



For Gramps.
Boat builder, music master
& chocolate cake consuming champion!
Lots of love always
xxx



MARNIE MIDNIGHT

AND THE GREAT CRITTER CONTEST



First published in Great Britain in 2024 by Farshore

An imprint of HarperCollins*Publishers*
1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9GF

farshore.co.uk

HarperCollins*Publishers*
Macken House, 39/40 Mayor Street Upper,
Dublin 1, D01 C9W8

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A CIP catalogue record of this title is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 0 00 859136 6

Printed and bound in the UK using 100% renewable
electricity at CPI Group (UK) Ltd
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Typeset in Century Old Style Std by HarperCollins*Publishers* India

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MARNIE MIDNIGHT AND THE GREAT CRITTER CONTEST



LAURA ELLEN ANDERSON

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MEET THE MINIBEASTS!



MARNIE MIDNIGHT

Can't wait to start using real moon magic and loves studying at Minibeast Academy!



FLOYD FLOMBIDDIUM

Loves to make up words and clutches his trusty pearls when he's shocked or scared.



STAR VONSTROSITY

Always seems to have access to a large spoon, and is determined to avenge her father.

VERONICA SPOTTAGE

A butterfly who loves her wing-glitter and will be sure to let you know her surname is pronounced 'SPOTTAR-SHAY'.





LUNORA WINGHEART

Thought to be missing for years until Marnie found her on the moon! Now she's the new Moon Club tutor.

CARETAKER WINCY

Mostly gets annoyed by the students, but keeps Minibeast Academy clean and tidy. Oh, and has a mysterious ninth leg!



Dear Mama, Papa, Milo and the forty-eight eggs under the leaf,

I'm having the most amazing time at Minibeast Academy!

I have SO MUCH to tell you! Me and Floyd found a forbidden classroom at the top of the school, where there used to be a Moon Club! Which was weird because *none* of our lessons were about the moon. When I asked my teacher Mr Atlas why, he got angry, but it turned out he was just feeling really sad because anything to do with the moon reminded him of his sister who he lost many years ago.

But you'll never guess what . . .

It turned out his sister is my hero, the super-duper moonologist LUNORA WINGHEART! Everyone thought she'd been eaten by the Early Bird, but in fact she'd flown to the moon and couldn't fly home as she'd hurt her wing.

To cut a long story short, we discovered that Mr Atlas was trying to destroy the moon, so we went on a big adventure to stop him. We rode on a rat called Audrey and met the dreaded Early Bird. Except her name is Sharon and she's actually very friendly. Sharon flew us all the way to the moon so we could stop Mr Atlas carrying out his moon-demolishing plan AND save Lunora!

It was an incredible trip. Up close the moon was like nothing I've ever seen. It was mind-blowing!

Mr Atlas was reunited with his long-lost sister and became much nicer and happier.

Lunora said she's going to start up the Moon Club again for any bugs (including me!) who'd like to learn moon magic. The ancient moths never shared moon magic with other bugs. But now everyone can get involved!

Anyway, it's time for assembly so I need to go. See you all at half-term.

I love you to the moon and beyond!

Marnie xxx



CHAPTER 1

A SECOND HEAD

Friday assembly took place inside the Buckled Bulge, the widest and bobbliest part of the tree trunk that contained the Minibeast Academy. The large, dome-shaped room was lined with bright green moss, and on this particular day rows of colourful petal bunting were draped around the walls with shimmery bows and ribbons. But gleaming at the very front of the hall was something very exciting indeed . . . A great big golden TROPHY!

The room was buzzier and brighter than usual. A first-year firefly named Rodrigo was emitting so much light from his bottom it was impossible to look directly at him. Marnie's wings trembled with anticipation, and Floyd, who usually considered himself more of an A than a bee, had decided that today he was a 'YAY!' Even Star



was smiling more than usual . . . This was most definitely a sign of exciting things to come!

To begin, students sang the Minibeast Academy song and special certificates of achievement were handed out to those lucky few bugs who had done particularly well over the last week. At last, Miss Odonata, the dragonfly head teacher, rose into the air, her wings flittering so fast it looked as if they weren't moving at all.

'Before you head off to registration, I have some final announcements,' she said, smiling, 'The very first New Moon Club session with your new teacher, Professor Lunora Wingheart, will take in the top mushroom after school tonight. All are welcome and encouraged to attend, to learn more about our beautiful lunar neighbour.'

Marnie Midnight tried very hard not to jump out of her seat with utter joy. She loved ANYTHING to do with the moon and now there was an after-school club dedicated to it!

'As you know, tomorrow is a very exciting day for all first years,' Miss Odonata continued, 'because the annual Minibeast Academy Great Critter Contest is taking place!'

Immediately, the Buckled Bulge was filled with with excitable cheers, buzzes, clicks, hums and whirrs. Woodlice curled up into balls, worms wiggled their tails and Ron (the unidentifiable bug of the year group) sprouted a second head in sheer delight.

‘Each team will be given a map marked with a set of locations around the Museum of Nature gardens,’ said Miss Odonata.

A fuzzy-haired worm called Gilbert Gubble raised his tail shakily.

‘Yes, Gilbert?’ said the head teacher.

‘Um . . . aren’t the museum gardens a bit dangerous?’ he said quietly. ‘Won’t there be loads of Stompers stomping around? I really don’t fancy losing my tail for the eighth time . . .’



Miss Odonata chuckled. ‘The contest always takes place during the orchid season, when a large section of the museum gardens is cordoned off from the Stompers to allow the new seeds to grow and bloom,’ she said reassuringly. ‘There will be no Stompers around, making the gardens a much safer place for the minibeast world.’

‘Thank the worms for that,’ said Marnie. ‘I definitely can’t fly well enough yet to avoid getting swatted by a massive hand or squashed under a huge, sticky shoe!’

Floyd nodded in agreement. ‘I think every minibeast apart from the wasps will be happy about it,’ he said. ‘They thrive on annoying Swatters who sit outside with food.’

Miss Odonata went on. ‘At each location, you will face a challenge. Your aim is to complete as many of these challenges as you can before midnight. For each completed challenge, your

team will earn a special Critter Contest sticker to stick to the back of your map. The team with the most stickers at the end will receive the Great Critter Contest trophy!'

There was a resounding gasp from the pupils. Winning the Great Critter Contest trophy was a MASSIVE deal. The successful team got their names engraved on the trophy and it would sit in the Minibeast Academy entrance hall on the super-shiny Shelf of Grand Achievements!

Veronica Spottage, a butterfly sitting in the front row, turned around to glare at Marnie. She had bright yellow-and-purple wings with gold-heart patterns that glittered in the sunlight: quite different from Marnie's wings that were as black as night and dotted with delicate patterns that resembled the phases of the moon.

There was no doubt in Marnie's mind that Veronica would be hungry for that trophy, and every other bug would be seen as the enemy!

With Veronica still throwing dirty looks at her, Marnie simply smiled and waved back, causing the butterfly to huff and turn away.

'As you know, in the Great Critter Contest, pupils will work in teams,' Miss Odonata continued.



Marnie nodded at her two best friends sitting beside her. They had already talked about entering the Great Critter Contest together, and Marnie couldn't think of another two bugs she'd rather share the winning trophy with!

Floyd was the first friend Marnie had made, on the exciting Snail Rail journey to Minibeast Academy, but she'd already seen his face long before she met him! He was Floyd Flombiddium – the face of Flombiddium's Famous Honey: a firm favourite among the bug world. Just like in his photo on the label of the honey jars, Floyd wore a bright green leaf hat and a red scarf (draped over a trusty pearl necklace for clutching in extreme circumstances) and had sparkly jewels dangling from his antennae. Floyd was part bee, part ladybird and part mystery.

Marnie's other best friend, Star Vonstrosity, was an ant of very few words: always calm and composed. Star was tinier than most ants, but

incredibly strong. Marnie had been surprised to discover that this unassuming ant was a princess of the Seven Ant Hills and next in line for the throne!

'First-year teams taking part in the Great Critter Contest are to meet outside the school entrance tomorrow, straight after breakfast, to receive your maps,' concluded Miss Odonata, before raising her arms and declaring, 'MAY THE GREAT CRITTER CONTEST BRING OUT YOUR VERY BEST!'