

Antje Szillat

# Flätscher 1

What a Stinker!

Original title: Fletscher  
Die Sache Stinkt!

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128 pages  
Age 8 and up

Fletcher, the cleverest and coolest striped skunk in town by a long shot, has made his home in the back yard of the Wild Elk Restaurant—where he also enjoys many an alfresco dining experience – until the day Bode, the head chef and owner of the establishment, cottons on. As a result of this bad break, which Fletcher only survives thanks to his stink pistol, he meets Bode’s son Theo. The two of them discover that they share more than just a penchant for bread dumplings—they both harbour dreams of becoming famous detectives! Fletcher finds a backyard detective agency right there and then, appointing Theo as his PA, and they soon find themselves up to their necks in their first case: Bode, of all people, who is constantly hunting down poor Fletcher, is in danger himself! With the help of his beautiful secretary Cloe the pygmy weasel and his junior assistant detectives, cellar mice Flo, Mo, Jo, Po and Bo, Fletcher immediately sets about solving the case.

Can the combined forces of the backyard detective agency manage to outwit the villains? It’s logicolo!

- Kick-off to a series starring a hilarious new character. Fletcher, a master detective in a class of his own, is clever, cool, nimble, a little on the vain side – and always ready with a smart reply.
- a fast-paced and highly original children’s book with just the right touch of rule-breaking all children over eight enjoy
- with fantastic illustrations by Jan Birk
- Fletcher guarantees non-stop excitement, fast-paced action, much accidental hilarity, loads of chaos and plenty of drama—a massively enjoyable read!

*Antje Szillat* is a full time author who has written numerous books for children, teenagers and young readers. Her children’s book series Rick and Fletcher were huge successes. Szillat lives near Hanover with her husband and four children.



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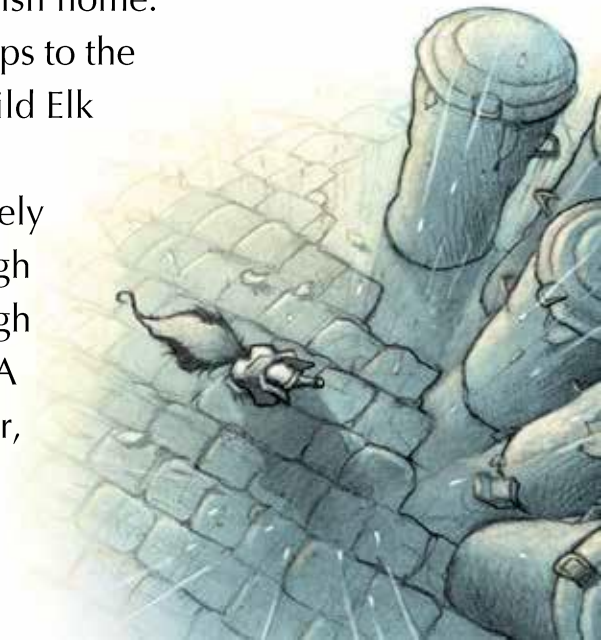
It was a rainy morning, as I scrambled out of bed with a yawn. After a lot of stretching and straining, eleven knee bends, and seven and three-quarter sit-ups, my stomach began to growl mightily.

### **HUNGER!**

»Wild Elk, I'm coming!« I called, primed for action, as I left my stylish home.

It was only a few steps to the breakfast bar at the Wild Elk restaurant.

I pulled my extremely broad shoulders up high and marched through the irritating drizzle. A couple of seconds later,



I was opening the first lid – and almost toppled over backwards.

»Ewwww, what in the world is that???»



It smelled strange and looked even stranger ... but there it was in my favorite trash can, in the bread dumpling-and-other-potato-like- tidbit-can!

At this point, perhaps I should mention that I loove bread dumplings! There's nothing that can calm my constantly growling stomach more than these clumpy round things.

»There has to be a mistake here,« I conjectured.

»And a big one at that!«

I had to figure this out since there was no way I wanted to eat something like that.

However, before lodging a complaint with top chef Bode, I was going to give him one last chance. I mean, after all, to err is human – I had heard that somewhere. And I was definitely no beast.

So I trotted over to the next can. But just as I was about to open it, something else opened, specifically the back door to the Wild Elk.

»Darned compote! That's the last straw!«

Oh dear, I knew that voice. Although it had never clattered so dangerously close in my ear drum as now. I whirled around lickety-split, crouched, slipped elegantly away, sprinted to the side, leaped up high, darted in a circle – and failed miserably. Which was obviously due to the flagging emptiness in my stomach.

**That's logicolo!**

The nasty – albeit very talented – top chef Bode had caught me.

I'll show you, you rascal!



Rascal? There's no way I'll put up with such name-calling – this thought shot indignantly through my mind. And then it grew dark around me.

**Dark as night-pitch black-forlorn-macabre-opaque darkness!**

»Papaaa,« a shrill squawk interrupted my lonely darkness a few seconds later. »Will there be bread dumplings for lunch?«

»Theo, not now. I just caught that blasted cat!«  
CAT??? Come again????

»Where?«

»Right here in the potato sack!«

Drizzle! I was stuck in a cheap sack.

How humiliating.

How embarrassing.

How mean.

And that horrible thing scratched like crazy.

»I don't see anything. And what's up with the bread dumplings? There weren't any yesterday either.«



Aha, so that was it. My favorite dish hadn't even been on the menu. And something else was whirring in my head – despite my pathetic imprisonment – this Theo, whom I'd only caught a fleeting glance of before now, was clearly just as crazy about bread dumplings as I was.

That had to be a sign!

I scurried around the sack with all my strength. Passionately determined to show this Bode that I was definitely no stupid cat.

»Theo, come help me,« the top chef grumbled.

»Are you sure, Papa,« Theo squeaked, »that you've caught a cat? And what do you plan to do with it? You won't roast it, right?!«

»Nonsense, of course not. After all, I'm a top chef. The creature will go to the animal shelter. Or the zoo. Or I'll take it over to the traveling circus, which is currently camped on the edge of town. First and foremost, away, far away from our courtyard!«



My mouth was dry as I swallowed. I was going to be banned from the courtyard? Away from my beloved home? From my even more beloved dumplings?

**NEVER!**

My outrage swelled, imbuing me with new, unforeseen powers, and escaped in one powerful **ZIISCH**.

»Oh my God, what is it that stinks so bad around here?« top chef Bode wheezed. The next moment, I saw the light at the end of the tunnel ... um, of the sack and shot out.

I didn't spend much time thinking where I should go. There weren't all that many possibilities. To be precise, only ONE!!!

»Urk,« something said quietly, as I slipped into Theo's pant leg. I clutched his leg and thought: How dumb are you really? The boy will holler any minute, and then you're done for.

Bye, bye, coolest courtyard of all time, adieu, tastiest favorite food in the universe.

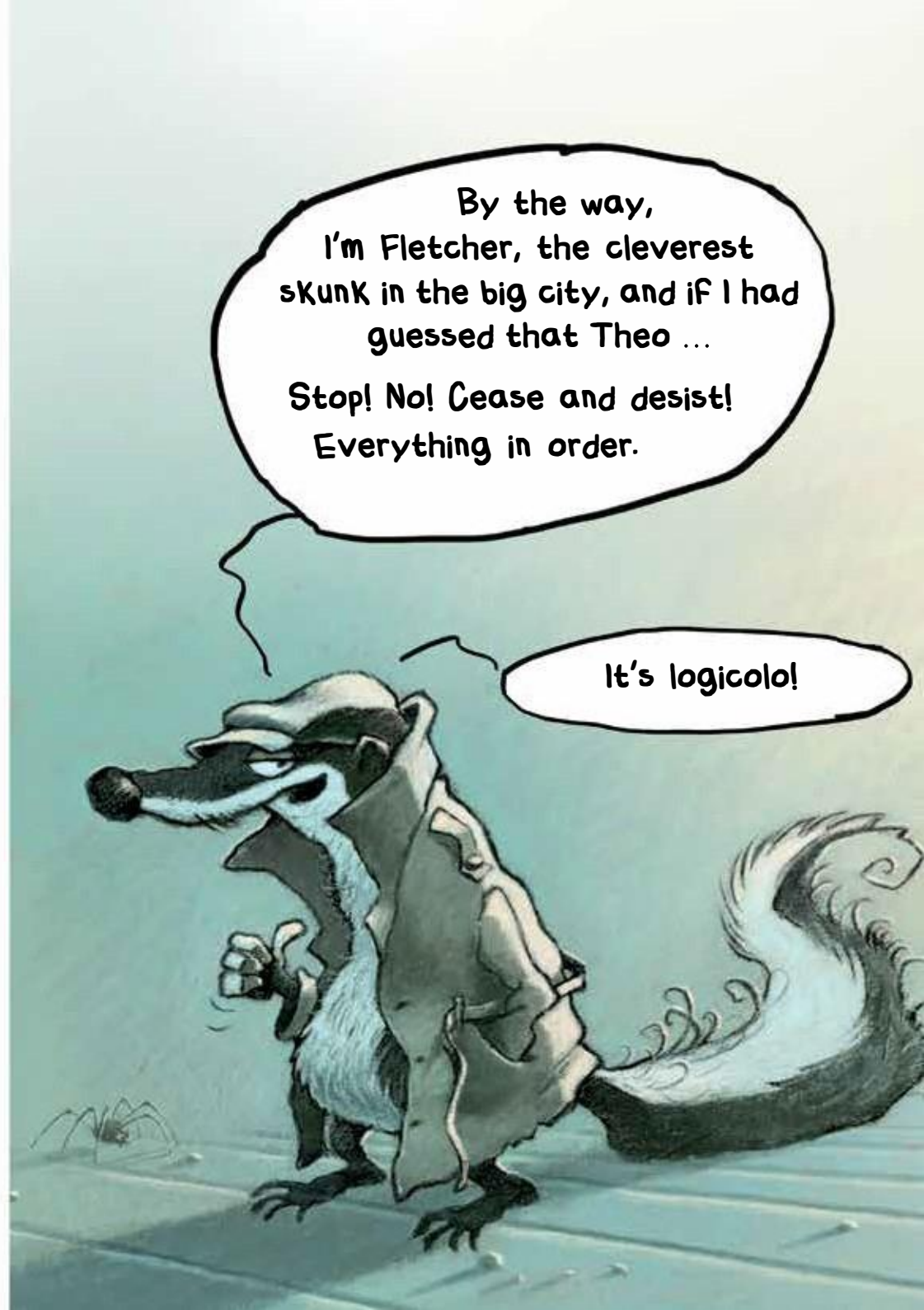


But Theo was frozen like a pillar of salt and didn't make even the slightest peep. Not even a little one.

And then he took off – stiff step for stiff step.

Whoa, whoa ...

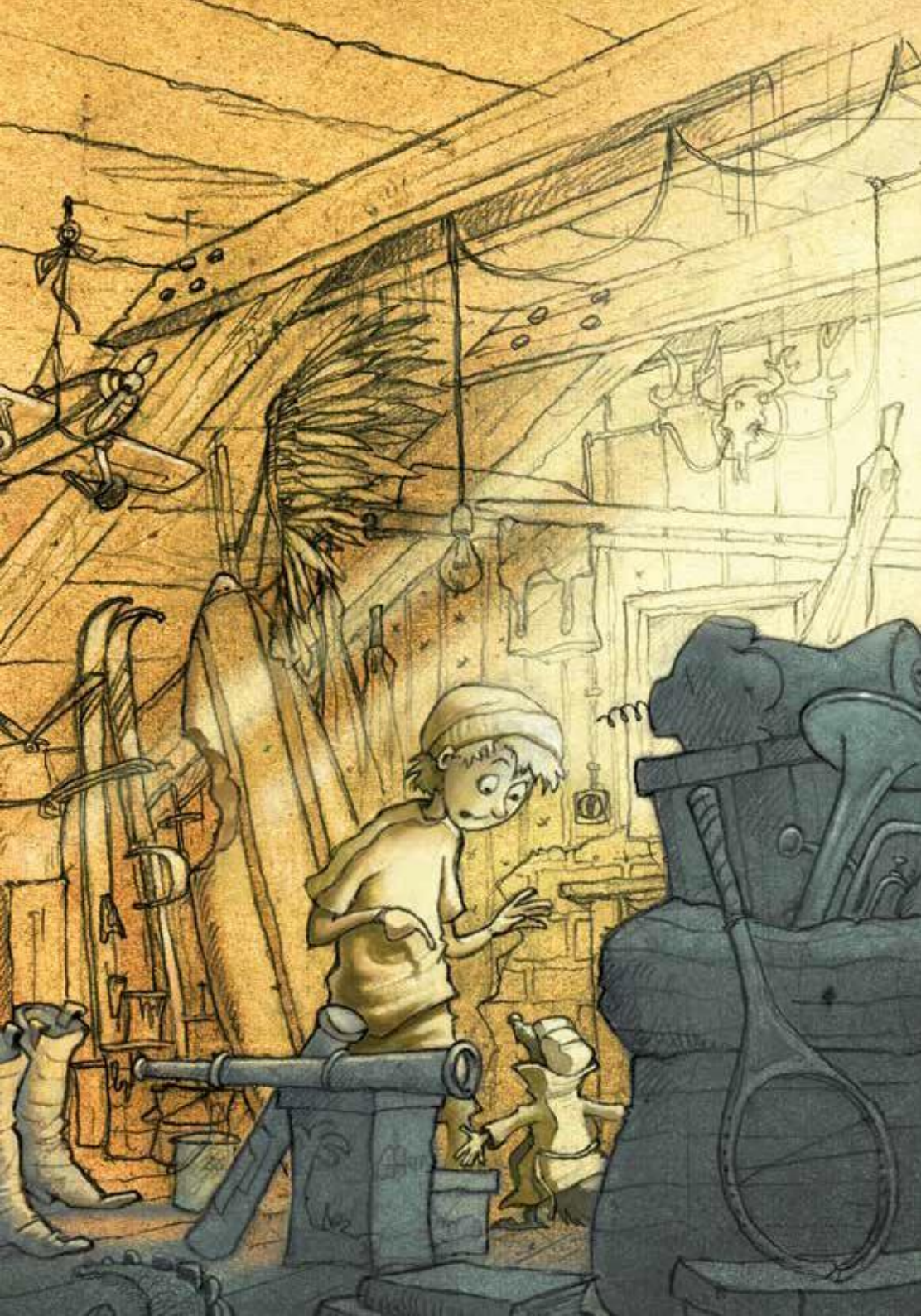
Somewhere in a distance, I could hear top chef Bode swearing miserably. »For heaven's sake, what was that? I think it was an apparition. A stink-emitting apparition. I'm going to definitely smell for the next two weeks ... Jesus, Jesus ...«



By the way,  
I'm Fletcher, the cleverest  
skunk in the big city, and if I had  
guessed that Theo ...

**Stop! No! Cease and desist!  
Everything in order.**

It's logicolo!



»How-who-what are-are y-you?

Oh goodness, this Theo was a st-stut-ter-er.

»Fletcher, nice to meet you, my name is Fletcher!« I said by way of introduction.

Theo's eyes became bowling balls.

For real!

»You-you ... uh ... you-you can sp-speak?«

Unfortunately not the good Theo. At least not fluently. But I didn't say that out loud. Didn't want to insult the urchin. After all, he had just rescued me from a furious top chef.

And now just between you and me, I was every bit as flabbergasted. But I wasn't going to let on to this. The fact that I, the coolest and most intelligent skunk in the courtyard, alright, in the city, the

world, the universe – haaaands down – could understand human speech was absolutely nothing new for me. But the fact that a person, this Theo, could also understand me, drizzle, drizzle, that was sensational. And had neeeeeever happened before.

In any case, I didn't care in the least for the place that Theo and I now found ourselves, absolutely not. It was much too shadowy for me. And it reeked disgustingly of marten droppings. And dust covered everything. Grr ... My nostrils were beginning to itch something horrible. Ewww! I couldn't take it anymore.

»This storage room, Theo, is actually not a place I care to spend any time in.«

»Um, how do you know my name?«

Whoa, this Theo could speak fluently after all. Nonetheless, I wrinkled my nose. Once because of the dust, then another time because of the stupid question.

Hello! It is logicolo that I know about everything and everyone in my courtyard.

»I live here, you live here!« I explained. »Ca-peesh?«

»No, not really,« Theo replied.

I sighed deeply. »People usually know their neighbors.« Eventually the other shoe would finally drop for him.

»**NEIGHBORS???**«

Good grief, so I'd finally met a person who was so advanced that he could understand the exalted language of animals – in other words, mine. And what happened? He was proving to be extremely challenged in the comprehension end of the spectrum.

Claro, it was also unusual for me to be able to converse with a human. But was I staring at this Theo the whole time with saucer eyes and asking him stupid questions?

**NO!**

»Well then, thank you anyway, Theo, for not rati-ting me out. I'm now going to go back to my significantly more stylish home, where I will eventually taking a nap. I hope you have an amazeballs day. **Ciao – Adieu – Auf Wiedersehen!**«

I positioned myself for an elegant leap and then to comfortably trot over to the storage room door. But Theo held me back. And – outrageously – by

the tip of my very bushy tail. Which, by the way, I'm especially proud of.

»Ow, owwww, let go!« I cried excitedly.

Because Theo refused to let go, I loaded my stink pistol and promptly ran into another jamming complication. Drizzle, drizzle. Good thing that I had developed my first fully mechanical stink pistol the day before yesterday – how sad that I didn't have it on me, of course.

»Please, Fletcher, stay here,« Theo implored. »I have never met a talking marten before, you know?!«

### **M.A.R.T.E.N.**

»Where do you see a marten?« I called in alarm, ready to fight. Oh man, I absolutely can't stand martens. Tootally not!

Theo rubbed his chin. »Uh, well, I thought you were a marten.«



»WHAT DID YOU SAY? I? I'M SUPPOSED TO BE A MARTEN? For real? Have you ever met a marten who can talk? Who looks even half as attractive as I do? Who is as elegant, cunning, brave, and exceedingly urbane?«

»No,« mumbled Theo under his breath.

»There you go!« I crowed.

»How did you hit on the dumb idea that I'm an ew-sickening, ew-dumb marten?«

Theo shrugged cluelessly. Then he opened his mouth. But before anything could cross his thin, relatively pale

lips, top cook Bode's caustic voice rang out, fairly close by.

»Theo? Theeeooo?«

»Drizzle, not him again already,« I groaned.

»My father's calling me,« Theo said.

Jesus, I never would've thought of that.

»I have to hurry to see what he wants,« Theo continued, unperturbed by my unmistakable eye

rolls. »Otherwise he'll come in here. And then he'll find you. And well, he'd be really surprised if he discovered me with a ... uh, with a ... ?«

»Skunk! I'm a skunk, in case you really haven't figured it out yet,« I growled. »And definitely not a **MARTEN** and most definitely not a **CAT!**«

»Oh yeah, that's obvious,« Theo was quick to act as if he had long been aware of this.

»Either way, my father would be shocked if he realized that I'm here in the storage room talking to a skunk. That doesn't happen just any old day.«

Okay, in this case, Theo was right, of course. And I certainly had no desire to be ambushed again in such an underhanded manner and to be stuffed in yet another scratchy potato sack – despite the fact that I find potato products extremely yummy.

»Can you wait for me here for a few minutes?!« Theo asked. He rolled his pale blue eyes to such an extent that I promptly became somewhat woozy. That's the only reason I agreed. And because Theo was somehow fairly ... well, totally alright. And besides that, my stomach was growling

quite loudly. And Theo surely knew where top chef Bode was hiding the bread dumplings.

»Okay,« I said. »But I won't just sit around here forever. And bring me some bread dumplings, do you hear me, Theo?!«

Theo looked extremely incredulous, but he nodded before he dashed over to the door.

# FLÄTSCHER



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