

## Snow

Luke runs out the front door, enjoying the sound that his boots make as they crunch into the snow beneath his feet.

'I told you to wait for me,' his mother says angrily when she catches up with him. 'Can't you just do what you're told for once?'

He doesn't say anything for a moment. She's been in a terrible mood since last night. He watched her drink two glasses of wine with her lunch and whenever she does that he knows he should stay out of her way. Instead he concentrates on the snow and reaches down when he sees a small black stone peeping out from the smooth layer beneath him. He wipes it clean with his mittens – it's almost a perfect sphere – and puts it in his pocket.

'What time is George coming over at tonight?' he asks. 'I want to show him my -'

'George won't be coming over tonight,' she says quickly.

He frowns and considers this. 'But he said on Sunday that he'd -'

'George says a lot of things.'

George is his mother's friend. He and Luke play computer games together until she asks him who he came over to see, her or her son, and then he puts the console down, ruffles the boy's hair and says 'sorry, kiddo, duty calls.'

'Well can I phone him when I get home and ask him to come over?'

'No,' she snaps. 'And stop asking about him, alright? We won't be seeing him again.'

This doesn't make any sense to him as George has been a regular fixture for months now and he likes it when he comes over. He's the only one who can stop his mother from getting angry with him. He waits a long time before speaking again.

'But he said I could teach him Auto-Crash Bandits,' he says.

'What?' she asks, looking at him as if she doesn't even know who he is. 'Who did?'

'George,' he says in frustration. 'I told you. He promised he would. What did you do to -  
?'

'Listen to me,' she says, stopping fast in the snow now, then leaning down and gripping him hard by either arm, so tightly that he lets out a cry of pain. 'I don't want to hear another word from you about George, alright? He's not coming back. You drove him away. You always drive them away. It's what you do. So it's just you and me again now. Happy?'

She lets go of him then and continues to walk, faster now, as if she wants to lose him in the drift. He waits for a moment before crouching down to scoop as much snow in his hands as he can. He rolls the ice together and places the black stone at its centre, packing the snowball tightly so it's hard and solid. When it's finished he runs forward to catch up with her, narrows his eyes, takes aim and throws.

He throws it as hard as he can.