

**No
Second
Chance**

Sylvia C. Garfield

© 2007 Sylvia C. Garfield
All Rights Reserved

*To my dear son Charles, without whose
loving assistance
in getting this book published it would
never have seen the light of day.*

Contents

Chapter 1	Linda	1
Chapter 2	The New Girl	7
Chapter 3	On the Playground	11
Chapter 4	“Where I Used to Live”	15
Chapter 5	The Accident	21
Chapter 6	Where’s Jane?	29
Chapter 7	A Talk With Mother	33
Chapter 8	Gone Forever	41
Chapter 9	The Golden Smile	45
Chapter 10	Linda’s Letter	51
Chapter 11	A Long Reply	55

Chapter 1

Linda

“It’s not that I didn’t like her,” Linda puckered her forehead as she spoke. “It’s that she was so . . . well . . .”

“C’mon, Linda, you can admit you didn’t like her,” Cathi said, kicking a rock that lay at her feet. “Neither did I. In fact, I think we all hated her. No one would sit next to her in class or stand near her in line. Of course, nobody would ever, ever play with her. After all, she

NO SECOND CHANCE

was sort of fat and not very neat and . . . like . . . oh, I don't know."

It was a lovely day early in June. The warm sun beat down on the girls' backs as they talked. "The sun is pouring melted butter over everything," Cathi had said when they'd walked to school together that morning.

"Just the same," Linda said, "I know we could have been much nicer to her all along. I keep thinking of what Mrs. Gunther said, 'Sometimes we don't get a second chance.' It makes me want to cry."

A bell rang, echoing through the playground. "Shoot, time to line up already!" groaned Cathi. Somehow, there never seemed to be enough time outdoors after lunch. The girls hurried to join the other children, who were already on their way into the school building.

Seated at her desk, Linda glanced across the three rows and toward the back of the room,

LINDA

where Jane used to sit. She could almost see her there now—big blue eyes in a pale, chubby face, short blond hair hanging limp. She was wearing one of her faded cotton dresses that was clean but wrinkled, as though someone had left the laundry in the dryer a little too long. Linda realized that no one had sat in that seat since Jane disappeared.

Linda told herself that she had to stop thinking about Jane, but she couldn't stop herself. Her mind kept racing back to that day. That horrible day four months ago, the day of the accident. Linda shuddered.

"Linda!" Mrs. Gunther's usually kind voice had a sharp edge. "Linda, pay attention! I asked you a question. What is the Declaration of Independence?"

"Oh!" said Linda, struggling to pull herself together. "The Declaration of Independence is . . . well . . . it's . . . um . . . it's a piece of paper with words written on it," she said slowly. A

burst of laughter from the class startled her.

“Well, I should think so!” Mrs. Gunther replied, hiding a smile. “Can you explain further, Linda?”

The other kids were still laughing. “A piece of paper with words written on it,” they said over and over.

Linda’s face reddened. Suddenly she knew just how Jane must have felt most of the time.

“I’m, I’m all mixed up,” she stammered. “I was thinking about something else.”

Mrs. Gunther called on Smart Sue. She always knew the answer. Linda was too embarrassed to hear it, though.

I must stop thinking of Jane, Linda lectured herself for the thousandth time. I can't concentrate and my schoolwork has fallen down. Mother wants to take me to the doctor because I don't eat well. And all because my mind keeps going on and on about Jane—about the accident. Could I really have prevented it? Could I have?

LINDA

That night, long after she should have been asleep, Linda lay awake thinking, thinking, thinking. She heard her parents talking just outside her bedroom door. "I know something is worrying her, but she doesn't seem able to tell me about it," her mother said softly. "The poor child is making herself sick."

"Perhaps we'd better speak to her together," her father answered.

That does it! thought Linda. *If they both get after me, they'll never stop until I tell them the whole story and I just can't! I can talk about it only to Cathi. After all, she's my best friend and we were in this whole thing together.*

Linda sat up in bed. *I know what I'm going to do, she thought. I'm going to think this through from the beginning, from the very first time I ever saw Jane, even if it takes me all night! Then maybe I'll get it out of my head once and for all.*

Linda propped up her pillows and leaned back against the headboard. Despite her re-

NO SECOND CHANCE

solve, her eyes grew heavy and her head began to nod. She forced herself to sit up straighter and remember exactly what had happened.

How clearly she saw it all now—like watching a movie.

Chapter 2

The New Girl

It was late October. They had been talking about Halloween costumes. Linda would wear last year's princess costume and Cathi decided she would go as a witch.

Both girls were trudging through the rain on their way to school when Cathi stopped at a store window. "Look at these raindrops having a race down the glass!" she exclaimed. "Let's see which one wins."

NO SECOND CHANCE

“Oh, come on, Cathi. We’ll be late,” Linda protested.

“Trouble with you, Linda Bowman, is you’re always worrying. We have time. Look, this big raindrop up here is yours. This one is mine. Now let’s watch and see which one comes down first.”

At first, the drops on the big windowpane didn’t move. They just seemed to shiver a little. Soon a wind came up, driving more rain against the store window.

“Oh, look at my drop!” Linda exclaimed.

“Mine, too,” replied Cathi. “I think mine is winning!”

Gathering more and more water as they slid downward, both raindrops streamed in little rivers down, down the glass and onto the brickwork below.

“They came down too fast. I couldn’t tell which one got down first!” said Cathi.

“O.K.,” Linda said crossly. “They both won.”

THE NEW GIRL

Now, let's hurry!"

Walking rapidly against the wind, the girls were soaked by the time they reached the school building. To make matters worse, they were late. Moving at a half run, they headed for their classroom.

Thinking only about how she hated to be late, Linda had her raincoat, hat, and boots off before she heard what Mrs. Gunther was saying to the class.

Standing beside Mrs. Gunther was a girl almost as tall as Mrs. Gunther herself. "Her name is Jane Connors," Mrs. Gunther announced. "Let's see now. Where can she sit? Oh, yes, there's a seat in the fifth row behind Tommy. You're nice and tall, Jane, and you'll have no trouble seeing the board from there."

Linda tiptoed to her seat, hoping Mrs. Gunther wouldn't notice she was late and had missed most of the introduction of the new girl.

From her seat Linda could see Jane clearly.

NO SECOND CHANCE

She watched as the large, heavy girl, her mouth tightened into a thin line and her eyes on the floor, made her way to the seat Mrs. Gunther had indicated in the back of the room.

There was a sudden scraping and pushing of chairs and desks in several directions at once. Linda grimaced, but at the same time she understood: No one wanted to sit anywhere near Jane Connors.

Chapter 3

On The Playground

Linda shifted position against her pillows. She was wide-awake now, and turned her thoughts to the day on the playground when they'd started the where-I-used-to-live game.

It was a few days after Jane came into the class. The rain had finally stopped—it had poured for three whole days and trick-or-treat had been a washout—but it was cold, and Miss Jackson, who had playground-duty that week,

told everyone to move around to keep warm. A group of five or six girls began to play tag.

“Here come the boys,” said Smart Sue. “Let’s pretend we don’t see them.”

“Y-e-e-e-e!” screamed the boys as they quickly surrounded the girls.

“Got ya!” yelled Robert Blakeley.

He had caught Cathi around the waist and she squirmed to get loose. Meantime, the other boys had caught the rest of the girls. There was a lot of screaming and stamping of feet as the girls tried to get away.

“Cool it,” yelled Mike Hopper, his red hair blowing in the wind. “Here comes Miss Jackson!”

The boys quickly let the girls go and ran to the other side of the playground.

“Let’s go after them,” Cathi said. Linda didn’t want to go. She was sure they would get into trouble, but she followed anyway. When the girls approached, they found the boys in a

ON THE PLAYGROUND

huddle. "Who could have snitched to Miss Jackson?" Robert wanted to know.

"Yeah," said Stevie. "How'd she even see us chasing the girls when she had so many other kids to watch?"

"Hey, maybe it was Fatso!" Brian pointed to the other side of the playground, where Jane was leaning against a corner of the school building. "Look at her, all alone reading a book!" he sneered. "Who reads books on the playground? Does she think she's smarter than we are?"

"Let's get her!" cried Robert.

"No!" exclaimed Linda, looking at the sad figure. "She's probably lonely. No one thought of asking her to play. Leave her alone."

"Aw, come on guys!" Robert started off toward Jane.

"I'm telling Miss Jackson!" Smart Sue yelled as she ran after the boys.

"O.K., O.K.," called the boys, and they took

off in the opposite direction.

The girls began to walk toward Jane. "Let's ask her to play tag," suggested Linda.

"She's so fat. Do you think she can run?" Peggy asked. No one answered her.

"Hello, Jane," Cathi said as they got near. "Do you want to play tag with us?"

"Come on," Linda put in. "It's too cold to stand still."

"No, no thank you," Jane managed to say. "I can't run holding a book."

"Maybe Miss Jackson would hold it for you," Smart Sue suggested.

"Oh, I couldn't ask her to do that!" Jane replied.

"So how do you like this school?" asked Linda.

"It's O.K. I guess." Jane replied.

"Just O.K.? What do you mean 'I guess'?" several of the girls asked at the same time.

"With . . . well . . . where I used to live . . ." Jane began.

Chapter 4

“Where I Used to Live”

Jane flashed a sudden smile, but it was gone in a minute. “Where I used to live,” she repeated, “the school was much smaller and it was built all on one floor. There weren’t so many classes and most of the kids knew one another.” Jane didn’t look at anybody while she talked, but seemed to be looking at some point beyond the girls.

“You’ll get to know a lot of kids here, too,”

Linda assured her. "I'm Linda. And this is—"

"Oh, I know your names," Jane interrupted. "After all, I'm in your class. But still . . ." Jane didn't finish her thought. After a while, she continued. "Where I used to live, the playground was much larger. There really was room to run around. We had a baseball field and handball courts and everything—where I used to live."

"We have lots of room here, too," Cathi said. "Besides, you aren't even playing. You're just standing there reading a book!"

Jane pressed her lips together and dropped her eyes.

"Just like her first day here," thought Linda. The line-up bell rang before she could say anything.

"What do you think of her 'Where I used to live' problem?" Cathi asked in a loud whisper. "She hates it here already."

"Maybe she'll get used to things," Linda

whispered back. "It takes time."

Linda was more observant of Jane after their talk on the playground. She noticed that Mrs. Gunther seldom called on Jane and, when she did, Jane usually gave the wrong answer or said, "I don't know." Once, during oral reading, Jane read, "It was much *Easter* to do it this way," instead of "much *easier*." Even when the kids laughed, she didn't seem aware of her mistake.

Only long afterwards did Linda realize this was all because of Jane's troubles. She remembered how the kids had laughed at her, Linda, about that "Declaration of Independence" thing, when *she* had sounded dumb because she was worried about something. No, maybe Jane wasn't really dumb, but why did she always say that everything was better where she used to live? That was really annoying, and it was what had started all the trouble.

Before long it became kind of a game. First,

someone would say, "Jane, how do you like our gym periods?" (Everyone loved phys. ed.) Or, "Doesn't Mrs. Coleman do great things with us in art class?" And always, it was better where Jane used to live. Back there, Jane said, they played more games in phys. ed., and they did more painting in art.

Then the game really got going. The kids would think of something to ask Jane but before she could answer, someone would call out, "Where I used to live!"

One day Cathi asked Jane just where she had lived before she moved to Morgan City.

"Where I used to live!" chorused a few kids.

Jane smiled again before she spoke. Linda thought that even though Jane wasn't very pretty, she had a beautiful smile that lit up her whole face, like the sun coming out from behind a cloud.

"Where I used to live, in South Bay, we had our own house," Jane began. "It was small, but

“WHERE I USED TO LIVE”

we were the only family who lived in it. Now I live in an apartment building. There’s so much noise!”

“Of course, the house was better where you used to live,” said Peggy with a shake of her blond curls. Linda imagined that Peggy must resent Jane more than anybody. Peggy was rich. She thought *she* had the best of everything.

“Oh, yes,” Jane answered. “The house was pretty and we had a lovely back yard. Now we have no place to play outside the apartment.”

“Well, why did you move if you don’t like anything around here?” asked Cathi.

Jane lowered her blue eyes. She seemed to be examining her shoes. “We just did, that’s all,” she said softly.

Chapter 5

The Accident

Oh, Jane, if only you'd told us right then, thought Linda as she lay propped up against the headboard. *Why didn't you tell us the whole story? Then all of the teasing would have stopped. After all, we're really not mean kids. I know we would have understood! And that terrible thing wouldn't have happened to you. Oh, Jane!* But Jane didn't tell—not then, not ever. Mrs. Gunther told. But only when it was too late.

NO SECOND CHANCE

Tears welled up in Linda's eyes. *I knew it was wrong to tease Jane. But I never did it, she consoled herself. I even tried to tell the kids to quit, but no one would listen.*

Linda wiped the dampness from her forehead with the back of her hand. Her auburn hair was spread out like a fan on her pillow. She couldn't go to sleep yet.

Although it was cloudy, it was pretty warm on the playground, for the end of February, that is. For several weeks, after-lunch activities had been mostly indoors because of the cold and the snow, so there had been little opportunity to tease Jane. But today they were outdoors.

"Yippee! No school tomorrow!" yelled Cathi. "Good old George Washington! We should've had more like him!"

"We'll have a lot of homework, though," said Smart Sue. "Remember, we have to write

THE ACCIDENT

up that science experiment and we'll write reports when we come back, so we'd better finish reading our library books."

"Anyhow, it's a day off," said Robert, approaching the group with some of the boys.

"Hey," called Stevie. "Talking about science, let's go ask Fatso if science was better where she used to live. She never knows the answer!" Everyone laughed.

Linda's heart sank. She had hoped the kids had forgotten about teasing Jane. She couldn't think of a way to stop them.

Already they were on their way to Jane's corner, the one where she always stood and read her book. When Linda got close she heard Jane saying to the boys, "Where I used to live, we didn't do much science but we wrote stories and poems and made books of them. Some of the books were so good they were put in the school library for other kids to read."

"And I suppose some of your books were

put in the library, too," sneered Smart Sue.

"Yes, they were," Jane replied quietly.
"Two of mine are still there."

She flashed her beautiful smile. *What lovely white teeth she has*, Linda thought.

The boys and girls were too busy to notice that the sky had clouded over. Snowflakes began falling softly, gently dusting the ground, the buildings, and the children's clothes.

"Snow!" several kids called out at the same time.

"Hey," Brian suddenly turned toward Jane, "I'll bet even the snow was whiter where you used to live!"

"Why, yes," Jane answered, oblivious to the fact she was being teased. "As a matter of fact it was. In our small town there weren't so many feet to trample it or so many cars to make it dirty and mushy. The snow *was* whiter!"

"Y-a-a-ah," yelled Brian. "The snow was

THE ACCIDENT

whiter! Get her, guys!”

Dropping her book, Jane dashed away, the boys racing close behind her.

“Wow, look at her run!” exclaimed Peggy. “I didn’t think she had it in her.”

The girls were now running after Jane and the boys. Linda picked up Jane’s book and followed them. The snow was falling harder now but the children didn’t care.

Jane was heading for the wire fence that surrounded the playground, the boys at her heels. The big gate at the corner of the fence stood open and Jane rushed through it just as Brian reached out to grab her.

No one was allowed out of the playground, so the boys stopped short of the gate. Jane continued to run, however. The boys watched her go down Marple Avenue and turn the corner onto Legion Street. By the time the girls arrived, out of breath, Jane was nowhere to be seen.

"She'll catch it for running out!" cried Robert.

"I'll go after her and bring her back," said Linda.

"No, then you'll get in trouble, too," Cathi said. "She'll come back soon. She must know by now that the boys are not following her any more."

"What did she think we would do to her, anyhow?" Mike asked. "All we do is grab girls around the waist."

"How could Jane have known that when she's never been part of the group that plays that game?" Linda retorted.

"Hey, look!" Smart Sue cried suddenly. "Mr. Thompson is waving to us. We'd better go back!"

"Yeah," Stevie said, "He's sending all the kids inside. It's snowing hard. Hurry, let's not get him mad at us." The children ran toward the school building.

THE ACCIDENT

“Look at those big snowflakes!” cried Cathi as she ran. “Sugar Snow! Sugar Snow!” she sang. “I just caught a huge flake on my tongue. It tickles!”

The boys, as usual, were already way ahead. A sudden screeching of car wheels in the distance made the girls stop short for a moment.

“Hurry up!” yelled Peggy.

Mr. Thompson looked angry when they arrived. All the other children had already entered the building. “Just what were you people doing way back there?” he scolded, as he closed the two big doors after them. “Now get in line!”

What line? thought Linda. *There must be a million kids in this hall all pushing and yelling.* She suddenly realized she was still holding Jane’s book.

“Everyone listen!” boomed Mr. Thompson. “You will not go to your classrooms until you

NO SECOND CHANCE

are perfectly still! Form two straight lines against the walls!”

Finally, things quieted down and the lines began to move. Through the halls, up the stairs, and into their classrooms they trooped. When Linda reached her room, she looked up and down the hall, hoping to see Jane.

Chapter 6

Where's Jane?

It took Mrs. Gunther only a minute or two to notice that Jane was not in her seat. "Where is Jane Connors?" she asked.

No one answered at first. Finally Smart Sue said, "She ran out of the playground."

"Why did she do that?" Mrs. Gunther wanted to know.

"The boys were after her," explained Peggy. Brian stood up slowly. "I guess it was my

fault,” he said, pushing back a lock of hair that had tumbled over his forehead. “I said ‘get her.’ Then all the boys began chasing her. But we wouldn’t have hurt her. The girls ran after her, too!”

“We didn’t! We were chasing the boys,” cried Cathi.

Soon everyone was calling out at once.

“Silence!” Mrs. Gunther rapped her desk with a ruler. Then, how she scolded the class! She seemed to know everything—how Jane was always alone, how unfriendly the children had been.

“Jane has had a bad time lately,” she said. Mrs. Gunther went on to tell them that Jane’s father had been ill for a long time and he was now in the hospital again. Jane’s mother had to get a job, and she had found one in Morgan City. So the family had given up their home in South Bay and come to live here.

From the corner of her eye, Linda could see

WHERE'S JANE?

that most of the other kids were sitting with their heads lowered. *Do they feel as ashamed as I do?* she wondered.

Mrs. Gunther continued, "Let's hope Jane returns soon. I doubt if she went home, because no one is there during the day."

Linda looked at Jane's book. It was a hard-cover copy of *Little Women*. Handing it to Mrs. Gunther, Linda explained that Jane had dropped it while running.

"This is a difficult book!" Mrs. Gunther said. "I am surprised anyone in this class can read it."

You could have heard a pin drop in the room. Finally, Mrs. Gunther continued. "Well, let's take our math test. We'll let Jane do hers when she comes back."

Linda found it hard to keep her mind on her work. She kept watching the door for Jane. A few minutes later the room telephone buzzed. It sounded unusually loud in the quiet

classroom. "Room 304," Mrs. Gunther answered. There was a pause, and then, "Oh! Oh, my! That's dreadful! When did it happen?"

All eyes were on Mrs. Gunther as she turned toward the class. Her face was white and her hands were shaking slightly. "Jane Connors has been in an accident," she said slowly. "She was hit by a car while crossing Legion Street."

"The screeching car wheels!" Linda gasped.

"Mercy Hospital just called the school," Mrs. Gunther went on. "The doctors need to locate Jane's mother."

Chapter 7

A Talk With Mother

Linda leaped out of bed and ran to the window. "I can't take any more of this!" she said aloud.

All at once, she was aware of the pale, early morning light peeping gently into her room. She raised the shade higher. Toward the left, there was a rosy glow over the rooftops. Linda never knew how long she stood there looking out of the window. Finally, heaving a big sigh,

she turned and climbed back into bed.

Next thing she knew, her mother was shaking her. "Linda, wake up, Dear," Mrs. Bowman was saying. "It's nearly noon!" Linda opened her eyes and sat up.

"I didn't wake you for school," her mother said. "You've had a bad night. I heard you tossing about and very early this morning you were walking around muttering to yourself. It seemed best to let you sleep."

"I stayed awake all night," Linda yawned. "It was almost daylight before I fell asleep."

"Dad and I have known for some time that something is on your mind," Mrs. Bowman remarked. "I think it's time we had a little talk. Perhaps I can help. But come and have your breakfast first."

"Yes," said Linda. "Yes, I think I can tell you now."

Seated opposite her mother at the breakfast table, Linda told her all about Jane. It was eas-

ier than she expected. Of course, she did feel choked up when she got to the part about the accident. "No one ever saw Jane again or heard from her, or anything. She just disappeared. We don't even know if she's alive!"

"But how can that be?" Mrs. Bowman asked.

"You see," Linda answered, "Mrs. Gunther phoned the hospital a couple of times. They said Jane's condition was serious and that she wasn't allowed to have visitors. And Mrs. Connors couldn't be reached at home. I guess she was at Mercy Hospital most of the time with both Jane and Mr. Connors there.

"About two weeks after the accident, Mrs. Gunther went over to the hospital anyway. They wouldn't let her see Jane but she did get to speak to Jane's mother for a few minutes. Mrs. Connors told Mrs. Gunther that she had quit her job to be with Jane. She also said that they would have to go to live with relatives

when Jane and Mr. Connors were well enough to be moved. They were going to a town about 25 miles from Morgan City.

“And that was it!” Linda cried.

“What do you mean?” Mrs. Bowman asked.

“I mean that we never heard another word about Jane. When Mrs. Gunther phoned the hospital again about a week later, they told her that Mr. Connors had been discharged and that Jane had been taken to another hospital. But they weren’t permitted to tell her which one.

“The school nurse tried to make a home visit and found out that the Connors family had already moved. Jane may be dead for all we know.”

“I don’t think so,” her mother said. “Remember, they wouldn’t have moved her unless she was feeling better.”

Mrs. Bowman had a sudden thought. “What about school records?” she asked. “Hasn’t any new school sent for them?”

A TALK WITH MOTHER

“We thought of that, too,” replied Linda. “We asked Mrs. Gunther. No school has sent for her records. Mrs. Gunther said that they might not need them because she was here for such a short time. Maybe they only sent for the records from her old school in South Bay. Or maybe she isn’t going to school anywhere. Maybe she’s dead!” Linda brushed away a tear with the back of her hand. “If only we knew which town they moved to!” she sighed.

“Linda, are you by any chance blaming yourself for what happened to Jane?” Mrs. Bowman asked suddenly.

“Well, yes,” replied Linda. “I really didn’t do much to stop the kids, even though I knew they were wrong. And I should have been Jane’s friend even if it meant losing the other girls.”

“Now think, Linda,” her mother said. “Could you have stopped all of those

boys and girls? Could you have, all by yourself?

“As for being Jane’s friend,” she continued, “it’s extremely hard to be friends with someone who doesn’t let you in. Jane wasn’t really open to you, either.”

“Still, I know I should have tried harder,” Linda insisted.

“Perhaps,” her mother replied, “But sometimes we don’t get a second chance.”

“Why, that’s just what Mrs. Gunther said!” Linda exclaimed.

“The whole class seems different now,” Linda went on. “We hardly ever laugh or have fun any more. It’s worst of all on the playground. Most of the time, we just stand around doing nothing. Even the boys don’t run around much any more. I guess we just keep thinking of Jane.”

“This school year will be over in a couple of weeks,” Mrs. Bowman reminded her. “Things

A TALK WITH MOTHER

will be different next year. The children will have forgotten about Jane. And you must remember to look at the bright side of things," Mrs. Bowman added. "Jane is probably well by now and happier, perhaps, than she was here in Morgan City."

Chapter 8

Gone Forever

The weeks went by very quickly, and the glorious summer vacation that all school children wait for so impatiently was upon them. Nearly every day found Linda at Morgan City Pool with some of her friends. She learned to swim quite well that summer.

Then came Dad's vacation and a marvelous trip out west. They visited several national parks, including Grand Canyon. *Oh, America,*

the Beautiful! thought Linda.

Linda was back at school now. Many new children were in her class. Only about six or seven of the old bunch were with her this year. Cathi and Linda were overjoyed at finding themselves in the same class again. And Mr. Thompson was great! He was very strict, but fair. The kids liked him.

No one ever mentioned Jane, but Linda knew everyone was still thinking about her. Sometimes, when a couple of kids stood talking on the playground, they would suddenly stop smiling and a sad look would come into their eyes. Some looked down so that no one would notice. Linda knew just how it felt: like a heavy weight pressing down on her chest. Would it be like this for the rest of her life?

Mrs. Gunther had promised to make every effort to find Jane's family. She even wrote a letter to the Connors' address in Morgan City, hoping it would be forwarded to their new

GONE FOREVER

home. But the letter was returned. Mrs. Connors must have forgotten to leave a forwarding address at the post office. After that, Mrs. Gunther stopped searching. What else could she have done? Jane's disappearance remained a mystery.

Chapter 9

The Golden Smile

Cathi and Linda crunched through dry leaves on their way home from school. Cathi went out of her way to find little piles of leaves so she could jump on them. "Like dry cereal," she said.

"Aren't the trees beautiful!" Linda remarked, stopping to admire their red, brown, and orange hues.

"Yeah," said Cathi. "But it's kind of a sad

time, too.”

Linda was afraid to ask Cathi what she meant. Was it a sad time because leaves were falling and trees would soon be bare? Or was it because it was just about a year ago that they’d first met Jane?

Cathi wasn’t one to stay with the same idea for very long. “Say,” she said suddenly. “Today’s Tuesday! That new T.V. program will be on. It’s at 7:30. My sister, Amy, read about it in the newspaper. It’s called *The Astronettes* and it’s all about space-girls. They fly around in spaceships and go to other planets. It sounds great!”

“I guess I can finish my homework by 7:30,” Linda said. “I’m not allowed to watch until I’m done.”

“Tonight’s episode tells how the leader punishes an astronette for trying to turn the spaceship back to Earth. Amy told me about it—”

THE GOLDEN SMILE

“Oh, Cathi, you’ll spoil it for me,” cried Linda. “Don’t tell me the whole story!”

That night, Linda turned on the television a few minutes late because a math problem had given her some trouble. Now, the beautiful leader of the astronettes was giving final instructions before lift-off.

“When they put their space helmets on, you won’t be able to tell they’re girls,” thought Linda.

Then the screen shifted to a commercial about *Foremost* Toothpaste.

Good time to get an apple, Linda thought. She ran to the kitchen and was back at the television set in a few seconds.

On the screen, a man was holding a tube of toothpaste. It had the name *Foremost* printed on it. He was saying, “And here she comes, ‘The Girl With the Golden Smile.’”

The man disappeared and a beautiful girl came on. She seemed to float toward the mid-

dle of the screen. Her slim body was wrapped in a long, flowing dress that billowed out behind her. Long blond hair swept backward and then fell to her shoulders as she came to rest. Soon, all you could see of her was her head and shoulders. Tilting her head a little to one side, the girl smiled, showing lovely white teeth.

No wonder they call it the Golden Smile, thought Linda. *It's like the sun just rising—or just coming out from behind a cloud. Like Jane's."* My God, it is Jane!" she cried aloud.

While Linda stared with wide eyes, the man asked from off screen, "How did you get your lovely, golden smile?"

Raising her head slightly, the girl replied, "I brush with Foremost Toothpaste after every meal."

"Even the voice! It's Jane's!" Linda exclaimed.

The girl vanished and the show picked up where it had left off.

THE GOLDEN SMILE

Linda's head spun. How could it be Jane? Jane was fat. This girl was slim. Jane had short hair. This girl's hair was long. Jane always looked sad. This girl looked happy.

It seemed like someone else's voice inside Linda that said, *"Fat people lose weight. Short hair grows long. When things go well, sad people become happy."*

Linda never saw the rest of the program even though she kept her eyes fixed on the television set. Her uneaten apple had rolled under the couch. Finally, she jumped up and ran to phone Cathi.

"Listen, Cathi. That girl on T.V.!"

"Gorgeous!" Cathi replied, "and so brave! She didn't let them return to Earth until their mission was finished. I can't wait until next week's—"

"No, not the astronette leader," Linda interrupted. "The girl in the toothpaste commercial, 'The Girl With the Golden Smile.' Cathi," Linda

was out of breath now. "Cathi, that girl was Jane!"

"You're crazy!" Cathi declared.

"No, Cathi, listen to me. Did you see that smile, those teeth—even her voice? They were just like Jane's!"

"But what about everything else?" Cathi wanted to know. "How can you compare Fatso with that beautiful girl? You're dreaming again, Linda. Better wake up!"

Chapter 10

Linda's Letter

Perhaps Cathi is right and I'd better stop dreaming, Linda thought the next day as they were lining up in the playground. They had asked the other kids about it. A few of them had seen the program, too. But nobody, not even Smart Sue, thought "The Girl With the Golden Smile" could be Jane. In fact, they laughed so hard at the possibility that Linda began to feel foolish.

But Linda couldn't shake off the idea, and

soon Mother began to notice that something was wrong.

“Linda,” Mrs. Bowman said one evening just after dinner. “Linda, I called your name three times before you even looked up. What’s the matter, Honey?”

Linda told her mother about the girl on television. “I’ll watch her very carefully next week,” she concluded. “But what should I do if I’m still not absolutely sure? What then?”

Mrs. Bowman thought for a moment. Then she said, “You know, you could write a letter to the television station. Address it to ‘The Girl With the Golden Smile.’”

The following Tuesday night, Linda wrote her letter. After seeing the girl again, she was almost certain it was Jane. It was way past her bedtime before she finished. Knowing how important this was to Linda, her mother hadn’t interrupted her to send her to bed.

Satisfied, finally, Linda reread her letter one

LINDA'S LETTER

last time before putting it into the envelope.

Dear Girl With the Golden Smile, she had written, I think you are so beautiful. You have the prettiest smile I have ever seen, and such lovely teeth!

There used to be a girl at our school with a smile like yours. Her name was Jane Connors. Could you be Jane? The other kids think I'm crazy for saying so, but I think you are!

Jane (if you are Jane), I know how mean the kids were to you--teasing you like that. But you'll never know how sorry we are now! We were to blame for your accident. And when we couldn't find out what happened to you after that, it nearly drove us crazy! If you are Jane, please forgive us!

I wanted to be your friend but I didn't know how. Can you understand that?

Please, oh please, Girl With the Golden Smile, try to find the time to answer my letter. We just have to know!"

Then she had signed her name.

Chapter 11

A Long Reply

Linda waited impatiently for more than two weeks. Each day, when she returned from school, she asked her mother if a letter had come. Finally, one afternoon she found Mrs. Bowman waiting at the door with a letter in her hand. "You will soon know," she said.

Linda's hand trembled as she took the envelope. It was heavy. "Must be a long letter," she said. Somehow, she couldn't open it.

After a moment, she told her mother, "I'll take the letter up to my room. I want to be alone when I read it."

"I understand," Mrs. Bowman replied.

Sitting on her bed, Linda finished reading the letter. She put her head down on her pillow, letting the letter fall to the floor. She cried for a long time.

People must be made of water! she thought. *We cry when we're happy. We cry when we're sad.*

Linda was happy—very happy . . .

Dear Linda, the letter began, *Yes, I am Jane Connors, but so much has happened to me since the last time I saw you that I don't feel like the same person.*

I was in the hospital for over three months. At first, it looked like I was getting better and they moved me to Riverside Hospital. But, later on, something went wrong and the doctors didn't think I would live. But, you see, I did.

A LONG REPLY

My father was not too well even when he left Mercy Hospital and poor Mother had to face so much trouble all alone!

Still, it was not all wasted. Because of my illness, I lost a lot of weight. Nobody cut my hair, so it grew long. Finally, I was able to get out of bed and have a look at myself in the mirror. I really looked better! Of course, I was very pale and weak, but I did look better!

Even more important, I had time to think—to think how silly I acted to you and the other kids. I felt sorry for myself, as if I were the only one in the world with troubles.

Instead of trying to be friendly, I made everyone mad at me by talking about what I used to have. You kids must have thought I was a snob. Really, I'm not. I was just so unhappy about everything!

But lying in the hospital I learned that there was so much to be thankful for. I was alive! My father could have a second operation to make him well again. Everything would be all right. I was happier

than I had been in a long time.

Dad did have his operation. In a couple of months he was able to go back to work.

While Dad was in the hospital, Mother and I went to visit him every day after school. His roommate, Mr. Brenner, was a television cameraman. He always teased me about my smile—at least I thought he was teasing.

One day, Mr. Brenner asked if I would like to be a television model. Would I! What girl wouldn't? Right then he picked up the phone and made an appointment for me at the studio.

They took many pictures of me and decided that I would do. Now I travel to the television studio on Saturdays when they need me. That's how I became the girl you saw on T.V.

You must write and tell me about yourself. Somehow, I knew that you tried to be my friend. It's all my fault that you couldn't be. I didn't feel like having friends.

Remember me to the other kids at school. I hope

A LONG REPLY

they won't think badly of me any more.

Jane Connors

But there was one thing the letter didn't say.
Jane Connors would walk with crutches for the
rest of her life.

Acknowledgements

To my loving husband, Edward, who would have been
so proud of my maiden voyage as an author

~

To my dear son Jonathan, who encouraged me
early in the book's development and who helps me
in so many ways

~

To my devoted daughter-in-law Cindy,
who is like a daughter to me in all the ways that matter

~

To my daughter-in-law Deborah, whose
kindnesses at key moments have been greatly
appreciated.

~

To my adorable grandchildren, Teddy and Hannah,
who never fail to light up my life

~

To Annie Stine, whose technical assistance
was invaluable

~

Finally, to the hundreds of students
whom I taught throughout the years and
from whom I learned so much

About the Author

Sylvia C. Garfield was born in Brooklyn, New York, and graduated from Brooklyn College prior to receiving a master's degree in Reading Science from Hofstra University. For more than twenty years, she was a teacher and a reading specialist at the Shore Road School in Bellmore, New York, on Long Island. She currently lives in California.

