

Could you imagine staying with your lover if he was accused of murder, convicted of rape or arrested for crimes against the state? Here four women reveal what made them endure the hatred of family, friends and neighbours for the sake of their relationship. Photographs by Polly Borland

Sleeping with the enemy

Women despised for standing by their man.

Annie Machon's boyfriend is an informer

When Annie Machon's boyfriend David Shayler, 33, turned whistle-blower on MI5 in 1997, he was forced to go into hiding abroad. Despite having to leave behind family and friends, Annie, 30, a former MI5 officer herself, decided to sacrifice everything to live in exile with him. 'I met David at work. He was the new boy in the office. A lot of couples meet in the intelligence service as you're not allowed to talk about your work to outsiders, which makes it very incestuous. 'It was in late 1996 that I first knew David wanted to expose some of the practices at MI5. By that time mismanagement and incompetence in the service had caused us both to become disillusioned with our jobs. It was all anyone ever talked about. But David wanted to go public. This scared me. The Establishment would turn against him, and he could go to prison for up to two years for breaking the Official Secrets Act. I pleaded with him not to say anything. At first he agreed, but I knew he wouldn't let it go. About five months later, he started having meetings with a journalist. 'By that time we'd both resigned from the service because we were so fed up and had found new jobs in management consultancy. I didn't want to jeopardise our future together by stopping him from talking to the journalist - he would have ended up resenting me if I tried. I was frightened, though. We both had sleepless nights. I agreed somebody should speak out, but I wondered why it had to be my boyfriend. We'd have to leave the country, our family and friends, and the lives we'd built for ourselves. 'Throughout the summer of 1997, David talked to

a Sunday newspaper. We decided it was safer that I didn't know the details, in case he was arrested and I was questioned, too. I tried to get on with my life but I was convinced that we were under surveillance, being followed and having our phones tapped. However, when the story broke in August 1997, it still came as a shock. David had been given £20,000 expenses by the newspaper to help us with our life on the run, so the day before the story broke we flew to Holland and spent the next morning phoning friends and relatives from call boxes. They didn't know a thing. 'My mum was stunned. "Have you thought about your future?" she asked. I told her we'd considered everything and we hoped we'd be back after Christmas. We moved from hotel to hotel. It was exhausting. I imagined we were being followed everywhere. I hardly ate for a month. Neither of us slept. We were travelling without anywhere to go. 'A month later I flew back to England to sort out the flat we'd left behind in London. As I stepped off the plane at Gatwick Airport I was surrounded by Special Branch officers and was questioned. Our flat had also been raided by Special Branch. Furniture had been smashed, sofas and beds ripped, and love letters and even my underwear had been taken. I felt efforts were being made to intimidate me. Two of our friends were arrested, along with David's brother, Philip, and although they were released, the threat of a charge was kept hanging over me for six months before it was dropped. I stayed in England for a week, reassuring family and friends we were OK. They didn't blame David for what had happened - they were just worried. 'David and I moved into a friend's remote farmhouse in France. For ten months we led a rural existence >



'Our relationship has been tested to the limit, but we've never cracked under the pressure'

Annie Machon and David Shayler



'The hardest thing was coping with the things people said about us'

Cheryl Tooze, left, with husband Jonathan and son, James

< there, with nothing to do but talk. Then, last August, David was arrested by the DSP, the French MI5, at the request of the British Government who were worried he was about to make more revelations. At first I didn't even know where he had been taken. When I did find out, I was refused permission to see him for nine weeks. It was over three months before he was released from La Santé, a prison in Paris. 'I felt angry at how David had been treated. But it made me more determined to fight his case and stand by him. We're living in Paris now. I'm free to go back home but David is still in exile. 'I sometimes wonder if people think I am just a silly girl, sacrificing everything for love. I am doing it for love - but I also believe that what David has done is right. Both our families support us, although a couple of friends have dropped by the wayside. Our relationship has been tested to the limit, but we've never cracked under the pressure.'

Chris Morris

Cheryl Tooze's husband was jailed for murder

Cheryl Tooze's parents were shot and killed at their Welsh farmhouse in 1993. Her then boyfriend, Jonathan, 38, was arrested and jailed for life in 1995. Convinced of his innocence, Cheryl, 38, successfully campaigned for his release. They married in February last year. 'My parents worshipped Jonathan. My dad treated him like a son, and my mum was always telling me to marry him. So when Jonathan was arrested we had no idea that the police even suspected him of their murders - it doesn't occur to you if you're innocent. The police kept changing their ideas about his motive. Initially they said he was after my inheritance of £100,000. Then they said it was because he was jealous of my relationship with my parents. But, I never believed that Jonathan was guilty. 'After the verdict I was hysterical. I screamed for 24 hours. When my parents were murdered,

'I didn't stay in - I went out to face them all. I thought, "Damn it, I haven't done anything wrong - I want to go shopping at Asda and Safeway." In Caerphilly, my own community, people gave me their support - they would come up and wish me luck in my campaign. 'I'd sometimes be annoyed with Jonathan when he was in prison - I felt as though I'd been left on my own to cope. His parents were a great comfort, but I needed him to help. 'When Jonathan was released I was delighted, but I didn't jump for joy. My first thought was, "I'd better get myself ready to face the press." There was one hurtful article which quoted some of the locals, saying they didn't want us back in Wales, which really upset me. 'We married over a year ago and I had our son, James, in the summer. As soon as my parents died I wanted a baby, a bloodline. I hope that by the time James is old enough to understand, someone will have been convicted for my parents' murder. But I worry about him going to school, and other children saying things. 'These days, Jonathan gets nothing but support from everyone. He's not a broken man, but he is bitter. We are both angry against certain members of our family and the judicial system. 'Of course, people will still have doubts about Jonathan's innocence. But you cope with it, and try to make people realise that they're misjudging you. I don't think we can feel truly vindicated, however, until the killers are caught. Until then, it will dominate our lives.'

Rosalind Powell

Marie Dawson's partner is a convicted rapist

Marie Dawson, 44, is a housing and welfare adviser. Her partner of eight years, David, 38, was sentenced to twelve years in prison in June 1997 for raping a fifteen-year-old girl. Marie now lives in North London with her thirteen-year-old daughter and is planning to marry David on his release.

'David used to do a bit of minicabbing, and on Christmas Eve, 1996, he went out, saying, >



Margaret Wilson chose her son-in-law over her family

'She came to my house and scrawled "slut" on the bedroom walls' Margaret Wilson, above

< "I'll be back by 3am." At 6.30am I got a phone call from the police. David had been arrested for rape. It didn't cross my mind that he might be guilty. 'When I went to the magistrates court for the hearing and heard the details of what he was supposed to have done, I was shocked. The crime sounded so brutal. The girl had been dragged into a doorway and raped, and afterwards David was supposed to have walked casually away, as if nothing had happened. 'As the evidence was being given, the police officers were looking at me as though I was dirt. The court-room was full of people pointing at me, as if to say, "You're with him? That monster?" They were calling things out from the public gallery, like "String him up, the bastard." I was glad I didn't live in the area because I feared for my life that day. One or two friends were supportive, but the rest of them thought, "There's no smoke without fire." If I brought the subject up, there'd be total silence. 'When David was released on bail I became like his jailer. I'd be constantly asking him, "Where are you going? What are you doing?" and telling him not to be late, in case somebody made an accusation that they'd seen him somewhere. 'It put a lot of pressure on us and we began to argue. I would shout at him, "How the hell did you get us into this mess?" He didn't want to talk about it. At first I would question him all the time, saying things like, "Are you sure you didn't

have sex? Are you sure nothing will come out in the trial that I don't know about?" He'd say, "No, how many times do I have to keep telling you?" At least it didn't affect our sex life. 'When it came to the sentencing at the trial I was the only person on his side. Even his own solicitor said to me, "You've got a daughter - doesn't it bother you?" Since he's been in prison, there have been only two women I could call friends. Those with children have avoided me. They don't want to be near me, probably because they think he'll be released eventually. I've heard them say things like, "If any man touched my child, I'd kill them." 'I haven't told my family. If they knew, they'd turn their back on me. My biggest fear is that they would try to influence my daughter. I told her all about David as I thought she had a right to know. She hasn't confided in anyone - apart from her best friend - and I don't think it's necessary. It would isolate her, and she'd be bullied at school. Living in this situation is bad enough, without giving people more mud to sling. 'I visit David in prison once a week. He's kept in a separate area for sexual offenders - he was put there for his own safety. The other women visitors look at those of us who are segregated

as if we're unclean - even though their husbands might be in for armed robbery. 'I've no illusions about what the future holds - one thing's for sure, we're not going to be riding off into the sunset together. But I have no doubts about my loyalty. As far as I'm concerned, I'm there for him until the end.'

Rosalind Powell

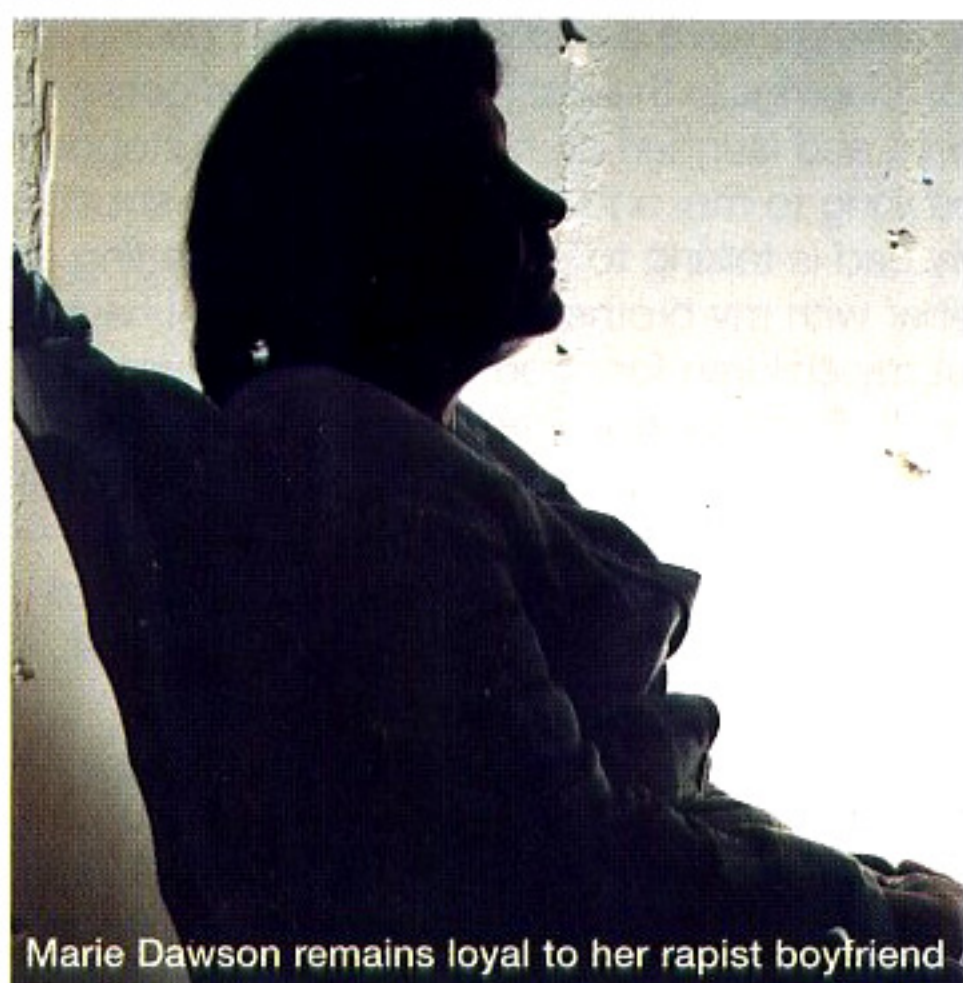
Margaret Wilson stole her daughter's husband

When Margaret Wilson, 51, began an affair with her daughter Angela's husband, Michael Potts, 32, they were both ostracised by the family. Then, two years later, in 1997, Michael, a technician, left Margaret and is now in a new relationship. She is still trying to heal the rift with her family. 'The affair between Michael and me has torn my family apart and I can't see it ever being resolved. Angela [now 30] no longer wants to know me, and I'm not allowed to see my young grandchildren, Carl and Lyndsey. 'It started after Angela and Michael had been married for a few years. I began to feel sorry for Michael because Angela has a temper and I felt she took her frustrations out on him. Michael began coming round to my house when they rowed. One day I went to kiss him on the cheek, and it somehow turned into a full kiss. He said, "That's what I've always wanted." I was

confused and embarrassed, but also flattered. 'The next day I tried to put it out of my mind, pretending it had never happened. But it was hard. I began to see Michael through different eyes - as a man, and not my son-in-law. My husband, from whom I was separated, had died the year before my affair with Michael began. 'Late one night, Michael came round after he'd been out for a drink. I was in bed, and because he'd lost his inhibitions, he got into bed with me. We made love. Afterwards, I told him it must stop, but he kept saying he wanted to be with me and that he'd tell Angela. But she was my daughter. I'd always been there for her, and now I was falling in love with her husband. 'When Michael confessed, Angela went crazy. She came round to my house while I was out, smashed the TV and ornaments, and poured curry and coffee all over the carpets and sofa. She scrawled 'bitch' and 'slut' in lipstick on the bedroom walls. Everybody turned against Michael, too. Up until then he'd been the perfect husband and father - now everyone hated him for what he'd done to Angela. 'My sons, Billy and Chris, and even my dad stopped speaking to Michael and me. Although people turned against both of us, I felt as though I was carrying most of the blame. Nobody knew that Michael had encouraged it all, that he'd told me he wanted an affair. I wanted Angela to know that I didn't pinch her husband and to explain how hard I'd fought against it. But I was too scared to try. 'I'm the eldest of nine brothers and two sisters, and each one told me that Michael and I were not welcome in their homes. They were ashamed of what we'd done. My sisters and my nieces were even worried I'd steal their husbands. 'In November 1997 the affair ended. I still loved Michael but I couldn't bear the isolation and the bad feeling. Michael was depressed, too. He has since met somebody else. I still live alone. I've ruined my life and now it doesn't seem worth it. I knew there was no future with Michael - there was a nineteen-year age difference between us - but something else had taken control. I believed he was in love with me. 'I don't feel guilty that it happened because the feelings were genuine. But I regret having those feelings in the first place. I've been gossiped about and laughed at, neighbours have stopped speaking to me, and people point in the street. 'My dad is talking to me again and it's getting better with my brothers and sisters. But I have lost my children for good. Angela will never get over it. She has since remarried but I don't even know her husband's name. Billy refuses to speak to me and Chris won't let me have his phone number. I still love them but they wouldn't care if I was dead. I've also lost touch with Michael. 'What hurts the most is not seeing my grandchildren. Only a few weeks ago I was walking home when I heard someone shout, "There's that wicked witch." It was my eight-year-old grandson, Carl. I went home in tears. ■

Chris Morris

'The court was full of people pointing, as if to say, "You're with that monster?"' Marie Dawson



Marie Dawson remains loyal to her rapist boyfriend

I didn't think anything worse could happen, but now it felt like a nightmare I couldn't get out of. 'The hardest thing was coping with the things people said about Jonathan and me behind our backs. The locals from Llanharry, my parents' village, were nice to my face, but when I read the papers or saw them on television, they'd say things like, "She must be behind it. It must stem from her," which I found very hurtful. I've no idea why they said it. 'One relative, in particular, became really antagonistic. After Jonathan's arrest she would phone me once a week to say, "It will be all right, he'll be out soon." Then, during the trial, she turned against us. She'd switch from saying, "She's blinded by love" to "She planned it." At one point, she tried to get signatures to keep Jonathan in prison.