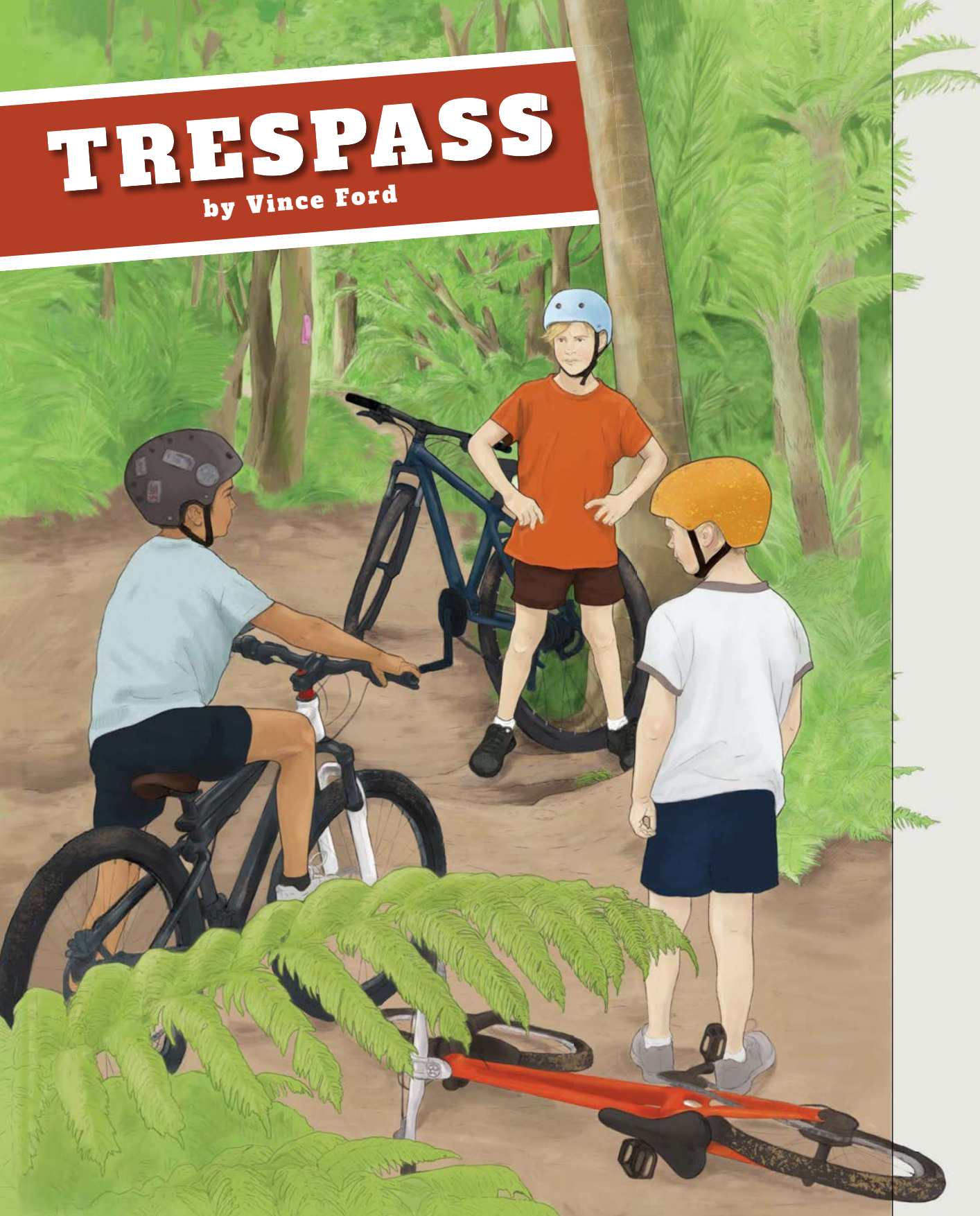


TRESPASS

by Vince Ford



Raj had come over after school. He and Jordie were talking about what they might do. "I'm going for a ride at the reserve," said Jess, helping himself to a second cold sausage. "You guys should come."

Jordie frowned. He didn't want to hang out with his little brother. Jess had his own friends. "There's not enough bikes, bonehead," he said.

"You could ride Dad's new bike," said Jess, "and Raj could take yours."

"Sounds like fun," said Raj.

Jordie hadn't ridden the new bike yet. Grudgingly, he agreed.



"The track joins an old tramway," Jess said, pointing to a map on the sign. "They used it in the olden days for bringing out timber."

"Cool." Raj leant in closer to take a proper look.

"Forget that," said Jordie. "Come on!" He pulled a wheel-stand along the gravel path. "Race you to the bridge."

"You've got a head start!" Raj called, standing on his pedals.

"Not fair," agreed Jess.

They raced for a bit, but Jordie pulled away, so Raj and Jess slowed to have a look around. Huge trunks forced their way through clinging webs of supplejack. Tree ferns spread like green umbrellas.

"It's epic in here," said Raj.

"I know, right," agreed Jess.

Jordie was waiting in a little dip. "I thought we would have lost you by now," he said, looking at Jess.

"Where's the bridge?" Raj asked.

"Had a better idea," Jordie said. He nodded towards a second route, marked by pink tape. It plunged off into the trees. "That trapline will take us to a waterhole."

Raj frowned. "I've never heard of a waterhole here."

"It's on private land. The locals have used it for years. It's fine."

"If you say so," said Raj.

"I do," Jordie said.

They hid their bikes and followed the pink tape, weaving and ducking for ten minutes before they came to a fence. Jordie got there first. He stopped, scowling. Beside the track, there was a sign: "No Trespassers".

Raj shrugged. "That's OK. We can just go back."

"No way!" Jordie crossed his arms. "There's a farm track further on – it drops down to the same waterhole. I bet there's no sign there."

"We'd still be trespassing," said Jess.

Jordie snorted. "We'll just say we didn't know. Let's go."



There wasn't a second sign. Jordie put his hand on the fence post and leapt over. The other two stayed put.

"We're just going to a waterhole," said Jordie.

"I dunno ...," said Jess.

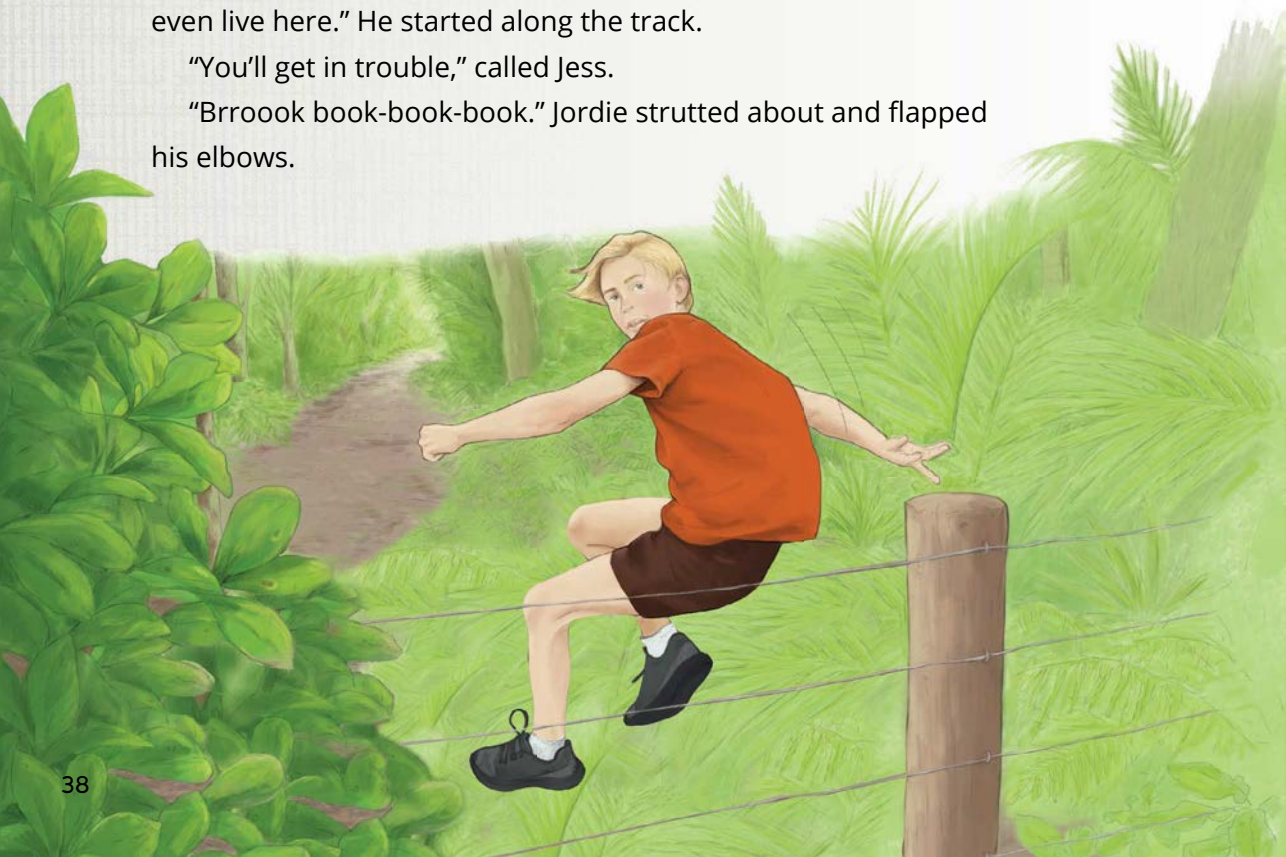
"Well, you can stay here if you want," Jordie sneered. "C'mon, Raj."

"We shouldn't be on private property."

"It'll be fine!" said Jordie. "Chill out. The guy who owns this place doesn't even live here." He started along the track.

"You'll get in trouble," called Jess.

"Brrook book-book-book." Jordie strutted about and flapped his elbows.



Jess glanced at Raj. "I'll go if you go."

"It'll only take five minutes," Jordie coaxed. Then he started walking – not looking back.

"Arrr," Raj cried. "I give up." He climbed the fence. Jess hesitated before slipping through the wires after him.

Jordie laughed when he saw them. They raced a few hundred metres, then slowed to a shambling jog as they began a sharp descent. The bush was similar here – only now, there were signs of people. A black plastic pipe snaked beside the track. Up ahead, beehives squatted in a small clearing.

"Not far," said Jordie. He grinned, eyes bright ... but Raj had spotted something. Barely 20 metres away, a four-wheeler bike was parked on the track. Beside the bike, a man was bent over the water pipe – a big man, with close-cropped hair and thick stubble. He wore denim shorts and cut-off gumboots. A pair of big pliers dangled from one hand.

The three boys halted as the man straightened. He looked at them, deep lines wrinkling his tanned brow. "You're trespassing," he said.

The boys glanced nervously at each other. "We ... um ... we didn't see the sign," said Jordie, thrusting his hands awkwardly in his pockets.

"Bull. You need to get off my property – now."

Jordie's face reddened. He half-shrugged and began to turn away.

Then Raj spoke. He raised his hands, palms out. "We're really sorry. We were going to the waterhole."

"You saw the sign, didn't you?" It was more a statement than a question.



Raj glanced at Jordie, but his friend was no help. Instead, Jess stepped forward. "Yeah, we did," he admitted.

The man nodded slowly. "And you decided to push on anyway?"

"It was a bad idea," said Raj.

"It was," the man agreed. "I'm sure you kids don't mean any harm, but that hole's dangerous after rain. Someone's going to get themselves in trouble. And with health and safety rules the way they are, I'll end up copping it."

Raj nodded. "We didn't mean to cause trouble. We'll go."

"Have you fixed the pipe?" asked Jess. The older boys froze.

The man frowned. "Why?"

"We could help. The water pump's down there, right?" Jess nodded along the track. "We can turn it on. Save you going back and forth."

The man snorted. "You've got a cheek."

Jess shrugged, a tiny gleam in his eye. "It hasn't rained for a while – I think I can stay out of trouble."

The man started to turn away, then changed his mind and swung back. He seemed to be holding back a smile. "Go on then. Pump shed's by the river."

Jess jogged down the track. After a moment, Jordie and Raj followed.

"I'll wait a bit after the pump's on," Jess called. "Yell out if the pipe's still leaking, and I'll turn it off."

The man grinned. "At least one of you has some brains."

Jess made straight for the little green pump shed. Raj and Jordie went to check out the river. In the middle, water flowed over boulders, forming a large pool. The waterhole. The boys stood for a while, watching dragonflies hover. Behind them, the water pump started its low hum.

"That was a bit freaky," Raj said eventually, glancing at Jordie.

"Yeah. I shouldn't have lied to that guy. I thought we were the ones who were going to cop it ..."

"He was all right," said Raj, "and we still got to see the waterhole."

Jordie smiled. "True."

"Your brother's pretty sharp."

"I guess," said Jordie. "It's a shame we can't come back here," he added.



Jordie picked up a stone and skimmed it across the pool. "Did you see that?" he said. "It skipped four times!"

"If we got that guy's number," said Raj, "we could ring him sometime – get permission to come to the waterhole ..."

"Maybe," said Jordie.

"Although Jess probably has it already," said Raj with a laugh. "Come on – let's go see what's happening."

Jordie scowled, then squatted down to splash the heat from his face. After a moment, he turned to join the others.

illustrations by Leilani Isara

Trespass

by Vince Ford

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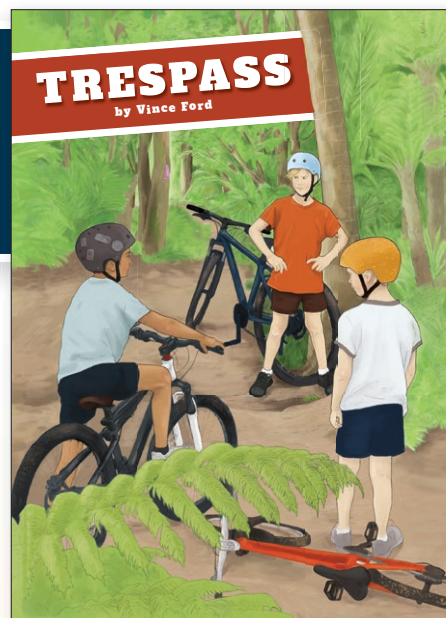
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