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opening extract from

The Medusa Project: The Set-Up

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1: Freak storm

I'm Nico and what I'm about to tell you is Secret and Dangerous and True. It's also several planetary systems beyond Weird. Here's how it started ...

Picture this ... Friday morning. A whole-school assembly in the big hall. Rows and rows of teenagers in lines of plastic chairs. I was sitting there, towards the back – dark hair, brown eyes – the guy all the girls wanted to get their hands on.

Only joking.

Anyway, there we all were, sunlight blistering in through high windows and the head teacher, Fergus Fox, droning on.

He's not just the head teacher. He's also my stepdad. I've lived with him in his boarding school since my mum died of cancer when I was five. We don't get on, for reasons which will soon become obvious.

But this isn't about him.

If it's about anyone, it's about her ... Ketty.

She was sitting two rows in front and four seats to the left of me. You're probably surprised I can remember that little detail. Well, get used to it. When it comes to Ketty, I tend to remember everything.

That day she had her dark, curly hair in a ponytail, tied back with a piece of string. Very Ketty, that string. She doesn't go in for girly things like ribbon – she's practical. Doesn't wear loads of make-up or jewellery either and I've never seen her in a dress.

My eyes kept sliding over to where she was sitting. Which is when I saw Billy Martin put his arm round her shoulders. My mouth fell open. Everything else dropped away, even the sound of Fergus's droning voice. I waited for Ketty to push the arm away. But she didn't. Instead, she leaned in closer.

No *way*. But there it was. My best friend ... with Billy Martin.

I looked away. Tried to calm myself. But my eyes kept going back to them.

I couldn't believe she'd go with Billy. What did he have that I didn't? Apart from a load of money, of course. But Ketty wouldn't be interested in that, would she?

I looked up at the stage and tried to concentrate on what Fergus was talking about. Some long, dull lecture about the appropriate way to wear your school uniform.

Billy's hand was on Ketty's arm now, his fingertips moving slightly up and down.

I tore my eyes away and felt the fury building in my chest.

It's your own fault, said the voice in my head. *You've been friends for months. You've had every chance to ask her out yourself.*

It was true. Worse, I didn't even know why I hadn't said anything to Ketty so far.

Actually, I did.

It was because I'd been sure Ketty would say no. I mean, we got on really well, but she was so completely into her running it was like there wasn't room for anything else important.

I didn't want to think about that so I tried to focus on Fergus again. But everything about him was annoying me now – his solemn face ... his serious voice ... I mean, he was talking about school uniform, for God's sake, not war or dying babies.

Billy squeezed Ketty's arm and smiled. I half thought of jumping up and pointing and shouting for the teachers to stop them. But even I'm not that crazy.

And then Ketty turned her head to look at him and right there, in front of everyone ... in front of *me* ... she smiled back at him.

A great, big, loved-up smile.

My stomach turned over. I could feel my face flooding red. I stared through the nearest window. It was open just a fraction. I imagined storming over to it and slamming it shut. Hard.

With a sudden swerve, the window swung wide open. I jumped. Before I could even register what was happening, the window slammed shut.

Several people sitting nearby looked round. I watched as the window opened and slammed shut again, then opened once more.

I glanced at the curtains beside it. As I did, they lifted away from the wall, like a gust of wind had rippled through them.

My eyes tore round the room. More curtains moved. Some floated up for a second and dropped again. Others flew high into the air. What was going on? Around me I could hear people gasping. Whimpers and anxious squeals from the younger kids filled the air.

'What's happening?'

'Why's everything moving?'

In the background Fergus's voice was a loud appeal. 'Be quiet. It's just a freak gust of wind. Stay in your seats.'

My eyes lit on the clock beside the stage – a big, open, white-faced clock with black hands and numbers. The clock hands moved – first slowly, then faster and faster, whizzing until they were a blur.

I blinked and the hands stopped.

Which is when it struck me. This was no freak wind.

It was *me.*

I was making everything move.

My heart hammered like a machine gun. I glanced away from the clock, to a vase that teetered on the table by the stage ... to the windows on the other side of the room. More curtains flew up. A chair tipped against the wall. The vase smashed.

Whatever I looked at was moving – violently, angrily. Like I was riding a wave of anger and every time I looked at something that wave crashed down.

How am I doing this?

For a second I felt like I was two people: one watching what was going on along with everyone else; the other somehow making it happen.

My eyes swept back to the clock. As I stared, it fell off the wall and crashed to the floor. *Jesus.* Screams now around me. A girl sobbing in the row behind.

'Help! Make it stop!'

My eyes flashed back to the window where the whole thing had started. It was still standing wide open. Mr Rogerson, the maths teacher, was walking towards it, hands outstretched.

Before he reached the window, I willed it to shut.

It did. Noisily.

I closed my eyes. My heart pounded. How was this *happening*?

From the stage, Fergus's voice sounded low and reassuring.

'Calm down, everyone. Like I said, it's just a freak wind. It's over.'

I took a deep breath and looked up, my pulse slowing. It *was* over at last. People in the hall were glancing round – some nervously, others with wide, wondering eyes. The babble of voices rose.

'Did you see that chair tip up against the wall?'

'And the clock hands going mad?'

'Man, that vase just exploded!'

I looked over at Ketty. She was gazing round, her golden-brown eyes huge circles. At least Billy didn't have his arm round her any more. I stared down at my lap. Fergus was still talking over the hubbub.

'Just a freak storm ...' he repeated like a mantra. 'Everyone be quiet ... Show's over.'

Slowly the anxious voices died away.

'Stand and file out from the back, row by row,' Fergus went on. 'If you are close to the smashed clock or the broken vase, please be careful.'

I kept my eyes on the ground as we stood up. At least Fergus had assumed it was a freak storm. Not a freak stepson. My heart was still beating fast. What if I looked up and the whole thing started again? I shot a swift glance sideways, at my vacated chair. No movement. *Good.*

My stomach twisted with cramps as we walked out. None of this made sense.

Everyone around me was still talking about the 'storm'. And then a large hand clamped down on my shoulder. 'There you are.' Fergus spun me round and glared down at me. 'This way,' he said.

Reluctantly, I followed him away from the crowds. As we reached his office Fergus looked round, as if to make sure we couldn't be overheard.

'What in God's name did you think you were doing?' he spat.

'What?' I said, startled. 'When?'

'Don't play games with me, Nico. I know it was you causing that mess in assembly.'

My mouth fell open. How could Fergus possibly know it was me? 'What?' I said, weakly.

Fergus frowned. 'How long has it been going on?'

My mouth closed, then opened again. My head felt like it might explode. 'I don't know what you're talking about,' I stammered.

Fergus crossed his arms. 'Okay, you don't want to talk to me. So listen.' He narrowed his eyes. 'The power you have is evil. I don't ever want you to use it again. Understand?'

I stared at him.

Fergus gripped my arm and gave me a little shake. 'Nico, are you listening to me? This power – moving things ... telekinesis, whatever you want to call it ... I'm telling you it's evil.'

‘And *I’m* telling *you* I have no idea what you’re on about,’ I said, pulling my arm away. I turned to go.

‘Come back here!’ Fergus barked.

No. I stuck my finger up at him and dived back into the crowd. As I made my way up to my dorm, my heart started pumping hard again.

How did Fergus know that it had been me moving things with my mind? And why was he saying it was evil?

An ice-cold shiver circled my throat.

What on earth was happening to me?