

Katie-Lee and the Monster Trees

Chapter 11 - November - Feeding Time

It was a cold, grey November day and Katie-Lee was eating her lunch. It was her favourite - a bacon sandwich and what mum called a monkey's breakfast. This was made up of lots of fruit cut into hand sized pieces that Katie-Lee could pick up with her fingers to eat. Today there were slices of apple and pear, segments of satsuma and a small banana with the skin peeled back so that Katie-Lee could hold it.

While she ate, Katie-Lee watched the birds. Mum had fixed a bird feeder onto the outside of the window and filled it with peanuts. The blue tits and great tits loved the nuts and they came one after another to collect them. Each bird would pick up a nut in its beak and carry it off to the bushes to eat. They were not very tidy feeders though and lots of nuts got dropped or knocked to the ground around the window.

'Look at all the birds, Mum!' said Katie-Lee

'Yes, I see they are very busy today,' replied Mum. 'When the weather gets cold they need lots of food to give them energy to keep warm.'

After lunch it was time for Bella's walk. It took Mum and Katie-Lee ages to get ready to go out in the winter. They put on padded trousers, winter jackets, warm socks, waterproof boots, woolly hats and last of all thick gloves. But Bella did not need any of that. She just wore her collar and her own cosy fur coat.

As soon as they got outside Bella rushed round to the window to eat up the nuts that the birds had knocked off the feeder. She was a very greedy dog!

'I wish we could stop her doing that,' said Mum. 'She will get very fat eating all those nuts and the birds need them much more than she does.'

There wasn't much sign of birds in the woods. Selsdon Wood was supposed to be a bird sanctuary but Mum and Katie-Lee never saw many birds there. In the summer they heard lots of them singing up high in the trees but in the winter even the singing stopped. The best place to see birds all year round were the meadows. There were often magpies and crows there wandering around on the grass and sometimes even a green woodpecker.

'What are they doing, Mum?' Katie-Lee asked.

'They are looking for worms to eat,' replied Mum.

On the way home they walked down the path past the Monster Trees and as usual Katie-Lee ran ahead to peep inside. The trees stood out clear and green now that lots of those around them had lots their leaves.

Under the drooping branches there was a lovely smell of bacon and a familiar voice was singing.

'Feed the birds, tuppence a bag,
Tuppence, tuppence, tuppence a bag.'

The thin monster was standing at her workbench stirring something with a big spoon.

'Hello Felicity!' called Katie-Lee. 'What are you up to today?'

'Oh, hello there, Chicky,' said Felicity. 'How lovely to see you again!'

'Today I am making a seedcake for the birds. Come on over and take a look.'

Katie-Lee stood on tiptoes beside the bench and peeped into the bowl.

It was full of a squidgy mess.

'All year I have been saving the fat left over when I make bacon sandwiches,' explained Felicity.

'And now I'm mixing it up with lots of seeds and nuts to put in there.'

The monster pointed to a row of yoghurt pots standing on the bench. Each had two holes in the side with string threaded through and tied into a loop.

'When the fat has set hard I will take the pots out and tie them onto the trees with the string. There the birds can come to eat the seedcake where they are safe from the foxes.' explained the monster.

'What a good idea! We could do that at home to stop Bella eating all the nuts.' said Katie-Lee and she told Felicity all about the bird feeder on the window and what happened to the peanuts that go knocked to the ground.

"I can let you have a pot if you like, Sweetheart,' said Felicity

"Have you been picking up litter again?' asked Mum as Katie-Lee appeared carrying something in her gloved hand.

'It's not litter,' said Katie-Lee. 'Felicity gave it to me.'

Mum inspected the pot and saw that I had a hole in the bottom with string threaded through.

'That's an odd thing to be lying about in the woods,' she thought. 'I wonder how the string got there? I suppose it must have been something that children have been playing with.'

'We'll take it home and put it in the bin,' Mum said.

'No, Mum,' said Katie-Lee. 'It's for making a bird feeder. If we mix the peanuts up with some fat they will stick in the pots. Then the blue tits can eat the nuts and they won't fall on the ground where Bella can get them,' she explained.

'I think that child is a genius!' thought Mum. 'She has such great ideas!'

When she next went to the shops Mum bought a block of lard and Katie-Lee had great fun squishing it up with her fingers in a big bowl and mixing it with the peanuts and lots of birdseeds, raisins and grated cheese. She then spooned the mixture into Felicity's yogurt pot and five more that she had made with Mum. They put them in the fridge for an hour to set hard and when they were ready Katie-Lee and Mum went out into the garden to hang them on the bushes.

It worked a treat! The birds loved them. Now they could feed without spilling any nuts and greedy old Bella would not get fat.
