

MELDY SAVES THE SQUIRRELS

(by Mr Sproule and Mrs Sproule)

Chapter 1 Meldy Gets Angry

One day Meldy was walking along their boundary when she saw Mr Bedinsede, their neighbour, pacing round his garden.

“Hello, Mr Bedinsede,” said Meldy.

“Why, hello young Meldy,” said Mr B.

Meldy wondered if he thought there was another, older Meldy lurking around but carried on walking. She bumped into the twins who were also looking over the fence.

One of them said, “What’s Mr Bedbugs up to?” They both laughed at this, then thought perhaps an explanation was needed so they gave her one.

“We saw him scratching!” said Kick.

“He always seems to be doing it!” said Popster.

Meldy carried on into the house. Now she wanted to scratch as well.

The next morning her father spoke up. “So they want to open a B&B next door, do they?”

Meldy perked up at this. “I saw Mr Bedinsede over the fence yesterday looking around.”

“Well yes, he wants to cut down all those trees to make a car park.”

Meldy nearly spat out her cereal. “What! They can’t! There’s Sammy and Simone and Sedwick and ...”

“Who?”

“The squirrels! They live in the trees!”

“You’ve named them?”

“Of course!”

“How can you tell them apart? They all look the same.”

“No, they don’t! I expect they think we all look the same but we don’t!”

“We do!” chorused the twins.

“Well, yes, I see what you mean,” said her father. He realised by now he wasn’t going to win this argument. He looked across at Meldy and could see she was tearful.

“Meldy, are you alright?”

“I hate him! I hate him! I hope he gets eaten by his bedbugs!” she cried and stormed out of the room.

Later she was walking along the same boundary. She was idly playing with a conker when she saw Mr Bedbugs. He looked like he was planning to evict the squirrels so without thinking, or maybe she was thinking, she threw the conker at him.

He turned and walked right into it. He would have been alright if he had stayed where he was.

“Hoy!” he shouted as Meldy raced back to the house and bounded up the stairs to her room. She felt good, really good. She smiled for the first time since she had heard about his plans.

Of course, there was a knock on the front door, muffled voices, then her father called out from the bottom of the stairs, “Meldy, can you come down here for a minute?” That was just like her dad, always polite and he never shouted.

She must have delayed a bit too long because the next time he was more insistent.

“Meldy, get down here now!”

She went downstairs and there was Mr Bedbugs looking, well, not friendly. Her dad didn’t look that friendly either.

“Meldy, Mr Bedinsede has just told me that you threw a conker at him.”

“No, I didn’t!” As she said this her shoulders began to hunch and her head began to sag.

“Meldy, I know you’re lying.”

“Well, he asked for it! I hate him! He’s a - a - a neanderthal!!!”

“Meldy, that is not nice! And we do not tell lies, do we.”

“Well, he wants to destroy the homes of the squirrels and - and - !”

“Well, it is Mr Bedinsede’s property.”

“How would he like it if - if a monster mutant squirrel came and destroyed his house! It could happen! I hope it does!”

“Meldy, you are not making sense.”

“I am! It could happen! They could get radioactive! Isn’t that it? Radioactive?”

Mr Bedinsede laughed and said, “Well, Meldy, you see I will be retiring soon and we need to earn money. You can see that, can’t you? A nice B&B will suit us very well and those trees, well, they are a bit past their best.”

“But they are wonderful!”

“We could plant some more at the back.”

Well, they parted on better terms but Meldy went back up the stairs in a reflective mood.

Mr Bedinsede walked down the drive but he couldn’t help smiling as he thought of huge squirrels stomping on little houses and people fleeing in terror. Maybe she was right, one day

Meldy sat in her room and thought. She had read that squirrels could find hundreds of hidden nut stores, maybe they would remember who had been

mean to them and when they grew massive they would seek revenge. She'd be alright. She'd always been nice to them.

An hour later, there was a knock on her door. In came the twins.

"Did you really throw a conker at old Bedbugs?"

"Yes!"

"Where did you hit him?"

"On the side of the head. It was really funny! He walked right into it and he really yelled."

They all laughed and then Popster said, "What do you want to do now?"

"I want it stopped!"

"Yes, but how? We don't want smelly Bed and Breakfast people looking at us over the fence. Anyway, who would stay there anyway? They should call it Bedbug Vista."

Kick howled with laughter then said, "We could put a notice on the gate saying 'hundreds of squirrels were evicted so you can be bitten by bedbugs.'"

There was silence, then they all looked at each other. "We need to start a campaign," said Kick.

"How?" asked Meldy.

"Well, let's think about it. They can't do it without permission and these things take weeks and weeks." On that note they parted.

Later, Meldy's dad came to see her. "What you did was wrong. You do see that, don't you Meldy?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"I really liked your idea of the Monster Mutant Squirrels. Your mother liked it, too."

"Well, he'd deserve it!"

“Maybe, but Meldy ...” He thought for a moment. “Meldy, you are right to stand up for what you believe in. Too many people roll over and take it on the chin. You are a good girl even though you slipped up today. Your mother and I want you to do what you think is best and we will back you all the way. Now, you must obey the law and you will need a plan of action.”

Meldy hugged her father and thanked him. She thought awhile and then told him what the twins had told her.

He smiled and said, “Well, actually we don’t want a B&B there either. I really like those trees and if you like the squirrels, we like them, too.”

Meldy was almost in tears again but she told him about the idea for the name of the B&B. “It should be Mr and Mrs Bedbug’s Bedbug Vista!”

Her dad laughed so much his eyes started to water. “Meldy, you’ll be the death of me,” he said before he left.

Meldy lay on the floor looking at the shadows. The birds sang and the squirrels did what squirrels do without realising that they might soon be evicted.

“Not if I can help it,” whispered Meldy.

Chapter 2 Meldy Wins the Day

Next day at school she thought to herself, ‘How can we blame other countries for cutting down their trees when we are cutting down ours? What about those poor monkeys in what’s left of the rainforest? What are they supposed to do?’

Meldy went to biology, her favourite subject, but was not her normal lively self. Ms Frogmore-Frinton noticed and at the end of the lesson asked Meldy what the problem was.

“Our neighbour wants to have a B&B and cut down lots of trees and where will the squirrels go? I threw a conker at him and my parents got annoyed and I was rude and now I don’t know what to do. It’s not fair!”

“I know how you feel. Everywhere you look the environment suffers while people make more and more money. I suppose you would like this to go away and everything to stay pretty much the same?”

“Yes I would.”

“Tell me about the trees and plants they want to destroy. What wildlife lives there? Could it be that this could be a way to stop the B&B? I have to take another lesson now but come back with some more information when you have it.”

That evening Meldy told the twins what the biology teacher had said and added the bit about the newts and the orchids.

“Right,” said Popster. “We need to get over there and have a good look.”

“I think they go to the cinema on Thursday evenings,” said Kick, “so we could go then.”

“We’ll need to be careful, though,” said Meldy. “We don’t want them to find out what we’re up to.”

“We should wear green clothes and rub stuff on our faces,” suggested Popster.

Meldy worried about this as she didn’t have anything green.

“Meldy, you can wear that old rug in the shed. You know, it’s draped over the mower!”

So they had a plan.

Next Thursday they crept out of the house. Luckily there was a football match on so their father was glued to the TV while their mother was reading a journal. They found the gap in the hedge and shone their torches as they criss-crossed through the undergrowth.

“What’s that?” whispered Meldy.

“It looks like an underground cellar,” said one of the twins.

“There are steps and a door down there. I dare you to go inside!” said the other.

“No fear! You do it!”

“It looks so creepy!”

No one was feeling brave enough so they moved on. No sign of ponds or flowers so they couldn't imagine any butterflies coming anywhere near the place. They got back into their house undetected and crept upstairs.

Although she had had fun creeping around in the neighbour's garden with her sisters, Meldy was sad as she thought about the trees being destroyed and all the cars and people turning up next door.

Next day she went back to see Ms Frogmore-Frinton and told her what they had seen.

"You mentioned an underground cellar or something?" she asked.

"Yes, there were steps down to it and a door. It looked really spooky so we didn't dare go in!"

"Now Meldy, think carefully. Have you seen any bats in your garden?"

Meldy thought for a bit. She didn't really like bats but was sure they were around somewhere.

"I think so," she said.

Ms Frogmore-Frinton sat back in her chair and had a satisfied look on her face. "Meldy, go back at dusk and see if there are any bats coming out of that doorway. This could be the ammunition we need to stop this development."

As Meldy left, she thought about what her teacher had said. She had said 'we' not 'you' - she was on their side! Meldy always knew she was alright and she would never call her "old Ms Frogspawn" like the twins sometimes did.

That evening she told them about the bats.

"We'll have to go back," said Popster.

"When is dusk anyway?" asked Kick.

"We had better tell Mum and Dad," said Meldy.

"No, we can manage this," said the twins. They all crept out again and got through the fence.

Unfortunately Mr B had decided to take a twilight walk and they ducked down as he approached. They lay there as he got nearer, then Meldy felt a sneeze coming on. Kick, who was nearest, realised what was happening and placed her hand over Meldy's face to stifle it. Mr B walked on, unaware that three pairs of eyes were watching close by.

"Lucky he doesn't have a dog," hissed Popster.

"We're not doing any harm," whispered Meldy.

"Yes, but remember, we don't want to let him know what we are doing, do we?" said Kick.

They were about to leave when Meldy looked at the cellar steps. She shone her torch down towards the door and there it was - a bat! It fluttered about a bit before flying off to look for bugs, as bats do.

"Creepy things!" said the twins.

"Yes, but they are here. We've found them!" cried Meldy. She was getting excited and a bit loud.

"Let's get out of here," said a twin.

"Quick, there's someone coming," said the other twin.

There was someone coming, but it turned out to be their father. "What are you doing over there? Come back here this minute!"

"We've found the bats! We've found the bats!" sang Meldy.

"Has she gone batty?" asked her father.

"Not quite yet, Dad. We think the bats are living in that cellar thing and that could stop the Bedbugs doing what they want," cried Kick.

"Oh, now I see," said their father. They walked back to the house where their mother was waiting. They told her what they had discovered.

"Bats! That does it. It's illegal to destroy a bat roost!" she cried.

Anyway, that started the ball rolling. Their biology teacher got in touch with a friend at the County Wildlife Trust and she informed the local council. An inspection was made and, yes, it was a bat roost. The development was stopped in its tracks.

On a Friday a few weeks later a TV crew waited to interview Meldy. They had seized on the story as more evidence that young people did care about the environment and they thought Meldy would perform well 'on camera'. The lights were set up in front of Mr Bedinsede's gate and everything was ready.

As her proud parents watched, the interviewer stepped forward.

"Meldy, tell us how you became involved in this campaign."

"Well I - er -er" stuttered Meldy.

Her parents looked worried as Meldy froze. Just as the crew were about to stop filming the twins stepped forward.

"Meldy, our sister, heard about our neighbours' plans and became alarmed," said Kick as she took hold of Meldy's hand.

"She was worried about the loss of trees and the damage to the environment," said Popster as she took hold of Meldy's other hand.

"She talked to our biology teacher, Ms Frogmore-Frinton and, acting on her advice, we searched for endangered species and found the bat roost. I would like to apologise to Mr and Mrs Bedinsede as we did, in fact, trespass on their property," said Kick.

At this point Meldy found her voice. "And we wanted to help the squirrels as well. Don't forget the squirrels! They have their dray in one of the trees!"

The interviewer smiled at Meldy and turned to the camera. "So Meldy, Kick and Popster have saved a small corner of our region for wildlife. Well done! And now, back to the studio."

The crew packed up their equipment and the family walked back to their house. Meldy was very quiet for a bit but then she started to cry.

"I was useless!" she wailed. "I couldn't say what I wanted to say!"

“You were not!” said the twins. “Without your effort, the bat roost would have gone before anyone realised how important it was. We’re so proud of you.”

Meldy was pleased that the twins had praised her. “You two were so brilliant!” she said, and she really meant it.

“Well done all of you,” said the parents.

A few days later Ms Frogmore-Frinton went into her laboratory and found a bunch of flowers on her desk. There was a note attached which said:

‘Thank you so much, Ms F.F., for your help. We stopped the development and the bats and the squirrels are safe. When I am a famous biologist I will tell everyone what a brilliant teacher you are. I will never ever ever forget you!
From Esmerelda Wagley.

P.S. Yes, I do want to be a biologist when I grow up.

P.P.S. You really are my best ever favourite teacher!’

She sat for awhile and looked again at the note. A lump appeared in her throat as she smiled to herself. That smile remained on her face for quite a while - maybe it’s still there.