The Bottom Step

The treehouse was still in the oak, but the bottom step was missing. Vera's father had put it high on purpose so the dogs couldn't get up. When she was seven, all she had to do was grab a branch.

Vera's son jumped twice without reaching. She was about to lift him when she saw him head for the shed. He came back dragging an apple crate. He set it by the trunk and climbed up on his own.

On a shelf inside, Vera found a book her father had read aloud to her. She remembered how he changed one character's name every time. She'd always thought he did it to make her laugh. When she opened the book, she saw two pencil marks beside that name, like the ones she used to make when a word gave her trouble.

Her son asked her to start there. Vera read the name the way her father had said it the first time.