

DOCTOR WHO



Behind You
Part One

By Mark Williams

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Ceri was reading a magazine in the backstage lounge when the shadow appeared.

It was Christmas Eve, and the matinee had just started. As female understudy, Ceri had to be ready to perform, should the star of the Palace Theatre's first ever pantomime fall ill. But halfway through a six week run, Jade Martin had fended off every last seasonal bug, and Ceri had given up hope of ever stepping into Cinderella's glass slippers.

The shadow was cast onto the wall, opposite the open door behind which Ceri sat. The outline was human-shaped, apart from the head – a long muzzle, topped with a pair of antlers like a stag. It was Tom, the male understudy, wearing a mask from the Props Room, she knew it! Ceri tiptoed over to hide behind the door, and was about to jump out at Tom when he spoke in a strange voice.

“The revel begins,” he said.

For a moment, it seemed as if he was about to enter the room. Then the audience applauded in the auditorium above, and the shadow of the antlers receded as he stepped back into the corridor.

Ceri shivered. Typical of Tom to take a joke too far! She marched out into the corridor, catching up with him by the stairs leading up to the stage. He had his back to her, but it was Tom alright, she recognised his jumper.

“Very funny, Rudolph!” said Ceri.

Tom turned around. And Ceri gasped.

The stag's head was like no mask she'd ever seen. This was alive, with eyes like dark pearls behind blinking lids, breath snorting out through a wet nose. Its neck was soft and furry, disappearing below the top of Tom's jumper, but the rest of the body was human. “The revel begins,” it said again. Ceri ran back down the corridor. The Props Room was open to her right, and she dived inside, slamming the door and turning the latch.

She was just getting her breath back when she felt a hand on her shoulder, and screamed.

“You look scared,” said the man. He was tall, lean and wore a dark coat. White shirt. Black boots. Eyes sharper than frost gleamed beneath jagged eyebrows.

“I do tend to, when people jump out at me!” Ceri fumed. Not to mention when they turn into stags, she thought.

“I’m the Doctor,” said the man. “Who are you?”

“Ceri. I’m the understudy.”

The Doctor frowned at the room. It was packed with props, from spare heads for the pantomime horse, to a large, blue police box. He waved a device like an usher’s torch in the air. It made a soft whirring sound. “According to the sonic screwdriver, this is definitely the Bishop’s Palace,” he said.

“About a hundred years ago. Now it’s the Palace Theatre,” said Ceri.

“No, it isn’t,” said the Doctor.

Still giddy with fear, Ceri couldn’t help herself. “Oh yes it is!” she grinned.

“I don’t get it,” said the Doctor.

“It’s a panto joke.”

“No, I mean panto. I don’t get it. Skirts. Songs. Endless puns.”

“Well audiences love it, even if you don’t,” said Ceri. “There’s a full house up there right now.”

“So tell me,” said the Doctor, “if they love it so much, how come we haven’t heard a single laugh or round of applause since we started talking?”

Ceri listened. The Doctor was right.

The auditorium above their heads had fallen completely silent.

“Where did everybody go?” Ceri whispered. Inside the auditorium, the lights were off and everything was quiet.

“They’re still here,” said the Doctor. He shone the sonic screwdriver along the nearest row. A man was frozen with a toffee halfway to his mouth. Next to him, a woman’s face was fixed in a wide smile. Row upon row it was the same story.

“Talk about a captive audience,” said Ceri.

“Oy! No panto-ing on my watch,” said the Doctor.

Up on stage, a single spotlight suddenly pierced the darkness, shining down on a woman wearing tattered rags. “That’s Jade, she’s Cinderella!” said Ceri, following the Doctor as he bounded up onto the stage. Taking care not to step into the spotlight, he scanned Jade with the sonic.

“Oh no it isn’t,” he said.

Jade turned to look at them, and her face began to change. Copper-coloured fur grew out of her cheeks. Dog-like ears sprouted on top of her head. Jade’s mouth shrank and opened, revealing the pointed teeth of a fox.

“The revel begins!” the fox said.

To be continued...

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