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Opening extract from

The Medusa Project: Hit Squad

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

Initially, the four worked together as the Medusa Project – a secret, government-funded, crime-fighting force. However, after learning that their mentor had betrayed them, the Medusa teens fled the country. On the run, they discovered the existence of two other young people with the Medusa gene: Cal – Nico's half-brother – who can fly, and Amy – Ed's sister – a shapeshifter.

Temporarily based in Australia, various factions are now battling for control of the teenagers' lives. Their parents, who want to separate them and hide them away with new lives and identities, face opposition from the government, which is keen to make fresh use of their psychic skills.

However, Nico, Ketty, Ed and Dylan are determined to investigate claims that a drug conveying the same abilities as the Medusa gene has been developed – and are making plans of their own . . .

KETTY

1: The Getaway

The night sky over the ranch was full of stars, but I wasn't looking up. I was leading the way to our meeting place with the others. I stopped at the end of the porch and took a couple of steadying breaths. I was desperate to see into the next few minutes. That's my particular Medusa ability . . . visions of the future. But, as so often when I'm feeling stressed, I couldn't see anything.

'What is it, Ketty?' Ed whispered behind me.

I shook my head, glad that he wasn't attempting to read my mind. 'Nothing.'

I hoped it didn't matter that I couldn't see if there were any obstacles to our escape. We were on the trail of a drug – Medusix – that mimicked our genetically-given psychic skills and it was important we got away from here tonight. In the morning our parents, in an effort to prevent the UK government from taking charge of us again, were planning

to separate us from each other and send us on different flights all over the world.

'Er . . . come on, Ketty, the others will be waiting,' Ed whispered. He ran his hand anxiously through his sandy, tufty hair. 'Ketty?'

I peered round the corner of the porch. It was nearly 3 a.m. and the ranch house was dark and silent. The night air was still and cool. Apart from the moon and stars above, the only light came from the lanterns that illuminated the exit – across the field to our right. We were heading in the opposite direction.

'Okay, let's go.' With a final glance back at the ranch I raced across the field on our left, Ed by my side. We were due to meet the others at 3 a.m. in the paddock. As we neared the paddock fence I could just make out Dylan's profile. She was leaning against the gate stroking one of the horses in the field. Nico stood beside her. He caught sight of me and beckoned us over. I could see the tension on his face as we ran up. He turned to Ed.

'Where's your sister?' he demanded. 'Where's Amy?'

'Er . . .' Ed stammered.

'We didn't bring her,' I said quickly. Confessing that Amy wasn't with us was what I'd been nervous about, much more than running away from the ranch. Ed and I had decided to leave her behind . . . that she'd be safer staying with the adults.

'*What?*' Nico's mouth fell open. 'But we agreed.'

'No we didn't.' I stood my ground. '*You* were the only

person who wanted Amy along. You ordered Ed to tell her where to meet but Ed never actually said he would do it.'
When the four of us had discussed ways of leaving the house, neither Cal nor Amy had been present. Nico had talked to Cal later about his role in our escape but he'd told Ed to tell Amy about our plans.
Neither Ed nor I had spoken up against this at the time, though it was obvious from the look on Ed's face that he disliked Nico's order as much as I did.
'Amy's too young,' Ed protested, finding his voice at last.
'She's three years younger than we are.'
Nico turned his gaze to me. 'Ketts? What's going on?'
I looked away. Things had been awkward between Nico and me for a couple of weeks now and Amy – or rather her ability to change her appearance at will – was at the heart of the problem. Basically, a few weeks ago, she'd been forced to look like me to manipulate Nico. After the danger we'd been facing had passed, Amy hadn't changed back to herself straight away. She'd waited a few minutes . . . letting Nico kiss her while he still thought she was me. I didn't really blame Amy for that. She was young and my boyfriend is gorgeous – all dark eyes, silky hair and charming smile.
No, I blamed Nico for encouraging her to have a huge crush on him. He'd flirted with her like mad for ages. Not because he particularly liked her – but just because he could. It was typical Nico behaviour . . . egotistical and thoughtless. . . and I was fed up with it.
'Excuse me,' drawled Dylan. She moved away from the horse she was stroking and stood between us.

The moonlight picked out the tiny white-gold stud in her nose. She'd only had the piercing done last week and it kind of suited her hard-faced prettiness. 'This is no time for a tiff. If you
wanna know what *I* think, we're totally better off without Princess Ten-Faces, but the important thing is that we get out of here.' She peered towards the ranch. 'Where *is* Cal anyway? He should be here by now.'
Nico's jaw tightened. 'I'm going back for Amy,' he said. 'It's not fair to leave her out – and we need her Medusa skill. It's just as valuable as any of ours.' He paused. 'And more reliable than some.'
I winced. This was, I was sure, a dig at my own flaky ability to see into the future. Beside me, Ed's face reddened. He hates it when we all argue.
Dylan grabbed Nico's arm. 'You can't go back. Cal will be here any second. And if we're caught trying to leave they'll watch over us till morning and then we'll *never* get away.'
'Remember what we need to do,' I insisted. 'We have to find out if Medusix really exists . . . if anyone's used it yet. It's going to be a really dangerous mission.'
'Ketty's right,' Ed added. 'It's too risky for Amy.'
I could see Nico wavering. Like the rest of us he had been shocked at our recent discovery that Geri Paterson – the government agent who brought us together as the Medusa Project – was a murderer who had tried to kill us. Two weeks ago, in a terrible showdown at the ranch, Geri had herself been killed in front of us.

The images were still seared onto my mind and I knew they'd affected Nico deeply as well. The situation we were heading into could easily be just as dangerous.
'I still think Amy could be useful,' Nico said stubbornly.
Something snapped inside me. 'Useful as a boost to your massive ego, you mean?' I said.
'Oooh, someone's jealous.' Dylan suppressed a giggle.
An awkward silence fell. I looked away.
'Look!' At the sound of Ed's voice I spun round. He was pointing towards the ranch house. A light had been switched on inside and a slight figure in jeans was racing towards us across the field. It was Cal, Nico's half-brother.
'At last,' Dylan muttered.
As Cal drew closer, another light came on in the house.
'Man, those lights are coming from our bedrooms.' Nico turned on me and Ed, furious. 'How much noise did you make leaving?'
'None,' Ed protested.
'Stop picking on us, Nico,' I said.
He glared at me as Cal raced up. He was slightly out of breath from running, his white-blond hair and pale face contrasting dramatically with his dark clothes.
'Come on,' he gasped, his Australian accent strong in his voice. 'We have to hurry. They know we're gone. They'll be out here any sec.'
'We still need to fetch Amy,' Nico said. 'I can get in and out fast and—'

‘No way,’ Cal interrupted. ‘It was Amy who sounded the alarm. She woke up and saw everyone was gone. She assumed someone had kidnapped us.’
Nico swore. Dylan’s eyes widened.
‘Didn’t you think to leave a note for your sister, Chino Boy?’ she asked Ed.
‘I *did*,’ Ed blustered. ‘She obviously hasn’t seen it yet in the dark and—’
‘Will you all shut up,’ Cal hissed. ‘We need to go. Right now.’ He extended his arms. I took hold of one hand, Dylan the other.
Nico took a step back. ‘I’m telling you this is a mistake,’ he said.
‘Come on, Nico, please.’ I held out my other hand to him.
For a second, Nico looked at me. His eyes, even in the darkness, were full of emotion: part frustration, part anger . . . part disappointment. He didn’t speak but I could read his thoughts as powerfully as if I were Ed.
You’ve let me down, Ketty.
I was still holding out my hand, waiting for him to take it. When Cal was using his Medusa gift with the four of us, we always travelled in the same formation: me and Nico on one side; Dylan and Ed on the other.
Shouts were now audible from the house. There was Fergus, Dylan’s uncle, shouting all our names . . . and Amy, calling for Ed . . . and Nico.
‘Come on, mate,’ Cal urged.
With a growl, Nico gave in. My hand was still outstretched, but he pointedly walked away from me, to Cal’s other side, and took Dylan’s hand.

It felt like a punch in the guts.
The atmosphere tensed further.
‘Ed, mate, get in line,’ Cal snapped.
Ed, who’d been watching the scene between Nico and me with gaping mouth, stepped over and took my hand. As the five of us stood in a row, ready to take off, Ed squeezed my fingers. I gave his hand a squeeze back to acknowledge his kindness, but inside it made no difference. Inside I was devastated.
‘Ready?’ Cal glanced up and down the line.
We all nodded. No one spoke. The yells from the ranch house were louder now. Out of the corner of my eye, I could just make out Fergus racing across the field in our direction.
‘No!’ he yelled. ‘Stop!’
With a sudden jerk, Cal yanked on my hand. My feet left the ground and a moment later we soared into the night sky.