moonlight shining in on such a complexity of mechanical parts that she could make no sense of them at all. At the same moment, she heard a little song. It was the prince calling to her.

Dazzled by the moonlight, Gretl blinked and rubbed her eyes. And there was Prince Florian, with the very last of his clockwork life, singing like a nightingale.

‘Oh! You poor cold thing! He’s fastened you so tightly I can’t undo the bolts – oh, that was wicked! He was going to leave you here and run away, I’m sure. What’s the matter with you, Prince Florian? I’m sure you’d tell me if you could. I think you’re ill, that’s what the trouble is. I think you need warming up. You’re too cold, but that’s hardly surprising, seeing what they’ve done with you. Never mind! If I can’t get you down, I’ll stay up here with you. I can wrap my cloak around us both, you’ll see. We’re better off up here in any case, if you ask me. The things that have been going on! You’d never believe it!
I won't tell you now, because you wouldn't go to sleep. I'll tell you in the morning, I promise. Are you comfortable, Prince Florian? You don't have to speak if you don't want to; you can just nod.

Prince Florian nodded, and Gretl tucked her cloak around them, and held the little boy in her arms as she went to sleep. The last thing she thought was: He is getting warmer, I'm sure; I can feel it!

The morning came. All through the town, visitors and townsfolk alike were getting dressed and eating their breakfasts hungrily, eager to see the new figure in the famous clock.

The snow-laden rooftops glittered and gleamed in the bright blue air, and the fragrance of roasting coffee and fresh-baked rolls drifted through the streets. And as time drew on towards ten o'clock, a strange rumour went round the town: the clockmaker's apprentice had been found dead! Murdered, what was more!
The police called Herr Ringelmann in to look at the body. The old clockmaker was shocked and dismayed to see his apprentice lying dead.

‘The poor boy! It was his day of fame! Whatever can have happened? What a disaster! Who can have done this terrible thing?’

‘Do you recognize this figure, Herr Ringelmann?’ said the sergeant. ‘This clockwork knight?’

‘No, I’ve never seen it before in my life. Is that Karl’s blood on its sword?’

‘I’m afraid so. Do you think he could have made this figure?’

‘No, certainly not! The figure he made is up in the clock. That’s the tradition, you know, sergeant: he was going to fit his new figure in the clock on the last evening of his apprenticeship, just as I did in my time. Karl was a good boy; a little quiet and morose, perhaps, but a good apprentice; I’m sure he did what he was supposed to do, and we’ll see his new figure when it comes out in a minute or so. What a sad occasion, instead of a happy
one! The new figure will have to be his memorial, poor boy.'

Nothing was right that morning. The innkeeper was desperately anxious, because Gretl was missing. What could have happened to her? The whole town was in a ferment. A crowd had gathered outside the inn, and they watched the policemen carrying out Karl’s body on a stretcher, covered by a piece of canvas. But they didn’t look that way for long, because it was nearly ten o’clock, and the time had come for the mechanism to reveal the new figure.

All eyes turned upwards. There was even more interest than usual, because of the strange circumstances of Karl’s death, and the square was so crowded that you couldn’t see the cobbles; people were crammed shoulder to shoulder, and every face was turned up like a flower to the sun.

The hour began to strike. The ancient clock wheezed and whirred as the mechanism came
into play. The familiar figures came out first, and bowed or gestured or simply twirled on their toes; there was St Wolfgang, throwing the devil over his shoulder; there was the Archangel Michael with his glittering armour; there was the figure Herr Ringelmann had made for the end of his apprenticeship, many years ago: a little boy who popped out, thumbed his nose at Death, and twiddled his fingers before ducking out of sight again.

And then came the new figure.

But it wasn’t one figure, it was two: two sleeping children, a girl and a boy, so lifelike and beautiful that they didn’t seem to be made of clockwork at all.

A gasp of surprise went up from the crowd as the two little figures yawned and stretched and looked down, clutching each other for fear of the height, and yet laughing and chatting together in the bright morning light, and pointing out the sights around the square.
‘A masterpiece!’ cried someone, and another voice said, ‘The best figures ever made!’
And more voices joined in:
‘A work of genius!’
‘Incomparable!’
‘So lifelike – look at the way they’re waving at us!’

‘I’ve never seen anything like it!’

But Herr Ringelmann had his suspicions, and peered upwards, shading his eyes. And then the innkeeper, looking up with everyone else, saw who it was, and gave a cry of joy.

‘It’s my Gretl! She’s safe! Gretl, keep still! We’ll come up and bring you down safely! Don’t move! We’ll be there in a moment!’

And very soon, the two children were safely on the ground. Two children, because the prince wasn’t clockwork any more; he was a child as real as any other, and so he remained. ‘The heart that is given must also be kept,’ as Dr Kalmenius had been about to say to Prince Otto; but the prince
Out of the night, and out of the past. Gretl has made Florian a present of her heart, and what they're looking at is the future.
didn’t listen, did he? No-one could guess where the little boy had come from, and Florian couldn’t remember. Presently everyone accepted that he had been lost, and that they had better look after him; so they did.

As for the metal knight with the bloodstained sword, Herr Ringelmann took it away to his workshop to examine closely. When they asked him about it later, he could only shake his head.

‘I don’t know how anyone expected that to work,’ he said. ‘It’s full of miscellaneous bits and pieces, and they’re not even connected up properly: broken springs, wheels with cogs missing, rusty gears – worthless rubbish, all of it! I do hope Karl didn’t make it; I thought better of him than that. Well, my friends, it’s just a mystery, and I don’t suppose we’ll ever get to the bottom of it.’

Nor did they, because the one person who might have been able to tell them the truth was Fritz, and he had been so badly scared that he’d left town before the sun rose, and he never came
back. He fled to another part of Germany, and he was going to stop writing fiction altogether, until he found he could earn lots of money by making up speeches for politicians. As for what happened to Dr Kalmenius, who can say? He was only a character in a story, after all.

And if Gretl knew more than anyone, she said nothing about it. She had lost her heart to the prince, and kept it too, which was how he came to be turned from clockwork into boy. So they both lived happily ever after; and that was how they all wound up.