

The Diary of a Wannabe Rock Star would contain such entries as; close calls with fame, dates of no-money gigs and that night when some drunk bloke said you were as good as Hendrix.

But it would mostly be empty.

And an empty diary means no work and no work means no money.

In my mid-twenties I was a wannabe rock star; I had a band, full of potential, up to the brim; in fact we had been brim-full of potential for years, but my landlord stubbornly refused to accept potential for rent. I was broke and living on mates' floors, too busy writing songs and practicing the guitar to do anything remotely sensible about the logistics of living.

One day a friend told me that a local evening art class was paying good money for nude models and maybe I should try it. If I did I could perhaps finally buy a round of drinks, she suggested.

Now I have never been prudish about nudity – indeed I was once an art college student (expelled, but that's another story) – however my views on nakedness had only ever related to other people's, not my own. The last time I had been naked in front of strangers was when I was born (there was actually a more recent time, but that's also another story). The truth was, in those idealistic days, I went around spurting highly dogmatic nonsense about only earning money through my music – I wouldn't lower myself to accept the uncreative shilling. But I was virtually homeless and stretching my remaining friendships to bursting with un-repaid debts; it was time to lay down my principles and rise to the occasion.

So, I rang the class and offered my services; two consecutive Wednesday evenings from 6:30-9pm for an admittedly disappointing fee but still more than I was likely to earn gigging.

I was very nervous...and for good reason. There is one obvious – or not so obvious – factor a man thinks about when considering taking off his clothes and sitting nude for two hours in a room probably containing some women; perhaps some attractive women.

Nevertheless, a week later I turned up at the college half an hour early and stood in the classroom's open doorway. There were perhaps ten easels placed in a rather intimate semi-circle facing an armchair perched on a small podium. A few of the student artists were already there. They were all women. I think at least one was attractive. They turned to me as I entered and smiled. I held my forefinger aloft in a gesture of sudden inspiration, "I'll just be a minute", I said and ran back out of the room, onto the street and straight into a nearby pub.

I ordered a double brandy, drank it then ordered a second; desperately figuring that if I drank enough then my great fear – that fear all naked men have when confronted by a room full of clothed women - would not come to pass. I drank a third brandy. I had now spent half of what I would earn that evening.

I returned to the classroom and was welcomed by the teacher, an elderly man who seemed unduly delighted I had turned up. I forget his name but I shall call him George. The class was now full, every easel had paper on it; George and I were the only men in the room. He pointed to a small curtained-off area where I could change. I remember thinking it was odd; I would be sitting naked in front of these people – women – all evening, baring everything, on a raised stage, yet I needed to hide in order to actually take my clothes off. There was clearly a rule: clothed was fine, naked was fine, but the act of becoming naked was somehow not.

Behind the curtain, I took off all my clothes and waited....and waited. I waited for something catastrophic to happen; an electrical blackout, an announcement that the building was unsafe and we should all evacuate, a police drugs raid; anything to stop me having to part the curtain and go out there.

A gentle cough, “Are we ready? Felix”? George’s kindly voice brought me back. It was then I noticed, on the back of a chair beside me, a folded towel. There were no washing facilities, but a flash of realisation and I understood another stage of the protocols of nudity; sitting naked was fine, walking naked was not. I wrapped the towel around my waist, parted the curtains and, skilfully avoiding everyone’s eyes, walked with what I thought passed for dignity, to the elevated, exposed leather armchair. As I sat, I let the towel drop to the floor.

There was a sound, a vocal sound from around the class; a sort of, “ahh”, followed by a hint of murmuring. Whether it was of disappointment or appreciation I could not tell.

Delightfully, there were two heaters close by – this was England in autumn so naked without heaters was not an option. Their immediate warmth, together with George’s welcome, no doubt intending to relax me, simply raised the temperature of everything everywhere. You know that phrase “living the dream!”? Well this Wannabe Rock Star was living the dream...the recurring dream where you are in a room full of people and you slowly realise you have no clothes on....

The students started to draw straight away; did I mention they were all women? George began to walk around the easels observing the early marks on paper. I wondered which part of my body they would start with; then I stopped myself thinking about that. He said, looking up at me, “it’s so nice to have someone with such enthusiasm”. I assumed he meant that I turned up on time and sat relatively still. Tonight I was motionless, frozen with pure fear, fear and complete concentration; concentration on one thing only.

One of the older women, I'm sure trying to put me at ease, joked loudly about not being able to see all the small details; later she suggested her paper might not be big enough. The class laughed, George smiled at me, sharing the lightness of the room and including the whole class, "so enthusiastic! Lovely!" And the class seemed to agree. I might have smiled back, I don't know. I was focused, firmly...so to speak...focused.

After an hour we had a tea break. The art class was in a college with a canteen two floors away. I was invited to join them; there was a moment – just a moment - when I wondered if they meant I should remain naked and what that would mean as I walked along the corridors, up two flights of stairs and into the canteen where other evening classes - Beginners' Practical Spanish, or Level 2 Maths for Plumbers - were also having their tea breaks. But George helpfully pointed towards the curtain and I went and changed.

Sitting opposite the art students in the canteen, drinking tea with my clothes on, was surprisingly unsettling. Dressed I may now have been but they knew what was underneath; and I knew that they knew and they knew that I knew.... Our conversation was stilted.

"So what do you do, you know, normally?"

"I play the guitar", instantly picturing my nude self with a badly positioned Stratocaster failing to hide my crucial parts.

I looked over at the other tables where Level 2 plumbers and Spanish beginners were chatting; healthy, straightforward, non-subtext laden. My memory of maths class being that it mostly did not involve one person getting his clothes off and sitting in front the class while the rest worked out simultaneous equations.

We returned to the class; once more I undressed behind the screen, donned the towel and emerged to sit naked upon the raised chair. Yet again George commented upon my enthusiasm and the class all voiced their agreement. Though I was occasionally directed to change position, none of these requests involved me crossing my legs to give me some respite from overexposure. But with the heaters' warmth, I was almost beginning to relax. I looked up and around the room, at the backs of the easels, wondering what the pictures looked like – I had not been allowed to look at them at the break – and then to the students' faces. They were focused on their work, only occasionally looking my way, so I could observe them without too much fear of eye contact. There were two older women I imagined to be in their sixties, clothes woollen and baggy, the rest were much younger, my age in fact; probably students taking extra evening classes for whatever reason. And, it is true, some of them were indeed not entirely unattractive, especially that one....my mind, wandering no more, was headed in one direction....

The internal alarm rang violently somewhere near my groin, just in time. Nobody seemed to notice and certainly George didn't remark upon my enthusiasm. I returned to focusing firmly.

After perhaps the longest two and a half hours of my life, at 9 o'clock, the class finished. George thanked me profusely – more enthusiasm – and the class applauded, worryingly more than I'd ever had at a gig. They all voiced their eagerness for next week's session. I stood up and suddenly felt weak at the knees. Now it was over, all the suppressed tension was released, leaving me visibly shaking. I quickly went and changed behind the curtain – now I knew why it was there; not for modesty, but for moments such as these. It was a recovery room. By the time I re-entered the class everyone had gone, except for George who was still smiling. "See you next week then!"

I mumbled something to reassure him and left for the pub, a different pub; one where I knew I would be amongst friends. Right then I needed sympathy and understanding.

I bought another large brandy, drank it and was about to order a disastrous second (or fourth/fifth?) when I saw the very same friend who had suggested I do the nude modelling in the first place. I hadn't seen her since and she wouldn't have known I had acted upon her idea. I made my way to her.

"You'll never guess what! Tonight I did that nude modelling class!"

"Great! You can buy me a drink."

"It was the most terrifying thing I've ever done"

"Really? Why? You just have to sit there, in your jockstrap for a couple of hours while they draw you and..."

"Sorry?" I interrupted. "Did you say 'jockstrap'?"

"Yeah, you know, all the male models wear them"

My mind ran back to the class's murmuring as I first sat before them, to George's repeated delight in my 'enthusiasm' for the job and to the final loud applause. My friend's eyes lit up as she saw the dawning awareness on my face. She told just about everyone in the pub. I was bought several rounds of drinks.

And of course I had to do it all again the next week; I couldn't suddenly turn up with a jockstrap, having gone all Full Monty the week before. Strangely, it wasn't so bad the second time. I had realised one crucial element in man's physiology – when a man is completely naked before a crowd of clothed women, the terrorizing fear of his body behaving inappropriately, renders the said inappropriate behaviour completely impossible. I didn't need a drink; I saved my earnings and shrank to the occasion.