



TRULY TAN JINXED!

JEN
STORER

Illustrated by
CLAIRE ROBERTSON

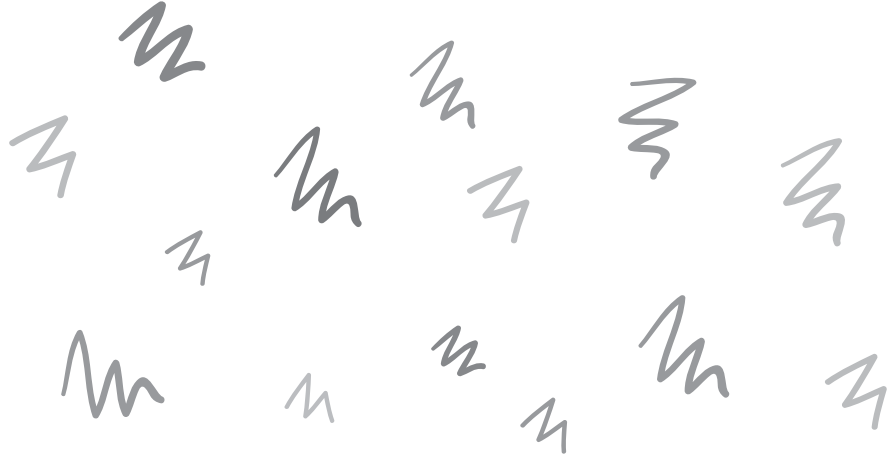


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TRULY
TAN



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TRULY TAN JINXED!



BY JEN STORER

Illustrated by
CLAIRE ROBERTSON



ABC
Books



For Arabella H, Secret Spy in disguise - JS
For lovely Phil - CR



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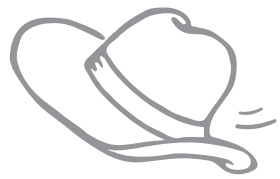
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EPIISODE ONE:

TRAMS, DAMS AND A MAGIC HAT

Here is a *living in the country observation*. Some people have sheep in their back paddock. Others have cows ... or camels. Scary people have emus. But not us. We do not have sheep or cows or camels.

We have a tram. A real, live, broken-down tram. Dad bought it. He did not ask for our opinion.



Dad put his tram on the far bank of our dam and hung a sign on the

door. It says, **ALL STICKYBEAKS BANNED**. This means none of us kids are allowed in – not me, and definitely not the lollipops, my sisters, Emerald, Amber and Rose. Personally, I am not happy to be banned from Dad's tram. He should know the rules about sharing. I am also highly suspicious. What is he doing in there? Hammering and sawing and carting mysterious boxes and packages to and fro. He even

hung old white sheets at the windows. And believe me, you cannot see through those sheets ...

Rose and I are floating on the dam. So is my dog, Awesome. Awesome is stretched out on his very own canvas li-lo. It has faded green and blue stripes.



Rose and I have a tractor tube. She is hanging over one side and I am hanging over the other side. Rose is wearing her black bathers with the big silver raven on the front. I do not know where she got them, but I wish I had bathers like that. Our three-legged cat, E, is spying on us through the long grass.

We are just floating about, when suddenly Rose says, 'So Tan, are you keeping an eye on that tram?'

‘Naturally,’ I say. ‘I’m a Secret Spy. Nothing gets past me ...’

‘Have you noticed the graffiti on it?’ says Rose.

‘Of course,’ I say, because I have noticed the graffiti. It says, **FOLLOW ME THROUGH THE SHADOW.** ‘It’s just old rubbish, right?’

‘Tan,’ says Rose, wiping her wet hair from her eyes, ‘use your brain. What kind of a tram has “Follow me through the Shadow” painted on it?’

Rose is being **dark and mysterious.** It is helpful to have a sister who is dark and mysterious and knows all about graffiti and shadows ... and hidden meanings.

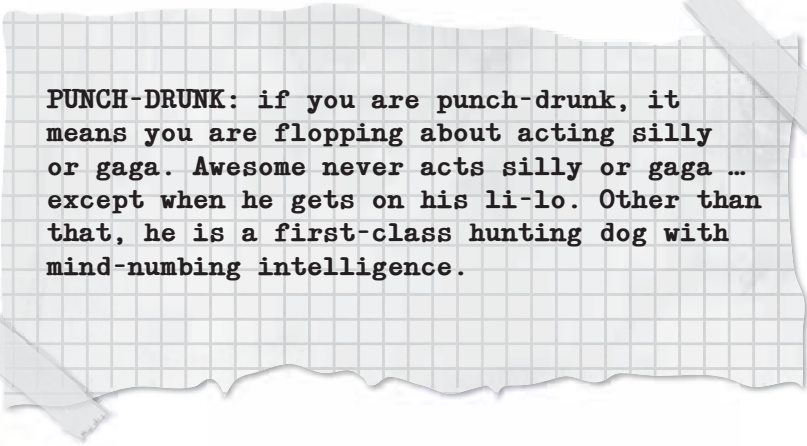
I kick around in the water until my side of the tube is facing the tram. I take another look at it – a long, thoughtful look. It should be glinting in the sun. But it’s not. If you ask me, it looks very ... guilty.

‘That tram is definitely unusual,’ I say. ‘It’s had a bad effect on Dad, too.’

Rose flicks at a waterbug. ‘I think we’re being watched,’ she says softly.

‘Yes!’ I gasp, and then something under the water touches my leg.

I scream and Rose screams and I don't know if Rose is screaming because I am screaming or because she knows something I don't know and that makes me scream louder. We kick and splash and squeal until we are way over the other side of the dam, as far away as possible from the creepy old tram. Awesome is still floating on the other side. He raises his head and opens one eye. Then his head flops down and he goes back to sleep. Awesome is always punch-drunk when he gets on his li-lo.



PUNCH-DRUNK: if you are punch-drunk, it means you are flopping about acting silly or gaga. Awesome never acts silly or gaga ... except when he gets on his li-lo. Other than that, he is a first-class hunting dog with mind-numbing intelligence.

‘I wish you wouldn't scream like that,’ says Rose as we heave the tractor tube up onto the shore. ‘It's ridiculous.’

‘Sorry,’ I grunt – the tractor tube is heavy. ‘It's that rotten old tram's fault.’

Rose opens the Esky and pulls out a can of sarsaparilla (which I believe is highly poisonous). I get a can of Passiona. We also have flaky pastry cheesy bacon turnovers and homemade chocolate marshmallow snowballs. Mum has been experimenting for her new cookbook. We drop belly-down on our towels. We can feel the mud baking to the soles of our feet.

‘Do you actually know where Dad bought that tram?’ says Rose.

‘Um, Tram City?’ I say as I crack open my Passiona and poke my twirly straw in it.

‘**Buh-bow.** Wrong,’ says Rose. ‘He bought it from a deceased estate.’

Rose and I look across the dam to where the tram is ... crouching.

‘Rose,’ I whisper, ‘can you remind me. What’s a *deceased estate*?’

‘When someone **dies**, or becomes *deceased*,’ says Rose, ‘there is often a big sale and they sell off all the dead person’s things. Their house, their furniture, their suitcases, their photos, their cups and plates and knives and forks.’

‘Everything?’ I say.

‘Even teaspoons and eggbeaters and pegs and sunglasses,’ says Rose.

‘Yuk!’ I cry. ‘What kind of person would wear a dead man’s sunglasses?’

Rose rolls on her back. ‘The same kind of person who would buy a dead man’s tram,’ she says.

Has Dad been wearing weird sunglasses lately? I try to remember the last time I saw him. No. He just looked like a normal vet. He was wearing overalls and gumboots. Someone’s cow had hurt her leg and Dad was going to give her a needle.

‘Look,’ says Rose, propping herself up on her elbows, ‘Dad might not be completely bonkers, but I don’t think he’s thought this through. I bet that tram holds all sorts of secrets. Maybe even its very own **ghosts.**’

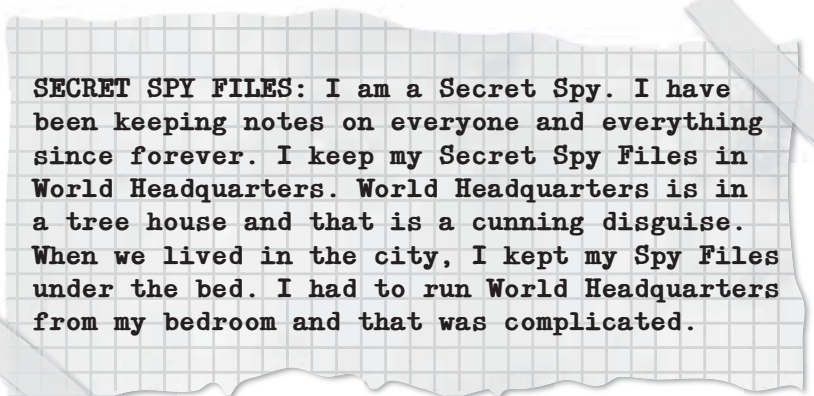
‘Really?’ I breathe, giving the tram a sideways glance.

‘Of course,’ says Rose, lying back down. ‘It’s logical.’

And it is logical and it is also alarming. From now on I am going to



keep a close eye on that tram. I will keep a close eye on Dad, too. In fact, I think it's time I opened a Secret Spy File.



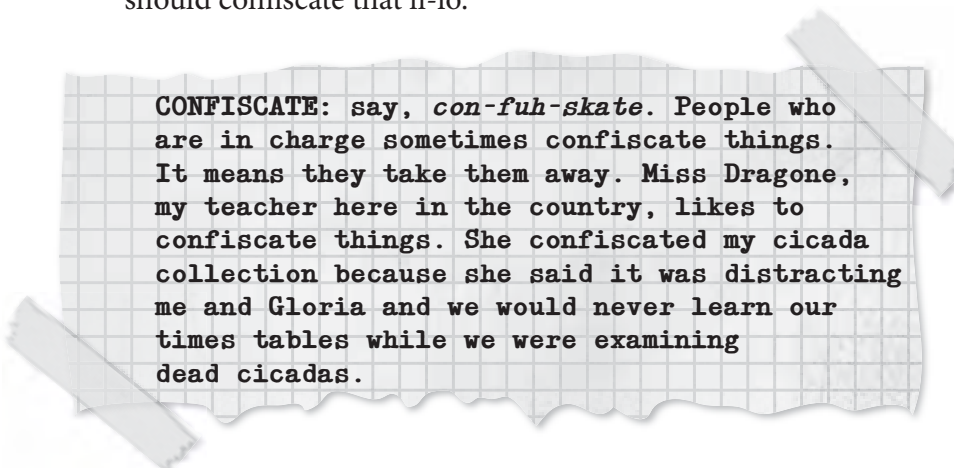
SECRET SPY FILES: I am a Secret Spy. I have been keeping notes on everyone and everything since forever. I keep my Secret Spy Files in World Headquarters. World Headquarters is in a tree house and that is a cunning disguise. When we lived in the city, I kept my Spy Files under the bed. I had to run World Headquarters from my bedroom and that was complicated.



After we have eaten our flaky pastry cheesy bacon turnovers and our chocolate marshmallow snowballs and drunk our sarsaparilla and Passiona, we decide that we are hungry. We pull on our T-shirts, loop our towels around our necks and slip on our thongs. Then we throw our zinc cream and empty cans and Rose's book of horoscopes and my **Casey Kelvin, Girl Detective** book into the empty Esky. We are all set for the trek back home across the paddocks, but Awesome is still way over the other side.

‘Awesome!’ I yell. ‘Come on. It’s past lunchtime!’

I know he can hear me, but he just lies there on his li-lo like some Hollywood movie-star dog. Sometimes I think I should confiscate that li-lo.



CONFISCATE: say, *con-fuh-skate*. People who are in charge sometimes confiscate things. It means they take them away. Miss Dragone, my teacher here in the country, likes to confiscate things. She confiscated my cicada collection because she said it was distracting me and Gloria and we would never learn our times tables while we were examining dead cicadas.

By now Awesome has floated close to the far shore. I shade my eyes and check his position. He is floating in the shadow of the tram.

‘Awesome!’ I yell. ‘Get here, **NOW!**’

No reaction.

‘Stupid mutt,’ mumbles Rose. ‘Go on, Tan. Go drag him out.’

I wonder if I should just leave Awesome on his own. That would teach him a lesson. But I have been doing an official

**Safe Swimming and Water Responsibility
Development Programme** and I know for a fact that

it would be reckless to leave an inexperienced, gaga dog floating on a li-lo in the middle of nowhere. I have no choice. I will have to go and get him.

I will have to walk through the shadow of the tram.

‘Keep an eye on the tram, Rose,’ I say. ‘If you see anything suspicious, warn me.’

‘Naturally,’ says Rose. She sits on the Esky and crosses her legs. ‘Think of this as homebase.’

I hand her my thongs and set off, picking my way around the gooey shoreline. I could swim across. But I am entering the shadow of a dead man’s tram. I feel safer with my bare feet firmly on the ground.

Our dam is much bigger than a five-star luxury aquatic swimming pool, so it takes a while to get around the other side.

‘Awesome,’ I say as I draw nearer, ‘you are breaking all the faithful dog rules.’

Awesome twitches.

I glance at the tram. It is dead still. Dead quiet. **Dead creepy.**

I sneak toward Awesome. I am getting closer and closer to the gloomy tram.

I take one last step and suddenly I am in it – The Shadow. It is cold and grey, as if a ghostly tram driver has slipped his hand across the sun.

‘Awesome,’ I hiss, ‘come here *now*.’ But Awesome is creepily still. Oh, **no!** What if he’s spellbound?

I plough into the water and lunge at the li-lo. I grab it and yank it toward me. Awesome leaps up. I struggle to hold the li-lo steady, but it flips and throws Awesome overboard. There is lots of splashing and kicking and barking while I grope around, spitting and spluttering and wrestling with Awesome. Just as I grab his collar there is a terrible, ear-splitting scream.

I look up. Rose is standing on the Esky, waving her hands. ‘Tan,’ she yells, ‘get out of there!’

I boot the li-lo out of the way, drag Awesome to my side and take off toward homebase.

Suddenly the dam feels as big as the ocean.



When I finally reach Rose, I am puffing and panting and trying not to look back.

Rose jumps off the Esky.

‘I saw something,’ she says as I slump over and try to catch my breath. ‘As soon as you entered the shadow of the tram, one of the curtains moved!’

‘Really?’ I say, straightening up. ‘Are you sure?’

‘Of course I’m sure,’ says Rose. She shoves my thongs at me. ‘I knew there was something dark and menacing about that tram. I knew it was **treacherous.**’

I hop about, poking my thongs at my feet. It is difficult to put thongs on when your feet are caked with dam goo and your fingers are shaking from a hair-raising encounter with a treacherous tram.

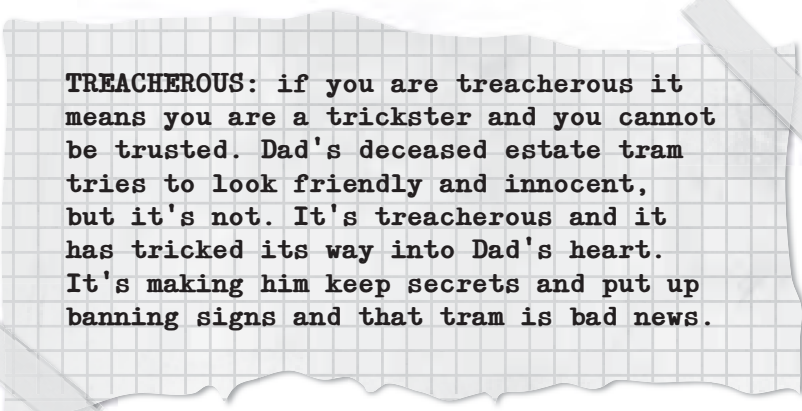
‘I’m going,’ says Rose, grabbing the Esky and shoving Awesome aside. ‘I’ve got some thinking to do.’

I hobble after Rose. I am growling at Awesome, too. And struggling with my thongs. And flicking at my towel. As I climb the high, clay bank, I stop and glance back across the water. The tram is silent. Its curtains are still. In fact, they don’t look like they have moved at all. But Rose has had many dealings with things **dark and menacing.**

And if Rose is worried, I am doubly, triply, *exceptionally* worried.

I stare at the tram for the longest second. Who or what is in it? Who or what is watching us? Goosebumps prickle my neck. I wrap my towel around myself and stumble down the hill.

Sometimes you go for an innocent swim and the next minute you are in the biggest mystery.



TREACHEROUS: if you are treacherous it means you are a trickster and you cannot be trusted. Dad's deceased estate tram tries to look friendly and innocent, but it's not. It's treacherous and it has tricked its way into Dad's heart. It's making him keep secrets and put up banning signs and that tram is bad news.

