

Leanne and the Surprising Christmas



Peter A Johnson

Illustrated by Ann-Marie Stokes

Dedicated to Beth and Fran who still love
a good Christmas celebration and to their
children, Jude, Lucy, Harry and Isabella,
who are the joy of their lives

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About the author:

Peter Johnson is approaching retirement from teaching Mathematics after 36 years, but with no intention of retiring fully. This story completes the tale of Leanne and Simon. Whether it finds a sequel for an older Leanne and Simon remains to be seen.

Chapter One:

Getting Ready For Her Big Moment

“But Mum, I can’t sing anymore! Do I have to go? I am so tired.”

Leanne looked at her Mum with those big, pleading eyes that hoped for some mercy and some motherly understanding. There was none forthcoming.

“Leanne, you have to go. It is the last Carol Service and you are singing the first verse of Once in Royal David’s City. You can’t just opt out.”

“But Mum ...”

“But nothing, Leanne. I don’t want to hear any more about it. Eat your ham sandwich and then you can go and get ready.”

Leanne looked down at the uninviting ham sandwich and decided resistance was futile. She knew her Mum. She would not give in nor indulge her one bit. There was no way out; she had to go and sing her solo. She decided there was nothing more to be done than to eat the sandwich and get on with it. The Carol Service was in just under an hour’s time and there was no going back now. It was St. Jude’s College second Carol Service, which marked the end of term and the start of the Christmas holidays.

Her Dad and brother Jack were out for a run and were not expected back for another 30 minutes, by which time her Mum and Leanne would be on their way to the School for the Carol Service. Jack and her Dad would get to the College Chapel just in time for the service no doubt, so there was no help for her predicament from her Dad either. Leanne would simply just have to get on with it and do the best she could, nerves or not.

Leanne had been told to be there at least 30 minutes before the service was due to commence to get ready and warm up. She was part of the School choir and had been given her first chance to sing a solo this year, which was a huge honour. It didn’t seem like an honour right this moment to Leanne. It seemed more like a big dark and scary cloud about to break on the weary plains of her life.

Leanne dutifully got changed and smartened up for the service with a little persuasion from her Mum. Once ready, her Mum and Leanne made their way to College on foot. It wasn’t a long way and they could walk it in 10 minutes. As they stepped outside into the cold, dark air and onto the pavement, a few soft flakes of snow began to fall gently onto their coats.

“Mum, it’s snowing!”

“I know. Isn’t that exciting? One week to go before Christmas and maybe we’ll get a white Christmas for once.”

“That would be great. But what about getting up to Granny’s? Wouldn’t Staffsbury be too far with snow on the ground?”

Staffsbury was a good 200 miles from London. Furthermore, it was at the start of the higher ground beyond, that usually attracted more snow on that account.

“It really depends how much snow, Leanne? It would have to be quite bad to stop us from getting there tomorrow. The roads are very good up until the final few miles.”

“I can’t remember the last time we were up at Granny’s at Christmas and there was snow.”

The lamppost along the street showed up the snowflakes softly falling down. They rounded the corner of their road and out onto the High Street. There were a few more people out on the High, leaving

shops laden with presents or rushing off to drinks parties. Some were no doubt making their way to St Jude's College for the College's final Carol Service of the term.

At the corner of the High Street and College Lane they turned into the Lane towards the main College buildings. They passed the old classrooms, now darkened for the holidays on their right, before they came to the big main door of the College. The door led into the front Quad. The big old wooden door was open and there at the side, as always, was Mr Bowlam, the porter.

"Evening Mrs Prendle."

"Evening Jim."

"Evening Leanne. Ready for your big moment?"

"I'm not sure Mr Bowlam. I'm a little nervous to say the least."

"I'm sure you will be fine, Leanne. Most of the choir have gone through to the Choristers' Practice Room. You better get your skates on."

"Thank you. Mum, I am going to rush on. See you later."

"All the best Leanne," Mr Bowlam encouraged, as she sped off across the quad towards the Chapel. Underfoot was the cobbled stone that countless students had trod over the 300 years of the College's existence. She had often wondered at the history of this place and how many students over those years had trod through this Quad. It made her feel somehow quite humble, that she was in a long line of students who had spent the years of their childhood amongst these buildings.

The snow had by now, sadly, stopped falling. There was only the faintest dusting of snow on the ground. It was cold enough to snow, but the clouds held fast their store of snow. Even though she had gloves on she felt the cold through the fleece. The moon was hidden behind

the snow-heavy clouds and there was a light breeze, even here in the Quad.

Looking up she saw the imposing front of the College Chapel looming ahead in the dark.

