Transvestia: A Look Back

Amanda Hawkins
Transvestía: February 1961

New York — The first time I met Amanda Hawkins she was gliding across the floor of the Club d’Orange, which was a popular hangout for the local cross-dressing community. Our arms bumped together and some of my drink spilled on my pants. She immediately apologized for her carelessness, which was quite gracious of her as I’m fairly certain the fault was mine. Nonetheless, that is how we met and we spent the next hour or so sharing a front-row table in full view of an audience who all knew who she was. We discussed what it was like to be a cross-dresser in a society that so disapproves of the practice, though at the time I had no idea she was speaking from personal experience.

I should explain. The Club d’Orange was a venue for drag acts—and several such did take the stage that evening—but it featured female performers as well, and I naturally assumed Amanda was one of those ladies. A torch singer perhaps, both from the way she dressed and the sultry voice in which she spoke. The figure enclosed in her floor-length sheath gown gave no indication that she was anything but a woman. Even the merest glimpse of cleavage she allowed on her chest looked genuine, though as a gentleman I did feign a lack of interest.

Early in our conversation Amanda mentioned she was at the club that evening with a sister—so to speak—who was at that time up on stage grinding out a rather hoarse rendition of “The Lady is a Tramp”. Both the voice and the height of the singer left no doubt as to her true gender, and I took that person to be Miss Hawkins’ brother whom she was there to support. Yet another mistake on my part; among many, it would seem. I would later learn that cross-dressers often refer to one another as “sister”, but by then I had stumbled upon the truth myself.

As a journalist, I document my sources. Amanda described herself as a receptionist for a midtown accountancy firm, and I had no reason to doubt her word. But it was a fib only by half, as I was soon to learn.
Truth be told, the attentions of a woman as sexy and vivacious as Miss Hawkins had raised my hopes. I was smitten; this I admit freely. My plan was to obtain her contact information during the interview, and once my piece was finished and published, to call her up and announce my intentions. For the sake of my dignity, it was just as well that did not come to pass, because I would have found some other girl at reception and a male accountant with a knowing smile.

But Amanda was no fool. She saw straight through the game I was playing. “Why, Mr. Cassock,” she breathed, “I do believe that your intentions in this matter are somewhat lacking in journalistic ethics.”

I hung my head, admitting as much. “However, I am charmed,” she went on, “for you have paid me the highest tribute imaginable for one such as I: the knowledge that I have indeed achieved the presentation of a woman born.” I must have looked blank.

“You believe me to be female, do you not?” she asked, as a smile played upon her lips. I nodded. She patted my hand. “Thank you, good sir. You have made my day and my week, but the month is not yet done so for that we shall have to wait and see.” That’s when I knew.

Like many cross-dressers, Amanda first experienced the delicate feel of feminine finery at the hands of her mother. The occasion, as is often the case, was Halloween. A mother who, unlike her own sister, had no daughter was bound and determined to create one for the evening. Her only son served as the raw material for a pretty little girl, dressed for a neighborhood party as Cinderella. A more appropriate choice for a budding cross-dresser there could not be, as Amanda herself related that night at the Club. From that day on, she was hooked.

Without any real understanding of what “he” was doing, or why, he sought out feminine clothing whenever he could. Certain items would go missing from the laundry, or from charity bins, to be hidden under stairwells or deep in her own closet, and inevitably discovered by his
mother and returned from whence they came. They never spoke of this at the time, but Amanda believes her mother must have known all along. The next Halloween saw him out trick-or-treating as a miniature version of his mother, in full makeup, an up-do and matching little black dresses. His father objected, but then came the divorce.

This changed everything. Mother and son moved away, and perhaps a year later the divorcée took up with a man much older than herself. They eventually married and Amanda took up residence in what she describes as a mansion, the stepfather being quite well-off. He had two adult children of his own and little interest in further parenting, so the child was left fully in his mother’s control—with the able assistance of several maids and other female servants. These girls were delighted to have someone lower in the pecking order to boss around, and once the lady of the house informed them of her son’s interest in female garb the maids were eager to turn him into “one of them”.

One of the maids, a French girl named Yvette, enjoyed dressing the boy head-to-toe as a girl. She dubbed him Éloïse, after her favorite doll in her own youth. This activity had the full blessing of the boy’s mother, who enjoyed passing him off as her daughter to the ladies of her social circle. These ladies, if they formed an opinion at all, were given to understand that their new friend had both a son and a daughter, and apparently made no inquiries that would suggest otherwise.

This cycle was to continue throughout the boy’s childhood. Amanda describes it as living a double life; sometimes a boy, sometimes a girl. One can only imagine the dire effect this could have on an immature psyche. Freud might have said that a split personality would result, but Amanda was fortunate to have lived a life largely free of the kind of trauma that might push a mind in that direction. Between that and his earlier interest in ladies wear, the boy found himself increasingly drawn toward a life of femininity. He came to embrace being a girl, although to others he continued to insist that it had been foisted upon him.
Éloïse, mon cheri... Do stop fidgeting! You are... how you say? La dame de la maison.

Mother must have misunderstood...

All I said was that I wanted to be just like her when I grew up.

Oh, madame sait mieux... she know what you mean.

Head back, please. Lean into perruque.

Now I make you pretty.

Une belle femme... just like mamma.

Text by Amanda Hawkins
Some years later, Amanda’s stepfather passed away and her mother assumed ownership of the property. Not long thereafter, the widow took up with a younger man and began spending much of her time in Europe, particularly in the south of France. Raising her son was left to the discretion of the staff, who were told to continue his education in the fine art of being a proper young lady. He attended school as a boy, but the rest of the time lived as a girl.

In spite of the obvious potential for confusion, Amanda describes herself as having a happy childhood. She felt close to the maids, who treated her as a younger sister, and to the cook as well, who served as more of a maternal figure to the boy than did his real mother.

On the occasion of the boy’s sixteenth birthday, and with his mother due to return from France for the event, Yvette dressed him top to bottom as a girl would for a “sweet sixteen” party. This inevitably involved a figure-hugging party dress, high heels, and a longer, more sophisticated-looking wig than he was used to. Hence, instead of a girl, he found himself transformed into an attractive young woman.

Although the boy continued to maintain that he was a “normal guy” and this wasn’t what he wanted at all, Amanda describes it as a turning point in her life: the moment when she first gazed into a mirror and saw reflected there a living, breathing woman. That is when she first knew, she says now, that being a woman was destined to forevermore be part of her life. Up until then it was something the boy assumed would disappear once he was fully grown and out on his own.

One might well ask, at this juncture, how it was that a teenage boy ostensibly growing into manhood could so successfully impersonate an attractive young lady. Amanda knew nothing of this at the time, but as she later learned Yvette and the other staff had been feeding the boy a small daily dose of the female hormone estrogen.

The “pill” had yet to be invented, but an early version of the drug,
Éloïse, chérie? Come here, s'il vous plaît... I have selected your frock for the party. La belle femme, you shall be.

But... surely Mother will be expecting to present a young man to her friends.

Mais non... madame was quite clear... her daughter was to be in attendance.

I suppose it's for the best. I can't recall the last time mamma saw me as a boy.

My goodness... I'm certainly very pretty for a boy. Does that meant I am meant to become... a woman?

Un garçon, ma chérie? Madame does not see you that way. Vous êtes une fille!

Text by
Amanda Hawkins
produced from animal sources, was available for a price; a high price, needless to say. The drug was arranged through the mother’s physician and it served to delay the onset of puberty. In fact, some aspects were postponed indefinitely: even as a man he has little need to shave, he never developed much body hair, and his voice never deepened the way it might have. Of course, this is all to the good for a cross-dresser.

After graduation, the young man was determined to make his own way in the world. He attended college, gaining a degree in economics, and for a time he managed to set his female persona aside. He spurned his mother’s wealth and sought a normal life among the middle class. But an upbringing like his cannot be washed away by a simple change of clothes; even dating women, at college and during his working life, failed to prevent the allure of the feminine role from returning. In fact, it had the opposite effect. He found himself drawn more to the image of a woman than to her physicality as a female.

By his late twenties, Amanda had returned to feminine garb—not all the time, but certainly whenever it was convenient to do so. When the hormone became readily available, he returned to dosing himself with estrogen; to help maintain his figure, to avoid having to shave, and to generally improve his feminine appearance. Without maids to dress him, he became adept with both cosmetics and female fashions. The proof sat demurely before me at the Club d’Orange.

This needs to be said: Miss Hawkins is a beautiful woman, in every sense of the word. She is female in all but her base physical aspects, which remain invisible to the world. We do both her and her kind a terrible disservice by relegating them to the margins of society. They are human beings; they deserve our respect, and they deserve to be accepted as the women they purport to be, because to do otherwise is to throw into question the very notion of womanhood. It isn’t just an ability to bear children that makes a woman who she is: it is the way she carries herself. Who she is on the inside is what truly matters.