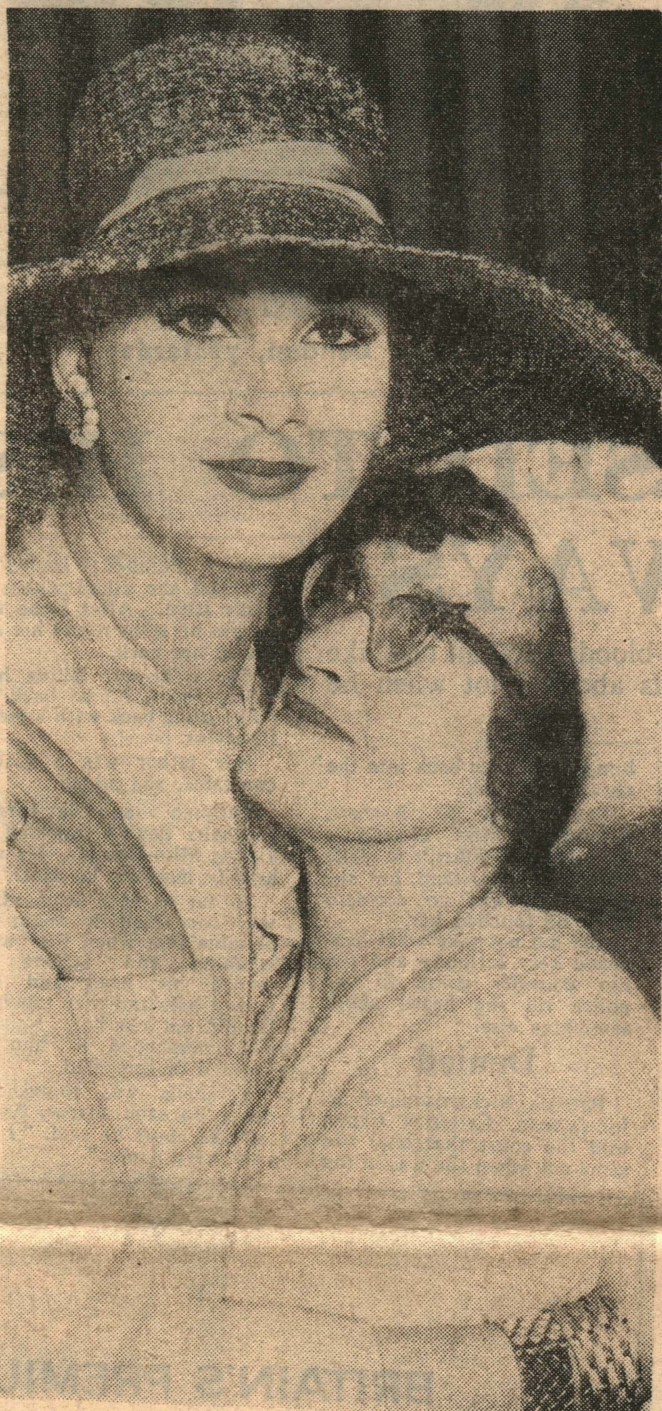


MY STRANGE LIFE

By April Ashley

HER OWN AMAZING STORY STARTS TODAY ON PAGES 2 AND 3



My strange life by

From cabin

THIS, surely, was the most agonising yet joyous, the most harrowing yet soothing moment of my whole strange, mad whirlwind life.

The moment a few hours ago, when for the first time in more than eight stormy years, I was reunited with my mother.

The mother who last saw me when I was George Jamieson, deck-hand in a British cargo ship.

The mother, so dearly beloved, from whom I had deliberately kept apart all this time to spare her the agony of my transformation from manhood into womanhood.

The mother to whom now, at long last, I was ready—even proud—to present myself anew as a daughter.

TELEGRAM

I had hesitated about this reunion right up to the time the papers broke the news of my forthcoming engagement to the Hon. Arthur Corbett, the son and heir of Lord Rowallan, present Governor-General of Tasmania and a former Chief Scout.

Even then I dithered for a day or two. But finally I plucked up courage and sent a telegram to her at her home in Cheetham, Manchester.

It said: "Dear mother. Very urgent you 'phone me as soon as you get this. Love."

And so, not many hours later, my mother arrived at my flat in Kensington.

All morning I had been watching for her from the first-floor window. But somehow, when the taxi drew up, I didn't see it.

The first I knew was the familiar voice behind me in the room saying: "George!"

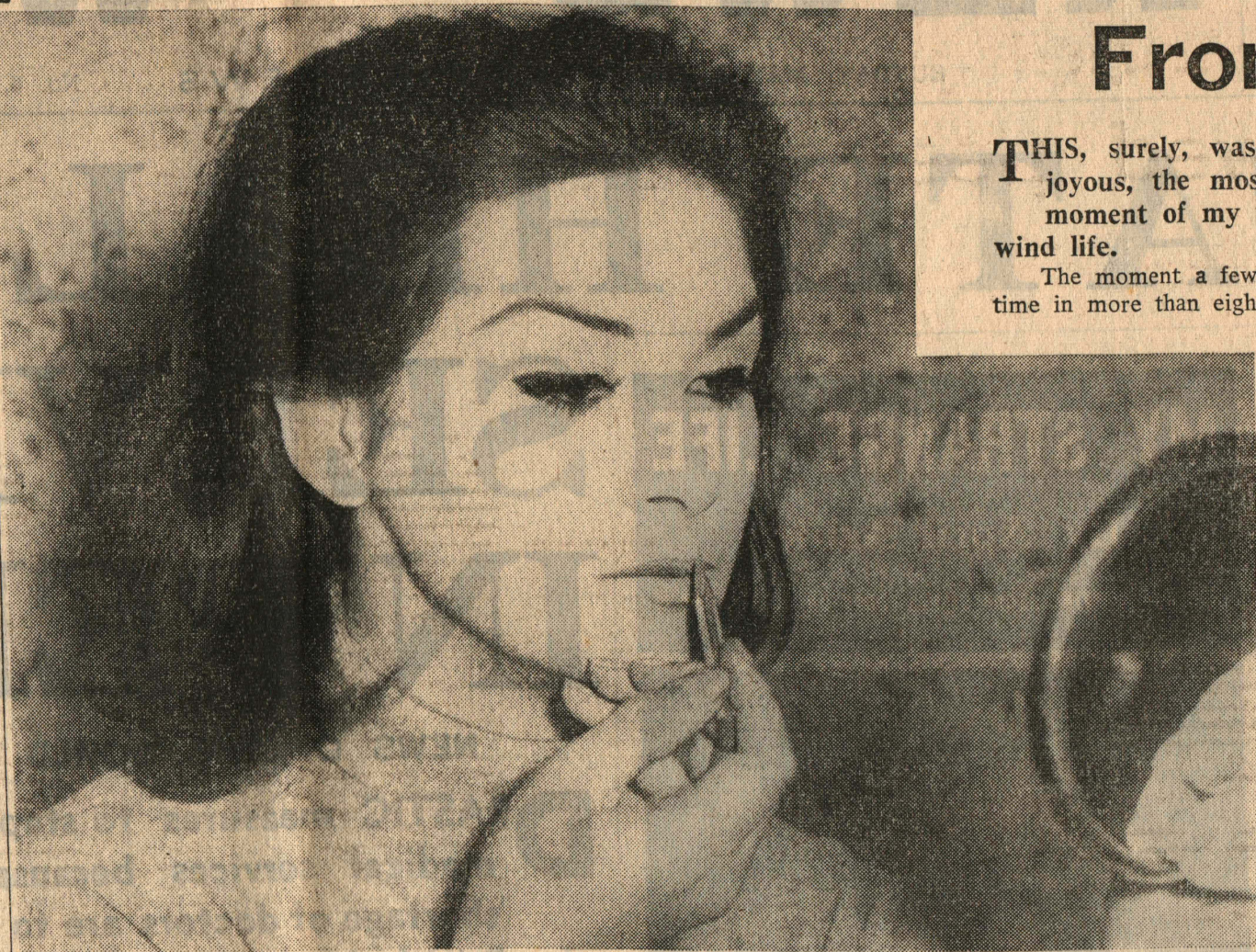
I turned and flew into her arms. Tears streamed down our cheeks as we hugged one another. And for a while not another word was spoken.

TALKED . . .

But then she drew back a little and, holding me at arms length, gazed at my long hair, my pearl ear-rings, the jewels about my neck and on my fingers, my new lemon-coloured suit and stiletto-heeled shoes.

"Why, George," she said, "I can't believe it. I simply can't believe it.

"How you've changed. You



A lovely girl adds a touch of lipstick—April Ashley in London, yesterday.

WEREN'T USED TO HIS ITALIAN WAYS

FRANCO FARABELLA is a happy, lively, hot-blooded Italian and like

surgery Farabella smiled at her and she asked where he came from. After some talk he put his arms round her and kissed her neck.

She went out telling him.

April Ashley

boy to model girl—now she'll wed peer's son

look so young, so beautiful. Just like a film star."

Gently then, right at the beginning, I had to remind her: "Not 'George' now, mother, but April. Try to remember always—April."

We drank champagne and talked of all the members of our large family. I had not seen any of them, except one sister, Marjorie, since I was a young man of 19, just eight years ago.

All my three brothers and two sisters are married now, I discovered. And all have children—the one great blessing which I am forever denied.

It was long past midnight when at last we decided it was time to go to bed. But even then I said: "Come along, mother. Come and sit with me and talk to me while I have a bath."

And all the time she kept saying: "I can't believe it. You are so beautiful. So very beautiful."

FRANKNESS

I tried to be completely frank with her. I explained everything about my transformation and the wonderful magical operation in the minutest detail, but very, very gently.

We have hardly stopped talking since that first meeting.

We have been out on several exciting shopping expeditions, choosing wonderful clothes and lingerie and cosmetics together. And talking all the time.

And now I have asked her to come with me to help me choose an engagement ring.

I've explained to her that I've had a letter from Arthur, at the night club he runs in Marbella, on the Spanish coast near Malaga, telling me to go along to Aspreys, in Bond-street, and choose a fine ruby surrounded by diamonds.

Arthur is a connoisseur of rubies.

My sister Marjorie is coming to join us tomorrow. I would like them to be with me when I open in cabaret at the Astor, in the West End, probably next week. But I doubt whether they will be able to stay that long.

Before they leave me, though, I hope I shall be able

to tell them everything about my fascinating, exciting but often frightening life in the years I have been away from them.

Just as I shall be telling you in the News of the World in the next few weeks.

They know already, of course, about the early days in the back streets of Liverpool, when I was an ugly, thin, but quite hearty little boy.

Even though I did like playing with dolls and preferred the company of little girls, I literally forced myself to box with my brothers. To



April as a boy.

play football and cricket. To win a medal for long-distance running.

And, when I was old enough, at 15, I chose to go to the Merchant Navy school, the Vindicatrix, on the River Severn, to be trained as an able-bodied seaman.

DIFFICULTIES

I was just 16 when I joined my first ship, the Pacific Fortune. She was a freighter carrying 12 passengers and plying between Manchester, Canada, Panama, the West coast of America, the West Indies and European ports.

But now my troubles and adventures were beginning. And I quickly retired into my own very secret half-world.

I worked hard and tried to

be "one of the boys" by going out drinking with the crew at ports of call.

But it didn't quite work out. The bitterness grew all the time.

Often I was accused of being soft. And that I resented most of all. The very thought horrified me. My reaction was to try all the harder to go to the opposite extreme.

Finally, in Los Angeles I gave way to despair. I tried to commit suicide.

They rushed me to the Seaside Memorial Hospital at Long Beach, California.

SECRET

There my life was saved but my seafaring ended. After some weeks they shipped me home and out of the Merchant Navy. "Unfit on medical grounds," they said.

I told my mother only that I'd had a nervous breakdown and kept my terrible, gnawing secret to myself.

Without telling anyone, I went to the Walton Hospital, Liverpool, and told a doctor there my troubles.

I asked for and was given a long course of drugs and electric treatment, all designed to make me more manly.

But it made no difference, and in the end they told me it was no use.

Again I tried to commit suicide by throwing myself into the cold waters of the Mersey.

All the time my body was changing gradually. But now came a sudden and violent change in my mind.

I decided that I'd try making the most of my life. Just as I was.

I took jobs as a barman at the Westminster Hotel, Rhyd, the Tarlady Hotel, St. Asaph, and an hotel off Northgate-street, Chester. Then London. Then Jersey, as a waiter at the Corbiere Hotel, Corbiere.

It was during that spell that I met my first love. I was wearing jeans and a sweater and had no trace of a beard.

He was a tall and very handsome Jewish boy, who believed I was a girl.

We spent some happy, innocent hours together. But then, one day, he telephoned me and said: "You fascinate me." And I thought it was time to enlighten him.

The shock was cruel for us both. But we remain firm friends to this day.

HORROR

Next: Back to London and a job as a salesman in a Gloucester-road grocery store.

Now I found myself in the twilight world of the half-men and half-women. Drug addicts were among my friends. I went to grotesque, weird parties night after night.

It was an interlude of horror that I never wanted and have always regretted.

I was lucky to escape—back to Jersey, and, finally, on holiday, to the South of France.

There, everyone kept telling me I looked so much like a girl I should try for a job at a club in Paris called the Carrousel, where the cabaret is exclusively female impersonation.

I wasn't keen on the idea, but I was broke. So I hitch-hiked north and called at the club.

The manager took one look at me and said: "But we don't employ girls. Only men."

I proved to him that I was a man. And the job was mine.

Then began years of high living—of travel, luxury and beautiful clothes, in a background of fine hotels, aristocracy, movie stars and wealth.

In travels around France and Italy, dressed always as a woman now, I mingled happily and freely with people like the late Belinda Lee, Van Johnson, Bob Hope, Shirley Bassey, Juliette Greco, Margaret Lockwood and her daughter "Toots," and scores of other international personalities.

There were moments of acute embarrassment, and of high humour.

TRANSFORMATION

Like the time I moved into a Rome luxury hotel as the guest of a fabulously rich Italian, only to be handed over to the police as soon as the management saw my passport.

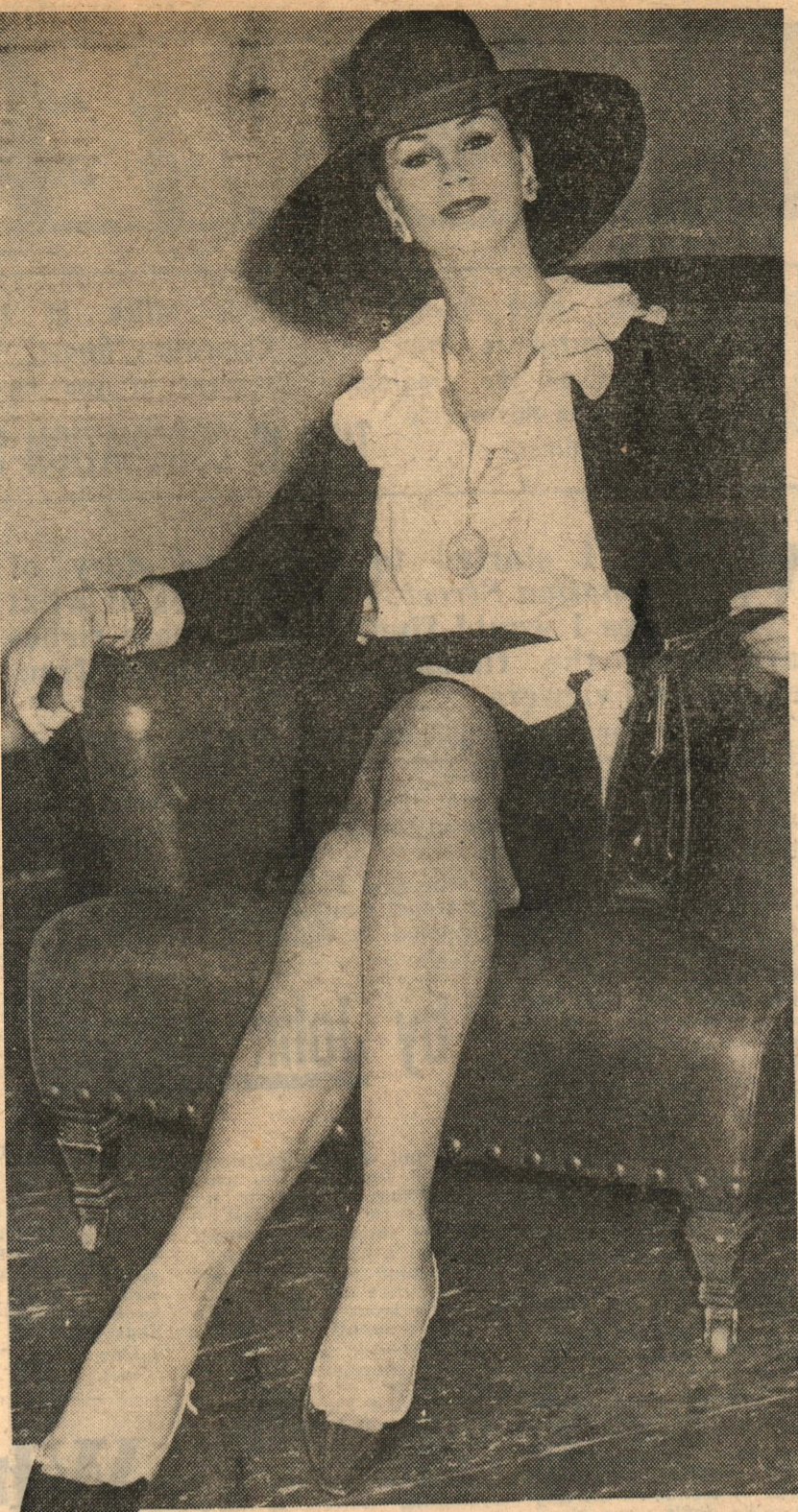
And all the time I was saving hard. Saving for an expensive operation which, I hoped, would transform me completely into the woman I yearned to be.

At last I had some thousands of pounds in the bank. Ana Coccinelle, a famous French cabaret star, who is probably the world's most famous impersonator, gave me a letter of introduction to a French-Moroccan surgeon at Casablanca.

He promised me nothing. He warned me of the great risk. And the next morning—at 7 o'clock on May 11, 1960—he operated.

NEXT WEEK

APRIL tells all... The haunting fears and the disillusionments, the excitements and the glamour, too, of her strange life.



'Not George now, mother but April. Try to remember always—April'

Ready to go shopping... April shows her model girl's flair for clothes.

PICTURES BY ROBERT CHANDLER.



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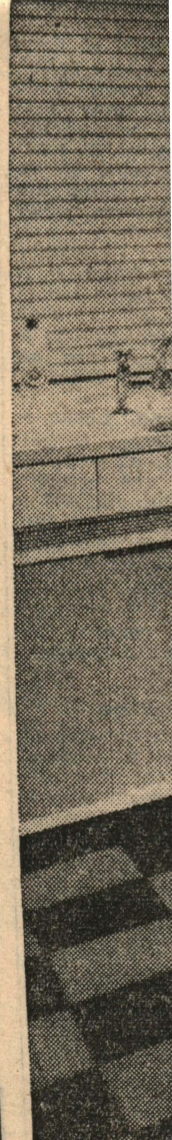
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