Helping your children choose books they will love

I ♥ reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

opening extract from

The Vanishing of Katharina Linden

written by

Helen Grant

published by

Puffin Books

All text is copyright © of the Author and/or the Illustrator

please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

One

My life might have been so different had I not been known as the girl whose grandmother exploded. And had I not been born in Bad Münstereifel. If we had lived in the city – well, I'm not saying the event would have gone unnoticed, but the fuss would probably only have lasted a week before public interest moved elsewhere. Besides, in a city you are anonymous; the chances of being picked out as Kristel Kolvenbach's granddaughter would be virtually zero. But in a small town – well, small towns everywhere are rife with gossip, but in Germany they raise it to an art form.

I remember my hometown as a place with a powerful sense of community, which was sometimes comforting and sometimes stifling. The passing of the seasons was marked by festivals that the whole town attended: Karneval in February, the cherry fair in the summer, the St Martin's day procession in November. At each one I saw the same faces: our neighbours from the Heisterbacher Strasse, the parents who gathered at the school gate every lunchtime, the ladies who served in the local bakery. If my family went out to dinner in the evening, we were quite likely to be served by the woman my mother had chatted to in the post office that morning, and at the next table would be the family from across the street. It would take real ingenuity to keep anything secret in a place like that – or so everyone thought.

Looking back on that year, those were innocent days; a time when my mother cheerfully allowed me at the tender age of ten to roam the town unsupervised – a time when parents let their children out to play without once entertaining the horrific notion that they might not return home again.

That came later, of course. My own problems began with my grandmother's death. A sensation at the time, it should by rights have been forgotten when the true horrors of the following year unfolded. But when it became clear that some malevolent force was at work in the town, public opinion looked back and marked Oma Kristel's death as the harbinger of doom. A Sign.

What was really unfair about the whole thing was that Oma Kristel hadn't so much exploded as spontaneously combusted. But Gossip is Baron Münchausen's little sister, and never lets the truth get in the way of a good story. To hear the tale retold on the streets of Bad Münstereifel, and especially in the playground of the *Grundschule*, which I was attending at the time, you would have thought my grandmother went off like a fire in a Chinese fireworks factory, filling the air with cracks and pops and dazzling flares of coloured light. But I was there; I saw it happen with my own eyes.