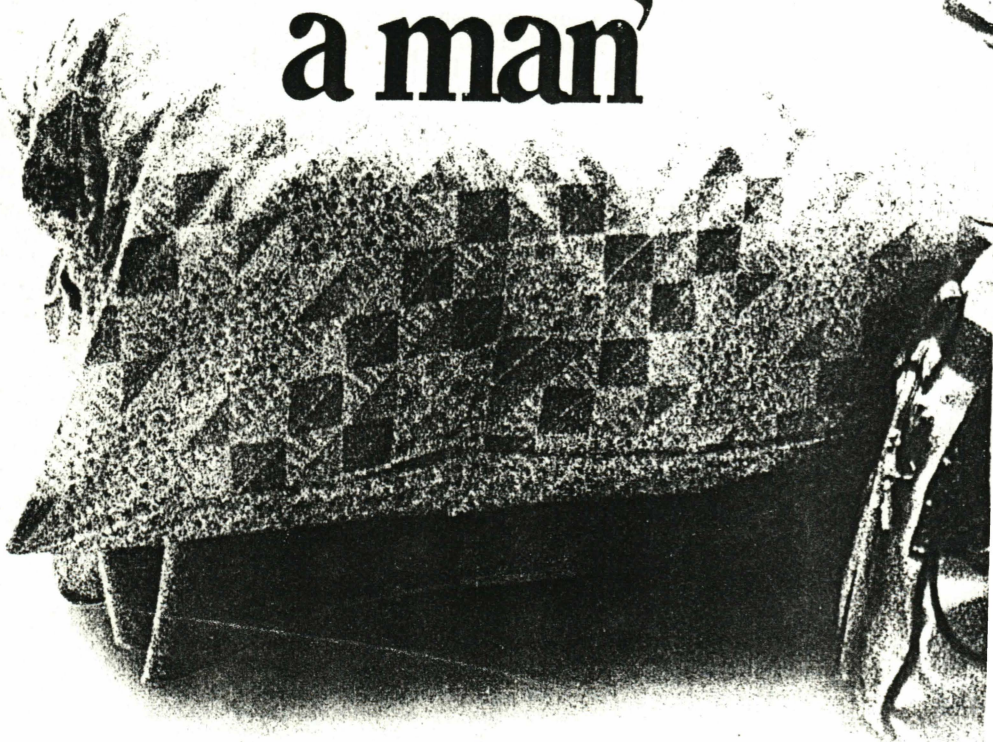


## WINNING THROUGH – OUR REAL-LIFE SERIES

The taboo subject of a husband who likes to dress up in women's clothes is aired here by a courageous reader. She agreed to talk candidly to Dee Remington, as long as she could remain anonymous

# 'This wasn't the man I married... this wasn't a man'



**M**Y HUSBAND IS A TRANSVESTITE. Let me say it straight away and in even plainer terms. He is a man who enjoys dressing up in my clothes – bra, panties, suspender belt, stockings, the lot. He wears a false bosom, wigs and make-up. For him, this is an obsession, a need he can't overcome.

He is six foot tall, well-built, very good looking with dark hair, a twinkle in his blue eyes and an attractive grin. He has a devastating effect on girls – I've seen it happen at parties. He is, in every other way, a normal man, and a loving father to our six-year-old daughter.

I fell for him straight away when we met, and he said afterwards that it was love at first sight for him, too. We were both 23, had good jobs in the Northern town where we'd grown up and we were soon regarded as a couple who would be marrying before long. But, somehow, I hung back. It wasn't because I had any premonitions of what was to happen, simply that I had several boyfriends at the time and was rather enjoying my life. I didn't want to tie myself down in marriage and, anyway, I thought the whole thing had happened too quickly.

But after six months we felt sure it was the real thing and we married. We settled down in a small, rented flat and it seemed as if we were going to live happily ever after. We knew we wanted children, but for the time being we were going to keep on with our jobs and save up for a house. Our love life was good, and we enjoyed each other's company. Rick had a great sense of humour and we had lots of friends.

It was Rick's sense of humour getting the better of him, I thought, when one evening as we were going to bed, he dressed up in my nightie, a pair of my tights and said: 'What do you think about playing this game, then?' He looked so ridiculous I giggled and said, 'Don't be daft!' And he laughed and went into the bedroom to take the things off.

It was about a year later that I began to notice that things in my dresser seemed to be getting into the wrong places. I'm a tidy person and I know where everything is, so it struck me when my bras, pants, skirts and make-up, if not actually disappearing, didn't seem to be where I thought I'd put them.

One night, I had arranged to stay late at the office where I worked as a secretary, but during the day I felt flu coming on, so I asked if I could go home early. Rick usually got in before me – he worked at a nearby engineering firm, so I expected to see him when I walked in. But not like this – dressed in my clothes! My kilt, my blouse, my bra, my stockings. He had make-up smeared all over his face and he looked absolutely grotesque. I went crazy. I remember screaming at him: 'What are you doing? For God's sake take those things off. . .'

He calmed me down and started laughing. He said, 'Oh, come on. What are you making a fuss about? It's something I read about in a book. Men dress up in women's clothes to feel good; it's relaxing after having a hard day at work. I thought

I'd try it, but it doesn't do anything for me.'

After a bit I started laughing, too. I remember saying: 'Well, thank God for that. I've never seen such a sight.'

He promised he wouldn't do it again. 'It was just a joke,' he kept saying.

I forgot about it as the months went by and I found I was pregnant. We were both looking forward to starting a family. Rick came to all the antenatal classes and was there when our daughter, Sandra, was born.

No one, I thought, could be happier than I was. We had moved into a house by then, and although I wasn't working, Rick had just got a promotion and we were quite well off. He had a tough work force under him, but seemed to get on very well with the men, and was set for a successful career.

When Sandra was about a year old I took

her with me to see my parents in Devon, because Dad had had a heart attack. He wasn't expected to live, but after about a week he had made an amazing recovery and I felt I could go home. I was missing Rick, and as I had told him I'd probably be gone for a fortnight, I thought I'd just walk in on him and surprise him by going back several days early.

He was at work when we got back. I settled Sandra down and went into our bedroom to unpack my case. It was then I noticed a holdall on top of the wardrobe. I pulled it down – and nearly went mad.

It was full of the most garish women's clothes you could ever imagine. There were miniskirts spangled with sequins, revealing evening dresses, sexy black underwear and nighties. There were false boobs, blonde

said. He didn't ask any questions - I don't know what he guessed - he just said very kindly: 'Would you like me to take you upstairs now to prove it?' Of course I didn't accept, but I felt a lot better after that.

Even so, the strain of living this unnatural life began to get me down. I felt in a dreadful trap. I thought about divorce, even suicide. It was always the thought of Sandra, my daughter, that held me back. I wasn't sleeping, wasn't bothering to eat. I didn't go and see my friends or family, for fear I should break down and blurt it all out.

My weight dropped to under five stones from my normal eight, and I moved around in a kind of daze. I suppose I was on the verge of a mental breakdown and realising this, that if anything happened to me, Sandra would be left alone with Rick, I went to see the doctor. She noticed at once that something was wrong with me.

I said Rick and I were quarrelling because he was spending too much time at work and seemed to have lost interest in me. But under her gentle probing I broke down. Through my tears I sobbed out the story.

To my surprise, she wasn't shocked, or horrified, but very sympathetic. She said she would like to see Rick and explain to him that we should get some kind of help, probably from a sex therapist.

For the first time in months I felt almost happy when I left. At last I had told someone. I had been given sympathetic help, and there was hope for the future.

The hope I had was short-lived. Rick refused to see the doctor. He looked at me coldly and said, 'Why should I go? There's nothing wrong with me. It's you. You should try to understand.' There it was again - that implication that it was all my fault. That, more than anything, had been driving me nearly demented.

It seemed the end. Rick had refused any chance of help. I couldn't go on any longer. I would get a divorce, take my daughter and start a new life.

Suddenly, everything seemed cold and clear in my mind. I went to a solicitor and told him I wanted to divorce Rick on the grounds of unreasonable behaviour. He said he thought I had every grounds for it.

It was when the papers were served on Rick that I saw the first sign of a break in his attitude to me. Up to then, he had blamed everything on me, he had said nasty, bitter things. Once, when I threatened to leave him, he had shouted: 'Go, I'll be glad to see the back of you! Then I can have my house to myself and do what I want.' The bewildering thing was that at other times he had still maintained that he loved me and still felt as a husband towards me.

But now he broke down and cried. He begged me not to divorce him. He knew that he couldn't promise to stop his dressing up, because I just wouldn't have believed him - he had broken promises like

that so many times before. But he did say he would go with me to the sex therapy clinic.

I think this was the first big breakthrough. The therapist offered no hope that Rick would change - I had thought of what he was doing as a 'disease' and hoped that one day he could be 'cured' - and told me not to carry on looking at it that way. What I had to do was to try and understand the situation and, above all, realise that it was not my fault: Rick had to stop ramming down my throat the fact that it was.

The effect had been to make me lose all confidence in myself. I had taken on his fear and guilt and was blaming myself for being frigid, for being a bad wife, for everything. At last, it seemed someone was telling Rick that it wasn't my fault.

He seemed to be getting through to us that each of us had a problem - but the problem was not that Rick liked dressing up in women's clothes. *The problem was that he was blaming me for something he was ashamed of and I was unable to understand his need to continue doing it.*

It seemed a little light at the end of a long, dark tunnel. But it wasn't until the sex therapist put us in touch with Polly Robinson, who runs a support group for the wives of transvestites, that I could come to terms with what had happened.

For one thing, I realised that I wasn't the only one. Polly estimated that about one in five hundred men in this country had a liking for dressing up in women's clothes. She herself had a husband who was a transvestite and, even after 16 years of marriage, she still got wound up about it. She tried to explain to me that there was nothing 'disgusting' about it. By 'cross-dressing', as she called it, the man was allowing another side of his personality to come out, which made him feel happier.

Another thing I learned was that most men who feel this need are heterosexual - they go on loving, and making love to their wives just as other men do.

I was beginning to learn quite a lot about transvestism, but I won't pretend it was easy for me to come to terms with. I began to realise that I would have to think about the positive side of our life, rather than just sitting around moaning about what had happened. Rick loved Sandra and she needed the love and security of two parents. He said he loved me, and we would resume our relationship as lovers if I agreed.

But all this had to take place on my terms. If Rick wanted to go upstairs and dress up then he could - provided he told me first and there was a secure lock on the bedroom door. Although Polly said their 15-year-old son knew her husband dressed up and he took it in his stride, Sandra must never know - and if she ever saw Rick like that it would be the end of our marriage.

When I discussed this with him, he said that kids saw people like Boy George

dressed up in women's clothes on television and didn't think anything of it. 'If she sees me, she'll understand,' he said. But I was the one that was making the rules now, and I told him that I would not chance it.

I felt I was getting control of the situation and I was getting confidence back in myself. I even agreed to go with Polly to a transvestite club where they met so that I could find out as much as possible about it. There were a lot of wives there who seemed to accept it as normal, but all the same I didn't enjoy it. They looked grotesque, these men, with their lop-sided wigs and lop-sided falsies, thick, hairy legs, and make-up smeared on.

Afterwards, I said to Rick: 'It's a sick joke the way you all look. OK, if you want to dress up, you'll have to do it properly. As a man you choose your clothes with care. You'll do the same as a woman.'

I taught him how to dress and wear make-up properly so that he wouldn't look a freak when he went to the club. But I told him that he would leave our house dressed as a man, and come back dressed as a man.

I suppose there are many women reading this who would say that they could not possibly go on living with their husbands. All I can say to them is that the man you fell in love with, the father of your children, is still there, whether you discover he has a terrible illness or you discover he likes cross-dressing. It is something he can't help, something in his hormones that no one knows anything about and can't correct. You have to stop blaming him and decide for yourself how to live with it.

The only way I have been able to do this is to say: 'I am going to be in charge of it. I am going to say where or when he can dress up and whether anyone else should know.'

Rick and I lead a normal married life once again. Some wives will let their husbands go to bed with them when they're dressed up, but I won't. Not to keep the peace, nor to please him. You have to be honest about how much you can accept and how much you can allow.

Rick says that, in time, people will come to accept transvestism, just as they have come to accept gays. Maybe. I love Rick, always have and always will. I try to understand what he does and I have learned to live with it now. But accept it? I never will.

*All family names have been changed to protect the interviewee's identity.*

*The Beaumont Society offers contact and advice to heterosexual transvestites nationwide. Write to Box No 3084, London WC1N 3XX.*

*B M WOBS is a parallel self-help group offering advice and help to those living with or married to heterosexual transvestites. Its help-line is open from 9-12am every Wednesday (tel: 01-660 7224). For a booklet on the service they offer, write with an sae to B M WOBS, London WC1N 3XX.*