

# Lost in the Jungle

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The air conditioner was running, but Aida opened the car window anyway. Cold air rushed out, and a hot muggy breeze hit her in the face. She sighed happily. They were almost there. Soon talkative name-calling school-mates would be forgotten, and gentle jungle sounds would calm her thoughts. Her family and Iliyani's family were going to spend the weekend up at Lake Kenyir.

The two families parked their cars at the resort, and the girls ran off to explore. Their parents quickly called them back and gave them their small tent to erect in the camping area near the edge of the jungle. Their parents would sleep in the luxury of the resort, but the girls had chosen to camp out and enjoy nature.

Soon, with the tent standing straight and neat, the girls could hardly wait for bed-time. After an early dinner with their parents in the restaurant, they eagerly hurried out to their tent with their pockets full of fruit and biscuits for a feast later. Sitting on a blanket outside the tent, they sprayed themselves with mosquito repellent and watched the sun sinking in the sky.

"I would love to see what is just over the top of that hill!" said Iliyani, quietly. "There is probably a great view of the lake, and with the sun setting soon it could make a great photo."

Aida looked at her friend. "Are you serious? Do you want to go for a short hike before it gets dark?"

There was a clear path leading up the hill, so the girls didn't think about it for very long, and they quickly climbed the hill. Aida laughed happily when she saw the view. She pulled out her camera and took some shots while Iliyani posed this way and that. Without really thinking about it, they started walking down the other side of the hill. There was so much to see, and they were both having so much fun.

They took lots of photos of each other and the scenery. Aida wasn't usually really interested in flowers, but she saw an amazing big bright bloom and wanted to take a picture of it with Iliyani's face close by. Her little camera seemed to be unable to focus properly, and suddenly they both noticed how dark it was.

"Ooooh! Look how dark it is already!" said Aida. "Quickly, let's get back to the tent."

"Yeah!" said Iliyani, turning around and around, suddenly not entirely sure which way to walk. "We need to go back up that hill there, right?"

They were only halfway up the hill when they heard the first thunderclap. Iliyani squealed in surprise. They hurried on up the hill. At the top of the hill they stopped in surprise – they had expected to be looking down on the campsite and their comfortable little tent. They stood and turned this way and that as the first heavy drops of rain fell. It was now really dark with the storm clouds blocking out nearly all the remaining light from the sky.

Looking back down the path they had just climbed, they could just see another path climbing another hill.

“Quick! Let’s try that one!” said Aida, rushing back down the hill with Iliyani scrambling behind her.

The path up the other hill was already muddy and slippery, and they each slipped several times before they reached the top. Despite the darkness and rain, they really expected to be looking down over the resort and their welcome little tent. Darkness. All they could see was a path heading into the jungle.

Iliyani started to cry. She wasn’t normally a tearful girl, but this was all just too much. Aida pulled her hand phone out of her pocket and backed up against the trunk of a big tree, bending over her phone to try to protect it from the rain. The little glowing light of the phone screen was very comforting, and Iliyani came and stood close to help keep the rain off. Aida pressed her mother’s phone number and held the phone close to her ear. Iliyani watched her face hopefully. Aida closed her eyes, clicked her phone shut, and put it back in her pocket. “No reception!” she explained and sank to the ground at the base of the big tree.

The thunder rumbled, and the rain pounded all around them. Aida shivered even though she wasn’t really cold. At least cold wasn’t something they had to worry about here. But there might be animals, like tigers and monkeys. The girls listened hard to the rumbling of the thunder, trying not to imagine they could hear a tiger growl.

Huddled together against the tree trunk, Aida held Iliyani tight and tried to be calm and brave. “Why aren’t our parents looking for us?” asked Iliyani.

“They probably think we are asleep in our tent. If they just look inside quickly, our beds and bags probably look like we are lying there.”

The storm only lasted an hour or so, and rumbled off into the distance. By then the two girls had fallen asleep in their wet clothes, leaning against each other and the strength of the big tree.

Aida was dreaming about school; she was sitting in the classroom and the teacher was asking her why her clothes were so wet. She jerked awake and could not think where she was. Feeling Iliyani’s head on her shoulder, she started to remember and started to cry very quietly. A crackling noise in the jungle nearby made her gasp and sit very still, staring into the darkness. She was glad that Iliyani hadn’t woken up because she might give one of her screams and attract unwanted attention.

Something was crashing about in the undergrowth nearby, but she couldn’t see anything and it didn’t come any closer or seem interested in the girls – after all, any wild animal would surely be able to smell their presence. She realised what it must be, just as a large monitor lizard emerged from the bushes right in front of them and hurried away in startled surprise.

Aida must have fallen asleep again, because when she finally opened her eyes again and looked around the sky was just beginning to lighten. She shifted her back against the tree, and Iliyani woke up too. The girls stood up and tried to straighten their clothes and stretch their stiff sore arms and legs.

Looking towards the first hill they had climbed the night before, they could definitely see a faint glow of light beyond it. Without even talking about it, they trudged down the hill and back up towards the light. Coming over the top, they could scarcely believe their eyes – there was the resort, and their

tiny tent nestled at the bottom of the hill. They scrambled down the path, unzipped the tent, and gratefully sank into the softness of their sleeping bags.

“Come on, girls! Wake up, sleepyheads! Time to have some breakfast ...” Aida’s mother had unzipped the tent and was staring hard at them. “Are you wet? Did the rain come right into your tent ... ?” she suddenly asked.

“Oh, Mum!” said Aida, flinging her arms around her mother’s neck. “I love you! I’m so glad to see you! Where did you go to last night?”

“Where did I go? What are you talking about?” asked her mother. “Oh, you mean in the thunderstorm when there was a power outage ... there were no lights in the resort. Were you afraid?”

“Can we have breakfast now?” asked Iliyani.

“Mum, after we have breakfast, then we’ll tell you all about what happened last night. But first, I want to change out of these wet, muddy clothes.”