

# Stunning Case of the Man Who Was Changed Into a Woman

Incredible as It Sounds, Einar Wegener, Well Known Danish Painter, Was Born and Reached Maturity as a Male, but Died in 1931 a Female, According to the Strange Disclosures in His Just Published Biography



A photograph showing Wegener dressed as "Lili" in the Paris studio days. "Was it really possible, I asked myself, that I could be so good-looking myself?"



Portrait of Wegener as "Lili" painted by Grete Wegener, the artist's wife.

IN THE fall of 1931 there died in the Women's hospital at Dresden, Germany a person named Lili Elbe. Her death passed unnoticed by the press of the world. But back of it there lay one of the most astounding stories in modern history—the record of a medical case which is almost beyond belief.

It is, in brief, the story of a person who was changed from a man into a woman. The details of this most remarkable case are revealed in a book, "Man Into Woman," edited by Niels Höry, translated from the German by H. J. Stenning, and printed in America this fall by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.

Lili Elbe, as the tombstone in Dresden records her name, was born Einar Wegener, a native of Denmark. Wegener grew up like any other healthy boy, studied painting in various European cities, and as a young man became an artist, winning a good reputation in Copenhagen and Paris for his work.

As a young student in the Copenhagen Academy of Art, he had fallen in love with a fellow student, a girl named Grete Sparre. They were married as soon as they had finished their work at the Academy, and thereafter they spent most of their time in Paris. Grete was a talented painter, too, and the two worked together and exhibited their paintings together after their marriage. They were ambitious artists, industrious—and very much in love with one another. Apparently a happy and successful married life was ahead of them.

A few weeks later there was an artist's ball, and Grete suggested that her husband go as "Lili." It was done—and, to Wegener's amusement, "Lili" was a huge success. The men sought him—or should we say her?—on the floor. One man, completely fooled by the artist's disguise, tried feebly to steal a kiss, until Wegener stopped him on the jaw with a view that no feminine person as "Lili" would not be expected to display.

All of this seemed a good joke to Einar Wegener and his wife Grete, and they played it again and again. "Strange as it may sound," Wegener said later on, "it was not I who dressed up as Lili, but both for me and for Grete, Lili very soon became a perfectly independent person, in fact a playmate for Grete, her own playmate and her toy at the same time."

When, after a time, both Wegener and Grete realized that Lili was establishing her identity altogether too firmly on both of them, Grete felt genuinely attached to this "girl friend." Wegener felt, as he told his wife, "that Lili is on the verge of becoming more Wegener than I am."

Furthermore, Wegener soon made an amazing discovery. "When, after a time, both Wegener and Grete realized that Lili was establishing her identity altogether too firmly on both of them, Grete felt genuinely attached to this 'girl friend.' Wegener felt, as he told his wife, 'that Lili is on the verge of becoming more Wegener than I am.'"

When he spent any length of time in his regular guise, as Einar Wegener the man, his health was bad. He suffered from spells of extreme melancholy. He lost interest in his work, became tired, languid, subject to a hacking cough that no medicine seemed to relieve.

When he dressed as Lili, all his given and his had health fell away and he became bright, hopeful, cheerful and happy. As time went on this strange condition grew more and more marked. Wegener wondered, sometimes, if he were going insane. He had periodical fits of extreme depression, became a sufferer from insomnia, his frequent manner was sad but sinister as a woman. He started going to doctors, and for months he visited every specialist he

could find. Not one could find any reason for his trouble. One doctor told him finally that he was suffering from hysteria. Others simply laughed at him. One gave him a course in X-ray treatment, which he could stand this kind of life no longer. If, he told himself, he did not wish a year from now, he would really feel him, he would commit suicide.

Lili adopted the surname of Elbe. He had a Danish passport issued to her in that name, and set to work to establish her life on an entirely new basis. She found that she no longer possessed any particular desire to paint, or any special talent for it. For some time she had been friendly with a young French painter, a man

with a long examination, told the young painter that he was suffering from a monstrous joke which nature had played on him. His body contained both male and female glands; the latter undeveloped and rudimentary, but nevertheless existing. The ill health from which he suffered, the mental confusion that oppressed him, arose simply because two elements in him were contending for the mastery.

Wegener, in short, suffered from one of the most incredible cases of dual personality on record. Half of his personality was that of a woman, and the other half that of a man. As truly as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, he needed imperatively to become either one person or the other for good—and was unable to do so no matter how he tried.

There might be a solution for him, this specialist said. If he would submit to a series of very delicate operations, this struggle could be ended. But afterward he would be Lili, not Einar Wegener! Wegener consented. He went to Berlin for a further examination, and then to Dresden, where he was installed in the Women's hospital. The specialist performed the operations he had described. The painter's masculine glands were removed. Transplantations of new tissue were made to develop the rudimentary feminine glands his body contained. Then began the long period of convalescence.

her hands and feet—all became typically feminine. "Einar Wegener, as Grete had said, simply was no more. In his place was a beautiful, shy, girlish creature named Lili. One gave him a course in X-ray treatment, which he could stand this kind of life no longer. If, he told himself, he did not wish a year from now, he would really feel him, he would commit suicide."

Naturally, all of this created certain complications. For one thing, there was the matter of the painter's marriage. Technically, Grete Wegener's husband was still alive; actually, he had gone from the earth. Grete and Lili finally went to the king of Denmark, and how I dread it. You're a lucky woman, being able to stay home all morning in this nice comfortable house, he said.

Will my hands, will you? If you feed it would do your heart good. I wish you would stay this morning and see that things run smoothly and give me a chance to do a little early shopping downtown before the bargains have all been pawed over and carried away, ma said, and pop said, I'll get you 10 cents. I'll take you up on that, nothing would suit me better than a good excuse to put me through to the 4 winds and stay home nice and cozy and keep home all morning.

Why William, what will be doing, I'll just give you a few instructions about the things that are left to learn, and everything will be easy sailing, ma said, and pop said, it will for me, anyway, fits you up on the instructions.

WELL, there's just a number of the usual little things ma said. I expect to be from Hookbook's upholstery department with a new curtain to hang in the front room, and he'll probably require a little help with the ladder and so on, so you'll have to stand by, so to speak, although I know

who she had known in Paris in her career as Einar Wegener. He and Lili began to see more and more of one another—until, at last, they fell in love. Lili wanted to be married. Furthermore, she wanted to be on the road to re-visit woman and bear children. But before she could do that she must go back to Dresden and submit to still another operation. She went eagerly and the operation was performed. The result was apparent. The upset was much less than she described in the old story. The operation was a success but the patient died. Lili rallied after the operation and seemed to be on the road to recovery. But her heart at last gave away, under the long strain she had been under, and in the fall of 1931 she died.

An English physician, commenting on this amazing case in the preface to "Man Into Woman," remarks that he believes it unwise to attempt such "proper" psychological treatment. "The duplication of personality might have been roused and he might have been enabled to lead a reasonably happy life instead of embarking on a series of painful and dangerous operations which ended only with his death."

## Little Benny's Notebook

By LEE PAPE

WE WAS eating breakfast and pop pushed his cup and saucer away after his 2nd cup of coffee, saying to me, Will I'm off to the office, and how I dread it. You're a lucky woman, being able to stay home all morning in this nice comfortable house, he said.

WELL, there's just a number of the usual little things ma said. I expect to be from Hookbook's upholstery department with a new curtain to hang in the front room, and he'll probably require a little help with the ladder and so on, so you'll have to stand by, so to speak, although I know



not tell him we'll consider it and do give him any definite answer, unless of course he agrees to meet the big rod around the chimney with no extra big air as high as a dollar, but do suggest it. Is that clear, ma said? Pop said, I'll take you up on that, nothing would suit me better than a good excuse to put me through to the 4 winds and stay home nice and cozy and keep home all morning.

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**BE BRIEF**

**HIS PERSONAL ATTENTION**

How you can curtains and hangings are put in place by an ornamental painter from anything but an ornamental painter. And then the roofer will probably call to give his estimate. We're viewing the little roof over the house. It's not so bad with the bay 20 dollars to replace the whole thing. Let him go ahead with it, but otherwise that's all for the time being. The bill will do it for under \$50, and if