

Katie-Lee and the Monster Trees

Chapter 3 - March - Muddy Time

It was a mild March morning and Katie-Lee and Mum were getting ready to go out walking with Bella. The weather was gloomy but at least it wasn't raining as it had been for most of the past week. After a lot of rain, the paths in the woods always turned to thick slippery mud, making walking very hard work.

'We shall certainly need our boots today!' said Mum as she turned on the kitchen tap.

When it was muddy in the woods Mum always put a bucket of hot water and a sponge by the back door before they set off for their walk. When they got back, the water was just nice and warm for washing Bella's feet (and Katie-Lee's boots) before they went back into the house.

'I like the mud!' said Katie-Lee, as Mum pulled on her red boots. 'I shall jump in it and make footprints'.

Bella liked the mud too. She would always find the biggest puddle to splash around in, so she usually got very dirty.

Up in the woods everything was very peaceful. Not many people went walking when the weather was bad and there was nobody else about. Mum showed Kate the places where people had put sticks and twigs on the muddiest places to make a kind of bridge to walk over.

'They do that so they don't get their boots stuck,' Mum explained. 'When the mud is very sticky it can hold your boots tight and it is hard to pull them out again.'

The mud was full of leaves which had fallen from the trees last autumn and been trampled in. Now they were all brown and thin but you could still recognise some of the shapes.

Mum pointed out a beech leaf and an oak leaf. Katie-Lee looked at them.

'Yes, and there are some old acorns,' she said. 'The squirrels seem to have missed those.'

They walked along in silence for a little while, with Bella trotting beside them.

Suddenly Katie-Lee asked, 'Why do all the flowers look so sad?'

Mum looked where Katie-Lee was pointing and saw that she was quite right. The little white wood anemones had all their petals closed up and the flowers drooped gloomily.

Mum explained that some flowers only opened up when the sun shone. If it was dark or wet they closed up tightly to keep out the rain.

'There are some yellow flowers in the woods that do that too,' Mum said. They are called celandines. We must look out for some. They usually grow in shady places under the trees.'

'I wonder if there are any in here,' said Katie-Lee as she ducked under the branches of one of the Monster Trees.

Katie-Lee loved the Monster Trees. They were two huge yew trees with thick knobbly trunks and wide-spreading branches. Every time Katie-Lee and Mum went past them, they would peep inside to see if the monsters were at home. Mum knew there weren't really any monsters, but Katie didn't.

'Please take your boots off before you come in,' said a mournful voice, 'It's muddy enough in here already!'

Katie-Lee jumped and looked round. She was back in the little house of Sobersides the fat monster and there he was with a mop in his hand and a big bucket.

'Hello, Sobersides!' exclaimed Katie-Lee, 'It's lovely to see you again.' She obediently slipped off her boots and padded across the floor towards him in her socks.

'I would be glad to see you, too, if I didn't have all this work to do,' Sobersides replied.

'When it is muddy like this my floors get in such a mess. Every time I come back into the house from my walks, I tread mud all over the floor and have to get a mop to clean it all up. It really makes me so miserable when my house isn't clean.'

Sobersides did not wear boots or any other clothes because he was covered in green fur. He had large feet, which were hairy on top and leathery and tough underneath, just like Bella's. Now they were filthy, and all over the floor Katie-Lee could see his muddy footprints.

'You should do what my mum does,' she advised the monster. 'When we set off for a walk she leaves a bucket of hot water outside the back door with a big yellow sponge.'

'When we get back the water is cooler and Mum washes Bella's feet, and her tummy, with the sponge before we go in to the house. That way the floor does not get muddy at all.'

'What a wonderful idea!' exclaimed Sobersides. 'If I wash my feet after every walk I won't have to spend so long cleaning up. It's going to take me hours to get the floor clean today!'

One of the reasons it was taking so long, was that as soon as one place had been wiped clean, Sobersides stood on it, making it dirty again!

'Well let me help you this time,' said Katie-Lee and she kneeled down beside her friend. 'First of all we must wash your feet so that you don't spread the mud.'

He could see the sense in that when it was pointed out to him but he had not thought of it for himself. Sobersides was not a very clever monster!

He gave her another mop and they worked away together and got the job finished in no time at all.

'Now we deserve some elevenses,' said Sobersides getting out his biscuit tin.

'Have you found any celandines in there?'

It was Mum calling, and at the sound of her voice the magic house disappeared.

Mum looked under the branches and there was Katie-Lee standing without her boots on! The boots were stuck in a muddy puddle.

Mum was very cross. 'Why didn't you call me when your boots got stuck?' she complained. 'It was very silly of you to take them off like that. You have made your socks all muddy!'

'They didn't get stuck, Mum,' Katie-Lee protested. 'Sobersides asked me to take them off so that they didn't make a mess in his house. But I did tell him about what you do to clean Bella's feet ... and I helped him clean up,' she added.

Mum sighed. She found it hard to be angry when Katie-Lee invented such clever excuses.

'I wish you would help me do the housework sometimes!' she said, as Katie-Lee put her boots back on. 'I think you are much better at making a mess than cleaning it up!'

When they got home Bella's feet got their usual washing.

Mum dipped them into the bucket one at a time and when they were all done Katie-Lee stood in the bucket and splashed about. Mum slipped off her own boots as she went through the door and Katie-Lee sat on the step to take hers off.

Her socks were terribly muddy so she had to take them off too.

'It's straight in the washing with those!' said Mum sternly.
