

Cut an apple in half across its width. There, in each half, you will see a five-pointed star. Two stars: one represents Venus, the evening star, also known as Hesperus. The other is your star, the one which speaks to you, and only you, across time and space. Now imagine a magnificent garden surrounded by waters. It shares its name with Hesperus, which shines above it. In this garden are three nymphs, who guard a tree which bears golden apples. Very few people ever reach into that world and learn its secrets. You are one of them. The first secret is this: anything and everything is possible. The rest of the secrets that have been entrusted to me, I share with you in the following pages. Let your star guide you in using them.

From the introduction to *The Apple Star*, by Ambrosia May.

Chapter One Magic Flower Juice

Cancer

June 22 - July 22

Hey, all you unadventurous crabs - this is no time to hide away in your shell!! When the opportunity presents itself to help others, go for it - you know you love to be needed!!

Lulu Baker chucked the magazine down on the bed. Why do I read these things? she wondered. They were *so* annoying, and it was *such* a silly magazine...yet she never could quite resist. She lay back and gazed out of the skylight in her attic bedroom. What did she care for horoscopes, anyway? She had her own personal star out there, and consulting it was her nightly habit now. The trouble was the growing sense of unease Lulu got lately whenever she stared at it - this was what had made her consult her horoscope in the first place. Her star - the Truth Star, as she thought of it - still wasn't always easy to interpret; all she knew was that recently, gazing at it was giving her butterflies in her belly. Lulu picked up the little yellow-bound book that lay beside her, and traced her finger over the gold star on its cover. Above it were the words:

The Apple Star

Ambrosia May

It was from this mysterious book that Lulu had learned all about her Truth Star, as well as many other fantastic secrets. It was, incredibly, a magic recipe book, and had fallen into her hands in mysterious circumstances on her thirteenth birthday. A message scrawled on the inside of the book's cover had seemed to suggest it was a gift from her mother...although Lulu could never be sure - her mother had died when Lulu was only five. But she still had her pictures of Mum, and now and then she found it reassuring to talk to them. She turned to her favourite picture now, the Mum-in-Muddy-Wellies one. But today, even this didn't seem to do the trick. Something was lurking around the corner, and neither Lulu's horoscope, nor the Truth Star, nor Mum-in-Muddy-Wellies could tell her what it was...

Lulu and her best friend Frenchy sat cross-legged on the dusty floor, their scripts in front of them, watching the two boys on stage. Mr Drinkmoore sat slumped like an oversized beanie toy on a chair nearby. Mr Drinkmoore had sad, red eyes that were too heavy for his face, so every now and then he had to squeeze his fingers under them to push them up. But they always slid back down again, even sadder and redder than before.

'Fetch me that flower,' one of the boys on stage enunciated breathlessly. 'The herb I showed thee once....The juice of it on sleeping eyelids...will make a man or woman madly dote...upon the next live creature that it sees.'

And the other boy piped up eagerly, 'I'll put a griddle around the earth in forty minutes!'

'Aghh, William, William!' groaned Mr Drinkmoore, breaking off from a vigorous eye-squeezing. 'The word is *girdle*, not griddle! It's like a belt. You're a fairy; you're going to *fly around* the world in forty minutes, not *fry* it!'

'Blimey, Sir. Not even a supersonic jet can do *that!*' quipped William.

This sent a ripple of giggles across the hall. 'Yes, yes, very...'
DINGALINGALING! went the school bell. '...Amusing. Oh, go on, off you go.' There was a loud commotion as everyone began to gather up their things. Mr Drinkmoore stood up and bellowed over the din,

' And make sure you all practice your lines over the weekend!'

'This Shakespeare stuff's tricky, isn't it?' said Lulu, climbing to her feet. 'I'm glad I've only got a small part.' She and Frenchy had been cast as fairies.

'Me too,' said Frenchy, stretching out the long, thin pale legs that her nickname, short for 'French Fry', described. She flicked back her equally long, thin, pale hair and stood up. 'Hey, and what about that love potion in the play! D'you think there really is such a flower?'

Lulu shot Frenchy a warning glance; she could tell where this conversation was leading. She marched purposefully toward the cloakroom.

Frenchy skipped to keep up with her. 'What's it called, "Love-in-idleness"?' she went on. 'I've never heard of it, have you?'

Lulu stopped in her tracks and turned. 'Don't be ridiculous. It's just a story, Frenchy, you know that.' The moment she said it, though, doubt crept into her mind. If there was one thing she'd learnt over the past year, it was that every story had some truth in it!

But she knew where Frenchy was going with this; it wasn't the first time she had dropped hints about *The Apple Star* and all its exciting possibilities, and Lulu didn't want to know. Lulu had used a recipe from *The Apple Star* just once, nearly a year ago, and ever since she had been, well, a little bit spooked by the whole business. She couldn't really explain why; after all, the one recipe she had used from it had been successful - far more so than she could ever have hoped. Dad had been about to marry Varaminta le Bone, a glamorous ex-model with a heart of steel. She and her spiteful son, Torquil, were making Lulu's life a misery at the time, but somehow they were always able to deceive Dad about what was really going on. When Lulu baked Ambrosia May's magical Truth Cookies with those extraordinary ingredients, she had changed all that. Torquil ate them at the St Toast's school summer fair, and found himself strangely compelled to blurt out

very publicly the truth about Varaminta's schemings against Lulu, how she was using Lulu's dad and how she had covered up Torquil's own nastiness. At last Lulu's dad had been able to see Varaminta for who she really was, and she and Torquil were out of their lives for ever. Even Aileen, the housekeeper and a close friend of Lulu's, was working for them again after having been sacked by Varaminta for no good reason. A nightmare had been brought to an end, and it was an *Apple Star* recipe that did it.

And yet, as special as *The Apple Star* was, Lulu felt uneasy: perhaps it was the new-found power that she found so unnerving. To think that all she had to do was use her secret recipes, and people would behave as she wished! It was all a bit too much to cope with.

'And I wish my *mum* would fall in love,' Frenchy went on, hinting for about the tenth time that week. 'She's been on her own too long; she even talks to herself. Remember in *The Apple Star*, how-'

'Shh!' hissed Lulu.

'Oops! Sorry, Lu.' Frenchy was quiet after that; she was the only friend Lulu had ever told

about *The Apple Star*, and she knew perfectly well that it was top secret information. There had been a strict warning in the book about this, saying it was meant only for Lulu and no one else; that in the wrong hands, its recipes could be harmful. Lulu had bent the rules already, by telling Frenchy; no-one else, not even Dad or Aileen must know about it. The fewer people who knew about it, however trustworthy they might be, the safer her little book and its powers would be.

So now the book spent most of the time languishing in its hiding place, unused since Lulu had made the Truth Cookies. Just occasionally she would take it out and look at it, only to put it away again swiftly. There was a whole recipe section, she remembered, entitled 'Matters of the Heart'; something that clearly had a hold on Frenchy's imagination right now. Helped along, no doubt, by the school production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

'Look French,' said Lulu, as soon as they were alone. 'You're out of your *mind* if you think I'm going to start mucking about, making

people fall in love with each other. No way, n'uh-uh, way too risky, the book says as much. It's serious stuff! So don't even think about it, OK?'

Frenchy sighed. 'You're right. Oh well. I've no idea who we'd pair my mum off with anyway.'

But even though Lulu was convinced she was right, those words from her horoscope, "unadventurous crabs" kept going around in her head on the way home. Must stop reading those stupid things, she told herself.