





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





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

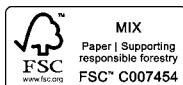
Printed and bound in the UK using 100% renewable
electricity at CPI Group (UK) Ltd

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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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UNSAFE
ZONE

Snail
or Slug
Challenge

Leaf
Limbo
Challenge

Petal
Punching
Challenge

Snack
Shack

Top o' the
Pumpkin
Challenge

Unwinding
the Web
Challenge

The
Incrediblar
Insect Hotel

Thimble-down
Stream

Fallen
Tree
Crossing

STARTING
POINT

Windy
Day
Challenge

Conquer
the Conker
Challenge

Dancing
Dandelions
Challenge

Bronwell's
Body
Challenge

Can You
Suc-SEED
Challenge

UNSAFE
ZONE

Minibeast
Maze
Challenge

Where's
Wendy
Challenge

Catch
the Aphid
Challenge

Stem
Sliding
Challenge

Winging It
Challenge

Wriggle or
Wiggle
Challenge

Fun with
Fungi
Challenge

Pollen
Pick-up
Challenge

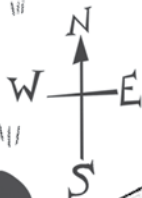
Unmuddle
the Muddy
Puddle
Challenge

Snack
Shack

DO NOT GO BEYOND THIS ZONE

Wicked Web
of West
Which is
Actually in
the East

FANCY FANGED ORCHID ZONE



MEET THE MINIBEASTS!



★ MARNIE MIDNIGHT ★

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

★ FLOYD FLOMBIDDUM ★

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!

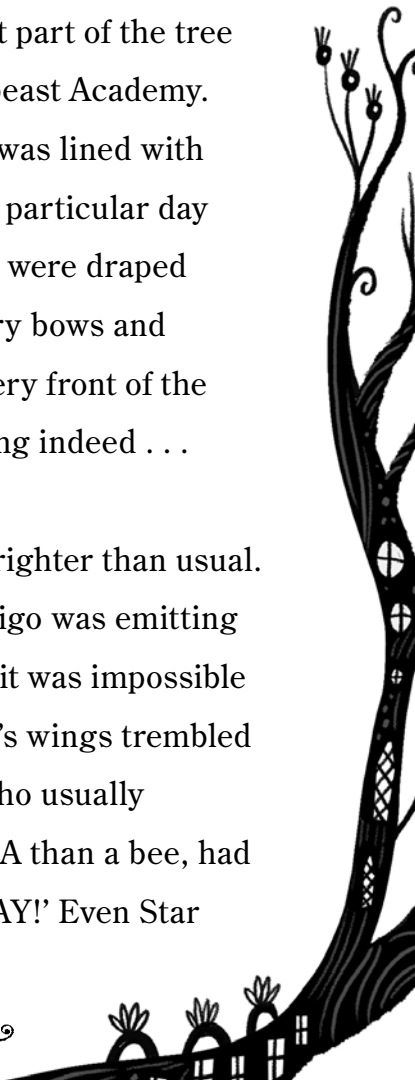
Marnie xxx



❁ 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!'