

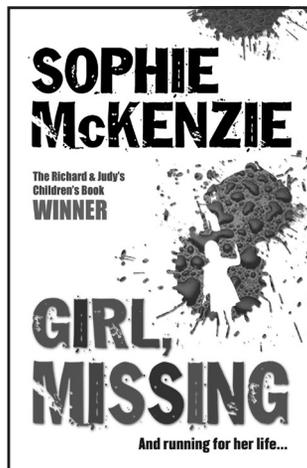
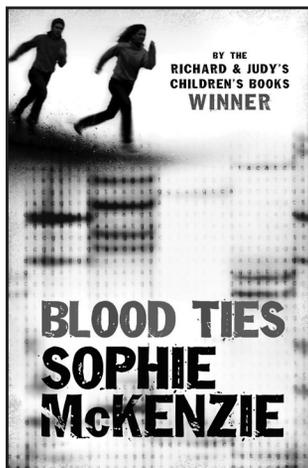
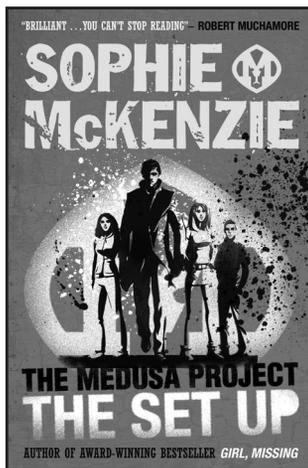


THE MEDUSA PROJECT THE THIEF

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For Sarah

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Fourteen years ago, scientist William Fox implanted four babies with the Medusa gene – a gene for psychic abilities. Now dead, his experiment left a legacy: four teenagers – Nico, Ketty, Ed and William’s own daughter, Dylan – each of whom have developed their own distinct and special skill.

Brought together by government agent, Geri Paterson, the four make up the Medusa Project – a secret, government-funded, crime-fighting force.

Until recently, the Medusa teens lived under the protection of William’s brother, Fergus Fox, at his North London boarding school – Fox Academy. However their existence has now become known to members of the criminal underworld, so they are being taken to a secluded training camp where their identities can be kept secret.







Nico: midnight

The news came when I was asleep in the back of the car. Ketty shook me awake to tell me.

‘Nico,’ she said. ‘*Nico.*’

In my dream she was kissing me . . .

‘Nico.’ Ketty shook my arm harder. ‘*Wake up.*’

Grumbling at being wrenched from my dream, I forced my eyes open.

‘He knows where we’re headed.’ Ketty was right beside me in the car. Her eyes were wide, horrified, as she spoke.

‘What?’ I said, blinking properly awake. ‘Who?’

‘It’s Foster.’ James, one of the agents assigned to protect us, glanced over his shoulder from the front passenger seat. ‘I’ve just had a message from HQ. Apparently he knows which private airport we’re taking you to.’

I squeezed Ketty’s hand. I wasn’t too worried about Damian Foster. We’d fought him off before. We could do it again.

‘It’ll be all right, babe.’

Ketty nodded. She’s cool, my girlfriend.



Unusual too – well, all four of us are. We’re the Medusa Project. Each of us has a particular psychic gift. Mine’s telekinesis; Ketty can see into the future.

Last night, Foster tried to kill us. We only just escaped. Our school got blown up too – which is why we were in a car, past midnight, driving away from our old life and heading for two months in some kind of training camp.

‘According to our intelligence, Foster is on his way to the same private airport we’re taking you to,’ James said.

‘How did he find out where we’re going?’ I asked.

‘Must have been his spy in the security services,’ Ketty said.

I glanced at our driver, Maria. She nodded, her mouth a grim line in the rear-view mirror.

Maria and James were our escorts for the journey to training camp. They’d been assigned to us by Geri Paterson – the woman in charge of the Medusa Project. We’d known Maria for a while. She’d given us regular defence and attack training for the past few weeks. James was a newer member of Geri’s team. He’d been drugged and left unconscious for a few minutes by Foster’s accomplice earlier tonight, but was fine now.

‘So what happens now?’ I asked.

‘We change our route . . . take you to a different location for the night,’ James explained.

‘Where?’ Ketty asked.

James and Maria exchanged looks.





‘We’re discussing it with Geri at the moment,’ Maria said.

‘Don’t worry,’ James added. ‘It’ll be somewhere Foster can’t possibly find you.’

He sounded confident. A bit *overconfident*, if you asked me. He was in his late twenties, I reckoned, with the look of a bloke trying too hard to be young – you know, leather jacket, over-gelled hair. Maria, on the other hand, was all skinny in jeans with long blonde hair and dangly earrings. Quite fit, actually, if you’re into the Older Woman. Not that I am. I’m all about one girl.

My girl.

Ketty.

It’s not so much that she’s pretty, though she is . . . *very*. It’s more . . . that she’s got her own way of doing things, like being obsessed with running and tying her hair back with bits of string. Ketty doesn’t care what other people think.

Beside me, she yawned. I checked the time. It was nearly one a.m.

‘Have you had any sleep?’ I whispered, putting my arm round her.

‘Not yet.’ She laid her head against my chest. Her curly brown hair tickled my chin. ‘We’ll be okay, won’t we, Nico?’

‘Course we will,’ I said. ‘James and Maria know what they’re doing. It’s just a detour.’

We sat in silence for a while.





‘Close your eyes,’ I whispered. ‘You need to sleep.’

A few minutes later I felt Ketty’s body sink down, heavy against mine. I sat as still as I could, so as not to wake her. Dylan and Ed were sleeping too. Dylan was sitting directly in front of me, her long red hair fanned out on either side of the seat. Ed was next to her. Light snores burbled out of his mouth. He and Dylan had both worked hard today too. Ed had read Foster’s mind, which had made him puke, and Dylan had used her protective skills to keep us all safe.

I leaned forward and teleported Dylan’s mp3 player off her lap and into my hands. I detached the headphones and spun the device in circles above my hand.

I wasn’t sleepy myself any more. Was this what life was going to be like forever now? Either dealing with bad guys or running away from them?

‘Why does Foster want *us*?’ I asked, letting the mp3 player drop into my hand.

‘Revenge, probably,’ Maria said from the front.

James twisted round to look at me. ‘Or else he wants to know more about what you can do.’ He paused. ‘That’s quite an array of talents the four of you have.’

I shrugged, spinning the mp3 player into the air again. James watched, transfixed.

‘Hey, what’re you doing?’ Dylan had woken up and was frowning at me through the gap in the seats. She reached towards the mp3 player. ‘Give that back, jerkwad. That’s mine.’





I rolled my eyes and sent the device tumbling through the air towards Dylan. She snatched at it, knocking Ed's shoulder. He woke with a start.

'Er . . . what's going on?' he said. His hair was all tufty and tousled, making him look even geekier than usual. 'Where are we?'

Maria explained quickly about Foster and our need to take a detour.

James's phone beeped. He picked it up. 'Message from Geri . . .' He paused, then turned to Maria. 'She's gone for it.'

'Gone for what?' I asked.

'Our new location for the night,' James explained. 'A house in Lymewich in Kent . . . near the coast. We're only about twenty minutes away.'

'An *ordinary* house?' I glanced at Dylan.

She frowned, picking up on my concerns straight away. 'Not a *safe* house?' she said.

Maria shrugged. 'We've been messaging on an encrypted line. HQ think you'll be as safe there as anywhere. The important thing is that Foster won't have any idea where you are.'

'We could go to a hotel, but Lymewich is close. It's actually my parents' place – a holiday home. The address isn't on any of my files,' James went on. 'It's a good choice.'

'Sure,' Dylan muttered, 'let's keep it in the family.'

'Will your parents be there?' Ed asked.

'No,' James said.





Ed looked round at Ketty – then, seeing she was asleep, glanced at me. Of course he didn't actually look me straight in the eye. Ed never does – says he can't help but mind-read you if he does that.

'What d'you think, Nico?' he asked.

'What choice do we have?' I said, thinking it through. 'A hotel's no safer than a private home. And if Foster's spy knew where we were going then there's no such thing as a "safe" house.'

Ed nodded and turned round.

Fifteen minutes later, James pulled the car across a crunchy gravel drive, I woke Ketty and we got out.

'Wow,' she said, looking at the tiny, detached brick cottage in front of us. 'It's like something off a postcard.'

It was. There were roses blooming all round the walls and flowering plants climbing up the front to two tiny latticed windows on the first floor. James fetched the key from its hiding place and unlocked the front door. It opened straight into a tiny living room, complete with armchairs, fireplace and the smell of damp.

Ed wandered over to Ketty, smoothing down his hair. Even though he'd been asleep, his chinos still had a neatly pressed line down the front. I shook my head as he told Ketty about our new plan – how we were going to stay here overnight and throw Foster off our trail. It was typical of Ed to try and take over like that. He went out with Ketty for a bit, you see, and part of me suspected he wished he still did.





As James and Maria took off their jackets and disappeared into the kitchen, Dylan drew me to one side.

‘At least they’re packing heat,’ she whispered, pointing to James. Now that he’d taken his jacket off, the outline of a revolver was clearly visible under his shirt.

‘Well that’s a comfort,’ I murmured.

I wanted to sound light and unbothered but, if I was honest, it *was* reassuring to know that our protectors were properly weaponed-up.

It turned out there were two bedrooms upstairs. ‘One for the boys and one for the girls,’ James said brightly. ‘Though Maria and I are going to take turns keeping watch down here.’

Dylan and Kitty disappeared into their bedroom immediately, leaving the door ajar. I turned to Ed.

‘Guess the girls reckon they need some beauty sleep.’ I grinned.

‘Don’t you?’ Ed raised his eyebrows as we walked into our room. It was tiny – just enough space for a chest of drawers under the window, with a narrow bed on either side.

‘Nah,’ I said. ‘I’m good on just a few hours.’

‘Oh, give it a rest,’ Ed muttered. ‘It’s one thirty in the morning.’ He flopped onto the bed on the right.

I sighed and wandered out onto the landing. Downstairs I could hear James and Maria whispering furiously, presumably trying not to disturb us. I poked my head round the girls’ bedroom door. Their room was larger than mine





and Ed's – but laid out in a similar way, with a double bed to the right of the door, a small sofa to the left and a window on the other side of the room.

Ketty was lying on the bed, still fully clothed. I could see from the way she was sprawled across the pillow that she was already asleep. Dylan had kicked off her shoes and was curled up on the sofa. She yawned as she looked up at me, her eyes glinting green in the light from the landing.

'Guess you'll have to wait 'til morning, loverboy,' she said with a grin.

'Whatever.' I wandered back out onto the landing. I didn't feel tired at all. Maria was coming up the stairs.

'Just going to check on the girls,' she said.

I nodded and padded downstairs.

James was pacing across the living room, a frown creasing his forehead.

He looked up when he saw me.

'Hi, Nico, you okay?'

'Yeah, I'm good.' I hesitated. 'What's going on? You look kind of worried.'

'It's nothing.' James smiled. 'We've agreed we'll just spend a few hours here, then Geri will tell us where to go next. If I were you, I'd get your head down.'

'I will. I'm gonna go outside for some air first though, okay?'

James hesitated for a second, then nodded. 'Just don't wander off.'





I slipped out the front door and crunched over the gravel to where a line of trees met the road. A car zoomed up the road. For a split second I froze. Could Foster have found us?

But the car didn't stop. I watched it disappear into the distance. Further along the road, I could just make out the brick walls of a couple more houses. It was pretty deserted here. I blew out my breath, watching it mist in the chilly night air.

In my bag upstairs, I'd packed a couple of pairs of jeans, spare trainers and a few T-shirts. The only other things with me were my iPod and a photo of my mum and my stepdad, Fergus. Like all our mums, mine died when I was little, from a virus connected with the Medusa gene. I don't remember her at all. After she died, I stayed with Fergus. He runs Fox Academy, where we're all at school, and knows all about the Medusa Project.

I'd hardly had time to say goodbye to him, what with the bomb alert and having to clear the school. I hoped he was safe, and not too worried about us all. For a second, I felt a stab of homesickness at the thought I wouldn't see him for such a long time. I shook it off and went back to the house.

I'd left the front door on the latch. As soon as I clicked it shut behind me, I knew something was wrong.

The house was too quiet. I glanced through the living room, into the kitchen. The lights were on in both rooms, but there was no sign of either James or Maria. Maybe





they were both upstairs. Except . . . hadn't James said they were going to take it in turns to keep watch down here?

My throat felt dry as I strained to hear any sound from upstairs.

Nothing. I tiptoed uneasily up the stairs. The top step creaked. I held my breath, my heart pounding. Why was it so quiet?

For goodness sake, man, they probably fell asleep.

I crept towards the room I was sharing with Ed. I pushed at the door. It opened slowly, with a creak.

Ed was no longer in his bed.

No.

No, no, no.

I stood on the landing, my mind running over what on earth could possibly have happened. Where *was* everyone? Had they all left while I wasn't looking? No, I'd have heard them on that crunchy gravel drive. Same if anyone had tried to get into the house from outside. There was no way Foster could have arrived without me noticing.

They *must* be here. Heart pounding, I glanced round for something to defend myself with, something I could teleport if I had to . . . The landing was empty, apart from a small table by the stairs containing a row of tiny silver-framed photos.

I raised my hand and teleported two of them into my palm.

Slowly, I pushed open the door to the girls' room.

A second of darkness, then a blinding light flashed in





my eyes. I squinted, turned away, tried to shield myself from the glare.

‘Who are you?’ I forced my voice to stay strong.

‘Just stay there, Nico, and you’ll be okay.’ It was James.

I reached for the light switch by the door. I flicked it on. Nothing.

‘James?’ I said. ‘What’s going on?’

‘Stay put,’ James insisted. ‘I’m serious. I’ve got a gun.’

I froze.

Why was James threatening me? He was here to protect us. Was someone else here? And where were the girls?

‘What are you doing?’ I said.

‘Wait by the door. Don’t move.’

Still shielding my eyes from the light, I took a few hesitant steps, in the direction of the bed.

‘Ketty?’ I said. ‘Dylan?’

No reply.

‘Stand *still*,’ James ordered.

My heart drummed against my chest. What was he doing? The light was still glaring in my eyes. I had to act. Work out what was going on.

Now.

I darted sideways, towards the sofa – the one Dylan had been curled up on. As I crashed onto it I realised she was still there. I’d landed on her legs.

She didn’t move.

Man, what was happening?

The glaring light followed me. But for a split second I





saw behind it. James was standing in the corner of the room, beside the window. The torch he'd been blinding me with was in his hand. He was alone.

It took a second for the full impact of this to sink in.

James was working against us. Against the Medusa Project.

Fury rose in me. 'What have you done to Dylan?' I yelled, hurling one of the silver photo frames towards the light.

James ducked to avoid it. As he moved, the torchlight wavered, giving me another second without the glare in my eyes. Squinting, I glanced over at the bed. Ketty and Ed were lying there, bound and gagged. Their eyes were shut and, like Dylan, they were completely still.

'Stay where you are and don't move,' James ordered.

Before I knew what was happening, he was rushing towards me, the torchlight brighter than ever . . . flaring in my eyes.

In one move James grabbed my wrist and dropped the torch. It fell with a thud onto the floor.

James yanked my arm behind my back. *Ow*. I gasped with the shock of the sudden pain.

'Get off!'

I still had one of the photo frames. With my free hand I drove it against James's head.

'Aaagh!' He reeled back.

I scrambled across the sofa, panting.

'What are you doing?' I shouted at him. 'You're





supposed to be looking after us.’ I looked over at Ketty, lying so still on the bed. Was she unconscious? Worse?

‘Slight change of plan, Nico.’ James lunged for me.

He caught my arm and jerked it up behind me again. I struggled. He yanked my arm higher, breathing heavily with the effort. The force of the movement was so fierce I thought the pain would make me vomit.

For a second I stopped fighting. In an instant James had wound some sort of plastic rope round my wrists. He pulled it tight, then sat back, panting.

I focused on the binding, trying to loosen it telekinetically. It was impossible. There was no knot to untie. Whatever clasp was holding the plastic together was too powerful for me to unstick. I kicked out. James scrambled off the sofa and stood up.

‘It’s over, Nico. *Man*, I knew you’d be the hardest to control, but—’

‘Why are you doing this?’ I demanded, looking round for something to teleport at him. But the room was completely empty.

‘Calm down.’

My heart pounded. I still couldn’t take it in. I suddenly remembered the other agent who’d driven here with us.

‘Maria?’ I yelled.

‘Be quiet.’ James pulled a foul-smelling cloth out of his pocket. ‘Maria’s already out cold. This is just me.’

‘What’s that?’





He walked towards me. ‘Nothing.’ He grabbed my bound wrists and twisted them round and up. I fought against him as he brought the cloth up to my mouth.

‘No.’ I struggled, pressing my lips together. Whatever was on the cloth had to be some sort of drug. I glanced again at the others. He must have used this on them.

James pushed the cloth against my mouth. ‘Give it up, Nico,’ he said.

Desperate, I tried to hold my breath.

I looked round. There must be something – *anything* – I could use as a weapon . . . I caught sight of Ketty’s bag, poking out from underneath her bed.

Yes. With a roar I teleported it up and across the room. *Wham.* It rammed against James’s side. Knocked him to the floor. I scrambled up, onto my feet. I raised the bag again, ready to dash it against him as he stood up.

‘Put that down,’ James ordered.

‘No,’ I said.

Then James raised his hand. He was holding a gun. He pointed it at me.

‘Nico, I don’t want to use this, but I will if I have to,’ he said. ‘You have three seconds to put that bag down.’

‘No!’

‘Three . . .’

I focused on the gun, trying mentally to wrest it out of his hands, but he was gripping it too tightly.

‘Two . . .’ James shifted slightly, so the gun was now





pointing at the bed where Ed and Ketty lay. ‘Lower the bag and close your eyes, or I’m shooting Ketty.’

My breath caught in my throat.

‘One . . .’

I didn’t have a choice.

I let the bag drop.





Ketty: dawn

‘So, what are we going to do?’ I asked.

Nico shook his head.

On the sofa, Ed chewed his lip. ‘I can’t believe James would *do* this,’ he said.

‘Well he has,’ Nico said, shortly.

It was light outside – early morning – and we were still in the room I’d been sharing with Dylan. Ed and I were sitting on the bed, Nico and Dylan on the small sofa opposite.

We were all bound at the wrists and ankles. Nico and Ed were also blindfolded. Ed’s hair stuck up in sandy tufts above the band round his eyes. It made him look even more vulnerable than usual. Unlike Nico, who somehow managed to look cool, even in his blindfold.

Dylan had been wearing tape over her mouth, but I’d managed to pick that off for her when I woke up.

‘I guess we could yell,’ Dylan suggested. ‘Maybe if we were real loud the neighbours would hear.’

‘The windows are double-glazed,’ Nico pointed out.



‘And the nearest neighbours are miles down the road – I saw last night when I went outside.’

I sighed. Last night was a blur for me – all I remembered was stumbling inside the cottage, then falling asleep on the bed. I’d half woken when Ed came in to say good-night. After that I had a vague recollection of James’s voice and a hand pressing damp gauze over my mouth. The smell of it had been horrible, but I’d had to breathe it in, and the next thing I remember was waking up with Ed lying next to me, drugged and tied up too – and the others in the same state on the sofa.

Now we were all awake. We must have been talking in low voices for ten minutes or so – there was no sign of either James or Maria. I’d managed, despite the plastic ties round my wrist, to reach the door and window handles, but both were locked.

‘Why is James *doing* this? What’s he after?’ Ed asked.

‘Maybe he’s planning to hand us over to Foster,’ Nico suggested.

Of course. I nodded. ‘James must be the spy who’s been giving Foster information on the Medusa Project,’ I said.

‘Forget *why* James is doing this,’ Dylan said. ‘The important thing is, how are we going to get away?’

I looked at my beautiful boyfriend. Nico’s telekinesis had saved us before.

Saved my life.

‘Can you untie our wrists and ankles, Nico?’ I asked.





‘No.’ He made a face. ‘This stuff James used has got some sort of plastic seal. And unless I can get my blindfold off I won’t be able to teleport anything either,’ Nico said. ‘I have to see what I want to move – or at least feel it – first.’

‘And I can’t mind-read anyone unless I can see into their eyes,’ Ed added.

I gazed at their blindfolds. It struck me that James had only met us a couple of times – and had certainly never seen us in action. He must have really studied our files to be able to limit our abilities so precisely.

‘What about you, Dylan?’

She tossed her head, flicking her long red hair out of her eyes. ‘I can protect myself from most sorts of attack, but not if it comes at me real hard or real fast. And being tied up makes it hard to help anyone else.’

‘It’s like James knows exactly what we’re capable of,’ I said.

‘And he’s stopping us from doing it.’ Dylan nodded.

‘He might have stopped the rest of us,’ Ed said, slowly, ‘but you could still have a vision, Kitty.’

‘Yeah.’ Dylan’s voice grew excited.

‘Kitty?’ Nico said. ‘What d’you think?’

I swallowed. I’d only just started being able to bring on visions at will – apart from the three people in this room, only Geri knew I could do it – and I didn’t find it easy. Especially in front of the others, who seemed so competent and capable when it came to handling their powers.





‘I’ll give it a go,’ I said uncertainly. ‘But I’m not sure how it’ll help. I still can’t really control what I see.’

I turned my face to the window, where the light was brightest. I blinked rapidly, trying to jump-start a vision. Lights flashed in front of my eyes. *Keep going.* I carried on blinking, trying not to think about how I looked. Dylan had once told me I looked freaky when I had visions. At least with that blindfold on Nico couldn’t see me.

The lights were really flashing now. A sweet sickly perfume filled the air. The vision rose up . . .

Nico by the sea. Waves crashing on a cold beach. All of us there. I’m looking at Nico. He’s staring at someone else. Not Ed or Dylan. I can’t see who. His dark brown eyes are angry. ‘You’re the real thief,’ Nico says.

I snapped out of the vision

‘What happened?’ Dylan leaped in. ‘What did you see?’

‘Give her a chance.’ That was Nico.

Heart sinking, I told them what I’d seen. ‘Sorry,’ I said, feeling that I’d let them down. ‘Sorry, it’s not much help.’

‘We don’t know that, yet,’ Ed said. ‘We don’t know what will help and what won’t.’

Dylan snorted. ‘Well, Nico on a beach isn’t going to get these bindings off, is it?’

‘At least Ketty’s seen that we *are* going to get them off,’ Nico said, darkly.

Footsteps sounded outside. The door swung open. It was James.





‘Sleep well?’ he said.

‘You drugged us,’ Dylan snarled.

‘What are you going to do with us?’ Nico demanded.

James looked round at us. He was wearing the same clothes as yesterday – jeans and a leather jacket. His hair didn’t look quite so gelled up as before, though, and there were dark shadows under his eyes.

‘I’m sorry about drugging you,’ he said, leaning against the door frame. ‘But you’re too powerful to take any risks with.’

‘What’ve you done with Maria?’ Ed asked.

‘She’s tied up downstairs,’ James said. ‘She’s got nothing to do with this.’

My guts gave a sickening twist. Poor Maria.

‘Are you working for Foster?’ I said.

James smiled. ‘Foster has no idea where you are,’ he said. ‘That was just a cover story so you wouldn’t get suspicious when we took a detour.’

I caught Dylan’s eye. She looked as surprised as I felt. What James was doing *wasn’t* connected with Foster? Then what was going on?

‘What about the training camp?’ I said, confused. ‘Why aren’t we going there?’

‘You are,’ James went on. ‘I’m just borrowing you for the day first.’

‘*Borrowing* us?’ Dylan held up her bound wrists. ‘Don’t you mean kidnapping us?’

‘Borrowing us to do what?’ Nico demanded.





James smiled again. 'To steal diamonds,' he said.

'*What?*' Nico said.

James crossed his arms. 'A wealthy friend of my mother's – a *very* wealthy friend – owns some extremely expensive diamonds. They're set in various pieces of jewellery which she keeps in a safe at her house,' James explained. 'Altogether the diamonds are worth over five million pounds. And I want them.'

'Well, go and get them,' Dylan said. 'You've got a gun. Get this woman to give you the diamonds.'

'I can't do that. For one thing Mrs Carter and her husband know me. For another, I happen to know that part of the insurance requirement for covering the diamonds is a security measure over which they have no direct control. *I* won't be able to bypass it. But *you* will.'

I thought back to my vision of Nico on the beach. *You're the real thief*, he'd said. It must have been James he'd been talking to.

Nico whistled. 'So you want *us* to steal them for you?'

'Yes,' James said with a smile.

Ed shook his head. 'But that doesn't make sense. You're connected with us. Once we've been identified, Geri Paterson will ask questions and work out you were behind the whole thing – and you'll be arrested.'

He was right. Geri Paterson was the head of the Medusa Project – the woman who had brought the four of us together and who was now sending us to a training camp for two months. She had phenomenal power over the





authorities. There was no way she wouldn't find out – and fast – if we stole a bunch of diamonds.

'No one will identify you,' James said. 'And even if the Carters offer up a few clues, the police won't connect you with the crime.'

'Why not?' I asked.

'The police can't track and arrest people who no longer exist,' he said, matter-of-factly.

'No longer exist?' What did *that* mean?

'If it was a bigger crime than theft, then there might be a small risk of some high-ranking officers working it out, but lower down the food chain . . .' James waved his hand impatiently. 'Anyway, that doesn't matter right now. All you need to know is how to steal the diamonds.'

I stared at him, my skin bursting into goosebumps. How could we no longer exist? Was he was planning to *kill* us?

Nico was obviously thinking the same thing. 'Geri'll never let it go if we don't turn up at this training camp,' he said.

'You *will* turn up,' James said. 'Just one day later than planned.'

'This is ridiculous,' Nico said. 'You can't *make* us take the diamonds. I mean, if you hurt us we won't be able to steal them.'

'That's true.' James's voice was icy. 'I'm not going to hurt *you*, Nico – or Dylan or Ed. Not the three I *need*. But if you don't do what I say and keep quiet about it, I *will* hurt *Ketty*.'





I gasped. ‘Me?’

‘Yes.’ James’s eyes burned into mine. ‘You. You’re the least useful member of the team – at least as far as I’m concerned. The others’ silence buys your safety. It’s as simple as that.’

I glanced at Nico. The blindfold hid most of his smooth, olive-skinned face but his lips were pressed so tightly together they were white.

‘If you *dare* touch Kitty—’

‘I won’t have to, Nico,’ James said calmly. ‘Not if everyone does what I tell them.’

My heart pounded.

‘So what’s to stop us telling someone what you’ve made us do *afterwards* . . . once we get to the camp?’ Dylan demanded.

Ed nodded. ‘What’s to stop *Maria* saying something? You can’t keep her tied up forever.’

‘Maria will keep quiet for the same reason that the rest of you will.’ He turned to me. ‘Like I said, it’s all about *you*, Kitty. It’s obvious that both Ed and Nico would do anything to protect you.’

I looked away, my face flushing.

‘On top of which, you and Dylan are friends and I know Maria has a soft spot for you,’ James went on. ‘If anyone breathes a word *after* the theft takes place, I swear I will make it my life’s ambition to hunt you down and kill you.’

A terrible silence fell over the room as James let this threat hang in the air.





I stared at the floor, unable to look at any of the others.

James stood up. 'Come on, Ketty, let's go.'

'No!' Nico said. 'Stop!'

'Please, James,' Ed pleaded.

'Where are you taking me?' I asked, trying to keep my voice steady.

James took a knife from his pocket. He held it towards me.

I gasped.

'Leave her alone,' Dylan yelled.

James knelt and in a single swift move cut through the binding round my ankles. I got to my feet, my legs trembling.

'If you hurt her, I'll be the one hunting *you* down,' Nico shouted.

'I'll be okay, Nico,' I said. Whatever was going to happen, the last thing I wanted was Nico provoking James into hurting *him*.

James gripped my arm and led me outside and down the stairs. As we crossed the living room I glanced at the kitchen. Maria was sitting on a chair, rope tied round her body.

'Ketty, help!' she cried out. 'He's going to kill me.'

'Shut up!' James swore, kicking the kitchen door shut.

He dragged me over to the front door and shoved me outside. Tears pricked at my eyes. How could this be happening? I'd spent the last few days consumed with worry about my brother Lex, trying to rescue him from Foster.





And now, just when I thought everything was going to be okay, here was a new threat . . . a new danger.

It was cold in the bright morning air, the sky dull and overcast. I shivered.

James walked over to the huge people carrier we'd travelled here in the night before.

I looked round, desperate to find something that might help me get away. I could only see a short way up the road in either direction. Like Nico had said, the nearest house was miles away.

James unlocked the car.

'Where are we going?' I said.

'We're not going anywhere.' He opened the boot. 'Say hello to your home for the next few hours.'

I stared inside. It was fairly large, but surely once the boot door shut it would be dark – and airless.

'I won't be able to breathe,' I said, panicking, backing away.

'You'll be fine,' James snapped. 'I'll come back out in an hour or so with some water. Now, get in.'

I stared at him. He couldn't be serious. 'You don't have to do this,' I pleaded. 'You can just shut me in another room.'

'It's better if the others don't know where you are,' he said, half pulling his gun out of his pocket. 'Plus, I don't want you overhearing anything,' He shoved me towards the car. 'Come on, hurry up!'

A chill snaked down my spine as I realised how closely





James must have studied my file. He knew exactly what I was capable of, and what I wasn't – I couldn't have a vision of a place or time I didn't experience. And if I wasn't involved in the jewellery theft, then I wouldn't be able to foresee it . . .

Shaking, I climbed into the boot. James bound my mouth and legs again and then, without speaking, he slammed the boot shut.

I was trapped and alone.





Ed: midday

James marched us out of the house and into his car. Nico, Dylan and I were all blindfolded and gagged. Most of James's attention was on Nico, which meant I kept stumbling and bumping into things. Still, who cared about a few bruises . . . there was only one thing on my mind.

Ketty. Where was she? What had he done with her? If only James would take this blindfold off, I could mind-read him and find out.

James shoved us onto the back seats of his 4x4 and told us to lie down, then covered us with a blanket. I lay in the dark, with one of Dylan's shoes against my face as the car drove away. Five minutes later we turned onto a bumpy road. The car pulled to a stop. I felt the blanket covering us being whisked off and struggled to sit up. It was lighter behind my blindfold now – not that I could make out anything beyond a red glow. My wrists were sore from where the plastic binding cut into my skin.

James pulled the gags off our mouths.

'Okay.' He cleared his throat. 'Survive the ride?'



‘Yeah, we’re great,’ Nico muttered. ‘Now will you just untie us, please?’

‘In a minute.’

I wriggled in my seat. I was uncomfortable and sweaty, my hair sticking to my forehead. A trickle of perspiration tickled my cheek but I couldn’t reach to wipe it away.

Like Ketty had said, James knew exactly what we were capable of and how to control our powers.

Ketty. It hurt inside my chest when I thought about her. She was my best friend – and she could be anywhere, scared or badly hurt . . . or worse . . .

‘Right, now I’m going to explain how you’re going to get past Mr Carter and the security in the safe he can’t control,’ James said.

‘We won’t be getting past anyone if you don’t untie my hands and take this blindfold off,’ Nico snapped. ‘And where is Ketty?’

‘Yes . . . *Please* tell us she’s okay.’ I could hear how anxious I sounded. ‘She *is* okay, isn’t she?’

‘I was just coming to Ketty,’ James said curtly. ‘Now, listen. In a minute I’m going to untie you. Remember, if you try anything, you’ll never see Ketty again. A friend of mine’s with her. I don’t even know where he’s taken her, so there’s no point mind-reading me, Ed, but unless he hears from me every ten minutes, he’s got instructions to kill her. Do you understand?’

‘Er . . . yes,’ I said, my heart racing. I could barely focus





on what James was saying. I closed my eyes behind my blindfold, trying to steady my nerves.

‘Okay,’ Nico muttered.

‘Deal,’ Dylan said.

‘Right.’ James paused. Then he explained the plan.

I calmed down a little as he spoke. I had to admit the plan was clever. And simple. Each of us had a role . . . each of us was needed to make the robbery work. We sat in silence, listening as he went over what we had to do.

‘Any questions?’ James asked, finally.

‘Just one,’ Nico said. ‘Did you train to be this much of an idiot, or does it come naturally?’

‘Shut up,’ James snapped.

For goodness sake. Why did Nico have to be so antagonistic? I hadn’t liked James right from the start, with his oily hair and mean little eyes, but being rude to him wasn’t going to help Ketty. Nico was her boyfriend. He was supposed to *care* about her, not endanger her by getting all aggressive with the guy who was holding her captive.

‘Okay, time to go.’ James reached over, grabbed my wrists and sliced through the binding. Then he yanked off my blindfold.

I blinked at the brightness of the light and rubbed my sore wrists. As James released the others I looked round. We were parked in a narrow country lane, just off a bigger, tarmac road. A couple of cars whizzed along the road. I couldn’t see any pedestrians.





James turned to face me. He was wearing dark sunglasses, clearly taking no chances that I might attempt to mind-read him.

‘Here.’ Holding his gun in one hand, he shoved a balaclava at me with the other, then pointed to a tiny black dot just beside the left eyehole.

‘There’s one of these for each of you,’ he explained. ‘The dot is a fibre-optic camera and microphone. My eyes and ears while you’re in the Carters’ house. Roll down the masks once you get to the drive. It’s just a few yards round the corner.’

I tugged the balaclava on, then rolled up the sides so it looked like a beanie hat. Seconds later we were out of the car and racing up the country lane.

Half a minute later we reached the house. It was enormous. A gravel drive, lined with tall trees, led up to a four-storey brick mansion. Just one car – a sleek silver Bentley – was parked outside the front door.

‘So far so good,’ Dylan whispered, as we pulled down our balaclavas.

I nodded. James had already explained Mr Carter would be alone in the house – his wife was always at the hairdresser’s this time of the week.

Nico was already focusing on the front door, his hands held over the handle. With a click, the lock retracted and the door swung back.

He glanced sideways at me and Dylan. ‘We’re in,’ he muttered.





Making sure I left the front door open – part of James’s plan to make the robbery look opportunistic – I followed the others into the house. The hallway was brightly lit, but still had an old, slightly musty smell. My heart thumped as we crept across the wooden floor, past a living room full of dark wood panelling and chintz-covered furniture.

James thought that the safe containing Mrs Carter’s jewellery would be somewhere near the master bedroom, but our first job was to find her husband. As we reached the stairs, Nico held his finger to his lips. We stood, silently, listening.

Footsteps sounded above us. Nico pointed up the stairs, then began to climb them. Dylan followed. I tiptoed after them, feeling weak at the knees.

As we reached the first-floor landing, a door opened along the corridor ahead of us. And then several things happened at once.

An elderly man, with grey hair and a stooped back, walked out into the corridor. His eyes just had time to register horror, and then Nico was at his side, hissing in his ear.

Dylan raced over. I turned away, unable to watch. This was *so* wrong. It was bad enough having psychic abilities in the first place, but using them to make some poor old man give up his wife’s diamonds was worse than evil. If Kitty’s life wasn’t at stake there was no way I’d let myself be used like this. *No way.*

‘Oy, Chino Boy, get down here,’ Dylan yelled at me.





I stumbled down the corridor towards them. I barely noticed Dylan's insult. I felt strangely numb, like all this wasn't really happening.

Mr Carter's face was lined and grey. He pressed himself against the wall behind him as I got closer. Dylan and Nico each held one of his arms.

I stopped, a metre or so away, feeling sick.

'You're up.' Nico grabbed my arm, and shoved me in front of Mr Carter. I could feel the fear radiating off the old man. I bit my lip. The balaclava prickled against my mouth.

'What do you want?' Mr Carter's voice was quavery.

I took a deep breath and looked into his eyes.

In an instant, I was there . . . inside his mind. The first, panicky wave of his thoughts broke over me.

What's happening? What are you doing? What do you want?

It's all right, I made myself think-speak. I always try to be as calm as possible when it's someone's first time. I guess it's scary for them. When I'm inside someone's head they're basically paralysed – unable to speak or move unless I let them, or until I break the connection.

I waited for the old man's thoughts to settle a bit, but they kept jumping around. One moment he'd be thought-speaking to me. The next, his own private thoughts forced their way to the front of his mind.

*Please don't hurt me. **Hooligan element.** I've got grandchildren. **What's happening?** I've been ill. How are*





*you doing this? **Lord, will they hurt me? Hooligans. What do you want?***

‘Hurry up.’ Nico’s voice sounded impatiently in my ear.

Please calm down, Mr Carter, I thought-spoke again, very slowly and deliberately. I just want to know where the diamonds are.

*What? No! **In the safe. No ... They’re mine ... Cheryl’s ... The safe ...***

Good. I wasn’t going to have to probe too deeply into Mr Carter’s mind. It’s funny how the very things people try not to focus on are exactly what jump to the front of their minds.

Okay, so the diamonds are in the safe. Where’s the safe? Is it on this floor?

*No ... no ... no ... **yes ... master bedroom ... dressing room ... left ... left of the dressing table ... no ... no ...***

I called out the information. Footsteps rushed away. Dylan, going to investigate.

I’m sorry, Mr Carter. We’re not going to hurt you. I tried to make my thought-speech sound as gentle as possible. Several long seconds passed. I kept the connection, trying not to engage with Mr Carter’s panic-stricken thoughts.

‘I’ve found the safe,’ Dylan called out. ‘What’s the combination?’

The safe combination, Mr Carter?

No ... can’t tell you ... don’t know ... don’t know ...





Damn, the old man had clearly realised how my telepathy worked. He was making a big effort to stop himself from consciously thinking the numbers of the safe combination.

I sighed.

‘*Ed,*’ Nico hissed in my ear. ‘*Get on* with it.’

Sorry, Mr Carter. I drew in my breath to focus, then dived into the first level of his deeper thoughts. They were all muddled up, like most people’s. Memories of a wedding day swirling around; his (not particularly flattering) opinion about what Mrs Carter had cooked for supper last night; and a persistent, nagging desire to complain about a mail order delivery of red wine. I pushed a little harder. It’s difficult to explain what that feels like – but it doesn’t usually take long to find something once the person you’re mind-reading knows you’re after it.

Imagine, for instance, that you and I were speaking and I said to you, *Don’t think about a penguin in a red hat.* Isn’t a penguin in a red hat *exactly* what you’re going to think about?

There. I found the part of Mr Carter’s mind which held the combination. I shouted the sequence out to Dylan.

‘Left 28 . . . right 11 . . . left 44 . . . it’s his wife’s birthday . . .’

‘Fascinating,’ Nico muttered. ‘Are we done?’

‘Yes,’ I said.

There was a short pause.





You still won't be able to get into the safe . . . Oh, dear, what are you going to do to me? Please don't hurt me. Mr Carter's thought-speech felt like he was sobbing.

My guts twisted. *Don't worry, Mr Carter, please – you're going to be fine.*

In the distance I could hear faint clicking noises as Dylan released the safe. I kept my gaze firmly on Mr Carter's eyes in case we needed more information, but I stayed at the surface level of his thoughts.

'Whoa, this is *sooo* awesome,' Dylan shouted out. 'I can see the diamonds, they're *enormous*.'

'What about the force field?' Nico asked.

I could feel Mr Carter's mind tense up at this.

How does the other boy know about that? he thought-spoke.

I swallowed, trying to ignore his question. James had explained when he'd briefed us that the safe contained a state-of-the art laser force field that was linked directly to an alarm at the local police station. The Carters had no direct control over it at home.

James had also warned it would burn the skin of anyone reaching through it to the diamonds.

Any normal person.

'Yeah, the force field's here,' Dylan shouted. 'I'm putting my hand in now. I can feel it but it's not hurting. *Whoa*, the laser's going round my hand . . . *awesome* . . . the stream isn't even broken. *No problem*.'

'Just get the diamonds, will you?' Nico shouted.





How is she doing that? Why isn't the alarm going off?

I ignored Mr Carter's thought-speech. Even if I explained about Dylan's ability to withstand physical attack, I was pretty sure he wouldn't be able to get his head round it.

Seconds later, there was a rustling sound and then Dylan was back. 'Got them.'

'Okay,' Nico ordered. 'Time to go.'

Thanks, Mr Carter. You're going to be fine.

*What's this? What's he putting over my mouth? **Smells ghastly.** Please don't . . . please . . .* Mr Carter's pitiful thoughts faded. His eyes glazed as his mind stilled into unconsciousness.

I broke the eye-to-eye contact and stood back.

Nico eased Mr Carter onto the floor. The drugged handkerchief James had given him was still clamped around the old man's mouth.

'How long did James say that would put him out for?' I asked anxiously.

'Not long.' Nico glanced at me. 'This sucks big time, doesn't it?'

I nodded, still staring at the old man. He looked so helpless, lying there on the floor.

Dylan was already at the top of the stairs, a small velvet bag in her hand. She pulled her balaclava off.

'Come *on*,' she called. 'Let's get out of here.'

'Okay, just wait a sec.' I darted into the nearest room –





some kind of office. I grabbed a cushion off the chair at the desk, ran back and eased it under Mr Carter's head.

'Very nice . . . very caring . . .' Nico said, his tone half amused, half exasperated. 'Now, come on. Let's give James these diamonds and get Kitty back.'

I followed him down the stairs and out of the front door, tugging my balaclava off as I ran. We jogged round the corner. The car was parked in the same place. James was sitting in the front seat, still wearing his dark glasses. He reached over and opened the front passenger door.

I raced over. 'Where's Kitty?' I demanded.

'Get in,' James said, roughly. His gun was gripped tightly in his hand.

Nico ran up. 'Not 'til you tell us where Kitty is.'

'We've got the diamonds.' Dylan held out the bag.

'I know.' James swore. 'Stop flashing them about and get in the car.'

The others scrambled into the back seat. James held out two blindfolds. 'Put these on,' he ordered, still gripping his gun.

I watched him, knowing he was holding the gun too tightly for Nico to teleport it away.

'Get in, Ed,' James said.

'What about Kitty?'

'My friend's looking after Kitty, remember?' James snapped. 'I'll call him once we've got away from here.'

'No.' I stood stubbornly on the pavement. It's funny. The Medusa gene that's inside each of us has developed in





a different way according to our personalities. I don't know for certain why I ended up able to mind-read, but I reckon it's got something to do with the fact that, unless I'm *really* feeling messed up, like I was earlier, I have good instincts. For instance, I can almost always sense when people are lying to me. And, right now, I was sure that what James had just said about Ketty being with his friend wasn't true.

I glanced into the car, where Nico was holding the blindfold in his hand like it was a dirty hanky. He felt my gaze and looked up. *Whoosh*. I jumped into his mind.

Sunglasses, I demanded. *Get James's sunglasses*.

I broke the connection. Nico turned. Held up his hands. In an instant the sunglasses were off James's face and soaring into Nico's outstretched palms.

Instinctively, James reached for them. Before he had time to realise what I was doing and shield his eyes, I was inside the car and across the passenger seat.

Trying not to think about the gun in his hand, I grabbed his chin and turned his head to face mine.

Connection. I dived in through James's eyes.

Where's Ketty? I demanded. *What have you done with her?*

James was trying to push my thoughts away but I forced my way further into his head. *What a mess*. A jumble of incoherent emotions. Rage. The diamond stealing plan going round and round in his head. *Will it work . . .? Can it work . . .?* and fear. Blood-curdling





anxiety that he would be caught. That we would overpower him.

Ketty! I demanded.

There. I saw what he knew about our abilities . . . yes. I saw where *Ketty* was. And . . . and *what was that?*

I broke the connection, unable to believe what I'd just stumbled across.

As soon as I let go of James's mind, he started shouting. 'Let me go.'

I blinked, taking in for the first time that Dylan had got out of the car and was now standing in the road, reaching over James in the driver's seat and fastening his wrists with the same plastic binding he'd used on us. His ankles were already tied.

Nico wound one of the blindfolds round James's mouth, as I scrambled out of the car. My head was whirling with what I'd seen. I needed some air.

Nico looked anxiously over at me as he pushed James down into the space between the front seats and the steering panel. Dylan had grabbed James's legs and was tying them to the accelerator pedal. She took his gun and held it carefully between her fingers. Nico fastened James's wrists to the bar under the front passenger seat, then jumped out of the car and grabbed my shoulders.

'What happened?' he asked. 'What did you see? Is *Ketty* all right?'

'Yeah,' I said, still feeling dazed. 'She's in the boot.'

'*What?*' Nico raced to the back of the car. I could hear





him clicking the boot open. Ketty's wail as he pulled her gag off. His voice, suddenly soft and reassuring.

He was holding her . . . hugging her . . . comforting her . . .

I stood, staring down at the pavement, unable to move. Dylan walked round the car and came up beside me. I could feel her gaze on my face – those pale green eyes piercing through me.

'What's up?' she said. 'Awesome move on the bad guy, by the way.'

I nodded as Nico and Ketty came over. Ketty's face was tear-stained and creased from where she'd been lying in the boot of the car. She was holding on to Nico like he might suddenly fly off the pavement. But, for once, I didn't feel a stab of jealousy.

'We need to go,' Nico said. 'Get to a phone. Call Geri.'

I nodded, feeling numb.

'What is it, Ed?' Ketty asked.

I took a deep breath. 'It's just something I saw . . .' I hesitated, not wanting to say it out loud.

'*What* did you see?' Dylan asked, impatiently. James's gun still dangled from her hand.

'D'you remember James saying earlier that we no longer existed?' I said.

The others nodded.

'Well, it's true.'

'What?' Nico stared at me.

Ketty frowned. 'What do you mean?'





‘All our records – school, medical, everywhere on paper and online – according to James’s thoughts, they’ve all been wiped, or changed to say we’re dead.’

‘All four of us?’ Dylan asked. ‘Are you sure? Is James sure?’

‘Yes. In James’s mind us being listed as dead is not a belief or an opinion. It’s a fact. It’s the *truth*.’

‘All the more reason to phone Geri fast,’ Nico said. ‘Find out what’s going on.’

‘It’s gotta be part of James’s plan,’ Dylan said.

She opened the cylinder at the side of the gun and tipped the bullets out. I stared at her. How did she know how to do that? She saw me looking and grinned.

‘James must reckon he can cover our tracks better if he’s made out we’re dead,’ Nico said. ‘He talked about it last night: how the police won’t be able to connect us with the crime.’

‘I don’t know.’ Ketty frowned. ‘How would James have had time to get into all our records to fake our deaths *and* do everything else he’s done today?’

‘And why?’ I asked. ‘Isn’t it more likely that he’s planning to . . . to . . .’

‘To kill us?’ Dylan asked.

‘But *why*?’ I glanced back at the car where James lay, all trussed up. ‘I suppose I could go back and read his mind again.’

‘There’s no time,’ Nico insisted. ‘Come *on*. Let’s find a phone and—’





‘We have to go back for Maria,’ Ketty said suddenly. ‘She’s trapped in that house. James tied her up. I saw her on my way out.’

I was still preoccupied with us being listed as dead. ‘So, before, when James said—’

‘Will you stop going on about James!’ Nico snapped. ‘Ketty’s right. We have to go back for Maria. The house can’t be that far away. We were only driving for a few minutes. Do any of you remember the route we took?’

‘I’m sure we took a left into this lane, which means we drove up there.’ Dylan pointed down the tarmac road.

‘And before we got onto that road, when we left the house, I remember sensing us turn left and then take a right, really quick, one after the other.’ Nico said. ‘We just have to retrace our steps. Get back to the house. Release Maria. Call Geri. Everything’ll be sorted out in ten minutes. Come on.’

He broke into a run. Dylan raced after him.

I hesitated. Ketty grabbed my hand and gave it a tug.

‘Ed, we need to hurry.’

Why was everyone always telling me to hurry?

‘I’m coming,’ I said. ‘I just want to think this through.’

Ketty shifted impatiently from foot to foot. ‘There really isn’t anything to think through. The faster we go, the sooner we’ll be able to call for help.’

I guessed she was right – and yet I still couldn’t make sense of it. Why would James bother to list us as dead? It seemed a bit of an extreme length to go to, just to cover up one jewellery theft . . .





‘Ed, come *on*.’ Ketty raced off.

I gave up trying to figure it out and followed her.

Seven minutes later we panted up to the house.

Nico was about to start unlocking the front door using telekinesis, but then Dylan broke the windowpane and twisted her hand round to flip the catch.

The look on Nico’s face was priceless. I smiled at that – even though everything was so tense. It’s always good to see the wind taken out of Nico’s sails.

We ran into the house.

‘Maria was in the kitchen,’ Ketty gasped.

As she raced across the living room, the kitchen door opened. Maria stood there, her mouth open in a huge ‘O’ shape. Her earrings jangled as she looked round at each of us in turn.

‘How did you . . .? Where’s . . .? What happened . . .?’

‘How did you get free?’ Dylan asked.

Maria blinked. ‘It took me ages – nearly sliced my hands off with the kitchen knife. I literally just managed it. Are you guys all right?’

‘Yeah.’ Dylan handed her the gun and bullets. ‘Have this. I hate guns.’

‘Wait.’ Everything was moving too fast. I knew something was wrong. ‘How come we didn’t see you when we left the house?’

‘James drugged me after I called out to Ketty,’ Maria said quickly. ‘So, did you get the diamonds? How did you get away from James?’ She started loading the gun





Dylan had just given her. ‘This is James’s gun. Where is he?’

‘Tied up in his car.’ Nico frowned. ‘So if you got yourself free, how come you haven’t called the police or Geri?’

‘I told you.’ Maria weighed the gun in her hand. ‘I literally just this minute got free.’

‘You’re lying,’ I said.

The others stared at me. Then Maria lifted the gun and pointed it at me. A slow smile spread across her face.

‘Yes, Ed,’ she said. ‘You’re right. I am.’





Dylan: sunset

The boat rocked and swayed. Ed's face underneath his blindfold was tinged with green.

'He needs some air,' Ketty said.

'You don't say.' I looked round the cabin. It was a bedroom – but tiny. The sort you often get on small boats, with a cupboard in the corner and a tiny, locked porthole on one wall. The three of us were sitting on the bed, hands and ankles tied as before. Ed was the only one blindfolded.

He gave a groan and bowed his head in his hands.

'We *have* to get out of here,' I said, for about the hundredth time.

We'd been locked in this cabin for a couple of hours now. It was early evening – the light outside was fading and the sky, or at least as much of it as I could make out through the porthole, was dark grey and threatening a storm.

'D'you think Nico's all right?' Ketty said, also for about the hundredth time.

'I've no freakin' idea,' I snapped.



Ketty turned away like I'd slapped her face.

'Please, can't we all get on?' Ed said, plaintively. 'This is bad enough without everyone falling out.'

I dug my nails into my palms, hard, so as not to bite his head off too.

I was real mad at myself. I should have guessed Maria was in on the whole thing. James was so aware of our abilities, it made total sense he and Maria would have set up some kind of double bluff. And if I hadn't been in such a rush to give Maria that gun, there was no way she would have been able to get all four of us tied up while she went to fetch James.

I was also worried about Nico. Not that I'd admit it to anyone. All we knew was that he was somewhere else on the boat.

If only there was something I could do, but my ability is defensive. I can protect myself from physical attack, but it's kind of a passive skill. It only works if I'm in actual danger.

Nico's telekinesis was a much bigger threat to James and Maria and they knew it.

'I'm taking no chances with this one,' James had more or less spat, before dragging Nico off and leaving Maria to lock the rest of us in this cabin.

'Where d'you think the boat's going?' Ed said quietly.

I got the distinct impression his question was for Ketty, not me.

'I don't know, but I've been thinking about what you





saw in James's mind,' Ketty said. 'About us being listed as dead. We need to find out what it means.'

'It's obvious what it freakin' means,' I said. 'It means he's planning to kill us and tell Geri we died on the way to the training camp.'

There was a long silence.

'I don't see why James would bother to list us as dead *before* he killed us. I mean, what's the point? And don't you think it's all a bit extreme – killing four people just for a few diamonds?' Ed said at last. 'I mean, I know they're worth a lot of money, but, before, James said he was taking us on to training camp after we'd stolen—'

'Of course he did, jerkwad,' I said. 'He wasn't going to *tell* us he was going to kill us, was he?'

'But we don't know for sure . . .' Ed persisted.

'Well, if you'd seen a bit more when you were mind-reading him then we *would* freakin' know for sure, wouldn't we?'

'Dylan, will you *please* calm down?' Ketty jumped up off the bed. 'It's not fair to get cross with Ed. He was doing the best he—'

'Yeah, yeah, all right. Stop freakin' whining,' I said. Then I hesitated. 'Sorry, Ed.'

He shrugged. We sat in silence again. I kicked my bound heels against the bed. Ketty shuffled over to the porthole. She stood on tiptoes and peered out.

'I can see land. We must be coming into dock.'





‘Thank goodness for that,’ Ed muttered. ‘Five more minutes at sea and I’d definitely be sick.’

What a loser.

‘This could be our best chance,’ I said, ignoring him. ‘They can’t march us through a port all tied up, with Nico and Ed wearing blindfolds. They’ll have to untie us. And once we’re free, maybe Nico can get the gun off them and we can get away.’

‘I don’t think this *is* a port,’ Ketty said from the window.

The boat’s engine slowed to a crawl. I joined Ketty at the little porthole. It was raining outside now, the sky the colour of steel. The beach shoreline in front of us stretched as far as I could see, though that wasn’t more than fifty yards or so. There were a few cottages in the distance but no sign of a port or a dock.

‘Oh, no,’ I said.

‘Where are we?’ Ed asked from the bed.

‘Could be anywhere,’ Ketty said. ‘Somewhere along the coast in England, maybe, or France, or even Holland.’

‘No way.’ I stared at her. I find British geography *real* confusing. ‘Europe’s that close?’

‘Yup.’ Ketty gritted her teeth.

I nodded. I like the way Ketty doesn’t waste words. The way she keeps it real. I mean, she dresses like a hobo, but she knows who she is and what she wants.

The sound of a key turning in the lock made us both turn round. As Maria walked in, I realised that we still had no plan.





Maria stood in the doorway, all blonde highlights, skinny jeans and stupid earrings. I should have known she was one of the bad guys from that awesomely tasteless jewellery. What a *cow*. Giving us all that training back at school, seeming like she really cared about us, then this . . .

‘Time to go,’ Maria said.

‘Where are we?’ I demanded.

‘Where’s Nico?’ Ketty added.

‘Er . . . have you got a bucket?’ That was Ed.

I shot him a look. Of the four of us, Ed *would* be the one to get seasick. He’s kind of annoying – the type of person I usually want to slap. But right now he looked real pale, like he genuinely was about to barf.

Maria clearly thought the same. ‘Okay, Ed, you first. Over here, please.’

Ed shuffled slowly across the room.

‘You could at least take his blindfold off,’ I insisted.

‘When we’re outside.’

With one eye on Ketty and me, Maria bent down and sliced through Ed’s ankle binding. She pushed him through the cabin, then beckoned Ketty over.

A few minutes later our feet were all untied, though our wrists were still bound behind our backs. Maria led us up on deck. The misty drizzle was damp on my face. I looked round, hoping to see something helpful, like a potential weapon, or a passing adult we could appeal to for help. But the deck was empty and the beach stretched into





woods on either side. Apart from the cottages in the distance, there was no sign of human life at all.

‘How can you do this to us, Maria?’ Ketty asked.

Ignoring her, Maria donned a pair of shades and removed Ed’s blindfold. It was dusk now, wherever we were, and gloomy with all the clouds. It suddenly struck me that Maria’s ultra-black sunnies would make everything around her look even darker. Maybe I could make her limited vision work to our advantage. I gritted my teeth. If I couldn’t use my psychic gift, at least I could be smart about more conventional ways of getting out of danger.

Maria ordered Ketty to jump off the little boat onto the wooden landing board that poked out into the sea. As she pushed Ketty forward, her attention turned away from me and Ed. I nudged Ed’s arm.

He got it straight away for once . . . looked me directly in the eyes.

Dylan?

You go next. When you get onto shore, tell Ketty to wait for my signal, then do something to get Maria’s attention.

What? Ed’s voice inside my head had a note of panic about it. *What signal? Do what to get attention?*

‘Over here, Dylan,’ Maria called.

Ed broke the connection. ‘Let Ed go first,’ I said quickly. ‘He’s still feeling real seasick.’

‘Fine.’

‘Go.’ I nudged Ed again.





He stumbled forwards, to the edge of the deck. Maria directed him to jump down. He landed heavily beside Kitty.

‘Your turn.’ Maria turned to me.

‘Sure.’ I tossed my head to get my hair off my face and moved towards her, watching Ed. He glanced for a split second into Kitty’s eyes, communicating my message, then collapsed onto the sand with a groan.

‘Aaagh . . . my leg . . .’ He clutched his ankle, sounding surprisingly convincing.

‘What?’ Maria shouted, turning back to the beach. ‘What’s the matter?’

‘I hurt my ankle when I fell,’ Ed moaned.

I was right beside Maria now, on the edge of the boat. I took a last look round. No sign of James or Nico. The handle of the knife Maria had used to cut our ankle bindings was peeking out of her pocket. I turned sideways on to her, so my fingertips brushed against the knife handle. Sweat beaded on my forehead.

‘Ed’s really hurt,’ Kitty called out from the beach.

Maria swore under her breath. She still wasn’t looking at me.

Now. Do it.

In a single movement, I grabbed the knife and kicked out at her.

Caught off guard, she stumbled sideways. I kicked again.

‘Aaagh!’ Maria fell over the side of the boat and landed in the water with an awesome splash.





I jumped onto the landing board, the knife clutched between my fingers, and raced onto the beach.

‘Run!’ I yelled and headed for the trees.

The sand shifted under my feet as I reached the woodland to the left. I dived, panting, into the trees. Ketty and Ed raced up behind me.

I turned. Maria was stomping out of the sea, drenched and dripping.

‘Come here!’ she yelled.

‘Stand still,’ I ordered Ketty. ‘Back to back.’

She stood, rigid, her back towards mine as I felt behind me for her wrists and positioned the knife against the plastic binding. I sliced upwards with the knife, praying I wasn’t cutting into her hands. The binding gave way.

‘Now do me.’

Ketty turned, took the knife and cut through the plastic round my own wrists. As she cut Ed free, I peered out from behind a tree. Maria was on the beach now but facing away from us, towards the boat.

‘James?’ she yelled. ‘James! Get out here.’

‘Let’s go,’ I whispered.

‘What about Nico?’ Ketty hissed. She and Ed were hiding behind the next tree along.

‘We’ll get help,’ I said. ‘Come back.’

‘There isn’t time. Look.’ Ed pointed towards the boat. James was crossing the deck, half pushing, half dragging a stumbling Nico by the elbow.

Even from this distance it was obvious Nico had been





beaten. He was limping and one side of his face looked red and swollen.

‘Oh, no,’ Ketty gasped. She made a move towards the beach.

‘Wait.’ I said. ‘Rushing out there’s a real bad idea.’

Ketty hesitated, then nodded and stepped back behind her tree. As we watched, the rain grew stronger. It pattered onto the leaves all around us. Wet on our heads . . . our faces.

‘They’ve got away, James, through there.’ Maria pointed towards the trees where we were standing. ‘We have to get them back . . . our cover will be blown if we don’t take them to camp.’

James swore. Nico’s head rose. He glanced round. James shoved him towards the wooden landing board. Nico jumped down. He winced as he landed, then walked on, his limp even more pronounced.

‘What do we do?’ Ed groaned.

‘We can’t leave him.’ Ketty sounded desperate.

‘Wait.’ The rain was falling even harder now, drumming onto the trees above our heads. It was soaking through my top, making my back damp.

I glanced at the plastic that had tied Ketty’s wrists. It was cut into two pieces now, but could still be tied in the normal way . . . the way I’d tied up James, before. I grabbed the other bindings off Ketty.

James and Nico were on the beach now. As James and Maria talked in low voices, the rain grew even stronger,





soaking my hair and dripping down my neck. Normally when it rains I use my protective abilities to keep the wetness off my hair and neck. I hate it when my hair goes frizzy. But that was the last thing on my mind now.

James pushed Nico onto his knees and drew his gun out of his pocket.

I shrank against my tree. I hate guns. My aunt and uncle in Philadelphia taught us all to shoot, but I never liked doing it.

‘Dylan?’ James yelled towards the trees. ‘Ed? Ketty? I know you’re there.’ He pressed the barrel of his gun against Nico’s head. ‘Come out, now!’

‘Oh, *no.*’ Ketty sort of crumpled against me.

I caught her arm.

‘We have to go out there,’ she said.

‘Wait . . . he’s bluffing . . .’

‘But he’s going to shoot Nico.’ Ed was hopping up and down, his breath coming in short bursts.

‘No,’ I said. ‘You heard Maria. They need us alive.’

‘Hurry, or Nico’s dead!’ James yelled towards the trees. ‘If you don’t come back, I don’t have anything to lose.’

I stared at him. Did he mean that? He certainly *looked* desperate enough to kill. So did Maria. She stood beside James, shivering, with her hair plastered to her head and her arms hugging her chest.

A drip of rain rolled down my forehead. Almost without thinking, I focused on the force inside me that keeps any





physical element away from my skin. The raindrop teetered on the end of my eyebrow, then fell away.

Of course.

‘Storm,’ I yelled. ‘There needs to be a *storm*, Nico.’

‘What are you doing?’ Ketty hissed.

I kept my gaze on the beach. James and Maria were staring towards us. They exchanged a few words we couldn’t hear, then Maria started walking in our direction.

Nico’s head was turned towards us too. He was still bound and blindfolded. I hoped the blindfold was tied on tight.

‘Storm, Nico,’ I yelled again. ‘Make a storm.’

‘What are you talking about?’ Ed gestured at the rain dripping off the leaves. ‘There’s already a storm. And you’re giving away where we are.’

‘Anyway, Nico can’t control the weather,’ Ketty added.

‘Not rain, not rain . . .’ I muttered, shoving all the plastic bindings into my pocket. ‘Come *on*, Nico.’

Across the sand, Nico grinned, then kicked off his shoes.

‘Yes!’ I said. ‘He understands. Stay here. Cover your eyes.’

‘What?’

I grabbed the knife from Ketty’s hands and stepped out from the trees. The sand around Nico whirled up into the air.

‘More!’ I yelled.





More sand flew into the air. Higher and higher – tornados of it . James and Maria turned away, covering their eyes, as the sand engulfed them. The swirling twisters spread across the beach. With his blindfold on, Nico’s eyes would be protected, but he’d have no idea where to direct the sand. It whirled around me, forcing its way against my face and inside my clothes. Squinting, I concentrated all my energy into protecting the tiny space in front of my eyes, then charged forward into the heart of the sandstorm. James and Maria and Nico were just dark blurs now. I ran harder. Against the wind, against the rain, against the sand – only caring about the tiny space in front of my eyes. It took all of my focus to keep it clear.

I reached Maria first. She was bent over, the sunglasses gone, her palms pressed over her eyes. I grabbed her wrists and pulled one of the plastic bindings out of my pocket. I tied it as tightly as I could round her hands.

‘No. Stop!’ Maria flailed out at me, but her eyes were shut tight against the storm and it was easy to sidestep her bound hands.

I bent down, still keeping my focus on protecting my eyes, and tied her ankles with another length of plastic twine. *There.* I shoved her down onto the beach and stumbled through the raging sandstorm across to Nico.

‘Keep it going,’ I shouted above the roar.

Nico was standing now. I took the knife and held it so that the sharp blade was against his own wrist binding.

‘Stay still.’





As I yelled out, my focus slid from my eyes and a shard of sand stung me. Trembling, I sliced upwards with the knife. The plastic binding gave way. Nico spun round, grabbed the knife. My energy was fading. Sand whipped around me, forcing its way against my scalp, inside my mouth. Tiny grains danced in front of my eyes. I looked round. Maria was still on the sand, curled up in a ball, as it beat against her. But where was James?

Nico tore the blindfold off. Sand swept towards his eyes. 'Aaagh!' He immediately directed the storm away from us, back towards Maria.

A roar. James lunged into view. He dragged Nico to the ground. The tornado blazed up again. The knife Nico had been holding fell onto the sand, then whirled out of reach.

James and Nico rolled on the sand, fighting. Nico closed his eyes. The sandstorm around them grew even bigger. Fiercer.

'Make it stop!' James yelled.

I could just make out his gun, waving dangerously in his hand above their heads. I grabbed it and threw it across the sand. At the same moment, Nico opened his eyes and reached out his palm. The knife which had fallen across the beach soared back towards him.

'I'll get you!' Nico yelled. His eyes were bloodshot, his face sore and swollen. The knife flew into his hands. He held it there, poised over James's neck, his whole body trembling with fury.

'No.' I reached through the storm and put my hand on





Nico's shoulder. Sand was flickering right in front of my eyes now, each tiny particle threatening to pierce my eyeballs. 'That's enough.'

With a roar of frustration, Nico flicked his hand. The knife fell with a thud onto the sand beside James's head. I grabbed the plastic rope that had fallen from Nico's own wrists and wound it quickly round James's hands. I fastened it firmly, then tied his ankles, as Nico sat back with a sigh.

The sandstorm around us stopped. James and Maria knelt up, heads bowed, eyes red and raw.

'Undo us now,' James ordered.

'*Please.*' Maria was weeping.

Ignoring them, I glanced round. Nico was covered in sand from head to foot. I was too. The others rushed over. They both looked sandswept, though nowhere near as badly as we were. Ketty swung Nico round.

'Are you all right?' she cried. 'Oh, look at your face!'

'I'm fine, babe,' he said gruffly.

I pointed to James and Maria. 'Let's get these two onto the boat,' I said, picking up the knife.

'Sure.' Nico reached forward and grabbed the velvet bag of diamonds from James's pocket. He handed it to me.

'Move!' I ordered.

'Okay, okay,' James grunted.

Maria bowed her head.

A couple of minutes later they were locked in the cabin that Ed, Ketty and I had been trapped in earlier.





As we walked away, I smiled to myself. What was it Ketty had called us? Team Medusa.

We *were* a team.

I patted the velvet bag of diamonds.

‘What now?’ Ed asked.

‘We need to find a phone,’ Nico said.

‘Here.’ Ketty had been investigating the main cabin on the boat. She held out a canvas bag. ‘All our mobiles are inside.’

I grabbed mine. No signal. None of the others had one, either.

‘Come on,’ Ketty said. ‘Let’s go along the beach. Head for one of those cottages.’

We left James and Maria locked up and raced along the beach. There were no cars on the dirt track that led up to the nearest set of small shops and houses, but a sign saying *internet access* swung from Bert’s Café on the corner.

‘Guess we’re not in France, then,’ Nico muttered.

As we burst into the café, the guy behind the counter looked horrified. Though we’d brushed our clothes down, we were all still covered in sand. Thanks to the rain it had stuck to our clothes like glitter make-up. We must have looked like total freaks. It had got underneath my clothes too. I could feel it covering my whole body like an itchy rash.

‘A hot shower would be awesome right now,’ I muttered.

‘I know,’ Ketty nodded.





‘Please may we use the computer?’ Ed asked.

The guy at the counter nodded, then pointed to a sign which demanded £2 as a minimum fee.

Ed dug his hands in his pocket and pulled out some coins and a pile of sand.

‘Is there a phone here?’ Nico asked.

‘On the wall.’

Nico went off to call Geri Paterson while Ketty and I stood over Ed as he logged on. A couple of minutes later we were still standing there, mouths open, unable to believe what we were seeing.

‘So it’s true,’ Ketty breathed. ‘We no longer exist. All our records say we’re dead.’

It was incredible. Every database or social networking site that Ed attempted to access either had no record of us – or said that we were no longer alive.

I turned to Nico, still hanging on the phone on the opposite wall. ‘I can’t get through,’ he said.

‘Come see this,’ I called.

The door opened. I swung round. Geri Paterson, the head of the Medusa Project, stood in the doorway. She strode in, then stopped abruptly. Her blonde bob swung, as she flicked her gaze from me to Ed to Nico to Ketty.

‘Oh my goodness,’ she gasped. ‘My *dears*.’ She looked at me again. ‘What happened?’

We went outside and told her everything, then Geri explained that she had found us by tracking and triangulating our mobiles.





‘I got suspicious when the intelligence chatter we were following suggested Foster was nowhere near you last night.’ She shook her head. ‘James came with the highest recommendations. I can’t believe he used you like this – and as for Maria . . .’

‘I saw her looking at James like she really liked him a couple of times in the car,’ Ketty said, thoughtfully.

I snorted. ‘That’s no freakin’ excuse.’

‘Quite,’ Geri agreed. ‘And it means we *still* don’t know who Foster’s spy is.’ She made a call and two minutes later a couple of police cars whizzed past us down the dirt track.

The rain had stopped now. Geri, for once, was in loafers and jeans instead of her usual smart heels and pantsuit. She led us onto the beach, seemingly lost in her own thoughts.

I watched the waves crashing onto the sand and felt in my pocket for the bag of diamonds. For a second I contemplated making some excuse to be alone for a moment and taking one. They were *sooo* beautiful. But I knew I couldn’t. It wasn’t right.

And, anyway, someone would notice one was missing.

‘Here.’ I handed Geri the bag. ‘These are the diamonds James made us steal.’

Geri sighed. ‘We’ll get them back to the Carters.’

‘Could you find out if Mr Carter is okay?’ Ed asked.

‘Of course, dear,’ Geri said. ‘Right. I’m escorting you to your training camp personally now. It’s going to be a





different camp, of course. We don't know who James and Maria have been talking to and we can't risk anyone finding out where you are. But it'll give you a chance to rest . . . put an end to all the drama of the past few days.'

'Except . . . er . . . there's something else,' Ed said. 'James somehow managed to alter our records to make out we were dead.'

'Yeah,' I added. 'We were just looking on the internet. All our records say we no longer exist. Everywhere we looked.'

Geri cleared her throat. 'That wasn't James,' she said. 'That was me.'

I stared at her. '*What?*'

Nico looked at her, a blank expression on his face. 'Why make out we're dead? What's the point?'

'Your own protection, dear,' Geri said briskly. 'Foster knows of your existence. There are other undesirable elements that do as well. It puts you at risk . . . *and* Fox Academy *and* all its students. We have to cut your links with your old life. Completely.'

'Does that mean we're not going back to school after training camp?' Ketty asked.

'That's right, dear,' Geri said.

There was a silence as this sank in. A seagull squawked overhead.

'Why didn't you tell us before?' Nico demanded.

'What about our parents?' Ed's voice rose as he spoke. 'What have you said to them?'





There was a pause. Geri cleared her throat. ‘They know you’re alive, but not where we’re taking you,’ she said. ‘It’s for *their* protection too. Because of their connection with you, all your families are at risk.’

Nico’s mouth fell open. I stared at the waves crashing onto the beach.

‘So when can we see them . . . speak to them?’ Ketty asked.

‘Are you saying we have to wait the whole two months we’ll be in the training camp?’ Nico demanded.

‘Longer,’ Geri said. ‘We need to let the situation settle first, make sure no one knows where you are . . . that you’re safe.’ She paused. ‘You’ll be in the training camp with no access to your family for at least six months. As far as everyone else is concerned, you died last night.’

‘*What!*’ Nico and I exploded together.

‘*No.*’ Ed’s face blanched. ‘No – you can’t do this. I need to speak to my parents.’

‘I’m sorry, dear, but it’s done,’ Geri said. ‘It’s a shame you had to find out like this. I was going to tell you once you reached camp. But it is for the best.’

I glanced at Ed and Ketty. They both looked close to tears. Nico put his arms round Ketty and she hugged him back.

I turned away, feeling all mixed up. I guess I didn’t care if I never saw my aunt and uncle and my cousins Paige and Tod again – but having my identity stolen away like this was horrible. I couldn’t imagine how the others must be feeling.





Behind me, I heard Nico speak. ‘So, Geri,’ – his voice was hard and angry – ‘you’re the *real* thief.’

I caught Ketty’s eye, remembering her earlier vision of Nico saying exactly that.

‘You’ve stolen our *lives*,’ Nico went on. ‘James might have got us to steal some diamonds, but if you hadn’t sent us after criminals like Foster, none of them would even know we existed and we wouldn’t *need* to spend time in hiding.’

Geri sighed. ‘You’re all overwrought, and it’s not surprising. Let’s get the car. There’s a hotel we can stop at for a shower and a change of clothes. I’m still finalising the details of the new camp we’re sending you to. We’ll talk more later.’

She strode off across the damp sand, leaving the four of us standing in silence. A tear trickled down Ketty’s cheek.

‘We’ll be okay,’ I said. ‘Never mind everyone thinking we’re freakin’ dead. We can look after ourselves.’

Ketty stared at me.

‘And each other,’ Nico said, putting his arm round her.

‘Yeah . . . *and* each other.’ I looked from Ketty to Ed.

He shrugged, then attempted a shy smile. I grinned back at him – at all of them.

‘Boot camp, then,’ I said. ‘Bring it on.’

