

# Do not disturb

## Joy Melville

"The real ultimate for transvestites, they say, is to make love to their wives while fully dressed as a woman. But for Denis, it's enough to have a slip on, or bra and pants, or just be play-acting a woman, using his feminine name, Denise."

Being married to a transvestite hasn't much going for it. But Sylvia—who is 41 and was previously married to an aggressively macho man—prefers the gentleness of her second husband, Denis, transvestism notwithstanding. Nervous of her reaction, Denis initially concealed his transvestism. He had admitted it to his first wife, telling her his psychiatrist believed a "normal relationship" would end his urges. But she had never accepted the truth, despite knowing about the box containing make-up and wig. He took to going off on trips away from home, buying women's knickers and masturbating. The marriage, inevitably, broke up.

Sylvia sensed "something odd" about him when they met. "I can't explain it; he fascinated me. I finally said, 'What are your hang-ups?' And he said he liked wearing women's clothes. At first, he found it very hard to have sex with me at all. In a way, I found it a challenge. I wanted to talk it through, and find out who this other person was; so I would ask questions, in the dark, in bed. I'd say, 'Tell me about it, tell me what you do. What order do you put on

your women's clothes and make up? Things like that. That way, I was introduced to it gradually."

Sex can cause enough problems with "normal" couples. Doesn't it become impossible when your male partner is wearing a prettier nightie than you are? "Denis gets a lot of satisfaction from wearing women's underclothes in bed," says Sylvia. "But, yes, when I first saw him in them, I thought how hideous it was. And the first time I saw him completely dressed as a woman, I think I was scared. I've always hated the way the pantomime dame takes her wig off to show a man's head underneath. But I went along with his need for it. I'd even encourage it to happen. I'd say, 'Why not? Let's do it together.' I didn't want it to be something furtive behind my back.

"I think in the early days, because I was also getting over a broken marriage, I may have accepted it as a way of keeping him. But now I've got used to it, and I like the feminine side. I also quite like taking the dominant role in bed. I lose myself in the fantasy: it's my way of coping. It's just that there are occasions when I need to be desired as a woman, and I get angry and upset because I feel deprived. But he's too inhibited to let himself go as a man. It's as if he can't be himself, he must be this lady, this feminine body."



Homer Sykes

*More female than male? A contender in the Alternative Miss World contest*

Physically, Denis has got what Sylvia calls "feminine areas." He is dark, fairly heavily built, with a faint six o'clock shadow, so these are not immediately apparent. "But his hips, legs and breasts are slightly more female than male," says Sylvia. "He's got a rounded bottom and very thin ankles. He looks terrific in high heels. I encourage him to look nice when he's dressed as a woman. If it's going to happen, I'd rather he looks good."

Equally keen to look good, Denis wears long-sleeved dresses with high necks, and three pairs of tights to conceal any black hairs on his legs. The clothes he really fancies are of the outrageous showgirl variety, but he concedes he would look silly in these. He borrows some of his wife's clothes, and they will shop together for tights, panties and wigs, which could be for her or her "sister."

Early in their relationship, Denis went into one of the few clothes shops for transvestites, while Sylvia waited in the car. Persuaded finally to go inside, she saw one male shopper feeling all the clothes. She felt he looked like a pervert and rushed out of the shop saying, "Oh my God, it sickens me, all of it." After they got home (clutching a wig, and "a bra filled up with some-

thing like birdseed"), it was one of the few occasions she really felt depressed. "Other times, it can be funny. We went into an outside shop last week and I saw some shoes and called out, 'Are these your size, darling?' I got ever such a look from the assistant. In some ways, I suppose I still find it a bit disgusting; yet it's hypocritical of me as I'm involved in it."

Her husband borrows some of her clothes, but keeps those he buys locked up in a tiny room off their bedroom. Sylvia's teenage boy and girl from her first marriage live with them, and the daughter is quite liable to rummage through her mother's wardrobe. Size ten shoes, or an unfamiliar-styled dress, would be a giveaway. The clothes only come out when they know the children are going to be late home, or are away.

In this way, transvestism touches life outside the bedroom. "You have to tell lies, hide things, be careful what you say," says Sylvia. Her husband's magazines come in plain brown envelopes, and have to be whipped out of sight of the children. If they go to a meeting of the Beaumont Society (a support organisation for transvestites), or an occasional drag ball, they have to pretend they are going elsewhere. "Or if I see an article on sex-change operations, for instance, I have to be careful I don't slip up and crack jokes in front of the children."

If they go away together, Denis may take the opportunity of sleeping in his wig and make-up. This means that the large number of tissues needed to remove his heavy make-up next morning must be hidden quickly, and flushed down the lavatory. In hotels, a "do not disturb" sign is vital.

Despite their need for a good lock on the bedroom door, once on the inside the secrecy creates a satisfactory tension between Sylvia and Denis. "I think a percentage of the enjoyment comes from the furtiveness," says Sylvia. "People underestimate the sexual side of it. I get tremendous sexual satisfaction. If we go to bed and feel more like sex than he does, to encourage him I'll whip out a favourite petticoat from under the pillow and say, 'Go on, put it on,' and that will stimulate him. He does make love to me as a man, sometimes, without feminine clothes or make-up, but his actions are very feminine: he cannot relax enough in the ordinary, straight male way. He's got to have some slight feminine thing happening, like fantasy thinking. I can tell he's doing that: it affects the way he uses his hands, or perhaps his body." If he is "dressed," the transition stage can be difficult. "For a long time he wouldn't like me to see him change back, particularly taking the wig off."

With a 16 year old son in the house, Sylvia is aware of the dangers of having her second husband's predilections discovered. She is also careful not to re-create the home atmosphere that she thinks triggered Denis's own transvestism.

His father worked long hours and was rarely at home. His mother was the dominant partner, very fussy and intent on bringing up her son to be polite and nice and not play with rough boys, full of biblical warnings against sex and women. He led a cloistered life, brightened by boys' science fiction of the Batman variety. He got his thrills by floating round his bedroom in sheet draped like a cape, living out his fantasies.

But then the fantasies merged with reality. He had to admit to his mother how it was that he had broken the strap on her bra. She whisked him off to a psychiatrist, at 16 and never mentioned it to him again.

"He was also pressurised to do well at school," says Sylvia, "and I wonder if dressing up was an outlet for him, the way I think it's an outlet for him now, when it's heavy going. Every now and then I sense there's a build-up for him to dress up completely as a woman. He may seem more irritable than usual, or very disturbed and preoccupied. I say, 'I think it's time you have a session.' And it does seem to lift some of the cloud."

"But he makes a terrific husband, as I think most transvestites do. They are often very good in the house, very kind and loving and soft and gentle. But I am a bit scared of the future, when he is older, and when sex is not such an important part of the relationship. I know there are Beaumont Society members in their seventies and think, God Almighty, I'm not looking forward to that."