

HEWIE THE SPIDER MEETS THE QUEEN

By Mark Clark

Hewie the garden spider had been very sad for a whole year. It had been a whole year since his wife Emily had gone missing.

He had looked everywhere for her. He had looked under her favourite (upturned) wheelbarrow at the back of the garden. He had looked in amongst the vegetable patch where they both used to stroll each evening. He had looked under the house in the cool, damp darkness. He had scurried into every nook and every cranny in the large garden looking for new spider webs. But alas, she was gone.

"Where oh where is she?" thought Hewie to himself and his eyes filled with tears, for he loved Emily very much.

But Hewie was a determined spider.

"I'll find her," he muttered, "even if I get squashed flat trying."

So, he scuttled towards the big house at the end of his garden, up two steps, onto the front porch, straight past a man at the big front door, under the door and into a long, wide hallway.

Over by the wall stood two large suitcases and a small travel bag with a zipper.

He stopped.

Somebody was coming! Hewie didn't hesitate. He scurried as fast as his little hairy legs could carry him, up over and onto the bag with the zipper and into a small hole left where the zipper hadn't been closed properly.

Hewie was very frightened and his heart was beating very fast. He peered out of the dark bag but couldn't see much. Then he heard voices.

"Your car is ready, Mr. Prime Minister," said a deep voice, "and your plane leaves in a little over one hour."

"Thank you, Allan," replied a dry, crackly voice. "Load my bags into the car please and we'll leave right away."

"Very good, sir," said the first voice.

The next thing poor old Hewie knew, he was being thrown all over the place. He fell backwards onto a pocket computer and had to dodge a flying gold pen. Then the bustling stopped and WHAM all the light was gone.

Hewie climbed to the top of the bag. He was in the boot of a car. He liked it better in the dark where those humans couldn't see you.

"No sign of Emily here," he said aloud and just then the limousine started up with a VROOM which sent Hewie scuttling back into his safe hiding place in the bag.

Hewie made himself comfortable in between a little packet of tissues in the corner of the bag. He was lucky because the bag he was in was picked up and put down so many times during the next few hours that in amongst the soft tissues were the safest place to be.

And all the time Hewie heard strange noises outside the bag. He heard the car stop. Then he heard the car start and then he heard the car stop again. People's voices said things like: "Let them pass" and "Open the gate" and "Have a nice trip, Mr Prime Minister." Then, like an earthquake the bag would begin moving up and away and so much noise from people and machines filled Hewie's ears, that he had to put his little padded feet over them so he didn't go deaf.

Then there was a loud voice over the microphone which said: "Qantas Flight 11 boarding now for London at gate 12," and away he was whisked again at high speed. Then up and down, up and down went the bag and further into the tissues crawled Hewie.

After a long time the clumping of shoes and the hundreds of voices faded away. Hewie heard a sweet voice say: "Welcome on board, sir. Your seat is up the front by the window."

After that, the bag came to a rest. All the banging and bustling stopped for a while.

Hewie was hungry but very tired. "It's so comfortable in these tissues," he yawned. "I think I'll sleep now. I can look for food and Emily later."

Well, it was very, very comfortable in that tissue packet, so Hewie slept for hours and hours. He would have slept for hours more but suddenly the bag came to life again.

Up, up it rose. Then ZZZIPP went the zipper and before Hewie could wipe the sleep out of his eyes, a huge hairy hand was grabbing at his tissue-bed and pulling it further up, up towards the sky.

"Air conditioning always gives me a stuffed up nose," said the crackly voice, and before you could say "Arachnophobia" Hewie's comfortable bed had been pulled from under him and he found himself somersaulting in mid-air towards a carpeted floor.

In the flash of a moment Hewie attached his spider thread to the nearest object, which happened to be the back of a seat. This stopped his fall but sent him swinging side to side like a mad pendulum clock.

When he stopped swinging, he let himself down to the floor. He raced past two big black shoes, up a funny sort of plastic wall and onto a ledge next to a window.

Hewie looked back. No, no-one had seen him. (There are some advantages in being small you know). What he saw was a friendly Australian face with white hair on top and a tie and suit below. At that moment, the friendly face was blowing its nose on Hewie's Kleenex bed linen.

"Hey I know him," said Hewie. "That's the Australian Prime Minister. He lives next door to me." (No-one heard Hewie say this of course because his voice was very tiny and the noise of nose-blowing was very loud).

"Hey, not bad," thought Hewie as he looked around the cabin. "So this is First Class."

Hewie knew all about First Class because he had seen advertisements for it on television through the window of "The Lodge", which was where the Australian Prime Minister lived.

"Hmmm, yep, plenty of leg room, just like they said on television" (which was good as far as Hewie was concerned since he had eight legs to worry about).

Then Hewie turned around and looked out of the window. "Eek!" he squeaked. "What are those clouds doing down there?"

It was true. The aeroplane was so high up that the white fluffy clouds were far below. And look, they were throwing long shadows onto the ground which was a long way underneath them.

"Wow," said Hewie enthusiastically, "this is great! I could look at this for hours. But I'd better not. It's time I started looking for Emily."

So, during the next two hours Hewie looked all over the aeroplane for Emily. He looked all around First Class where everyone seemed to be eating caviar and drinking champagne all the time (except for the Prime Minister of course); through Business Class where everyone was pushing buttons on little computers; and all around Economy Class which was more bumpy and crowded and there were lots of noisy children.

"You have to watch out for children," thought Hewie. "They're very observant. They're much more likely to notice me than adults." But luckily for Hewie not one of them did.

Hewie noticed the 'No Smoking' sign. "Why would anybody smoke?" Hewie wondered. "Silly habit. It would be like me building my nest across the top of a chimney."

Speaking of which, Hewie remembered he was hungry. So he caught the drinks trolley to the galley. There he took the elevator down to the hold where all the baggage was stored.

Down there in the cool, silent depths, he diligently spun a web and caught a stowaway mosquito. A nice juicy one too. Hewie wondered if he was dining on First Class, Business Class or Economy Class blood.

"Funny how you can't tell," mused Hewie. "No matter how much money or power they have, all humans are basically the same. Certainly mosquitoes aren't too fussy. They suck on paupers as well as Prime Ministers," thought Hewie as he finished his meal and headed upstairs again.

As he was leaving the galley he heard the chef say to a hostess: "This one's for the Prime Minister." As quick as a flash he caught a ride on a high-heeled shoe which took him right back to where he started, but still with no news of Emily.

He crawled back into the zipper bag and with a big sigh he nestled into his little tissue packet and fell back to sleep.

When he woke it was just like a backwards version of what had happened to him all those hours ago, back in Australia.

First, the bag was picked up and he was thrown all around the place. Then he heard the quiet movement of people. Then a sweet voice said, "Enjoy your stay, sir."

Then things got very, very noisy again and in the distance Hewie heard a loud English voice say: "Qantas Flight 11 now disembarking at Gate 7." Then he heard voices saying things like: "Welcome to London, sir," and "This way if you please, Mr Prime Minister." Then his bag was placed in a long, long car.

The last thing Hewie saw as the boot closed over him was a sign saying: "Welcome to Heathrow Airport". The last thing he heard was a very posh English voice say, "I hope you feel rested, sir. Her Majesty is expecting you later this afternoon."

And with that the boot was shut and all the light was gone again.

"Oh woe is me," Hewie almost cried. "Whatever shall I do? Here I am in London, half the world away from my dearest Australia. However will I find my long-lost Emily now?"

From outside the car came the sounds of car horns and the occasional screech of brakes. The car seemed to be moving very slowly, stopping and starting, stopping and starting in the London traffic. Then came the thud, thud, of heavy cold rain onto the metal above Hewie's bag.

All in all Hewie was about as miserable as a garden spider could be. It seemed to be taking longer to get from Heathrow to London than it did to get from Australia to England.

Finally though, after what must have been hours, the car stopped, the boot was opened and SPLISH, SPLOSH, SPLASH, the rain came tumbling in on Hewie's hideout. One big blob even found its way right onto Hewie's head as he peeped curiously out of the bag.

Then SWISH, he was whizzed out of the limousine, through the driving rain, into a hotel foyer, into a lift, up one, two, three, four floors, through a long corridor, click-click in through a door and settled to rest next to a window overlooking a big, beautiful green park.

On all the roads that crossed around and about the park was traffic. Hewie had never seen so much traffic. Lots of pretty, red, double-decker buses and black taxis dodging in and out underneath the low, grey clouds.

In between the traffic were thousands of men and women scurrying here and there, in and out. Some of them ran down into the underground railway stations, others took shelter under shop awnings, but most of them had umbrellas.

One lady tripped over and the wind blew her umbrella under a bus. Oh dear.

Nearby, a man was standing by the side of the road waiting to cross when a car came past and SPLASH, SPLOTCH, he was all soaking wet.

Hewie almost laughed. "I shouldn't laugh at others' misfortune," he said to himself.

Still, the man did look funny standing there with water running from the brim of his bowler hat, his lovely blue-striped suit all soaking wet. Hewie could see the man was shouting out something but he couldn't hear what it was. (It was probably just as well).

"London is so big and busy," marveled Hewie. "I'm so little compared to a human and a human is tiny compared to London and London is really tiny compared to England and England is one of the smallest countries in the whole wide world. However will I ever find Emily? She's even smaller than me!"

But before poor old Hewie could feel even sorer for himself, the door opened and in walked the Prime Minister. He looked pretty well really, considering it had been almost a whole day and a half since he and Hewie had left Australia.

While the Prime Minister took a bath, Hewie explored the hotel room and very nice it was too. The carpet was so thick it was as tall as a jungle to Hewie, so he traveled by the walls instead. (That's one of the advantages of being a spider, you don't have to stay on the ground, you can even stand on the ceiling if you want to).

"What a big, big room, and so pretty," admired Hewie. "Red, red carpet, brown carved furniture, gold-plated door handles, beautiful dark coloured paintings all over the walls and everything is so clean."

In fact, the room was too clean for Hewie's liking. Not one spider web to be seen anywhere. Where there were no spider webs, there were no spiders, and where there were no spiders there were no friends, and where there were no friends, there was certainly no Emily, for Emily was Hewie's best friend.

Eventually Hewie came across the Prime Minister's suit jacket neatly hung up on a brass pole.

Hewie stopped for a moment to think clearly, (which is often a good idea for human beings as well as spiders). He looked around.

"Hmmm," he thought. "There's really no point staying in this room, lovely though it is. I think I should stick with the Prime Minister for a while. He's going to see the Queen and I've only ever seen her on television and on Australian coins, of course."

So without further hesitation he scurried into the Prime Minister's coat pocket, which was beautifully soft and lined and naturally, because he was tired and comfortable, fell straight to sleep.

While Hewie slept, the Prime Minister was very busy. Prime Ministers are always very busy, but right now the Prime Minister was never busier than a Prime Minister could be.

You see, tomorrow he was to meet with the English Prime Minister about some important matters, but today he had been asked to have tea with the Queen and her husband.

The Prime Minister was very pleased and honoured to be asked to tea, of course. He had not seen the Queen for a year, since the last time he was in London. However, before he left to see the Royal couple, he had many business matters to which he must attend.

So, while Hewie slept, the Prime Minister made lots of phone calls, dictated many letters to his secretary and all the time people came and went. Some brought messages, others took messages away; questions came, answers were given; "yes" to this, "no" to that; decisions, decisions, and more decisions. Phew! It sure is hard work being a Prime Minister.

In the meantime, Hewie had been almost as busy. He was busy dreaming. He dreamt he was back home in Australia, cleverly spinning his web between two small trees in the Prime Minister's backyard. Emily was there too. She was admiring his handiwork and telling him how much she missed him. Next to her was another little baby spider with a bib on which said "I Love My Daddy-Long-Legs". Hewie didn't recognise the

cute little spider. He was about to ask Emily who the little baby belonged to when BINNGGG, his web began bouncing like a sideways trampoline.

Hewie woke with a start. The hairs on his legs were standing on end from the fright. Such a beautiful dream. What had spoiled it all?

It was the Prime Minister of course. HE didn't have time to day-dream. He was still in the real world and moving as quickly as ever. At the moment he was quickly running down stairs and jumping into a limousine to keep out of the rain. Hewie was in his jacket pocket bouncing around like the ball in a pinball machine. Then VROOM – off they went to visit the Queen of England.

After a little while Hewie got up his courage and carefully climbed out of the Prime Minister's pocket, up his arm and onto his shoulder. From there he could see the splendour of Buckingham Palace. The Palace gates were open and beside them sat the Palace guards mounted on horseback. The guards wore perfect red uniforms, with shiny black boots and helmets of gold. The horses had beautiful polished saddles and reins of gold. The guards were saluting Hewie as he drove past them. (It was only later that Hewie realised they had probably been saluting the Australian Prime Minister.)

As well as the guards, there were hundreds of people waving and cheering as the car entered the gates. It was all very exciting, but when the Prime Minister raised his arm to wave back, Hewie was almost thrown off his shoulder.

“Oops,” said Hewie as he tried to regain his balance. “Time for me to disappear for a while.”

So off he scurried down the Prime Minister's back and back into the Prime Minister's pocket.

After one or two minutes the car door was opened with a click and an Englishman's lovely voice said: “Welcome, Mr Prime Minister. Her Majesty is expecting you. This way if you please.”

“WOW! I'm really going to meet the Queen. I'll have to look my best. Trust me to pick a pocket without a mirror in it,” he thought to himself as he fussed about, smoothing down the hairs on his hairy legs.

Outside the pocket, Hewie could hear the loud echoes of footsteps on tiles in a long corridor. Then he heard an enormous heavy door open and a loud voice announce: “The Prime Minister of Australia, Your Majesty.”

With that, the door closed which caused loud echoes down the hall behind him.

There was silence for a brief moment. Hewie held his breath in anticipation.

Then came the polished voice of the Queen of the whole British Commonwealth. “Prime Minister, how nice to see you again. I trust you had a pleasant journey?”

Hewie shuddered. He was in the same room as the Queen.

“Yes, thank you Your Highness,” responded the Prime Minister. “I'm honoured by your invitation.”

“Not at all,” replied the Queen. “It is always a pleasure to see you. I believe you know my husband, the Duke?”

Both men laughed.

“We've met before I believe, Prime Minister,” came the lovely tone of the Duke.

“On many occasions,” replied the Prime Minister with a large smile in his voice and the two men shook hands which sent the eavesdropping Hewie shaking around more than ‘Bill Halley and the Comets’.

And so the conversation continued its polite, friendly tone.

In his dark, soft, hideaway, Hewie was growing impatient.

“Here I am in the same room as royalty and I haven’t seen anyone yet. Time for me to sneak a look. Be brave Hewie,” he said to himself as he scrambled out of the pocket and up the Prime Minister’s back, so as not to be seen.

As he approached the collar of the Prime Minister’s jacket, he heard the Duke say: “We’ve got the grandchildren over for the day. They’re racing about the palace somewhere.”

A servant poured a cup of tea for the Prime Minister as Hewie peered over the edge of his collar.

“Oh my gosh!” Hewie exclaimed and his legs began to tremble, for there, right in front of him, sat the royal couple.

They were wonderful to behold. Neither was wearing a crown because this was a social visit, but both were immaculately dressed. The Queen wore a dress of blue, the Duke a suit of grey. They sat amongst the most gorgeous cutlery and china that Hewie had ever seen in his life. A butler was serving them tea and cakes on a silver tray on a carved wooden table in a room as big as a circus tent (or so it seemed to Hewie).

So overcome and amazed was he that he lost his balance at the precise moment that the Prime Minister chose to lean forward to pick up his cup of tea.

“WHOOA!” screamed Hewie as he fell towards the Prime Minister’s lap. Too late to latch onto anything with his spider thread, he half fell, half floated, down, down, right onto the lip of the Prime Minister’s teacup.

The Prime Minister was talking as he raised the cup to his mouth to drink, when suddenly – he stopped. He sat there for a second as frozen as a waxwork’s dummy, his eyes fixed on our little spider friend.

Is something the matter?” enquired the Queen.

“No, nothing really,” replied the Prime Minister, “but I seem to have a tiny spider on the lip of my cup.”

Hewie was panic-stricken as the three gigantic faces drew up close to inspect him. He looked for a way of escaping, but it was useless. The stowaway had finally been caught.

“My word,” muttered the Duke. “Henry would you fetch me my magnifying glass, please? I have the strangest feeling. Oh and Henry, could you ask our grandchildren to come here for a moment?”

So off went Henry the butler to fetch the children whilst the Queen of England, her husband and the Prime Minister of Australia, all squinted to look closely at Hewie, tiny Australian garden spider.

“He must have fallen from my jacket,” the Prime Minister was saying.

“Yes, that’s what I was thinking,” replied the Duke.

Just then, the royal children came running in making lots of noise, as all good children must (it’s their job you see), and with them came old Henry, struggling behind, magnifying glass in hand.

“Now let me see,” said the Duke as he raised the glass to his eye to get a better look.

Well, Hewie was already terrified, but when the Duke’s already gigantic eye became *enormously* gigantic behind the magnifying glass, he almost fell into the Prime Minister’s hot tea! Luckily for him, he didn’t.

“Aha!” the Duke exclaimed.

“What is it?” questioned everyone all at once.

“If I’m not very much mistaken, this is an Australian garden spider,” announced the Duke. “Have a look.”

“How extraordinary!” the Prime Minister exclaimed as he peered down at Hewie. “If this is true, then this little fellow must have hitched a ride with me all the way from Australia.”

“But how can you be sure that it’s an Australian spider, dear?” enquired the Queen.

“Well, I’m not absolutely certain,” replied the Duke. “That’s why I’ve called in two experts. Children, take a look at this spider will you?”

So the two boys took the magnifying glass and came up so close to Hewie that he shut his eyes and prayed. He was imagining that great spider web in heaven where all good spiders go and was wishing he could see his beloved Emily once more before he left the earth forever. Things looked pretty bad. He expected to be squashed any second. (Humans do that sort of thing to spiders you know, even to little Australian garden spiders.)

But instead of instant death at the end of a child’s thumb, Hewie heard the children laugh loudly. He opened his eyes in time to see them run out of the room very fast.

“Where are you going children?” the Queen was asking as the children left.

“Back in a minute!” they yelled over their shoulders as they disappeared through the doorway.

For one terrifying moment they were gone. Hewie felt his life was hanging in the balance. “What will they do?” he wondered nervously. Then the children returned with a small, white box.

“Grandfather, grandmother, it’s amazing!” they shrieked. ‘Look!’

They placed the box on the table and opened the cover. There, inside, in amongst a few leaves and some grass, was a spider even smaller than Hewie. But, would you believe it, this spider was the same type of spider as Hewie.

“Look. Look!” persisted the children and they handed the magnifying glass to the Prime Minister.

He was amazed. “It’s remarkable,” he said, shaking his head. “No, it’s more than that – it’s incredible. Where did you find this spider, children?”

“In this room,” replied one of the children.

“How long have you had it?” the Prime Minister questioned further.

“Almost a year now,” agreed the two boys.

“Well that was the last time I visited you here,” suggested the Prime Minister.

“So it was,” said the Duke.

The Queen had a very puzzled look on her face. She said: “Are you suggesting that one year ago that spider in the box made a journey with you all the way from Australia and that today, a second spider of the same type has done exactly the same thing? Surely the coincidence is too great, Prime Minister.”

“But what other explanation could there be, dear?” asked the Duke. “There are no such spiders to be found in England and when was the last time an Australian was here in Buckingham Palace?”

“Let’s put them together and see how they get on,” suggested the two excited royal grandchildren.

Hewie had only been half listening to the conversation. His main concern had been with the little white box on the table next to him. He couldn’t see what was in it from his position on the tea cup, but something inside him told him to get in there and see. So when the Duke put his finger and offered Hewie a ride, he obligingly jumped aboard.

The loud chatter of excited human conversation faded away behind him and clattered into the distance as Hewie disembarked onto a leaf in the box. Cautiously he stepped forward onto the loose grass and listened.

From behind him came a voice as sweet as honey.

“Hewie?” it whispered.

Hewie span around in an instant, which sent grass flying onto cardboard walls. What he saw was enough to send his heart into galloping beats and set his cheeks on fire. For there, beside a gum leaf, as beautiful as ever, was his dearest Emily.

“Emily, my darling,” he cried and sprang forth towards her. His eyes filled with tears. “I never thought I’d ever see you again.”

Emily was too moved by emotion to say anything. She just threw her legs around Hewie (all eight of them) and cuddled him and cuddled him until she couldn’t cuddle him any more.

“But how did you get here?” sobbed the happiest of happy Hewies.

So Emily told him of how she had been exploring the trunk of the Prime Minister’s car about a year ago and had ended up on a free, but unwanted trip to England and how she had eventually fallen off the Prime Minister’s jacket during tea with the Queen.

“I can’t believe it,” squeaked Hewie. “That’s almost exactly what happened to me!”

“Really?” glowed Emily. “Oh Hewie, I do so love you. I’ve missed you so much.”

“And I’ve missed you,” replied Hewie.

Then Hewie noticed a rustling from behind a gum leaf.

“What was that?” he said, a little alarmed.

“It’s nothing to worry about, my love,” she said. “It’s a little surprise I have for you. Imogen, it’s alright darling, you can come out now. It’s your daddy.”

From around behind the edge of the leaf came a beribboned little girl garden spider.

“Dadda?” she questioned.

“Yes, dada baby. Come and say hello,” said Emily softly.

“Dadda, dadda, dadda!” shouted Imogen. She scuttled towards Hewie and crawled all over his back.

Hewie was dumbfounded.

“But how...” was all he could say.

“I didn’t have time to tell you,” Emily explained. “I didn’t know until I got to England.”

“Oh happy, happy, happy day!” exclaimed Hewie, and because he couldn’t speak for joy, he simply hugged his newfound baby and wife and kissed them until his spider lips wore sore with pleasure.

So there they were a reunited couple and a new family giving each other enough hugs and kisses for the next year.

“Well they seem to be getting on famously,” said the Prime Minister as he finished watching them and sat back in his chair. “Perhaps they know each other.”

“Did you notice the baby spider?” asked one of the children.

“No, I didn’t,” replied the Prime Minister. “My old eyes can’t see as well as yours, young Prince, but after what’s happened, nothing would surprise me.”

“Will you be taking the spiders back to Australia, Prime Minister?” asked the Queen.

“Well if the boys don’t mind too much, Your Highness, yes I will,” replied Mr Hawke. “It is their home and quite frankly, I’m surprised this little spider has survived one of your cold northern winters.”

No, the boys didn't mind too much. They would miss the little spider but they knew what it was like to be away from home for a long time. You see it doesn't matter whether your home is England, or Australia, or the North Pole for that matter, home is always the nicest place to be.

So after a very pleasant afternoon the Prime Minister said goodbye to the Royal Family and returned to his hotel carrying the little white box with Hewie, Emily and Imogen in it.

But of course that is not quite the end of our story, because after the Prime Minister had gone, the butler told the cleaning maid what had happened and she told the palace gardener, who told the palace guard, who told the man who tends the palace horses, who told the lady who tends the palace corgis, who told the palace publicity agent, who told all the newspapers, who came to the palace and asked the butler if he knew anything about it, to which he replied angrily that he was there at the time and it was *he* who started off the whole rumour, to which they apologized and asked him to give them the full story.

The next day the London papers had headlines like: "How the Queen Spied-a-Spider" and "Palace Web of Intrigue" and by the time the Prime Minister got back to Australia three days later, the Australian press was waiting at the airport for his comments on the spider story. He showed the happy family and they took hundreds of photographs.

Hewie and his family were famous.

So, that's almost where our story ends. When the Prime Minister got back to The Lodge he told his family all about the strange story. Then he let Hewie's family go, next to the big, (upturned) wheelbarrow in the back of the garden.

Hewie and Emily had a happy life together and lived to a ripe old age. After Imogen, came many more children: Elliot, Gene, Liam, Dylan, Jessica and Darcy.

So it was that many years later, long after the Australian Prime Minister and his family had moved out of The Lodge and the next Australian Prime Minister had moved in, on any Sunday Hewie could be found sitting on a rock beside a web with a grandchild on each of his eight knees, telling the wide-eyed infants the story of how he went to London to see the Queen and brought their grandmother back to Australia where she properly belonged.