



# Gretel and the Dark

*Eliza Granville*

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## **Gretel and the Dark** Eliza Granville

A dark, distinctive and addictively compelling novel set in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna and Nazi Germany—with a dizzying final twist.

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 world around her becomes as frightening as any fairy tale, Krysta finds her imagination holds powers beyond what she could have ever guessed. . . .

Eliza Granville 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.

## **Gretel and the Dark Details**

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Author : Eliza Granville

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# From Reader Review Gretel and the Dark for online ebook

## Tania says

Firstly, I would like to mention that I listened to the audio and it was an amazing experience. Cassandra Campbell did a phenomenal job, and I was entranced throughout the story. For me this was a book about the power of stories. There are two main stories lines but within these are many backflashes and many fairytales shared with us. It is one of the darkest books I've read in a long time - I think almost all the evil men can do is showcased. Although I liked the ending, and I understand the need for the balance between the two stories, I definitely preferred the hauntingly beautiful writing in Krysta's section. I can't wait to read more by this author.

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## Georgia ♥ Team Dex ♥ says

### Just Stars

*First I was an idea. Then I came into being, charged with a very important task. I've come to find the monster.*

There are stories that I enjoyed. There are stories that I fell in love with. And then there are stories that will haunt me forever. This is such a story.

In Vienna in 1899, a time of turmoil and fear, a young woman is found naked, beaten and with no memory. She is brought for treatment to the renowned psychoanalyst Josef Breuer, because she makes an unusual claim. That she was made into being to find and kill the monster.

Years later in Germany, we meet Krysta, a young orphaned girl that watches her Papa treating "animal people", when her life suddenly changes into a living nightmare and she seems to hold some strange power over it...

These two narrations, along with a breathtaking prologue, strangely overlap to create an amazing book about human nature, evil and our history's vilest moments. A known story, a tragedy from a fantasy POV, utterly frightening and weirdly fascinating. I had to stop frequently while I read this book. Not because I was bored. Simply because my mind couldn't comprehend the injustice and the darkness that exists inside a human soul. Dark, ugly, beautiful and ethereal, innocent and painful only as a true fairytale can be, this was an extraordinary book that made me loathe and celebrate man. Capable of greatness and madness. And the thin line between them.

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## Bill says

I cannot begin to articulate how much I LOVED this book. What a TERRIFIC read! Dark and mysterious, hauntingly familiar but unnervingly eerie and seductive, the historical fiction was scrumptious, the writing hypnotic and by story's end I couldn't get enough of Krysta and Daniel, Lilie and Benjamin, Josef and Greet. It's impossible for me to share much about the plot without spoiling the read for you but I can share it was the most unique and heartfelt treatment of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust I have ever read in my lifetime so far.

*“After all, why should I be punished for obeying orders? We all knew what happened to anyone who objected. Everything I’ve done, I was forced to do. No good telling them it had scientific purpose,” said the witch. “She’s after Daniel’s memories so she can invent a wicked story of her own,” thought Krysta.*

Was the witch a fairy tale character?

Brothers Grimm fairy tales, especially Hansel and Gretel and The Pied Piper, are strategically and skillfully woven into the fabric of this story. There are ogres and bean stalks, witches and ovens, dark woods and candy houses. At times the story felt supernatural and mystic, just like a fairy tale, but painfully real at the same time. This story is a fairy tale woven into a fairy tale folded into a fairy tale...so dark and menacing but agonizingly satisfying. I couldn't stop turning the pages! The word “enchanted” keeps popping into my head!

*“I try doing what I’ve always done – escape into that secret part of me where by magic or heroism I make things turn out differently, leaving behind an automaton, a machine with no feelings whatsoever – but today I can’t. A door has closed. The ideas have gone. The words aren’t there. Perhaps this is what happens when you invent stories inside stories that are themselves inside a fairy tale: they become horribly real.”*

The last chapter of just forty-one pages ties the whole story together and I wept like a child as I slowly made my way through those final pages and put everything together. Oh my I could not stop crying! The reaction was so profound I took the dry eye test – the next day I re-read the closing chapter to see if I could replicate the reaction – the flood gates opened once again. My emotions flowed from my eyes onto the pages!

Read just the last chapter and you won't get it. Read up to the last chapter and stop and you won't get it. The last chapter is the big finale, the culminating revelation that binds this remarkable story together.

Just when I thought I've heard every version and interpretation of the horrors of Nazi genocide, along comes **Gretel and the Dark!** I loved this book. Perhaps you will too.

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## karen says

wow, this was a gorgeous, dark, unsettling marvel of a book.

and like jaye davidson in *the crying game*, it's got a little secret to it, so i'm going to dance around that part of

it in this review. but know that, yes, there is a twist, but it is not the kind of book whose appeal lies solely in this twist. this novel stands on its own merit, and the little "aha!" moment at the end just enhances what is already a stunner of a book.

this is not the first book i have read in which fairy tales are used to offset the horrors of WWII. The True Story of Hansel and Gretel also used this conceit very well, but this book is a much more ambitious exploration of the idea.

there are three storylines here. the brief tease that opens the book follows two fearful and bruised children and the shadow they carry between them as they escape from an unknown foe through an enchanted forest, while the girl tells remembered fairytales and plots revenge upon the one responsible for their situation. it ends with a threat and a promise.

the second story takes place in vienna in 1899, and features the psychoanalyst josef breuer and a mysterious woman he calls "lilie." she was found all alone, nude and bruised, with a shaved head and tattoos on one arm, and insists that she is not a woman at all, but a machine. breuer is captivated by her beauty, and sets her up in his home until her identity can be established, over the huffy protestations of his maid gudrun. while she is under his care, black-and-white butterflies infest his home, and lilie's strange behavior manages to infatuate both breuer and his servant benjamin, while outside of his walls, the city simmers with violence and anti-semitic sentiment.

the third story takes place years later, in germany, and stars one of the most beastly little girls ever to grace a page. she is a spoiled creature, the daughter of a doctor who works with "animal people" in a "zoo" and her favorite word is "won't." her mother is dead, and her only companion is greet, her changeable servant, who fills her head with fairy tales, which get darker and more violent depending on her mood and krysta's behavior. krysta's understanding of the world around her becomes infected with these fantasy elements, and her impulsive and destructive behavior leads her into dangerous circumstances, which she continues to interpret through a veil of make-believe.

these three disparate narratives will converge in a most satisfying way, but even if they hadn't - if the "aha!" hadn't been successful - it would still have been worth reading for krysta's storyline alone. the arc her character experiences is incredibly effective and well-written, and the fairytales themselves are stories within stories within stories in that way i love.

there is so much to talk about here, but six months away from pub date, i don't want to do more than just offer a glimpse into what's coming. definitely check this one out, because - wow.

come to my blog!

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## **Diane S ? says**

Dark is in the title and dark is this story. The power of story telling, the holocaust and all its atrocities and a young girl caught up in its web. Such a different way of telling this story, like fairy tales so much of it is veiled, not spelled out but just hinted at. So hard to describe, almost like a tale within a tale. Two different time lines but the circumstances are so different in both so one is not easily confused. All the fairy tales in the book are so fitting and they are the dark tales of old not the clean sanitized Disney tales.

Very different, but a powerful look at the horrors of the holocaust and beyond and before.

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## Desirae says

Okay, if I were grading the last 80% of this novel, I would give it a well deserved 4 stars, but I can't do that, and my rating needs to reflect the novel as a whole. Frankly, the first half of this book was trash; confusing, frustrating, and held together by two narrators who were equal parts unreliable and arguably insane.

I've noticed a growing trend with writers where they deliberately withhold information for the sake of being poetic or dramatic, or tell a story backwards to "keep the reader guessing," but it just doesn't work. I can have my footing on a novel and still be dazzled with surprise and meaning. As a reader, I shouldn't have to be wandering in the dark until the end when I'm allowed that moment of clarity when everything else becomes clear.

I don't know, honestly, part of me hates this book, and the other half really liked the end, when I just wanted to enjoy a good dark book.

(view spoiler)

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## Max Nemtsov says

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## Elise (TheBookishActress) says

*I try doing what I've always done – escape into that secret part of me where by magic or heroism I make things turn out differently, leaving behind an automaton, a machine with no feelings whatsoever – but today I can't. A door has closed. The ideas have gone. The words aren't there. Perhaps this is what happens when you invent stories inside stories that are themselves inside a fairy tale: they become horribly real.*

**This book is about the power of storytelling.** And more importantly, this book is about how stories can pull us out of the darkness and back into the light. *Gretel and the Dark* was marketed to me as having a stunning twist, but honestly, the twist isn't what I liked about this book. **I liked this book more for the characters and for the intrigue than for the actual twist.**

This book is *also* about prejudice, and more specifically, it's about the holocaust. Part of what appealed to me about this book was the **interesting new take** on portraying the horrors of the holocaust. The book is genuinely horrifying - you feel as if you're in the *head* of our main character.

I'm still a bit conflicted about the audiobook version of this. **The audiobook was both the best and worst part of this book.** The female narrator's voice was incredibly eerie and creepy!! Perfect for this story. Unfortunately, **I also found the two narrators hard to focus on.** The audio was fantastic, but unfortunately, given how confusing the story is, **I found the actual book hard to follow.**

This may be the shortest review I've written in the last bit of my reviewing career, but **I haven't really figured out how I feel about this.** Perhaps I'll write more of this later.

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## Blair says

*Gretel and the Dark* is a very hard book to review. Perhaps even impossible, because the entirety of the review I was *going* to write was wiped out when I came to the ending, which turned most of what I thought this story was completely upside down. As a result, I can't write, for example, about some of the reservations I had about the characterisation, because those reservations are invalidated by the ending; but if I explain how then I will ruin the final twist, which is crucial to enjoying the book, and is difficult (again, maybe even impossible) to guess.

I suppose it's pretty safe for me to explain what is covered in the blurb. Setting the tone for the rest of the

narrative, the novel opens with a fairytale-like prologue in which two children run through a forest, dragging a 'Shadow' with them, escaping an unnamed monster, and telling each other stories. What seems to be the real story then begins, with Josef Breuer - a renowned psychoanalyst and contemporary of Freud - encountering a very unusual patient: a young woman who the modern reader can instantly recognise as an escapee from a WWII concentration camp. However, this section of the book takes place in Vienna in 1899, and the girl, named Lilie by Breuer, claims she is not even human, but instead a machine. The chapters following the mystery of Lilie, as Josef and his servant Benjamin compete to establish her real identity, are punctuated by chapters set some years later. Here, a badly behaved little girl called Krysta moves to a new town with her widowed father, a doctor. While he works in what she thinks is a hospital, Krysta does her best to upset and reject all his staff and suitors, but she doesn't realise her actions are leading her towards a terrible fate, one exacerbated when she becomes friends with one of the 'animal-people' who live in the 'hospital', a boy called Daniel.

After that, it all becomes difficult to talk about without spoiling everything. Seriously, don't read anything beneath the spoiler cut unless you a) have already read the book or b) have no plans to read it ever.

(view spoiler)

I really admired the complexity of the characterisation - this would be the easiest story in the world to fill with clear-cut Good and Bad characters, but even the 'good guys' here are very obviously imperfect and sometimes corrupt. Krysta is a far from flawless heroine - even after terrible things happen to her she still behaves horribly and petulantly towards others, for example (view spoiler) - and, in the Lilie narrative, Josef is a self-obsessed, arrogant misogynist, while Benjamin is a bit of a bumbling fool. I often found the characters hard to like, but the realistic nature of these portrayals acted as a good foil for the fairytale-inspired, dreamlike elements of the story.

*Gretel and the Dark* is the most surprising and moving WWII novel since *The Book Thief*, and I think a lot of readers are going to *love* it - even if it is a bit of a mindfuck (in a good way). It's the perfect balance of heartbreaking humanity with elements of apparent fantasy and the power of the imagination. A unique and very memorable read.

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### **Teresa Cantrell says**

Wow. Just. Wow! I really liked this but I can see how it would not be everyone's cup of tea. It's not easy to follow but it all comes together in the end. Thought provoking and worth reading.

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### **Sonja Arlow says**

3 1/2 stars

Dr. Josef Breuer, in 1899 Vienna, a much-celebrated psychoanalyst is brought a new patient. A young beautiful woman, found naked and beaten. She has no memory of who she is but instead claims to be a machine.



Many years later, in Nazi Germany, a young girl named Krysta plays alone while her father works in an infirmary next to her home. Krysta is a spoiled little brat but also completely neglected by her father and the other adults in her life. She is still young enough to firmly believe in fairytales and we see her observations of the world through this filter.

The chapters are interwoven with time changes and with dark fairy stories and the only criticism I have is that sometimes these time jumps happened without warning. Literally from one paragraph to the next, making the reading slightly jarring at times.

This book is hard to review, not because of the big plot twist, but because I disliked the majority of the characters. They were unlikable, selfish or even just plain destructive so I can't say that I actually enjoyed the reading experience but it was unquestionably unique.

If WW2 books and dark fairytales are your thing then you have to read this.

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### **Lotte says**

Didn't really care for this book to be honest. Didn't hate it, didn't love it. I'm still excited to talk about it with my book club though, because the story leaves lots of room for discussions and interpretations.

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### **Dem says**

Gretel and the Dark by Eliza Granville is a wonderful atmospheric and haunting novel which is written in two linked narratives. I love this type of story as it is imaginative and edgy and a real page turner.

Set in Vienna in 1899 Joseph Breuer is a Psychoanalyst and has a new case on his hands when a young woman is found in the streets with shaven head, starved and naked, unable to establish her origins and with very little communication apart from her insistence that she is a machine with no feelings. Joseph sets out on finding out the truth about this girl and names her Lilie.

In another time and another place a child by the name of Krysta, whose father is working in the infirmary with the "animal people" spends her days listening to the gruesome fairytales of kitchenworker Greet until suddenly her life changes and she is faced with gruesome tales of her own.

I really enjoyed this dark and haunting novel. I loved the vivid settings of this historical story and found myself totally drawn into the novel. It did take me a couple of chapters to settle into the book and to get a grasp on the characters but when I did I was both moved and delighted with the imaginative and unique storytelling of Eliza Granville.

The characters are so well written and you really do get a wonderful sense of time and place and also a sense of fear that runs through the story right to the end.

### **Quote from Gretel and the Dark**

*Books; I repeat, for they've not only been a solace during the long years but also provided the keys to understanding other people's ideas and achievements, their hopes and fears, quirks and foibles, their dreams.....their demons"*

The story is both moving and disturbing and I found the fairy tales told within the story to be well excuted as well as vivid and eerie.

This is a very powerful and memorable novel and the stroy is told in beautiful prose.

I think readers who enjoyed books like the The Snow Child will really enjoy this dark tale.

*My thanks to Penguin Books for an Advance Reading Copy of this novel in return for an honest unbiased review.*

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## **Liz Barnsley says**

**\*\*3.5 stars rounded up to 4 for writing genius\*\***

So here we are, I'm finally getting some words down about this one – it has kind of had me in a dither because whilst I LOVED the writing, dark and delicious – with an intriguing story and some wonderful prose – I found that I was vaguely disappointed with it. Doesnt make much sense I know, but this is INCREDIBLY difficult because anything I can say that would explain would spoil the heart of the novel for the next reader – and I do not want to do that. Because despite my personal feelings towards it, I fully appreciate the talent behind this.

We have two strands to the tale, the story of Josef Breuer and his search for answers about a beautiful young girl who comes under his care and the story of Krysta, a somewhat lonely child, living a few years later. It kept me involved, deep into one half then the other, this was a dark and often terrifying story obviously inspired by the brothers Grimm and all things fairytale. The often poetic prose is terrific and there was a lot here that I loved.

The author has created something special, there is no doubt about that – and its purely my own head that wishes it had been something other than it is – so I would encourage anyone who likes the sound of this one to give it a go. Some tough subjects are tackled in a unique way and for that reason alone it will be worth your time and effort.

Happy Reading Folks!

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## **Bettie? says**

[Bettie's Books  
(hide spoiler)]

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