When wives find out he wants to be a woman

Joan (right) and her husband, "Veronica," as he prefers to appear.

THE WORLD of housewife Joan was shattered the day she found a length of patterned material hidden in a cupboard of her suburban semi-detached.

When she questioned her husband about it he admitted that the material was to make a dress—for HIMSELF.

Joan was faced with, perhaps, the most shattering discovery a wife can make: *That she had married a man who secretly yearned to be a woman.*

It is a problem shared in desperate secrecy by wives and mothers all over Britain.

And, for every wife who has discovered her husband's secret, there are hundreds more who will probably live out their lives never knowing that the man who gave them the gold ring on their fingers secretly covets their womanhood.

EXCLUSIVE by PAUL PICKERING

'I'm used to it'

"My world seemed smashed to pieces," said Joan, an attractive 33-year-old. "At first I went into a kind of dazed shock. But I suppose I'm used to it now."

Beside her sat "Veronica" as her husband likes to call himself, in spotted dress and brunette wig. Nobody would have taken him for anything more than a rather well-built woman in her late thirties.

He is one of the unfortunate, tormented people known by doctors as trans-sexuals—not homosexuals or mere "kinky" transvestites, but people who genuinely feel they should be the opposite sex.

"I wanted a sex-change long ago," he said. "But the drugs made me so ill and it didn't work out.

"I was so lonely that I thought marriage would help."

Joan recalls the first time, after the initial shattering discovery, that her husband appeared before her as "Veronica."

"I just wouldn't look at him," she said. "We just sat there doing nothing. It always used to be at night, after our elder boy had gone to bed.

"Frankly I felt cheated, because he hadn't told me about this before we married.

Big fear

"But I suppose, like any other wife, I was prepared to do a lot to keep my home together. I began to make allowances—I'd say to myself that at least he isn't an alcoholic or a gambler."

The big fear was that the elder boy, aged 12, would come down from the bedroom unexpectedly. "I would sit there on the edge of my chair listening for every noise and creak," said Joan.

At last it was decided to tell him. Said Joan: "I explained there were different types of people and then showed him some photographs of his daddy dressed as a woman.

"I made it clear that this wasn't the only one in the world—that daddy wasn't some kind of outcast.

"He was upset about it. There were a few tears. I don't know if it was bewilderment or what. I just hope that it wasn't something deep.

"Anyway, he seemed to get over it."

None of the couple's friends know of their secret. "If someone came to the door unexpectedly I often had to say that my husband was in the bath," said Joan.

"But it's nice to be able to talk to someone now.

"I still wish, of course, that there wasn't this thing. The sex life isn't too good, which I gather is often so in these cases.

"But I make the best of it. I dress-make and buy things for him. We share gloves, handbags and jewellery.

"And it has its advantages. I never buy cosmetics. I can always use his. . . ."

Arrest

THE SHOCK when Hampshire housewife Gwen found that her electrician husband wanted to be a woman was bad enough.

But the worst humiliation came one night when, on an impulse he describes as "stupid," he went out dressed as a woman—and was arrested.

She remembers the ring at the doorbell, the policeman standing there. . . .

"I had guessed instantly what had happened. He said they had my husband at the station in rather unusual circumstances. I said: 'You mean dressed as a woman.'

"He was found guilty of behaving in a manner likely to cause a breach of the peace. Good heavens, he wasn't hurting anyone.

"The real punishment was the publicity—the headlines in the local paper.

"But strangely out of all the people I met, only one ignored me. And out of my husband's 60 workmates, only one ignored him. People are more tolerant about this than you realise."

It was more than 20 years ago that Gwen discovered the truth about the husband who calls himself "Pat."

She tried to understand. "Mind you, I think I would have tried for a divorce if he had done this dressing-up in front of the children," she said.

"It was a terrible strain. They couldn't bring their friends home, for instance.

"My father, who is 73, saw him and just couldn't understand. He went away vowing 'Never again.'"

And husband "Pat," now in his fifties, said: "I would have had a sex-change if it was possible when I was younger. But I couldn't do it now.

"I couldn't leave my wife and start a new life. For me, it is too late."

A joke

THE SHOCK came for Elizabeth, a pretty Manchester brunette, before her marriage.

"I went round to his house one night and he came downstairs dressed as a woman. He made a joke of it.

"I thought so long as that's all he wants, that's all right. I thought being married with a family would be an end of it."

But it was not the end. And today, at 25 and with a two-year-old daughter, Elizabeth has to live with a husband who calls himself "Linda."

She said: "All I'm doing is living from day to day. I've never liked it. How can any woman like it?

Help

"My parents have been wonderful really. They've seen my husband as this Linda but they do all they can to help—like baby sitting to enable us to go out."

And "Linda" said: "No one can understand this unless it is happening to them. You just don't understand whether you are a man or a woman and you just want to be one or the other.

"The half-dozen people I've met who have had the sex-change operation never struck me as very happy.

"Then there's my wife and baby. I couldn't leave them.

"She's been very good really, my wife."

MOVING letters have been received from readers, themselves tormented by this problem, and from wives who have kept their husbands' secret for years. Some will be published next week.

THE VERGER WHO WAS GIVEN A WEEK TO GO

CHURCH verger Louis Veness is pretty sure why he suddenly got the sack.

The vicar discovered he was wearing women's clothes under his church robe.

The shock at St. Nicholas', Newbury, Berks, was not shared by the verger's wife.

Mrs. Yvonne Veness has known throughout 22 years of marriage that her husband wants to be a woman.

In fact, since the sacking (by a former vicar) Louis Veness has lived openly as a woman, known as "Louise," and the couple have lived together as "sisters."

"It was really I who pushed him into it," said Yvonne, 51, now proprietor of an antique shop in Oxford Street, Newbury, Berks.

"I knew about this problem soon after we met. But people get married for different reasons. Ours was for security and friendship as much as anything."

"Louise" said: "I have always considered I was a woman. But I had to conceal the way I felt and wear women's dress under my church clothes, which I always kept buttoned up.

"But the vicar of that time must have discovered because he suddenly gave us a week to get out of the verger's house.

"I'd been trying for the sex-change operation, anyway, ever since I knew you could have it under the National Health.

"Living as a woman has made me feel at peace with myself.

"But it wasn't an easy decision to make at first. It took a lot of courage."

Yvonne said: "I was in favour of it. I could see the terrible effect this problem was having—terrible sleepless nights, pacing about, tears.

"Something just had to be done.

"It just wasn't worth the unhappiness, whatever people thought."

Now the couple hope that "Louise" can have the operation and they will be divorced—so that they can continue to live together as sisters.

As well as the antique shop, the Venesses run an animal hospital well known in the district.

"People round here have been wonderful," said "Louise" Veness. "The only ones really hostile have been some of the church people—those who are supposed to be charitable and tolerant."

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