



# Mystery in the Eifel

Tervuren author makes an international splash with debut novel

REBECCA BENOOT

In the age of Postmodernism, it is hard to find some decent, dare I say, old-fashioned, storytelling where the tale is as exciting and as intricately worked out as its captivating characters. No technology, no shock effects – just real people in their everyday small town surroundings living their lives, until one day tragedy strikes: Katharina Linden vanishes.

*The Vanishing of Katharina Linden* is set in the picturesque town of Bad Münstereifel, located in the Eifel mountain region of Germany, just west of the Belgian border, where our tenacious 10-year-old heroine Pia tries to find out what happened to her friend. She is aided by Stefan, another outcast, and guided by the stories of the old and wise Herr Schiller.

This novel is timeless: a tale that combines real folklore and mystery in an almost claustrophobic yet fantastical setting filled with colourful people. The fairy tale atmosphere is in fact reminiscent of the Brothers Grimm.

Helen Grant, the British author of this Gothic goodie, has been writing non-fiction articles and ghost stories for several years, but *Vanishing* is her first novel. She's off to a cracking start.

Grant, who presents her book later this month at Waterstone's in Brus-

sels, moved to Bad Münstereifel with her family from England in 2001 for her husband's job. She was not only captivated by the town and its mediaeval surroundings but also inspired by its countless myths and legends. "All the stories in the book are genuine local folk legends collected by a Catholic priest," she explains. "He went and talked to old people in the area and wrote down the legends before they could be lost."

Grant also shows a different side of Germany, one that isn't plagued by a Second World War legacy and doesn't include "retired Nazi war criminals".

*Vanishing* is ostensibly a novel for young adults but easily captures adult imaginations. The Guardian wrote: "The excellent writing – and the eschewing of anything remotely winsome or mawkish – make this an eerily subtle literary page-turner."

In fact, she didn't specifically aim it at an age group; it was her publisher, Penguin, that felt that it would be right for a young adult market and function as a cross-over novel. But Grant did choose the ages of her characters carefully. "The heroine had to be quite young," she explains. "If she were an adult or even a teenager, she wouldn't believe as much of the

stories of the town. She interprets everything in a different way than an adult would."



Helen Grant

Published in the UK in March, *Vanishing* is also being translated and released in Germany, Spain, Italy and Romania. (Let's hope Dutch and French are next.)

Due to the combination of mystery, a young and inquisitive protagonist and the ability to appeal to readers from 12 on up, *Vanishing* has been compared to British writer Mark Haddon's run-away hit *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*: "It's a compliment because it was a best-selling book," says Grant. "But in terms of the style, there's not much point of contact. I guess the thing is that whenever there are reviews, people



always want to categorise what they've read."

After some extensive travelling, Grant has settled down in Tervuren with her family, where she is working on her second novel. Also inspired by a German legend, it's about an English girl in Germany and deals with an outsider's perspective compared to *Vanishing's* inner turmoil. ♦

**Helen Grant presents**

*The Vanishing of Katharina Linden*

26 June, 18.30

Waterstone's, Adolphe Maxlaan 71, Brussels

→ [www.waterstones.com](http://www.waterstones.com)

## fashionista

STÉPHANIE DUVAL



Déborah Marin's hand-made accessories are colourful and fun

### D-I-Y

Fashion takes the most interesting directions when it's made by hand – by the hand of someone who is passionate about their project. There's a reason why haute couture is still the *crème de la crème* of fashion, after all. However, it is limited to those happy few who can say Karl (to Mr Lagerfeld) and who have Alber (Elbaz, of Lanvin) on speed dial.

But there's no reason why mere mortals can't experience the joys of handmade fashion. In fact, they can get the extra satisfaction of having made something themselves, starting from scratch. It's a way of experiencing fashion that goes way beyond stepping into a store and walking out with a new sweater. Even if you fell madly in love with the sweater, the love will never be as deep as you feel for your first self-made scarf.

It's a message that resounds especially on the internet, where creative types find ever-more ways to fashion their own outfits. Some bloggers even post manuals to recreate certain looks from the catwalk. Others start businesses that thrive on stimulating people to make their own clothes.

One group of knitting wonders are those who started up Wool and the Gang. Originally a band of friends, they grew into a full-blown business, importing fair-trade Peruvian wool and selling it in packages complete with knitting needles and patterns. They encourage buyers to capture the process of their own knitting and post stories and pictures on their website, thus creating a worldly gang of wool lovers.

That sense of community seems to be very important in the

D-I-Y fashion movement. At Etsy.com, creative talents can sell their homemade accessories and clothes in their own little shop-in-shop. There have been cases of abuse, such as when a Chinese factory invents a fake identity and sells cheap hand labour on the site. It usually doesn't take a week before protest arises from within the Etsy community, and a boycott is issued against the abuser. These consumers are pretty serious about the goals and ideals of Etsy: it should be a place for honest homemade creations.

Belgian designer Déborah Marin launched her own web shop on which she sells woollen bracelets, rings and headbands in every colour. The photography is her own, too, and it looks so fun and colourful, your Mastercard won't stand a chance.

→ [www.bijouxmistinguettes.kingshop.com](http://www.bijouxmistinguettes.kingshop.com)