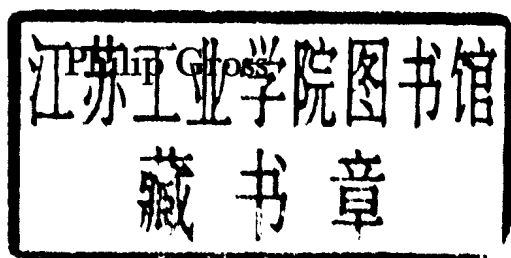


Marginaliens



Philip Gross

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*'Mum . . . ?' said Enna as she came into the kitchen . . .
'Something . . . happened. Something scary . . . I was drawing,
and I drew this face, and it went all horrible, and . . . and then it
winked at me.'*

When she's fed up, Enna doodles. This time it's a scribbly, hunchbacked, squatting figure—which suddenly winks, speaks, and jumps off the page. It's alive, with a mind of its own. Enna can't believe what is happening. Her mother is far too busy and too worried about the café to talk to her, so Enna has to cope on her own—and then her little brother finds the doodle . . . and disappears! What is Enna to do when no one will listen to her? How can she get her brother back? And can the doodle help? Is it all imagination? Or will it lead her into dangers and adventures that she hasn't dreamed of yet?

Philip Gross was born in Cornwall in 1952, the son of an Estonian wartime refugee and a Cornish schoolmaster's daughter. He has won several prizes for his poetry and his collection *The Wasting Game* was shortlisted for the Whitbread Poetry Prize in 1998. He now teaches Creative Writing at Bath Spa University College and lives in Bristol. His first novel for Oxford University Press, *Going For Stone*, is a thrilling and chilling adventure for teenagers. *Marginaliens* shows that he can work magic for slightly younger readers, too.

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Chapter 1

A Nod and a Wink

It was stupid. A silly thought—a crazy one—the kind her friends would laugh at if she mentioned it at school. Enna couldn't believe she'd even thought it . . . so she looked back at the notebook just to show herself how silly it had been.

And she gasped. The silly, crazy thought . . . was true.

The thing in the notebook was watching her.

But it wasn't a thing. It was a drawing, a scribble of lines on the page. It wasn't even a proper drawing, not like Mrs Bolt told them to do in class, when she put down a vase of wilted flowers and said: *Draw what you see*. No, this was the kind of thing Enna did in the margins when she was restless, when her fingers wanted to be doing something else. It was doodling. Teachers told you off for it.

Enna often got restless. Most of life just seemed to move too slowly. So she doodled—faces, mostly. When she was happy the faces would be round and smiley; they would be jagged and snaggly when she was fed up. Today she'd been really fed up—it had been that sort of day from the beginning: grumpy breakfast, boring school, and everybody scratchy when she got home, so she'd come straight upstairs and shut the door behind her. She'd



sat staring at the open notebook. No way was she going to write Mrs Bolt a nice little poem about being an endangered species in the rainforest. She picked up a really sharp hard pencil and scribbled, almost hard enough to rip the pages. She did it with her eyes screwed up so tight that all she could see was an eyelashy blur . . . then she looked down to inspect what she'd done.

It was the snaggiest face ever, with a straggly beard, a hooked down nose, and big teeth bared in a nasty know-all sort of grin. It had a hand, where it rested its chin as if it was thinking—thinking wicked, snaggly, vicious, angry thoughts—and she drew the hand an arm, and drew the arm a shoulder, so you could tell it was squatting, with its back hunched. She knew what it looked like now: a gargoyle, one of those carvings they'd seen looking down on them from that cathedral in France last year. Enna remembered that: when Connie, all snotty and getting into being just-teenaged, turned to her and said in a voice loud enough for half of France to hear: *Oh, Enna, look, it's just like you.*

And the gargoyle on the page . . . Impossible, but it had moved.

The first time she looked it was in profile, sideways on. That's how she usually did her fierce ones, so she could make the nose really knobbly and the chin really long. Now that she looked again she thought . . . she felt . . . she could almost have sworn that it had turned its head a little, so she could see *both* its eyes. They were deep-set, dark with scribble, under those brambly eyebrows, so she couldn't quite see them, but she knew

they would have heavy lids which never opened wide. Through the slits, though, it was peering at her.

Then it winked.

Enna shrieked and threw the notebook on the floor. It landed open—cover side upwards, luckily—and she picked it up at arm's length, as if it was hot. Taking care not to look she shut it and ran to the toy chest, dropped it in, and slammed the lid. She threw the bedspread over the chest, so she could not see it. Then she backed away.

Enna went downstairs. Already, halfway there, she could hear Mum and Wes down in the kitchen deep in conversation. She couldn't catch what they were saying, but it sounded serious.

It had been like this all day. OK, breakfast was never the sweetness-and-light time they'd have you believe on the cornflake packets. Mum would always be shouting upstairs: *Connie? Enna? Wake up Henry, will you? And I want you downstairs NOW!* But that's just family, thought Enna. Me and Connie have to wind each other up, till Mum says, *Stop it, both of you!* This morning, though, had been different. Mum was dressed in the kind of clothes you never, never saw her wear—plain and dark, sort of straight up and down, with a proper skirt, like, well . . . a business woman. Worse, she was nagging at Wes. When he appeared downstairs—moving kind of slow, in the cool way Wes did, just doing it faster than usual—Enna gasped. Wes was wearing a tie. Actually, he looked great, with jacket, shirt, and tie all toned just right for

his coffee-cream complexion and his beard trimmed to a neat point. He looked a star. He just didn't look like the Wes Enna had grown to love ever since he'd been the big thing in Mum's life. And this morning he looked worried, too. There were no easy grins that morning, the kind of Wes grin that told Enna life was OK and Mum didn't mean it when she scolded. Nobody talked much over breakfast, and the three children were hustled out schoolwards, wondering what had hit them.

When Enna got back from school, nothing seemed better. She'd had to walk Henry home—that was another thing: Mum couldn't be there to fetch him, and he *was* only seven, and she *was* his sister, and . . . Enna had tuned out for the rest of what Mum said. But she'd brought Henry home. It was true, he was a spoiled little brat and a pain in the elbow, but she *was* his sister. Another day, it might even have been sweet, the way he rattled off everything he'd done today, and what the teacher had said, and . . .

'Oh, not now, Henry!' Enna had burst out, a bit like Mum did sometimes. Henry's eyes went wide for a moment, then he stumped on, being quiet. He just kept walking off pavements and dragging his bag and staring into people's windows, all the way home.

When they walked in, Mum wasn't in the café. No one was there, in fact, except old Mrs Grobowski, and she hardly counted as a customer. She came in and sat in silence, with one small black coffee, sometimes all day. Now she nodded to Enna. Mrs Grobowski never smiled, exactly, but there was a kind of mournful twinkle in her eye.

Mum and Wes were at the kitchen table, still talking. They looked worse than they had at breakfast, and they hardly said hello. Even Henry saw it would be a good idea to scuttle upstairs quietly. So did Enna, though there was a note from school about a trip, which Mrs Bolt had said she must give to her parents *right away*.

Don't stamp on the stairs, Mum called after her. *And do your homework*.

Yes, that was the kind of day it had been—one that called for a really scribbly angry face. But scribbles were meant to stay put, where you left them. They weren't meant to catch your eye, like a dirty old man, and wink. It was the wink that sent her downstairs, in a hurry, now.

'Mum . . . ?' said Enna as she came into the kitchen. Mum looked up, trying not to be impatient, then she saw the look on Enna's face. 'Something . . . happened. Something scary,' Enna said.

'What, love?'

'Well, I was drawing, and I drew this face, and it went all horrible, and . . . and then it winked at me.'

Mum's kind look suddenly went wooden. 'Oh, Enna, don't be silly,' she said. 'Can't you see there's something *important* going on?'

That was it. It must be one of those crises—probably Connie again. You'd think that being oldest, being fourteen, would mean you'd be better at things, but Connie managed to stage a crisis once or twice a week. 'Is it Connie again?' Enna said.

Wes kind of smiled and shook his head. 'Sorry, sugar,' he said. 'Things are a bit tense, that's all. We'll explain

later. We got things we need to talk through first, you see?’

But by the time bedtime came, nobody had explained a thing. Enna lay in the bed trying to work it out. Mum came up to tuck her in. ‘Mum?’ said Enna. ‘Are you and Wes . . . are you splitting up, like Gaynor’s mum and dad?’

Mum looked at her, surprised, then gave a tired smile. ‘No, no . . . Oh, sorry, love. Don’t worry. It’s nothing like that.’ And she gave her a kiss and took the bedspread from the toy chest and tucked it in around the duvet, very snug and neat.

Enna lay there, in the half-light. There was a streetlight just outside and the curtains didn’t quite reach to the edge of the window, so there was always a thin line of light that came in. Enna liked it. Tonight, though, it seemed to point across the carpet, to the toy chest in the corner of the room. Enna couldn’t stop glancing at it. Mum had moved the bedspread, but the chest was solid enough. The heavy lid was tightly shut. The trouble was, Enna knew what was inside it.

The notebook. The face. That snaggly beard, those overhanging eyebrows and those deep-set eyes . . . In her mind’s eye she could see it, as clear as she’d seen it on the page . . . except that it had moved a bit more, turning round to face her, and the grin was getting wider all the time.

It was trapped. She’d slammed the lid on it. How would she feel if she’d been shut in there? Angry, that’s how. Enna shuddered. What would happen next time someone raised the lid?

How was Enna meant to get to sleep, with that in there? She tried. She tried. She couldn't.

Then after a while she thought: it only winked at me. What if it was trying to be friendly? What if it couldn't help the way it looked? *She'd* drawn it that way, after all. Then she'd thrown it away. How would *she* feel, if she'd smiled at someone and they bunged her in a trunk and locked her in? Wouldn't she feel sad, as well as angry?

Enna looked at the chest and she could almost see those scribbly eyes down in the darkness of it, looking sideways at the tiny crack of light. What if it was just sad. Left out? *Lonely?*

Enna wasn't going to get a wink of sleep tonight, unless . . . Unless . . . She had to have a look.



Chapter 2

Draw Me In

Enna opened the lid . . . very slowly, just a crack . . . then a little bit more, till the light from the window fell into the chest and she could see.

Nothing there. It was just a toy chest, full of things she didn't use much any more. Her old dressing-up clothes were tangled up together, and there was the tatty pink feather boa old Maggie Aspidistra gave her years and years ago. There was a neat small heap of all those Beanie Babies she'd badgered Mum for, till she gave in with a sigh. Money was tight, what with the café having problems, and Enna had pretended to go on playing with them long after the rest of the class lost interest in theirs, just for Mum's sake. Then there were old magazines and school books and all the stuff she'd flung in there some time when Mum would call: *I'm coming up in five minutes and if that bedroom isn't tidy . . .*

And there was the notebook, with its stripy cover. She hadn't seen it at first, but there it was, slipped down the side, behind the feather boa. Enna took a deep breath and picked it up. She laid it flat on the floor, in the light from the window. Now, she had to look.

It fell open on the page, and the gargoyle face was looking straight up, as if it was expecting her.

Its lips moved. 'Hhhuhhmuhhh,' it said.

Enna stared. For it to move a bit, that's one thing.

But to *speak* . . . ? That's just silly. Impossible. Then it did it again. It was a small voice, thin and papery, and sort of muffled. She leaned closer. 'Help me,' it said.

It was struggling; she could see that. All its lines were bending, stretching, like something caught in a trap. 'Help me!' It didn't sound angry—more like desperate.

'How?' whispered Enna.

'Draw me in. Finish me.'

Enna fumbled with her pencil case. Pencils, felt pens, and pretty rubbers spilled out on the carpet, but she left them there. This was an emergency; she could feel it. The pencil wobbled in her grip as she brought it towards the paper. Her hand felt big and clumsy. What was she meant to do next?

The thing on the page was nothing but a head and arms and shoulders. It looked as if it had pushed its top part through the paper from the other side, and got stuck halfway.

'H-how?' said Enna. 'I don't know what you look like.'

'Look me in the eye.' As she did, she got the feeling. It might have been a memory, from that cathedral they'd visited in Paris, but she could see the figure crouching, with shaggy hind legs crooked up beneath it, and on its hunched back there were rather elegantly folded bat-like wings.

'Now,' it said. 'Draw!'

'I can't draw.'

The thing just sighed. If it had had hips it would have put its hands on them, like Mum did when she was

losing her patience. 'You drew me this far. What kind of scribe are you?'

'Scribe? All I can do is doodle.'

'Well, *do dull* some more.' Its voice was shrill now. 'It's true. You don't know what you're doing, do you?'

'No! You tell me.' They stared at each other. 'I was just . . . I don't know. I was angry. Fed up.'

'Good!' the thing said. 'Remember that.' She screwed her eyes tight again. There'd been Mum being snappy over breakfast, and Miss Crop-top Connie looking down her nose at her, and Henry being a pain—all the usual—and . . . And suddenly the pencil tip was moving. 'Yes!' she heard the creature whisper. 'Don't stop. That's it . . . Yes!'

Enna didn't dare look. 'Thank you,' the voice said, soft as paper rustling in the wind. Enna opened her eyes.

She could have cried with disappointment. Yes, there was the picture, more or less the way she'd seen it in her head. But it was only a picture. Its head was in profile, the way it had been when she had drawn it first, and it was motionless. It felt empty. No one at home.

'Wonderful,' said the small voice. '*Mirabilis*.' Enna looked up. It hadn't come from the drawing but there, on the edge of the light, perched on the side of the toy chest, was the squatting thing. It was real, and alive, and it was touching itself all over—arms, legs, feet—as if it couldn't quite believe that it was there. 'Yes!' it said. 'Yes! *Real!*' The strangest thing was that it was still an outline—like a cartoon, a pale line in the air with dark inside it. 'Thank you,' it said again.

‘Who . . . I mean, what are you?’

It got to its feet—a little stiffly—and turned to the right, and to the left, and bowed towards her gravely. Then suddenly it flexed and turned a cartwheel off the chest. As it came upright on the carpet, full in the light now, its scraggly beard split open in a toothy grin.

‘Don’t be afraid,’ it said. ‘It’s always a shock, the first time. Would it help if I was bigger?’

‘No . . . ! I mean: *how much* bigger . . . ?’

‘That varies.’ It shrugged. ‘It’s just a matter of perspective,’ it added, mysteriously, and with a little shiver and a shake its outline rippled outwards to double the size.

‘That’s enough,’ said Enna, quickly.

‘As you wish.’ It stretched its arms and yawned. It shook its legs, one by one, stamped whatever it had for feet, then gave a frisk all over like a wet dog. Finally, it uncrumpled its wings. They weren’t big but they spread out taut and glossy as a sailboard’s sails. Enna gasped as they rippled with watery patterns, like Wes’s brown silk shirt held up to the light. There was detail in it drawn in by a point almost too fine for the human eye to see.

The thing folded its wings back round it like a cosy little cape.

‘Who are you?’ Enna said. ‘What’s your name?’

‘Name? We don’t need them, really, *out there*. We’re called . . . whatever you like. What would you like to call me?’

‘This is a dream,’ said Enna, closing her eyes. ‘When I open my eyes you won’t be there.’

‘Why are you still talking to me, then?’ the voice came. ‘What was that word you used? *Do dull?*’

‘Doodle.’

‘Very well,’ it said perkily. ‘You want a name? You can call me the Dood.’ She opened her eyes. She couldn’t help it; he sounded so pleased with himself. And she had to admit, it wasn’t *it* but *he*. Now she looked, the Dood began to laugh. ‘That was meant to be a joke,’ he said. ‘But I like it.’ And he did a little caper, clapped his hands to his stomach, doubled over, with his wings wrapped round him, chortling like a silly kid.

‘Hold it right there.’ If there was one thing Enna didn’t like, it was people having private jokes. Connie and her gang seemed to do it all the time, giggling together in that way you had to notice. ‘If you’ve just stepped out of nowhere, how come you speak English?’

‘Hmmm . . . Complicated. I came through your head, like I came through your writing stick.’

‘So . . . you know what I’m thinking?’

‘Not exactly. You don’t know everything your mother thinks, do you?’

‘You mean I’m, like . . . your mother. Yuck!’

‘What’s so *yuck* about it?’

‘For one thing, you’re *old*. And for another . . .’ Enna caught herself in mid breath. What was she doing, arguing with someone who didn’t exist? ‘I’m fed up with this. If I thought you up, I can unthink you. You can just go back right now.’

He didn’t move. ‘But there must be a reason,’ he said. ‘I wouldn’t *be* here if—Hey!’