

TREE FORT RESCUE

by Erin Ash Sullivan • illustrated by Hari Conner



Realistic Fiction

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THE DISCOVERY

It was a beautiful June morning. Luciana Herrera could see patches of bright blue sky as she looked up through the trees. The leaves crunched beneath her feet. She heard squirrels rustling overhead and the birds singing, too.

Luciana was on a hike with her two best friends, Monica Smith and Alex Kemp. The hike had been Alex's idea. "It's the first day of summer vacation," he had said. "I don't want to waste a minute of it, so let's get outside and have an adventure."

Luciana's house was full of people—Luciana and her siblings, her parents, and grandparents who were visiting. Getting outside for some fun seemed like a great idea.

So Luciana, Monica, and Alex headed into the woods behind Luciana's house. They had thought about going to the beach nearby, but it was going to be a hot day. The woods were shady and cool.

Monica had been whistling throughout their walk, practicing birdcalls and trying to coax the birds in the forest to call back. She stopped for a moment. "You know what I've always wanted to do?" she said enthusiastically. "Build a tree fort. We should try to build one this summer!"

“That’s a great idea,” Luciana agreed. “The trick, of course, is to find the perfect tree.” She looked around and saw a big tree. “That one might work,” she said.

As the friends walked closer to the tree, they noticed a structure covered with some vines. A tree fort was already there. “What are the chances?!” Luciana said in disbelief.

Luciana ran ahead to get a better look at the tree fort. She stood staring at the unexpected find. It was completely silent in the woods except for the rustle of the leaves in the wind. Monica and Alex waited.

“Come here, you guys!” she shouted excitedly. “This tree fort is spectacular!”



Monica and Alex joined Luciana. They pulled away a few of the vines to expose more of the tree fort. First, they saw wood boards nailed to the tree trunk, forming a ladder. Then their eyes traveled up the trunk to the top of the tree to examine the rest of the fort. Despite the vines, they could see the sides and the floor of the fort.



“Cool,” said Alex. “It looks old, but I bet we could clean it up easily. We just have to clear away the vines. Monica, do you know what kind of tree this is?”

Monica loved science. She had a large collection of nature guides and science books, and she also had a bunch of handy science apps on her phone. “I think it’s a black oak,” she responded, pulling her phone out of her pocket to double-check. “And you can tell it’s an old one. Look how big the trunk is!”

Luciana ran her hand along the trunk, feeling the grooves of the bark. “Hey, check this out,” she said. Alex and Monica came closer. They saw a set of initials carved into one of the boards: A.H.

“That must be the person who built the tree fort,” Luciana guessed. “I wonder who it is.”

“I wonder if A.H. would mind if we cleaned up the fort,” Alex added.

“I wonder if A.H. would mind if we went back to your house for lunch,” Monica said. “I’m starving!”

The three friends headed out of the woods toward Luciana’s house. The idea of fixing up the tree fort filled them with excitement.

At Luciana's house, the friends couldn't wait to tell Luciana's mom about their big find. As usual, Monica and Alex interrupted each other as they told the story.

"We'll just clean it up, and it will be ready to go!" Monica said.

"It's going to be awesome!" Alex agreed.

"Not so fast," Luciana said, sounding **glum**. "We probably won't be able to do anything with the tree fort," she said. "We need to get permission from the owner, and we have no idea who A.H. is or how to find him."

"Actually," Luciana's mom said, "A.H. is a 'her.'"

"How do you know?" Monica asked.

"Because ... it's me," Luciana's mom said. "I'm A.H.! Andrea Hernandez. Hernandez was my last name before I was married. And I, well, Grandpa, built that tree fort when I was just your age. Luciana, don't you remember my stories about the fort?"



Luciana, Alex, and Monica were **stunned**. They could not believe it. A.H. was Luciana's mom!

"I remember now! I thought that fort had fallen down years ago," Luciana said, looking baffled.

"Well, what are we waiting for?" Monica said. "Let's go back to the fort and get started!"

"I wish I could," Alex said, "but can we start tomorrow? I have to go back home and help my dad get our boat ready for a big fishing trip." He sighed. "It's fun taking the boat out, but it's so much work to keep it shipshape. My dad has us cleaning, sanding, and painting the boat every weekend. I even have to polish all the metal. It's so time-consuming!"



BAD NEWS

Early the next day, Luciana, Monica, and Alex headed back to the woods. It was a warm, sunny morning. The salty ocean wind whistled through the trees. Alex carried a backpack of supplies for the fort, while Monica carried some gardening tools. Luciana was in charge of the snacks.

Once they got to the tree fort, they started working right away. Little by little, they cut and pulled vines off the tree fort. It was hard work, but they were **motivated** and eager to get the fort cleaned up.

Finally, all the vines were cleared away. Alex tossed his backpack of supplies up over the tree fort's railing. The backpack landed with a plunk, and the tree fort's floorboards rattled.

"The boards sound loose," Alex said. "We better be careful up there."





“Since it was my mom’s fort, can I go first?” Luciana asked. The two friends nodded. Luciana set one foot on the first board of the ladder and grabbed the top board. Suddenly, the first board broke away from the trunk, and Luciana stumbled to the ground.

“Are you okay?” Monica asked, rushing over.

“Yeah, I’m fine.” Luciana responded as she looked up at the fort. For the first time, she realized what bad shape the fort was in. The railings were **warped** and coming away from the other pieces of wood, and the floorboards were loose.

Uh-oh, Luciana thought. Maybe cleaning isn’t all the tree fort needs.