

THE MOON WITHIN

By Vic Grant



ILLUSTRATED BY BRIAN DUKEHART

A 'NEW WOMAN' NOVEL

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Introduction

If you read *Boardwalk* by this publisher, you can skip this introduction.

Joe Stagnaro and René Malotte were partners; detectives with the City of Santa Cruz Police Department. Joe, one of two sons of a commercial fisherman and his wife, was born in Santa Cruz California. René, a French Canadian by birth, emigrated with his family to California when in his early teens.

A series of rapes leads to Joe, René, and another detective, Pat Logan, being assigned to a decoy program, intended to catch the slippery perpetrator.

Unremarkable at first glance, Joe shows great loyalty and compassion when he learns the secret that René has kept hidden from everyone, including himself. In spite of this, however, Joe still is unable to fully understand René's point of view.

Through the program, René meets Kim and Jenny, both of whom share a common bond with him. The fact that Kim and Jenny have both accepted themselves, embracing the very thing that René has kept shamefully secreted, helps René come to terms with his own femininity. After a long and difficult period of soul searching, René comes to a critical conclusion which leads him to cross the line, break all the rules, and begin life as a woman.

At this point, Renée leaves SCPD. She and Joe meet one last time at her new ocean front apartment, where she reveals herself to Joe. Although somewhat surprised, Joe reconciles himself to the inevitability of Renée's decision. After this, they drift apart, not through enmity, but simply for lack of the common bond they once shared.

In this story, Joe and Renée meet once again, this time at Lake Tahoe, in the rugged and beautiful Sierra Nevada Mountains of Northern California. This time, Joe is transferred temporarily to the El Dorado sheriff's office to assist in the investigation of the brutal homicides of three young women.

The story of this re-acquaintance after the passage of several years transcends Joe and Renée, focusing on Alex, a friend of Renée's, who is struggling with the same problem which confronted Renée years earlier.

The Moon Within

BY VIC GRANT

So long she lay in silent slumber,
long in fallow slumber lay.
Stirred not by love, nor wind, nor song,
nor by the burning light of day.

*In darkest shadow she lay hidden,
apart from all, in deepest night.
'Till the moon from horizon risen,
did her then bathe in clear white light.*

*She called out thus unto the other,
and did the other so awake.
As newborn fawn, fresh from the mother,
faltering, virgin steps does take.*

*Not angel's prayer, nor king's decree,
nor words, however wrong or right.
Not threat, nor deed, nor hope, nor plea,
unbreach the breech, unlight this light.*

*A diamond set in purest gold,
as well might be but glass and tin.
For none there is so clear and bold,
as is the moon which shines within.*

THE MOON WITHIN

By Vic Grant

Chapter 1: Silent Death April, 1995

Joanne Chambers loved the lake at this time of evening. The shadows were long and of the early spring day, only the glow of twilight remained. The small lamp affixed to the handle bars of her mountain bike was powered by a tiny generator which was driven by the front wheel. The generator, when engaged, put a small drag on the bike, but she rationalized that the extra effort would keep her in that much better shape. Joanne Chambers was an optimist.

She could think of nothing she'd rather do than teaching third grade. Although not universally liked by the more traditional of her colleagues, the kids loved her. Coming from a large family herself, she had ample experience dealing with young minds. She made learning a game. Frequently taking her class on short excursions near the school, she would incorporate English or arithmetic problems into the walk.

'How many trees are there between those two mail boxes?' 'If a Paul Bunyan came and cut three, how many would be left?'

She enjoyed riding her bike in the crisp evening air. Oddly, Joanne Chambers was a loner. Aside from the occasional date or evening out, she preferred solitary pastimes. The fact that the trail was virtually deserted by this time suited her fine. Typically, the only signs of proximate life were the small forest animals which ventured forth after sundown.

Just as she rounded a bend in the bike path, her headlight picked up a large shape on the ground just ahead. Her first thought was that it was an animal, maybe a deer. But as she got closer, she could make out the shape of a man; a bike lay just ahead of him on the ground.

"Are you okay?"

"Ow!" the man groaned. "God, this is embarrassing. You'd think I'd have learned to ride a bike by now. I think I must have twisted my ankle."

"I'll go get someone to help. You just wait here."

"Please. Don't bother. The fewer people see me like this the better I'll like it. I'm sure I'll be okay. If you could just give me a hand up, I'll hobble over to my bike and ride home in dishonor." He added, laughing, "My wife will never let me hear the end of this."

Joanne hesitated. She was aware of the recent brutal murders of two young women. Her impulse was to insist on riding on, but a certain vulnerability in the man's demeanor made her stay. Besides, she thought, her two years of karate classes have well equipped her to deal with any would-be aggressor.

She propped her bike against a pine tree. "Here, just put your weight on my shoulder and we'll walk you to your bike."

The man held her hand as he lifted himself to a standing position.

What followed was so fast, she had no time to act. She felt herself roughly twisted her hands brought behind her. Twine or wire was wrapped quickly around her wrists.

"My God. Please. Don't." The words are little more than sobs. "I have money at my house. You can have it all."

"Be quiet." the man said. "I'm not going to hurt you. I just want a little fun, then I'm out of here. Come on; we're going for an evening stroll."

There was a collective groan the next morning in the third-grade classroom at Evangeline School as Ms. Dunwoody, the Principal, entered the room. She reflected briefly how she wished she had ten Joanne Chambers. She dismissed a vague apprehension as she thought how, of all her staff, Joanne Chambers was perhaps the most dependable. It wasn't like her to be AWOL.

"Ms. Chambers is ill today, so I will be conducting class. Francie Saunders, would you be so kind as to show me where you are in your arithmetic book?"

A cute little blond girl in a red jumper and white cotton blouse tripped proudly up the aisle, delighted to have been given the honor.

The school day is barely thirty minutes old and Ms. Dunwoody was just beginning to write a problem on the board when Ms. McBride, the school secretary and heart-throb of virtually the entire male portion of the student body enters after a perfunctory knock. Her face was strangely red. Ms. Dunwoody knew immediately that something was wrong and, without being asked, walked with the young lady into the hall.

Out of sight of the class, Ms. McBride broke into sobs.

"What is it, child. My God, get control of yourself. The children will hear." Ms. Dunwoody walked her down the hall, out of earshot of the class. Another minute passed before the girl was able to speak.

"It's Joanne ..." she began, then again broke into tears.

"What about Joanne?" There was an urgency to the older woman's voice now. She had never seen Jackie McBride upset like this, and knew instinctively that something awful had happened.

"She's dead. She was killed. Yesterday. By the lake. She was murdered. The police are in your office. They want to talk to you."

The older woman began to shake in spite of her determination to set the proper example for the younger one. She steeled herself. "I want you to contact the parents of all

the children. Tell them nothing except that there is a problem with ..." she thinks quickly "... the furnace. Tell them to come and pick up their children as soon as possible." Like a field commander, she gave further instructions regarding temporarily taking Ms. Chambers' class to the fourth-grade class where Ms. Jacobs can watch over both groups. As they part, she reiterates, "You mustn't tell anyone about this. When the children are all gone, convene a meeting of the staff in the multipurpose room."

Chapter 2: Alex May, 1978

The seven year-old stood before the vanity mirror, applying lipstick. Although the mind held a picture of the desired result, the hands were unable to achieve it, causing the red substance to be smeared well outside the margins of the child's mouth.

Clip-clop, clip-clop. The oversized high heels clatter noisily on the hardwood floor as the child approaches the kitchen where the mother was placing the last sheet of cookies into the oven.

"Mommy. Look. I'm going to the store." The child looked up.

"Oh. What have we here? Mrs. Murphy. How nice to see you again. You haven't seen my little Alex, have you?"

"No. Alex went away. I'm here now."

"Oh, that's too bad, I just baked some cookies for Alex, but I guess I'll just have to throw them away. I don't suppose you'd want any, would you?"

"Oh yes. Oh yes." The child jumped up and down in glee. "I love cookies. Please? Can I? Please?"

"Well, all right. But only because you look so nice."

April, 1983

It's evening. The woman and man are sitting on a sofa. While the man read his newspaper, his wife turned the page of a novel she was reading. She stopped, laying the book down on the small table beside her.

"I spoke with Ms. DeGraff today."

"Oh?" the husband responds, absorbed in an article about an alliance between IBM and a small software firm.

"She thinks Alex should see a psychologist."

This got the man's attention. "What? What for, for God's sake?"

"She says that Alex is too ..," she pauses, trying to find a neutral phrase, "that he needs to increase his social contact with the other boys in the class."

"That's why our taxes are so high," the husband responded, a slight edge to his voice. "They should eliminate all those staff jobs. Let the schools educate and let the parents attend to the business of raising the kids. Besides, Alex is a loner. He always has been." He picked the paper back up.

"That's not it, Jim," the wife objected. "She says he's constantly with the girls in the class."

"Takes after the old man, huh?"

"Ah, not exactly." She had a hard time putting the situation into words. "He's more like one of the group. He doesn't have one friend that's a boy. All his friends are girls."

"What? Alex? She must be nuts. What's she talking about?"

"She says Alex is a little effeminate." She hurries on, "Not a lot, I mean not like he's a sissy or anything. Just that he needs to, well, maybe toughen up a little."

The man removed his glasses. Now, he's very concerned. "Damn. I should be spending more time with him. That damn job! But what the hell can I do? It's either that or starve." He became pensive; said nothing for a moment. "Do you remember when he was little how he used to dress up in your stuff? Do you think that was some kind of precursor?"

"I don't know. I don't think so. I mean, kids do that kind of thing."

"Well, of course," the man said, relaxing a little. "I mean, kids don't even know what they are until they get to be twelve or so." He laughs.

The woman shifted uneasily. "Actually, Alex never really stopped dressing up."

"Do you mean he still does it?" the man asked incredulously.

"Yes. Not that often, really."

"How often?" the man asks, his voice rising.

"Jim, Please. You'll wake Alex."

"Sorry." he repeated the query, this time in a quieter tone of voice.

"I'm not sure. I just know he does it."

"How do you know?"

"There are signs. Sometimes, in my dresser, things aren't exactly where they should be. You know, that kind of thing. What do you think we should do?"

"Talk to him. I'll have a talk with him. I'll try to spend more time with the kid; teach him baseball, stuff like that."

He brightened. "Hey, maybe he'd like to go with me to a Lakers game. I'll get some tickets."

Thus, at the age of twelve, the boy for the first time in his life became the focus of his father's attention. Oddly, his efforts only widened the chasm which existed between them. When Jim wanted Alex to play football, the boy instead found an interest in the ballet. When he tried to teach him to box, the boy became so upset at the brutality that he ran to his room, crying, and locked the door.

It was six years before Jan Webb finally got Alex professional help.

Chapter 3: As The Twig is Bent! April, 1983

In a different town, over 500 miles to the North, another twelve year-old boy sat on his bed. Even with the rock music playing, he could hear his father's loud threats. He knew from long experience what follow. First, there would be the sound of something being thrown against a wall or to the floor. Then, there be more yelling followed by more sounds. But these, sounds will be of slaps or punches. The next morning, his mother will be up early and his breakfast will be waiting for him. Unless the blows were all to the body, her face will bear silent witness to the previous-night's abuse. He heard the sound of a punch followed by the muffled thump of a body hitting the floor. Then his father's voice slurred drunkenly "Get up, bitch."

It had all been different when Merle and Rose were dating. Merle's confident swagger had been appealing to her then. Sure, he was a little rough around the edges, but he sure knew how to show a girl a good time. And that boy could dance! She thought back to all the times they'd hit the clubs and she'd show him off in front of the other girls. She was pretty then ... and thin.

When they got married, it all changed. It was like she was just another possession - like his prize sixteen-gauge or one of his two pit bulls. God, there ought to be some kind of sign guys like him were required to wear, like the ones they had on those trucks that hauled dynamite on the highway: Danger - Explosives. Then a girl could steer clear.

They'd been married thirteen tough years now. She'd left him twice, but both times he'd found her and beat the hell out of her when he got her home. She was too scared to go to the police. She'd done it once, but that was back in the days when cops figured you didn't mess in a man's marriage. If he wanted to slap the old lady around a little, she probably had it coming.

It wasn't bad enough that he beat her, he'd also poisoned the kid. Her boy. How pretty he was when he was a baby - fat little pink cheeks. He was like a little angel. When he got to be five, she'd started reading him those cute little Christopher Robin poems. But old Merle had made short work of all that. He wasn't going to see his son raised a sissy with all those 'put on' manners and fancy-pants attitudes. No way! Not his son. Merle openly ridiculed the poems, and soon the boy too felt they were a silly waste of time. It wasn't long before he'd put a .22 into his hands and had him shooting cans in the back yard, and it wasn't long after that he had him shooting rabbits, then birds, then deer. And, if that wasn't bad enough, he would sometimes even slap her around in front of the kid.

About the only pleasure Rose got from life, aside from joking around with some of her friends at work, was her cat, 7-Up. There was something real nice having a critter that gave unconditional love. Sometimes she'd sit up at night when Merle was out drinking and watch TV with old 7-Up on her lap. The cat would purr and she'd stroke it's fur. The nice thing about 7-Up was that she was always there for her. It was the only thing that kept her sane. Maybe she loved 7-Up so much because Merle hated the cat with such passion. Or maybe it was the other way around. She couldn't think real deeply any more.

Why he didn't just kill her and get it over with, she could never figure out. Probably 'cause she had a steady income and he didn't. In spite of the fact that she made pretty good money as a waitress in one of the hotel restaurants, they lived like pigs in a rented shack behind the bowling alley. Real convenient for Merle, though. He only had to walk a hundred yards to drink up her paycheck.

It was easy to pinpoint the exact minute Rose finally decided she'd had it 'up to here'. It wasn't so much a matter of time as it was the straw that broke the camel's back. She'd become almost desensitized to him hitting her. Funny, at first it had hurt big time, but either she was losing her sense of pain or she was just getting used to it. What kicked it over the top was when he came in drunk as a skunk and decided to try something new. Beating her up mustn't have given him quite the satisfaction it once had.

It was a warm July night in 1983 when Merle came home and got ugly for the zillionth time. Rose had put up some new curtains in the kitchen. They were white with blue flowers and she'd gotten them on sale at the discount store in Bijou for \$11.95. Merle spotted them the minute he walked in, and then proceeded to tell her what a slut she was to waste their money on such trash. Just as he was about to whack her good, poor 7-Up made the fatal error or meowing at the torn screen door that separated the kitchen from the junk yard that lay beyond.

Merle got a look she'd never seen before on his bearded face. He looked like the devil himself. He turned away from her and staggered to the back door, walked out, and grabbed 7-Up by her back fur. There were only a couple of cat screams after he threw 7-Up into the pen where his two pit bulls were kept.

Just like when he hit her, she betrayed no emotion when he came back, leering like the evil demon he was. Inside, however, was a different story. The rage that burned inside Rose that night would have powered a fifty-car freight train over the Donner Pass.

It wasn't long before old Merle was fast asleep in a drunken stupor. He was lying there snoring obscenely, still wearing his dirty trousers and sweat-stained, blue and gray flannel shirt. It was funny how his large body was almost completely obscured by the two small tubes down which she sighted.

She was still holding the sixteen gauge, double-barreled shotgun when the police officer knocked at the front door.

"Sorry to bother you, ma'am, but we got a report of a gunshot in the vicinity. Is it okay if we come in for a minute?"

He was pink-cheeked and young. A real nice young man. Such a shame. What a shame.

Rose was found guilty of second-degree homicide. The public defender did the best he could. She couldn't blame him, or the jury who found her guilty, or the judge who sentenced her to fifteen to twenty-five years.

The boy was made a ward of the court, and had lived with six different foster families before he reached the age of eighteen. He'd forgotten years earlier the poems about Christopher Robin, but he still knew how to kill.

Chapter 4: Alex April, 1989

Alex walked into the office. Dr. White, the boy's therapist, was attending some sort of conference, and a man Alex didn't know was administering the test for her. He looked to be in his sixties, had an athletic build, and was well over six feet tall. The man had had a kind smile.

“Hi. I'm Dr. Richards. Today, we're going to get to know you a little better. You're going to take a very simple written, multiple choice test. We've found it pretty effective over the years in assessing gender orientation. Although it doesn't tell the whole story, it fits into the big picture. Think of it like one piece in a jigsaw puzzle.”

Dr. Richards' speech slowed as, removing his glasses, he continued. “This is not like tests you take in school. In this test, there is no objective 'right' or 'wrong'. What's right is what's true. It's just as simple as that. So, the key here is just to take it easy and answer as truthfully as you can. If you do that, we can help you. It's very easy to see where the questions are going, which makes it easy to cheat. That, of course, would be a big mistake.”

“When you're finished, you're free to go. Dr. White will review the results with you during your next visit.”

Alex was then given a pencil, a copy of the exam, and a columnar answer sheet.

“Okay,” Dr. Richards began. “you can start any time. There's no time limit and, if you have problems with any of the questions, just let me know. It's pretty self-explanatory.”

Exam

For each question, circle a letter (a, b, or c) for the single, unique response which best fits your self image. After selecting your response, place one of the following numbers in the box to the right of the answer you select:

0 – *Strongly disagree.*

1 – *Disagree.*

2 – *Agree.*

3 – *Strongly agree.*

1. You're visiting a friend whose pet cat of many years just died. While telling you about it, she begins to cry. You:

- a. Tell her to get a grip. She can buy a new one cheap. [___]
- b. Let her cry it out; she'll stop eventually. [___]
- c. Go over and hug her and try to make her feel better. [___]

2. When considering a new car, which of the following is most important to you:

- a. What's under the hood. [___]
- b. Appearance items: color, line, upholstery. [___]
- d. The price. [___]

3. Which of the following best expresses how you feel about killing an animal:

a. You'd kill an animal if you had no other source of meat. [___]

b. Hunting is a good, wholesome, outdoor activity. There's nothing wrong with killing animals for sport. [___]

c. You'd only kill an animal to put it out of its misery or to save your own life or that of someone you love. [___]

- or -

c. You might not be able to kill an animal, even under these circumstances. [___]

4. You're entertaining friends in your yard and have just spilled a small drop of mayonnaise on your pants. After wiping it off, you:

a. Go into the house immediately and change pants. You hate wearing something that's soiled. [___]

b. Plan to put them in the hamper later. You can live with it 'till then. [___]

c. Leave it alone. It's a small spot. What the hell? [___]

5. You're at the beach and two teenage boys next to you are playing their radio too loud. You:

a. Yell at tell them to turn it down. [___]

b. Ask them nicely if they'd mind turning down the volume a little. [___]

c. Pick up and move to a quieter spot. [___]

6. You're having trouble locating an item in a department store. You:

a. Approach a salesperson and ask for help. [___]

b. Keep looking; you'll find it eventually. [___]

7. A nicely-dressed, older lady approaches you in a public place, you:

a. Let her know with your body language that you're not approachable. [___]

b. Wait to see what she wants. [___]

c. Give her an open smile to show that you're receptive to her. [___]

8. When you see a cute baby, you:

a. Make over the baby and tell the mother how pretty her baby is. [___]

b. Smile at or wave to the baby. [___]

c. Think how they all look alike. [___]

9. You're driving on a quiet street and see a little bird floundering in the middle of the road. You:

a. Run over it to put it out of its misery. [___]

b. Drive by; it's not your problem. [___]

c. Stop and try to rescue the bird. [___]

10. If women had a greater voice in world affairs:

- a. It wouldn't change much one way or the other. [___]
 - b. Things would be out of control because the bad guys would get away with murder. [___]
 - c. There would be more peace in the world. [___]
11. There's a large old oak tree right in the way of a new room you want to add on to your home. You:
- a. Have the tree removed so you can get on with construction. [___]
 - b. See if there's an alternative solution. If there isn't, the tree's gotta go. [___]
 - c. Resolve not to harm the tree even if it means having to alter your add-on plans. [___]
12. When you have a misunderstanding with someone, you:
- a. Often say "I'm sorry", even if it isn't your fault.
 - b. Apologize, but only if it's your fault.
 - c. Never apologize; it's a sign of weakness.
13. The world would be a better place if:
- a. People stopped killing one another. [___]
 - b. People were more sensitive to the needs of others. [___]
 - c. They shot all the bad guys. [___]
14. Boxing:
- a. Is a good, healthy sport. [___]
 - b. Should be abolished. It's a cruel sport that brutalizes society and gives people the wrong idea of what constitutes good entertainment. [___]
 - c. Is somewhat brutal, but nobody's forcing boxers into the ring. If they don't like it, they don't have to do it. [___]
15. When you're among strangers, you most often:
- a. Approach and engage someone in conversation. [___]
 - b. Establish eye contact so someone will engage you in conversation. [___]
 - c. Keep to yourself. [___]
16. You're taking a 2000-mile trip, and have lots of time. You would prefer to:
- a. Take the cheapest mode of transportation. [___]
 - b. Fly, to get there faster. [___]
 - c. Take a bus or train so you can enjoy the scenery. [___]
17. If you see a very sad movie or hear an exceptionally moving song, you often:
- a. Wonder why people waste their time on such junk. [___]
 - b. Have the strong urge to cry. [___]
 - c. Are moved, but not physically. [___]

18. People find that taking advantage of you is:

- a. Difficult. [__]
- b. Easy. [__]
- c. Virtually impossible. [__]

19. You pass two men on the street who are using obscene language. Which best expresses your reaction?:

- a. You're offended. [__]
- b. So what? Guys swear. [__]
- c. They should save their swearing for a bar. [__]

20. You accidentally said something which hurt a friend's feelings. Which most closely describes how you would feel:

- a. She shouldn't be so sensitive. [__]
- b. You're sorry you hurt her feelings, but she'll get over it. [__]
- c. You're very upset and want to call her and apologize right away. [__]

21. When somebody says something nice about the way you look, it makes you feel:

- a. Flattered. [__]
- b. Awkward. [__]
- c. Neutral. [__]

22. Which of the following would you rather do on your day off:

- a. Go shopping for a new dress.
- b. Watch a football game on TV.
- c. Read a book.

Scoring

Write the score of each question in the box whose letter corresponds to your answer. If your letter is missing (e.g., answer *b* in question #1), it doesn't count.

12

- 1.c | ___ | a | ___ |
- 2.b | ___ | a | ___ |
- 3.c | ___ | b | ___ |
- 4.a | ___ | c | ___ |
- 5.c | ___ | a | ___ |
- 6.a | ___ | b | ___ |
- 7.c | ___ | a | ___ |
- 8.a | ___ | b | ___ |
- 9.c | ___ | a | ___ |
- 10.c | ___ | b | ___ |
- 11.c | ___ | a | ___ |

12.a | ___ | c | ___ |
13.b | ___ | c | ___ |
14.b | ___ | a | ___ |
15.c | ___ | a | ___ |
16.b | ___ | a | ___ |
17.b | ___ | a | ___ |
18.b | ___ | c | ___ |
19.a | ___ | b | ___ |
20.c | ___ | a | ___ |
21.a | ___ | b | ___ |
22.a | *_ | b | *_ | *Did you really expect this to count?*
Sum: | ___ | | ___ |

By the next day, the tests had been scored, Dr. Richards called Dr. White to advise her of Alex's score.

“Bottom line. Alex scored - are you ready? 54/3; F over M!”

“Are ya sure, doctor?”

“Checked it twice.” Dr. Richards replied.

Dr. White knew that scores under 21 were considered low, 22 through 42 was moderate, and 43 through 63 was high. These values applied to both the F and M columns. The 85th percentile for males was in the 11/19 F range and 38/47 M range. For females, it wasn't quite the reverse, but pretty close.”

Janet Webb waited nervously in the reception area of Dr. White's office. The counseling had been her idea; Jim had been reluctant, holding the opinion that psychiatrists and social workers were at best ineffective and at worst, communists. She had prevailed however, conceding that if they didn't get early positive results, she would throw in the towel. She'd heard about Dr. White from Sarah Finley, one of her friends in the church choir. Sarah's daughter had been successfully treated by Dr. White for an eating disorder.

Now, after almost four months of tests and counseling. Dr. White was ready to meet with her and summarize the situation. Due to a tight schedule and Jim's being out of town on a business trip, Jan was forced to attend the meeting by herself.

“Dr. White will see you now Mrs. Webb.” Jan gave a start. A magazine article on the effectiveness of annual mammograms for women under 50 remained partially unread.

Dr. White's Scottish roots were betrayed by a strong accent. Her friendly, open manner had set Jan at ease within minutes of their initial encounter months ago. Janet liked Dr. White.

Accepting her offer of tea, the woman sank into a comfortable leather chair beside an identical one occupied by the doctor.

Dr. White got right down to business. “Alex has a condition we refer to as 'gender dysphoria'. Do you know what that means, Mrs. Webb?”

“Basically, doesn't it mean that one is confused over one's gender?” responded the woman, not at all sure that her answer was adequate.

Rather than either correcting or affirming her definition, the doctor gave a small lecture. “Years ago,” she smiled, “the world was a simple place for our Western culture. Men were men; women were women. Anyone who didn't fit neatly into one of those two simple boxes was deemed in some way defective or inferior.

“A woman who dared aspire to a career or who wanted the right to vote, 'didn't know her place' or was 'masculine'. Worse than an assertive woman, however, was a man who was sensitive, or who had any manifestation of femininity. This was, of course, due to women's' lower status, and so a man who exhibited feminine traits or cross-dressed was, for obvious reasons, 'missing something' and an object of scorn and ridicule. It was during this time that pejorative terms like 'sissy' and 'pansy' came into common use.

“Due to the social sanctions prohibiting feminine behavior in males, those who exhibit such traits often have a very strong need which overcomes their desire to conform.

“A more functional definition of gender dysphoria might be that the subject, in this case your lad, Alex, has a lack of congruity between what he is and what he feels he ought to be, with respect to his gender. There is a mix of the masculine and the feminine in us all, Ms. Webb, and the normal and natural variations are enormous. Although you feel that Alex is too feminine, he is like two people.

“The public Alex - although soft, vulnerable, feminine in preferring the company of girls and women, and lacking interest in typical masculine pastimes - still represses overt feminine behavior. The private Alex, however, derives enormous fulfillment from the wearing of feminine attire. This is stereotypical, being the most common, though by no means only, manifestation of feminine predisposition in a male.”

Dr. White paused to pour more tea.

“I always thought that it was because he dressed up so much when he was little. That's obviously the reason, isn't it? I mean, shouldn't this be pretty easy to fix with some therapy or whatever.” Clearly out of her element, Jan was flustered.

The doctor smiled at the woman compassionately. “It hasn't been easy for you, has it now, Mrs. Webb? Although I've only met the lad in a professional capacity, I know that Alex is a fine person.”

“Based on what I've been able to determine, I believe Alex's orientation may be endemic. You don't change people that easily, Mrs. Webb. We are, to a large extent, what we're born.”

“What can be done to help him?” said Jan, a note of concern in her voice.

“I will not give you false hopes.” replied the doctor. “It's a matter of removing the fence which separates his two halves. He must love and accept himself for what he is.