Angelina's Christmas

Illustrations by Helen Craig  Story by Katharine Holabird
Christmas was coming, and everyone at Angelina’s school was working hard to prepare for the Christmas show. Angelina and the other children stayed after their lessons to rehearse and help decorate the hall.

When Angelina left school it was already dark outside. Large snowflakes were falling and Angelina was so excited that she danced along the pavement.
The cottages in the village looked warm and welcoming, with holly wreaths on the doors and Christmas lights shining in all the windows; but the very last cottage was cold and dark. Angelina peeped in the window and saw an old man huddled by a tiny fire.
Angelina ran the rest of the way home and found her mother and little cousin Henry in the kitchen. She asked her mother about the man who lived all alone in the cottage.

“Oh, that’s Mr Bell,” her mother replied. “He used to be the village postman, but he’s too old to work now.”

Angelina decided that she wanted to make a Christmas surprise for Mr Bell, so Mrs Mouseling gave her some dough to make biscuits shaped like stars, bells and trees.
Henry had a piece of dough too, and he made a nice big Father Christmas biscuit. “Look!” he said proudly. “I’m going to see Father Christmas tonight and give him this biscuit myself!”

“Father Christmas only comes very late at night after everyone has gone to bed,” Angelina explained. “Why don’t you leave your special biscuit out on a plate for him?”
Henry started to cry. "No!" he shouted. "I want to see Father Christmas!"

"Don’t be such a crybaby, Henry," Angelina scolded, but Henry wouldn’t stop crying.
Next afternoon Angelina and her mother packed a basket with the biscuits, mince pies and fruit for Mr Bell. "Don't you want to help Angelina take the presents to Mr Bell?" asked Mrs Mouseling, but Henry only shook his head.
Then Angelina and her father went out to find a Christmas tree for Mr Bell. Henry followed Angelina and Mr Mouseling all the way to Mr Bell’s cottage, but he still wouldn’t speak to them.
The old postman was amazed and delighted to see his visitors. He invited Angelina and her father inside, and then he noticed Henry standing alone in the snow.

“Come in, my friend!” said Mr Bell with a smile, and he picked Henry up and brought him in near the fire.

Mr Bell’s eyes were bright and twinkling. “Wait here a moment,” he said, and disappeared up the stairs. Then he came down looking . . .
just like FATHER CHRISTMAS!

“This is the red costume I wore once when Father Christmas needed someone to take his place at the village Christmas party,” said Mr Bell with a chuckle, and he sat down with Henry on his knee. While Mr Mouseling made tea and Angelina decorated the tree, Henry listened to Mr Bell’s stories.
“I used to go out on my bicycle, no matter what the weather was like, to deliver presents to all the children in the countryside. One year there was a terrible snow storm and all the roads were covered with snow. I had to deliver the toys on a sledge, and if I hadn’t glimpsed the village lights blinking in the distance I would have been lost out in the storm.” Henry listened with wide eyes.
When it was time to go Henry reached into his pocket. "I made this," he said, "and I'd like to give it to you." Out of his pocket he took his big Father Christmas biscuit and gave it to Mr Bell.

"This is the best Christmas surprise I've had for many years," said Mr Bell, thanking Henry and Angelina for their presents. Angelina said she wished Mr Bell would come to her school show in his Father Christmas costume.

"That would be a pleasure," he said, smiling.
Mr Bell kept his promise: he came to the Christmas show in his red costume and watched Angelina and
her friends dressed as sugar plum fairies dancing the Nutcracker Suite.
Later all the children gathered round Mr Bell, and Henry felt proud as Mr Bell handed out the Christmas presents and entertained everyone with stories about his adventures as a postman.
Mr Bell was never lonely at Christmas again, because every year he was invited to come to Angelina’s school show dressed as Father Christmas.