



Jan Mark Is Here!

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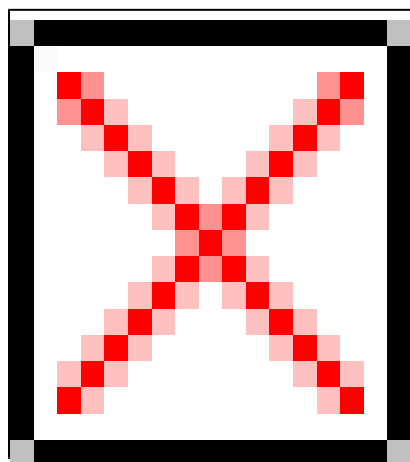
[Jon Appleton](#) [1]

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Byline:

A new website for the acclaimed author and new story collection

A new website and new story collection celebrates **Jan Mark**, one of children's literature's most distinguished authors. Founder Jon Appleton introduces **Jan Mark is Here**.

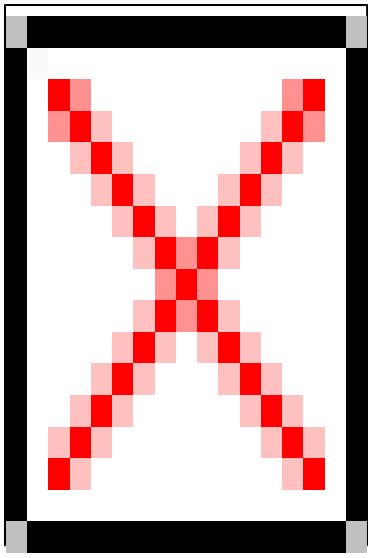


Jan Mark was one of the most acclaimed writers for children to have emerged in the mid-late 1970s, at the end of the second golden age of children's literature which saw a flourishing of talents including Philippa Pearce, Alan Garner and Joan Aiken. She began writing in response to a one-off competition launched by the Guardian and Penguin's new children's hardback imprint Kestrel to find new writers of contemporary children's fiction. Not only did she win, but [Thunder and Lightnings](#) [3] was awarded the first of Jan's two **Carnegie Medals**. From then on, she was in demand – often publishing two or more titles in a year, from picture books to novels for readers of all ages. She was always first choice for anyone commissioning an anthology of short stories.

Jan's short stories are perhaps her finest work; certainly the work she found most satisfying. She once said, 'Writing short stories is harder than writing novels. You can't get away with anything in a short story; you shouldn't want to get away with anything in a novel, but it's almost inevitable that you do because in a novel you're aiming for an overall effect. It is said that in a novel every chapter must count; in a short story every sentence must count.'

Jan died suddenly in January 2006, with several books in various stages of production. Already, many of her titles had gone out of print after being backlist stalwarts. I knew a traditionally published retrospective collection would probably sink without trace in the wider retail landscape. But luckily, I've come to know exactly where her readers are, and so can speak to them direct.

In the past year, I've noticed people talking about Jan on social media. Often, they're teachers who read her as a child, or taught her books in the classroom, or engaged with her in professional development. Jan spent a lot of time in schools, encouraging children and teachers to gain confidence in their own writing through enjoying books of the highest quality and honing their skills of observation, their ear for and understanding of language. They treasure their copies of Jan's books and buy up second-hand copies wherever they find them.



I was inspired [to build a website](#) [4] to bring these fans together. Trawling the internet I found a host of tributes and reminiscences to link to or republish, and many other people have generously provided their own memories of Jan. She also wrote generously about her own craft and inspiration for specific books so you'll find her words, too. Now I'm publishing **The One That Got Away: Thirty Stories from Thirty Years**.

Jan's fans are adults so it seemed obvious that the collection wouldn't be a children's book. She said, 'I write about children, but I don't mind who reads the books,' which permitted me to publish exactly the book I wanted – a big, fat volume, bringing together all the stories in three of her collections – **Nothing to be Afraid Of, In Black and White** and **Eyes Wide Open**, plus the two long stories in **Hairs in the Palm of the Hand**, and four previously uncollected stories.

There's an abiding truth about her work: she did write about children, accurately through the lens of a child equipped with whatever level of experience and understanding that comes with being five or eight or twelve, but she made her child characters face up to adults. Often her novels are about a journey over time away from childhood towards adulthood; the stories in **The One That Got Away** are about the specific moments where the blinkers come off and you can't unsee – you can't look back, only forwards. You're excused nothing. Sometimes, she even takes the teachers' and parents' side.

This is a book for grown-up fans but also one for them to introduce Jan Mark's work to today's young readers. Obviously, references have dated and language too, although the feminist vibe speaks more loudly than ever. The spirit of enquiry and enterprise, and a selective anti-establishmentarianism (in 'Mystery Tour' Ozzie writes, 'I don't like bossy grown-ups, but I can't stand bossy grown-ups who know less than I do?'), are as relevant as ever. Several of the stories border on farce and make perfect read-alouds, particularly the title story, 'The One That Got Away' and 'Send Three and Fourpence We Are Going to a Dance?.'

I hope these wide-ranging stories will once again inspire readers to appreciate the craft of writing – because Jan was a champion of anyone who cared about equipping children with the skills to write and read well – as well as offering readers sublime entertainment from a true master. If you haven't discovered her, you're in for a treat. Don't let Jan Mark be the one that got away!

Order **The One That Got Away** for £10 plus postage [via the website](#) [4] or [email](#) [5].

Jon Appleton will be speaking about **The One That Got Away** and Jan Mark's work during the 'Boxes of Delights' evening, part of the **Think Human Festival**, on 11 February 2020 at Oxford Brookes University. Book free tickets via [Eventbrite](#) [6].

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[3] <http://typo3.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/70/childrens-books/reviews/thunder-and-lightnings>

[4] <http://www.janmark.net>

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