

The Danish Girl

by David Ebershoff



About the Book

A stunning first novel that probes the mysteries of sex, gender, and love with insight and subtlety.

Inspired by the true story of Danish painter Einar Wegener and his California-born wife, this tender portrait of a marriage asks: What do you do when someone you love wants to change? It starts with a question, a simple favor asked of a husband by his wife on an afternoon chilled by the Baltic wind while both are painting in their studio. Her portrait model has canceled, and would he mind slipping into a pair of women's shoes and stockings for a few moments so she can finish the painting on time. "Of course," he answers. "Anything at all." With that, one of the most passionate and unusual love stories of the twentieth century begins.

Discussion Guide

1. What is the true nature of Greta and Einar's marriage? Is it, at heart, a love story?
2. Who do you think must cope with the most change?
3. Would Einar have become Lili without Greta's help? Why does he initially agree to try on Anna's dress? Would Greta have done the same for Einar?
4. What role does the city of Copenhagen play in influencing the lives of its characters?
5. Greta loves the men in her life in different ways. Are there any similarities between her love for Teddy and her love for Einar?
6. When Henrik says to Lili "I already know. Don't worry about anything but I already know" (page 60) what does he mean? What role does Einar play in Lili telling Henrik she can't see him anymore?
7. What is happening to Einar when he goes to Mme. Jasmin-Carton's and dances for the man? How does this influence his full metamorphosis into Lili?
8. Why doesn't Lili pack Einar's paintings to take with her to New York? What do the paintings symbolize for Lili?
9. Why doesn't Lili tell Greta about re-meeting Henrik?

10. Should Greta have done more to stop Lili's last operation? Why or why not?

11. How much does the last operation mean to Lili, in terms of becoming a complete woman? Should she have risked it?

12. Of the people Lili feels are responsible for her birth—Henrik, Anna, Carlilse, Hans, Greta—why doesn't she include Einar?

Author Bio

David Ebershoff is the author of **The Danish Girl**, a *New York Times* Notable Book and the winner of the Rosenthal Foundation Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the Lambda Literary Award. His collection of stories, **The Rose City**, was named one of the best books of 2001 by the *Los Angeles Times*. His books have been published in more than a dozen countries to critical acclaim. Since 1998, he has been the publishing director of the Modern Library. He has taught at New York University and Princeton, where he is now a visiting lecturer. Originally from Pasadena, he is a graduate of Brown University and the University of Chicago, and he currently lives in New York City. He can be reached at www.ebershoff.com.

Critical Praise

"Heartbreaking and unforgettable, it is a complete triumph."

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