



Lala

Jacek Dehnel

Antonia Lloyd-Jones, Translator

Oneworld Publications (Jul 10, 2018)

Hardcover \$24.99 (336pp)

978-1-78607-357-0

Jacek Dehnel's *Lala* is a wonderful mosaic of stories about a woman's unbelievably adventurous youth; they were shared with family members so many times that her children and grandchildren could recite them practically verbatim. Lala's memories began to crumble, though, under the onset of dementia. Dehnel, Lala's grandson, decided to compile the stories to keep his grandmother's memory alive.

Lala's stories are outrageous and humorous. She is situated in a family in which the women all share a certain attitude: part confidence, a little craziness, and absolute hilarity. Scenes set during World War II find Lala standing up for what she believes in despite great personal risk; she could have been killed time and again but was miraculously honored, instead, for her brazenness. She is shown tricking people into doing exactly what she wanted and joking that she "always had more luck than common sense."

The pace of Lala's stories is rapid fire, and new character introductions are frequent. Each time a family member becomes the sudden star in a story, a bit more of their personality and background is divulged; the broader picture doesn't come into focus until the very end.

Each story is spellbinding and captivating, moving out of order but related in ways that suggest good humor and sly smiles. Lala's story is a tapestry of intriguing memories, and pictures of her family are peppered throughout, putting faces to personalities and demeanors.

As Lala moves toward death, her story teems with life, each shared event building upon another, slowly surging forward and back. During his gradual shift from the position of a listener to the primary storyteller, Dehnel successfully carries on his grandmother's memory in his interpretation of her life.

KATIE ASHER (July/August 2018)

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