

## Deleted chapter: The Medusa Project – *The Rescue*

**In this original version of *The Rescue* the end of chapter one and the start of chapter two were different. Geri is still present at the camp after Nico and Ed have met Luz while Luz herself is called on to defend herself by Fernandez. I ended up cutting both sections in order to move the story on faster – it seemed important to discover that Luz has vanished as soon as possible as this, more than anything, reinforces her assertion that Fernandez is not all he seems.**

“No problem. Now I suggest you and the young ladies come with me. Girls quarters are at the other end of the building.”

“What about the boys’ quarters?” Nico asked.

Senor Fernandez flashed a fierce look at him. “Rule number one,” he snapped. “Young people must ask for permission to speak.” He face relaxed. “However an adjustment period for new young people is only fair, so no demerits tonight.”

“Dem-- what?” Nico said.

Senor Fernandez shook his head and made a clicking sound at the back of his throat. “We’ll talk later. You two boys wait here.”

He swept off. Geri, Dylan and Ketty followed. As they disappeared down a corridor, Geri was explaining she couldn’t stay too long, as she wanted to drive back to her hotel before it got dark.

As soon as they were gone, Nico bounded over to the door on the far side of the room. “Come on.” He beckoned me over.

“What?” My heart thudded. “That man told us to stay here.”

“For God’s sake, Ed.” Nico made a face. “We’ll be back before Senor Fussypants – or whatever he’s called - knows we were gone. Come *on*.”

I peered after him through the door. It led onto a gloomy corridor. The only light came from a small window that looked out into an empty, shaded courtyard.

“Where d’you think everyone is?” I whispered.

“The *Young People* are doing their chores, remember?” Nico sounded disgusted. “Don’t you hate being called that... Young People? It’s so patronising.”

“Well—“

“Sssh!” Nico held up his hand to silence me. “Look.” He pointed through the window. A line of five or six kids – some about our age, others younger - were filing

after a woman in a red tracksuit across the bleak stone courtyard. They were dressed shabbily, though they looked clean. But there was something defeated about the way they were walking that sent a chill snaking down my spine.

As we watched, one of the younger kids said something, and the woman in red turned and hit him across the head. He stumbled sideways, then carried on walking. My mouth fell open. I moved closer to the window.

Nico sucked in his breath. "That doesn't look like the *Young People* doing their chores, does it?"

I shook my head, frowning.

We watched for a moment longer. As they reached the edge of the hut in the centre of the courtyard, the woman in red struck another member of the group. A skinny girl with long dark hair. The girl fell to the ground. The woman pointed to her trailing shoe lace and the girl, meekly knelt up to tie it.

"Jesus Christ," Nico breathed. "What the hell *is* this place?"

I moved over to stand beside him, to get a better view. The stone courtyard was surrounded on three sides by buildings. The large hut that stood in the centre contained two doors, one marked *W.C. senior*, the other *W.C. senora*. The woman and the other kids had vanished round the side of the hut, leaving the skinny dark-haired girl still struggling with her shoe lace.

Nico reached for the door by the window and yanked on the handle. Locked. He raised his hand in the gesture he uses to perform telekinesis.

"What are you doing?" I said, appalled.

"We've got time. And if what we've just seen is typical Camp Felici-fascist, we need to find out and tell Geri before she leaves us here with no access to the outside world for six months." He twisted his hand. There was a click as the lock undid and the door sprang ajar. Nico pushed it open and stepped into the courtyard.

I hesitated for a second, then followed.

The heat hit me hard. Even in the shade of the courtyard it was like stepping into an oven. I glanced round as we crept across the paving stones. No one at the windows. At least we wouldn't be spotted from inside the house.

Nico had already reached the girl. She jumped as he touched her shoulder. He said something in a low voice as I ran past and peered round the side of the hut.

The other kids and the woman in red were gathered next to a ramshackle old VW bus, parked in the shade of a single tree. Next to the bus was a huge wooden

well, with a fenced area beyond. This area was strikingly lush and green compared to the arid desert all around us. The woman in red was talking in Spanish. Her speech was too rapid for me to catch any of the words, but she was clearly barking out orders.

I turned back to Nico and the girl.

“Que?” she was whispering. “Quien eres?”

Nico turned to me. “I don’t understand what she’s saying,” he whispered.

I barely heard him. I was staring, transfixed at the girl. I wasn’t looking right into her eyes, obviously, but I’d already seen they were beautiful – a sea-green colour that stood out against her tanned skin. And it wasn’t just her eyes. *She* was beautiful. About my age, with a worried, oval face, a long nose and silky dark hair that curled onto her shoulders.

“*Ed*,” Nico hissed.

“She asked who we were,” I explained. “Ed,” I said to the girl. “Me llamo Ed. Este es Nico. Y tu? Como te llamas?”

The girl was trying to look into my eyes, but I kept my gaze averted.

“Luz,” she whispered. “Me llamo Luz. You... Eds, English... please, help...”

“What are you saying?” Nico hissed beside us

“Just our names,” I said. “She’s called Luz.”

“Loos?” Nico said.

“Luz where are you!” It was the woman round the corner, an American twang to her voice.

Luz froze. Nico grabbed my arm with one hand and Luz’s with the other and dragged us into the WC marked *senors* – the men’s toilet.

We stood in the narrow, dimly lit, corridor. A stench drifted out from the toilets that had to be just round the tiled corner.

“Ask her what the hell’s going on here,” Nico demanded.

A second later, a shadow fell across the doorway. I held my breath and pressed my back against the cool concrete wall.

“LUZ don’t make me come in there!” It was the woman in red, even angrier than before. “Goddam, Luz, we don’t have time for a restroom break.”

She thought Luz was in the ladies toilet next to this one.

Luz took a step towards the door. I grabbed her arm. I didn’t dare speak in case the woman heard us. If I wanted to know what was going on here, I was going to have to mind read. I pulled Luz round until she met my eyes.

In a second I was inside her mind. People always freak when that happens the first time, and Luz was no exception. Her mind was jumping, full of fear and confusion. Mind you, my own thoughts were jumping around just as badly.

*Hola*, I stammered – not knowing what else to thought-speak. *It's okay. Who is that woman?*

Luz's mind was still all over the place, her thought-speech tumbling out.

*How this?* A single strand of thought stood out above the rest: *We must quick... Eds, English... you just come in camp, no?*

*Si*. I tried to make my mind settle.

*This place no es good. Senor Fernandez es bad man. You go. Tell persons... help...*

*Where are you going in the van...*

*Que?*

*Donde vas en el... el coche grand?* Damn it, why did my Spanish have to desert me now?

*No se... I don't know.... Ed. Por favor. Ayudame.*

Ayudame. Help me. My stomach turned over.

*"Luz!"* The woman outside sounded very close. *"Are you in the boys restroom?"*

*Need go*, Luz's thought-speech grew panicky. *Help.*

*"Ed, leave it,"* Nico hissed, right in my ear.

*I will help, I promise.* I broke the connection.

Luz burst through the door. We waited, holding our breath. I could hear the woman yelling at her, then the slap of a hand, presumably making contact with Luz's head. My heart raged at the thought of her being hurt. A few more seconds passed, then Nico peered after her. *"They've gone, come on,"* he said.

He slipped outside and raced across the courtyard. I followed, more slowly, a large part of me wanting to find Luz. I could hear the bus revving up round the corner.

What was happening to her? Where was she being taken?

And then a large hand clamped down on my shoulder and Senor Fernandez' heavy, nasal voice sounded in my ear.

*"Only in camp five minutes,"* he said, *"and you, Ed, are already in the deepest of deep shits."*

## Chapter 2 Punishment

My hands were shaking as we walked inside. Fernandez took his hand off my shoulder only when we were back in the entrance area of the main building. The others were all standing round the long dining table at the back of the room. Geri and the girls were wide-eyed with shock. Nico's expression was a mix of guilt and concern. Clearly he'd managed to make it inside without being spotted by Fernandez or any of his workers.

"What on earth happened, Ed?" Geri said. "Where did you go?"

I opened my mouth, but before I could speak, Fernandez cut in.

"Excuse me, Ms Paterson but, with respect, the question is irrelevant. It doesn't matter where Ed went or what he did. He disobeyed a direct order from me. At Camp Felicidad, that's a punishable offence. Cause and effect. Simple."

Geri frowned. "Well, it is typical of this lot to go off on their own – though I'm surprised it was *Ed*. He's the last one I'd expect to find acting out without the others."

What was she saying? That I was easily led?

"He wasn't on his own," Nico said, defiantly. "We went outside together."

In spite of the trouble I was in – and my annoyance that Geri clearly thought I was easily influenced - my spirits rose slightly. Nico might be a smooth-talking smile on legs who'd more-or-less stolen my girlfriend, but he was loyal when it came to stuff like this.

Geri rolled her eyes. I had to tell her what had happened outside, but. I couldn't risk prolonged mind-reading in front of Fernandez.

"Geri...?" I started.

"Silence." Fernandez glared at me. "Now I know you need to leave, Ms Paterson so—"

"Wait," I blurted out. "Geri you have to listen to me, there're some kids here who aren't—"

"Silence," Fernandez snapped again.

“No,” I persisted, panic rising. I couldn’t let Geri go without telling her what Luz had said about the camp... without trying to help Luz.

“Actually, I’d like to hear what Ed’s got to say.” Geri’s voice sharpened.

Fernandez instantly stepped back. “Of course.”

I took a deep breath. I didn’t want to speak in front of Fernandez, but there wasn’t any choice.

“There’s a... some kids out the back getting into a bus. I spoke to one. She said this, er... its not a good place, that the people here aren’t treated well. She asked me to help her.”

Geri stared at me. I looked up, just briefly, into her eyes.

*It’s true. I swear,* I thought-spoke. I broke the connection before Fernandez wondered what I was doing.

“Did you hear this, Nico?” There was an urgent, warning note in Geri’s voice as she turned to him. *Yes.* She was suspicious.

“Some of it,” Nico said. “Ed was talking *quietly*, you know that way he does?”

Geri nodded. I could feel Dylan and Ketty staring at me. They knew what Nico meant – that I’d been mind-reading the girl.

I glanced over at Fernandez, my heart thumping. He’d moved over to the door without me noticing and was speaking to the woman in red who’d been standing by the bus earlier. Close to I could see she had a small thin face – kind of mean-looking, with narrow eyes and lips painted the same colour as her tracksuit.

Fernandez looked up.

“Ms Paterson, if you can wait just a moment. I think we can clear this up.”

There was an awkward silence. Geri looked as anxious as I’d ever seen her. As Fernandez and the woman in red disappeared, she met my gaze.

*Ed, what were you doing mind-reading someone?*

*I know, but I had to. She said—*

*I thought I made it clear. Your number one priority is to keep your Gift secret. Now let me go.*

I broke the connection as Fernandez came back. Despite the cool of the room my shirt was sticking to my back. A line of sweat trickled down the back of my right knee. What was Fernandez up to?

A minute later the woman in red reappeared. She had Luz by the arm. My heart skipped a beat as I saw her. Luz kept her gaze on the floor.

“This her?” the woman snarled. Her accent was American.

I nodded. Now my heart was thumping. Had I just got Luz into terrible trouble?

“Luz?” Senor Fernandez’ voice was calm and steady. “Did you speak with this boy?” He pointed at me and repeated the question in Spanish.

Luz looked up at last, though she avoided making eye contact with me.

“Si.”

“In English, please. What did you say to him?”

“I lie,” Luz said in her thick accent. “I say no verdad... not true things that this is bad here.”

I stared at her, the whole world tumbling inside my head. *What?*

“Por que?” Senor Fernandez went on. “Why did you lie?”

“I anger... no me gusta... I no like here...” Luz said.

Fernandez waved his hand dismissively. The woman in red took Luz off. I watched as she was led away. In her faded t-shirt and cut-off jeans, she looked small and fragile. Had she really been lying to me? I couldn’t believe it.

“Luz Martinez. A habitual liar, Ms Paterson.” Fernandez sighed. “More than just a liar, in fact... she’s got a record as long as your arm. She – and some other young offenders - were sent here yesterday by mistake.” Fernandez handed Geri a sheet of paper. A passport-sized photo was pinned to the top. “This is the information I have on her. She’s being moved today to a proper facility for young people. We manage delinquents here, but not out and out criminals.”

At that moment, the woman in red reappeared with another girl in tow. This one was Asian-looking, with a round, clear face. She was smaller than Luz – and much more smartly dressed. Fernandez introduced her as Camila, one of the other girls staying in the camp.

“An erstwhile truanter, who’s learning the error of her ways,” Fernandez said, a relaxed smile on his face. “What do you say, Camila? Camp Felicidad is hard work, but good fun, too?”

“Yes sir,” she said in a strong Spanish accent.

I stared at the huge smile spread across Camila’s face. I didn’t buy it. There was something guarded behind her eyes. I looked round, to check Geri wasn’t falling for the smile. *No*. She was nodding... totally taken in.

I shifted my gaze to Luz herself. She was at the door now, about to go.

“Luz.” I could the note of desperation in my voice.

She turned and looked at me with those sad, beautiful eyes. In an instant I was there...

*Luz? Por que...?*

*Senor Fernandez make me say.* Luz’s thought-speech cut across my struggling attempt at Spanish. *Lo siento, Eds... I sorry.*

And then the woman in red dragged Luz through the door and it banged shut and the connection was ripped away and she was gone. It’s horrible when the connection’s ended like that – like having cold water thrown in your face. My guts twisted into a knot.

So Luz *hadn’t* been lying. I knew it. I turned to Geri.

“Geri, please listen.”

“Enough, Ed.” Geri was shaking her head and checking her watch. “I have to leave now. I should have gone twenty minutes ago. I’m sorry you were lied to, but you should have done what Senor Fernandez told you and stayed inside.”

“Please.”

“No. Enough.” Geri glanced round at the others, patted Dylan on the side of the arm, and left.

I stood in a stunned silence, as Senor Fernandez followed her out. As soon as the front door shut behind them, Ketty spoke.

“What was that about, Ed? Are you okay?”

“That girl told me this is a bad place. That *wasn’t* a lie, whatever Fernandez and that other girl say.”

“What d’you think Nico?” Dylan asked.

He shrugged. “She seemed genuine, but most of what she said was in Spanish – that’s when she was actually speaking. Ed mind read her for ages.”

“Did you, Ed?” Ketty sounded surprised.

I understood why. After all, I’ve gone on to Ketty more than anyone how much I hate my telepathy. Of course she’d be surprised at me using it. But with Luz I hadn’t really thought about it.

The door slammed. I jumped. Fernandez stood, his face filled with fury, in the doorway.