

# The Fruitcake Special and other stories

Frank Brennan

## Before reading

- Look at the front cover. What is happening?
- Look at the front cover, contents page and the blurb on the back cover.  
Now match the story titles with their descriptions in the blurb.

- |                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 1 <i>The Fruitcake Special</i> | a 'a perfume that attracts men'           |
| 2 <i>The Real Aunt Molly</i>   | b 'a book that shows people's thoughts'   |
| 3 <i>Brains</i>                | c 'a remarkable change in a woman's life' |
| 4 <i>The Book of Thoughts</i>  | d 'the secret of high intelligence'       |
| 5 <i>Finders Keepers</i>       | e 'a way of making time stand still'      |

- There are five different stories in the book. Which one would you like to read first?
- If you have the cassette, listen to the story of your choice.

## Check your reading

### *The Fruitcake Special*

- Put the events in the right order.
  - Anna's boss took no interest in her at dinner until she put on more of the fruitcake special.
  - Sabina was jealous of Anna, and a fight developed.
  - Anna met the man who had always been interested in her.
  - Anna put on some *Intrigue* before dinner.
  - Aunt Mimi said that the old lady who made the cake had died.
  - Anna poured the fruitcake special over Sabina and left her job.
  - Anna's boss invited her out for dinner.
  - Anna put a piece of fruitcake into the perfume mix.
- Who said what?
  - 'So when are you going to bring a nice boy home?'
  - 'You must realise that I'm crazy about you, darling.'
  - 'I know I can offer you more than that rich fool you're sitting with.'
  - 'Don't you work for David making perfume or something? Terrribly exciting.'
  - 'Anyway, this woman who made the cake told me to give it to you and your problems would be over.'
  - 'He means that a rich and handsome man like him could not possibly fall in love with a nobody like you ...'
  - 'Take that and him too, you horrible little woman!'

Anna   Mr Amos   Sabina   Aunt Mimi   a waiter

### *The Real Aunt Molly*

- Match the beginnings and endings.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 After her husband died,                 | a with a recorded message from Maxwell.   |
| 2 The twins persuaded Aunt Molly          | b Aunt Molly knew exactly what to do.     |
| 3 When Maxwell Marvel had a heart attack, | c whether to tell Aunt Molly or not.      |
| 4 Aunt Molly developed new interests      | d to see a television show at the studio. |
| 5 Grandpa received a letter               | e and she even decided to go abroad.      |
| 6 Rufus and the twins were still not sure | f Aunt Molly became less cheerful.        |

- Complete the summary.

After being ..... by Maxwell Marvel, Aunt Molly lived life to the ..... She discovered that she could ..... and she also took up painting. Soon she was painting like a ..... The twins were very surprised when Aunt Molly said she was going to ..... with a professor. She explained that he was a ..... man, and that she might ..... again. Although the new Aunt Molly was very different, she was very easy to .....

- What would you do if you were in Rufus and the twins' position?  
Would you tell Aunt Molly or not?

### *Brains*

- Correct the summary.

Gina was pleased when Max the monkey completed the rubik cube in twenty minutes. Now she had to see Mr Dimitri, a simple businessman, to talk about her idea for an exercise to increase intelligence. Mr Dimitri said that her work had been awful and she had to stop immediately. He knew business would not be good if people were too stupid. He asked her to work in a different area, and he decided to put Gina's idea in a public place with all the other excellent ideas. Gina would now work on three-headed chickens.

- Look at the words in italics. Who or what is *he, you, I, we*?

- He* now has the intelligence of an eight-year-old human child.
- And what if *you* worked on a human being — could you make them smarter?
- Unfortunately, *I* must ask you to stop what you are doing.
- We do not want people to think that *we* are anything other than a completely honest organisation.
- I want *you* to see that a dangerous animal from one of our centres is killed.

Gina   Mr Dimitri   CSBD  
Miss Epstein   Max the monkey

- If you were Gina, would you have accepted Mr Dimitri's offer?

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## The Book of Thoughts

1. Whose thoughts did Chester read?

- a *He wouldn't look so pleased with himself if he knew what I had put on to his chicken while I was in the kitchen.*
- b *He must decide today — leave that awful wife and marry me or I'll shoot him and myself dead.*
- c *Mum's a great cook — I love you, Mum.*
- d *He needs to learn some respect for experienced professionals like me.*
- e *I hate it when Chester and I play squash — he always wants to beat me.*

a woman on the train      the waiter      Mr Shaw  
Kim      a man on the train

2. True or false?

- a Chester bought the book from an old antique shop.
- b Chester told nobody about the book.
- c The book told Chester that his boss had given him incorrect figures.
- d Chester discovered that he was the most popular person in his office.
- e Dorothy agreed to go out for dinner with Chester.
- f Chester found out what Dorothy thought of him.

3. If you had a *Book of Thoughts*, do you think it would be helpful or harmful?

## Finders Keepers

1. Match the beginnings and endings.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1 Harry Chen was a lecturer in archaeology,              | a he could steal the antiques he had always wanted. |
| 2 He kept the small clay pipe                            | b but he also stole things for his private museum.  |
| 3 When Harry blew into the pipe,                         | c about the person who was found in the grave.      |
| 4 Harry knew that with the help of the whistle,          | d and there was nothing he could do about it.       |
| 5 Professor Teo said that there was something strange    | e when he blew into the whistle.                    |
| 6 Harry realised that time itself stopped                | f everything around him froze.                      |
| 7 After breaking the whistle, he knew he was stuck there | g with the words BE STILL on it.                    |

2. Look at the words in italics. Who or what are *he, it*?

- a *He* was also a thief.
- b Now that *it* was broken, he could see that there had been something inside.
- c He wondered if *it* would still work.
- d *He* was a priest who was thrown out by the other priests.
- e *He* was like a figure made of stone.
- f Would *he* live there always, with no future and no past?

Professor Teo      Harry Chen      the whistle  
the clay pot      Lou Foo (the man in the grave)

3. 'Would he live there always with no future and no past? Would he die there?' (pp 78) What do you think?

## After reading

Choose some of these activities.

- 1. Which of the five stories did you enjoy most? Write an article for the classroom noticeboard explaining why you liked the story.
- 2. Do you think the stories teach us anything about life? If yes, what lessons have you learnt, and from which stories?
- 3. Here are the main characters from each story:

Anna — *The Fruitcake Special*  
Aunt Molly — *The Real Aunt Molly*  
Gina — *Brains*  
Chester — *The Book of Thoughts*  
Harry — *Finders Keepers*

Which character did you like best or least? Why?

- 4. Write a sentence for each picture at the beginning of the stories.
- 5. Choose one of the stories and write a different ending. For example, if Harry Chen hadn't broken the whistle, how would the story end?
- 6. Write a dialogue. Choose one of these situations:
  - a The argument between David Amos and Sabina after the meal at the restaurant.
  - b The discussion between Rufus and the twins about whether to tell Aunt Molly or not.
  - c The conversation at dinner between Chester and Dorothy.
- 7. Which story do you think would work best as a play in the theatre? Write the first act of the play with a classmate.
- 8. Make your own activities for other students to do. e.g. Make a word search puzzle or write some true/false questions.
- 9. Here is the blurb from another book at this level.

### Nothing but the Truth

Hu is a teenage student at an international school in the exciting city of Bangkok. She has a problem with one of the teachers and does not know what to do. An adventure in a national park, acting in a musical, and the help of friends make Hu realise that she must tell nothing but the truth.

Do you want to read *Nothing but the Truth*?