

Oh Yes We Will!

A Liam and Justin Christmas story

by Rob Keeley

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“Liam, it’s no good shouting, is it?” Justin’s voice was heard outside the school hall. “You’ll just have to find someone else. Now don’t get wound up, it’s nearly Christmas!”

Liam strode past the school Christmas tree. He was wearing a red robe trimmed with artificial white fur, and a cardboard crown, and painted on his face was a black goatee that didn’t match his own, blond hair. Justin followed. Over his school uniform he wore an old black waistcoat that had been his Grandad’s, and on his head was a flat cap.

“The Juniper Players,” Liam bemoaned. “Our first panto. And I get to the final rehearsal, and what do I find? The villain’s playing football. We’re meant to be doing this, on Friday.”

“There was no such thing as the Juniper Players ‘til a few weeks ago,” Justin reminded him. “And then you only started it ‘cause Kimberley was doing a Christmas play as well.”

“And ours is *so* much better than theirs,” Liam said. “Have you seen what they’re doing? It’s about a girl band, and all they’re doing is miming to songs.” He adjusted his crown. “We’ve got a new and original modern panto, by Liam, never performed anywhere in the world before. *Prince Rockstar and the Magic Guitar –*”

Justin sniggered, then quickly turned it into a sneeze as Liam looked at him.

“– is gonna take the world by storm,” Liam said. “Come on. We’ll just have to rehearse the panto without Prince Jasper for now.”

Justin grinned. “Oh no, we won’t.”

Liam looked puzzled. “Oh yes, we will.”

“OH NO WE WON’T!” yelled Justin.

“Oh...” Liam glared at him. “Oh, shut up.”

“I don’t like this.” Ben came into the hall. Over his uniform he wore a cut-down version of the pink dress his big sister had worn for her Prom, an apron, and a bright red wig. He was looking very uncomfortable. “Why do I have to be the Dame?”

He looked at Justin.

“I’m only in this at all ‘cause Liam let me off the fiver I owe him. I’ve just had to walk through the cookery area, like this. You should have seen the faces on Purple Class.”

“Ah, come on,” Liam said. “Let’s get on with it. We’ve only got about ten minutes before the end of break.” He looked around. “Where’s Big Ryan? And where’s the Princess?”

Into the hall came Davina. She was followed by Big Ryan, who was holding a toy guitar, and a box full of percussion instruments they’d managed to borrow from the Infant Department.

Davina was wearing a party dress, and a plastic tiara, and a look of hatred, which she aimed at Liam.

“I’ve just seen the script!” she told him. “And I am *not* happy. You haven’t changed anything! You said you’d give me more of a part, and all I’ve got is this “Ah

me! When is my Prince coming” baloney.” She sniffed. “You’re dealing with a *proper* actress here, you know.”

“Actress!” Liam hooted. “Just ‘cause you were an extra in that cheese commercial! And then you were only there for about three seconds.”

“It’s not my fault the crackers got cut!” Davina pushed her tiara back from her face. “Either I get a better part, or I’m going.”

“All right,” Liam said. “You can do another song. Just after the bit with Clara the Cook. OK, Ben? Now, what songs do you know, Davina?”

Davina thought. “I can do a medley of football songs.”

“That’ll do,” Liam said. “It’s modern. You can have a football, with your sceptre. Now, let’s get on.” He turned to Justin. “At the start of Act Two –”

“The whole play only lasts ten minutes!” Justin said.

“– Act Two,” Liam said firmly, “you’ve got your scene with Davina. I mean, Princess Rubina. Now remember, Justin, you’re Jake. You’re only a poor, simple stable-boy, but you’re madly in love with the Princess –”

There was a pause while Justin and Davina looked at each other and made *euww* faces.

“But she’s only got eyes for one man,” Liam finished. “And that’s Prince Rockstar, the Royal Rocker.” He took a bow.

“Hey.” Big Ryan held the guitar out. “Your Highness. You left this in the loo.”

Liam snatched it. “Come on. Centre stage.”

Davina struck a pose, while Justin stood alongside her like someone waiting for the last bus.

“Oh, your Highness,” Justin mumbled in embarrassment. “How many nights have I lain awake and thought of how you smell.”

Liam grabbed a crumpled copy of the script from inside his robe.

“*Smile!*”

Justin beamed.

“NO!” Liam yelled. “Thought of how you *smile!*”

“Oh, that isn’t my fault!” Justin went over and looked at the page Liam was prodding with his finger. “I couldn’t read mine properly. You shouldn’t have let that Work Experience girl do the photocopying. Told you to ask Mrs Dexter.”

Liam took a deep breath.

“Go on. Princess.”

“Oh, Jake,” Davina shrilled, “my heart belongs to another. The one I love is brave, you know, and plays guitar just like a pro.”

“How about that?” Liam smiled. “Rhyming.”

“I’ve often tried to tell you how I feel,” Justin muttered on. “But every time I saw you at the stables, I just went hoarse.”

Liam laughed. “And comedy, too. I tell you, I’m wasted here.”

“But what’s this I hear?” Davina put a hand to her ear. “I hear my loved one approaching on his horse.”

There was the sound of a pair of maracas being shaken.

“RYAN!” Liam yelled. “What’s that?”

“I haven’t got a coconut in this lot,” Big Ryan explained. He rummaged in the box. “You can have a tambourine, a triangle, or bongos.”

“Oh, forget it!” Liam moved to stand behind Davina and Justin. “Right. Now I come on.” He leapt boldly and heroically forward. “Ah—”

His foot caught in his robe, sending him headlong. Big Ryan winced.

“You all right, Liam?” Justin helped his friend to his feet. “You OK, mate?”

Liam straightened his crown, and blinked.

“Fine. Yeah.” He rubbed his nose. “Now.” He raised his voice again to actor level. “I heard there was a party going. Shall we get the music flowing?” He turned. “Now, Ryan, that’s your cue, put the CD on. And I’ll mime with the guitar.”

“Coming up.” Big Ryan pressed a button on the school’s music system.

The next moment, the school hall resounded to the sound of a saxophone being played. Bewildered, Liam went on strumming the toy guitar for a moment before he realised.

“Track seven, I said!”

“Ah, sorry.” Ryan pressed another button.

“You’re doing this on purpose, aren’t you?” Liam hastily grabbed up the toy guitar again as electric twelve-string guitar came over the speaker system. For several moments, he strode around the hall, posing, glaring up at the ceiling when the moody bit came on, while the others stood and stared at him.

Then, a woman’s voice was heard to sing along.

The others burst out laughing.

“Nice singing, Liam!” Ben pushed his wig aside.

“Well, cut it there!” Liam yelled. “How many times have we practised this?”

“We didn’t have the player, last time,” Ryan said. “Emerald Class had it for Sing-Along Radio. Remember?” He pressed a button and the song cut out mid-bar. The speakers blew a raspberry.

“Now...” Liam said. “At the end of the song, Prince Jasper comes on, trying to chat up Clara the Cook –”

“Glad he’s not here, then,” Ben muttered.

“– so she’ll bake him the pie with the magic potion,” Liam explained. “And he’ll try to get me to eat that in the next scene, the Royal Feast.” He turned to Justin. “Your Mum did say she’d make us some fairy cakes?”

“Yeah,” Justin said.

“I dunno who’s going to play Jasper.” Liam turned to Big Ryan. “We really need another actor...”

“Ah, sorry.” Big Ryan shook his head. “I do sound. I don’t do acting. Not since our Nativity Play, when the stable fell down.”

“That was years ago!” Liam said.

“Still hurts,” Big Ryan said. “They said it was the cord from my dressing-gown that did it.”

“I’ll ask Daniel,” Justin said. “He might be Jasper. If you let him play in goal next term.”

“Yeah...” Liam brightened. “Good idea, J. And he’d probably fit the armour, too. OK. Meanwhile, let’s push on to the finale.”

“About time.” Ben moved forward. “At last, I get to do something.”

“In the final scene,” Liam said, “Prince Jasper’s been vanquished, so we don’t need him. Jake the stable-boy marries Clara the Cook. I’m married to Princess Thing. And we all live happily ever after. Now, form a line. I found a good song for this. First track on the other disk, Ryan.”

They all linked arms.

“Music!”

Ryan played a jolly song to which they all sang, danced and kicked their legs a bit.

Within ten seconds, Justin had forgotten the words, Ben was helpless with laughter and Davina was looking annoyed.

“Stop!” Liam bellowed. “STOP!!!”

“LIAM!”

They all turned to see Mrs Richardson, Head of the Infant Department.

“*What’s* all this noise?”

“Mr Gillespie said we could use the hall for our dress rehearsal, miss,” the Prince said.

“Well, you’ll have to finish, now.” Mrs Richardson looked at her watch. “The bell went two minutes ago. We’ve got a rehearsal of our own to do.”

Liam found himself surrounded by assorted Shepherds and Kings. On his left was a small but fierce-looking Mary, who was looking at him as if to say: *Get out of my stable.*

“And get that mess off your face before you go back into class!” Mrs Richardson told him.

“Yes, miss.” Liam picked up his guitar. “Sorry, miss.”

He led his actors aside.

“I don’t think it’s really working. Is it?” He turned to Justin. “If we do that for the class...”

“We’ll get slaughtered,” Justin said.

“I’ve had enough of this.” Ben pulled his wig off and scratched his head. The Infants were pointing and giggling at the sight of a boy in a dress.

Liam turned to see Big Ryan packing the instruments away. He turned back. The Princess was already heading for her Music lesson, pulling off her tiara as she went.

He removed the script from his robe. The pages had all got in the wrong order.

He took his crown off.

“You know what, J?” He led Justin away towards their classroom. “I think we’ll just mime to some songs.”

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If you’d like to read more about Liam and Justin, read one of Rob Keeley’s short story books:

The Alien in the Garage and Other Stories
The (Fairly) Magic Show and Other Stories
The Dinner Club and Other Stories

Details at www.robkeeley.co.uk

Happy Christmas!