It's Paris. It's 1928. It's a painting — an oil portrait — called Queen of Hearts. It's a portrait of a woman playing cards and smoking a cigarette. She wears a short dress as pink as a bougainvillea. One leg is tucked under her thigh, her other foot propped on a chair. A large pearl hangs from her ear, almost as luminous as the one the girl wears in the famous painting by Vermeer. But it's the woman's eyes I always return to— big, dark, penetrating eyes cast in the direction of something unseen in the frame. What is she looking at? The game? TheINTERVIEWER ¿She has her eye full of joy? Appreciation? Is she looking at someone we can't see? When Lili Elbe — whose life inspired my first book and the new film The Danish Girl — sat for this painting she was at a crossroads. After years of internal struggle she had finally come to understand who she really was. Assigned male at birth and given the name Einar Wegener, Lili now saw her true self in the mirror and in portraits such as Queen of Hearts. But she was a transgender woman decades before the word transgender existed. She lived at a time when there were almost no resources for her to turn to— almost no information for her to look up; no organisations for her to reach out to; no representation in the media; and, at least initially, no one in the medical establishment willing or able to help. The doctors she first consulted labelled her insane or schizophrenic. They wanted to lobotomise her or lock her up. One put her through a harmful radiation treatment in order to “cure” her of her most fundamental sense of herself. Yet Lili’s heart and mind reassured her of the truth. Fortunately Lili was not alone in her journey. In fact, the artist painting Queen of Hearts was her biggest champion: her wife, Gerda Wegener. Gerda’s love and support played a fundamental role in Lili’s transition. They were both artists. Lili, as Einar, had had a successful career as a landscape painter. Gerda, though not a professional artist herself, was also a master of the medium. They met in art school and shared a studio in Copenhagen. They were best friends and comrades, as they described themselves, as well as husband and wife. When Lili began her transition, Gerda was presented with a question many of us have faced: what do you do when the person you love feels they have to change? Gerda answered that question by loving Lili even more. Gerda painted Lili over and over — in an enormous white hat ready for a masquerade ball, naked and with her backside exposed on an upholstered red chair, holding her shoulder with those big, hooded eyes. The portraits capture Lili’s complexity— her desire to make her appear both innocent and mature, hesitant and driven, playful and serious. They depict the contours and shadows of her soul, the contradictions, the inner strength and self-doubt. The portraits also show the depth of Gerda’s love — she saw Lili clearly, accepted her fully and then painted her for the world to see her as she saw herself. Their story is as much about art as it is about love and identity— about seeing someone while they make the most important choice of their life. Gerda painted Lili over and over — in an enormous white hat ready for a masquerade ball, naked, her backside exposed, on an upholstered red chair, holding her shoulder with those big, hooded eyes. The portraits capture Lili’s complexity— her desire to make her appear both innocent and mature, hesitant and driven, playful and serious. They depict the contours and shadows of her soul, the contradictions, the inner strength and self-doubt. The portraits also show the depth of Gerda’s love — she saw Lili clearly, accepted her fully and then painted her for the world to see her as she saw herself. Their story is as much about art as it is about love and identity— about seeing someone while they make the most important choice of their life.

Who's that girl?
Lili Elbe was one of the first people to have a full sex change and was vilified for it. She was played by Eddie Redmayne in a film based on a book by David Ebershoff, who reveals her transition was made possible by the love of another woman — her wife

Who's that girl?
Lili Elbe was one of the first people to have a full sex change and was vilified for it. She was played by Eddie Redmayne in a film based on a book by David Ebershoff, who reveals her transition was made possible by the love of another woman — her wife.
Pictur...
Eddie, the sensitive boy with the right face to play a girl

even a southerner like me must let rip

falling. All this effort and for what? To be
the one to cross the threshold of the
nearest neighbour (known as
Edinburgh revellers mark the new year. The pressure to celebrate is intense in Scotland

Richard Hoffman, from Emblem (Barrow Street Press, 2011)

The lodge is large but there is nowhere

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere
to put the Christmas tree. There isn’t an
absolutely gigantic party

The lodge is large but there is nowhere