

**F**INALLY, after 20 years of marriage, my husband brokenly confessed the bizarre truth: he had always felt far more a woman than a man. I think what I felt more than anything else was overwhelming relief.

Even as the first shock waves receded I thought, "Thank God, at last I *know*." Suddenly, so many small, unexplained incidents, mysteries, and confusions about our marriage became clear.

Farquhar's distress on our honeymoon many years before, his awkwardness with our children when they were small, our non-existent sex life, the fact that I had never seen him naked, his preference for underclothes in softer, feminine fabrics, above all, his one-time heavy drinking. Now it all fell into place and I understood. I understood, too, the misery he had suffered.

The fact that I have decided to go on living with Farquhar has caused almost as much talk as his widely publicised intention to have a sex-change operation. But it never seriously occurred to me to leave him. Horror, disgust, revulsion, betrayal, humiliation—many wives would have felt one or all of these things. Not me. I still love my husband, you see, and he still loves me.

Does that sound strange? There's a great deal more to love than the physical act itself, than simply sharing sex. Obviously ours wasn't a normal marriage—though I never guessed the real trouble—but our love developed and grew. It strengthened over the years and held us together through all the difficult times.

If you love someone, and they have a problem, then you do what you can to help. And I can help Farquhar best by staying with him.

**'I'm going to marry that girl,' he told the sergeant**

That our marriage lasted as long as it did was a small miracle. But I think that as time passed I gradually slipped into the more "masculine" role. I'd always been the practical one, anyway, and so I made all the decisions and carried them out.

Our first meeting was oddly prophetic, as though it was meant to be. I was a member of the Caledonian Society in Plymouth. Farquhar, then a piper with the Scots Guards, arrived with a sergeant piper to accompany our display of country dancing.

Farquhar had never intended to marry, but the moment he saw me across the room he turned to his companion and said: "I'm going to marry that girl." The sergeant was astonished. Farquhar had

never been out with a girl all the time he'd been in the army.

He was 21 then, and I was 20. We went out together a few times but then he was posted to Egypt and, though we wrote, we didn't see each other again until five years later, when he was re-posted to Edinburgh where I was working.

We met up again, got engaged and married within four months. The very first hint of trouble came



feels he's a woman), he still had the outward body of a male.

Soon after we were married I discovered that our stumbling, unsatisfactory attempts at love-making had been successful in one way at least. I was pregnant.

I suppose if sex is difficult but you do make it, and at the same time you make a baby, it removes one barrier. Farquhar had established himself as a father. And just

**"Disgust, revulsion, betrayal . . . other wives may have felt such things. Not me. You see I still love my husband"**

on our honeymoon. Farquhar has told me since that almost at once he realised he had made a dreadful mistake in getting married. Marriage confirmed a suspicion he had long ignored, that he wasn't like other men. He didn't understand why and he certainly couldn't confide in me. All he said then was, "There's something terribly wrong with me. But I can't talk about it."

For me, sexually, things were not quite as I had expected. I was surprised at his, well . . . lack of enthusiasm. But then I didn't really know what to expect.

Farquhar was a virgin, too—otherwise he would never have married. When he discovered what was involved it was a colossal shock. But he's always been a gentle and considerate person and so, for my sake, he tried.

To undertake the act in the first place, he had to transpose himself into a female state of mind, and at the same time act as a male. Naturally, I knew nothing of this at the time, but the strain on Farquhar was immense. So much so that shortly after our honeymoon he made the first of several suicide attempts.

He told me again that he had made an awful mistake and should never have married, that it would be kinder to end it all. I was terribly hurt. I thought it was my fault, something I'd done. If your husband tells you he was wrong to marry you, then you do blame yourself and wonder how you have failed.

To make matters worse, Farquhar was so confused and humiliated by the situation that we couldn't even talk it over. It was a traumatic time for us both.

Although Farquhar was born a transexual (a man who emotionally

15 months after Liz was born, Fiona came along.

Farquhar didn't dread fatherhood, but he wasn't wildly delighted either. With hindsight, I think he resented my maternal role. He would have loved to have been able to be a mother but he couldn't demonstrate the depth of his emotion to his children. He felt that, as a father, his role was to discipline and guide, not to be overtly affectionate. So he tended to distance himself from the girls.

Our sex life was jogging along after a fashion. Even though Farquhar found it so difficult, he went on trying because he thought I expected it. Gradually, he came to realise that I *wasn't* expecting it, and after about four years our love-making just petered out without either of us saying a word.

It's 18 years since we had any kind of sexual contact at all, but we never—until recently—discussed it. Perhaps this might have posed problems for other women, but I was simply relieved. I think I have a very low sex drive for I've never really been very interested in that side of life. In fact, we were happier without it. It was a strain trying to act out something which was alien to Farquhar, and which I wasn't keen on either.

By the time the children arrived we were living in Germany. Life became a round of nappy-changing for me and a round of drinking for Farquhar. Or so it seemed. But his increasingly frequent drinking bouts weren't the only sign of the strain he was under. His hair turned white very early, and later when things got worse, it fell out in handfuls.

When I heard we were due to be posted back to Britain I thought, and hoped, perhaps that would help. There'd be different

surroundings, new faces, fresh interests. But it was too late.

Eventually Farquhar was able to buy himself out of the army—which he had always hated—and a succession of jobs followed in one place after another. He thought that a change, even a geographical change, would stop the drinking. It didn't, for he was an alcoholic by that time.

It was then our marriage came closest to foundering. But all the time I thought drink was the only trouble, not merely the symptom of another problem. Nobody knew. Not even Farquhar could pinpoint the real cause of his misery. He only knew that drink helped him to forget for a while.

Life became so fraught that at last he turned to Alcoholics Anonymous. That was 11 years ago and, except for one early slip-back, he hasn't had a drink since.

Seven years ago we moved to Skye, and Farquhar loaded himself with so much work, as piping instructor to the local schools, there wasn't time to dwell on his problems. But when a neck injury forced him to retire, the wretchedness overwhelmed him again.

**There were some signs . . . I began to suspect**

By then I was beginning to suspect . . . I don't really know what, but there were some signs which I thought were strange. For instance, he once bought me a beautiful nightdress. It was odd because I don't like nighties, I always wear pyjamas. But then I caught him once or twice wearing it. I was rather taken aback, but he explained that he liked the feel of the nightie rather than the rougher texture of his pyjamas.

And occasionally he would ask me to buy him different items of underwear. Naturally I'd ask why, but again he'd say he preferred the finer, more comfortable material. Frankly, I felt too shy to ask more.

I don't know whether Farquhar was trying to break me in gently about the way he felt, or whether he was just trying to make himself feel a little happier. But I didn't find any of it shocking or nasty.

You must remember that my husband and I had had no sexual contact for years and that I was hardly less ignorant of the facts of life than when we were married. It never occurred to me as unusual that we had never seen each other without clothes. I know now, of course, that Farquhar was horribly ashamed of his male body. Transvestism and transexualism were not openly discussed then.

However, as the years passed I began to get hints that perhaps what was (Please turn to next page)

## SUSAN, MY HUSBAND

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wrong with the sexual side of our marriage had a deeper significance. I don't know why it took me so long to realise this—perhaps I didn't really want to. However, I didn't know what I was really up against until just three years ago. Farquhar pointed out an advertisement in a newspaper offering help to men who felt the need to dress as women. He confessed he wanted that help.

When I asked why, I got the first real truth out of him.

"I've always felt I'm not as I should be," he told me.

"Even as a child I knew something was wrong, and it's been a terrible strain living as a man all these years." It would be a relief if he could dress as a woman at least part of the time, he said. It had got so bad he was actually on the point of leaving.

I told him I needed a week to think about it, and I shut myself up in my workshop where I run an upholstery business.

Of course, it was a shock. But, strangely, the confession was a relief. It didn't take me long to decide that the best thing I could do was to help, rather than to run away crying. Then came the realisation that, in fact, it really made no difference at all to the way I had grown to feel about Farquhar.

So I told him we would tackle the problem together. We had managed all these years, so why should we give up now?

### **I found myself giving Susan advice on clothes**

We answered the advertisement and got various leaflets back from a number of minority groups. There was one from the Beaumont Society, who offer counselling to transvestites, saying they were keen to help people who like cross-dressing, as it's called. Farquhar—or Susan as he decided to call himself—joined and was put in touch with men with similar problems.

We sent off, too, for mail order clothes—underwear, skirts, tops and dresses—and my husband began to wear women's clothes in private, when we were alone together. I found myself giving

*Susan helps me with the upholstery business I run from home*



advice, saying this is too bright or that is too young. I also began to call him Susan, as he wished.

It was a weird, unreal situation. Something that you could never imagine in your wildest dreams. But when it did happen, I found I could be quite matter-of-fact about it. It took some getting used to. To see someone you've always known as a man, husband and father suddenly acting as a woman is very, very strange. But after my first startled reaction I told myself that if it made Farquhar happy, it had to be all right with me.

### **It was comforting to know other men were the same**

However, although Farquhar was happier now, he still felt vaguely unsatisfied. Letters arrived from fellow members of the Beaumont Society but most were about fashion and make-up.

"These people are not the same as me," he said. "I'm not interested in fashion. I'm not a transvestite. The way I feel has nothing to do with dressing up for its own sake."

We belonged to the Beaumont Society's library, too. Much of it, we thought, was trivial, but some was useful. It was comforting to know that so many other men—and their wives—were in a similar position with similar problems.

One day, about six months after he had joined, Farquhar was reading a casebook history by a psychiatrist. Suddenly he leapt to his feet, terribly excited.

"This is it. This is what I am. I'm a transexual, not a transvestite." He recognised many of the symptoms as his own and was almost jubilant. At last he understood himself. Life was suddenly a great deal brighter.

We found a specialist who quickly diagnosed Farquhar as a true transexual case. His blood was analysed and found to have an abnormally low male hormone level. He began to take massive doses of female hormones. Soon a decision had to be taken—whether to follow the treatment through to its logical conclusion: surgery to remove the outward signs of Farquhar's masculinity.

Neither of us doubted that this was the right step. He believes he will only feel "normal" and happy with a female body. And I want whatever will give him peace.

Once we made our decision, it became increasingly obvious that we would have to make a public announcement. Even without surgery, the physical results of the drug treatment were beginning to become obvious.

Farquhar's beard loss speeded up, his skin softened, and he started to develop a bosom. Before, he had a 38-inch chest, now he has a 42-inch bust. For the moment he wears a wig, but the hair that fell out through anxiety is now re-growing fast. As for his facial hair, he is so desperately conscious of it that he can't wait

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## SUSAN, MY HUSBAND

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for the oestrogen to work and is having electrolysis to remove it.

We had already told our friends what was happening—but we decided we had to make the announcement properly, through the press, because Farquhar is so well known through his work. And had he just appeared locally, dressed as a woman, people would have said, "Good heavens, Farquhar's flipped his lid."

In the event, it wasn't such an ordeal as we had imagined. Everybody was very kind and understanding, and Farquhar is accepted everywhere now as Susan. And I found it less of a problem to cope with than the drinking.

Our daughters took it very well. Liz has known for some time and is very sympathetic. We didn't tell Fiona until just before the public announcement. She's younger and we thought that perhaps she wouldn't have the same understanding as her sister.

But I think, like me, they were relieved in a way because it cleared up a lot of things that hadn't made sense for years. At last the girls realised why their father had always been such a distant figure to them.

Since the announcement I've called my husband Sue, both privately and publicly, and now I always think of Sue as a woman.

### **I'll gain a sister-in-law, not lose a husband**

The last hurdle is the surgery. But we'll face that together like every thing else. It doesn't distress me—in fact, I think the sooner the better. At the moment, Sue is so obviously happy, but there is still that overwhelming feeling of "wrongness". And the longer the delay, the worse Sue feels.

However, we'll have to get divorced before the operation. But it's only a formality—we shall go on living together. I shall be gaining a sister-in-law rather than losing a husband.

Of course, I shan't have a husband in the sexual sense of the word, but then I haven't had that for many years and I have no regrets. I enjoyed my marriage. We got on well, we have two lovely daughters and many friends. What more can you want?

People expect too much from the sexual side of a marriage. If it doesn't work out, they think the marriage is a failure. But it's genuine affection and understanding that count and that last; Sue and I have that. I believe we're closer now than we've ever been. Since we've been able to understand and share the problem our loving relationship has deepened.

We've been through a lot together. We like each other. We love each other. And we'll stay together. ▶THE END

*Mrs. McIntosh was talking to  
Shelagh Massie.*