

## THE REAL AUNT MOLLI.

My Aunt Molly is the kindest, sweetest person on earth. She may not be the cleverest woman in the world, but I love her a lot. However, a strange thing happened to Aunt Molly and now we don't know what to do.

It all started when her husband, Uncle Dalton, died. Well, I called him Uncle Dalton but she always called him 'Dally'. He was my mother's only brother. Aunt Molly really loved him, we all knew that.

Life had been quite difficult for Aunt Molly when she was a child. She was poor and her parents had died early on. She was left to look after herself. She had never learned to read properly and left school at an early age. But she was always cheerful and honest and never complained about the hard work she did to earn her living. She worked as a cleaner wherever there was work to do. She liked cleaning because she didn't have to make any difficult decisions. Aunt Molly didn't like making decisions. Perhaps she wasn't used to it. I don't know. But everybody liked her and she was never out of work.

She met Uncle Dalton when she was working as a cleaner at the bus station. He was a bus driver and it was when he had just finished for the day that he first saw her cleaning the station office. He fell in love with her as soon as he saw her. It was the same for Aunt Molly. As soon as their eyes met it was love for both of them. He soon grew to love her gentleness and she loved his kind heart and willingness to make decisions.

They got married two weeks later.

A year after that she gave birth to twin boys. They were my cousins and their names were Winston and Clement. I was born in the same year two months later. I was called Rufus. I still am. Anyway, Uncle Dalton got a better job at die bus station soon afterwards, and they bought a house near us.

Aunt Molly and Uncle Dalton had a happy marriage. Uncle Dalton earned the money and Aunt Molly cooked, cleaned and made the house a wonderful home for her dear Dally and the boys.

It would not be quite right to say that Aunt Molly actually *ran* the house. In fact, all the big decisions were left to Uncle Dalton. But she made sure that everything went smoothly. Everybody was happy. I was happy, too, because I liked to play with my cousins. I also looked forward to the delicious home-made biscuits Aunt Molly always gave me.

My cousins and I were five years old when Uncle Dalton was run over by a bus at the station. It was an accident. Uncle Dalton didn't know what hit him and he was killed immediately. Well, I suppose he guessed it was a bus, but I don't think he had much time to think it over, if you see what I mean. Anyway, he was dead.

In a way, once Uncle Dalton had died, I think a part of Aunt Molly died too. She was still a hard worker and remained a good mother to Winston and Clement. Indeed, the

routine of running the house was something she no longer needed any help with. My parents and Uncle Dalton's parents - my grandparents — all helped Aunt Molly with the decision making. But the cheerfulness that we had come to expect from her had gone. It was as if all her cheerfulness had died with Uncle Dalton, her 'dear Dally'. She got some money from the bus company because Uncle Dalton had been killed at work. At least she didn't have to leave the twins in order to earn money.

Life continued.

The twins grew into fine boys. But by the time they were fourteen they wanted to see a bit more of the world outside their comfortable home. Both of them were bright and interested in the world outside. Especially Winston. They were beginning to get bored with life at home with all its safe routines.

That's where the trouble really began. Aunt Molly had not really changed since their father's death. She had not even learned to read properly. She never went out and had no outside interests. She spent what free time she had listening to the radio or watching the television, especially game shows.

The boys, though they loved their mother, wanted to decide more things for themselves. And like me, they wanted to go out more. Aunt Molly, however, just wanted to stay at home all the time. The boys never went out much with their mother — whenever they did go out, it was with me and my parents or with our grandparents. Aunt Molly always stayed at home.

It was Winston who thought of taking their mother to the theatre on her next birthday. She would be thirty-nine. The boys planned it all out carefully with the help of the rest of the family. We were all there, my parents and my grandparents.

'I don't think Mum would like to see a Shakespeare play or anything like that,' said Clement. 'But I'm sure that going to see *something* would do her good!'

'You're right,' said Gran. 'I think your mother should go to see something she would enjoy. It would make a nice change for her. Something like those shows she likes on the television.'

'Gran, you're brilliant!' said Winston. 'What about that show on the television with that hypnotist guy . . . the *Maxwell Marvel Show*? Mum loves that!' "

'What's that all about?' asked Grandpa. 'I don't think I've seen it.'

'You must be the only person in the country who hasn't,' said Clement. 'Maxwell Marvel is an expert hypnotist — he gives people suggestions and orders after he has made them go to sleep. When they wake up they do all kinds of funny things. Then, at an order from Maxwell Marvel, they go to sleep again. When they wake up again, they can't remember a thing about it.'

Grandpa laughed. 'I've had a few evenings like that myself.' Gran looked at him. 'Er . . . when I was much younger, of course,' he added quickly.

'Mum would really like to see that show - I just know it,' said Winston.

'Yes, but how do we get your Mum on a television show? Won't it be expensive? How will we get the money?' I asked.

'Relax,' said Winston. 'All we have to do is write to the television company and they'll send us the tickets free — that's where they get their live audiences from! All we have to do is make sure we let them know in time for the show.'

We all agreed that this was a great idea. So we did it. Aunt Molly, of course, was at first unwilling to go along with it. However, we had all made the decision for her and we wouldn't take no for an answer. In her heart, though, she did not really care what happened to her, not since her dear Dally had gone. But she went along to please her boys because she cared deeply for them, and did not want to disappoint them.

The television studio — the place where the show took place - was not at all what Aunt Molly imagined it would be like. She thought it would be like the inside of a theatre or a cinema. It wasn't. It was full of lighting and sound equipment. There were all kinds of people around whose job it was to make sure that everything worked properly. The audience itself was smaller than she expected. She could see the star of the show, Maxwell Marvel, nervously brushing his jacket in full view of the audience.

'Don't worry, Mum,' said Winston with confidence. 'It's always like this in a television studio. They're just getting ready for the show.'

Aunt Molly was sitting in the middle of the second row between the twins. I was there, too, along with Grandpa, who, from time to time, took little drinks from a small bottle of something he kept in his pocket. He was smiling.

Gran had stayed at home.

'Hey, the show's starting,' said Clement.

A man came out and told some jokes to make everybody feel more relaxed. He explained how the show was recorded for television and what was expected of the audience.

Then the lights went down and the opening music to the show started. Maxwell Marvel came into the centre of the studio, full of smiles. The audience clapped for a long time. Aunt Molly had seen this show many times on television, so she knew what to expect. Even so, we could tell that she was getting excited. We could see her smiling. It had been a long time since we had seen her smile like that. Then the show began.

Maxwell Marvel asked for some people from the audience to be hypnotised. Quite a few of the audience were willing but only about ten were chosen. They came on to the small stage and were immediately hypnotised by Maxwell.

They were told to do the strangest things - such as behaving like farm animals, or dancing at a disco, or acting like famous people. And they did everything they were told to do! Even the quiet looking ones were persuaded to do things that looked completely different from their usual behaviour.

Then, at a word or sign from Maxwell, they became themselves again and couldn't remember anything about what they had done. Some of them didn't even believe that

they had been hypnotised at all and would only believe Maxwell after they were shown a video of what they had been doing.

Everybody loved it. Including Aunt Molly.

The final part of the show came when Maxwell asked for a last person to come forward.

'Here!' shouted Winston. He was pointing at his mother.

'Winston! What are you doing?' she said. 'I can't do that - I'd die of embarrassment!'

'Oh, go on, Mum. Do something different for once,' Clement whispered loudly. Grandpa and I were smiling. Aunt Molly smiled too.

She felt that she couldn't say no after all the trouble they had taken. What if she did look silly? That wouldn't matter. Nothing mattered now but her boys.

'All right - I'll do it!' she said.

Aunt Molly, for some reason, was an especially easy person to hypnotize. As she sat on a chair she 'went to sleep' to the sound of Maxwell's voice like a baby. We all wondered what hypnotic suggestions Maxwell would give her. Then Maxwell turned to Winston and said: 'What suggestions would you like to make, young man? I'll tell this lovely lady to do anything that won't get her into trouble with the police!'

The audience laughed.

The twins whispered to each other, then Winston spoke. 'Well . . . Mum's always needed a bit more confidence, so what could you do to make her more . . .'

'*Decisive*' said Clement.

'That's it,' said Winston. 'More able to make decisions and be more confident - let her live life to the full!'

'Let's see what we can do,' said Maxwell. He first asked for her name and Grandpa told him. Then Maxwell turned to Aunt Molly who was still fast asleep. 'Now, Molly, you will answer only to my voice, do you understand?'

'I understand,' said Aunt Molly quietly, though she was still asleep.

'You will be a confident woman, full of strength. Whatever you want to do, you will succeed in doing. Nothing is too difficult for you. Is that clear to you, Molly?' said Maxwell.

Molly said that it was.

'When I tell you to open your eyes you will be that intelligent, confident woman; you will live life to the full. You will not remember that you have been hypnotized but you will be a new, confident woman who will live life to the full. You will continue until I - and only I - tell you to return to your normal life. Is that understood, Molly?' said Maxwell loudly and with quite a lot of confidence of his own.

Molly said she understood.

'Now, Molly,' said Maxwell. 'Open your eyes . . .'

But as he said this he suddenly gave a loud cry and fell at Aunt Molly's feet while holding on to his tie. His face had turned grey. Maxwell Marvel had a heart attack just as Aunt Molly was opening her eyes.

The first thing she saw was Maxwell Marvel lying at her feet. She turned to the nearest person in the audience and said, 'Well, don't just sit there, man! This man has obviously had a heart attack - call for a doctor and an ambulance at once. He needs immediate attention.'

The man did as he was told while Aunt Molly undid Maxwell's tie and put him in a comfortable position. She acted as if she knew exactly what to do. Help soon arrived and the unconscious Maxwell was taken away in an ambulance.

A man from the television company spoke to the audience and explained that, because of Maxwell Marvel's sudden and unfortunate accident, the show was at an end. He said he was very sorry that things had been cut short in this way.

Somebody behind us called out that it had been the best part of the show.

Grandpa went up to the man who had spoken to us. He asked him what they could do to get Aunt Molly back to normal now that Maxwell Marvel wasn't here.

'You heard Maxwell,' the man told him. 'Only his voice can undo the orders. I'm sorry - you'll have to wait until Maxwell can speak to her himself.'

'But what if. . .' asked Grandpa, '. . . what if he doesn't get better?'

'Let's all hope that he does,' the man said. 'It's a popular show. Anyway, the order he gave her wasn't so bad was it?

It's not as if he told her to start acting like a monkey or something! Don't worry - we'll get in touch.'

In the car on the way back home we talked about what had happened that evening. We had all been surprised, to say the least, at the way Aunt Molly had behaved when Maxwell Marvel had had his heart attack; she had been more in control than anybody. It was as if she had known exactly what to do.

'Nonsense,' said Aunt Molly when we put this to her. 'just a little common sense. Besides, everything about his condition showed that his attack was not a serious one. He should get better soon if he rests for a while and looks after himself

Was this Aunt Molly talking? We could hardly believe what we were hearing. She sounded like a doctor.

'How do you know that, Mum?' asked Winston.

'I heard a radio programme all about looking after your heart - it described everything about heart conditions very clearly,' she answered.

'And when, exactly, did you hear this?' asked Grandpa.

'Oh, ten years ago while I was cleaning the carpet. When Dally was alive. Bless him,' said Molly with a smile.

The week that followed Aunt Molly's return home was full of surprises for all of us. She was not the Molly we all knew. For a start, she soon discovered that she could read, after

all. After years of hardly looking at even a newspaper, she began to read anything she could get her hands on. At first it was cheap magazines and love stories. Then she started on serious newspapers and Russian novels.

During the following weeks she took up painting and found that she was able to paint beautiful pictures. Soon she could paint as well as a professional. Then her beloved cooking changed. No longer did she cook simple but delicious meals. Now she tried Indian, Chinese and Italian meals which were also, it must be said, delicious.

She started to go out to all kinds of places - museums, art shows, scientific talks given by experts, political meetings - and she took the twins, too!

'You were complaining that we never went out - we're going out!' she said to them.

Nobody dared to advise her any more.

'I'm a grown woman — I can do things for myself, thank you very much!' she would tell us.

Then she came home with Horace, the Professor of Classics at the university. He was an expert on ancient Greek and Roman history.

'Horace has asked me to spend a week in Greece with him. We're going to explore the ancient buildings,' she said.

'But Mum . . .' began the twins.

'No buts . . .' Molly said. 'I'd rather explore an ancient building than look like one. Besides, Horace is a good-looking man - with brains, too. He likes me. And I'm still an attractive woman; I could marry again. It's about time I started to live life to the full. I've stayed at home for too long.'

We were all amazed by this new Aunt Molly. She could, it seemed, do anything she put her mind to. And although we loved the old Aunt Molly, we soon liked this new person who had come into our lives.

In fact, she was now a lively, funny and thoughtful woman. She scared us a little, too, with her burning wish for improvement.

But we all found her very, very easy to like. It was twelve weeks after Maxwell Marvel had had his heart attack. We had heard nothing from him but we saw on the television that he had been let out of hospital.

Two days after he left hospital he was found dead in the bed of his latest twenty-year-old girlfriend. He had died of another heart attack. He was forty-nine.

A week after Maxwell Marvel's death, Grandpa received a letter from the man he had spoken to at the television studio. There was a taped message with the letter. On the tape was a recording of Maxwell giving the order for Aunt Molly to return to what she had been before. He had recorded the message just before he left hospital, just before he hurried off to meet his new lover. It has now been a week since Grandpa got the letter.

We still haven't played the tape to Aunt Molly. We can't decide what we should do.

We have discovered another person in Aunt Molly and we love her, too. She's a new

Aunt Molly who has rediscovered life. Yet we also love and miss the sweet, kind lady who The truth is, we don't know which Aunt Molly is now the real one. What would happen if we played her the tape? Would a part of her die once again, as it had seemed to do when Uncle Dalton died? Would it be right for us to take this new life away from her? Then, again, perhaps nothing would happen and she would remain as she is — full of the love of life.

And which Aunt Molly has the most right to be here -the old or the new?

Who is the real Aunt Molly?

She and Horace are going off to Greece next week. That will give us all time to think things over. Then we will decide.

The old or the new?

Well, what would *you* do?

### **Task 1. Find in the book:**

- what kind of person Aunt Molly was;
- when the changes started;
- describe Aunt Molly's early years;
- how their love story started;
- if it was a happy marriage;
- what happened to uncle Dalton;
- how Aunt Molly changed;
- what were the boys' new interests;
- whose idea it was – a surprise for Aunt Molly's 39<sup>th</sup> birthday;
- what show was chosen; describe the show;
- what the studio was like;
- if Aunt Molly felt comfortable/ at ease;
- how the hypnotized people from the audience behaved;
- what Winston's instructions to Maxwell were;
- if you believe Aunt Molly understood the magician's words;
- how Aunt Molly helped to save Maxwell Marvel's life (first aid);
- if Aunt Molly realized the degree of her personality transformation;
- how Aunt Molly surprised her relatives in her new capacity;
- if they liked her as she was now;
- what happened to Maxwell Marvel; if he forgot about his last client;
- how Aunt Molly's life was going to change.

### **Task 2. Explain why.**

1. Why did everybody like Aunt Molly (old and new)?
2. Why did Aunt Molly always stay at home?
3. Why did Aunt Molly finally agree to take part in the TV show?

4. Why did Aunt Molly agree to be last person to come forward and to be hypnotized in front of the audience?
5. Why couldn't Aunt Molly return to her "normal" life, the life in which she used to be a different person?
6. Why did Aunt Molly scare her family a little?
7. Why couldn't they play the tape?