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Shadows on the Wall

by Dan Judd

Here I am, CJ, back at the beginning. Theatre royalty at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. It's the avenue I'm taking you to. Well passed 40 but still naughty on 42nd Street. Art mirroring life as I've gone from bright young thing to faded star.

They say it's my last hoorah. But I've got the last laugh. The pictures haven't gotten too small it's the audiences. Now the stage is set for the silver screen and I'm ready for my close-up.

I should explain, the show is being filmed 'as live' over two performance for a limited cinema release. An unexpected bonus as I'm the third lead in the fourth change of cast since the show was revived. I chuckle at the vision of my predecessors spitting feathers, when they read that they came that close to making movie magic

"Shadows on the wall

I can see them fall.

Here am I."

In the gap after matinee, I turned on the television in my dressing room. Something to distract me from a disappointing show followed by notes from the studio behind the filming, presented by an awkward second director. Cut the reveal of the two men cavorting in the train carriage? I was aghast and showed it. It was my unseen backers that could shuffle off to Buffalo, I had shouted, before flouncing off.

Back in my impossibly small room, I almost choked on my custard cream as there she was, Rebecca Richardson towering over Wayne Sleep! A Pointless Celebrity, how apt! I laughed the dirtiest laugh in showbiz and forgot about the missed cue and failing revolve.

A musicals special? Rebecca had only been in the two. This one and that one song wonder; a cross between Brookside and Call the Midwife with a lesser McGann.

I'd smarted nay bristled when I, CJ, had been asked if I'd step into Rebecca's shoes. Built like a navy they were size 10 and I had doubted there'd be much of a budget for wardrobe changes. So, I turned the part down and hoped the Nolan would be dreadful.

"Cole Porter", "Anything Goes", "in the Palladium," I found myself shouting, not just at the screen but my silver-permed nemesis

That perm. As a signature look it had long-since out stayed its welcome. I had seen it slouching off at many audition and close-up over an intense fortnight when we recorded my number one hit record and the video, the one that unleashed Rebecca's 'do to the nation!

We'd both fallen for the powerful lyrics and message of the song not knowing that it hadn't just been written for us, it was written *about* us.

"He doesn't love you the way he loves me" we had sung in harmony and against each other, the visuals shot split screen as if pre-empting the fallout when I realised, I was no longer mistress number one.

Any audition queue comradery vanished, overnight. I of course went on to success after success, a hit radio show and now this. Rebecca, well she'd had a few hit records and an ITV drama. You know, the one about hookers.

I was snapped out of my memories with a double-take at the screen. Rebecca and Wayne had, by some miracle, made it to the final and was being asked what charities they were supporting. "CJ's Thank Your Lucky Stars Foundation". My charity. Dismissing my gut instinct that a plan was afoot, something involving me being upstaged, I called for my PA. 4 tickets were sent with a thank you note for that night's performance. I would return the hand of friendship! The fact the film crew would be here again was just periphery. Coincidence.

Come 7.34pm, a new sensation took hold and gave me a confidence never felt before. I had been nice. Let bygones sent packing.

But come the curtain call, I spotted her. Them. I should have realised that unlike the musicals, there are never really endings, happy or otherwise. I hadn't written the lyrics or the book just sung the notes in the right order and faked the emotions.

I glanced around during the bows and there she was still clapping, long passed everyone else. With him and their two kids, fidgeting and itching to go. I didn't wait for them to come backstage. I sloped off in my car to take possibly my final bow, a nod to my backers, Hendricks and Sertraline.