

Katie-Lee and the Monster Trees

Chapter 12 - December - Christmas Time

Katie-Lee was very excited. This morning she had been with Mum to visit Father Christmas in one of the big stores in town. She and Mum were still talking about it as they walked through the wood.

'The fairy grotto was lovely, wasn't it, Mum,' said Katie-Lee.

'Yes, it was very pretty,' Mum agreed. 'And Santa's little house was very cosy and snug. Did you like his Christmas tree?'

The trees in the wood were all bare now, and on this gloomy afternoon they stood like skeletons holding their arms up to the grey sky.

'Hey, look, Mum,' exclaimed Katie-Lee, 'there's some holly just like Father Christmas had around his chimney.'

'So it is!' said Mum, 'And it's got red berries on it just like his had.'

'Mum?' quizzed Katie-Lee, 'Why don't the leaves fall off the holly bushes like they do off all the other trees?'

'Well, holly is a different kind of tree,' Mum replied. 'It doesn't lose its leaves in the Winter but stays green all year round, so we call it an evergreen tree.'

'Can you think of any other evergreens?' she asked.

Katie-Lee thought hard.

'Yes,' she shouted, 'Christmas trees are evergreen too aren't they?'

'That's right,' said Mum. 'Any more?'

As Katie-Lee stood thinking Lido scampered on up the hill. She watched him go and suddenly shouted,

'Yes, the Monster Trees are evergreen. And that's where Lido's going. I'll catch him.'

Mum watched as the girl and her dog galloped up the hill and disappeared into the green tent of the Monster Tree.

As she entered the tent Katie-Lee heard a sorrowful wailing, and looking around her she found that she was back again in the house of her monster friend Sobersides.

'Hello, Sobersides. I haven't seen you for ages,' Katie-Lee cried.

The monster looked up startled. He was sitting on the floor by the fireside holding a big box and surrounded by bits of paper. As usual he seemed very unhappy and big tears were rolling down his cheeks.

'Oh, Hello, Katie-Lee,' he sobbed. 'Just look what a mess I'm in!'

'What are you doing?' the little girl asked.

'I'm trying to wrap up this Christmas present,' sobbed Sobersides. 'But I'm no good at it. Every time I wrap the paper round the box it just comes undone again.'

'You need something to tie it with,' Katie-Lee told him. 'Haven't you got any string or sellotape?'

'No, I forgot to buy any when I was shopping,' answered Sobersides and he began to howl even more.

'Never mind,' said Katie-Lee. 'Leave it for now, and let me make you a nice cup of acorn tea.'

'I'm sure we will be able to think of something.' she added.

Katie-Lee went into the monster's kitchen and returned in no time with two mugs of tea and a packet of biscuits. She sat down on the floor beside Sobersides, put her arm around him, and handed him his tea.

'Oh, you're such a kind girl to me,' said the monster giving her a squeeze. 'And you're so pretty too. Doesn't your hair look lovely with that red bow?'

'That's it!' shouted Katie-Lee, so suddenly that the monster nearly dropped his tea. 'You can use my ribbon to tie your parcel!'

Oh, I couldn't take your ribbon!' exclaimed Sobersides. 'It looks so lovely in your hair, and besides, whatever would your Mum say?'

'Oh, she wouldn't mind,' replied Katie-Lee. 'I'm always losing them anyway, but this time it would be in a good cause.'

She pulled the ribbon out of her hair, undid the bow and smoothed out the wrinkles.

'Pass me the parcel,' she said. And taking it from the monster she wrapped the ribbon around it and tied it with a neat bow on the top.

'That looks lovely,' said Sobersides.

'I knew we would manage to think of something,' said Katie-Lee happily.

'Who is the present for?'

'It's for my friend Felicity,' replied Sobersides. 'Do you know her?'

'Oh, yes I do,' exclaimed Katie-Lee. 'I often visit her in her workshop. What are you giving her - or is it a secret?'

'Well, it is a secret really but I don't mind telling you, especially since you've been so helpful. I've baked her a special chestnut cake. She never seems to get any time to do any cooking. She's always too busy inventing things.'

'Oh, I'm sure she will love that,' said Katie-Lee.

At that moment, their chat was interrupted by the tinkling of a little bell.

'That's my doorbell,' said Sobersides getting up. 'I wonder who it can be?'

Katie watched as the monster walked over to a long curtain, which hung on part of the curved wall of his little round house. He pulled the curtain aside and opened the little green door behind it.

There, standing on the doorstep was Felicity singing:

'I wish you a Merry Christmas

I wish you a Merry Christmas

I wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.'

'Well, hello Dearies,' she cried. 'Fancy finding my two best friends together like this! Happy Christmas to you both!'

She gave Sobersides a big hug and then danced into the room and hugged Katie-Lee too.

'Hello, Felicity,' chorused Sobersides and Katie-Lee laughing. 'We were just talking about you!'

'Come and have some acorn tea with us,' invited Sobersides.

'I'll get it,' said Katie-Lee, jumping up. And she ran off into the kitchen and was back in no time with another cup.

'Thanks, Pet,' said Felicity. 'And in return here's a little something from me. I just popped round to give Sobersides his Christmas present but I've been carrying yours around with me all week in case I bumped into you.'

She dug into one of the many huge pockets on her overall and brought out two little gifts, each prettily wrapped in silvery paper.

'Oooh, thank you so much,' Katie-Lee and Sobersides said together, and they laughed again. 'Can we open them now?'

'Of course, Chuckies,' replied Felicity. 'I do hope you like them.'

The little girl and the fat monster unwrapped their presents together. Inside the wrappings of each one was a little pebble with a small fir cone stuck to it.'

'They're weather forecasters, Sweeties,' explained Felicity. 'They will tell you if it is going to rain. On fine days the cones will be open, just like they are now, but when it's going to rain the cones will close up tight.'

'Oh, they're lovely,' cried Katie-Lee. 'I shall put mine on my bedroom window ledge and look at it every day.'

Sobersides too, was delighted with his present and gave Felicity hers in return. She unwrapped it and discovering the cake, insisted on sharing it with her friends there and then.

As Katie-Lee ate the last bite of her slice, the little round room began to fade and she found herself sitting on a log under the branches of the Monster tree. Lido pushed his way in and sniffed round, almost as if he was looking for crumbs.

Katie-Lee got up and they went together out onto the path. Mum was just coming up the hill.

'Look, mum,' Katie-Lee cried. 'Look what Felicity gave me for Christmas!' And holding out her hand she showed her mum the little cone.

'That's pretty, dear,' Mum said. 'What is it?'

Mum knew by now that Katie-Lee liked to pretend that the things she found under the Monster trees were not always what they seemed.

As they walked home Katie-Lee told her mum about her meeting with her monster friends and about how the weather forecaster worked.

Suddenly, as they were chatting, Mum noticed the missing ribbon.

'Oh dear, Katie-Lee, you've lost your ribbon again!' she exclaimed crossly.

No, I didn't lose it, Mum,' said the little girl. 'I gave it to Sobersides to wrap up his Christmas present to Felicity.'

'And just what did he give her?' Mum asked, smiling.

'It was a chestnut cake and I had some and it was lovely,' replied Katie-Lee.

As usual, Mum didn't believe a word of it.

But Katie-Lee did put the little cone on her window ledge and, surprise, surprise, when the weather was dry it opened right out but when it rained it shut up tight, just like Katie-Lee had told her mum it would.
