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Gretel and the Dark



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurGretel and the Dark is Eliza Granville's dazzling novel of darkness, evil - and hope.For fans of Markus Zusak's The Book Thief and Guillermo del Toro's Pan's Labyrinth.Vienna, 1899. Josef Breuer - celebrated psychoanalyst - is about to encounter his strangest case yet. Found by the lunatic asylum, thin, head shaved, she claims to have no name, no feelings - to be, in fact, not even human. Intrigued, Breuer determines to fathom the roots of her disturbance.Years later, in Germany, we meet Krysta. Krysta's Papa is busy working in the infirmary with the 'animal people', so little Krysta plays alone, lost in the stories of Hansel and Gretel, the Pied Piper, and more. And when everything changes and the real world around her becomes as frightening as any fairy tale, Krysta finds that her imagination holds powers beyond what she

could have ever guessed . . . 'Atmospheric and beautifully written. Gretel and the Dark will be one of the best books of 2014' The ListEliza Granville was born in Worcestershire and now lives in the Welsh Marches. She has had a life-long fascination with the enduring quality of fairytales and their symbolism, and the idea for Gretel and the Dark was sparked when she became interested in the emphasis placed on these stories during the Third Reich.ExtraitPrologueIt is many years before the Pied Piper comes back for the other children.

Though his music has been silenced, still thousands are forced to follow him, young, old, large, small, everyone . . . even the ogres wearing ten-league boots and cracking whips, even their nine-headed dogs. We are the rats in exodus now and the Earth shrinks from the touch of our feet. Spring leaves a bitter taste. All day, rain and people fall; all night, nixies wail from the lakes. The blood-colored bear sniffs at our heels. I keep my eyes on the road, counting white pebbles, fearful of where this last gingerbread trail is leading us. Has the spell worked? I think so: coils of mist lap at our ankles, rising to mute all sounds, swallowing everyone around us whole. When the moment comes, we run blind, dragging the Shadow behind us, stopping only when my outstretched hand meets the rough bark of pine trunks. One step, two, and were inside the enchanted forest, the air threaded with icy witch breaths. The day collapses around us. Phantom sentries swoop from the trees, demanding names, but our teeth guard the answers so they turn away, flapping eastward in search of the cloud-shrouded moon. Roots coil, binding us to the forest floor. We crouch in a silence punctuated by the distant clatter of stags shedding their antlers. We wake, uneaten. Every trace of mist has been sucked away by the sun. The landscape seems empty. We havent come far: I can see where the road runs, but theres no sign of anything moving along it. Its quiet until a cuckoo calls from deep within the trees. Listen. Kukulka, he says, shielding his eyes as he searches the topmost branches. Kuckuck, I tell him. He still talks funny. Shes saying Kuckuck! He gives his usual jerky shrug. At least were free. Only if we keep moving. Come on. The Shadow whimpers, but we force it upright and, supporting it between us, move slowly along the edge of the trees until we come to fields where ravens are busy gouging out the eyes of young wheat. Beyond, newly buried potatoes shiver beneath earth ridges. Cabbages swell like lines of green heads. When we kneel to gnaw at their skulls, the leaves stick in our throats. We carry on walking, feet weighted by the sticky clay, until the Shadow crumples. I pull at its arm. Its not safe here. We must go farther. If they notice weve gone Keep going. We have to keep going. Surely sooner or later kindly dwarves or a softhearted giants wife must take pity on us. But fear has become too familiar a companion to act as a spur for long. Besides, were carrying the Shadow now. Its head lolls, the wide eyes are empty, and its feet trail behind, making two furrows in the soft mud. It could be the death of us. We should go on alone. No, he pants. I promised not to leave I didnt. Then you go. Save yourself. He knows I wont go on without him. No good standing here talking, I snap, hooking my arm under the Shadows shoulder and wondering how something thin as a knife blade can be so heavy. Another rest, this time perched on the mossy elbow of an oak tree, attempting to chew a handful of last years acorns. Only the sprouted ones stay down. The Shadow lies where we dropped it, facing the sky, though I notice its eyes are completely white now. Without warning it gives a cry, the loudest noise its ever made, followed by a gasp and a long, juddering out-breath. I finish spitting out the last of the acorns. The Shadow isnt doing its usual twitching and jumping; it doesnt even move when I push my foot into its chest. After a moment I gather handfuls of oak leaves and cover its face. He tries to stop me. Why are you doing that? Its dead. No! But I can see the relief as he pulls himself onto his knees to check. After enduring so much, still we die like dogs . . . pod plotem . . . next to a fence, under a hedge. He closes the Shadows eyes. Baruch dayan emet. It must be a prayer: his lips go on moving but no sound emerges. But were not going to die. I tug at his clothes. Shadows never last long. You always knew it was hopeless. Now we can travel faster, just you and me. He shakes me off. The ground here is soft. Help me dig a grave. Wont. Theres no time. We have to keep going. Its already past midday. I watch him hesitate. Nothing will eat a shadow. Theres no meat on it. When he doesnt move, I trudge away, forcing myself not to look back. Eventually he catches up. The path continues to weave between field and forest. Once, we catch sight of a village but decide its still too near the black magicians stronghold to be safe. Finally, even the sun starts to abandon us, and our progress slows until I know we can drag ourselves no farther. By now the forest has thinned; before us stretches an enormous field with neat rows as far as the eye can see. Weve pushed deep between the bushy plants before I realize its a field of beans. What does it matter? he asks wearily. Cecily said you go mad if you fall asleep under flowering beans. No flowers, he says curtly. Hes wrong, though. A few of the uppermost buds are already unfurling white petals, ghostly in the twilight, and in the morning its obvious we should have pressed on, for hundreds of flowers have opened overnight, dancing like butterflies on the breeze, spreading their perfume on the warming air. Let me rest for

a bit longer, he whispers, cheek pressed against the mud, refusing to move, not even noticing a black beetle ponderously climbing over his hand. No one will find us here. His bruises are changing color. Where they were purple-black, now they are tinged with green. When he asks for a story, I remember what Cecily told me about two children who came out of a magic wolf pit. They had green skin, too. It was in England, I tell him, at harvesttime, a very long time ago. A boy and a girl appeared suddenly, as if by magic, on the edge of the cornfield. Their skin was bright green and they wore strange clothing. I look down at myself and laugh.

When they spoke, nobody could understand their fairy language. The harvesters took them to the Lords house, where they were looked after, but they would eat nothing at all, not a thing, until one day they saw a servant carrying away a bundle of beanstalks. They ate those but never the actual beans. Why didnt they eat the beans like anyone else? Cecily said the souls of the dead live in the beans. If you ate one you might be eating your mother or your father. Thats plain silly. Im only telling you what she said. Its a true story, but if you dont want me to No, go on, he says, and I notice in spite of his superior tone hes looking uneasily at the bean flowers. What happened to the green children? After they ate the beanstalks, they grew stronger and learned to speak English. They told the Lord about their beautiful homeland where poverty was unknown and everyone lived forever. The girl said that while playing one day theyd heard the sound of sweet music and followed it across pastureland and into a dark cave Like your story of the Pied Piper? Yes. I hesitate, remembering that in Cecily's story the boy died and the little girl grew up to be an ordinary wife. I dont remember the rest. Hes silent for a moment, then looks at me. What are we going to do? Where can we go? Who can we turn to? Nobody has ever helped us before. They said help was coming. They said it was on its way. Do you believe it? Yes. Thats why we must keep walking towards them. Beneath the bruises, his face is chalk-white. His arm doesnt look right and he winces whenever he tries to move it. Theres fresh blood at the corners of his mouth. And suddenly Im so angry I might explode. I wish I could kill him. My fists clench so hard my nails dig in. I want to scream and spit and kick things. He continues to look questioningly at me. I mean the man who started it all. If it hadnt been for him Didnt you hear what everyone was whispering? Hes already dead. Again, the small shrug. Anyway, my father said if it hadnt been him there'd have been someone else just like him. And maybe then it would have been someone else here, not us. He smiles and squeezes my hand. And we would never have met. Yes, we would, I say fiercely. Somehow, somewhere like in the old stories. Still I wish it could have been me that killed him. Too big, he says weakly. And too powerful. I knuckle my eyes. Then I wish Id been even bigger. I would have stepped on him or squashed him like a fly. Or I wish hed been even smaller. Then I could have knocked him over and cut off his head or stabbed him in the heart. We sit in silence for a while. I think about all the ways you could kill someone shrunk to Tom Thumb size. We ought to go now. Let me sleep. Walk now. Sleep later. All right. But first tell me a story one of your really long ones about a boy and a girl who kill an ogre. I think for a moment. None of my old stories seem bad enough until I realize there are other circumstances in which an ogre really could be killed. Thanks to Hanna, I know where. And I even know when. All of a sudden, Im excited. Once upon a time, I begin, but see immediately I cant start that way. It isnt that sort of tale. Hes still holding my hand. I give it a sharp pull. Get up. From now on I shall only tell you my story while were walking. The moment you stop, I shant say another word. One he town of Gmunden, with its placid lake surrounded by high mountains, was a peaceful summer retreat until the morning Mathilde observed that a certain General Pappenheim had brutally suppressed a peasant rebellion there in 1626. The name stirred up a hornets nest of resentments. Pappenheim was also the family name of that Bertha creature the young patient Josef had been so preoccupied with. The one he had never stopped talking about, worrying over, at mealtimes, bedtimes, morning, noon, and night, even when his own wife was so heavily pregnant. Why was that? Actually, she had a very good idea why, thank you very much, Doktor Josef Breuer. And she wasnt the only one who thought along those lines. Ask Sigmund. Hed verify it. Mathilde simply could not let the subject rest. The fact that almost two decades had passed made not a scrap of difference. Neither did Josefs protestations. On and on the argument went, growing more accusatory, weighted with increasing bitterness, until he could stand it no longer and returned to Vienna alone. With the exception of the childrens old nurse, and the boy, of course, the house was empty. At least it was quiet here. Or rather, after so many years, Josef was used to the muted noises from beyond the window. His mind no longer registered the distant rumble of trams or the grind and rattle of horse-drawn vehicles, the street cries, the high-pitched chatter of passing maidservants. Even late-night revelers and their cacophonous renditions of melodies by the recently deceased Strauss were barely noticed. Within his consulting room, only the somnolent pulse of the ancient clock usually broke the silence that filled the spaces between patients and none of those would beat a path to his door until the rest of the

family returned, marking the official end of his vacation. This morning, hunched over his desk, Josef became aware of another sound, a tremulous beat, a whisper-soft allegrissimo countermelody to the groan of the clock. It seemed so much a part of him that he clutched at his chest, suddenly alarmed. However, it was not, after all, the arrhythmic fluttering of his heart but merely the frantic escape bid of a rag-winged butterfly confused by the glass. That this realization took so long was a measure of how disturbing he'd found the earlier incident. It had required enormous effort to unlock the girl's fingers. He'd never before encountered such prehensile determination. The cat was still hiding beneath the bureau. Perhaps it was dead, for during the struggle, Gudrun, shrieking with fury, had seized its head, forcibly yanking it free of the girl's hands. Clawing empty air as it fell, the animal added its own banshee howl to the din. Benjamin, lurking beyond the door, had immediately bounded into the room. Pandemonium. And yet the girl continued to stare straight ahead, wordless, blank. What had the animal done to warrant her assault? Plenty of people disliked cats, and some were reputed to have found them terrifying. Napoleon, Meyerbeer, the dissolute Henry III of England but there were few who, expressionless and without even glancing down, would seize one by the neck and proceed to crush its windpipe. Josef rose from his desk with a sigh, keeping well back in the shadow of the curtain as he opened the window. After a moment's hesitation, the butterfly—a Groer Kohlweiling, summer ravager of cabbage patches, against whose progeny Benjamin waged constant warfare—exited to certain death. He watched it flutter upwards, keeping close to the building as it battled against the breeze. Not, after all, a Cabbage White: the sooty black spots on the forewings were too large, unusually pronounced, even for a female. It was a rare subspecies, perhaps, though it hardly mattered. The dying year had a voracious appetite for such delicate creatures. Today Josef could smell autumn on the air, a mixture of wood smoke and fungus, death and decay. He sensed worms wreaking their transformation in the dark loam beneath the leaf mold. The trees were changing color. A few leaves had fallen. Faced with the prospect of a bleak winter, his mood always veered towards the melancholic, never more so than this year, which marked not only the end of the present century but also the end of love. Mathilde had turned from him. Her moods, this difficult passage marking an end to her fertility, would pass; life would settle down again. But the harsh words, those vile accusations. He tugged angrily at his beard. Things could never be the same between them. What remained? How could his declining years be faced, emotionally lacking, with affection rationed, touch denied? At least there was the steady acquisition of knowledge to sustain him: *sum esse conservare*. Thank God for work. And, as if to underline it, this intriguing case had simply fallen into his lap. Josef returned to his chair and stared at the virgin page, as yet unsullied by whatever agonizing secrets were waiting to be unlocked. The facts would have to be recorded. He wrote a single word, *Frulein*, and stopped. He scratched his head and looked about him at the familiar faces of his daily companions: the ancient clock, increasingly dragging its feet over the passing of time; the carved-wood deer's head mounted with hugely branching six-point antlers, its gaze fixed on each patient, its ears pricked as if eternally eavesdropping; the portrait of his father, Leopold, watching, waiting. For over thirty years Josef had sat at this desk, never once lost for words. He should simply choose a name, any name, and alter it as soon as the girl's identity was established. But still he hesitated. It was not an easy thing, for to name something established dominion over it. As with an infant, it shaped and molded the namer's expectations of that which was named. It set apart. It emphasized human aloneness. A pseudonym was different, a mere cloak. Josef thought back to his first glimpse of the girl in Benjamin's arms, swaddled in a horse blanket, its coarse folds framing her pale and bloodied face, the gash on her throat a gaping second mouth, the shock of the naked skull, her eyes open but unseeing, as though fixed on a grim hereafter. In that moment, she had put him in mind of a broken flower. A flower name, then, for such was almost an endearment. Since she was so pale, so slender, and because it was his favorite flower, they would henceforth refer to her as *Lilie*. *Die Rose, die Lilie, die Taube, die Sonne, Die liebt ich einst alle in Liebeswonne*. The decision galvanized Josef into action. Squaring up his notebook, he began to write. *Frulein Lilie X* *Frulein Lilie X* appears to be in her early twenties and in good physical health. Nothing is known about her past life. Her well-kept hands and fine features suggest that she comes from the upper stratum of society. She was discovered unclothed on rough ground near the Narrenturm (27 August 1899). It is difficult to ascertain how long she lay there, but probably no more than twenty-four hours, as what has become known as the Tower of Fools is a favorite meeting place for schoolboys who congregate to throw stones at the lightning rod. *Lilie's* condition was such that the boys who stumbled across her thought she was dead. My primary examination revealed an exceptionally slow heartbeat and hardly discernible breathing. She appeared to have no awareness of self or others, neither reacting to the external world nor to the passage of time. Her eyes remained open but were similarly unresponsive to

stimuli. Skin and mucous membranes appeared normal. The teeth are all present and sound. The patients head had been crudely shorn. There was severe bruising behind the ears and around the left eye. Two shallow incisions had been made in the throat, close together, probably with a small pocketknife. There was further bruising on the lower arms and wrists, partially obscuring a line of inked characters on the left, which appear to be permanent. I also found bruising on the inner thighs and buttocks but no indication of very recent sexual assault. There were abrasions on both left and right scapulae consistent with the patient having been dragged along the ground by the feet. The patient has remained comatose for three days, during which time she has not eaten or taken liquid apart from a few drops of water spooned between her lips. Josef put down his pen, reluctant to revisit the moment of change. Instead he made his way to the kitchen, drawn by his nose to the prospect of freshly made Shlishkes. The relaxed, almost schlampig way in which the house was run in Mathildes absence was a holiday in itself. To perch on a stool amid the scrubbing and chopping, the beating and mixing, the basting and tasting, transported him back to childhood, when his grandmother had taken charge of his fathers house, especially as Gudrun was familiar with so many old Hungarian recipes. He took advantage of Gudruns turned back to palm surreptitiously one of the warm dumplings with its coating of sugar and caramelized bread crumbs. Leave them alone, said Gudrun, without turning, and in the fearsome voice formerly reserved for the nursery. Theyre counted. Josef said nothing. The old nurse had strict rules about speaking with ones mouth full. She brought him coffee without being asked. Ive made some soup for the patient. I doubt shell eat it. She will, if I feed her. Gudrun stood before him, arms akimbo, glaring. Its no good forcing food into her mouth if she cant swallow. Gudrun snorted. Cant? Wont. Im surprised youre still taken in after this mornings little episode. Vicious, that was. The girl deserves a good hiding. She needs locking up. Josef ignored the venom. Shell stay in her room for another few days. Ive come to the conclusion that we brought her downstairs too soon. And Ive come to the conclusion that shes playacting, pretending to be dead to the world. You mark my words: theres more to this than meets the eye. Shell probably wait until were off guard and then let in her accomplices to ransack the silver and murder us all in our beds. Viennas not what it was, with all these strangers pouring into the city. I told you, plain as plain, you were bringing trouble into the house. Would you listen? No. Am I right? I am. And whats the mistress going to say, tell me that? Frau Doktor Breuer wont want her nicely brought-up daughters associating with a wench whos probably no better than she should be. The girl was brutally attacked, said Josef, in an attempt to stem the flow. Gudrun moved the plate of Shlishkes out of reach. Theres no need to raise your voice. Josef was on the verge of forbidding force-feeding and then beating a hasty retreat when Benjamin clumped in carrying a frail piled high with vegetables, distracting Gudrun, who turned her bad temper on his muddy boots. The young man grinned, ignoring the ensuing threats. How is she now, Herr Doktor? And youll scrub the floor until its clean enough to eat off, Gudrun finished, adding: Never mind her. Its the cats health you should be asking after. If the poor creatures still alive. Her eyes gleamed. Josef recalled that shed never liked the animal. He set down his empty cup, nodding as Gudrun hovered with the coffeepot. Thank you. It was not his practice to discuss patients, but Benjamins quick action in bringing the girl . . . in bringing Lilie . . . here earned him the right to inquire. Physically shes much improved. The bruising I told him already, the bruises are fading, Gudrun put in. Almost gone, thanks to me. And those nasty cuts on her neck have more or less healed. She sniffed. I cant shift those ink marks on her arm, though, no matter how hard I scrub. Theyre tattoos, Benjamin muttered, rolling his eyes. Tell her, Herr Doktor. She takes no notice of me. He glanced defiantly at Gudrun. Theyre tattoos. They wont come off. Sailors have tattoos, Gudrun said scornfully. Theres a reason for that, which I wont go into. No reason for one to be on a young womans arm. Perhaps its decorative, hazarded Josef. People have decorated their bodies with tattoos since the beginning of time. They used to pierce the skin with thin sticks and sharpened bones. A painful process, I should imagine, but I understand a New York mans invented a tattooing machine. Must still hurt. Benjamin winced as he unlaced the offending boots. Leviticus 19, verse 28, declared Gudrun. You shall not make gashes in your flesh for the dead, or incise any marks on yourselves: I am the Lord. The two men glanced at each other but said nothing. Josef had taken the presence of those marks to confirm Benjamins suspicions that Lilie could not possibly be a Jew. It mattered now that Vienna had lapsed into one of its periodic bouts of anti-Semitism: taunts and slogans, occasional skirmishes nothing new. This time he suspected it was being fueled by Mayor Lueger for his own political ends, and exacerbated, as always, by ill-educated Roman Catholic priests exercising their fervid imaginations to embellish age-old myths of ritual murder, including the sacrifice of Christian babies. The blood libel trial of Hilsner in Bohemia hadnt helped. The similarities between the discovery of Aneka Hruzovs bodythroat slashed, clothes half torn off and that of Lilie had

prompted the boy to act quickly for fear of reprisals against the Jewish community. Lucky for them it was Benjamins younger brother and his friend whod found her: within an hour the girl was safely concealed within the respectable Breuer house. Benjamin was to be commended for taking their late-night conversations so seriously. Anyway, Gudrun continued, plunging her knife into the heart of a cabbage, what self-respecting woman wants a string of lines and numbers decorating her wrist when she could have a nice bracelet? Whatever she is, the girl doesnt look like a savage. Lilie, said Josef. Ive decided we should call her Lilie. Lilie, echoed Benjamin, savoring the word. Lilie. And has Lilie recovered since this morning? How is her mental state? Never mind that, said Gudrun. What about this soup? Josef stood. Ill take it up now. Let me go. Ill get her eating, see if I dont, Gudrun promised. No, insisted Josef. Since she took water only from me, I should feed her. He was immediately oppressed by a sense of dj vu, and a tiny frisson of something akin to fear ran the length of his spine. This was history repeating itself. He remembered long passages when Bertha had accepted food only when he extended the spoon. Perhaps it might be better . . . Then he remembered Mathildes offensive accusations and turned his back on good sense. I will feed her, he said, more firmly this time. Then I shall carry the tray, Gudrun said, just as firmly, fixing him with her eye. You shouldnt go alone. Josefs mouth tightened. For a moment the voices of his wife and Gudrun seemed to fuse into one. The young woman needs no protection from me. He avoided looking at Benjamin. Its your reputation Im thinking of, Herr Doktor. What with the mistress away. They trudged upstairs, both breathing heavily, both oppressed by their age. On reaching the guest-room door, Josef knocked out of courtesy, but Gudrun shoved past him, balancing the tray on one generously padded hip. Lilie was exactly as theyd left her, sitting bolt upright in the chair and staring straight ahead. Her eyes were wide open. Dull. Blank. The only difference Josef could find was that her left hand lay loosely cupped in her lap. Some water first. He held the glass to Lilies mouth. Meeting no response, he pushed a small spoonful of water between her lips. It spilled from the corners of her mouth, trickled down the sides of her neck, fingered under the plum-colored fabric, and continued stealthily downwards. Josef looked away. Gudrun had dressed the girl in outgrown family garments. Dark shades didnt suit the girls pale complexion; some other arrangements would have to be made. After a moment he refilled the spoon. This time drink it, commanded Gudrun. Hurry up, the soups getting cold. Shouting wont achieve anything. Hows it going to look if she starves to death, Herr Doktor? What then? Gudrun leaned closer. No good sitting there, mooning over whatever happened, my girl. Chances are you brought it on yourself anyway. Whats done is done. Get up and get on with life, thats what I say. Enough, said Josef. From now on, please remain silent at all times in Lilies presence. Very well. The direct order didnt stop Gudrun from tapping Lilie sharply on the back of the neck as she passed. It couldnt have hurt, but Lilie responded immediately with an audible intake of breath, jerking her head vigorously to one side and wriggling her shoulders. A soft pink, the color of wild-rose petals, crept up her cheeks. Her eyes brightened. She blinked and focused, not on Josef, who sat opposite her, but on an area somewhere above his left shoulder. Vous tes qui? Lilies voice was low, melodic, totally pleasing to Josef. He stared back, transfixed by her irises, which were a curiously intense blue-green, almost turquoise, with a ring of amber flecks around the pupil. Now that her face was animated, he realized Lilie was possessed of a rare beauty, her features perfectly symmetrical and in proportion. A hazy recollection of some painting hovered on the edge of his memory. He struggled to remember the artist. Vous tes qui? she repeated, and still receiving no answer: s n? Cine esti tu? Kim? Her voice rose a fraction. Ktry jestescie ty? Kdo ar tebe? Wer sind Sie? Who are you? Her lips continued to move, but Josef was unable to pick out any words. Forgive me, Frulein. My name is Josef Breuer. I am a physician. Josef Robert Breuer, said Lilie, looking directly at him for the first time. Born Vienna, January 15, 1842, graduated from the Akademisches Gymnasium in 1858. That is correct, said Josef, a little startled. And what is your name? I have no name. Lilie turned her left arm so the wrist faced him. Just my number. Number? snorted Gudrun. How much more of this nonsense? Josef shot her a warning look before turning his attention back to the girl. Everyone has a name, Frulein. It is what distinguishes one human being from another. Why do you assume Im human? Lilie inspected her cupped hand and slowly opened her fingers, revealing a white butterfly, its blotched wings ragged but otherwise undamaged, for it immediately fluttered away, joining several others dancing aimless figure eights against the ceiling. So many, she murmured. Thousands, millions, one for every stolen soul. Already there are too many to count. Ah, yes, agreed Josef, the butterfly has long been associated with the human soul. In Greek myth Lilie closed her hand. Not butterflies. Theyre flowers. Josef glanced at Gudrun. Tight-mouthed and resentful, she sat pleating the hem of her apron between her fingers. He cleared his throat and steered the conversation back to the girls feeling of exclusion from the human race. He smiled. I see no reason not to assume youre human. I am not

part of the human race. First I was an idea. Then I came into being charged with a very important task. Josef nodded but made no comment. And were you born here in Vienna? No? Then can you remember where you spent your childhood? I wasnt born. I was created just like this. As were we all, agreed Josef. The creator of the universe? Do you think I'm an angel? asked Lillie, staring straight in front of her. No. I'm not that, either. I'm sure you've heard of Olimpia Ernst Hoffmann, murmured Josef, nodding sagely. She was the beautiful automaton in his short story Der Sandmann. Of course, but she could only say Ah, ah. Think of me as being more like that but much cleverer. A machine made in the image of an adult human female. I see. Josef cleared his throat. Made half-baked, if you ask me, muttered Gudrun, flicking away imaginary dust. Very well, said Josef, pointedly raising one shoulder against Gudrun's interruption. Since you have no name, I shall call you Lillie. He waited for an objection but none came, though her lips moved. Now, Lillie, tell us about your task. Lillie turned the full blue-green of her gaze on him. I've come to find the monster. Ah. And this monster is it in Vienna? No, said Lillie, but he's coming. Look. She opened her hand, and to Josef's amazement another of the curiously marked butterflies hung poised for a moment, its black markings reminiscent of the empty eye cavities of the skull, before spiraling up to join the endless dance above their heads. Where? This soup will be stone cold in a minute, said Gudrun, and rattled the spoon against the bowl. Eat. That's what were up here for. Josef snatched it from her hand and held it out to the girl. Will you eat something, Frulein? Lillie glanced at the soup and wrinkled her nose in what might have been distaste. Machines don't need to eat. There's plenty in Vienna would be glad of that soup, let me tell you, huffed Gudrun, taking the gesture personally. I'll give you turning your nose up at good food. Just who do you think you are? Silence, Frau Gschaltner! roared Josef. Not another word. Huh, said Gudrun, and folded her arms over her chest. Once again, Josef thrust forward the spoon, handle-first, willing Lillie to take it. Come, Lillie, eat just a little. He didn't want to repeat history by feeding her, but since she continued to stare at the opposite wall, he supposed there was nothing else for it. By now the girl must be hungry. He stirred the soup and took a small spoonful, carefully avoiding the congealing fat. Open your mouth, Lillie. It was a very pretty mouth, the lips well shaped and generous, so full of promise that Josef could almost imagine how it might feel to sate his own hunger there. His heart lurched. The spoon juddered violently, spilling most of the liquid. Open your mouth immediately, Lillie, he said, more forcefully than he'd intended. You must eat. It emerged as an order. And perhaps this was the way it would work, for Lillie immediately obeyed. The thought both alarmed and exhilarated Josef. He could hardly bear to watch the shallow bowl of the spoon pressing down on her lower lip as he fed her. Occasionally the pink tip of her tongue emerged to lick away a glistening trail of soup droplets. Twice Lillie turned her head away, but the insistent spoon pursued her. Josef stopped only when he observed that she was holding the liquid in her mouth rather than swallowing it. Good. He surreptitiously ran his fingers beneath his damp collar. Rest now, Lillie. We will talk again later. Outside the door Gudrun eyed him severely. You should have let me deal with her. Start pandering to her nonsense and there'll be no end to this foolishness. The poor child will recover soon enough. No fool like an old fool, said Gudrun, taking the tray. Josef flinched. Had he made himself so obvious? Then it occurred to him that Gudrun would never have dared to speak to him with such disrespect if Mathilde had been there. Send Benjamin to me. He omitted the courtesy that would have softened the command to a request. Not that it redressed the balance. And prepare something more substantial for the girls evening meal. Cold meat, fruit, cheese anything she can pick up with her fingers. He couldn't go through all that again. And will you be in there talking to her later? Gudrun flushed crimson before Josef's glare, but she didn't drop her eyes. If so, I should accompany you. Send Benjamin to me, he repeated, without answering. The boy couldn't have been far away. Josef had barely settled himself before he heard the heavy clump of work boots along the passage from the kitchen stairs. And, newly cleaned or not, that was something else Mathilde wouldn't have tolerated. He opened the door before there was time for Benjamin to forget about knocking. What have you found out, Benjamin? Any talk of young women going missing? Benjamin shook his head. Nothing. Well, nothing apart from the Grossmanns scullery maid. She ran off ten days ago. Their cook reckons she got homesick and went back to her fathers farm. Couldn't be Lillie, though. He looked at his hands. Hedda is much older, and ugly as sin, with a backside the size of a tram. Nothing else. Couple of whores found dead in Spittelberg. You'd better keep trying, said Josef after a moment's thought. Someone must know something. She didn't fall out of the air. For the reasons we discussed, I don't want to involve outsiders unless it's absolutely necessary. He carefully lined up his pens. So far, Lillie hasn't said anything sensible about her family background. A girl like Lillie, you'd think there'd be people out looking for her. I don't believe she's from Vienna. Josef replayed her few short answers in his head. There'd been traces of a strange accent. He couldn't

place it. Of course, she may have been brought here, perhaps against her will. He leaned forward, lowering his voice. That other matter we spoke of . . . Ill try, said Benjamin, but it wont be easy. I cant just walk in. Fat chance of getting work there apparently the pays so good the servants hang on to their jobs. Anyway, Ive heard tell they wont take on young men because of all the girls. He hesitated. Herr Doktor, it would be a simple matter for you to join the club. No. Josef clenched his fists. Out of the question. They say many of Viennas top men are members. Herr Doktor Schmidt, Herr Professor Voss No! Josef almost choked on the word. Rumors abounded about what went on beneath the Thlmes well-polished veneer of respectability. Foreign women . . . and men . . . prepared to engage in unnatural acts. Sexual coupling turned into theater. Orgies: the loosening of Saturns restraints as in the ancient temples. Josef swallowed hard. Those who frequented such places were either degenerate, a state surely denoting lack of purpose, or poor, sad creatures having no other recourse to sensual warmth; to be numbered among the latter would be to grind salt into his emotional wounds. He visualized Frau Voss with her sharp nose and lipless mouth, Frau Doktor Schmidt and her shifty-eyed piety. How would others judge Mathilde if he No. Besides, a poisonous word dropped here, a venomous nod and wink there . . . even Mayor Lueger wasnt immune: Vienna was growing fast, but salacious gossip traveled faster. He would lay himself open to ridicule, to blackmail. All those that he held dear might be exposed to scandal. No, he repeated. No, that place is a pit of depravity. Benjamin turned scarlet. I only meant to see if Lilie It could give certain factions more ammunition than they need. Nobody need find out. Josef looked hard at him. And how did you discover that the doctor and the professor were members? Well, everyone knows . . . Oh. Yes. Sorry. Benjamin coughed gently. Ill go back. See what I can find out by hanging around the kitchen door. He was silent for a moment before asking diffidently: Is she . . . is Lilie all right? One minute Gudrun says shes a thief waiting until were off our guard, the next that shes a raving lunatic, harping on about being made of clockwork or something. Is that true? Is she really mad? Time will tell, Josef said vaguely. If Im to find out what happened to Lilie, she must be questioned extremely carefully. She may not remember yet. She might be hiding something. In either case she must be induced to confide in me. Of course, Herr Doktor. I understand. Patience is called for. Such things cant be rushed. In many ways it was akin to seduction. To his horror, Josef found his imagination was still conjuring up voluptuous pictures of what might be happening even now in the Thlme. The writhing images had Lilies mouth. Her eyes. Her neck. Those marks on her arm they were like cattle brands, livestock an appalling thought. He jumped to his feet and opened the safe, keeping his back to the boy. Youll need more money since youre going back into the coffeehouses, Benjamin. The taverns, too, I suppose. Do you think shes married? Who? Josef thought of Lilie using the revealing pronoun he instead of the neutral it for the monster. In his professional capacity, hed examined her carefully. He knew what he knew. Undoubtedly there was a brutish man in this somewhere, but there was no ring on her finger and no mark where one had been. You mean Lilie, Benjamin? He turned to face him. I doubt it. WAIT FOR ME, HERR DOKTOR. Gudrun labored up the stairs after him, clutching a workbasket. I promised to come with you, and come with you I will. Josef drew himself upright. Theres really no need I wont utter a word, said Gudrun, shouldering past him. Not a word. I shall sit by the window and get on with my mending. Quiet as a mouse. In silence. Very well. Josef knocked on the door and entered quickly before Gudrun could blunder in. The girl was sitting exactly as before: hands loosely clasped in her lap; eyes wide open and blank. Good afternoon, Lilie. I thought we might have a chat. How are you feeling now? He raised his voice when no answer came: Lilie, you must speak to me. Answer now, please. Do you hear? How are you feeling? Lilie inclined her head. A machine has no feelings. Josef waited until Gudrun had settled herself by the window with her darning mushroom and was busily jabbing a large needle into the heel of one of his socks. He left the question of emotional response for the moment. There was another, more promising topic that might yield results. Tell me about the monster, Lilie. She stared at him for so long without blinking that Josef found himself opening and shutting his eyes at twice the normal speed, as if to ease her ocular discomfort as well as his own. Tell me about the monster. What does he look like? He is small and dark. Small, yes. Unusual. Dark? Josef thought back to childrens tales. A picture of a prancing devil presented itself. And does he have claws or horns? A tail? Huge teeth? No. Do you see him in your dreams or in everyday life? No. Josef frowned. Where is he then? He is somewhere else. Somewhere in Vienna? No, but he will come here soon. To find you? No, said Lilie. He isnt looking for me. I am looking for him. Oh? And why is that? He wont recognize me. Ill be able to put an end to it before it begins. Ah, said Josef, wondering what Lilie imagined had rendered her incognito. The lack of hair, perhaps: women often attached disproportionate importance to the effects of a different style. Are you frightened of him? Lilie shook her head. Fear is a human weakness. I have no

feelings. Its hard to believe youre a machine, Lilie, since you look exactly like a real human woman. And a very comely one, if I might say so. The girls face remained without expression, but a prolonged clattering of bobbins from the window seat said far more than words and Josef immediately wished the stiff compliment unvoiced. Like Galatea, he added, who though not a machine was made by human hands. Pygmalion only sculpted one Galatea, responded Lilie. I am one of many. There are thousands with the face and body that you see before you. Machines such as I are provided with a pleasing female likeness unless otherwise requested. Since we are neither dead nor alive our appearance remains a matter of indifference to us. Josef leaned his elbows on his knees and made a steeple of his fingers. Galatea was brought to life by Aphrodite. How is it that you are able to move, breathe, think, and speak? Electrical impulses, said Lilie, rubbing her left wrist, as in human bodies. But, he persisted, what equivalence exists for the divine spark whereby a human infant quickens? Its the same thing. Nothing but an electrical charge. She looked directly at him. Such as a bolt of lightning from the Blitzfinger. From what you say Josefs eyes flicked sideways, irritated by the outbreak of huffing and tutting from near the window the only difference between a human and a machine such as yourself seems to be the existence of a soul. Lilie shook her head. All the soul cares about is experiencing every variety of pain this world can offer. Souls are so greedy for pain they dont care whether the body is natural or man-made. In a natural body it can feel the pain. In a fabricated one it observes the effects. But there are pleasures, too, said Josef, profoundly shocked. Love, friendship, service, knowledge. Pleasure is only a pathway to pain because it must always end in . . . Lilie looked up at the ceiling and Josefs eyes followed her gaze. More of the butterflies must have entered through the partially opened window, for now fifty or more fluttered helplessly against the plaster. Gudrun would have to take a brush to them. The garden must be overrun with the creatures. In? he prompted. Death, said Lilie. Fear of dying brings humans the greatest pain. Death is implicit in every form of joy. Of course, it also brings the end of pain. And what happens when a machine dies? Does its soul return to God? God is a human invention, said Lilie. Thats enough. Red-faced and trembling, Gudrun thrust herself between Josef and Lilie, still shoving her sewing inside the workbasket. Im not listening to any more of this wickedness. What would your father say, Herr Doktor? What would he say? She turned on Lilie. Ill bring you food later, Miss. Eat it or not, as you please. I refuse to take part in your nasty game. And by the way, dont expect me to get you ready for bed this evening. Youre quite capable of looking after yourself. Josef found himself on the other side of the slammed door without working out how it had been achieved. Im surprised at you, encouraging that sort of talk, Herr Doktor, said Gudrun. A type of pantheism, perhaps, murmured Josef. Shes a well-educated young woman. She can read, if thats what you mean. Every books been off the shelves in that room. I can tell. I wont explain how. Its enough to say Ive only one pair of hands and this is a big house. Gudrun pursed her lips. Unless, of course, she was looking to see if anything had been hidden behind them. Two conversations with Frulein Lilie took place today after I discovered that, while gentle persuasion has no effect, a direct order is instantly obeyed. It became apparent that the young woman has been well educated and is of high intelligence. However, whatever occurred in her past has led her to detach herself from emotional response. Lilie avers that she has no feelings, either negative or positive, that she has, in short, turned into a machine. Her elaboration of this fantasy involves a gloomy and joyless view of the world, backed up by simple logic gleaned from atheist literature. Lilie also referred to a man who is likely to have been responsible for the attack on her. She identifies him as a monster and courageously asserts that she will find him in order to see him punished. I am confident that considerable progress has been made and that Lilie is ready to receive treatment. Twoapa says I should be glad that weve come to live in such a beautiful place. There are many important people here. People that matter. People who will make the future better for everyone. Im not glad at all, and I dont think he is, either. As we were leaving our proper house, Papa said I must stay in the car with my toys and books while he locked up. After a bit I followed him back inside and heard him walking around talking to Mama, which was very silly because she isnt there anymore. What else can I do, Lidia? he asked the bed. Its the last thing I want to be involved with, but these are dangerous times. He picked up Mamas hairbrush and ran his hand across the bristles. How else can I keep her safe? I popped out from behind the door. Keep who safe, Papa? Papa got very cross and marched me back outside. Its about time you learned to do as youre told, young lady. Dont want to go. I try to stop him putting me into the car. No! No! I scream so loudly the lady from the house next door throws open her windows to look out. Papa pushes me onto the backseat and starts the engine. He tidies his hair and mops his forehead, watching me in the cars little mirror. Be a good girl and we will stop somewhere nice on the way. Wont. Dont want to. Very well, Krysta. Papa sighs. He sighs a lot more than he used to. I kneel on the seat, watching our house get

smaller and smaller until it isn't there anymore. This new house is big, with fine new furniture and no dark corners to hide in, unlike our real home, which Greet said was impossible for one person to keep clean. A cat with a family of new kittens lives downstairs. Outside, we have a garden with flowers and trees instead of the noisy street. Beyond its walls there's a big zoo, but not the kind that has lots of visitors. There are lakes and forests, too, Papa says, raising his voice as I continue to wail and stamp and call for Greet. When summer comes we'll go for picnics and gather berries. And in the autumn we'll hunt for mushrooms Steinpilz and Pfifferlinge. You'd like that, wouldn't you? No. No! No! Who will thread the wild mushrooms on strings now that Greet has gone? Who will tie ribbons in my hair? Who will tell me stories? I throw myself on the floor and kick my legs. Stop that, Krysta, Papa says sharply. You're a big girl now, not a baby. He picks me up and sits me in a chair. I scream and drum my heels against the seat. His eyes dart from me to the door. Stop! Any more noise and you'll get a smack. I stick my thumb in my mouth, sniffing and hiccupping. Papa takes out a handkerchief and tells me to blow. That's better. He walks to the window and looks out. I'm only here for your sake, Krysta, he says very quietly. If it wasn't for you . . . He sighs again, and adds in a louder voice: At least it's safe here. You can play anywhere you like. All the dangerous creatures are behind the walls, and there are guards with fierce dogs to make sure they never get out. When will my Greet come? Papa frowns. Greet can't come here. This is a special place. Don't like it. Want to go home. Want Greet. Enough. Do you know what happens to bad little girls who don't do as they are told? One of these days you'll find out. Then you'll be sorry. **IM LONELY WITHOUT GREET.** I don't miss her shouting and flicking me with the dishrag, or the way she dragged the comb through my hair and made me drink my milk even when it had skin on it. Even though he sometimes threatens to, Papa never smacks me like Greet did. Instead he sits me on his knee and talks for a long time about being nice and how good little girls are supposed to behave. But he doesn't do cuddles like Greet, either. He holds my hand. Sometimes he kisses the top of my head. Greet gave me big, squashy cuddles and tickled me when she was in a good mood. She kissed me good night and tucked me in unless I'd made her cross. Then she used to shout: Get up those stairs out of my sight and let's hope the evil one doesn't carry you off in the night. Papa just stands at the end of the bed and hopes I sleep well. Most of all, I miss Greet's storytelling. Stories for this, stories for that, stories for everything else she had new ones for each day of the week, ones that went with most of her jobs. There were puffing, blowing wash-day stories and hot, red-faced ironing stories. There were quick stories for making dumplings or Apfelstrudel and extra-long stories for sewing and mending afternoons. People here sometimes read me stories from books. They don't carry them in their heads. They can't do voices like Greet, either. She did little honey-cake voices for princesses, crackly burning-paper ones for the witches, great big roars for the baddies, cheerful voices for the brave heroes. They don't sing. They don't make the right faces. Most stories here are nice and end happily. Some of Greet's were nasty, especially the liver-chopping and fish-gutting ones. Once upon a time, begins Greet, grabbing the whetstone from its tub of water, on a farm near Sachsenhausen, lived a man who let his children watch as he slaughtered a pig. She draws the blade of the largest kitchen knife across the whetstone, tip to heel, with a long quivering whi-i-i-sh that sounds like pirate swords slicing the air. Shivers run up my back. Again. Again. Later that day, when the children went off to play, the eldest child said to the youngest: You shall be the little pig. I'll be the butcher. And with that . . . Greet reaches into a bucket and slaps a bloody mass onto the table. She brandishes the newly sharpened blade aloft. The eldest child took a shiny knife and slit his little brother's throat. I gulp and shuffle backwards, staring openmouthed as her blade slices the offal as easily as a breakfast knife slides through warm butter. I want and do not want to hear more. Greet straightens up, wiping her brow with the back of one hand. Now, the mother was upstairs bathing the baby. When she heard the cries of her son, she ran helter-skelter downstairs. On seeing what had happened, she pulled the knife out of the boy's throat and was so angry that she plunged it straight into the heart of the son who'd played butcher. Here Greet lunges across the table with the kitchen knife, making me scream and run for the door. Then she remembered the baby and raced back upstairs. But it was too late. He'd drowned in the bath. By now I'm trembling from head to foot. A small whimper squeezes through my clenched teeth. Greet sweeps the bloody offering into a pan with her bright red hand. The woman was so distressed, she continues, her voice mournful, mouth pursed, head shaking, that she hanged herself from a beam in the barn. And that evening, when the father returned from working in the fields, he took his gun. **Margarete!** roars Papa. What's the meaning of this? Greet's mouth snaps shut just like one of the Little Nippers in the pantry, but this time she is the mouse. I put my thumb in. She hangs her head. Beg pardon, Herr Doktor. She does like her stories. There are other stories, Margarete. Pleasant stories. Uplifting ones that tell of the beauty and sanctity of life, of good overcoming evil. You should know better than to frighten an

innocent child with such dreadful tales. Greet glances sideways at me. Papa, if only you knew . . . Beg pardon, Herr Doktor, she mutters. It wont happen again. I should think not, says Papa, his face grim. Such tales spring from sick imaginations. Childhood is precious. Its where the building blocks of life are laid. We have a duty to protect our little ones from hearing about such atrocities. EVERY DAY NOW Papa goes to the infirmary. When he comes back he washes his hands. He rubs and scrubs until the basin is full of soap bubbles. His fingers go pink and wrinkly. After he has finished drying his hands, Papa runs clean water and washes them again. FACES HERE ARE MOSTLY STERN, but Uncle Hraben never stops smiling. He even smiled when he kicked the kittens out of the way. Johanna says he is very handsome but not nearly so handsome as Papa. On my birthday Uncle Hraben gives me a Negerksse. I eat it very slowly, first the chocolate shell, then the marshmallow filling, then the biscuit base. Afterwards I smooth out the wrapper, rubbing the back with my nail until it shines like silver, and he makes it into a ring for me. Where is your father taking you this afternoon, pretty Krysta? asks Uncle Hraben, stroking the back of my neck. I pull away. He says its a secret surprise. Ah. I see. But where do you hope youre going? I run to the window and point in the direction of the high wall. To the zoo. Greets uncle, whos a sailor, went to one in America. He saw a polar bear and a giraffe and . . . I pause, overcome with excitement and anticipation, before continuing in a hushed voice, and they let him ride on an elephant. Uncle Hraben bellows with laughter. Some of his friends come over and he repeats what Ive said. They also laugh. Eventually he dries his eyes and tells me there are no elephants, bears, giraffes, or monkeys behind the wall. I take off his ring and put my thumb in my mouth. Its bad luck to cry on your birthday. Its not that sort of zoo, Mdchen. This ones for a different kind of beast altogether, explains the man with straw hair and eyes the color of winter rain. They laugh again. What sort of beasts? I stamp my foot but this only makes them laugh more. Animal-people. There are animals that look like people. The old lady who lives next door to our real house has a pet schnauzer, the fattest dog Ive ever seen. Greet said over many years theyd grown alike: now both had hair sprinkled with salt and pepper, both with snouts poking into other peoples private business, both with bad tempers and yappy voices, both the shape of wine barrels. And once I heard Greet shout, Manner sind Schweine! at the man who brought firewood. Also, one of Papas friends had big, yellow teeth that made him look like a rat. I still want to see them. Too dangerous, says Uncle Hraben. They eat proper little human girls, especially pretty ones. Snip, snap one bite and youd be gone. WHEN PAPA CAME BACK from the infirmary, he still did all the hand washing, even though hed promised wed go out straightaway. While he was scrubbing his nails with the little brush, I asked if we were going to the zoo, in case Uncle Hraben had been joking. No. I scowl. You said I could choose. Papa dries his hands and looks carefully at his fingers. Wouldnt you rather come to the toy shop with me? Theres something there you might like to bring home. And afterwards we can have ice cream in a caf. He runs fresh water and picks up the soap. Erdbeereis? Strawberry, chocolate whatever flavor you like. The town is bright, with flowers at the windows and many red flags with bendy-arm Xs on them fluttering very gently in the breeze. People sitting outside a caf smile at us, some stand up to wave, and when we go into the toy shop, the shopkeeper leaves all his other customers to serve Papa. Ah, so this is the birthday Frulein. Alles Gute zum Geburtstag! He reaches below the counter and brings out two boxes. Each contains a pretty doll. One has dark brown curly hair and a red frock; the other is blonde and dressed all in blue. Yes, many happy returns from all of us. Here we are. Your papa wasnt sure which youd prefer. I look at Papa. He nods. Which one would you like? Cant I have both? Papa shakes his head. No. Want both. I kick at the brass rail running along the base of the counter. I try squeezing out a tear, but it wont come. Not fair. Why cant I have both? You may have one, he says in a tired voice. If you cant choose, then we will come back another day. Is that what you want? No. Then hurry up and decide before all the ice cream has melted. Not fair, I repeat but already know which doll Ill be taking home. The shopkeeper almost imperceptibly pushes the brown-haired doll towards me. She is a bit like Greet except that her eyes are the wrong color, but the yellow-haired doll looks like a fairy princess. That one. I point and the shopkeeper gives a little sigh and takes the brown doll away. Whats her name? You want the fair one. Good. Papa looks very pleased as he reads the label. It says Charlotte, but you can give her whatever name you wish. I shall call her Lottie, except when shes been naughty, I say, remembering Papa changing Greet to Margarete when she annoyed him. Then, she will be Charlotte. *Revue de presse* "As haunting, lyrical, and enchanting as the fairy tales Krysta is so taken with, Granvilles bittersweet first novel will keep readers hooked, guessing and wondering how Lilie and Krystas stories relate, right up to the end." *Library Journal* (starred) In *Gretel and the Dark*, Eliza Granville masterfully entwines two richly layered and compelling stories of two seemingly different worlds. Filled with remarkable historical detail and stunning

prose, both Krystas and Lilies stories captivated me, and Granville kept me quickly turning the pages to discover the connection between these two girls. By turns beautiful and frightening, magical and dark, this is a novel that will stay with me for a long time to come. Jillian Cantor, author of Margot "Dark and intriguing . . . a highly clever, original book." The Daily Mail (UK) A powerful story, sensitively told a terrifying tale about the stories we hear and the stories we tell ourselves to understand our experiences it's impossible not to find yourself racing through the pages, desperate to discover the connections heartbreaking and heart-racing. The Times (UK) Atmospheric and beautifully written a subtle and thoughtful novel. It seems soon to call it, but Gretel and the Dark will be one of the best books of 2014. The List (UK)