

Katie-Lee and the Monster Trees

Chapter 1 - January - Magic Time

Bella was a honey-coloured Labrador puppy. She lived with Katie-Lee and her family in a comfortable little house on a modern estate called Forestdale.

Next to Forestdale there was a large wood. Bella knew the wood very well because each day she went there for a walk. Sometimes Dad took her, but usually it was Mum. Bella and Mum went walking in all weathers, come rain, come wind, come snow, but when the weather was fine and sunny Katie-Lee often went along too.

The wood was a beautiful place all year round. In the spring the ground was carpeted with bluebells. In the summer the thick canopy of leaves kept it shady and cool. Autumn was the time for blackberries and nuts. And in winter, when it snowed, the wood was silent and magical.

But whatever the time of year, Katie-Lee's favourite place in the wood was where the Monster Trees grew. The Monster Trees were two huge yew trees with thick knobbly trunks and wide spreading branches. These hung almost to the ground, making each tree into a sort of tent. Inside the tents it was cool and dark and Katie-Lee and her mum used to pretend that a monster lived in each tree.

Every time that Katie-Lee and Mum took Bella for a walk in the wood they would pass the Monster Trees and peep inside together to see if the monsters were at home. It was all a game of make-believe of course; there weren't really any monsters. But one New Year's Day, soon after Katie-Lee's fourth birthday, something magical happened and the make-believe came true!

It was the first day of January and although it was cold, the sun was shining and the air felt fresh and crisp.

'It's a lovely day for a walk,' Mum had said.

'Come on, let's go out to see what we can find in the wood today.'

Bella had jumped up like a jack-in-a-box at the sound of the word 'walk'. So when she had her collar on and Katie-Lee and mum were well wrapped up in warm coats, gloves, hats and boots, they had all set off up the hill.

Now in the wood, Katie-Lee and her mum were playing hide-and-seek but Bella didn't really understand the game and kept spoiling it by standing right next to the tree or bush where Katie-Lee was hiding.

'Go away Bella!' hissed Katie-Lee crossly. 'Every time I try to hide you give me away.'

'You will have to find a bigger hiding place,' said Mum, coming up to them. 'One big enough for Bella to hide as well.'

'O.K. I will,' said Katie-Lee and she wondered where to go.

Suddenly she thought of the Monster Trees. That would be a great place to hide and the trees were not far away.

'Hide your eyes and count to fifty, Mum,' Katie-Lee shouted. And she ran off around the corner and up the hill to the nearest Monster Tree with Bella trotting behind her.

Katie-Lee bent down and crawled under the canopy of the Monster Tree. Bella did not follow her but stayed outside sniffing along the path. It was the first time Katie-Lee had been there on her own but she knew the place well and as Bella and Mum were only just a shout away she didn't feel at all frightened.

As she stood up inside the tree Katie-Lee heard a strange little sound. At first she didn't know what it was but after a minute she realised that it was the sound of someone crying. She looked around to see where the sound was coming from and discovered that something magical had happened.

The spreading branches of the Monster Tree had vanished and Katie-Lee found herself standing in an odd little room. It was quite round with curved walls and in the middle of the room where the tree trunk had been there was a spiral staircase. The crying seemed to be coming from upstairs, so Katie-Lee took hold of the banister and climbed cautiously to the top.

The room at the top was even stranger than the one downstairs. It had a low domed ceiling and was full of a dim green light. At one side of the room was a little round bed and this was where the crying sound was coming from.

Curled up in the bed was a very fat monster. His face was buried in his pillow and he was sobbing and wailing so loudly that he did not even hear Katie-Lee come in.

'Hello,' said Katie-Lee. 'Whatever is the matter?'

The monster looked up in surprise. His eyes were all red from crying and he looked very miserable.

'It's my foot,' said the monster. 'I went out for a walk in the winter sunshine and suddenly I felt a terrible pain. It hurts so much and I can't bend down to see what the matter is because of my round tummy.'

The monster wailed again and rocked himself backwards and forwards on the bed.

Now, Katie-Lee was a very kind little girl and it upset her to see someone so unhappy.

'Let me help you,' she said.

'Put your foot here on the edge of the bed so that I can take a look.'

The monster did as she asked and straight away Katie-Lee could see what was wrong. A huge thorn was sticking out of the monster's big toe.

'I see what the trouble is,' said Katie-Lee. 'There's a thorn in your foot. Keep quite still and I'll pull it out for you.'

Katie-Lee took hold of the thorn and gave it a sudden tug. It slipped out easily leaving a little round hole.

'I think you need to put some cream and a plaster on, then you won't get any germs in it,' said Katie-Lee. 'Have you got any?'

By this time the monster seemed a bit better. He had stopped crying and he gave Katie-Lee a little smile.

'Look in the cupboard by the bed,' he said.

Katie-Lee opened the door and looked in. Sure enough, there was some cream and a box of plasters, but when she looked in the box it was quite empty.

'I've found some cream, but you have run out of plasters,' said Katie-Lee. 'I have a tissue here in my pocket. I'll wrap that round your toe instead.'

After Katie-Lee had finished dressing the monster's foot he gave her a big hug and said, 'Thank you so much for helping me. I really don't know what I would have done if you had not come along. Now come downstairs and tell me who you are.'

So Katie-Lee and the monster went downstairs, and he fetched her a steaming cup of acorn tea. She told him that her name was Katie-Lee and that she lived nearby on Forestdale. The monster said that his name was Sobersides and that he lived here in this tree all alone and that he had never ever seen a little girl before.

'But I hope you'll come to visit me again,' Sobersides said. 'It gets a bit lonely here on my own.'

'Oh yes, I'd love to,' said Katie-Lee. 'Mum and I often come for walks in the wood with our dog, Bella. We could call in to see you each time we come.'

'Oh, could you really,' exclaimed Sobersides. 'That would be just wonderful!'

'Coming, ready or not!'

Katie-Lee heard her mum's voice and looked up.

'I must be going now,' she said.

And as she stood up the monster and the magic little house faded away and there she was standing under the branches of the Monster Tree.

'Found you,' cried Mum, parting the branches and peeping inside. 'Bella gave you away again!'

Katie-Lee and Bella and Mum played for a little longer and then it was time to go home. As they walked back to the gate Katie-Lee tripped and got her hands all muddy.

'Wipe them on your tissue,' Mum suggested. 'You've got one in your pocket, haven't you?'

Katie-Lee searched in her pockets but she couldn't find a tissue anywhere.

'I hope you haven't dropped it making the woods untidy,' scolded Mum.

Mum got very cross about the thoughtless people who dropped litter in the woods. Sometimes she took a bag and some rubber gloves to pick it up and bring it home to put in the bin.

'Ah now I remember what I did with it,' said Katie-Lee. 'I gave it to the monster to bandage his foot.'

'Did you indeed!' said Mum, not believing a word of it.

'Yes, I did. I really, really did,' replied Katie-Lee.

Mum shrugged her shoulders. 'Ah well, never mind, use mine instead,' said Mum.

'Perhaps this make believe game has gone a bit too far,' thought Mum as they walked home.

'Why, sometimes I think Katie-Lee really believes it's all true!'
