

# ***Secretly Pleased***

**by**

**Anna Carlisle**

**Scenes from the life of Alice Longstaff  
(1907 – 1992)**

**First performances:  
Land Farm, Colden, Hebden Bridge, August 2007**

**Repeat production:  
Land Farm, Colden, Hebden Bridge, July 2008**

**A play for two characters:**

**Alice Longstaff, photographer and studio proprietor:  
around 80 years of age;**

**John Longstaff, her husband, around 76 years of age.**

**The year: 1987  
The place: the couple's garden and terrace at  
Colden, Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire**

**Extract from:**

**Scene 4: A strict regimen**

**ALICE:** Ooh, don't you still thrill to those words. 'Ave yer seen yer photographs int' winder?'

**JOHN:** Every time you'd walk down Bridge Gate or Crown Street, every time, you'd overhear someone saying that to folk.

**ALICE:** Aye, everyone, just everyone, had their portraits done with us then, didn't they?

**JOHN:** It was more like a club you joined - or a community circle – than a studio. Once you'd come in in your best and been 'done', you'd become a member.

**ALICE:** Sometimes, you know, folk were frightened they'd not remember what a loved one looked like when they passed on – or, worse, not *be* remembered.

**JOHN:** Such fragile times, eh? People needed a real occasion made of it. It were really somewhere to go.

**ALICE:** All dressed up and deferential, that's what folk liked: 'Mr Sutcliffe', 'Miss Ogden', 'Master Bibby' even – it made them feel like someone worth preserving in a frame – and they still all enjoy calling me Mrs Longstaff ...

**JOHN:** ... except for the lads who worked in the shop. As long ago as the thirties, Harold was calling you Alice ...

**ALICE:** ... but not beyond the curtain at the front!

**JOHN:** Funny how you got slices of other folks' lives: slices you'd not had yourself ...

**ALICE:** ... family groups, littlies, frilly weddings and anniversaries – aye ... what’s that word for getting it all second hand? V–, vi–, vicar-something - ...

**JOHN:** ... Vicarious.

**ALICE:** Vicarious, thank you. ... There, you see? You’ve got your uses. ... Ah, but then again, the best of them I knew truly at first hand: dogs. I’ve always liked animal sitters the best. They don’t talk at you while you’re trying to pose them and they don’t grumble when you hand over the proofs ...

**JOHN:** You’d have worked seven days if you could have – none of this ‘rest day’ stuff for you. We never took holidays, just days here and there. It wore *me* out.

**ALICE:** But we didn’t want to go places, did we? We had a service to provide. And we’d stay open the whole of Wakes Week Saturday so that folks back from their holiday could get their films in for developing ...

**JOHN:** It’s a damned shame we’ve let the studio become something of a dumping ground, you know. It’s not what it was when folks came for a proper sitting, not just to pick up their snaps and their next roll of film.

**ALICE:** What on earth do you mean, a dumping ground? It’s an archive: all that legacy of the Westermans, all those wonderful photographs: it’s teeming with local history, that’s what it is. And it’s a salon - full of folk, a real melting-pot of characters with all their tales and their smoke and their chatter ...

**JOHN:** Aye, it still amuses me seeing you as the social-y type. Not interested in local events, hardly a taker-part. And you can only see with your mind’s eye what places and experiences folks are regaling you with – but on you go, entertaining all comers ...