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Theodore Boone: The Abduction

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John Grisham

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Theodore Boone

THE ABDUCTION

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Theodore Boone

THE ABDUCTION



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Theodore Boone

THE ABDUCTION

Chapter 1

The abduction of April Finnemore took place in the dead of night, sometime between 9:15 p.m., when she last spoke with Theo Boone, and 3:30 a.m., when her mother entered her bedroom and realized she was gone. The abduction appeared to have been rushed; whoever took April did not allow her to gather her things. Her laptop was left behind. Though her bedroom was fairly neat, there was some clothing strewn about, which made it difficult to determine if she had been able to pack. Probably not, the police thought. Her toothbrush was still by the sink. Her backpack was by her bed. Her pajamas were on the floor, so she at least had been allowed to change. Her mother,

when she wasn't crying or ranting, told the police that her daughter's favorite blue-and-white sweater was not in the closet. And April's favorite sneakers were gone, too.

The police soon dismissed the notion that she'd simply run away. There was no reason to run away, her mother assured them, and she had not packed the things that would make such an escape successful.

A quick inspection of the home revealed no apparent break-in. The windows were all closed and locked, as were the three doors downstairs. Whoever took April was careful enough to close the door behind them, and lock it on the way out. After observing the scene and listening to Mrs. Finnemore for about an hour, the police decided to have a talk with Theo Boone. He was, after all, April's best friend, and they usually chatted by phone or online at night before going to sleep.

At the Boone home, the phone rang at 4:33, according to the digital clock next to the bed where the parents slept. Mr. Woods Boone, the lighter sleeper, grabbed the phone, while Mrs. Marcella Boone rolled over and began wondering who would call at such an hour. When Mr. Boone said, "Yes, Officer," Mrs. Boone really woke up and scrambled out of bed. She listened to his end of the conversation, soon understood that it had something to do with April Finnemore, and was really confused when her husband

said, "Sure, Officer, we can be over there in fifteen minutes." He hung up, and she said, "What is it, Woods?"

"Apparently, April's been abducted, and the police would like to talk to Theo."

"I doubt if he abducted her."

"Well, if he's not upstairs in his room, we may have a problem."

He was upstairs in his room, sound asleep, undisturbed by the ringing of the phone. As he threw on blue jeans and a sweatshirt, he explained to his parents that he had called April the night before on his cell phone and they'd chatted for a few minutes, same as usual.

As they drove through Strattenburg in the predawn darkness, Theo could think of nothing but April and of her miserable home life, her warring parents, her scarred brother and sister, both of whom had fled as soon as they were old enough. April was the youngest of three children born to two people who had no business having a family. Both parents were crazy, according to April herself, and Theo certainly agreed. Both had drug convictions. Her mother kept goats on a small farm outside of town and made cheese, bad cheese in Theo's opinion. She peddled it around town in an old funeral hearse painted yellow, with a pet spider monkey riding shotgun. Her father was an aging hippie, who still played in a bad garage band with a bunch of

other leftovers from the 1980s. He had no real job and was often gone for weeks. The Finnemores were in a perpetual state of separation, with talk of divorce always in the air.

April confided in Theo, and told him things he vowed to never repeat.

The Finnemore home was owned by someone else, a rental house April hated because her parents had no interest in maintaining it. It was in an older section of Strattenburg, on a shady street lined with other postwar homes that had seen better days. Theo had been there only one time, for a less-than-successful birthday party April's mother had thrown together two years earlier. Most of the kids who'd been invited did not attend because their parents wouldn't allow it. Such was the Finnemore family reputation.

There were two police cars in the driveway when the Boones arrived. Across the street, the neighbors were on their porches, watching.

Mrs. Finnemore—she went by the name of May and had named her children April, March, and August—was in the living room on a sofa talking to a uniformed officer when the Boones entered, rather awkwardly. Quick introductions were made; Mr. Boone had never met her.

"Theo!" Mrs. Finnemore said, very dramatically. "Someone has taken our April!" Then she burst into tears and reached to hug Theo. He wanted no part of being hugged

but went along with the ritual out of respect. As always, she wore a large flowing garment that was more of a tent than a dress, light brown in color and made from what appeared to be burlap. Her long graying hair was pulled into a tight ponytail. Crazy as she was, Theo had always been struck by her beauty. She made no effort at being attractive—quite unlike his mother—but some things you can't hide. She was also very creative, liked to paint and do pottery, in addition to making goat cheese. April had inherited the good genes—the pretty eyes, the artistic flair.

When Mrs. Finnemore settled down, Mrs. Boone asked the officer, "What happened?" He responded with a quick summary of what little they knew at that point.

"Did you talk to her last night?" the officer asked Theo. The cop's name was Bolick, Sergeant Bolick, which Theo knew because he'd seen him around the courthouse. Theo knew most of the policemen in Strattenburg, as well as most of the lawyers, judges, janitors, and clerks in the courthouse.

"Yes, sir. At nine fifteen, according to my phone log. We talk almost every night before going to bed," Theo said. Bolick had the reputation of being a wise guy. Theo wasn't prepared to like him.

"How sweet. Did she say anything that might be useful here? Was she worried? Scared?"

Theo was immediately caught in a vise. He could not

lie to a police officer, yet he could not tell a secret that he'd promised he wouldn't tell. So he fudged a bit by saying, "I don't recall anything like that." Mrs. Finnemore was no longer crying; she was staring intensely at Theo, her eyes glowing.

"What did you talk about?" Sergeant Bolick asked. A detective in plainclothes entered the room and listened carefully.

"The usual stuff. School, homework, I don't remember everything." Theo had watched enough trials to know that answers should often be kept vague, and that "I don't recall" and "I don't remember" were perfectly acceptable in many instances.

"Did you chat online?" the detective asked.

"No, sir, not last night. Just phone." They often used Facebook and text messages, but Theo knew not to volunteer information. Just answer the question in front of you. He'd heard his mother say this to her clients many times.

"Any sign of a break-in?" Mr. Boone asked.

"None," said Bolick. "Mrs. Finnemore was sound asleep in the downstairs bedroom, she heard nothing, and at some point she got up to check on April. That's when she realized she was gone."

Theo looked at Mrs. Finnemore, who again shot him a

fierce look. He knew the truth, and she knew he knew the truth. Trouble was, Theo couldn't tell the truth because he'd made a promise to April.

The truth was that Mrs. Finnemore had not been home for the past two nights. April had been living alone, terrified, with all the doors and windows locked as tightly as possible; with a chair jammed against her bedroom door; with an old baseball bat across the end of her bed; with the phone close and ready to dial 911, and with no one in the world to talk to but Theodore Boone, who had vowed not to tell a soul. Her father was out of town with his band. Her mother was taking pills and losing her mind.

"In the past few days, has April said anything about running away?" the detective was asking Theo.

Oh, yes. Nonstop. She wants to run away to Paris and study art. She wants to run away to LA and live with March, her older sister. She wants to run away to Santa Fe and become a painter. She wants to run away, period.

"I don't recall anything like that," Theo said, and it was the truth because "in the past few days" could mean almost anything; thus, the question was too vague to require a definite answer on his part. He had seen this time and time again in trials. In his opinion, Sergeant Bolick and the detective were being far too sloppy with their questions. So

far, they had not been able to pin him down, and he had not told a lie.

May Finnemore was overcome with tears and made a big show out of crying. Bolick and the detective quizzed Theo about April's other friends, any potential problems she was having, how she was doing in school, and so on. Theo gave straight answers, with no wasted words.

A female officer in uniform had entered the den from upstairs, and she sat with Mrs. Finnemore, who was again distraught and overcome. Sergeant Bolick nodded at the Boones and motioned for them to follow him into the kitchen. They did, and the detective joined them. Bolick glared at Theo and in a low voice said, "Did the girl ever mention a relative in prison in California?"

"No, sir," Theo said.

"Are you sure?"

"Sure I'm sure."

"What's this all about?" Mrs. Boone jumped in. She was not about to stand by silently while her son was rudely interrogated. Mr. Boone was ready to pounce, too.

The detective pulled out an 8" x 10" black-and-white photo, a mug shot of a shady-looking character who gave every indication of being a veteran criminal. Bolick went on, "Guy's name is Jack Leeper, a ten-time loser. Distant cousin to May Finnemore, even more distant to April. He

grew up around here, drifted away a long time ago, became a career thug, petty thief, drug dealer, and so on. Got busted in California for kidnapping ten years ago, sentenced to life with no parole. Escaped two weeks ago. This afternoon we get a tip that he might be in this area."

Theo looked at the sinister face of Jack Leeper and felt ill. If this thug had April, then she was in serious trouble.

Bolick continued, "Last night around seven thirty, Leeper here walks into the Korean Quick Shop four blocks away, buys cigarettes and beer, gets his face captured on the surveillance cameras. Not the smartest crook in the world. So, we know he's definitely in the area."

"Why would he take April?" Theo blurted, his mouth dry with fear, his knees ready to buckle.

"According to authorities in California, they found some letters from April in his prison cell. She was his pen pal, probably felt sorry for the guy 'cause he's never supposed to get out of prison. So she strikes up a correspondence. We've searched her room upstairs and can't find anything he may have written to her."

"She never mentioned this to you?" the detective asked.

"Never," Theo said. He had learned that with April's weird family there were many secrets, many things she kept to herself.

The detective put away the photo, and Theo was relieved.

He never wanted to see the face again, but he doubted if he could ever forget it.

Sergeant Bolick said, "We suspect that April knew the person who took her. How else can you explain the lack of a forcible entry?"

"Do you think he would hurt her?" Theo asked.

"We have no way of knowing that, Theo. This man's been in prison most of his life. His behavior is unpredictable."

The detective added, "The good thing is that he always gets caught."

Theo said, "If April's with him, she'll contact us. She'll find a way."

"Then, please let us know."

"Don't worry."

"Excuse me, Officer," Mrs. Boone said. "But I thought in a case like this you first investigate the parents. Missing children are almost always taken by one of their parents, right?"

"This is correct," Bolick said. "And we are looking for the father. According to the mother, though, she spoke with him yesterday afternoon and he was with his band somewhere in West Virginia. She feels rather strongly that he is not involved in this."

"April can't stand her father," Theo blurted, then wished he'd remained quiet.

They chatted for a few more minutes, but the conversation was obviously over. The officers thanked the Boones for coming and promised to check back later. Both Mr. and Mrs. Boone said they would be at their office all day if they were needed for anything. Theo, of course, would be in school.

As they drove away, Mrs. Boone said, "That poor child. Snatched from her own bedroom."

Mr. Boone, who was driving, glanced back over his shoulder and said, "Are you okay, Theo?"

"I guess," he said.

"Of course he's not okay, Woods. His friend has just been abducted."

"I can speak for myself, Mom," Theo said.

"Of course you can, dear. I just hope they find her, and soon."

There was a hint of sunlight to the east. As they drove through the residential neighborhood, Theo stared out of his window, searching for the hardened face of Jack Leeper. But no one was out there. Lights in homes were being turned on. The town was waking up.

"It's almost six," Mr. Boone announced. "I say we go to Gertrude's and have her world-famous waffles. Theo?"

"I'm in," Theo replied, though he had no appetite.

"Marvelous, honey," Mrs. Boone said, though all three knew she would have nothing but coffee.