

STILL LIVES

A play by Phil Lewis

Additional dialogue by Joy Tilbury

This play requires permission to perform and a performance fee

SHORTENED SAMPLE VERSION

For full version please contact:

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Approx. 9 minutes.

CHARACTER:

DAWN: Any age over 40

SET:

Single chair and spotlight.

Large sheet on the stage floor.

STILL LIVES

(OPENING MUSIC.

LIGHTS UP ON DAWN ENTERING, DRAPED IN A DRESSING GOWN. SHE ARRANGES HERSELF IN A POSE – EITHER ON THE CHAIR, OR ON THE SHEET ON THE FLOOR.

SHE IS NOW PREGNANT AND HER BUMP SHOWS.

AS SHE SPEAKS, SHE ALTERS THE POSE, AS IF BIDDEN BY AN UNSEEN VOICE. IF POSSIBLE, THE LIGHTING CAN CHANGE BETWEEN EACH POSE. SOMETIMES DARK AND SULTRY. AT OTHERS BRIGHT AND GLOWING.

THERE ARE LONG PAUSES BETWEEN SENTENCES, NORMALLY JUST AFTER SHE'S CHANGED A POSE. THIS ADDS TO THE VISUAL ASPECT OF THE PIECE.)

DAWN: It's coming, I can feel it. Have to move.

(SHE SUBTLY MOVES HER LEG OUT STRAIGHT)

Don't change the face. Grin and bear it. The pain will subside. Here it comes.

(SLIGHT GRIMACE)

There it goes. I get them more often now. Now I'm pregnant.

You know, I wasn't sure how that would affect business. I wasn't sure if my regulars wanted to see pregnant women sprawled before them. Do you know...they love it.

I suppose it does give another dimension, after all.

When I first got pregnant I was cheeky and told Matthew – the one who pays my fees - he should pay me more...he said, "Why's that?" and I said, "I'm not a blooming BogOff you know, buy one get the baby free!"

They say.....when women are pregnant they have a glow, an aura. This can be especially appealing to artists. This time, I think they're right.

For me, it's more difficult. I just can't get comfortable. I shift more often. But, to be fair, they don't tut tut and harrumph. Well, there's one that does. But he's the only one.

Jeremy came to watch the other week. He said he wanted to know what this posing was all about. He came to make sure I was not ridiculed, that's all.

He thinks it's a bit of an odd occupation, staying still for money. He could have made a fortune if he'd been paid for sitting still with his TV remote in his hand!

He got bored. Well I get bored. This is not the height of excitement. It's not bungee jumping for the elderly.

But at least he showed he cares. Well I know he does.

We've moved into a tiny flat up the road. He's no longer married. No kids, so he doesn't come with baggage. Although I do now.

(SHE INDICATES THE BUMP)

I left the Café. Not just because of the baby, Jeremy wanted me to.

I thought about applying to model for the nation on that plinth in Trafalgar Square. But quite frankly - the pigeon situation put me off.

I now work for a local taxi service. Controller, is my title. I keep in touch with the drivers and tell them where to go. In a nice way of course.

Jeremy's changed jobs too. He's a sales rep for a pharmaceutical company. He's doing very well. Earning more than before and we're saving to buy a small flat next year.

So between us we get free cabs and medication. And things are looking really good.

I'll be the first of my sisters to have a child. Both have tried and failed in the past.

You know, even my sisters don't understand why I still do modelling.

I got my first job via an ad in the post office window, it said, "Nude art class model required, £5 an hour, no tattoos."

After sitting on schoolroom desks for hours on end you tend to get all kinds of interesting indentations on your old bo-hum; 'Kylie luvs Wayne', or something far filthier.

You see, women tend to look on a female model with scorn, or suspicion. Believing they're only interested in sex. Women feel their husbands are in danger.

Now...men can see female models as women of loose virtues, available, susceptible to approach. Someone to chat up up. It's a macho thing, isn't it?

Women see male models in the same way men see female models. Something to admire in the human form.

Me...I'm just in it for the money. It's a living. Nothing more, nothing less.

People misunderstand what modelling is all about. Yes, it is showing off your body to total strangers. But it's not for sexual stimulation on the part of the model, or even the viewers. People don't have much opportunity to see the pure naked human form and to then recreate it in an art form. Like painting, drawing or photography.

The people that come to these classes may have partners, but their partner's naked bodies are familiar, every day objects. There's no originality there to create from, to inspire. A naked stranger has a freshness, like exploring the unknown – not knowing what the outcome is going to look like. This freshness can stimulate artistic creativity.

I suppose, from one point of view, a man looking at a photograph of a naked woman would be a different experience to seeing the real thing. On an emotional, level, sexual or even erotic level. It is an entirely different experience.

That experience is, however, tempered by the fact that there are a group of people involved. There is a lack of personalisation. No opportunity to ogle, or be titivated. That is not why people attend these sessions. Looking at magazines is a more solitary pursuit.

People often think that modelling is a matter of having the courage to take your clothes off in front of strangers. But there's so much more to it than that.

There's been a long line of models like me you know. Lizzie Sidall got pneumonia lying in a bath of cold water for Rosetti's Ophelia picture. Sometimes I bring a hot water bottle to hide under the drapery, it'll be a good excuse if my water's break won't it?

(SHE MOVES WITH DIFFIUCILITY INTO A RECLINING POSITION)

You're expected to get into uncomfortable positions and to hold them for some time. There's a general uncomfortable feeling about it all. There's an element of patience and dedication on the part of the model, and the viewers too.

The popular opinion is that all models are glamorous, young and attractive. But for artists they prefer real life imagery. And that means real people from the real world. Real life image, not the airbrushed version seen in magazines.

Most models are not glamorous. I suppose, if you are a gorgeous twenty something with a killer body, your fame and fortune would be elsewhere. Not with the South Croydon Photographic Club.

Of course, this is only my own opinion. Why other men and women model may be different for each of them.

This is a funny business, in that I don't know anyone else that does it. We don't have an annual meeting, we don't belong to a union and we don't have a big Christmas do.

My agent calls me and says there is a gig, do I want it? Can I do it? Bish, bosh. Another few quid in the savings account.

EDITED