



LIFE'S A DRAG

... or at least it was for EVA writer Nick/Nicola McGrath when he endured an extensive makeover to discover all the trials and tribulations of being a woman for a day!

For decades, men have stared blankly as their girlfriends utter phrases such as: 'Does my bum look big in this?', 'These bloody heels are killing me,' and 'Why's that bloke talking to my tits?'

For years, I was one of those men. But not any more.

It's 2pm on a Monday afternoon, and I'm hopelessly wrestling with a pair of extra-long tights in a dimly-lit dressing room in Soho's infamous drag club, Madame Jo Jo's. My dangly bits are being strangled by the black G-string I've stolen from my girl friend's knicker drawer, so I yank them between my legs before squeezing my footballer's thighs into a figure-hugging skirt. I look like a trucker at a fancy-dress party.

After much discussion, I plump for a sleek leopard print skirt, silky black shirt and simple jacket, along with a rather fetching purple scarf.

I still feel like a man, but after years of incomprehension, I'm

beginning to understand why, when women say they'll be ready at 7.30pm, they really mean 9pm.

Any final reservations are brusquely extinguished when Kitty Cartier, Madame Jo Jo's leading drag queen, approaches me with a make-up box the size of a picnic hamper. With my exquisite bone structure and dazzling eyes, I assume it will be easy to transform me into a cross between Kate Moss and Liz Hurley.

But due to my heavy stubble, Noel Gallagher-style monobrow, and chunky jawline, I'm told that I'm more likely to resemble a cross-dresser. The finished result underlines this in spectacular fashion. To disguise my masculinity, I've been forced to wear enough slap to keep Pat Butcher and Bet Lynch happy for a year.

The moment of truth has

arrived - I've got to face the outside world as a woman, with nothing to hang on to except my handbag.

Adjusting the straps of my cotton wool-stuffed 42DD bra, I confidently fling open the doors and hit the streets of Soho. But even here in the most liberal place in Britain, I feel completely out of place.

After 10 minutes of hobbling in heels, I find myself glaring enviously at a man speeding past me on crutches. The 'walk as if you are treading a tight-rope' advice I'd received from my female friends is much harder than I'd expected.

Unperturbed, I limp on. Flickers of reaction are everywhere, but nothing obvious. Even the sight of me holding a pair of juicy melons by a market stall fails to raise the sniggers I'd expected.

Fither people are feeling sorry for me and don't want to upset me, or I'm too feminine for my own good. I assume it's the first option, but a visit to my regular hairdresser suggests differently.

After staring blankly at me for 2 minutes, all he can say is: 'What can I do for you, darling?'

'It's working!' I think excitedly. Next stop is Carnaby Street to try on a few frocks for a 'girls' night out' on Friday. The manageress in the first shop eyes me suspiciously, so I decide against asking her advice on glittery boob tubes for the larger woman.

The guy in the next shop is far more accommodating, and even offers me a discount as I'm 'a very bewdiful ladee.' At least that's what he told my chest.

A couple of wolf whistles and



a beep from a passing courier later, and I'm feeling brave enough to venture into Boots to ask for a bit of make-up advice.

Despite resembling a trashier version of Lily Savage, the sales assistant takes my request for something a little redder seriously, patiently explaining the relative merits of gloss and matte lipstick. She seems oblivious to the fact that I haven't got a clue what she's on about.

Completely exhausted after an afternoon's shopping, I admire my



Out on the streets: is it Joan Collins or Mrs Doubtfire? 'Nicola' keeps 'em guessing

firmer-than-silicone breasts and head to the West End for a well-deserved drink.

Crowds of Suits are spilling out of London's offices into the pubs. I feel that my usual Guinness might appear somewhat unfeminine to the already gawping bunch of blokes hovering by the bar.

I'm caught in two minds.

What shall I order? Will it be a vodka, a lime and soda, or a white-wine spritzer?

Demonstrating my new-found female qualities of diplomacy and compromise, I ask for half a lager in a straight glass, before dangling my shapely pins over a bar stool next to the gazing men.

Apart from the bar staff, I'm one of only a couple of 'women' in the pub, which takes on an intimidating atmosphere for the first time in my life.

The three blokes beside me have either left work early and had a few beers, or they've missed

their optician's appointments, as none of them seem remotely embarrassed to be seen with such a buxom, brassy minx.

After assuring them I'm not a prostitute or an ageing porn star and that I won't tell their wives, they're more than happy to share a joke and a drink, but not a date.

'It's half-six love, not half-eleven, and I'm married anyway,' says one.

Another just can't resist and grabs one of my generous mammaries. Did he feel a right tit, I hear you ask? No, it was the left one, actually (ho, ho). This is a step too far, so I make my excuses and leave.

With my leg hair poking through my tights and my chest hair peeping out from under my scarf, I know the time has come to return to the land of men. After all, the Monday night match kicks off in a bit and I'm gasping for a pint!

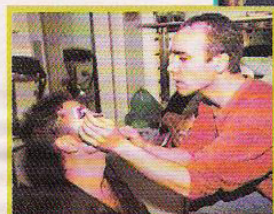
Back in front of the mirror, I remove my wig. Then comes the arduous task of hacking off my multicoloured face mask. Due to my less than silky smooth complexion, the endless layers of foundation, blusher, eyeliner, mascara, lipstick and every other type of cosmetic device known to woman won't budge - well, not without a fight, anyway.

Good old-fashioned soap and water removes the first layer. A dollop of industrial-strength cleanser struggles to scour off the second, but the only thing oily enough to get it all off is vegetable oil, applied liberally.

As I return home with my masculinity restored - except for the perma-stay Mark Almond eyeliner, my swollen feet and the marks in my back from where the bra rubbed me - I breathe a huge sigh of relief that my journey into femaleness has only been temporary.

Now, where did I put those tweezers - I must pluck my eyebrows before aerobics!

“TO DISGUISE MY MASCULINITY, I’VE BEEN FORCED TO WEAR ENOUGH SLAP TO KEEP BET LYNCH HAPPY FOR A YEAR”



He becomes she: Kitty gives Nick the glam treatment and Nick shows he's not short of bra-vado



PHOTOS: TIM FONEY