

# CHAPTER

## TWO

### *Welcome to the Trees*

*M*aria scrambled from the boat and bounded towards the tree house, she paused momentarily and looked back at her mum. “Are we going to live here?” She queried.

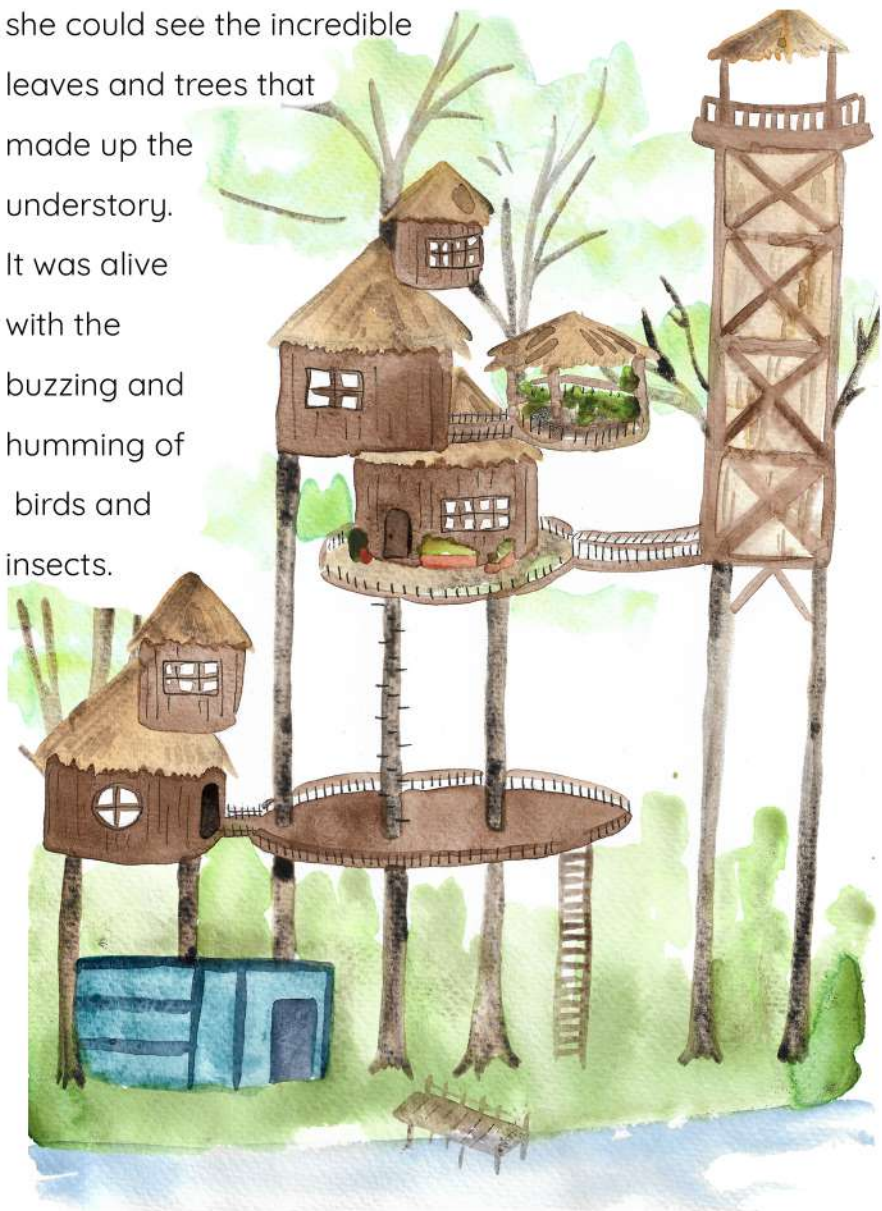
“The ground floor contains the lab and research facilities.” She pointed towards a small raised tree house to their left, “The south tower is where my assistant lives, then there is the high look out tower over there.” Again gesturing to the tallest part of the structure, “This however is for us” pointed into the trees ahead of them.

The incredible structure, set high above the forest floor, had at least three floors stretching high into the canopy and a rope bridge joining it to the lookout tower. Maria gasped.

“Why don’t you go explore, while I pop into the lab. Make sure you don’t leave the tree house though.”

Not needing to be told twice, Maria headed straight for the rope ladder that led up into the trees, which finished on a platform about 8

metres off the ground; she could barely see the floor and shrubs below. All around her she could see the incredible leaves and trees that made up the understory. It was alive with the buzzing and humming of birds and insects.



Looking around she could see that the wooden platform she stood on was suspended between three rather straight tree trunks, large and sturdy but bare of leaves, they reached far above her head. Boxes of supplies were stored here, as well as a winch system for lifting them further up the structure, looking around there was a walkway which led over to the south tree house. From what she could see it looked like a cosy two story cabin built over the lab area.

One of the large trunks in the centre of the platform had a spiral staircase winding around it heading up to the main tree house. Ascending further up the trees as she climbed, Maria could begin to hear the screeches of parrots and the distant calls of the native monkeys.

Finally she reached a second platform, this one was much smaller than the first, it was