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# Bliss

## Karen Mccombie

## Scholastic

Extract

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# chapter one

## *Cosmic clues (oh yeah?)*

**Date:** *Wednesday 12th June*

**Frame of mind:** *Nauseous*

**Twists of Fate:** *Knots in my stomach, more like.*

"'*VIRGO: 24 August–23 September.*

*Whay-hey! Here comes summer, and if you want an indication of what the next few months of sunshine have in store for you, then look no further than this week for cosmic clues. Oh, yes – it's time to set your Virgoan radar on tracking and pick up what Fate's got planned!*

*Lucky Day: Thursday 13 June.*'"

"That's mine, is it?" I ask, after Jude stops reading aloud from the horoscope page of her magazine.

To be honest, I was only half-listening – I guess I'm sort of *mildly* interested in stars and stuff, but I usually forget what they said five minutes after I've read them. Anyway, I'm slightly distracted by the large pile of maths books scattered on my bedroom floor, staring up at me. Somehow, I have to shoehorn all that information into the maths-free zone that's my head today, if I've got any chance of passing the exam tomorrow.

"Excuse me, you *are* the only Virgoan in the room, right? Were you too busy with some illustrious thought to be paying attention, Ms Palmer?" Shaunna eyeballs me, sticking her hands on her hips and doing an uncanny impersonation of Mrs Klein, our demon maths teacher.

"Yes, I *am* the only Virgoan, and yes, I *was* paying attention – kind of. I just never know what horoscopes are trying to *say*. Why can't they be written in plain English? It's like they're some weird, complicated code that I can't figure out."

"Like algebra equations?" Jude suggests.

"Don't remind me. . ."

I flop face-first into my squashy duvet, glad of

the sudden dark blotting out my irritatingly relaxed friends and the ominous pile of books I haven't a hope in hell of understanding.

I know, I know, I *know* I should have started swotting earlier, but I've been kind of . . . distracted lately.

"What's up with you? You've gone really gloomy on us recently, Molly!"

Gloomy – is that how Shaunna sees me? I'm usually the practical one out of the three of us. That's how it works: Shaunna's the funny one, I'm the sensible one, and Jude . . . well, Jude's just a bit scatty – worrying and daydreaming a speciality. Except she's not the one doing the worrying just now; it's me.

"She's allergic to exams," I hear Jude explain to Shaunna.

That's true. It's like these stupid exams have been going on for ever, sucking all the joy out of my life. But that's not *all* that's doing my head in.

"Only one more to go, Mol, and then you'd better start getting happy again!"

Easy for Shaunna to say – she's not living inside my head, which lately has been just a mush of German verbs, examples of allegories, chunks of the Russian Revolution, and thoughts of. . .

"Dean coming round today?"

"No," I mumble a reply to Jude straight into my duvet.

Dean.

If Dean had a fan club, it'd have Shaunna, Jude and my entire family as die-hard members. Dean is the text-book perfect boyfriend: "*Shaunna*'s dated him, *you*'ve been going out with him for ever, Molly – so when do *I* get a turn?" Jude once joked. The answer is she doesn't (get a turn, I mean) – Dean's mine, all mine.

But you know something? Right now, I kind of wish Shaunna and Jude didn't like him *quite* so much. Then maybe I'd be able to talk to them about all the mad thoughts running around in my head, without them telling me I'm being stupid, or worse still, thinking badly of Dean, when he hasn't done anything wrong. But then maybe it's nothing to do with them . . . it's between me and Dean, right? Right? Except I don't really know how to say anything to him either. How do I start? "Hey, Dean, about that night a couple of weeks ago. . ."

"Well, if you're not going to be any fun, we're going!" Shaunna calls out. "See you tomorrow at the exam hall!"

"Bye, Molly. Here – I'm finished with this. You can have it if you want. . ."

There's a rustle of paper and air and a thump, as Jude chucks the magazine and it lands somewhere beside my ear.

"Thanks, bye. . ." I mumble, wiggling my hand limply as they pad out of my room.

After I hear the front door bang, I reluctantly prop myself up on my elbows and let my gaze fall on the opened page of the magazine (well, anything to avoid facing those looming textbooks).

. . .*if you want an indication of what the next few months of sunshine have in store for you, then look no further than this week for cosmic clues*. . .

Call me cynical, but what's that supposed to mean, exactly? And anyway, I know what the next few months of sunshine have in store for me – complete boredom, since I'm the only person I know that hasn't sorted themselves out with a summer job (not for the lack of trying).

*Lucky Day: Thursday 13 June.*

Uh . . . I don't *think* so. That's tomorrow, and that's the worst exam of the lot.

It's dumb, it doesn't make sense, and it's probably made up. So how come I find myself reading my horoscope again, and again, and again?

Maybe it's because right now, all my sensible thinking and analysing and common sense isn't helping to sort out the mush in my head one little

bit. Maybe it would be a relief – fun, even – if I stopped being this typical, rational Virgo my horoscopes always tell me I am and hand over responsibility to fate. Maybe I should do what this says and keep an eye out for those cosmic clues that are meant to be magically popping up all over the place, telling me what I should (or shouldn't?) be doing.

Or maybe I just need to drag myself off this bed and start revising. Yeah, I'll get started on that straight away, right after I lie here for a while longer and think about me and Dean and . . . everything.

Guess I'll be kissing that maths exam goodbye. . .

# chapter two

## *Hello trees, hello sky...*

**Date:** *Thursday 13th June*

**Frame of mind:** *Blissed out*

**Twists of Fate:** *So many it's silly...*

"Is your face broken?" Shaunna grins, suddenly looming over me, her head of long, wavy brown hair blocking out the early summer sunlight.

Me, Shaunna and Jude have been lying here on our backs on the daisy-splattered lawns of Westburn Park for the last half an hour, getting grass stains on our school uniform (but not caring), with our heads practically touching and

our bare feet (school shoes kicked off) radiating outwards and forming all three points of some mystical, invisible triangle.

At least that's what I said to Shaunna and Jude five minutes ago, but they just laughed at me. Not that I mind. And I don't mind that Shaunna seems to be teasing me again now.

"What are you on about?" I blink up at her.

"I'm on about that stupid smile of yours, Molly Palmer – it's still there. You've had that stuck on your face since first thing this morning; since before we even went into the exam room."

It's true. There were plenty of people smiling nervous smiles of relief at the *end* of our maths exam (specially since it was the last day of exams and first day of freedom), but I must have been the only person grinning going *into* the exam hall in the first place.

"I thought you *wanted* me to cheer up!"

"Molly, I wanted you to get *happy*," says Shaunna, "not turn all freaky on us. . ."

I know they think it's kind of *fruitcake*, all the stuff I've just told them about: the coincidences that have happened around me today; the way Fate seemed to be letting me in on some cosmic secret (that I don't quite understand yet), *just* like my horoscope said. But I shrug and close my eyes,

happy to be a freak if it means my personal little cloud of gloom seems to have finally floated off somewhere.

"You're going to have to watch yourself now, Molly." Jude widens her dark eyes, as she rolls over on to her elbows like Shaunna and stares down at me.

"And why am I going to have to watch myself?" I ask an upside-down, spiky-haired Jude, still smiling the smile I can't seem to wipe off my face.

"'Cause with all this spook stuff you've been spouting today, people might want to burn you as a witch!"

"Oh, ha, ha, ha," I reply dryly, rolling my eyes at Jude, which must look really bizarre from my friends' angle.

"Yeah, but she must be a *white* witch!" Shaunna sniggers, tugging at a hunk of my not golden, not honey-coloured, not platinum, but wishy-washy milk-white blonde hair.

Hilarious – I don't think.

"You two take the mickey if you want. All I know is that a lot of strange things have happened today and it all has to mean *something*, doesn't it?"

"What – the fact that your mum gave you a biscuit instead of toast for breakfast, you think

that's a cosmic event, do you?" says Shaunna, studying me hard.

"It's not that! It was the way that it all linked together! You know *exactly* what I mean!"

Course she did. So did Jude. OK, so the odd coincidence can make you go "hmm". In fact, the odd coincidence – like four red cars in a row driving by – can shoot right over your head, before you've even registered it properly. But a whole run of coincidences, like I'd just had . . . they couldn't just happen for no reason, could they?

You want evidence? OK. . .

To start with, before I woke up this morning I'd had this brilliant dream that I was out in some huge green field, twirling round and round, arms outstretched, gazing into the clear blue sky and feeling totally blissed out. Which was a weird dream to have considering I was totally stressed out last night, trying to cram like crazy for my maths exam today (and failing miserably). Then, in my dream, there's suddenly a huge, sparkly, sun-dappled shower of cooling rain – even though there's not a cloud in the sky. As I feel the droplets splash on my face I start laughing and twirling faster and faster, until—

The radio alarm clock came on, blasting out that feel-good Travis song, "Why Does It Always Rain On Me?".

See what I mean?

Next, I'm getting dressed, and something makes me think of the gold heart locket my gran gave me years ago. I've hardly ever worn it – it's not exactly as trendy as the jewellery and stuff I'm usually into. But this morning, I had this really strong feeling that I should wear it for luck. The only trouble was, I'd no idea where it could be, and I didn't have time to rummage around for it, if I wanted to get to school and the dreaded exam on time. It was then that I noticed the goofy-looking kink that had appeared in my hair overnight – a pony-tail was the only thing that was going to rescue me quickly from a hair disaster, but I couldn't find any of my usual black scrunchies lying around. I started yanking open the drawers in this cute wooden box thing I got from IKEA, and there was a pale blue scrunchie I've never worn – right on top of a red velvet box that held Gran's gold heart locket. . .

After that, the coincidences came thick and fast.

When I got down to breakfast, my little sister Mia gave me a handmade Good Luck card that she'd put together using pale blue paper folded over, with a heart drawn on in gold metallic ink.

Like every other exam day morning, I knew I was too nervous to eat anything, and hoped

Mum wouldn't give me her usual "but you can't do an exam on an empty stomach!" rant, not this morning. And she didn't. Instead of trying to tempt me with toast or cereal, she handed me one of those energy bars. "There's no point nagging you today," she laughed. "Not since it's the last exam. Just try and eat a bit of that on the way to school."

I was about to leave the house when I had this sinking realization that Dad didn't wish me luck before I went to bed last night – he'd have left for work already, and that felt wrong somehow. "Hi, Molly!" he surprised me by saying, as I opened the front door. "Left without my notes. What an idiot! Anyway, good luck for today, eh?!"

And with that, I walked smiling towards the bus stop, squinting against the sun and wishing I'd brought my shades with me. But as soon as I thought that, a few specks of light rain sprinkled out of nowhere, making me grin as my dream came flooding back to me.

On the bus, I sat daydreaming and gazing out of the window, still watching the strangely sunny rain sprinkle down, when I realized we were going nowhere fast; and getting stuck in a huge, long traffic jam wasn't great news, since I couldn't afford to be late. Just as I felt myself frowning,

sensing my inexplicable good mood start to slip away, I realized the bus had stopped right beside a giant billboard, advertising some kind of insurance or something. But apart from the name of the company at the bottom, all that was written on the billboard, in letters half a metre high, was "*Everything is going to be all right!*"

And with a lurch of the bus (and my heart) we were moving again, and I knew that I was going to make it to school on time, but only just. As soon as the bus pulled up at my stop, I ran like lightning for the main door, but before I got the chance to yank it open, the sun bounced off the glass door panel, and for a fleeting second, I could see my reflection surrounded by a halo of rainbow-tinted light.

And in that second – don't ask me why or how – I knew that everything was going to be all right. This series of coincidences; this was my "cosmic clue". Suddenly, all the things that had been worrying me and bugging me the last couple of weeks just didn't matter any more. Like these exams that've been giving me a premature ulcer. . .? I'm going to pass them OK, I just know it. The summer. . .? Something will come up; I won't be sitting twiddling my thumbs while my friends earn bucketloads of money.

And the stuff with Dean. . .? That'll be all right too, for sure.

Call me a freak, but I'm positive that Fate is – very kindly – trying to tell me to quit worrying. Thank you, Fate. . .

"Hey, what's that famous psychic called again? The one with the black hair and crossed eyes?"

"Mystic Meg," Jude helps Shaunna out.

"Mystic Meg – that's right! And we've got our very own Mental Molly!"

"Thanks for listening with an open mind, Shaunna," I flip a silly, sarky comment back to her. "Wait till Dean hears the names you've been calling me; he'll— *eek!*"

My bare feet are suddenly being tickled, and unless Jude and Shaunna have grown exceptionally long arms, I can't pin the blame on them.

"Who's been calling you what names?" says Dean, appearing out of nowhere and dropping on to his knees beside me and my friends.

He presents me with a buttercup – the instrument of my tickling torture.

"Hi! What are you doing here?" I quiz him, sitting bolt upright now.

In spite of my daily (and nightly) head tangles about the two of us, I'm as glad as ever to see him and in no hurry to answer his question.

"Just thought I'd come and meet you from school as a surprise, Mol. But I didn't realize you'd have finished your exam already."

"How did you know to find us here?" Jude asks him, elbows buried in the grass, propping up her head with her hands.

"I didn't. I don't know what made me decide to cut through the park, really. But here I am. And then, of course, I heard you lot laughing. . ."

I turn round and raise my eyebrows at my girlfriends. Do they need any more proof?

"Don't start!" Shaunna smirks, waggling a finger in my face.

"What's going on?" Dean asks, confused, and knowing he's stumbled into the middle of something. (Into the middle of a whole *bundle* of coincidences.)

"Don't take any notice of her, Dean," Shaunna informs him brightly. "Molly's gone all 'Hello trees, hello sky!' hippy-dippy on us today."

"Hey, I think I like the sound of that!" Dean grins, linking the fingers of one hand around mine.

I notice a tiny, flyaway, buttercup petal on his fingernail. It's a funny shape; like a perfect golden-yellow heart.

With my free hand, I reach up and touch the locket around my neck.

"Want to hear about my weird day?" I smile at Dean.

"Sure . . . but do you want to get out of here first?" he asks, staring into the sunny sky. "It feels like it's starting to rain. . ."

I think Dean – not to mention Shaunna and Jude – is quite surprised when I leap to my feet and start twirling and laughing, arms outstretched, feeling the raindrops on my face.

Bonkers? Yes. But it has been a bonkers, blissed-out kind of day. . .