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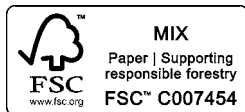
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MARNIE

MIDNIGHT AND THE MOON MYSTERY



LAURA ELLEN ANDERSON

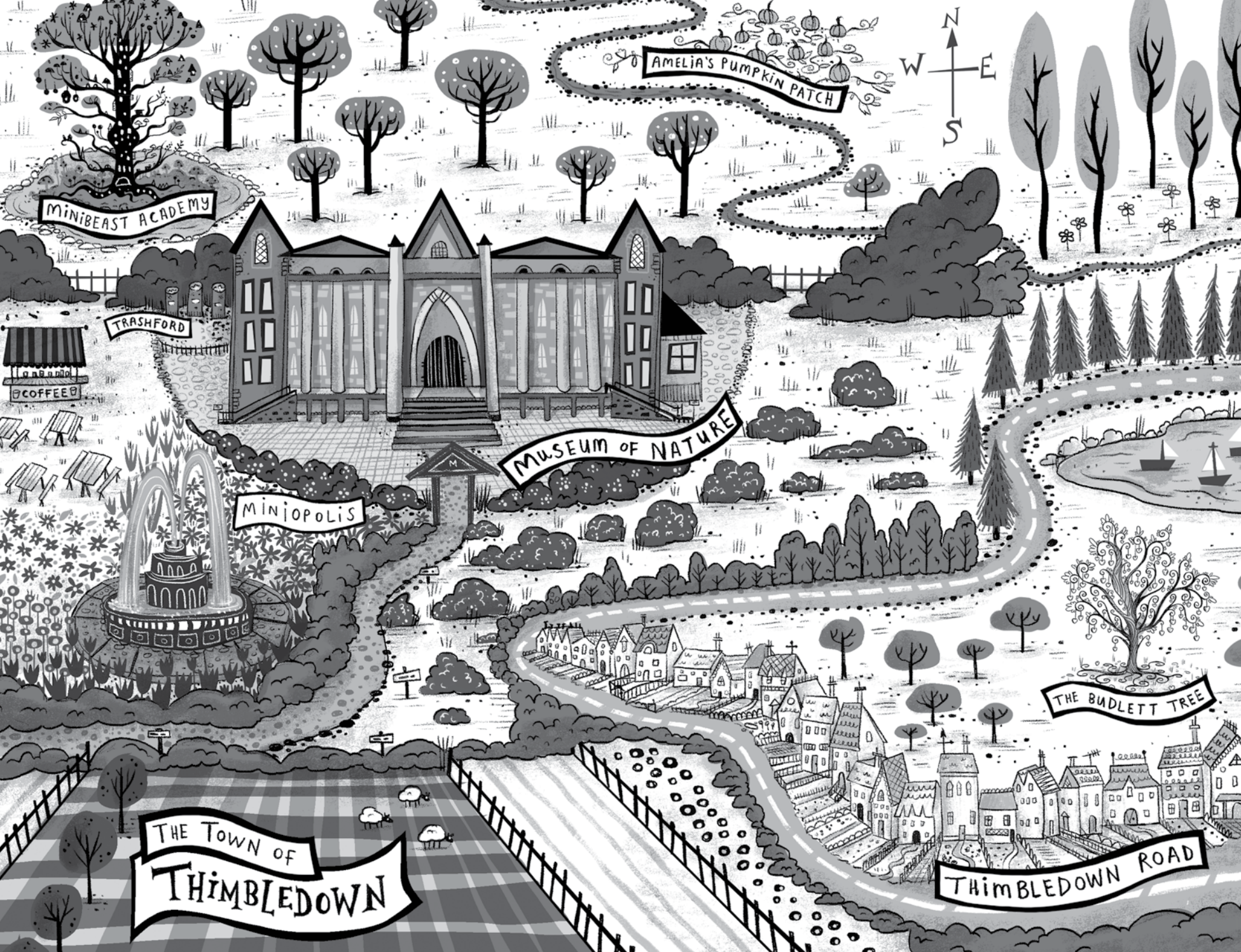




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AMELIA'S PUMPKIN PATCH



MINIBEAST ACADEMY

TRASHFORD

MINIOPOLIS

MUSEUM OF NATURE

THE TOWN OF THIMBLE DOWN

THE BADLETT TREE

THIMBLE DOWN ROAD

MEET THE MINIBEASTS

MARNIE

Friendly, enthusiastic and loves anything to do with the moon!



MABEL AND MARVIN

Marnie's mum and dad! Mabel loves to write a detailed 'To Do' list, whilst Marvin knits fabulous jumpers!



FLOYD

Glambulous! And rather fond of a cheese and onion crisp crumb.



MILO

Loves to eat EVERYTHING and can't wait to be a BIG moth!



STAR


Princess of the Seven Anthills and not to be messed with.



MR ATLAS

The grumpiest teacher at Minibeast Academy and loves to give out extra homework.





✿ CHAPTER 1 ✿
TWENTY-SEVEN
GARDEN FENCES AWAY

In the little town of Thimbledown stood a big budlett tree where some teeny tiny creatures lived. And these teeny tiny creatures were going on a very BIG adventure!

The Snail Rail raced underground along the Slime Line at super speed. The bugs on board rode in colourful shell carriages, and the air was full of hums and clicks and flitters and flutters of critters of all shapes and sizes as they set off on their morning travels.

One carriage in particular was positively BUSTLING. Inside this little shell carriage sat the Midnights: a moth family who now had one less caterpillar and one more moth. For Marnie Midnight had recently transformed!

Marnie was the first of her brothers and sisters

to metamorphose from caterpillar to moth.

She had cocooned on a drizzly Wednesday evening, wrapped up snug as her body

changed. Marnie's days spent wriggling along ivy stems and chomping on cabbage leaves were now over. She had been there, done that and got the caterpillar T-shirt. Now she was a big moth and ready to take on the world!

'Wiggling worm tails! I LOVE having wings!' cried Marnie, flapping them enthusiastically and almost knocking her little brother, Milo, out of the carriage window.

Marnie hadn't quite got used to her new wings yet. They were much larger than she thought they'd be, and often got rather tangled.

Moths' wings had all sorts of different patterns on them: Marnie's were black and grey




with curved white shapes that looked a bit like the moon. (Marnie was very happy about this because she **ADORED** anything to do with the moon!) She also had two fluffy feelers on her head, along with a mop of messy black hair and big orange eyes.

Today, Marnie and her brand-new wings were on a very exciting journey, accompanied by travel snacks, bubbly sap shakes and some crispy cress for Milo, who was still a squidgy little caterpillar.

Marnie's forty-eight other siblings were still tiny eggs stuck on the underside of a huge leaf at the very top of the budlett tree that was, by now, quite a few garden fences away.

'It's wonderful to see you embracing your new form, little one,' said Papa Moth, his floofy moustache hairs protruding almost as much as the hair on his slightly wonky antennae. Marvin Midnight was a wing doctor and **ALWAYS** wore




a jumper he'd knitted, usually one with very loud designs that cheered up his patients.

'Being a moth is soooooo much better than being a caterpillar!' said Marnie with a grin, as she chomped on a bag of petal puffs. 'I don't have to live on a diet of cabbage and cress any more. Nectar is much yummier.'

'I still can't get over the fact you're off to Minibeast Academy,' said Mama Moth wiping a happy tear from her eye. Mabel Midnight was a chef at the Ruddy Carpet, their local restaurant, and always tried out the new recipes at home, much to Marnie's delight.

Her large grey-speckled wings engulfed Marnie in a warm hug. 'It feels like only yesterday you started at the Larvae Learning Zone. Look at you now – all grown up and off to BIG bug school!'

Marnie wriggled with joy. She clutched her acorn backpack, which was full to the brim



with her new moon-themed stationery set and her favourite poster of Lunora Wingheart – the famous moonologist who had spent her life studying the mysteries of the ancient moths and their use of moon magic. Lunora had been a pupil at Minibeast Academy too! Marnie wanted to be just like her, and couldn't wait to follow in her flutterings.

'I can't wait to leave the budlett tree and go to big school,' whined Milo, chewing grumpily on a large mouthful of cress. 'You get to live a whole twenty-seven garden fences away from home!'

'You'll be a fully fledged moth and at Minibeast Academy before you know it,' said Marnie, before yawning the biggest and longest yawn she'd ever yawned. 'It may take a while to get used to being up this early, though.'

The sun had been rising when Marnie and her family left home that morning. During the daytime Marnie was usually fast asleep, like

most moths. But she would have to get used to a different sleeping routine now she was joining Minibeast Academy. In order to make sure all the different bugs were happy – both daytime and night-time creatures – lessons started in the middle of the day and went on until the middle of the night. It meant that every minibeast could see how each other lived.

‘What you need is a nice warm cup of nectar tea for energy!’ said Papa Moth, holding up a steaming mug of the sweet-smelling juice, before grabbing a generous helping of petal puffs in each of his three other hands. ‘*And* it’s very good for the thorax.’

Mama Moth sighed. ‘Marvin, darling, you know it’s bad manners to eat and drink from all four arms at once.’

‘What’s the point of having four of them then?’ said Papa Moth innocently, giving Marnie a wink.

The Snail Rail continued to carry them along,



through the network of twisty underground tunnels, passing stops for Wingchester, Pond Street and Pestminster. They were now many garden fences away from their budlett tree home.

‘Shouldn’t be too long until we reach Minibeast Academy. Once we’ve passed under the city of Miniopolis, it’ll be just a few stops away,’ Marvin said with a grin, playfully ruffling Marnie’s hair.



‘What are you looking forward to most at big bug school?’

‘Learning more about the moon!’ Marnie said without a second thought. ‘And flying practice, of course. In fact, I want to get strong enough to fly to the moon, just like Lunora Wingheart tried to do.’ Marnie pulled out the rolled-up poster of Lunora Wingheart and hugged it tight.

‘Why did Lunora bother flying to the moon? It’s SO far away,’ said Milo as he attempted to steal one of Marnie’s petal puffs.

‘Because, little brother of mine, she was trying to find the forgotten Book of Moon Spells,’ said Marnie matter-of-factly as she moved her snacks out of Milo’s reach.

‘But isn’t moon magic just a critter tale?’ asked her brother. ‘How can you find something that isn’t real?’

‘Well, nobody knows for sure,’ replied Marnie. ‘But Lunora Wingheart believed that moon

magic really exists, and I do too.’

‘Yeah, but look at what happened to Lunora What’s-her-wing,’ said Milo. ‘She got EATEN by the big, scary Early Bird! Maybe you will too!’ He grinned a cheeky grin. ‘Then I’d be the oldest of our brothers and sisters.’

‘Enough of that, thank you, Milo Midnight,’ said Mama Moth sternly. ‘If you don’t behave, the Early Bird will come for you next,’ she warned.

This usually worked when young bugs were trying their luck. (It certainly had when Marnie was a caterpillar – she’d once decorated their living-room walls with poo, and when she found out that her actions MIGHT get her an unwanted visit from the Early Bird, she never decorated anything with poo ever again.) Somehow, though, these terrifying warnings just egged Milo on even more.

‘Lunora must’ve been REALLY naughty!’ he bellowed.



Marnie rolled her eyes. 'I'm sure Lunora wasn't naughty, and we don't know if she actually got eaten,' she said with a frown. 'Lunora disappeared. But she believed that the Book of Moon Spells was still out there, and I do too! Anyway, I'll make sure I don't get eaten.'

'You probably will,' teased Milo. 'I think the Early Bird would eat your antennae for starters, and your face for dessert!'

'MILO,' Mabel snapped. Then she turned to Marvin and muttered, 'You really need to stop leaving your *True Grime* magazines out where Milo can find them.'

'Whatever happened to Lunora Wingheart, I'm sure she would have been very proud of you, my little mothling,' said Papa Moth, putting a comforting arm around his daughter.

Marnie grinned and snuggled up to her dad, taking in his musty, mothy scent.

What if all the critter tales about moon magic weren't JUST tales? Marnie thought to herself. In her heart she knew there was more to the moon than met the eye. Something . . . magical!

