Nevertheless, many of her fellow students openly avoid her, ridicule her and are not made to answer for their conduct because the school principal feels that Meg and her family are traitors.

Before Meg can even put the fake prosecution of her family behind her, however, she is kidnapped. The psychological impact to Meg is actually quite subdued given how horrific her personal situation. Rather than give in to her fear and hysteria, Meg forces herself to remain stoic and quick-thinking. This is her survival strategy, to be sure. It is also her way of blocking out the mental demons that would otherwise plague her confined as she is in small, dark places. Meg shows that she has grown from her previous stint as a fugitive from the law and has learned to take advantage of any opportunities if they will further her goal to survive.

Meg does learn to see that not all of the kidnapers are as cold and remote as the rest. Mickey, the youngest kidnapper, actually opens up to Meg and reveals a softer side. But basically, Meg is forced to keep from focusing on her own internal character issues beyond surviving her ordeal. Simply staying alive and using her brains is the story of her character's arc as the book progresses. While she misses her family, even these feelings are actively suppressed by Meg, because she realizes they will only slow her down and cause her to make mistakes.

In some ways, Meg's biggest character conflict throughout the book is to not only out-wit her captors, but not allow herself to become her own worst enemy. To counter any internal voices of dissent, she uses action and careful planning to pre-occupy her thoughts. But it is often not easy for her to maintain her cool facade when things go awry, hence her conflict is very externalized.

## **John Falconer**

Dr. John Falconer is Aiden's and Meg's father. He is a college professor. He is on hiatus when the story begins because no one will enroll in his classes owing to the fact he was previously but erroneously labeled as being a traitor by the FBI. Though he is a strong man, John is overcome by the events of the story and quickly becomes little more than a source of emotional support for his wife Louise as the plot unfolds. He is a good character, well-meaning, but who is overcome by the unending turmoils.

## **Louise Falconer**

Dr. Louise Falconer is Aiden's and Meg's mother. She is also a college professor. And like her husband, she is on fully-paid hiatus because of the controversial status of their recent notoriety. Louise has always been a stable of strength for her family when the story begins. But with Meg's kidnapping, Louise begins to slowly unravel. By the time the book ends, Louise has been reduced to a figure of pity, broken by the loss of her daughter after the family has just been through so much grief.



## Agent Emmanuel Harris

FBI Agent Emmanuel is a giant of man. At six-feet, six-inches in height, he literally towers over every crime scene and federal investigation he oversees. He is solemn and not given to small talk. He has a strong feeling of guilt that it was his botched investigation before the story begins that lead to the Falconers' misery. Though Harris helped to free the Falconers in order to begin restitution for his mistake, he knows he still has much to answer for to the Falconers in order to earn their true forgiveness.

## Rufus Sehorn

Rufus Sehorn is the dweeb editor, publisher, and writer of the Blog Hog.com. Though he is annoying and has a penchant for putting his nose into other peoples' business, Rufus proudly defends his actions as being the privilege of a free press. To his credit, his blog does attempt to tell a balanced side of the Falconer's story, which is why the family allows him to be their personal chronicler and confidante despite Agent Harris' objections.

## Richie Pembleton

Fifteen-year-old Richie Pembleton is Aiden's best friend. Richie's father works a late-night shift at work, so Richie is often up at very late hours. He frequently drops by Aiden's house very late and stays to chat. Richie insists he can still be a friend to Aiden despite Aiden's recent set-backs, but Aiden is less convinced. Richie risks his life to help Aiden when the crucial moment arrives, however, and so Aiden comes to value their friendship yet again.

## Dr. Barstow

Dr. Barstow is the cold-featured principal at Meg's school. He is biased against the Falconers, secretly believing as many still do that the family really helped terrorists despite their being cleared by the FBI. When Meg gets in trouble because other students taunt her patriotism, Dr. Barstow refuses to punish them, instead taking action only against Meg who acted out of provocation.

## Officer Kincannin

Officer Kincannin is from the local police department. When the Falconers' home is vandalized, Officer Kincannin takes the call. He responds by telling the Falconers there is not much he or his understaffed department can do, alas. This motivates the Falconers to consider contacting Agent Harris for assistance despite their reservations about his previous conduct in their case.



## Spiderman

Spiderman is the nickname Meg gives to the first of her three captors. He wears a Spiderman mask most times. Spiderman is a large, heavy-set man. He has a powerful build and is very fast on his feet. He is gruff and does not like Meg at all. When unmasked, he turns out to have a beard and mustache. He has a bad temper.

## Mickey Mouse

Mickey Mouse is the nickname Meg gives to the second of her three captors. He wears a Mickey Mouse mask most times. Mickey Mouse is a younger man barely out of high school. He has a slight build and is easily distracted. He wants to be Meg's friend despite the ludicrous nature of that desire given her predicament. Mickey Mouse is baby-faced when unmasked. He can be manipulated mentally without much effort by anyone desiring to misdirect him for whatever purpose.

## Tiger Woods

Tiger Woods is the nickname Meg gives to the third of her three captors. She wears a Tiger Woods mask most times. She is lethal and coldly tells Meg whatever she thinks Meg wants to hear, as long as it means Meg will go along with the trio's evil plans. She often drives the kidnappers' getaway vehicles. When unmasked, she turns out to be attractive, but with hard, inscrutable features. She dresses as a clown on roller skates later to take the ransom money from Aiden.

## Chief Aberfeldy

Chief Aberfeldy is the commanding officer of the local police department. He is on hand to help John Falconer appear before a hastily-arranged press conference when Meg is abducted so that John can make an emotional plea for his daughter's release. Aberfeldy is well-meaning but Agent Harris stops the press conference, wisely protecting the Falconers from needless media scrutiny.

## Agent Ortiz

FBI Agent Ortiz is a junior agent who is assigned to act as Aiden's bodyguard when the FBI determines it would be best for Aiden to go through his normal school routine and not let the kidnappers see him altering his schedule. It proves an impossible task, but Agent Ortiz is professional and doesn't allow the scrutiny and uncomfortable glances prevent him from doing his job of protecting Aiden. Ortiz is well-built and powerful, but he is restrained and remains in the background.





## **Agent Hank Brajansky**

FBI Agent Hank Brajansky is an older agent. He is on vacation when Agent Harris calls and asks him the favor of checking on a warehouse locale where Meg may be held hostage. Brajansky is not happy with the request, as Harris has asked him to work on vacation once before in their shared work history. Brajansky winds up finding the rescue note Meg has left, but Meg accidentally hits him on the head while Brajansky is rescuing her, knocking him unconscious.

## **Agent Ernie Hoag**

FBI Agent Ernie Hoag, retired, helps his buddy Agent Brajansky with the warehouse investigation. Hoag is glad to help because he has recently retired and already grown bored with the routine of doing nothing all day. He tries to prevent Meg's kidnappers from fleeing the warehouse with her, but is unsuccessful.



## Objects/Places

### Baltimore

Baltimore, Maryland, is the home city of the Falconers when the story begins. It is a large city on the Eastern seaboard of the United States.

### HORUS Global Group

HORUS Global Group is the front name for the terrorist front organization falsely linked to the Falconers before the story begins. They are an international terrorist outfit seeking to destroy American interests worldwide, but particularly inside the American borders.

### FBI

The FBI or Federal Bureau of Investigations is a federally-funded criminal agency concerned with domestic terrorism, in part. It is the FBI's fault that the Falconers have been wrongly accused of being traitors when the book begins.

### Chloroform

Chloroform is a gas that renders anyone who inhales it unconscious. It is used by Meg's kidnappers to subdue her so that they may more easily transport her from one locale to the next. While it is usually harmless in small doses, repeated exposure to Chloroform as Meg undergoes can be dangerous to one's health.

### Blog Hog

The Blog Hog.com is the name of the online blog run by Rufus Sehorn. It is mostly a single person's perspective on the news. In this regard, it is partly reporting and partly editorial in nature. Rufus realizes some folks believe he is a parasite who preys on peoples' worst moments for his blog's headlines, but Rufus believes he is truly a First Amendment example in action.

### Diamonds Are a Wise Guy's Best Friend

"Diamonds Are a Wise Guy's Best Friend" is the name of a fictional novel supposedly written by Meg's father. It is described by Meg as being "pure cheese" but she admires the resilient nature of the protagonist, who uses his brains rather than his brawn to solve



action mysteries. She patterns herself after this pretend character in order to cope with her stress when she is kidnapped and must try to repeatedly escape.

## **Bethesda**

Bethesda, Maryland, is where the FBI find the van used by the kidnappers to abduct Meg. Unfortunately, only Meg's fingerprints are found on the van. Bethesda is a major port city just northwest of the American capital city of Washington, D.C.

## **Quincy District**

The Quincy District is an urban wasteland outside of Alexandria, Virginia. It was once a bustling storage facility. It is now almost entirely abandoned. It consists of mile after mile of desolated warehouses and emptied buildings. It is where the kidnappers take Meg so that no one will find them.

## **Quantico**

Quantico is the name of the FBI's central headquarters in Virginia. Agent Harris briefly considers calling Quantico for back-up agents to help with Meg's case but realizes the agency will never grant them.

## **Pikesville**

Pikesville is a suburban sprawl located just outside of Baltimore, Maryland. This is where the FBI mistakenly believes they have found Meg being held in a home in the suburbs. When they raid it, however, they realize the tip they have acted upon was false.

## **GPS Transmitter**

When Aiden takes the ransom money to pay off the kidnappers, he wears a wireless GPS, or Global Positioning Satellite, transmitter beneath his shirt. This enables the FBI to keep track of his whereabouts at all times via GPS as well as two-way voice communications with him.



# Themes

## Self-Reliance

Self-Reliance is one of the major themes of *Kidnapped: The Abduction*. While the Falconers treasure their family life together, they realize having survived an ordeal prior to the book's beginning that when they are apart, they must remain strong as individuals in order to keep their family intact at a later date. The group is only as good as its weakest element or so the old theory goes. Herein, the Falconers, particularly Meg and Aiden, demonstrate that just because they are underage, they lack any fundamental skills or abilities the adults around them display or possess.

Meg embodies all the family stands for in its purest form. She realizes the danger she is in but does not become hysterical. Instead, she self-empowers by remaining calm and objectively analyzing the weaknesses in her captor's plans. This self-reliance is very critical not only to the book's entertainment value, but equally, to making the protagonist's plight something other than feeling sorry for Meg. Such pity is important for any protagonist to engender, it is true. But because of the dark nature of Meg's predicament, Meg's self-reliant attitude makes her character noble rather than merely pitiable.

Likewise, it is Aiden's astute analysis of Meg's action with the gas station flags that alerts the FBI to where she is being held by the kidnappers. If Aiden had only crumpled in on himself and given up after witnessing his sister's abduction, he would not have lead the FBI to Meg's rescue. Again, the theme of self-reliant behavior is core to both of the Falconer children's worldview. They do not wait for others to define them. They instead watch for their opportunity and then, after careful consideration, take it or pass on it. It is an attractive quality in both characters.

## Prejudice

Prejudice is the judgement of others based not on evidence of wrongdoing, but on superficial qualities such as religious beliefs, political affiliations or even cultural background. The Falconers are very much made the victims of many of their fellow Americans' prejudice. They have been wrongly accused of being traitors, and now many bigots will not forgive them. In some regards, the fictitious Falconers remind of the actual Rosenbergs. Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were an American couple convicted of passing secrets to the Soviets during the height of the Cold War in the 1950s and were executed for treason. The difference, and it is key, is that the Falconers are cleared of all charges, whereas the Rosenbergs clearly were not. But the Rosenberg case was accused of being founded largely on prejudice, as well, hence the similarity.

Both Meg and Aiden pay a heavy price for the prejudice of their classmates. Just when both children need their classmates' support and love because of their previous ordeal



as fugitives, they instead find many of their former friends turning on them and whispering ugly rumors about the Falconers' patriotism in the hallways at school. It hurts the brother and sister pair because they see that in a land of supposedly free people, some people will do whatever they can to remain willfully self-ignorant. This ignorance quickly turns into prejudice when the believers act on their own false ideas about others.

There are echoes of the theme of Prejudice throughout the book, too. Rufus as the First Amendment crusading journalist blogger is prejudiced against the FBI because he feels they are to blame for the Falconers' predicament. Agent Harris is prejudiced against Rufus because Harris believes all media types such as Rufus are just crass exploiters looking for sensationalized headlines. The Falconers are prejudiced against Agent Harris and the FBI because Harris and the agency wrongfully accused them. Even the kidnapers are prejudiced against Aiden Falconer, calling him out by name at one point and vowing revenge at him. In other words, Prejudice takes the form and manner of many different types throughout *Kidnapped: The Abduction*.

## Loyalty

Loyalty is another major theme echoed throughout *Kidnapped: The Abduction*. The question of the Falconers' patriotic loyalty is always in question. The media feel free to speculate endlessly as to whether or not the FBI was correct in pardoning and releasing them back into private citizenry, creating a feeling to the Falconers that no matter what they say or do from this point forward, their loyalty will always be questioned. This causes the entire family great shame and stress. Each member is forced to process and internalize what it means to have one's loyalty questioned by total strangers on a daily, ongoing basis.

There is another bond of loyalty thematically resonating beneath the story's plot, too. That is the relationship between Meg and Aiden. Even though they are separated from one another after the opening chapters for the duration of the book, they are very Loyal to one another prior to the book's beginning. This is demonstrated by the fact they relied so heavily on one another while they were fugitives from the law in the book's back story and had to survive by trusting one another without question.

This kind of loyalty as an emotional bond is difficult to break when built between two caring people. Meg and Aiden are very close as sister and brother, and even though they are kept apart during the story's duration, each constantly thinks of the other's well-being. Even when she is alone and frightened, Meg worries that Aiden will be devastated by what has happened to her and lose faith in their special bond as siblings. Such extreme Loyalty in the face of adversity is moving to the reader as well as being a worthwhile goal for the characters' to mutually maintain. To their credit, both Aiden and Meg keep their loyalty to one another intact, fighting to survive just as they earlier have when they were on the run together.



# Style

## Point of View

The point of view is the third-person. While the third-person perspective allows the author to change point of view to show multiple characters' thoughts and feelings about the story's events, it is somewhat restricted in use in *Kidnapped: The Abducted*. For example, while the readers are easily allowed into the minds and emotions of Meg and her brother Aiden, as well as Agent Harris' to a limited extent, the readers are still not allowed into the thoughts and motivations of the kidnappers.

This third-person viewpoint with restrictions is interesting because of this omission. Instead, the author deliberately keeps the trio of kidnappers away from the reader's ability to easily comprehend. The perspective when dealing with them always comes from Meg's or Aiden's viewpoint, which leaves them as mystery figures.

Suspense is effectively built when some of the third-person perspective is limited in this fashion. It forces the reader to speculate and imagine why certain characters such as the protagonists are transparent, while others such as the captors are kept in the dark. It builds a feeling of terror and powerlessness in the reader because the lack of information makes the kidnappers seem monstrously larger in comparison to the more fragile, complex brother and sister heroes.

## Setting

The Setting for most of *Kidnapped: The Abduction Book One* is in and around Maryland state areas. Baltimore, Maryland, is featured prominently as the home city of the Falconers and where they teach at a nearby university as professors. This is an appropriate setting because Baltimore has a long tradition of involvement with Washington, D.C., the American capital of federal power located just northwest in the District of Columbia. As a result, the Falconers and their story become very much "All-American" in nature, as many professionals and politicians who work in Washington, D.C., by day commute to Baltimore and surrounding cities to live by night.

The school Setting is also significant. It is a very universal setting and therefore again "All-American" in use. Most Americans can relate very easily to the idea of playing baseball at school as Meg is shown doing in her opening scene. Likewise, the Setting of the Falconers' home as a non-descriptive but charming suburban two-story evokes images of middle class security and stability for the Falconers. This creates a sense of the family having a protective place to escape the pressures of the world. Alas, as the story quickly demonstrates, this is only an illusion maintained by the Falconers, as is revealed when a rock is thrown through their living room window late one night.

The Quincy District warehouse Setting is very sinister. The idea of being alone in a darkened, emptied city with just one's abductors is frightening. Even when Meg finally



frees herself from the warehouse interior, she finds that the entire neighborhood is, in a bizarre way, just a larger warehouse in and of itself. There is nowhere Meg can go because there is no living being save the kidnapers for miles around.

The Setting herein acts almost as an active character rather than passive landscape as in most fiction. The warehouse seems to come alive, personified, as it "fights back" at Meg's efforts to secure freedom. Even though the warehouse is not really alive, the author uses the locale to impart a feeling that everything is working against Meg's best interests, even the warehouse itself.

The final Setting with the clown parade going on is a novel twist. Because a street carnival featuring dozens of circus clowns in full regalia is going on, the kidnapper is able to disguise herself as just another clown and gain access to the protagonist. She blends in and out of the pack of other clowns almost invisible, chameleon-like.

## Language and Meaning

The Language used throughout *Kidnapped: The Abducted* is very contemporary and spare. While some street slang terms are occasionally used to make the teenagers' idiom ring truer to life, most of the dialogue is written with the brevity and impact one associates with modern crime fiction and t.v. series. Characters tend to speak in clipped, telling sentences that reveal sparse bits of subtext. This is traditional to the crime fiction genre, which favors shorter, staccato-like sentences rather than longer, verbose ones. *Kidnapped: The Abducted* is so leanly written in its use of language that it could easily read as a police transcript of events in sections, with bits of characters' points of view sprinkled throughout to add interest.

Still, the use of Meaning is clear enough, however pithy the author's style. For but one example, consider the opening scene with Meg. The fact that she slings her bat into a flag pole and accidentally causes the American flag to fall to the ground is very telling as a symbolic choice. Her action of slinging her bat is caused by her classmates calling her a traitor. In other words, the only reason Meg downs the American flag is after her classmates act very un-American and call Meg's patriotism into question.

None of this would work, however, if the author's use of Language and Meaning were not so subtle. He does not bring this idea of Meg's patriotism being illustrated in the flag's falling into the story by using exposition or dialogue. Rather, by selecting the images carefully and implanting them with skillful use of Language, his Meaning becomes clear to the reader without having to literally spell it out.

## Structure

The Structure is Twenty-Four Chapters. Each Chapter is very short, some only a few pages in length. As a result of this truncated Structure, the pace of the story's narrative is breathless. Action and short bursts of dialogue are favored over long, descriptive blocks of text and dense, layered monologues. This makes sections of the book read



very quickly and with minimal effort, as the writer has a talent for describing action in a manner that holds the reader's interest.

The Structure is overall a very classical Three Act Structure. This ancient narrative construction provides for a precise beginning, middle and end to the story's conflict. The conflict should arise quickly in the First Act. Said conflict should then complicate and twist in the Second Act. And finally, the protagonist(s) must resolve the conflict or fail to do so by the end of the Third Act. Kidnapped: The Abduction follows this to letter perfection in terms of narrative construction, right down to having Meg fail to free herself as has been her story's goal.

The Structure is very episodic in tone, and this is both its strength and weakness. While it works well for the book during the first reading, it does leave the overall narrative open-ended and unresolved until the next book in the series. Taken alone and without the following books in the series, Kidnapped: The Abduction is actually a tragedy since Meg remains in the hands of the kidnappers and Aiden has been unable to successfully help his sister - instead he only fails at it.





## Quotes

"'We've had enough of headlines,' Dr. John Falconer told reporters. 'What we want — what we pray for — is just to get back to normal'" (Chapter 1, p. 1-2).

"How could a pudgy middle-aged guy intimidate her after she'd faced a killer" (Chapter 2, p. 4).

"Meg struggled for a moment before her body went limp, and she sagged in her attacker's arms" (Chapter 3, p. 17).

"An ordinary eleven-year-old-girl would have fallen to pieces, but Meg was hardly ordinary" (Chapter 5, pt. 25).

"Meg paced the room like a penned animal" (Chapter 7, p. 38).

"He'd memorized every late-show science fiction movie word-for-word" (Chapter 9, p. 49).

"She bit her lip. If only Aiden were here to make fun of her" (Chapter 10, p. 52).

"She didn't delude herself - in the next thirty seconds, she would be caught. So this precious half-minute of freedom had to count" (Chapter 11, p. 61).

"His appearance in the student common area created a buzz, sending dozens of hands reaching for cell phones" (Chapter 12, p. 64).

"Aiden confronted the FBI agent who had contributed more than anyone else to the Falconer family's sorrows" (Chapter 13, p. 71).

"FBI Agent Hank Brajansky cursed the day he'd ever met Emmanuel Harris" (Chapter 20, pg. 107).

"The sound of grinding metal on metal pulled Meg back from the edge of consciousness" (Chapter 24, p. 135).



## Topics for Discussion

Is Aiden's conflict with Richie something you can relate to as a reader? Have you ever had a friend that seemingly needed you more than the other way around? How did you resolve this impasse with your friend?

The Falconers have been wrongfully convicted of aiding a terrorist group before the story begins, and then cleared of all wrongdoing shortly before events begin in earnest in the story. Do you find it believable that this series of events took place as described by the author? Do you believe a normal couple like the Falconers would really be involved with a known terrorist group such as the fictional HORUS as portrayed in this book?

Agent Harris has a guilty conscience about the fact he earlier set the Falconers up for a wrongful conviction. He struggles to regain their confidence and respect as a result. Have you ever had to face someone you've wronged and ask for forgiveness? Do you find Agent Harris sincere in his attempt to redeem himself, or do you think he is simply trying to better his promotional opportunities within the agency by erasing a past mistake? Could both scenarios be truth to his character? If not, why not?

Meg refuses to give into despair and instead focuses her being on survival. Have you ever faced a series of tests or obstacles that were so seemingly overwhelming, you at first didn't believe you could complete them? Discuss the techniques and methods you utilized to help solve your own problems. How are you like Meg, and how are you different, in terms of how you react to stressful situations?

Agent Harris has made a mistake previously but only the Falconers have really paid for it to date. While there is talk in the story the Falconers may eventually receive some settlement money from the government for their wrongful imprisonment, nothing has materialized when the narrative occurs. Do you think it fair that Agent Harris gets to keep his job even though he made a mistake previously, and at full pay, while the Falconers had to lose out on their salaries while they were imprisoned? How would you go about resolving such a conflict and maintaining justice for all concerned if you were the judge?

The author chooses the kidnappers' mask disguises as Spiderman, Mickey Mouse and Tiger Woods, respectively. What do you think he is trying to suggest about modern celebrity culture by having such popular figures of public adoration presented as proverbial "bad guys" in this context? Is there sometimes more than meets the eye to what public icons proclaim as their beliefs versus the way they actually behave in public?

Do you think that if you were kidnapped you would have the wherewithal that Meg displays throughout? Discuss how you might react differently and how that might have altered the outcome as presented. What fictional or real-life heroes might you draw

upon to summon courage as Meg does by mentally picturing a favorite detective character?