

# Astounding 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



Einar Wegener, distinguished Danish artist, as he looked in the days before his amazing transformation began.



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?"

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, briefly, 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 Hoyer, 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, gifted, industrious—and very much in love with one another. Apparently a happy and successful married life was ahead of them.

SOME time during the early years of their marriage there occurred an odd little incident which, in itself, would not be worth noticing—except for the things that followed it.

Grete was painting the portrait of a popular actress, one Anna Larsen. One day Anna was unable to come for her sitting, so Grete suggested that Einar pose as model for the lower part of the picture. Jokingly she pointed out that his feet and legs were quite feminine in appearance.

Laughingly, Einar consented. Grete gave him a dress, stockings and slippers to wear, and—to carry the joke along—got from a trunk a curly blond wig and told him to put it on. Then she powdered and reared him in the most up-to-date style.

"When all was ready we could scarcely believe our eyes," Wegener said later. "I turned round and stared at myself in a mirror again and again, trying to recognize myself. Was it really possible, I asked myself, that I could be so good-looking?"

"And I cannot deny, strange though it may sound, that I enjoyed myself in this disguise. I liked the feel of soft women's clothing; indeed, I seemed to take them as a matter of course. I felt at home in them from the first moment."

A little later the actress, Anna, arrived. At first she did not recognize Wegener in his new guise. Then, detecting that he was much better looking as a woman than as a man, she declared, "You know, you were certainly a girl in a former existence—or

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

Illustrations courtesy of E. P. Dutton & Co.

else Nature has made a mistake with you this time."

IT WAS Anna who suggested that Wegener in woman's clothing had to have a woman's name; and, on the spot, she christened him "Lili." The name stuck.

A few weeks later there was an artists' ball, and Grete suggested that her husband go as "Lili." It was done—and, to Wegener's amazement, "Lili"



Lili Elbe, formerly known as Einar Wegener, taken at Dresden after the operations.



was a huge success. The men sought him—or should we say her?—out for dances. One man, completely fooled by the artist's disguise, tried forcibly to steal a kiss, until Wegener slugged him on the jaw with a vigor that so feminine a 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.

"Lili and I became two beings. If Lili was not there we spoke of her as of a third person. And when Lili was there—that is, when I was not there—was I spoken of between her and Grete as of a third person."

SO THINGS went on for a number of years. Wegener's impersonations of Lili became more and more frequent; indeed, a number of their friends met Lili repeatedly without ever realizing that they were actually meeting their friend Wegener in disguise. Grete painted a number of pictures with "Lili" as model.

TWEN, 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 vigorous than I am."

Furthermore, Wegener soon made an amazing discovery.

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.

But when he dressed as Lili, all his gloom and his bad 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, had frequent seizures of violent but mysterious and seemingly causeless pains.

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 treatments which left him in worse shape than ever.

At length Wegener decided that he could stand this kind of life no longer. If, he told himself, he did not within a year find some doctor who could really help him, he would commit suicide.

THEN a friend put him in touch with a specialist from Germany. This doctor, after a lengthy 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 was 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, and not Einar Wegener!

Wegener consented. He went to Berlin for a further examination, and then went 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.

GRETE presently reached the hospital to visit her husband. (What she found is best described in a letter she wrote to a friend who knew all about the situation:

"I can only hint at what I have been through today. I thought I should find Andreas (the name Einar is given in the book which describes the case). Andreas is dead, for I could not see him. I found a pale being; Lili; and yet not Lili as we had known her in Paris.

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.

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 after the astounding case had been explained to him he issued a special decree declaring the marriage of Einar Wegener and Grete null and void. A little later Grete, with the warm approval of Lili, married a mutual friend of theirs in Rome.

LILI adopted the surname of Elbe. She 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 especial talent for it.

And now the events in Lili's career moved on to their climax.

For some time she had been friendly with a young French painter, a man

whom 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 completely a 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.

Apparently the upshot was much like the case described in the old saw—"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 way 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 operations.

"By proper psychological treatment," he says, "the duplication of personality might have been resolved 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."

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## Little Benny's Notebook

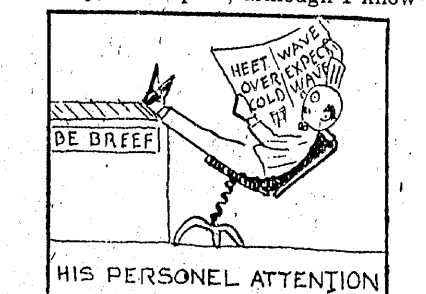
By LEE PAPE

WE WAS eating breakfast and pop pushed his cup and saucer away after his 2nd cup of coffee, saying to ma, Well, 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 my lands, Willyum, if you feel it would do your hart good I wish you would stay home 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 By gollies I believe I'll take you up on that, nothing would suit me better than a good excuse to throw bizzness cares to the 4 winds and stay home nice and lazy and keep house all morning.

Why Willyum that will be divine, I'll just give you a few instructions about the things that are libel to turn up, and everything will be easy sailing, ma said, and pop said, It will for me, anyway, fire away on the instructions.

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



how you hate curtains and hangings from anything but an ornamental point of view. And then the roofer will probably call to give his estimate on repairing the little roof over the bay window. If he doesn't want more than 20 dollars to replace the whole thing let him go ahead with it, but otherwise just have him fix the leak, that is if he'll do it for under 5 dollars, and if



not tell him we'll consider it and dont give him any definite anser, unless of course he agrees to mend the big roof around the chimney with no exter charge, in wich case you can even let him go as high as 6 dollers, but dont suggest it. Is that clear, ma said.

In a way, not in a big way, I fear, pop said. Is there anything elts? he said, and ma said, O yes, there are about a dozen small items altogether. The laundry man will call about 10, ask him if the laundry has located the 3 dollies they failed to return last week, and if not put in a claim for 7 dollers and not a penny less, and if he acts independent that's your cue to act even more independent, she said.

But sippose he acts even more independent than that, and so on add infinitum? pop said, and ma said, Then tell him with blunt finality it's either a case of having the claim acknowledged or elts changing laundries.

BUT sippose he soaks em on the nose? pop said, and ma said, Dont be absurd, and then about 10 thertv or eleven the butcher will call up. Ask him if he has a nice roast of beef and no matter how reassuring his anser is tell him if it's no better than the last one he can send a leg of lam instead, unless he frankly confesses his lam isn't too fresh today, in wich case you can order a nice-shoulder of veel. Is that strate in your mind? she said.

If it's in there at all perhaps it's strate, pop said, and ma said, Now let me see, that's about half the items, and pop said, That's a good percentage I mean it just occurs to me that there are a few things down at the office that will require my personel attention this morning, after all. Hee hee I sippose so, ma said. Properly meaning a man's not much good around a house.