

Katie-Lee and the Monster Trees

Chapter 10 - October - Chestnut Time

It was a calm October day. Katie-Lee was helping Mum with the gardening. All the summer bedding plants looked very drab. They were losing their leaves and the flowers had all died.

'It's time to take them out and put in some bulbs ready for spring,' Mum had said.

And that is what they were doing.

It was dirty work and so they were both wearing gardening gloves to protect their hands. Katie-Lee had a small pair that Mum had bought especially for her.

'Put the old dead plants in this big bag,' Mum told her. 'The council will collect it next Tuesday for recycling.'

'What's recycling?' asked Katie-Lee.

'Well,' said Mum, 'all the garden waste is put together in one big heap and it turns into compost ready to grow more flowers.'

'We'll use some when we plant the bulbs,' she added.

After the old plants had been cleared away Katie-Lee and Mum planted daffodils and tulips, packing the new compost tightly round to keep them snug for the winter.

'I hope the foxes don't come and dig them all up!' said Mum. 'I think we shall have to put something prickly around them to keep them away. Foxes do not like to get their feet pricked.'

'I know,' said Katie-Lee, 'why don't we collect some sweet-chestnut shells in the wood. They are very prickly.'

'That is an excellent idea!' exclaimed Mum.

So that is what they did.

The sweet-chestnuts had been falling for a few weeks and some parts of the wood were covered with them. Bella hated walking on the prickly shells and she tiptoed along carefully trying to choose a path where there were not too many.

On their walk that afternoon Katie-Lee and Mum took some bags and they both wore their gardening gloves so that they did not prick their hands when they collected the shells.

'We'll take another bag and collect the sweet-chestnuts themselves too,' said Mum. 'When we get home we can roast them for tea.'

Most of the sweet-chestnuts had popped out of their shells when they fell from the trees. They lay around on the ground, round and shiny all mixed in with the prickly shells.

There were not many sweet-chestnut trees along the path where the Monster Trees grew so Bella was trotting along looking much happier.

When they reached the big tree Katie-Lee peeped inside as usual to see if anyone was at home.

'Oh no! Whatever shall I do!' cried a voice.

Katie-Lee looked around and there was Sobersides standing in his little kitchen with tears running down his furry nose.

'What is the matter, Sobersides?' asked Katie-Lee. 'Can I do anything to help?'

'I don't think you can help me today, little friend,' said Sobersides sadly. 'Just look at my larder!'

The larder was a cool place where Sobersides kept his food but today there was hardly anything in it.

'The naughty foxes in the woods came into my house and stole all my food,' explained Sobersides.

'Each time I bake some tasty pies or cakes I put them in my larder but by the next day they are gone. Whatever can I do to protect my food?'

'Why don't you do what my mum does?' said Katie-Lee. 'You could put a ring of prickly sweet-chestnut shells all around your house and that would keep them away.'

'What a good idea!' Sobersides exclaimed with glee. 'There are plenty of them in the wood. I could go out now and collect some.'

'I have some in this bag,' said Katie-Lee. 'You can have a few of them but I think you had better collect most of your own because I got into trouble when I let you have the blackberries.'

Katie-Lee held out her bag to show Sobersides the shells that she had already collected and Sobersides put his hand in the bag to take a few.

'Ouch!!' he cried as the shells pricked his hand. He pulled it quickly out of the bag.

'You need something to protect your hands,' said Katie-Lee. Here, you can borrow my gloves.'

'Thank you so much,' said Sobersides. 'I'll let you have them back next time you come.'

'I don't think you will find any sweet-chestnuts under the Monster Trees,' sad Mum.

At the sound of her voice, Sobersides' home melted away and Katie-Lee was back under the spreading branches. She looked around and there were certainly no sweet-chestnuts to be seen.

Mum did not notice that Katie-Lee had lost her gloves until they got home.

Katie-Lee and Mum shook the sweet-chestnut shells out of the bags all around the places where they had planted the bulbs.

Katie-Lee was careful not to touch any of them with her bare hands.

'What have you done with your gardening gloves?' Mum asked her.

'Oh, I gave them to Sobersides', Katie-Lee replied and she explained all about her conversation with the monster.

'I suppose she must have dropped them somewhere,' thought Mum. 'Never mind when we go to the woods tomorrow we can look out for them.'

The next day when they reached the Monster Trees Mum peeped under the branches to see if Katie-Lee's gloves were there. Sure enough, they were neatly placed together under the tree and beside them was a smiley face drawn with sweet-chestnuts.

'So that's what she was doing yesterday!' thought Mum.

'Thank goodness we found the gloves.' she said. 'It is not easy to get little ones especially for children.'

But as she ducked back from under the branches Mum noticed something really strange. There was now a ring of prickly sweet-chestnut shells all around the tree.

'Isn't that odd?' thought Mum. 'There were none here yesterday! I suppose they must have fallen during the night.'
