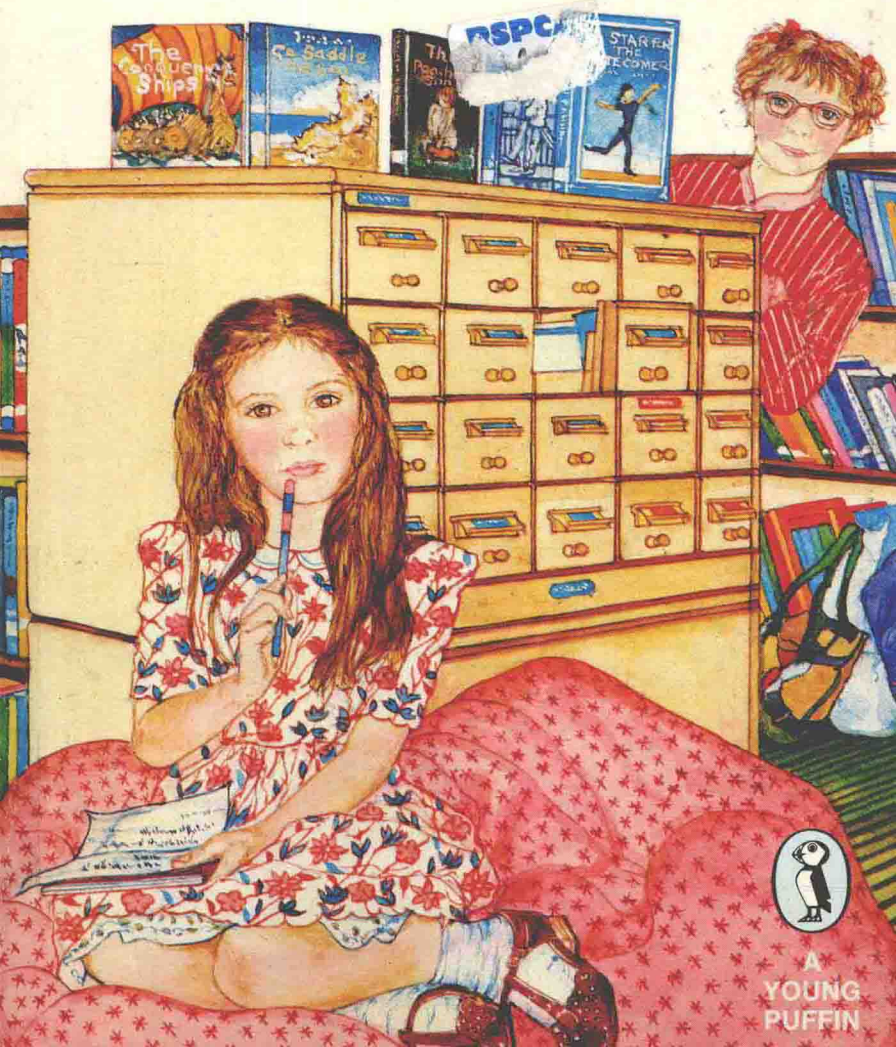


Jan Mark

THE DEAD LETTER BOX



A
YOUNG
PUFFIN

Jan Mark

THE DEAD LETTER BOX

Illustrated by Mary Rayner



PUFFIN BOOKS

Puffin Books, Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England
Penguin Books, 40 West 23rd Street, New York, New York 10010, U.S.A.
Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia
Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 2801 John Street, Markham, Ontario, Canada L3R 1B4
Penguin Books (N.Z.) Ltd, 182-190 Wairau Road, Auckland 10, New Zealand

First published by Hamish Hamilton Children's Books 1982
Published in Puffin Books 1983

Copyright © Jan Mark, 1982
Illustrations copyright © Mary Rayner, 1982
All rights reserved

Made and printed in Great Britain by
Richard Clay (The Chaucer Press) Ltd,
Bungay, Suffolk
Set in Monophoto Baskerville

Except in the United States of America,
this book is sold subject to the condition
that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise,
be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated
without the publisher's prior consent in any form of
binding or cover other than that in which it is
published and without a similar condition
including this condition being imposed
on the subsequent purchaser

PUFFIN BOOKS

THE DEAD LETTER BOX

The idea came to Louie while she was lying in bed thinking about an old film that she had seen on the telly at Gran's. It showed how spies didn't send their letters through the post but left them in secret places, to be picked up later by their friends.

A dead letter box was just what Louie needed to keep in touch with *her* friend, Glenda, who had moved away to a new house. And she knew the perfect place for it: an old book in the library.

The story of how Louie leaves her secret letters in the library, with unexpected results, makes for an unusual, funny book that will be enjoyed by children up to nine.



Jan Mark

THE
DEAD LETTER
BOX

Illustrated by Mary Rayner



PUFFIN BOOKS

Puffin Books, Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England
Penguin Books, 40 West 23rd Street, New York, New York 10010, U.S.A.
Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia
Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 2801 John Street, Markham, Ontario, Canada L3R 1B4
Penguin Books (N.Z.) Ltd, 182-190 Wairau Road, Auckland 10, New Zealand

First published by Hamish Hamilton Children's Books 1982

Published in Puffin Books 1983

Copyright © Jan Mark, 1982

Illustrations copyright © Mary Rayner, 1982

All rights reserved

Made and printed in Great Britain by
Richard Clay (The Chaucer Press) Ltd,
Bungay, Suffolk

Set in Monophoto Baskerville

Except in the United States of America,
this book is sold subject to the condition
that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise,
be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated
without the publisher's prior consent in any form of
binding or cover other than that in which it is
published and without a similar condition
including this condition being imposed
on the subsequent purchaser

Contents

1. Louie and Glenda 7
2. I Spy 17
3. Going, going . . . 28
4. Gone 39
5. Death of a Letter 50
6. Liberry Jam 62

Louie and Glenda

For five months now there had been a FOR SALE sign outside Glenda's house. Louie hardly noticed it any more; it had become part of the garden, like the concrete goblins, the bird-bath, and the green lamp post which grew up through the hedge; a tall tin plant with an orange flower on top that bloomed only at night.

Louie had forgotten that there was ever a time when the sign had not stood there, and she had begun to forget what it meant, so she was surprised one morning when she stopped on her way to school to wait for Glenda, and saw that the sign had changed. It no longer said FOR SALE. It said SOLD.

'You've sold your house,' Louie said, when Glenda came out through the gateway.



‘Last week,’ said Glenda. ‘They only changed the sign yesterday.’

‘You never told me.’

‘I forgot.’

Louie remembered then what it was that *she* had forgotten: when Glenda’s house was sold, Glenda would move away and Louie might never see her again, even though Glenda had been living at her end of the street as long as Louie had lived at the other. She had worked hard to forget it.

‘If it was *me* I wouldn’t have forgotten to tell *you*,’ Louie complained, as they walked round the corner into Manor Drive.

‘But you’re not moving,’ Glenda said.

‘I might move one day. If I moved I’d tell you right away.’

‘But I wouldn’t be here,’ said Glenda.

They were getting near the school, and people were turning into Manor Drive from all the other side roads. Glenda and Louie were best friends, but Glenda was Louie’s only friend, while everybody was Glenda’s friend. Glenda might start talk-

ing to almost anyone, even if Louie were already talking to her.

‘When are you going?’ Louie asked, quickly, but she was only just in time.

‘In the holidays, I expect. Not till the end of term, anyway,’ said Glenda, and hung back to talk to a girl from the top class who was coming up alongside them. Louie found that she was walking on her own, and started to hurry, so that people would think that she had left Glenda behind, and not that Glenda had left her in front.

Louie stood next to Glenda in Assembly, but there was no chance to talk



because they were in the choir and everyone could see them, up at the front. There was no chance to ask questions in class, because Glenda was on the other side of the room. Once they had sat at the same table, but Miss Ward said they talked too much, so now Louie had to share with Wayne Hodges, who wore his snorkel jacket indoors and sat with the hood zipped up, so that he looked like a ship's ventilator. Glenda was over by the window with Sarah and Helen Tate who were twins and talked only to each other, and Joanne Smith who sucked her pigtailed and never talked at all.

Louie sat staring at the two shifty eyes that were Wayne, deep, deep inside his ventilator, and wondered what it would be like next term in Mrs Thomas's class, without Glenda. She would have to make another friend. She looked round the room to see who might do, but everybody had friends already. You could not go round saying to people, 'Will you be my friend?' They would giggle and say 'Why?' She



looked at Wayne again. Being friends with Wayne would be like having a pet tortoise, and she had a pet tortoise. Half the time it wouldn't come out.

Miss Ward moved between the tables, looking at people's work.

'Now, Michael, that's not very clever, is it? Stop writing on your leg, Sarah. Wayne, take your coat off – how many more times? Yes, Glenda?'

'I've finished my card, Miss. Can I go down the lib'ry, Miss?'

'Library, not liberry,' said Miss Ward. 'Say it properly.'



‘Can I go down the *library*?’ Glenda said, already half out of her seat. She always finished first, and she always ended the morning in the library, looking for a book to read, although she never seemed to find one. Louie watched her leave the room. In fifteen minutes the bell would ring. Glenda would rush home for lunch and not come back until it was time for afternoon lessons. Louie ate at school because her Mum was at work. At this rate she would never manage to speak to Glenda before home time, and then Glenda would be staying late for gymnastics, after school.

Louie had an idea, and hurried to finish her own work card.

‘Can I go down the lib’ry, please, Miss?’

‘Down *where?*’

‘The lib’ry.’

‘*Library,*’ said Miss Ward. ‘How many more times? Library, not liberry. It’s not a fruit. It doesn’t grow on a liberry bush. Li-bra-ree.’

‘Can I?’

‘All right. Off you go.’ Louie went. Miss Ward was still at it as she left. ‘Wayne, take your coat off. How many more times?’

‘Here we go round the liberry bush, the liberry bush, the liberry bush,’ sang Louie, under her breath, as she went down the corridor.

Glenda, looking very learned, was sitting on the carpet in the library area, with books piled all round her. She was reading a comic. Louie took a book from the nearest shelf and sat down beside her.

‘You got finished quickly,’ Glenda said, surprised. Louie usually finished everything last, because she sat and thought