



The Treehouse

Randi Triant

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The Treehouse is earnest, sweet, and charming as it works through the struggles of its shining lead character.

Randi Triant's insightful character-focused novel *The Treehouse* finds an intertwined cast dealing with relationships, love, and trauma.

The story places particular focus on Camilla, a professor suffering through the distress of a recently dissolved relationship. Half of the story is told in flashbacks; the rest is set across two weeks in the present, during which Camilla secretly builds a treehouse for her son, Nico, whom she isn't allowed to see anymore.

Flashbacks reveal the reason for their separation: Camilla's ex-girlfriend, Allison, who is also Nico's mother, is incredibly manipulative and controlling. Not only did Allison cause significant emotional anguish for Camilla, she also forbade her from seeing Nico ever again—unless Camilla agrees to return to their harmful relationship.

While Allison and Nico are off on a vacation, Camilla builds a once-promised treehouse for her son. Expecting the construction to be simple and quick, Camilla actually winds up in a troublesome scenario. A budding love triangle blossoms and a scandalous allegation comes to light as she rushes to complete the treehouse before her malevolent ex returns.

Frequently witty, clever prose incorporates everything from snappy one-liners to elegant metaphors. A lot of the book is a meditation on the concept of relationships, and it makes some stunning and insightful points: "Objects transformed into something else when couples came together, and something else again when they broke up."

Dialogue, though, is stilted and unrealistic. Too many unnecessary details bog down the story. The plot, while intriguing, is slow to deliver. Gorgeous moments are undercut by more awkward lines, and the overall effect is uneven.

Some characters are better cultivated than others. Camilla is a well-rounded and believable lead: a woman once caught in a degrading relationship who is just beginning to patch herself back together. It's easy to root for her and her situation. Other characters fall flat, including Allison, who reads like a caricature of an abusive partner and who hardly has personal characteristics beyond her cruelty.

Camilla, with her connections to others, remains the star of the book. Her story is a heartfelt one—one of strength, love, and perseverance despite unforgiving circumstances. Camilla shines as an example of a flawed person persisting in a chaotic world. When the book focuses on her, it is wholly engaging. The fact that her sexual orientation is never treated as other is also a benefit; her problems are everyman problems, not specific to those in the lesbian community. This is a truly refreshing element of the book.

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MYA ALEXICE (March 30, 2018)

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