

## Gail Everett's unexpected travelling companion

Commuting from London to Kent wasn't the best way to end the working day, but at least the trains were warm and comfortable, and usually on time. One evening, I was the first person to enter the compartment, took the window seat facing the engine, and was immediately followed by a tall man who sat down opposite me, and who put a large, heavy carpet bag on the floor. The other four seats were very soon taken, and the train pulled away.

The compartment was cramped, and the bag was almost resting on my feet. I wondered why he hadn't put it on the luggage rack, and was about to ask him if he wouldn't mind moving it, when I discovered the reason why he was keeping it in such close proximity. Irritated at its presence, I nudged the bag with the toe of my shoe, and the bag nudged me back.

Glancing down, I saw that the T-shirt which had been lying just underneath the open zip had shifted with the motion of the train across the points, and I was now looking at the fat coils of a very large snake. Seeing my look of wide-eyed consternation as I pulled my feet away and shrank back in my seat, the man covered the snake with the T-shirt as the train pulled into the next station. The other four passengers disembarked, unaware of the situation.

Recovering my presence of mind, I said, "What the ... ?" and the man laughed.

"It's OK," he said, "she won't hurt you. She doesn't bite!"

I asked him if he'd got a ticket for that thing, and he laughed again.

"No," he said, "she's travelling incognito", and winked at me.

I then heard the full story. He worked as a dancer in a club in Soho, and the snake - a six foot Boa constrictor which he had somehow persuaded not to throttle him - was part of his act.

Under normal circumstances, my journey home from work was uneventful, but this time it was very different. It wasn't the travel experience I thought it would be, but it was certainly interesting.