

# **The Danish Girl Study Guide**

## **The Danish Girl by David Ebershoff**

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## Plot Summary

Greta, the daughter of a wealthy ambassador, is a struggling artist. Married to a famous landscape artist, Einar (her former painting professor), his work and talent overshadow hers. This frustrates her to no end. She finally lands a commission to paint a portrait of a famous opera singer, named Anna. However, when Anna sends word that she can't come in to stand for the portrait, in a panic Greta convinces her husband, Einar, to put on Anna's dress and pose for her. He begrudgingly does. Greta finds it humorous to see him standing there holding a bunch of lilies in his hand. As a joke she calls him Lili. Secretly, however, Einar finds that he loves wearing Anna's dress, and loves even more, the name Lili.

On a lark, he dresses up as Lili and goes out in public, accompanying Greta to several art gatherings and parties. At first he is very shy and doesn't speak much, because of course his voice would give him away. Greta notes how beautiful he actually is, dressed as a woman, and asks if she can paint him again. He agrees. The paintings begin to bring recognition to Greta, which she loves. She insists that Einar continue to dress as Lili. While in Paris, Lili meets another painter named, Henrik. They begin to go out, but after a few months, when things are progressing nicely, Lili realizes that the truth about her true gender is going to become known and she can't take it. She breaks off her relationship with Henrik, even though he attempts to tell Lili that he already knows the secret.

Meanwhile, the reader has learned that Greta's parents were famous ambassadors, and growing up under their shadow, and with their wealth and status, Greta felt was a burden. Everyone treated her oddly because of her fame and fortune. Everyone, that is, except Einar who, as her professor, did not know who she was. Later, when someone told him who she was, he began acting differently, but by that time, they'd already fallen in love.

The reader also learns that Greta had been married once before. Shortly after becoming involved with Einar, the looming threat of War caused Greta and her family to seek asylum in America. Separated from Einar he writes to her that they should break things off and that they most likely would never see one another again, anyway. Despondent, Greta moves on with her life and meets a man named Teddy. They marry after a whirlwind courtship.

Meanwhile, back in the present, Einar has confessed to Greta that his father once caught him and his best friend, Hans, playing house. Einar had dressed up in his mother's old aprons and dresses, while Hans acted like the husband. Einar's father had caught them and run Hans off. Greta determines to find Hans again after all of these years, hoping that it will make Einar happy. Greta locates Hans who sends an invitation for them to move to Paris to live there with him. They move to Paris. It is only later that it comes out that Hans never did invite them, but Greta made it up so that Einar would leave Copenhagen, as one of the doctors had been threatening to turn Einar in for lewd acts.



While Greta's art career is taking off, Einar's is failing miserably. In fact, Einar takes to going to a brothel, not so much for pleasure, as to see how women moved and talked, so he could try to emulate them in private. After leaving the brothel he comes to a decision. He will sort things out and decide whether he will be Lili or Einar, and if he hasn't figured it out in a year's time, then he will kill himself and be done with it. Greta's brother Carlisle comes to visit them, and Einar confesses everything to him. Carlisle vows to help him. Greta also attempts to help by contacting different doctors. She meets a Doctor Hexler, who is appalled at what he considers to be an aberrant behavior by a man. Carlisle finds a doctor that believes that Einar must have a tumor in his brain and a lobotomy will fix him right up. Luckily, while visiting a friend in Germany, she meets Professor Bolk, and they begin speaking. He's been experimenting with gender reassignment surgeries, and is willing to speak with Einar.

Einar determines that he will go to speak with Professor Bolk and have the surgery alone. When he arrives at the women's clinic, though, no one has been expecting him and it is a few days before they can work him in. Finally, it is time for the surgery and when Professor Bolk opens Einar up he finds out that there are a pair of shrunken ovaries inside of him. He really was female, too. The surgery is successful, and after he recovers, he goes back to Germany where Greta has moved back to their old apartment. Now, as Lili, he has also given himself a last name, based on a river that they used to see from their flat in Paris.

Lili begins seeing Henrik again, and soon, they agree to marry. Greta, who has been using Lili's recovery as an excuse to avoid living her own life, is now faced with the reality that Lili has moved on and does not need her. Hans, meanwhile, has become close to Greta and asks her to travel with him. At first she turns him down, but then changes her mind. Meanwhile, Lili excitedly tells Greta that she's going to go back to see Dr. Bolk for one more surgery, this time to implant a uterus so that she can carry a child for Henrik.

The surgery goes dreadfully wrong and an infection sets in. Carlisle goes to the clinic and he checks Lili out, knowing that it is only a matter of time before she dies. The book ends with Lili looking out over the Elbe river, appreciating the short happiness that she has been able to have in her life.



# Chapters 1-2

## Summary

### Chapter 1

The story begins in Copenhagen, during the year 1925. Einar is working on a painting when his wife, Greta, asks him for help with one of her paintings. Greta had been painting a woman, Anna, but she has called to say that she would not be coming in because she is too busy. Greta needs to finish the legs, so she asks Einar to dress up as Anna. Einar is hesitant at first, but Greta convinces him to do it. He puts on a pair of stockings and Anna's shoes, and eventually puts on her dress. He feels surprisingly comfortable and at peace with the clothing. He's humiliated when Anna shows up and she and Greta laugh at his appearance, with Greta remarking that they should call him Lili.

### Chapter 2

This chapter opens with Greta thinking back to her childhood. Her father was a famous ambassador, so everyone treated Greta and her twin brother, Carlisle differently. She hated it and wanted people to judge her based on who she was, not her family name. When she was attending college, her professor, Einar, had no idea who she was at first, something that she loved. Once he discovered the truth, he became nervous around her. She was still interested in him, knowing then that they would get married. She convinced him to attend her birthday party, and the two shared their first kiss.

Back in the present, Einar brings up 'Lili' every now and then. He eventually dresses up as Lili again, but he and Greta don't talk about it for some time. Greta is invited to a party, and she can sense that Einar doesn't want to go. She asks if 'Lili' wants to go instead. The next day, she receives a note from 'Lili' saying that she would love to go. Einar continues to dress up as Lili during the day, and leaves notes for Greta, talking about his insecurities and being afraid of the party. Greta is fine with it and tries to encourage him. She decides to pass Lili off as Einar's cousin. Whenever anyone asks about Lili, Einar seems to freeze up and doesn't know what to say. Greta knows she should talk to him about what is happening with him, but she can't bring herself to have that conversation, yet.

## Analysis

### Chapter 1

The first chapter primarily serves to set up important plot elements that are relevant throughout the rest of the story. The fact that the book takes place in the past is very relevant, since medicine was not nearly as advanced back then as it was today. Likewise, social mores have been firmly established for both male and female. Those



that liked to cross dress, had trans-gendered tendencies, had no recourse but to live in a type of fringe element, or underground. Einar and Greta are established as a married couple, both are artists. This ends up being more relevant for Greta, since many of the chapters focus more on what she's doing with her art.

The most important plot point that is set up is Einar dressing up as a woman for the first time as an adult. This is what kicks off the main focus of the book, with Einar struggling to come to terms with who he really is. This demonstrates several themes, right from the start, most notably the theme of Being Oneself.

## Chapter 2

This chapter explores Greta's past and helps to explain some of her actions later in the book. Greta frequently struggles with her family fame. She wants to be an individual, but she feels like everyone looks at her differently once they discover who her parents are. One of the reasons that she was attracted to Einar at all is because he didn't know anything about her family. This chapter does briefly discuss their first meeting, which is explored in a little more detail later on in the book. Even this early on, it establishes how Greta is the dominant person in the relationship.

Einar continues to bring up Lili, but he treats this other persona of his like a completely separate person. This touches on three of the themes of the story, Avoidance, Being Oneself, and Communication. Einar is hiding from reality by treating Lili like a separate person. Neither character is really talking about it, which creates even more problems. Greta is supportive of Einar being happy, but she's very confused about what is happening, and so she refuses to talk to him about it. Things could have been very different for both characters if they were more honest and upfront about their problems in these early chapters. Their communication issues come up many more times during the course of the story.

There are several symbols that are introduced in this chapter as well. First, there are Lili's notes to Greta. Obviously, this is Einar's way of communicating as Lili as talking with Greta directly isn't something that either of them can manage at the time. Thus, Lili's notes represent Einar (as Lili) and his attempt to communicate who he believes he truly is. It also represents his very real fear of being discovered and judged for wanting to live life as a woman.

Also, Greta's family wealth is a symbol. For Greta it represents judgement, almost a type of trapping that thrusts her into a mold not of her own choosing. This is partially why she has become an artist, because it affords her a freedom that she had never known. Likewise, it is this ignorance of her family's wealth and position by Einar that attracted her to him in the first place.

## Discussion Question 1

What was the initial inciting incident in the story?



## Discussion Question 2

How does Einar's character illustrate the theme of Avoidance?

## Discussion Question 3

Why doesn't Greta want to talk to Einar about Lili?

## Vocabulary

aberration, cadaverous, burnish, cacophony, effusive, abet, leonine, levity, preordain, brittle, pique, transpire



# Chapters 3-4

## Summary

### Chapter 3

This chapter focuses on Einar, and begins with Einar thinking back to his childhood. He lived with his father, who was very sickly. His mother had long been out of the picture and Einar basically raised himself. They lived near a bog and Einar liked to make up songs about himself, his father, and their dog, Edward. He referred to himself in these songs as 'pretty'.

He remembers he and his friend flying a kite over the bogs, and how wonderful it had been to watch the kite up in the sky. As a boy he wished he could, too, fly above all of the cares below. He also recalls that the kite never stayed aloft, and the last time he and that boy were ever allowed to be friends, that kite had crashed and been torn apart.

Einar had dressed up in his mother's old clothing once, something that upset his father. Einar ended up becoming friends with another young boy, Hans. Hans told Einar to keep his dreams of becoming an artist secret from his father, who would just disapprove. One evening, when Hans thought they were alone, he tried to play House with Einar. Einar took on the role of his wife, wearing an apron and preparing to cook for them. Einar's father discovered the two and chased off Hans, placing the blame for the incident on Einar.

### Chapter 4

This chapter focuses on Greta. She is also thinking about her past. When she was 18, Greta's family moved back to America because of the growing German threat. Greta hated being away from Copenhagen. She wanted to pursue her career in art, but her mother disapproved. She was jealous of her brother, who got to attend school. Greta ended up meeting a young man named, Teddy Cross. The two fell for one another and entered into a relationship. Greta, who was still involved with Einar at the time, missed Einar, but he hadn't been responding to her letters. The one response that he had offered was that he didn't think things could work between them. She was still unhappy being away from home, but she didn't ever blame that on Teddy. She and Teddy were together for several years. She even became pregnant with his child, but unfortunately, both Teddy and the baby died.

## Analysis

### Chapter 3

Einar brings up that he has always been confused about his gender, although not to the same extent as in the present. This is very early foreshadowing about the truth revealed





towards the end of the book, that Einar was born androgynous. Hans is introduced for the first time, at first appearing like a minor character. He becomes more relevant in the second part of the book, when Einar and Greta move to Paris.

Most notable is the symbol of the bog that is introduced through Einar's memory of his boyhood. That he referred to himself as a 'pretty' little boy is significant. Likewise, Einar and his connection to a figurative bog is important as he has always felt weighed down by his own emotions and not fitting in with those of his assigned gender.

This gives rise to the theme of Avoidance. Einar, as a boy, knows who he is and acts according to his nature with Hans. Unfortunately, Einar's father does not condone this expression and chases Hans away. He avoids what he knows to be true. His father also demonstrates the theme of Judging Others, as it is clear he does not care for his son at all.

The kite is a very strong symbol, and each time it shows up in the novel, it represents catastrophic change, a fall from grace, or a terrible tumble toward oblivion. In this instance, it foreshadowed his father's dismissal of Hans, and the fact that the friendship was destroyed beyond repair.

#### Chapter 4

This chapter primarily serves to introduce Teddy into the story. Teddy is an overall minor character, who in many ways acts as a mirror to Einar. In an effort to move on from Einar, Greta had attended an Art show and met Teddy there. Later, at a debutante ball she'd run into him again. Shortly after this, they were married. Greta talks about him more later in the book, when she reveals that Teddy was sick and trying to hide it, just like Einar. The chapter does a little more to establish the time period as well. Greta is very limited in what she can do because of the year and her gender, but she continues to study art, even while living in exile in America. The baby, who she names Carlisle after her brother, is born dead, which may represent the death of her relationship with Teddy (who had also died a little earlier from tuberculosis).

Another symbol in this chapter is Greta's wedding ring from Teddy. She has kept it all of these years and it serves as a reminder of the relationship that she had with him. That relationship was vastly different from the one that she ever had with Einar, and it serves as a benchmark and comparison for the way things unfold between Einar and Greta throughout the novel.

The theme of Everybody Needs Someone is very subtly offered in this chapter through Greta. Living in a different country, away from everything, and having Einar break things off with her, Greta feels very much adrift. When she meets Teddy she finds her bearings again, and it is clear that Teddy is truly the one great love of her life.

## Discussion Question 1

Compare Teddy to Einar.



## Discussion Question 2

Discuss the symbolism of the bog in Chapter 3.

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Avoidance.

## Vocabulary

travesty, treachery, vindictive, vestige, wiry, cupidity, decrepit, effrontery, encumber, fresco, debutante, hale



# Chapters 5-6

## Summary

### Chapter 5

Back in the present, it is the evening of the party. Greta and Lili attend the party at the art gallery. Lili doesn't want to be separated from Greta, who promises to watch over her. Greta is pulled away by a friend, leaving Lili alone. Lili meets a fellow painter, Henrik, who has no idea who she really is. The two start talking and Henrik offers to walk her home. She agrees, and soon the two of them are kissing. In his mind, Einar feels like he's still playing a game, still separating himself from Lili. He's reminded of the fact that he and Greta are unable to have children, and how his doctor had asked him if he was a homosexual. Lili gets a nosebleed during the kiss, which panics Henrik. He brings her back to Greta, who immediately becomes protective of Lili.

### Chapter 6

Einar and Greta never discover the source of Lili's nosebleeds. She continues to get them every once in a while over the course of the month. Einar uses some of his contacts to get Greta's art featured at a show, but hardly anyone shows up, which upsets Greta. Greta speaks with Lili again, who had been making brief appearances over the months. Lili eventually reveals to Greta that she's been seeing Henrik. Greta and Lili start talking about the nature of their relationship. She asks Lili if she's ever kissed a man before. Lili admits that, in her youth she kissed Hans, who ended up moving to Paris. Greta reaches out to her contacts, asking if they know anyone named Hans.

## Analysis

### Chapter 5

Einar starts to embrace his life as Lili, even though he's still unable to admit that they are one and the same. Greta shows off her protective nature of Lili during this chapter as well. Greta continues to act like this for the majority of the book, even when it's clear that Lili doesn't need protecting. Lili and Henrik meet and both feel a connection towards one another, foreshadowing their eventual marriage towards the end of the book.

Einar gets a nosebleed for the first time, something which continues to happen during the course of the story. Greta mistakenly believes that it is Henrik who caused the nose bleed, and doesn't yet realize that it is a persistent problem. This nosebleed becomes representative (symbolic) of Einar's inability to see that something is wrong, that he has been living a lie. It is literally killing him. This is also foreshadowing what will come in later chapters.



The theme of Avoidance is blatantly obvious in this chapter in the way that Lili and Einar are portrayed as separate people (even though they are not). In Lili's interaction with Henrik it is evident that Lili is avoiding the truth about herself. The theme of Being Oneself surfaces in this chapter too, if only to show that as Lili, Einar has found his true self and form, though he is unwilling to acknowledge it yet.

## Chapter 6

Hans is brought up again, and Greta begins her search to find him. Greta and Lili also discuss the nose bleeds. Again, Greta doesn't seem to realize how serious they are, as at this point they're still infrequent and not as serious as what happens later on in the book. This section of the book continues to explore Einar's dual identities, showing that he's still uncomfortable and having a hard time coming to terms with who he really is. Greta knows that this is a problem that has been plaguing him for some time, since it dates back to his childhood.

This introduces this symbol of duality. Einar is split between being a man or a woman. Later, the reader will learn that this is particularly true from a physical standpoint. The author uses language that reinforces the duality, the split, that Einar feels, using words like 'a walnut halved' or an 'oyster shucked open'. Later, the reader learns that when she was younger, Greta would split a frog in half, as a joke, and put it on a silver serving platter for her brother, Carlisle. In essence, she's done the same thing to Einar since it was she who suggested he dress up as Anna in the first place.

Greta and Einar's lack of communication is brought up again. While they are talking, Greta isn't asking important questions, such as where she fits into Einar's new life. Both she and Einar are still treating Lili like a separate person. Greta refuses to acknowledge that she's in a very awkward position, since her husband is clearly unhappy with their relationship and is trying to pursue one with Henrik.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss the symbolism of duality in these chapters.

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of Being Oneself.

## Discussion Question 3

What do the nosebleeds signify and when did they first start showing up?

## Vocabulary

harangue, gyrate, disunion, apogee, castigate, misogamy, requite, whet, whimsical, arbitrary



# Chapters 7-9

## Summary

### Chapter 7

Lili continues to see Henrik, which upsets Greta. Lili doesn't understand why Greta is upset. Greta finally asks her to stop seeing Henrik. Lili knows she can't, but lies to Greta while seeing Henrik in secret. She starts to feel guilty and wants to tell Henrik the truth about who she is. She never gets to that point, instead simply saying she can't see Henrik again. Henrik starts to say that he knows Lili's secret and doesn't care, but Lili runs off anyway.

### Chapter 8

Einar and Greta leave to Paris for their annual August vacation. Einar asks if Lili can come on the trip, which Greta agrees with. When Greta and Lili go out for dinner, Greta reveals that she has been able to get in touch with Hans, who wants to meet Lili. Hans has no idea that Lili is really Einar. This makes Greta think about her marriage to Teddy. She reveals to the reader that Teddy passed away at a young age, and the reader is once again reminded about the wedding ring. That evening, Lili doesn't return to being Einar, but instead goes to sleep as Lili with Greta, something that has never happened before and leaves Greta feeling confused.

### Chapter 9

Greta asks Einar to bring out Lili because she wants to paint her. Einar is conflicted at first, but eventually agrees. He stays as Lili more and more and keeps seeing Hans. She tells Hans that she is only 24, despite the fact that Einar is 35. She doesn't feel like she's lying, she genuinely believes that she's younger. Hans talks about his past, how he fell in love, but lost his bride in a tragic accident. Since then, he's been alone in the world. They keep seeing one another, and Greta continues to draw Lili as well.

Hans starts to talk about marriage, and Lili reveals she one day wants to get married. She believes marriage is important and helps people become who they're really meant to be. Hans laments that he's too old to start a relationship with Lili. While they are out shopping, Lili's purse is stolen. Hans tries to get her to go to the police, but Lili doesn't want to bother them about it. She ends up getting another nosebleed which causes her to run back home to Greta.

## Analysis

### Chapter 7



This chapter follows up on how uncomfortable Greta is with everything going on. Greta is able to express this, but she and Einar still aren't properly communicating. Both of them continue to hide from the real problem, that Einar doesn't know who he is. This demonstrates the theme of Communication, as well as Avoidance. Einar doesn't understand why it is a problem, because in his mind Lili is still a separate person. He's acting like he's a faithful husband, and he simply has a cousin that is pursuing a relationship with Henrik. The fact of the matter is that he's cheating on Greta, but Greta just can't seem to express this.

The lack of communication is brought up again with Henrik and Lili. Lili is afraid to reveal the truth to Henrik, so she runs off instead of talking to him. Henrik is aware of what is going on and tries to express this multiple times, but Lili doesn't let him. If they had simply sat down and had a conversation, they could have been together instead of having to wait many more years.

## Chapter 8

For the first time, Lili spends the night with Greta. This makes a huge change in their relationship, and it shows Greta exactly how serious Einar's gender identity problems are. Greta reintroduces Hans into Einar's life. Again, he doesn't do too much in this early part of the book, but he becomes more prominent when they permanently move to Paris. Greta gives a little more insight to her past with Teddy, hinting that he died young.

## Chapter 9

Einar continues to show that he's hiding from the real truth. Not only is he treating Lili like a separate person, but he's starting to make up a completely different life for her. This is clearly the life that Einar wishes he had. This shows how unhappy Einar truly is, but he's unable to express this to anyone for the majority of the book, again demonstrating the theme of Communication. The author is suggesting that open communication is the key to happiness. In all of these instances, so far, if the parties involved had just had an honest conversation so much unhappiness (and nosebleeds) might have been avoided.

The theme of Everyone Needing Someone is brought up when Hans and Lili discuss marriage. This theme is shown many more times throughout the book, especially with how much Lili relies on Greta when he's figuring out who he is and what he needs to do to be happy. There is also a little bit of foreshadowing, since Hans ends up helping Greta later on in the story.

Greta starts to paint Lili, which leads to her having a successful art career in the future. This behavior also encourages Einar to come out as Lili more, since Greta is actively demanding it. At this point in the story, Greta doesn't really understand what she's doing by making Lili come out so frequently, as she's very obsessed with the fact that she's now a successful artist. Again, this is something that she and Einar should have been communicating about. It is also very telling about Greta's personality, that quite likely her



feelings for Einar are not what she felt for Teddy. In many instances, it is she who has assisted and abetted Einar in making his change.

The persistent nosebleeds reappears in this chapter just when Lili refuses to talk to Henrik about her feelings, or who she is. It is clear that he's figured it out much earlier and that it does not matter to him. However, because Lili is still so conflicted, and still sees herself as someone other than Einar, it is too much for her to bear, and she runs away. The theme of Avoidance can be seen in this scene. It is clear that whenever Lili or Einar are confronted with the dual nature, and the need for them to recognize and merge into one person, this avoidance is literally causing them to bleed.

## **Discussion Question 1**

What is growing significance of the nosebleeds?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What is Greta's role in the continued emergence of Lili?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Discuss the theme of Communication as seen in Chapters 7-9.

## **Vocabulary**

differential, illogical, illusory, rapt, velvety, hosiery, aghast, corroborate, incidentally, stifle, wile, wrest





# Chapters 10-12

## Summary

### Chapter 10

Lili and Einar continue to experience sporadic nosebleeds over the next few weeks. During this time, Greta insists that Lili comes out every day so she can draw her. Portraits of Lili are starting to sell, and Greta feels like she's making it as an artist. She gets worried when she sees the nose bleeds are becoming more frequent, and that Einar is trying to hide them. She arranges a doctor's appointment for Einar, who doesn't want to go. He eventually agrees, but he makes Greta first promise that there isn't anything wrong with him.

### Chapter 11

Einar takes the train to see the specialist, Dr. Hexler. He thinks about running off and not seeing the doctor, but he doesn't want to disappoint Greta. The doctor reveals that he knows all about Lili and Einar dressing up. Einar admits that Lili is a part of him, and that he reaches deep down when he wants to bring her out. He tells Dr. Hexler about the nose bleeds, and Dr. Hexler recommends getting an x-ray. He insists it will not only find problems, but it might cure him of his Lili problem. During the procedure, Einar falls asleep. He can tell that something is wrong and he knows he's strapped down, but he can't bring himself to awaken fully to find out what is happening.

### Chapter 12

Greta is watching with Dr. Hexler as Einar gets his x-ray. The doctor believes that he has a tumor, which could be causing infertility as well as causing the gender confusion. Greta is worried and blames herself for not seeing things sooner. The x-ray reveals that nothing is physically wrong with Einar. Dr. Hexler stresses that Einar is not normal, and this behavior shouldn't be encouraged. Greta doesn't care, and in her mind the doctor has no idea what he's talking about.

## Analysis

### Chapter 10

Once again, Einar is trying to hide from his problems, but Greta is starting to catch on. Greta doesn't want Einar to be sick just like Teddy was. She arranges for him to see a doctor, which Einar is very hesitant about. Einar knows that something is wrong with him, but he prefers to run away from the truth. He's always been afraid of someone telling him that there's something wrong with him, which is why he likes to hide as Lili. The theme of Avoidance is strong in this chapter. It also indicates that avoiding something, regardless of its nature, can have a destructive effect on a person.



## Chapter 11

The theme of Communication is prominent in this chapter. Einar originally asked Greta to keep everything private about Lili. As the story goes on, it's revealed that Greta breaks this promise and tells many people, without ever talking to Lili about it. She doesn't do it because she wants to hurt Lili, but because she is worried or she is having problems. She should be talking to Lili about these problems though, not everyone else.

Einar's fears are realized when he sees the doctor, and it could have been prevented if he had known exactly what Dr. Hexler was aware of. Dr. Hexler doesn't understand Einar's problems, and he ends up doing far more harm than good. This illustrates the theme of Judging Others. This also indicates who Greta is as a person. She is very self centered and does not consider how her actions affect those around her. She uses people, this is clear, to her own ends.

## Chapter 12

Communication is brought up again in this chapter, showing that if Greta and Einar had been openly communicating, they both could have sat down with Dr. Hexler and would have realized he didn't understand the problem. The setting is very relevant in this chapter, since Dr. Hexler misses a lot of things that would be more apparent with modern day medicine. He says that nothing is physically wrong with Einar, but a few years later in the book Professor Bolk proves that wasn't the case at all.

### **Discussion Question 1**

Discuss the issues that Greta and Einar are having communicating with each other, as well as those around them.

### **Discussion Question 2**

Discuss Greta's character. What can readers tell about her by this point in the novel?

### **Discussion Question 3**

Why does Einar like to spend more time as Lili?

### **Vocabulary**

wry, enumerate, duplicity, commiserate, blase, apprehensible, galore, loathe, refute



# Chapters 13-14

## Summary

### Chapter 13

Einar and Greta receive an invitation from Hans to live in Paris. They move and spend the next four years there. Greta has become a huge success thanks to her drawings of Lili. Einar is still very confused. He starts to visit a brothel owned by Jasmin-Carton. He goes just to see the women because he likes to study their bodies. He still goes out as Lili and treats her like a separate identity. When he notices how everyone at the brothel tries to avoid him, he realizes how chaotic his life has gotten. He decides if he hasn't resolved everything with Lili in a year, he will kill himself. As he sits there on the park bench, he watches some children flying a kite with their nanny.

### Chapter 14

Greta reveals to the reader that she actually never received a letter of invitation from Hans. Dr. Hexler threatened to turn in Einar, so she decided to move them to Paris. Einar hadn't dressed up as Lili, but Greta forces him back into it because she needs to keep drawing Lili for her career. Hans had been acting as her dealer for her art, and she has become wildly successful. Einar, himself, hasn't drawn since they arrived. Greta notices how sad he seems, so she starts pushing him to help with her art. He draws some of the backgrounds and landscapes, while she draws Lili. Einar is still bleeding occasionally, but Greta is afraid to take him to see another doctor.

## Analysis

### Chapter 13

Einar goes to the brothel not because he seeks physical pleasure, but he enjoys just admiring the women. This in itself is symbolic of his desire to be unencumbered by his own gender confusion. Einar wishes that he could have a woman's body, and be open to pursuing relationships with men. Going to the brothel puts his mind at ease, because he feels like nobody knows what he is thinking. This illusion is shattered after a while, when he notices that the staff and patrons are actively avoiding him. Einar is finally ready to admit that there is a problem. This is the first hint that the reader has of Einar's depth of despair about this, as he has concluded that he will kill himself if he can't come to some decision in a year's time. This ties into the symbol of the kite, again. Here, it is being flown by some children, themselves representative of innocence and hopefulness. The fact that their kite crashes, and then they never seem to get it fully up off of the ground again, gives readers some foreshadowing of events to come.

### Chapter 14



One of Greta's negative character traits is how obsessed she can be with her work. Greta forces Einar to dress as Lili not because it's something that he needs to do, but because she can profit off of it. She doesn't realize how much Einar is struggling with his gender identity. It isn't entirely her fault, since Einar never tries to communicate it with her. Greta does try and help when she realizes how depressed Einar is. She's afraid of taking him to another doctor, based on the way that Dr. Hexler acted. This demonstrates, once again, the theme of Avoidance and how harmful it can be. That Einar continues to have nosebleeds continues to point to the fact that he is not being true to himself, and is slowly killing himself on many levels.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why does Greta force Einar to continue to pose as Lili?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What conclusion does Einar come to about his gender confusion when he is at the brothel?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Discuss the theme of Avoidance.

## **Vocabulary**

rehabilitate, induct, inexcusable, concurrent, indolent, prepubescent, propitious, unadulterated, discernment



# Chapters 15-16

## Summary

### Chapter 15

Greta's brother, Carlisle, is coming to visit, and Greta wants him to meet Einar first instead of Lili. Einar agrees, but then ends up just putting his clothes on over Lili's. He leaves the apartment and goes to the brothel, where he takes off his male clothing and sits there watching one of the women with a male customer. He starts to imitate her moves as Lili, and for the first time he feels pretty. He's chased out of the brothel shortly afterwards, once again dressed as Einar. He realizes that he's much happier as Lili than Einar, and he goes to the library to start researching gender identity and gender reassignment.

### Chapter 16

Greta is having a hard time dealing with everything in her life. She goes to visit Anna, who has a friend over, Professor Bolk. Greta ends up talking to Bolk about everything that is going on with Einar and Lili. Bolk says he understands and actually worked with a patient before that who had a similar issue. He was going to perform surgery to turn them into a girl, but the person ended up running away before he could do it. Bolk says he would be willing to speak with Einar, and Greta agrees that would be for the best.

## Analysis

### Chapter 15

Einar finally accepts the fact that he and Lili are one and the same. Lili is everything that he wants to be, and he's going to be unhappy as long as he tries to live as Einar. He wants to do something that will let him fully become Lili, and in a few chapters he'll discover exactly what needs to be done.

Carlisle coming over is at first brushed aside and just treated as a small event in their lives. In a few chapters, Carlisle ends up being very important, since he helps Lili research doctors, and over the next few years he continues to be a supportive character for both Greta as well as Lili.

The theme of Being Yourself surfaces in this chapter as Einar finally makes the move toward becoming who he feels he's been all along. When one looks back on the path that brought him to this point, one can see that almost at every junction where he might have become Lili, these feelings were suppressed, oppressed, or brushed aside by those who were well meaning, or in the case of his father, prejudiced.

### Chapter 16



Greta meets Professor Bolk and the two of them are able to figure out a solution to Lili's problems. This is both a positive and negative example of the theme of Communication and its importance. Greta openly speaking to Bolk shows the positives of it. However, she doesn't actually share the information with Lili for several months, showing the negative side of what happens when two people don't communicate well. If Greta had been more forthcoming right away, she could have saved months of research for Lili and Carlisle.

## **Discussion Question 1**

What finally brings Einar to the conclusion that he wants to fully become a woman?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Discuss the theme of Being Yourself.

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why does Einar go to the brothel on a regular basis?

## **Vocabulary**

protuberance, volition, discriminate, vulgarity, brevity, abscond, acquiesce, forthright



# Chapters 17-18

## Summary

### Chapter 17

In this shorter chapter Carlisle pushes Einar to spend time with him. He reveals that Greta has been writing to him for years and he knows all about Lili. He wants to help Einar, and he recommends that he sees a therapist instead of a medical doctor. The two secretly visit several doctors, but none of them can help Einar. They don't understand the problem, believing that Einar is mentally ill or a homosexual.

### Chapter 18

Greta and Carlisle continue to operate in secret trying to find help for Einar. After several months, they finally speak and reveal what they are doing. Bolk believes that he can fix Einar with surgery to make him a woman, while the doctor Carlisle found wants to give Einar a lobotomy. Greta wants him to get gender reassignment surgery, but admits the choice is his, ultimately. She's scared to talk to Einar about it because of what happened to Teddy. Teddy had gotten sick in their marriage, but kept refusing treatment. He continued to get sick and finally agreed to see a doctor. He pretended to be healthy, but finally had to admit that he was dying and there was no treatment. Teddy had asked Greta to kill him, but she couldn't do it. Instead, she just spent his final moments holding his hand until he finally passed away. Now, she's afraid that history is repeating itself.

## Analysis

### Chapter 17

The theme of Communication is brought up once again. Greta needed to communicate with Carlisle because of how stressed she was with Lili. Of course, this is both a good and bad example, since she should have been communicating with Lili in the first place. The negatives of not communicating are shown again with Carlisle and Lili going behind Greta's back. All this does is ultimately waste time, and the three of them should have just been communicating and working together in the first place.

### Chapter 18

In this chapter, everyone finally shares what they have been up to for the last few months. Carlisle believes he found a good doctor that can help, but what that doctor is proposing is a lobotomy. Again, this shows the importance of the setting, since this isn't something that a modern day doctor would dare to proscribe. Greta openly admits that she and Lili are having trouble communicating with one another. Greta reveals more of her history with Teddy, which helps to explain Greta's fears.



Greta doesn't want a repeat of what happened with Teddy. Both of her husbands have tried to hide when something was wrong with them. With Teddy, it ended up being fatal, and Greta is clearly worried that the same thing might happen with Einar. In a way she is right, since she does lose Einar when he fully becomes Lili. It is interesting to note that Einar still is not taking full responsibility for his own life or decisions, relegating them happily to either Carlisle or Greta.

## **Discussion Question 1**

What does Carlisle's ongoing correspondences throughout the years say about his relationship with Greta?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Discuss the theme of Communication as it involves Carlisle and Greta.

## **Discussion Question 3**

Compare the two procedures being offered by the two doctors.

## **Vocabulary**

ghastly, negation, intrude, embody, requisite, resilience, atone, authentic, lobotomy





# Chapter 19-20

## Summary

### Chapter 19

Sometime in 1930, Einar decides to visit Professor Bolk in Germany. He wants to go alone, because he's afraid he'll back out if anyone else is with him. While he's traveling on the train, he thinks about everything that has happened in his life, such as becoming an artist and meeting Greta. Once he becomes Lili, he knows there will be an obituary about Einar, but he also knows that it will leave out many important details, and people just won't understand anything about him.

### Chapter 20

Greta is back at home worrying about Einar. She isn't sure if she should go to him in Germany or not, despite his wishes for no one to be there during his transformation. Hans shows up to check on her, revealing that Einar had told him all about Lili when he was trying to decide which doctor to go and see. Hans comforts Greta and she realizes that she has feelings for him.

## Analysis

### Chapter 19

This is another chapter that's focused on why Einar needs to let go of his old life. In his mind, he's already planning out the death of Einar because he's ready to fully embrace his life as Lili. This chapter is essentially a follow up to the revelation that Einar had outside of the brothel, where he finally admitted that he and Lili were not only the same person, but he wanted to live his life as Lili. He knows that people aren't going to understand everything that he went through as Einar. He also knows that, despite how difficult life has been lately, it wasn't all bad, and he tries to reflect on the good parts of Einar's life.

The obituary that he constructs in his head represents his way of letting go of his old life before moving on to the new one that he has chosen to live as Lili. This also ties in with the theme of Being Yourself, which she is now ready to do.

### Chapter 20

Hans starts to become a larger part of Greta's life. This foreshadows their eventual relationship after Lili has gotten out of surgery. Overall, this chapter is also a good example the positive aspects of Communication. Hans and Greta are able to openly speak about what is going on with Lili. Before she left, Lili and Greta were also able to talk about what was going on, and why Lili felt she needed to be alone for the trip. Greta



understands that she had to be alone for the first part of the journey, but she also understands that Lili will need support afterwards, which is why she eventually does go out to Germany.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Discuss the significance of Einar constructing his own obituary while on the train to see Dr. Bolk.

## **Discussion Question 2**

Why does Einar decide he needs to make the trip to Germany and Dr. Bolk, alone?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What revelation does Greta have as a result of the increased and honest communication that she has with both Hans and Einar?

## **Vocabulary**

audible, bemoan, obituary, lament, bereaved, eulogy, facile, embark, permeate, soliloquy



# Chapters 21-22

## Summary

### Chapter 21

Einar arrives at the clinic, but he has to wait several days before he can speak with Professor Bolk. When he finally does, he isn't sure exactly what it is Bolk can do, as it's revealed Greta was very vague on the details. Bolk explains everything and Einar feels better about his chances, but before Bolk can do the operation, he wants Einar to gain more weight. Einar enters the clinic as Lili and spends some time trying to gain weight. After some time, Bolk performs the first part of the surgery, but Lili becomes very sick afterwards and spends three days trying to recover.

### Chapter 22

Greta and Hans continue to grow closer; with Greta feeling like Hans is her only friend. Her brother convinces her to go and visit Einar, insisting that he needs her help and just didn't know how to ask. Greta goes to visit Einar, hearing about the success of the first surgery to transform him into Lili. At first, Bolk avoids her. She eventually gets to talk to him, and he reveals that they found an underdeveloped set of ovaries during the surgery, revealing that Einar was androgynous. Greta spends several weeks helping Lili recover until Bolk is ready for the next part of surgery.

## Analysis

### Chapter 21

Lili's health is again explored in more detail. This shows that it wasn't just the nosebleeds that were causing problems, since Lili was practically wasting away when she was trying to live as Einar. Communication is brought up again as well. It's heavily implied that nobody actually set up an appointment with Professor Bolk, which is why the clinic is surprised when Lili arrives, especially since she looks very out of place given her appearance. This ultimately only costs her a few days, but it was a problem that likely could have been avoided by someone trying to reach out to the Professor beforehand. The weight issue might have been avoided as well, since Bolk could have advised Lili to bulk up before making the trip. It is obvious with this scene that communication is still a large issue between Greta and Einar. Both Einar and Greta avoid unpleasant topics and it is costing them in the long run.

### Chapter 22

Lili is finally revealed to be intersex, explaining why she has been having so many issues. It's never fully explained why Bolk was avoiding Lili and Greta during this time, but the implication seems to be that he was doing research and wanted to be sure



before he spoke to either Lili or Greta. Before she leaves, Greta makes her feelings towards Hans very clear. The reader doesn't get to see many of the interactions between the two, so this is important in setting up their eventual relationship. This lightly touches upon the theme of Everybody Needing Someone.

## Discussion Question 1

What is revealed about Greta's interaction with the doctor when Einar arrives and has to wait to be seen?

## Discussion Question 2

What most likely has drawn Hans and Greta together?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Communication.

## Vocabulary

stipend, subvert, vertigo, dissonance, arrogance, adroit, comely, diagnose, tacit, tangent, winsome



# Chapters 23-25

## Summary

### Chapter 23

Lili spends another several weeks recovering from her next surgery. She's gotten so sickly and weak that she's barely able to move, and requires constant pain medication. She and Greta have plans to move back to Copenhagen once the final operation is done. Lili insists that she's getting stronger, and convinces Greta that she's ready for the final surgery. They talk to Bolk, who tries to insist that they wait at least another week for Lili to recover more, but Lili just wants to get the surgery over with. The chapter ends with Hans showing up to visit.

### Chapter 24

This chapter jumps ahead to 1931, with Lili and Greta living together in Copenhagen once again. The surgery has been a success, although Lili is still very weak and sickly. Greta has had a hard time painting. She feels alone in the world, since she no longer has a husband. She runs into Hans again, who wants her to go on vacation with him. She insists that she can't because of work, but Hans keeps pressing her. Greta eventually excuses herself and gets away from Hans.

### Chapter 25

Lili runs into Henrik again, and the two start to see one another, entering into a secret relationship. Lili is worried about Greta, who seems to be falling into a deep depression. She speaks with Hans about this in private. Lili asks Hans if he intends to marry Greta, and Hans admits that he would like to, but he thinks that Greta would only agree if she knew someone was taking care of Lili.

## Analysis

### Chapter 23

This chapter goes to show some of the differences between Lili and Einar. When Lili was still living as Einar, she was very meek and shy, but as Lili she's able to speak her mind and be demanding when needed. Einar would never have pushed for the surgery, but Lili was willing to take charge and go after what she wanted. Lili is communicating much more clearly than Einar ever could. Greta is clearly having trouble adjusting to the change. In her mind, Lili will just continue to have the same life she did with Greta before her change.

It takes Greta some time to finally admit that her husband is gone, and she needs to move on with her life. This ability to finally stop avoiding the truth eventually will free



Greta to be herself (another one of the themes in this chapter). Right now, however, she can't see past her very real grief over the loss of Einar. Interestingly enough, she is grieving in much the same way that she would have, had Einar actually and truly died.

#### Chapter 24

This chapter continues to explore the idea that Greta doesn't really understand how much things has changed. She's being supportive of Lili, but she's still acting like a wife, not a friend. Lili has clearly started to embrace her life and is trying to be independent. Greta keeps insisting that Lili needs her, but the truth is that Lili is doing fine on her own. Greta likely has these feelings because when she was married to Einar, she was always the one that was taking charge and had to protect her husband. In a way she has been emasculated and she does not know how to act any longer. In a way, she's having to figure out her role and part to play in Lili's life, and she's not able to be herself. This is why her art also suffers.

#### Chapter 25

This chapter is another example of how important communication is. Lili and Henrik are starting to communicate and develop a relationship. Hans and Lili are able to talk about relationships as well, most notably Hans's feelings for Greta. Lili recognizes that Greta is having a hard time moving forward, and she's pushing for Hans to fill the role that Einar once did. She knows that Greta needs someone in her life, a fact that Greta herself later admits to. Hans is aware of this as well, and it's possible he was only reaching out to Lili because he wants to make sure that Lili is truly doing fine on her own and doesn't need Greta around to protect her.

### Discussion Question 1

Compare Lili to Einar.

### Discussion Question 2

How has Greta adjusted to Einar's gender reassignment?

### Discussion Question 3

Why does Lili think that Greta is so depressed?

### Vocabulary

evoke, diligent, divest, antic, conversant, lenient, morose, liniment, malign, nestle



# Chapters 26-27

## Summary

### Chapter 26

Hans once again tries to get Greta to come with him on vacation, this time to America. Greta's art work hasn't been selling, and she's been struggling to paint anything recently. Greta once again refuses, insisting that she has to take care of Lili. Both her brother and Hans argue that Lili should be the one to make that decision, pointing out that she's become her own woman and has started to recover well from the surgery. Greta watches Lili traveling through the city, likely going to meet with Henrik.

### Chapter 27

Lili tells Henrik everything about her previous life. Henrik isn't surprised, reminding her that he had tried to say he understood years ago. He asks Lili to marry him, and she agrees. Before they are married, she wants to return to Bolk to get a uterine transplant so she can bear children. She tells Greta all this, but Greta thinks it's too risky of a procedure. Lili asks Greta to go with her, but Greta says she can't. Lili instead goes with Carlisle, who is more optimistic about the procedure. Greta asks if Lili will want any of Einar's old paintings, but she decides not to take them because they don't belong to her.

## Analysis

### Chapter 26

Greta is sinking deeper into depression. Hans keeps trying to help her out, but Greta uses Lili as a shield. Everyone around Greta recognizes that Lili has moved on and embraced her new life. It's likely that Greta doesn't want to see this because she's trying not to think about the fact that she lost another husband. Losing Teddy had been difficult enough, but she and Einar were together for a much longer period. Greta is finally able to accept the truth when she sees that Lili is perfectly fine going about her day-to-day activities. In fact, Lili is doing better than Greta, since she's holding down a job as well as a relationship.

The reader knows that this is true for Lili as she has embraced not only her new gender, but has given herself a last name, something that she never did before. She has chosen the name Elbe. This represents that he has taken that final step toward choosing to live as a woman.

### Chapter 27

The theme of Communication is shown when Lili and Henrik are finally able to talk. Henrik references the fact that he's known all this time and has always loved Lili. Again,



if Lili was willing to have that talk several years ago, things could have been very different for the two of them. Lili shows how outgoing she is compared to Einar when she wants to go back to Bolk to get additional surgery. Her outgoing nature shines through again when Lili asks Greta for assistance.

Greta shows that she's having trouble letting go of Einar by holding onto his old pictures. When she offers them to Lili, Lili is able to reject them. She understands that part of her life is over now and she needs to let go of it in order to be happy, something that Greta has been having trouble accepting. Rejecting the paintings seems to be what Greta needs to finally understand, since she's able to finally go with Hans the next time he makes an offer.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why is Greta suffering from depression?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Describe the relationship between Henrik and Lili.

## **Discussion Question 3**

What does Lili's rejection of Einar's paintings represent?

## **Vocabulary**

resonance, reservoir, abject, circumnavigate, extenuate, candor, appall, impervious, imply, paragon





# Chapters 28-29

## Summary

### Chapter 28

Greta ends up accepting Hans's offer to travel. The two of them return to his and Einar's old home. Greta feels strange about returning to America, but she decides that it's the right thing to do. Carlisle has been writing, insisting that Bolk is optimistic about the surgery and that everything is going to go well with Lili. Greta tells Hans about the paintings that Lili refused to take, and Hans recommends that she take them for herself.

### Chapter 29

Lili has spent weeks trying to recover from her last surgery. Bolk insists everything is fine, but he tells Carlisle that he's worried she hasn't healed from the infection. He thinks her body is rejecting the transplant. Anna comes to visit since she's performing in Germany. She and Carlisle take Lili out of the clinic, knowing that Lili doesn't have long left to live. They bring and ultimately leave Lili at Brühlsche Terrace, knowing she'll enjoy the view in her final hours.

## Analysis

### Chapter 28

The paintings are brought up again, another sign that it is the wakeup call that Greta needed to finally move on. The theme of Avoidance is brought up briefly. Greta was always hesitant about returning to America because that's where her family is, as well as memories of Teddy. When Hans makes the offer, she decides to go back. Hans wants Greta to take the paintings that Lili left behind. Like Teddy's wedding ring, it can serve as a reminder of the different people who have loved her.

### Chapter 29

This bittersweet chapter sets up the ending of Lili's life. Anna and Carlisle do everything they can to make Lili comfortable in her final moments. This shows the reader that, while Lili lived a very short life, it was ultimately a very positive one. She's getting to live her final moments as a true woman, which is everything that she always wanted. The theme of Being Yourself shines through during this very poignant chapter, and the reader learns that Lili is happy, despite her life being cut short.

## Discussion Question 1

Why is Lili dying?



## Discussion Question 2

What has Greta decided to do with her life?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Being Yourself.

## Vocabulary

corrode, cosmopolitan, traipse, amity, languish, forlorn, muck, maxim, precipitate, amalgam, poignant, bittersweet



# Characters

## Einar/Lili

Einar begins the novel as Greta's art professor in Copenhagen, Germany. They marry and while Einar's landscape art is doing well, Greta's art career is stalled. It is only after she receives a lucrative commission for an opera diva, Anna, that she feels that she may have found her niche. When Anna cancels the appointment, which would put Greta behind on the work, Greta asks Einar to put on Anna's costume dress and pose for her, so she can continue. Einar is hesitant to do this, but seeing how desperate she is, he agrees. Once he has the dress on, secretly, he finds that he likes how he feels in the dress. When Greta jokingly calls him 'Lili' he finds that he loves being called by that name.

As the novel progresses, it becomes apparent to both Einar and Greta that Einar enjoys wearing women's clothing. Einar begins dressing up more and more in women's clothing, and leaving the flat dressed as a woman, calling himself Lili. Greta encourages and supports this, and even goes out with Lili to public events. To Greta it is a great lark, a grand joke on everyone. To Einar, it is something more.

Einar embarks on a quest to change his gender, and eventually with the help of Greta and her brother, they locate a doctor who has been experimenting with a cutting edge - and completely untested - procedure that would reassign one's gender. It is the mid-1930s so this procedure would be risky to begin with. Still, Einar - who now calls himself Lili - agrees to go through with it.

For most of the novel Einar has viewed Lili, not as an extension of himself, but rather a separate person all together. He is unable to reconcile himself to the fact that he and Lili are one in the same. With the surgery, however, he accepts and makes his choice to become a woman permanently. It is in the process of the surgery that the surgeon discovers that Einar actually possesses small ovaries, meaning that Einar was actually hermaphroditic. Lili later meets and reconciles with an earlier love interest, named Henrik, and they are happily married. However, this is not enough for Lili as she wants to bear his children. She dies as the result of complications from a surgery to implant an actual uterus.

## Gretta

Greta is the daughter of an Ambassador and has lived the life of a wealthy debutante. Rebelling against this, she determines that she will become a bohemian artist. She takes art classes at a local university where she falls for her art professor, Einar. They become involved, but before anything more can come of it, the war intervenes and Greta's family depart for America to ride out the war.



While she is living in America, Greta receives a letter from Einar breaking things off. She is devastated, but moves on with her life. She meets a young man named Teddy Cross whom she falls for deeply. They are married a year later, and she becomes pregnant with his child. Teddy develops a bad cough, refuses to go see a doctor about it until it is too late, and before Greta knows it, she is a widow. The shock of his death triggers early labor, and she loses the baby too.

By this time the war is over and, needing a change of scenery, Greta returns to Copenhagen. She still carries Teddy's wedding ring with her, but hidden away. She reunites with Einar, who has not moved on and is still teaching. His landscape art has begun to take off. They rekindle their relationship and are married shortly thereafter.

Greta is a frustrated artist. She'd like to be avant garde with her work, but as a woman, she is not taken seriously at all. It is Einar that gets her a showing, though few show up for it. In desperation she takes the commission to paint Anna, an opera star, for a patron. This leads to her asking Einar to stand in for Anna, who is called away before the portrait is finished.

At first, Greta thinks Einar dressing up and passing himself off as a woman is a great and jolly joke on everyone. It plays to her sense of impropriety, adventure, and rebellious nature. However, after the novelty wears off, she begins to see that there is an underlying issue. They go to the doctor because they are unable to have children. The doctor asks Einar, point blank, if he is gay. Einar denies it, and they are left with no answers. After Lili emerges, Greta must accept that her role is changing. Eventually, she is able to make the shift and become the friend that Lili needs.

## Hans

Hans was Einar's boyhood friend. Both of them knew that they were different from other boys their age, and were drawn to one another. As teens, when Einar's father was out of the house, they played 'house', dressing in the roles, Einar assuming the role of the wife. When Einar's father found them out, he chased Hans away and forbade them to ever see one another again.

Later, Hans is reunited with Einar when Greta is able to hunt him down. However, Hans has determined that he is no longer interested in men, and falls for Greta, instead. Later, they do marry and live happily ever after.

## Einar's Father

Einar's father is very stern and lectures Einar about the sins of being attracted to the same sex. Einar's mother is out of the picture and as such, Einar's father is twice as strict with him that he otherwise might be. They live near a bog and this is very suggestive of their relationship. As soon as Einar can leave, he does.



## Greta's Parents

Greta's parents are ambassadors and enjoy great wealth and a lifestyle that gives Greta a very good childhood. They attempt to save her from herself, but in the end, she is her own person and refuses to go along with their notions for her life.

## Teddy Cross

Teddy Cross is the man that Greta meets at a debutante ball when she is living in exile with her parents during the war. Einar has broken off things with her and she feels devastated. Teddy sweeps her off her feet in a way that Einar never had, and they marry.

Teddy is the type of man that doesn't like to inconvenience anyone, or to show that he has any problems. As a result, he doesn't go to see the doctor when he develops a deep cough. By the time Greta notices it and convinces Teddy to go to the doctor it is too late. Teddy initially lies to her and tells her that the doctor said it was merely a cold. He does this because she is pregnant and he wants to protect her. Of course, it doesn't do any good as she loses the baby anyway.

Teddy is already deceased when this novel begins, but he colors and overshadows much of Greta's life throughout the novel. She keeps his ring as a reminder of the love they had together, and to act as a benchmark, so that when true love comes around again, she will recognize it. She eventually does with Hans.

## Carlisle, Greta's brother

Carlisle, Greta's brother seems to be intelligent, supportive, understanding, and long suffering at the hands of his sister. When they were children, Greta would delight in torturing him with gross antics, including serving him a dead, mutilated frog for breakfast.

When Carlisle visits Greta and Einar in Paris, he realizes that they are in trouble on nearly every level. He agrees to do some research to find out what doctors can do to help Einar. The doctor he initially finds wants to give Einar a lobotomy, claiming that it is a tumor that is causing the deviant behavior. Later, he joins Greta in backing Dr. Bolk in doing the gender reassignment surgery.

## Carlisle, the II

When Teddy and Greta find that they are expecting their first child, Greta wants to name the baby Carlisle after her brother. The baby is born prematurely and does not survive.



## Henrik Sandahl

Henrik is an artist friend that Greta knows. When Greta attends an art show with Lili, Henrik is attracted at once. They begin dating, Einar going as Lili. Lili and Henrik develop feelings for one another, but this scares Lili as she's afraid that Henrik will discover her secret. She breaks it off before he has a chance to tell her that he already knows the secret, and doesn't care.

Later, after Lili has her surgery, she seeks out Henrik, who tells her that he would have accepted her even as Einar dressing as Lili. They are married later on and live happily for many years. He is with Lili at the end of her life.

## Professor Bolk

Professor Bolk meets with Greta when she is researching for answers for Einar. He tells her that the one subject he'd had for his experimental surgery has run away. Greta asks if Einar might be considered, and he agrees. Bolk discovers that Einar is actually both male and female when he is doing the surgery, as he discovers underdeveloped ovaries in this body cavity.

## Anna Fonsmark

Anna Fonsmark is the opera diva who is the subject of Greta's first real commission.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Lili's Notes

When Einar first starts to dress up as Lili he treats her like she's a separate person. Einar is still too embarrassed and uncomfortable to admit that they're one in the same. In order to communicate at this early on, he used notes. These notes represent his fear of being discovered and judged.

## Wealth

Greta dislikes wealth because of her family. Her father was an ambassador and they were very wealthy and famous as a result. Greta felt like she was being judged because of that. Any time that fame or wealth is brought up, she's reminded of her family.

## Teddy's Wedding Ring

Greta holds onto Teddy's wedding ring because it serves as a reminder of the relationship that they had and the love that she still has for him.

## Duality

The symbol of living a split life, of a duality, is offered in various ways throughout the novel. First, there is the reference to a walnut having two distinct halves, but living in one shell. Then, there is the mention of an oyster shucked and lying open in two halves. Of course, Lili and Einar are two halves of a whole, and when Dr. Bolk opens up Einar he finds that Einar was, indeed, of a dual nature, possessing both sexual organs.

## The Bog

When Einar was a child he lived with his father near a bog. A song that he sang about the bog was particularly notable, since in this song he talks about what a pretty boy he is. Likewise, for most of Einar's life, it is much like a bog, mired down in gender confusion. Interestingly enough, it is when he makes up his mind to become a woman that he quits painting landscapes of bogs.

## Plain Clothing

Einar is always drawn towards outfits that are described as ordinary. He wears these outfits as Lili, and he appreciates them on other women. Einar finds that their simplicity



actually makes them more beautiful, because to him it represents the natural beauty and appeal that women have, and how he wishes he could be one.

## Kites

Kites show up throughout the story, and never bode well when they do show up. Though they express a type of freedom, it is a type of freedom and lifting of the spirits that none of the characters can quite achieve for a very long time. The first kite shows up in chapter three, when he talks about flying a kite with Hans and it crashes to earth, foreshadowing the 'crash' that will take place when his father finds out about he and Hans.

The Kite shows up again when Einar is thinking about killing himself and there are children in the park flying a kite. And later, when he is waiting to go into Bolk's office, he stops at a shop where Kites are being sold. He is drawn to the kite shaped like a butterfly.

## Brothel

Einar enjoys going to the brothel because he feels that it's a place he can be free. He frequently spends all of his time there while in Paris, except for when he's dressed as Lili. He also lives vicariously through the female performers, since they're able to do what he wants to do, but can't.

## Obituary

Einar spends nearly a whole chapter thinking about what they will write in his obituary. He realizes they aren't going to cover any of the important details of his life, because nobody really knows what he's going through. The obituary is also his way of letting go of his old life before embracing a new one as Lili.

## Elbe

When Einar first started dressing as Lili, he never gave her a last name. He finally gives her a last name of Elbe, showing that he's accepted the new identity and has fully embraced Lili as his true self.

## Lili rejecting Einar's paintings

When Lili is getting ready to move and marry Henrik, Greta offers her a bunch of portraits that Einar drew. Lili rejects them because she's moved on from that part of her life, and she just wants to let go of Einar.





# Settings

## Widow's Peak, Copenhagen

This is the flat where Einar and Greta first live in Germany. This is also where Einar realizes that he would rather live life as Lili. It is particularly interesting to note, that the name of the building is Widow's Peak, because, in essence, Greta will be a widow twice.

## Brühlsche Terrace

This is the flat that Einar and Greta live in when they move to Paris, France. It has a view of the Elbe river. This is significant because that is the last name that Lili chooses for herself after her surgery. This is also the place where they bring Lili for her last moments in life.

## America

This is where Greta and her parents go to ride out the war. This is also where she meets Teddy, marries, and loses both her child and her husband. Later, Hans wants to move back to America, where Greta's parents still live, and she agrees.

## Dr. Hexler's Office

This is the doctor that is appalled that Einar wants to dress and act as a woman. He suggests to Greta that what Einar is doing is illegal and that he will turn them in to the authorities for such deviant behavior. It is because of this that Greta moves them to Paris.

## Paris Brothel

This is where Einar goes to watch the women. He isn't particularly turned on by it, but is more interested in observing how women move, thoroughly entranced with replicating the way a woman's body moves. When the patrons and the management catch him, they run him off. It is after this that he decides that he's ready to become Lili.



# Themes and Motifs

## Judging Others

This theme is outright stated by Greta during the first chapter, when Einar is afraid to pose for her in women's clothing. Einar is clearly uncomfortable about the idea, and keeps worrying that someone will come in. Greta assures him that won't happen, and even says that it doesn't matter because he shouldn't be bothered by what other people think. This ends up playing a much larger role in Einar's life as the book continues and he starts on his journey of fully becoming Lili.

Judging Others is shown to have a devastating effect on all of those to whom it is applied. Einar, even as a small child, was bullied and ridiculed by his father, not only because he wanted to become an artist, but because Einar was not attracted to women. Later, Einar was judged by Greta's parents, because he was not from their social status or social circles. He feels rejected by nearly everyone around him, and it can't escape him that for the most part, Greta has used him and their marriage as a gigantic symbol of rebellion against her parents, and to further her own career.

Despite Greta being the one to give the advice, her character is an example of someone that can't stop worrying about what other people think. Greta is hung up on what other people think of her. She used to be worried that everyone knew of her because of her famous father. One of the reasons she was initially attracted to Einar in the first place was because he didn't know who she was. Greta is constantly making herself miserable because of this, and would have been much happier not worrying about what other people thought.

This theme is demonstrated again through the character of Professor Bolk. Bolk is one of the few people in the medical field to understand what Lili is going through. He rejects the belief of his peers, even though they all think that he's wrong and there must be something physically or mentally wrong with Einar. Bolk doesn't care what they think because he knows that he's in the right, and he ultimately ends up being the one that helps Lili become the person she wants to be.

## Avoidance

This theme is first shown very early on when Einar begins to dress up as Lili. Greta is confused by what's happening, but she wants to be supportive. She soon realizes just how serious it is, and she isn't sure what's expected of her in the marriage. Even though she's confused, it takes her nearly a year before she can talk to Einar about it. Even when they do talk about it, they dance around the subject. This ultimately does more harm than good during a time where both Einar and Greta were very confused and needed someone to speak to.



The theme is shown through Einar's journey of becoming Lili as well. Einar is clearly unhappy in his own skin. Instead of addressing this issue, Einar hides as Lili. Einar treats Lili as being a separate person. Whenever Greta tries to allude to them being the same person, Einar usually argues that it's Lili she's talking about and not him. Einar is finally happy when he accepts that he and Lili are one and the same, but it takes him years to get to that point.

The theme is demonstrated again through both Greta and Lili's relationship. Each one wants to be in a relationship, but they hide this fact from the other. Lili even tries to hide from Henrik, who kept trying to tell her that he knew about her secret and was comfortable.

Greta kept trying to deny her feelings for Hans and refused to talk about it. Both characters ultimately ended up happier when they finally confronted this issue, allowing them to start the relationships that they wanted.

## Be Yourself

This theme is technically shown through Einar during the years in his life where he was treating Lili like a separate person. Einar originally created Lili because she was living the life that he wished he had. Einar could have been taking steps to get the life that he wanted, but he was too scared. Instead, he created the Lili persona and tried to live vicariously through her.

Einar repeats this process when he visits the brothel in Paris. Einar wants a relationship for Lili, but he can't get into one because that would mean admitting he and Lili are the same person. Greta points out that would be wrong to do and he'd be deceiving his partner, which is why things originally don't work with Henrik.

Henrik and Lili do end up finally with one another when she accepts the truth about who she is. If she had been honest with herself and didn't try and treat Lili as a separate entity, she could have been with Henrik much earlier, as it is clear that he had no problem with Einar.

This theme is also shown through Greta's character. Towards the end of the book, Greta is living through Lili. Greta is unhappy with her life, but she refuses to take any steps toward fixing it, constantly using Lili as an excuse. Greta spends her time taking care of Lili, even though Lili is doing just fine on her own. Lili has her own job and her own relationship, and Greta finally has to admit this when she sees how well Lili is doing on her own. Her inability to view herself as she is, to be herself, to be honest with herself, has cost her many years of happiness.

## Everyone Needs Someone

This theme is outright stated by Einar during the middle of the story. The theme is shown much earlier, practically from the start of the story. When Einar is experimenting



and considering dressing up as Lili, he's very hesitant because he doesn't want to be judged. Greta is very supportive and keeps encouraging Einar to dress up as Lili. Without her support, he never would have been able to become Lili.

This is taken to the next step when Einar considers getting surgery. Again, this is something he never would have done without Greta. At this point, Carlisle is also offering his support as well. Both siblings encourage Einar and make it clear that he needs to do whatever it takes to make him happy. When Lili meets Henrik again, he too offers support. It's because of him that Lili is comfortable leaving Greta and starting a new life.

The theme is shown in two different ways with Greta. Greta needs help from Einar and Hans to get her art career going. She also needed help from Teddy in her past to get away from her family. The theme becomes inverted during the majority of the book, when Greta feels like she's alone.

Greta loses her husband when Lili takes over Einar's life. She's lonely, but she feels like it's her responsibility to take care of Lili. She's miserable until she finally realizes that Lili is fine on her own. Then she realizes that the one person who really needed fixing and helping was really her.

## Communication

This theme is first demonstrated with Einar and Greta not seriously talking about Lili. When Einar is first dressing up as Lili, both of them treat her as a separate person. Greta doesn't talk about how it makes her feel to have her husband dressing up as a woman. Einar doesn't make it known how happy it makes him, and how he feels like that is his true self.

Greta eventually ends up understanding, but it all could have been resolved much earlier if they were openly communicating with one another. This happens with Henrik. Einar is too afraid to talk to Henrik about Lili. Henrik knows and is willing to accept Lili. He tries to express this, but Einar refuses to have a communication and they end up being separated for years as a result.

The theme is constantly demonstrated through Greta's character. Greta has a very hard time communicating with anyone. When she's struggling with her art, she refuses to just ask Einar for help. She's eventually able to talk to Hans about it, and he helps her sell her art. She ends up becoming a huge hit with his assistance.

Greta shows the theme when she refuses to talk to anyone about how depressed and lonely she's becoming. She eventually gets support from Hans, who can tell that she's unhappy even though she hadn't expressed it. This is very late into the book, and it's clear that if she had gone to Hans sooner, he would have helped.

The theme is demonstrated again when Carlisle and Greta are both looking for doctors. Neither character expresses this to the other, both feeling like they have to be secretive



about it. All this does is waste several months of searching before they finally speak with one another and discover that there has been someone that can help Einar all along. During this time, Einar is also lying about how sick he is.

Again, if he had expressed this earlier things could have been very different. This mimics what Greta and Teddy went through earlier. Teddy kept refusing to talk about the fact that he was sick, and ultimately ended up dying because he wasn't being treated.

# Styles

## Point of View

This book is written in third person, but limited viewpoint. However, this point of view is primarily split between Greta and Einar/Lili. The book itself is a journey of discovery for both Einar and Greta; Einar as he transitions into Lili, and Greta as she reinvents her role, not only for Lili, but also as a person.

## Language and Meaning

The language within the novel mimics some of the phraseology that would have been around during the 1930s Europe. There are also some medical and art terms that readers may have difficulty with. Overall, the vocabulary is accessible to advanced readers.

## Structure

The book is primarily linear in fashion, but does offer flashbacks from both Einar's viewpoint as well as Greta's. The author uses this as a point of characterization so that the reader understands their motivations for making the choices that they eventually decide upon.



## Quotes

Greta must have noticed his discomfort, because she reached out and held Einar's cheeks and said, "It means nothing." And then, "When will you stop worrying about what other people think?"

-- Greta (chapter 1 paragraph 28)

**Importance:** One of the main themes of the book is directly stated, with Greta telling Einar not to worry about what other people think.

Does that mean you don't want to try on her dress?" When she said the word "dress" his stomach filled with heat, followed by a clot of shame rising in his chest. "No, I don't think so," Einar said."

-- Einar (chapter 1 paragraph 45)

**Importance:** This early passage lets the reader know that Einar is clearly conflicted when it comes to wearing women's clothing, which is explored throughout the rest of the book.

One night at the theatre, she gently asked, "Would you like to go as Lili?" She asked because she guessed it was what Einar wanted. He would never confess such a desire; he rarely confessed anything to her, unless she prodded, in which case his true feelings would pour out, and she would listen patiently, sinking her chin into her fist."

-- Greta (chapter 2 paragraph 48)

**Importance:** The main plot of the story revolves around Einar coming to terms with his gender identity. This shows the struggles that he faces, as well as what he truly wants, foreshadowing his eventual change towards the end of the book.

It was the first time that Einar sensed how he was turning the world on its head by dressing as Lili. He could eliminate himself by pulling the camisole with the scallop-lace hem over his head. Einar could duck out of society by lifting his elbows and clasping the triple strand of Spanish pearls around his neck. He could comb his long soft hair around his face, and then tilt his head like an eager adolescent girl."

-- Einar (chapter 5 paragraph 45)

**Importance:** Einar enjoys living as Lili because it's an escape from the life he doesn't want. As Lili, he's starting to feel free and happy, without fear of being judged.

Henrik kept Lili waiting nearly twenty minutes beneath the streetlamp. She began to worry that maybe he had changed his mind, that perhaps he had realized something about her. It frightened her, to be alone on the street. But she was also thrilled by the sense of freedom, the rapid pulse in her throat telling her she could do almost anything she pleased."

-- Lili (chapter 7 paragraph 9)



**Importance:** Einar is again happy that he's getting to live as Lili. He's free to be the person that he's always wanted, and to pursue the types of relationships that he's always wanted as well.

He reached for Lili's hand but she refused. "But it doesn't make any difference to me. Is that what this is about? That's what I'm trying to tell you. Is this because you think that I won't—"

-- Henrik (chapter 7 paragraph 32)

**Importance:** This is a very important moment for Henrik, because it shows that he loves Lili for the person that he knows her to be.

Never before had Lili slept with Greta; they had eaten breakfast together in silk kimonos patterned with cranes, and shopped for stockings together, Greta always paying, like a mother or an odd, barren aunt. But Einar had never come to bed dressed as Lili. Greta's heart, knocking against her chest, felt as hard as the stone of a fruit. Was this to be part of the game, too? Should she kiss Lili as she might kiss her husband?"

-- Greta (chapter 8 paragraph 12)

**Importance:** Greta is having a hard time adjusting to the changes in Einar's life. She doesn't understand them, which is a problem throughout the majority of the book, even after Einar has his surgery and transitions into being Lili.

I think it does. Marriage is like a third person," Lili said. "It creates someone else, more than just the two of you."

-- Lili (chapter 9 paragraph 38)

**Importance:** Not only is this an example of the type of life that Lili wants to lead, but it's another example of the theme of everyone needing someone else in their life.

Einar stepped out of his trousers, dropped them on the green armchair. He was part Einar, part Lili. A man in Lili's oyster-gray underpants and a matching camisole that hung delicately from her shoulders. Einar could see a faint reflection of himself in the window's glass. For some reason, he didn't feel garish. He felt—it was the first time he had ever used this word to describe Lili—pretty."

-- Einar (chapter 15 paragraph 26)

**Importance:** This is a huge turning point for Einar. He's finally starting to accept that Lili isn't just another person, but she's part of him. He could never accept this because he was ashamed and embarrassed, but now he's seeing just how beautiful Lili really is.

She felt as if she were a different person with each of them. As if she rolled out a different repartee for each of them; and maybe she did. She wondered if they felt that they knew her at all. Perhaps she could be wrong, but it was how she felt—as if each of them wanted something different from her."

-- Greta (chapter 16 paragraph 18)





**Importance:** This is another example of how stressful things are becoming for Greta. It also shows the theme of Judging Others, and how they need to be happy and live for themselves.

Einar nearly gasped. “You mean you’ve met someone else like me?” “Didn’t Greta tell you about my experience with another man”—and here he leaned in over his plate—“in your position?” “No,” Einar said. “She told me nothing of it.””

-- Bolk/Einar (chapter 21 paragraph 58)

**Importance:** Einar and Greta are constantly having communication problems, as shown in this passage. This is an important moment for Einar, since he’s finally discovered that there’s a way for him to live the rest of his life as Lili.

In his abdomen,” Bolk continued, “tangled in with his intestine, I found something.” Dr. Bolk folded his hands together and cracked his knuckles. “I found a pair of ovaries. Underdeveloped, of course. Small, of course. But they were there.””

-- Dr. Bolk (chapter 22 paragraph 113)

**Importance:** This is another monumental moment for Lili, since she finally understands why she’s been having so many issues concerning her gender identity.

And wasn’t that the inexhaustible struggle for Greta? Her perpetual need to be alone but always loved, and in love.

-- Greta (chapter 24 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** This passage touches on the theme of everyone needing someone. It also just very neatly sums up a major part of Greta’s character. Greta feels like she needs to be the strong one, and while she wants independence, she also needs people in her life to help her.