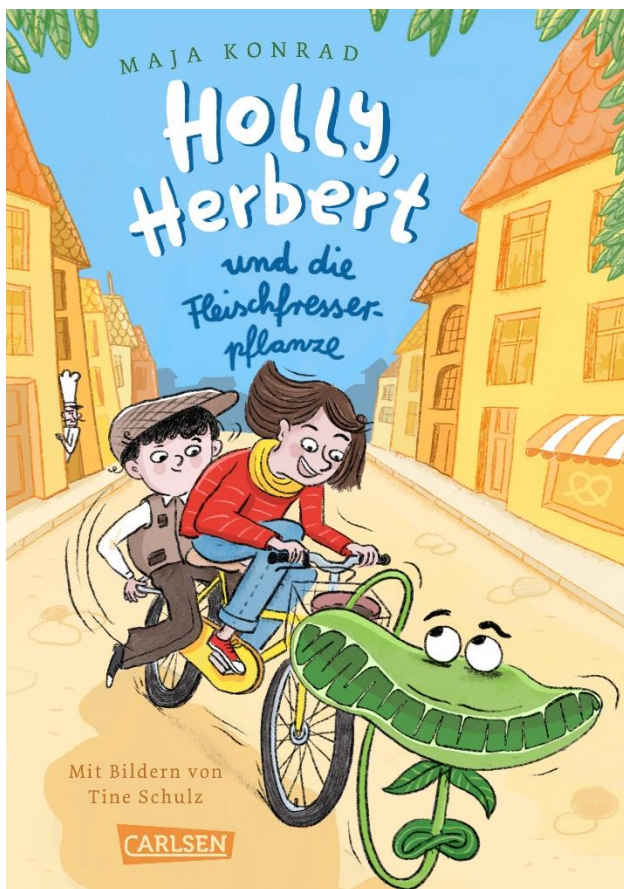


Maja Konrad: Holly, Herbert and the Flesh-eating Plant **With illustrations by Tine Schulz**

Holly, Herbert und die Fleischfresserpflanze

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MA J A KONRAD

Holly, Herbert and the Flesh-eating Plant

With pictures by Tine Schulz



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Chapter 1

At the flea market

There it was: the chameleon alarm clock. Directly opposite the stand. Holly could hardly believe it.

The woman with the polka-dot leggings and red curls had just pulled it out of a cardboard box under her sales table. Now the alarm clock with the rainbow-coloured clock face and the chameleon figure stood among the other things the woman was selling: on the left a doll with a hanging eye, on the right a houseplant in an orange pot - and in the middle: the colourful alarm clock.

Holly realised that her hands were getting sweaty. This was exactly what she didn't have in her collection yet.

"Holly darling, are you sure you still need this?"

Of course Holly's dad had noticed her looks. After all, nobody knew her as well as he did.

Holly sighed.

"Dad, it makes a clicking sound as an alarm. You know. Because of the long chameleon tongue." Holly made

a loud "slurp" sound and looked at him as if that explained afles.

Her dad smiled.

"Oh sooo. Well, of course you need one. A Chameleon alarm clock with a clicking sound." He nodded seriously.

Holly smacked him on the side and then looked at the woman again.

Oh no!

A little boy stood opposite. In his hand: the alarm clock.

Holly's heart was pounding in her throat.

"Please don't take it with you," she mumbled.

Holly watched as the shop assistant said something. The boy nodded but didn't take his eyes off the chameleon for a second.

Suddenly, a woman on high heels came, took the boy by the hand and dragged him away from the stand. The boy was only just able to put the alarm clock down and continued to reach out for it as he ran.

Phew, that was close, Holly thought with relief.

"I'll be right back," she said.

Her dad nodded absently and continued to negotiate with an elderly lady about a vase.

Holly jingled the small change in her pocket as she walked. 8 euros and 70 cents. Her earnings for the day. Holly's dad had helped her counting earlier.

Because if there was one thing Holly wasn't good at, it was maths.

"Hello, girl," said the woman with the polka-dot leggings and red hair. "Have you and your dad sold a lot today?"

"We have." Holly nodded and carefully stroked the colourful chameleon's head with his finger.

"And you're interested in the alarm clock?"

Holly nodded again and picked it up.

It was perfect: the clock face with the little Chameleon footprints. The figure on it with the slanted eyes, the curled tongue and the long tail. All there. Holly pressed the small comb on the chameleon's head and a loud "slurp" sound rang out. She simply had to have this alarm clock!

"I'll give you four euros for it," said Holly.

She knew from her dad that you had to start with a low offer. And to be self-confident. Holly arched her back.

"I'll give you *ten* euros," croaked a voice behind Holly. Nils had appeared next to her. The biggest pain in the arse of 4b. Oh no, the whole school.

He grinned at Holly.

"You don't even want it," said Holly, reaching for the alarm clock.

But Nils beat her to it.

"How do you know that, Zikowski?" He held the alarm clock demonstratively in the air. With his other hand, he dug a crumpled ten euro note out of his pocket.

The woman with the red curls looked back and forth between the children.

"This is how we do it," she said firmly and closed her eyes. Mumbling, she began to recite a counting rhyme that Holly had never heard before. Her index finger tapped back and forth between Holly and Nils in time with the syllables. "And you're out!" The woman opened her eyes and pointed at Holly.

"Sorry, girl," she said, shrugging her shoulders. "The rhyme has decided. Your friend can take him."

"That's not my friend," mumbled Holly.

Nils threw his note onto the sales table and grabbed the alarm clock. His eyes fell on the individual coins that Holly already had ready in her hand. An even nastier grin appeared on his face.

"Oh dear, Zikowski," he said in an artificially pitiful voice. "I'm sorry about that. It must have taken you ages to add them up." He took a step towards her.

"I wish you every success in the Maths Olympiad next week!"

Nils patted her on the shoulder and burst out laughing. "Our maths genius!" Then he strolled calmly on to one of the next stands.

Holly's fingers tightened around the coins. A huge wave of anger built up in her stomach. That idiot, she thought. He wasn't good at maths himself. Let alone win the maths Olympics.

But then another feeling mixed in with her anger. And it didn't even feel that bad. It was just as strong as her anger, but much better and somehow warmer.

I'll show him, thought Holly.

"Maths Olympiad, eh?" The shop assistant rubbed her chin.
"Girl, I think I have something else for you then."



She boldly pressed the plant in the orange-coloured pot into Holly's hand.

Holly looked at her, puzzled.

"Might bring you luck." The woman winked at her and gently stroked one of the plant's leaves.

Holly took a closer look at the plant, which was about the size of a feather bat. How could this thing bring her luck?

Two small leaves grew from a thick stem at the bottom and two large, oval leaves at the top. With the fine spines on their edges, the upper ones looked like an open mouth. Was this one of those fish-eating plants they had recently learnt about in science class? Holly got a queasy feeling in his stomach.

"Don't worry," said the woman and winked again. "This one eats a vegetarian diet." She grinned and bent over the box under her table again.

Holly stared at the pot of flowers in her hands, dumbstruck. She was annoyed with herself. Not only had she had her alarm clock snatched right from under her nose, she also had this stupid plant on her neck. A vegetarian fish-eating plant. What a load of rubbish. Besides, Holly didn't know the first thing about greens. She and her dad had exactly one plant: the 1-euro bamboo from IKEA that had been standing on their kitchen counter for a few weeks. And even that had lost its one leaf by now.

Annoyed, Holly ran back to her sales table.

But then something strange happened. Suddenly the stem of the plant bent over Holly's shoulder and Holly could have sworn that it was waving its little leaves. It was almost as if the plant was saying goodbye to the woman.

"Holly Zikowski," Holly admonished himself. "You're crazy!" But the strange feeling about the plant remained.



Chapter 2

Mr Pula

"Dio-nae-a mus-ci-pula," mumbled Holly, her head propped up on a tower of her two fists. She was sitting on the bar stool at the kitchen counter and had pushed her maths pen to one side. Holly looked at her new flatmate. Right after the flea market, she had put the fie-eating plant next to the IKEA bamboo on the counter.

"What?" Holly's dad called out from the background. He was busy mixing the caramel sauce for the popcorn. A deliciously sugary smell drifted through the open kitchen and living room. Holly's mouth was watering.

Today was Sunday and therefore film night at Zikowski's. A large pot on the hob kept making a lot of noise "plop".

"That's his name, in Latin." As proof, Holly held up the mobile phone she had received last Christmas. She read the article from the internet out loud. "*The Venus flytrap is a carnivorous plant from the sundew family.*" Holly held the mobile phone next to the plant and compared it to

the pictures on the website. "That's funny. He's much bigger than these. And the woman at the flea market said he's a vegetarian."

"Why *him*?" asked her dad.

"I think it's a he," Holly replied, "because he looks a bit like you."

Holly's dad turned to her and raised his eyebrows. Very high.

Holly giggled. She slid off the bar stool and fetched the large bowl from the cupboard.

Her dad let the fragrant popcorn trickle in. A few balls of popcorn tumbled next to it and Holly quickly popped a few into her mouth.

"Is Mr Pula watching too?"

Holly stopped chewing.

"Well, your plant friend. That's kind of his name." Holly's dad grinned.

Holly went to the orange-coloured pot and turned it so that the two large leaves were pointing towards the television.

"Have fun, Mr Pula," said Holly.

Then she and her dad made themselves comfortable on the sofa and clicked through the film programme.

They didn't notice what was happening behind them on the kitchen counter at that moment: the plant bent far down and grabbed one of the white popcorn balls still lying on the counter. Noiselessly, it let it disappear into its large mouth.

"It's a shame it's already over," said Holly as the film's closing music played and countless names scrolled across the screen.

"He gave me a fistful too," said her dad and stretched. At that moment, something made a loud "SHOOOO" and Holly's Dad looked at the clock above the television. It looked like a giant owl and its hour hand had just moved to nine.

"Your owl says it's bedtime, little mouse."

Holly sighed deeply.

Her dad switched off the TV and looked at her seriously.



"Are you excited about this Maths Olympiad?" He nudged her. "I know you'll do well. You've practised your multiplication tables so much this afternoon. Surely you can do it in your sleep by now."

Holly wrinkled her nose. Then she looked at him challengingly. "Do *you* know what 14 times 14 equals?" she asked.

"Sure," said her dad, rubbing his nose. "That's pretty accurate..." He continued rubbing his nose. "Something between 182 and 198."

Holly had to chuckle.

"You see, Dad. I didn't just inherit the nose rubbing from you."

Her dad took his hand away from her nose and in response Holly got a sofa cushion on her head.

And a wild pillow fight was already underway until Holly's dad finally shouted "Okay, okay, I surrender!".

Then he suddenly put on his serious, worried dad look. "Listen to me, Holly. These things are just about taking part. Nobody expects you to come first in this Olympics."

Nobody but me, Holly muttered quietly, thinking of that nasty Nils. He'd be surprised!

After a big hug and a "good night", Holly got up and trotted towards the bathroom.

Her eyes fell on the new plant. Something is different, she thought.

But it was only when she was brushing her teeth that she suddenly realised what it was.

She ran back into the living room, where only the small light above the kitchen counter was still on. But that was enough to see what she wanted to see.



