Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Opening extract from

Jamie and Angus Together

Written by

Anne Fine

Published by

Walker

All text is copyright of the author and illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

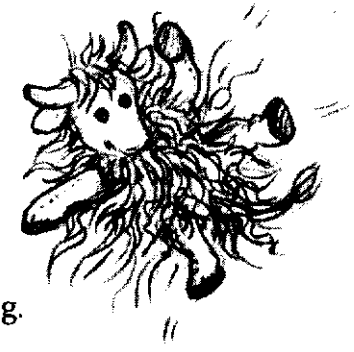
The Very Mysterious Present



Jamie pushed a chair up
to the table to have a serious talk
with Angus, his little Highland bull.
He stood Angus so the two of them
were nose to nose, then looked
deep into his eyes.

"Bella's coming to tea," he warned his favourite soft toy and his very best friend. "Remember Bella?"

Angus looked anxious. Perhaps, thought Jamie, he was remembering the time Bella threw him up so high he hit the ceiling.





Or the time Bella squashed his stumpy little legs.

Or the time Bella dropped him in the paddling pool, and he'd had to stand on the radiator for nearly a whole week to get dry, and then have the worst of the tangles brushed out of him.

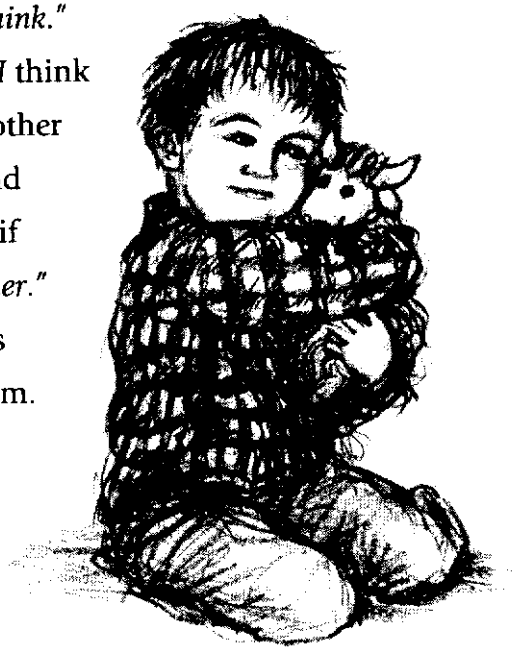


No wonder he wasn't looking too happy.

"It's not *my* fault she's coming," Jamie explained to Angus. "*I* didn't invite her. Mummy did. She's very friendly with Bella's mother, and Bella's just tagging along to save them getting a babysitter."

Angus didn't stop looking doubtful.

"She doesn't *mean* to be rough," Jamie told Angus. "It's just the way she is. Mummy calls her bouncy and Daddy says she doesn't stop and *think*." He scowled. "And *I* think she just sails into other people's houses and treats their toys as if they belonged to *her*."



He pulled Angus closer to cuddle him. "This time," he promised, "I am going to protect you. You wait and see."

Angus didn't look confident and Jamie could understand why. Jamie had tried to protect him from Bella before. Once, when she came, Jamie had rolled Angus up inside his pyjamas and hidden him in his bed. But Bella had suddenly started her own roly-poly-over-Jamie's-bed game, and he'd had to pull Angus out fast. Bella had snatched Angus and, before Jamie could stop her, had thrown him up at the ceiling – really hard.





The next time Bella came, Jamie had carried a stool all the way along the hall so he could hide Angus on the top shelf of the bookcase. But while Bella was rushing one of Jamie's teddies to her play hospital, her sharp eyes had noticed Angus peeping out from between the books. She'd dragged Jamie's toy box out of his bedroom so she could stand on it to fetch Angus down. Then she had put Angus in her hospital and squashed his poor little stumpy legs all over the place while she looked at his tummy.





The last time Bella came was the worst. In desperation, Jamie had hidden Angus at the bottom of the garden, deep among the daisies. But when Bella got as high as she could on Jamie's climbing frame, she'd suddenly spotted Angus's little grey horns poking out above the flowers. She'd hurried over to see whose horns they were, then snatched Angus up to cuddle him. Jamie ran to the rescue and crashed into her by mistake.



Bella had let go of Angus and he'd sailed over the lawn and landed – *splosh!* – in the paddling pool.

"She doesn't mean to be horrid," Jamie told Angus again. "She just gets noisy and bouncy. She really can't help it."

But Angus was still looking terribly trembly.



Jamie made up his mind. "This time," he promised his best friend in the whole wide world, "I'm going to hide you somewhere even Bella won't find you."

Where was the best place?



In the fridge, among the lettuces in the plastic drawer at the bottom?

No. Far too cold.

In the oven? But someone might decide to turn it on, and Angus might get cooked by mistake.

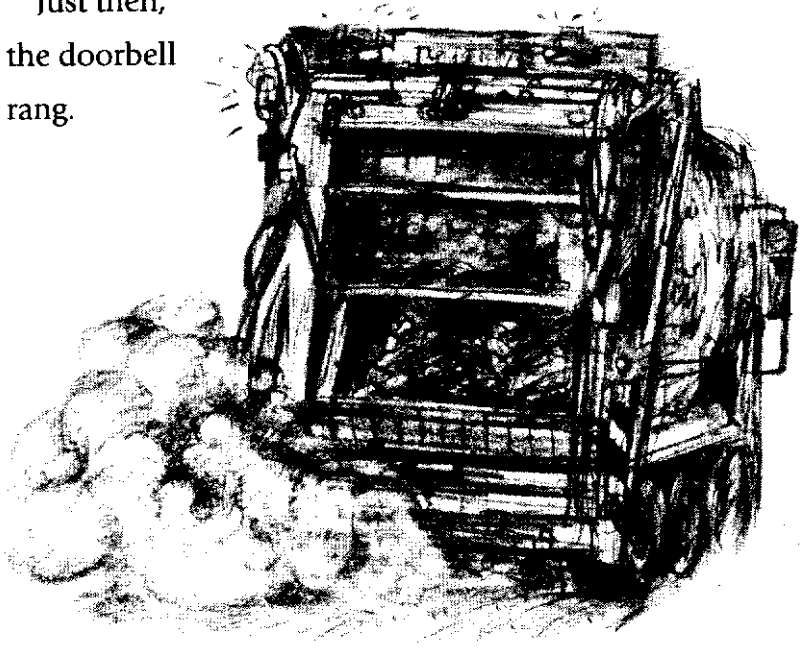


No. Definitely not in the oven.



He could wrap Angus up carefully and hide him in the rubbish bin. Bella would never look there. But even if he warned his mother, she might get busy and forget. Without even thinking she might put the bag in the wheelie bin. Then the bin men might come along and— Jamie couldn't bear to think about what might happen after that.

Just then, the doorbell rang.



Out of time! While Mummy went to open the door, Jamie grabbed Angus and ran to the nearest cupboard to hide. In it was all the stuff Jamie's mother and father used to send letters and post parcels. There were envelopes and piles of paper. There were boxes and cardboard tubes. There was sticky tape. There was a pile of odd bits of wrapping paper left over from birthdays and Christmas. There was even a box of fancy stick-on ribbon roses.

The cupboard was full to bursting. But Jamie still managed to squeeze in somehow, with Angus trembling in his arms.

And that was the moment when Jamie had his brilliant idea.

From inside the cupboard, Jamie could hear Bella running down the hall, calling out his name. He heard her opening the doors to all the rooms, looking for him, then banging them shut again. She thundered upstairs to see if he was there. Her shouts and thumpings and bangings were so loud they covered all the noise Jamie and Angus were trying so hard not to make in the cupboard. They covered the





sound of the wrapping paper unfolding around Angus's hooves. They covered the sound of the sticky tape unravelling. They even covered the rustling in the box of ribbon roses.

Footsteps came closer. Jamie could hear his mother calling him. "Jamie, you have to be polite. Come out and play with Bella."

Jamie took a deep breath and pushed open the cupboard door, ready to crawl out. "We have to be very brave now," he whispered to Angus. "And we have to wish ourselves luck."

All afternoon, a very mysterious present sat on the table.

"Who is it *for*?" Bella kept asking everyone. "There isn't a label on it and that's really strange."

That wasn't the only strange thing about the present. It was a very peculiar shape and covered in all different sorts of bright shiny wrapping paper. The bits were stuck together with sticky tape, like patchwork.

And there were ribbon roses all over it, as if someone had wrapped the present in the dark, squashed up in a small space, then stuck a rose over every little hole and tear in the paper, and another over every messy crumple.

If you looked carefully, you could see two tiny spyholes at the front, as if someone hidden in there might be peeping out.

And if you looked even more carefully, you'd see, just underneath, two even tinier holes, as if somebody might possibly need them for breathing.



Bella wasn't the looking carefully sort.

All she noticed was the bright glossy paper and the ribbons sparkling all over.

"Perhaps it's for me," she kept telling everybody. "It doesn't say who it's for, so it might be for me."

"I don't think it's for you," Jamie kept telling her back.

"We could open it and see," said Bella.



Did the present tremble? Jamie thought it did.

Perhaps Jamie's mother saw the little tremble too, because she suddenly said, "I'm sorry, Bella, but it's a rule that you can't open a present unless it's definitely for you."

She winked at Jamie.

If Jamie had been able to do it yet, he would have winked back.





"Let's go and play little lost bear cubs," he said to Bella. "You'll like that game. It's rough and noisy and bouncy and you don't have to *think*."



After tea, when Bella had
gone safely back to her own house,
Jamie's mother lifted the very mysterious present
off the table and handed it to Jamie.

"I think this might be for you," she said, smiling.

"Yes. I think it might be too," Jamie admitted.

He took his time unwrapping it. Playing with Bella had been a lot of fun because she was really rough and noisy and bouncy and didn't *think,* and that was the best way to play bear cubs.



But unwrapping Angus would be better. It would be just as wonderful as unwrapping him when he first came.

No.

It would be even better this time, because he'd had him long enough to love him even more.