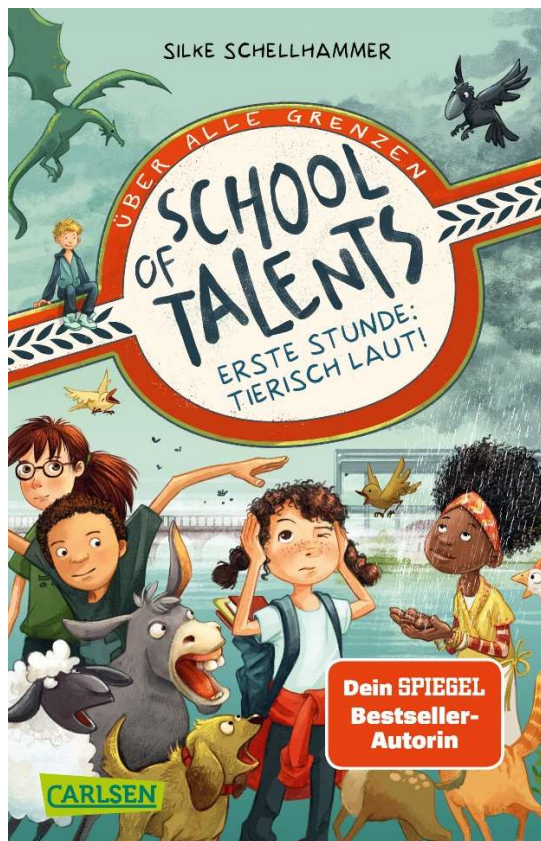


**Silke Schellhammer: Vol. 1, School of talents – First Lesson:
Devilish loud!
Illustrations by Simona M. Ceccarelli**

Bd. 1: School of Talents – Erste Stunde: Tierisch laut

Age: 8+ | 240 pages | 978-3-551-65146-4 | pub date: April 2021



ENGLISH SAMPLE TRANSLATION

© Carlsen Verlag GmbH, Hamburg

Rough translation. For sample use only.

Please always check the original manuscript

"So, how long did I make it?" asked the one school fly as it landed next to a second school fly on the windowsill.

"Eleven seconds! My turn!" the other fly replied and took off.

"Okay, but you have to sit on his nose. and I'll count how long it takes him to twitch!"

Alva watched as the fly took off and buzzed around her classmate Marco. The insect drew small circles around Marco's ear. Then it circled his nose and managed to land on it before Marco shook his head unwillingly and drove the insect away with his hand.

The second fly cheered when it arrived back on the windowsill.

"I won! That was at least fourteen seconds!"

"That's a lie! There weren't even ten," the first one contradicted.

"I don't believe it! Fourteen! I counted!"

The first fly did a furious somersault. *"Ten! Or since when does fourteen come after nine, you brainless ..."*

CHAPTER 1

TOCK, TOCK, TOCK

"... Alva? ALVA!" Frau Brösengel's voice snapped Alva's attention away from the two flies' argument and back to the lesson. Alva coughed sheepishly and straightened up as her eyes wandered to the blackboard.

What was the question? There were five sentences written down, in which various words were colourfully underlined. No chance of deducing what her teacher wanted to know.

Motionless and with folded arms, Mrs Brösengel stood there, not taking her eyes off her student.

Alva blinked and swallowed dryly.

Mrs Brösengel began tapping her foot on the floor. "We're waiting!" *Tock, tock, tock.*

Alva's gaze bounced back and forth between the words. Which one should she try her luck with? Perhaps was "swim" right? Or "the dog"? "My granny"?

"Swim," it suddenly crowed from the front row. Immediately, Mrs Brösengel beamed overjoyed at the pupil. "Very good, Carlos," she praised the annoying prodigy, who was only eight but already sat with Alva in fourth grade. And as if that wasn't bad enough, he was also Alva's brother.

Alva sank back against the back of her chair. She stared at the blackboard for the rest of the lesson, fighting back tears. At the same time, she pretended not to hear the flies arguing on the windowsill. Again. As always, she pretended to be a normal girl. An absolutely average girl for whom flies only buzzed, frogs croaked and dogs barked.

Alva sighed. Unfortunately, she heard very clearly that the flies on the windowsill were shouting loudly at each other. And she understood what they were saying to each other. It was impossible NOT to listen.

And it wasn't just the flies. On the tree in front of the open classroom window, two squirrels were telling each other jokes. And really good jokes at that. Alva bit her lip to keep from laughing out loud.

Unfortunately, Alva could not prove that she understood animals. If she could talk to them properly, it might be different. Then Alva could ask the flies to stand on their heads or something, and at least her family would believe her. Or at least no longer claim that Alva just had a very, very vivid imagination and was making it all up.

Alva had had to promise her parents not to talk to anyone at school about her "wild ideas". Because otherwise she wouldn't make any friends, they had said. And Alva kept her promise. She never said a word about the voices in her head.

Nevertheless not be friends with a girl who seemed to have her head radio turned up to full volume. Alva always tried to appear normal. Honestly. She tried really hard! But animals just talked an awful lot.

After school, Alva hid in her tree house. There she could do her homework in peace. In her room, Carlos would appear every five minutes to wonder why she still hadn't finished her maths course work.

In the tree house there were no know-it-alls and no one who looked at Alva worriedly, as if she had a screw loose. Here she had herself to herself. Most of the time, at least.

But today was not her lucky day. A troop of ants was walking along a branch right next to the house. The animals were talking about a dead beetle that their scouts had discovered further up. They were all talking in confusion and surpassing each other with speculations about how big their find would be.

In addition, a whistling blackbird had been hopping through the tree for a few minutes: *"Attention! Attention! To all birds: there is a cat on the ground. Blackbird parents, watch your children! Attention!"*

Alva sat cross-legged and tried to read a text assignment. Nice of the blackbird to warn other birds. But did it really have to be in that continuous alarm loop?

Alva covered her ears. It was no use. She could still hear the blackbird.

"Attention! Attention! Cat alert! It's under the bush and not moving! Attention! Be warned against landing on the grass!"

Alva looked down into the garden. Merlin, her neighbours' cat, was indeed snoozing under a bush. As he lolls, he grumbles sleepily:

"Shut the heck up already."

But the freaked-out blackbird thought nothing of it. *"Cat Alert! Everyone! Highest danger on the floor! Attention! Attention! This is not a drill!"*

It wouldn't work like that. It was high time Alva's ears got a break. She rummaged under a pillow for the box of earplugs. She hid them there so her mother wouldn't

find them. "Alva, stop this nonsense already!" she scolded. "It's not good for your ears at all!"

The plugs felt like little marshmallows. While Alva twisted them between her fingers to make them thinner and fit in her ears, she looked out into the garden. Her mother was sitting on the terrace reading the newspaper. On the lawn, Carlos was playing with Muffin, the family dog. Her brother was waving a tennis ball in front of Muffin's nose. Muffin jumped wildly back and forth, barking: "*Ball! Ball! Ball! Ball!*" until Carlos finally threw it. But the dog didn't notice and just stared at the empty hand.

The Blackbird expanded its warnings: "*... there is no danger from the dog! He's too stupid to chase a ball! Watch out for the cat!*"

By now the plugs Alva had rolled between her fingers were not much thicker than a cable and she put them in her ears. Slowly they swelled up. The blackbird, the dog, the cat, the ants and every other animal within earshot fell silent. The noisy world faded out and what remained was

... Silence. No one spoke. Not a sound. Absolute silence.

Alva exhaled in relief. Then she went back to her schoolwork. And suddenly she understood the text problems. She recognised what was required and knew how to calculate it. The homework was done in no time.

Alva put away the school books and took a book out of her bag. Finally she could continue reading!

She had hardly found the page where she had last stopped reading when her eyes already flew over the text. The heroine of the book, the famous treasure hunter Hanni Schliemann, had discovered a mysterious round metal plate in a rock cave. Alva was sure that Hanni would crack the great riddle of the book. Alva's fingers raced along the lines. In her head she tried to put all the clues together. Just when the solution seemed within reach, the plate was stolen from Hanni. Oh, no! What would she do now?

CHAPTER 2**UNCLE THOMAS, THE CREEPY ONE**

It took Alva a moment to realise that someone was tugging at her leg. Reluctantly, she left Hanni Schliemann's adventure and turned towards the rope ladder of the tree house. She saw her sister Fiona peering over the edge. Fiona moved her mouth, but Alva could not hear her.

"Huh, what is it?" Alva asked, pulling the plugs out of his ears.

"Dinner's ready," Fiona repeated and disappeared.

The sun was already low over the trees. Alva had completely forgotten the time. She put the book away and climbed downstairs. Her sister was waiting for her there.

"Uncle Thomas is here," Fiona announced, rolling her eyes.

"WHAT?" Alva wrinkled her nose as if something smelled strangely.

Nobody liked Uncle Thomas. He was Alva's mother's brother and sometimes really kind of scary. He hardly ever talked, never laughed and often stared at you as if you had done something bad. The best thing about him was that he never came to visit.

"Did something happen?" asked Alva therefore.

"I don't think so. But he wants to stay the night."

"That too," Alva grumbled.

Fiona nodded in agreement.

"Hello," Alva greeted Uncle Thomas as they arrived on the terrace. She tried to slide unobtrusively into the seat next to her mother.

Not a chance. Uncle Thomas immediately interrupted the conversation, stood up and held out his hand to Alva.

"Alva. Hello."

Oh, even a handshake.

Uncle Thomas' piercing blue eyes almost stared a hole in her forehead.

Alva was very relieved when Dad appeared on the terrace with a salad bowl in his hand. "Can I help you with anything else?" she asked, quickly wringing her hand out of her uncle's.

"No, Fiona will bring the lasagna in a minute and then we can get started."

When Alva's sister came out with the steaming casserole dish, everyone was already sitting around the table. Alva's father put the food on the plates. Alva poured water for everyone and then sat down in her seat. When she looked up, she noticed Uncle Thomas eyeing her. Alva frowned. Did she have ink stains on her face?

At that moment, the corners of Uncle Thomas' mouth twitched and he looked away. But Alva had seen it clearly. Uncle Thomas had smirked!

After dinner, Alva helped her father fill the dishwasher. Knives and forks rattled loudly in the cutlery basket. Alva was furious.

During dinner, Carlos had told them about their morning at school ... leaving out no detail. Her Mother had been anxiously pestering Alva with questions and Carlos and Fiona were cracking one animal joke after another.

"What's sitting in the tree and shouting *Aha*?", Carlos had asked with a grin.

Fiona had let out a loud snort. "Come on, Alva, you have to but know! An eagle owl with a speech impediment."

Haha. So funny.

It got even worse when Uncle Thomas addressed her.

"Don't let it get to you," he had said casually, staring at her again.

Easy for him to say. She would have liked to ask him if he knew how it felt to be the weirdo of the family. But she lacked the courage. That's why she had only thought it. But extremely reproachful!

"Honey, can you put the knives away a little more carefully? They are not javelins.

We still need our cutlery," Dad warned her.

Alva's thoughts returned to the present.

Uncle Thomas brought in the last plates. Out of the corner of her eye, Alva saw him nod to her father.

"I ... uh ... wait ... have to ask Mum something quickly," Dad said far too loudly and left the kitchen almost in a hurry.

Alva looked after him in amazement. Then she concentrated on her task again. Uncle Thomas leaned against the kitchen counter and watched her. What was he waiting for?

"I want to talk to you," he said, as if answering her silent question. "Because I know very well how it feels to be the weirdo of the family."

Alva almost dropped the glass from her hand. She gasped loudly. Could Uncle Thomas read minds?

CHAPTER 3

MOUSE LASAGNA

"Yes, he can!" replied Uncle Thomas calmly. Now the glass landed clattering in the basket of the dishwasher. As if in slow motion, Alva raised her eyes. Everything around her seemed to disappear. All she could see was Uncle Thomas leaning against the kitchen counter, never taking his eyes off her. My goodness! It couldn't be!

"And this is coming from a girl who understands the language of animals," Uncle Thomas replied, shaking his head.

Alva felt as if the ground was swaying beneath her.

Seeking support, she clung to the edge of the kitchen counter with one hand.

"Where ...? What ...?" she stammered. A thousand questions raced through her mind. Could he really read minds? Had he overheard Alva being pitied by an owl at dinner because there was no mouse in the lasagna? Did he know that Alva didn't really like him?

"Yes, I really can. Yes, I've noticed that and yes, I know you don't like me. But don't worry about it," Uncle Thomas answered Alva's thought questions without visible emotion.

To keep from crying out loud, Alva pressed her lips tightly together. Desperately she thought, "27! 27! Blue! Blue! Blue! 27! 27!"

"Blue and 27? Is this a test?", inquired Uncle Thomas with a raised eyebrow.

Ewww! That was totally weird!

"Maybe if you said something too, it would be less weird," Uncle Thomas suggested.

Alva nodded in agreement. That was all she was capable of. She had to concentrate tremendously NOT to think about how creepy she thought he was.

"Since when can you understand animals?", Uncle Thomas changed the subject. There was something reassuring about the matter-of-fact tone of his voice. Alva's panicked brain slowly shut down.

"I don't know. Always, I think," she said hesitantly.

"All animals?"

"Not all, but many." Alva became aware that she was still clawing at the kitchen counter. She loosened her grip, opened and closed her aching hand several times.

"Can you talk to them too?" continued Uncle Thomas.

"No, just hear what they say," Alva replied. "Does Mum know that you can read minds?" she now wanted to know from Uncle Thomas.

"No," he replied barely audibly, walking quickly across the room and closing the kitchen door.

A bit late, Alva thought, but if he thought that now was the moment for secrecy, sure! She saw the corners of Uncle Thomas' mouth twitch as if he had to suppress a grin. Oh, yeah! Crap! Reading minds! She really had to be careful.

"Why doesn't she know anything about it?", Alva quickly inquired.

"You of all people should understand that. We are scary to the others."

"We?" Alva never dreamed that Uncle Thomas and she could be a WE.

"Yes, we. You have a special talent, like me."

"I have a what?"

"A TA-LENT," Uncle Thomas repeated again slowly.

"Okaaaay," Alva replied stretched.

"People like you and me can do something that is not considered normal," Uncle Thomas explained.

"Isn't that called highly gifted?", Alva wanted to know.

"No," Uncle Thomas objected. "Giftedness is covered by the school system. We can do things that are not so much in demand at school."

"Like reading minds or understanding animals?", Alva made sure. Uncle Thomas nodded in agreement. "Like reading minds, understanding animals or many other things!"

"Does that mean ... there are more ... like US?" Alva could hardly believe what she was asking.

"Oh, yes."

"How do you know?"

"I run the SCHOOL OF TALENTS, the boarding school where they are taught." Uncle Thomas sounded really proud and for the first time Alva saw him smile. However, she found SCHOOL OF TALENTS a really swanky name.

"Besides the normal lessons, our students learn there how to use and improve their talents."

"What? Listen to more animals?" That was a super stupid idea.

"No, in your case it would be more like: listening to fewer animals."

For a moment, Alva couldn't breathe.

"Or none at all?" Her hopeful tone sounded a little miserable to her ears. She did not take her eyes off Uncle Thomas.

He bobbed his head thoughtfully. "Yes, that would be possible."

Alva's heart did a hop. "How do you learn to do that?" she wanted to know from Uncle Thomas. And how fast does it go?" she added in her thoughts.

"Unfortunately, this does not happen overnight. Talents are closely linked to feelings. They are driven by anger, resentment, Cockiness or joy controlled."

Uncle Thomas paused and looked at her urgently. "I'm not here by chance," he continued talking.

"Your parents are worried. They think you just made up your abilities."

"Yes, I know." Alva hung her head.

"They also believe that I run a school for ... children with learning problems. When they called me, I knew right away that you were one of us."

Alva fought down the impulse to give him a dirty look. There was no way she belonged to Uncle Thomas and his weird school! The next moment she lowered her eyes in fright. MIND READER!

But if her uncle heard her thoughts, he didn't let on.

"These other kids at school, do they also hear animals talking and can they read minds?", Alva continued to ask.

"Oh, we have all kinds of talents. Some can fly, some can walk through walls, some can transform...", Uncle Thomas explained.

"What, so when one of you gets angry, he flutters through the air as a bat?"

"Or as a pterosaur."

"Pte-ro-saur," Alva repeated slowly. She imagined a dragon whose jet of fire scorched Mrs. Brösengel's little curls. She liked this idea.

"We actually try not to set hair on fire," Uncle Thomas quashed her beautiful dream.

"Really? So if I could turn into a fire-breathing dragon ..."

"... then you would do anything to make sure no one found out!" The sharp tone of Uncle Thomas' voice brought a blush to Alva's face.

"But why?" she asked, intimidated.

Uncle Thomas' expression softened again. "There are not only nice people, Alva. A child with supernatural powers lives in great danger. Their abilities could be exploited, they could be kidnapped, their family could be threatened ..." Uncle Thomas interrupted himself and cleared his throat before changing the subject:

"Alva, it is extremely important to train your talent. To learn how to master it.

I offered your parents to take you on as a pupil. On a trial basis, just for a few weeks. Then you can look at everything and think about whether you want to stay."

Alva's heart was beating like crazy. Reflexively, she shook her head. She didn't want to go to Uncle Thomas' strange freak school!

Besides, she could hardly imagine not living at home any more.

But the prospect of no longer having to understand animals was really tempting.

And it would only be for a few weeks, Uncle Thomas had said.

If that was really all it took, shouldn't she try?

Alva took a deep breath and made a decision.

She would learn how to mute all the animals at Uncle Thomas' pterosaur school.

After that, she would come home again and everything would be the same as before.

Only that she would no longer be the crazy one.