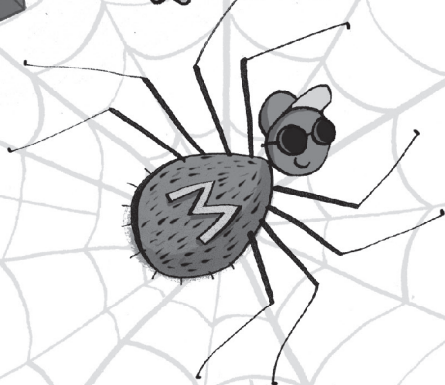


# MILTON THE MEGASTAR



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Chicken  
House

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*To all the Spider Warriors*

Also by Emma Read

*Milton the Mighty*

# CHAPTER 1

## Running and Flapping

‘**M**ilton said he would get the ladybird juice himself,’ Audrey called, from the top of a rose bush.

‘Careful up there!’ said Ralph. ‘That bunting’s not worth being eaten by a bird over.’

‘I’m fine. You concentrate on moving those benches and setting the tables. This must be the biggest charity fundraiser he’s done yet – there’s still loads to do.’

‘At least he’s mucking in this time. Not like the last—’ Ralph stopped mid-sentence. ‘Shh, here he comes.’

Milton scurried across the patio towards his



best friends, his eyes darting about at all the party preparations. 'Do you think that banner should be higher? I think it should be higher.'

Audrey abseiled down from a rose, her long legs trailing out behind her. 'Milton, it's fine. Calm down, you're getting yourself in a tangle.'

Milton closed his eyes, pressed his front two claws together and did some mindfulness breathing.

'I know it's an important cause.' Audrey put a claw gently on his small brown abdomen. 'But you must look after yourself.'

Milton glanced again at the banner, flapping gently in the early summer breeze.

## **BugKILL! Benefit Buffet**

Six months had passed since the terror of last autumn, when Felicity Thrubwell and her company, BugKILL!, came to their road. She and her spider-hating exterminators had convinced the humans that Milton and his species of false widows were deadly, and she'd tried to kill them all. If it hadn't been for Milton and his BHF (best human friend), Zoe, creating the *#NotScaredOfSpiders* campaign, they would've all been wiped out. Spider-kind had been saved, but the effects of Felicity's reign of terror were still felt all over town. Everyone knew someone who had been affected by the BugKILL! disaster.

Milton looked at Audrey, who'd lost the sight in three of her eyes thanks to Felicity's pesticide spray, and sighed. There was still work to be done.

Despite her injury, Audrey always managed to pull off a perfect stern look. ‘You’re working too hard. Perhaps you should cut back on the public appearances.’

Milton was unmoved. ‘Being a celebrity means hard work. I have to do what the campaign needs. Spiders look up to me now.’ He turned to Ralph, but instead of saying ‘hello’ to his big friend, he pulled a face. ‘Agh! Sticky webs! I forgot the ladybird juice.’ And he ran back towards the house in a flap.

Ralph waited until Milton was out of leg-hair hearing. ‘Aren’t you sick of this, Audrey?’

‘It’s for a good cause,’ she said, not sounding very convinced.

‘I know, but . . . oh, ignore me. The sight of all this food I can’t eat is making me grumpy. It’s just . . . don’t you miss the old days, before the *#NotScaredOfSpiders* campaign? Before Milton was famous and we could hang out and do proper spider things. Not fundraisers, or photo shoots, or sponsored woodlouse-eating competitions . . .



actually, that one I enjoyed. I'm fed up of serving vol-au-ants to snooty orb-weavers, and getting my claws glued together opening fan mail. All the "Oh, Milton, we love you so much, we want to have your spiderlings" is making his cephalothorax twice as big as it was before.'

'Hmm, he has changed,' agreed Audrey. 'Here, no one will miss a honey-roasted lacewing – eat it and cheer up. It's supposed to be a party.'

The fundraiser was a tremendous success, and attracted many species of local spider – jumping spiders, crab spiders, the event was glamorous enough even for a wasp spider to swing by, creating quite a stir. Food, ladybird juice and dark spaces were donated and their best garden spider friend, One Short, offered to build a new web for a group of homeless young orb-weavers every night for a week!

By the end of the evening everyone was exhausted.

‘Let’s clear up tomorrow,’ said Audrey, pushing aside fruit-fly flan crumbs before sitting down beside Milton.

Milton leapt up. ‘Too much to do. I still need to see Zoe and talk to her about the zoo promotion, and check the interweb for any messages from Hawaii. I’ve not heard from Dad in a while.’ He bit his claw. ‘And there’s more fan mail to open . . .’

Ralph groaned.

‘Surely it can wait until tomorrow?’ Audrey asked gently.

‘Well, not really. There’ll be something else tomorrow. Come on, Audrey, you know better than that. Can you at least get those banners and bunting down?’

‘Steady on, buddy,’ said Ralph. ‘Audrey’s worked proper hard on this for you. Have you even said thanks?’

Audrey held her leg out to Ralph. ‘It’s fine, I don’t mind. Milton’s right, let’s get this done, then we can relax tomorrow.’

‘Well, you can, maybe,’ said Milton, fussing over some spilt ladybird juice. ‘I’ve got a photo shoot to organize with a company who are building a bridge almost as strong as a spider silk.’ He rubbed his aching shoulders. ‘Aha, there’s Zoe now.’ And with that, he sped off towards the house.

Being the approximate size of a raisin, ‘sped’ was a relative term, and by the time Milton reached the dining room, Zoe and her dad were halfway up the stairs.

He sighed and collapsed in a puffed-out heap on the table.

*Typical.*

What was less usual was that they were talking in a whisper and Mr Macey’s arm was around Zoe as they walked. He gave her a reassuring pat which piqued Milton’s interest.

*Something’s wrong.*

He strained his leg hairs to listen to the conversation as he dashed up the banister.

‘. . . I’m sure he’s fine, Zoe – you heard the

message, it was almost impossible to make out properly. Please try not to worry.'

'I hope he's OK. He's so tiny,' said Zoe, with a long sigh.

Milton hid in a gap.

*What message? Is she worried about me? I am feeling pretty tiny right now.*

Zoe glanced anxiously back down the stairs, past Milton, towards Mr M's phone which was still glowing on the table.

Milton took a deep breath and ran. He reached the phone just as the call list blinked off, back to black, but as he'd got closer Milton was sure he'd seen the word 'Hawaii' on the screen.