Roman scandal —hotel throws us out

MY STRANGE LIFE . . . by April Ashley

. . . continuing the amazing story of the cabin boy who changed into a beautiful girl.

SUDDENLY it all seemed easy. I would live my life as a woman. I had made up my mind I could no longer face the twilight world in which I was existing.

A few weeks before, I had gone from my job in Jersey for a short holiday in the South of France. I was running away again. For now I was acutely, agonisingly, embarrassed.

My bust was developing so prominently and my features and limbs were becoming so feminine that I could no longer conceal the change. I wanted to hide; to be alone.

NIGHT CLUB

BUT on the Riviera coast I met several boys and girls who told me I could easily get a job at a night club in Paris called the Carrousel.

It was respectable, they said; patronised by some of the wealthiest and most famous people in the world.

Its speciality: female impersonation.

At first I didn't like the idea at all. But when my holiday money ran short I hitch-hiked to Paris. And at 11 o'clock one winter night I found myself at the entrance to the Carrousel, in the Rue de Colisee, just off the Champs-Elysees.

I was dressed in a sports coat with a white shirt and brown slacks. My hair was cropped, and I thought I looked as manly as I could.

But when, in answer to my timid inquiry, Mr Lasquin, the artistic director, came to see me in the foyer he took one look at me and said: "Sorry, we don't employ girls here."

"But I'm a man," I protested.

STRIPTEASE

M. LASQUIN shook his head slowly. But then he said: "All right, if you really are a boy you've got yourself a job."

He introduced me to some English-speaking members of his cast, and a few minutes later I was accepted.

Just as I had been told, all the artists were men. But on stage they appeared more feminine than many women. Some even did striptease acts—the best in Paris, many people thought.

One of the most popular artists was the famous French cabaret star Coccinelle, who was to have the same operation as mine. Later it was she who gave me a letter of introduction to the surgeon in Casablanca.

APRIL—PHOTOGRAPHED AT THE CARROUSEL.

Another was Bambi, who was to become my closest friend.

After a month of rehearsals I went into the show, dancing and singing.

Night after night there were famous people among the audience. I remember meeting poor Belinda Lee (later killed in a car crash) and Josephine Baker, who gave me a picture of herself autographed: "To the most beautiful girl in the world."

Belinda was in the audience on several occasions and became quite a close friend.

But now there were often awkward moments when I had to explain gently to boys who tried to date me that I was in fact a man.

One day Bambi said: "You know, it's time you dressed as a girl. It's too embarrassing going around with you like this."

BIKINI

THE Carrousel management refused point blank to let me wear women's clothing in the streets, but I ignored the ban.

One day I turned up there in a beautiful blue costume with a big black picture hat. All they said was: "How can we be cross with anyone who looks so beautiful."

Ever since, I have dressed as a girl.

It was a wonderful change. I felt completely at ease for the first time in my life. I could go swimming again—in a bikini now—without shame.

And everywhere the stares I attracted were of admiration. Instead of puzzlement or scorn.

For the first time, too, I found myself being accepted, without question, as a friend by other women, including a number of the most elegant in Paris.

I went around a lot with some of the lovely Bluebell Girls, those superb, tall English beauties from the famous Lido cabaret. And top models from the fashion houses began inviting me to their parties.

Then, after some months in Paris, I went on tour with a Carrousel show.

COCKTAILS

FIRST to Juan les Pins, on the Riviera, where Bambi, tall and blonde, and I, tall and dark, soon became quite well known.

Day after day some wealthy man or another would come to drive us along the coast for champagne cocktails on the terrace of the smart Carlton hotel in Cannes. Or to lunch at the lovely Hotel de Paris in Monte Carlo.

Then Italy. And a taste of the Dolce Vita. Everywhere we went we were mobbed. Noblemen and millionaires showered us with invitations.

Night after night, when the show was over, we went to crazy parties. Parties where sex was the blinding obsession and infidelity the passport to popularity.

The Italian nights seemed heavy with evil.

GOLD GIFT

AND as we escaped each dawn, creeping back to our hotel from some mansion where insensible couples lay waiting only for the next darkness, we gulped down the clean morning air, thankful in the light of day to be leaving it all.

One very rich Lebanese was the bane of my life in Italy. Finally he sent me a gift.

He told me it had been specially handwrought for him in solid gold.

Then in Milan, an Italian millionaire heard me talking about a trip to Rome with Kiki Moustic, another member of our show.

The millionaire immediately reserved one private suite for us on the train to Rome and another at the fashionable Ambassadore hotel there.

When we arrived the hotel manager asked for our passports. At first we put him off with excuses. But in the end, of course, we had to hand them over.

As soon as he saw we were not women but men, he called the police.

We were held at the police station for 10 hours, and the whole thing created a great sensation locally.

MODEL

WHEN, at last, we were released, we were besieged by photographers. We couldn't leave our hotel. And eventually we had to ask the police to put us on a train back to Milan.

It was this incident which, long afterwards, ended my new career in London as a top model girl.

One of my fashion pictures in a smart magazine was recognised. And a London newspaper printed the story of the Rome affair, exposing me as a girl who was once a man.

After that the big national advertisers, who had been scrambling for my services as a model, started to ask questions.

Anyway, we got back to Milan and there I counted up my savings. At last I had enough for the operation that was to transform me finally into a woman.

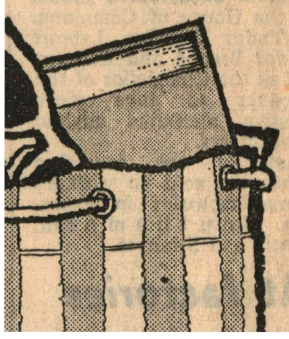
On May 3, 1960, I arrived back in Paris and went at once to see Coccinelle, who told me she had written to the clinic. Seven days later I flew to Casablanca.

So that there would not be any difficulties at the Customs, I dressed, once again, as a man.

NEXT WEEK.—My operation.

APRIL — AT HER LONDON FLAT YESTERDAY

IDEA
ARS!



FLAP A

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