

26 December 2011 | voaspecialenglish.com

## Short Story: 'Angelina's Dress'

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JUNE SIMMS: And now, for the season of Christmas, we present "Angelina's Dress," written for VOA Special English. Here is Doug Johnson with our story.

DOUG JOHNSON: It was dinner time at the Wilsons' house. Henry and Susan Wilson and their two children were starting their meal. The food was left from their Thanksgiving dinner two days before.

There was turkey soup. There was turkey meat mixed with potatoes and covered with turkey gravy. There were even small pieces of the traditional Thanksgiving bird with the salad greens.

Eleven year old Angelina Wilson asked:

SADIE GIDNER: Are we having turkey ice cream, too?

DOUG JOHNSON: Her father covered his mouth for a second. Then he said:

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: Angelina, have you forgotten that I had no job for a whole year? Now I have work again. You should be very thankful.

DOUG JOHNSON: He did not sound angry, however. Henry Wilson also felt he had eaten enough turkey -- more than enough.

Angelina wore her brown hair pulled back into a single braid, and she turned it thoughtfully. She regretted her comment. She regretted it especially because she had planned to ask her parents for something special. She knew that eating put them in good spirits.

Then she decided to act on her plan.

SADIE GIDNER: I am very sorry I said that about the turkey! But unless I get a new dress, I will not look good for the Christmas Festival.

DOUG JOHNSON: The Festival was the winter holiday celebration of a group she belonged to: the Avalon Girls' Service Club. The city's Avalon neighborhood was large. All the sixth and seventh grade girls from miles around took part.

Usually the club members worked hard. They wrote cheerful cards for hospital patients. They cooked meals for the homeless. Or they helped old people with their shopping needs.

But the Christmas Festival was different. The Community Center was brightly lit and ready for the big event. The girls wore party clothes. They sang and danced, and many people from the neighborhood came to see them perform. But for this special celebration, Angelina had only a plain gray, wool dress that she had worn to the event last year. And now it was a little too short. Angelina was growing.

Her best friend Margo kept saying:

DAISY BRACKEN: Mydress is blue, and beautiful.

DOUG JOHNSON: She said the dress was a copy of one designed by Giulio Someone of Rome. Or, was it Paris?

Angelina appealed to her parents.

SADIE GIDNER: I stopped into Forbes Department Store after school the other day. There is the most beautiful red dress there, just my size.

DOUG JOHNSON: Her mother put her fork down.

JOAN KORNBLITH: Well, we cannot buy it. We have to be careful. You never know when I might lose MY job.

SADIE GIDNER: But I have at least some money. Or you could give me the dress for Christmas.

DOUG JOHNSON: She had earned a little money by staying with her younger brother Louis when her parents went out at night.

JOAN KORNBLITH: Angelina, you need to save for much more important things, like books and school clothes.

SADIE GIDNER: But Mother --

DOUG JOHNSON: Mr. Wilson intervened.

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: We want to have nice Christmas gifts for both you and your brother, Angelina. You do not want to be selfish, do you?

DOUG JOHNSON: That gave nine-year-old Louis his chance to speak up. Louis always had to get into the action.

ADAM KONE: You just care about you, Angie. You are selfish.

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: Louis, be quiet! Everybody, just you eat your turkey.

DOUG JOHNSON: Angelina turned her braid some more. All hope was not gone. There was a sign in the Forbes store window that said "layaway." She decided that she would return to the store and ask about that. Maybe it was something that could help her.

After school the next day, Angelina went directly to the place in the store where girls' clothing was sold. The saleswoman there wore a label on her dress with the name "Mrs. Harding." Angelina asked her what "layaway" meant.

Mrs. Harding explained that buyers could choose a dress on layaway and pay just part of the total cost. That part was called a deposit. But the buyer could not take the dress home. The buyer had to return in two weeks to pay the rest of the price. If not, the dress would go back where anyone could buy it. And, the store would keep some of the deposit.

Angelina pulled ten worn dollar bills from her coat pocket. She showed them to the salesperson.

SADIE GIDNER: This is enough for you to hold 'my' dress for me, right?

CATY WEAVER: Yes, it is. But you must come back in two weeks to pay the rest. Or, the store keeps 'your' dress and a little of your first payment.

DOUG JOHNSON: Angelina felt like jumping into the air. She could get the dress on layaway. Angelina was so happy that she told Mrs. Harding about the Avalon Service Club's work and its Christmas party. Mrs. Harding wished her luck. She sounded as if she meant it.

Angelina almost floated out of the store. As she left, she saw a sign in one window that she did not read. She supposed it said something about the wonderful layaway plan.

(MUSIC)

Angelina did not tell her parents about the layaway plan, however. She was sure she could earn enough money baby-sitting to pay for the dress. She had stayed with Louis several times, after all.

Angelina shook and suffered in the cold December wind as she asked other families in the Avalon neighborhood for work. Could she baby-sit for them?

One after another, they said the same things. "We already have a sitter. Or, "It is fine for you to watch bigger kids. But we have a new baby. We need someone older." Seeing the look on her face, most were kind.

Then, happily, Margo's parents decided that Angelina should help Margo's little sister make new clothing for her dolls. It seemed that Margo could not sew very well. Angelina, however, was just excellent at sewing. Sure enough, the dolls' dresses turned out beautifully. Margo's parents paid Angelina twenty dollars.

Still, she was far from having enough money for her dress. The days passed way too fast. She felt helpless as the date for her final payment arrived. Angelina did not have enough money for "her" dress.

She returned sadly to Forbes' Store. This time, she read the sign in the window. It said, "Going Out of Business in January."

When Angelina arrived at the girls department, she again spoke to the saleswoman, Mrs. Harding.

SADIE GIDNER: I do not have enough money for the dress for the Festival.

DOUG JOHNSON: Then she saw that Mrs. Harding's eyes were red. She looked like she had been crying. Mrs. Harding said:

CATY WEAVER: You know, the store is closing. I am losing my job. And I would like to make one of my last sales here to someone who belongs to your service club. You do good work. I would like you to have this dress for your Festival. I will pay the rest of what you owe so you can have it.

DOUG JOHNSON: Angelina thought how much she wanted the red dress. But she remembered how worried and sad her father had felt during that long, long year when he had no work.

She chose her words carefully.

SADIE GIDNER: That is very good of you, Mrs. Harding. But you will need all your money until you get another job. I know about that.

CATY WEAVER: Are you sure? Are you very sure? I meant what I said.

SADIE GIDNER: Yes, I am very sure.

CATY WEAVER: Well, I will pay to return all of the ten-dollar deposit that you left with us.

DOUG JOHNSON: Angelina expressed thanks and closed her hand around the worn dollar bills.

SADIE GIDNER: I hope you find another job very soon.

DOUG JOHNSON: With that, she said goodbye and ran out of the store into the cold street.

Outside, a man who looked like Santa Claus was asking people for money to help poor people. Other people were ringing Christmas bells.

Angelina stood still for a moment on the snowy sidewalk. Then, quite suddenly, she gave the man dressed as Santa Claus several dollars.

SADIE GIDNER: Mrs. Harding is not the only one wants to help other people.

DOUG JOHNSON: Just as suddenly she decided that maybe she would buy some material to add length to her old gray wool dress. And she started to plan how she would sew bright red ribbons along the neckline.

Who knew, maybe she could look good at the Festival after all. But, in any event, she would have fun. After all, it was Christmas time.

Angelina turned around in the icy December wind and went back inside the store.

JUNE SIMMS: Our story "Angelina's Dress" was written by Jerilyn Watson. Sadie Gidner played Angelina. Adam Kone was Louis. Mr. and Mrs. Wilson were played by Christopher Cruise and Katherine Cole. Caty Weaver was our producer and Mrs. Harding. Join us again next week for another American story in VOA Special English.