

The Agony Column



"Cosmopolitan"
Feb/81

By Irma Kurtz

Q We've been married for fourteen years but I've always been baffled by my husband's behaviour. And lately I've discovered a hoard of female underwear, a wig, make-up, high-heeled shoes and lots of stockings in a box in his cupboard. I tried to confront him about it, but he won't discuss the matter. He denies that he is a homosexual.

We have two lovely children; he does, however, favour our nine-year-old son over our twelve-year-old daughter. Occasionally he says he had an unhappy childhood with a very domineering father and I am worried that he may do something regrettable. Can you help?

A Don't be so sure your husband is a homosexual. He has said he is not and is probably telling the truth. Your husband is a transvestite or a cross-dresser; that is, a man who may desire women and function as a heterosexual but who is stimulated by the sensuous feel of women's apparel or by the thrill of feminine glamour. After all, *we* are, aren't we? Women know the sexy awareness of their own bodies that comes from the touch of silk, the sheen of good stockings, and even—for some—the restrictive titillation of our largely absurd underwear. There are many transvestites in our society, and many of them are happily-married men. Some wives actually enjoy their husbands' cross-dressing, others tolerate it. Why do you fear that a man you have known for fourteen years (and who has probably been a cross-dresser all that time) will suddenly do something "regrettable"? He isn't a violent person is he? Is he a drunk? A wife-beater? A villain? No, I doubt it. He is a man with a sexual quirk that is really quite an innocent one.

The first problem is your own: you must enlighten yourself about transvestism so you can decide from a point of

knowledge, not of ignorance, what you should do. Write to the Beaumont Society (Box BM 3084, London WC1N 3XX) and tell them exactly what you have told me. They will be able to send you information that will help you understand and even accept your husband's condition. He is no different now from the man you married and the important things about your husband are as true as they always were, and as important. Why should your two lovely children suddenly be in any danger at the hands of a good father who has cherished them all their lives? As for favouring his son, that is *sa*u out not sinister, and a common failing of parents. Your husband might ever think you favour the daughter. Maybe you do. After you understand more, you will be able to talk to your husband calmly and then to work out what you want to do. Be wise and be patient. Remember, there are many, many much more terrible things to discover about the people we love than something in a box at the bottom of the cupboard.