

Charlie's Dad, by Josie Laird

The morning I found out Charlie was not my son, I ran him over.

I was taking him to play his first rugby game.

'Oh, I'm so not looking forward to freezing on the sidelines, watching a bunch of little kids act like seagulls around the ball,' I said to Ange, as I pulled on layers of warm clothes.

'And it's not like he's even mine.'

She knew immediately what I was talking about. 'I wasn't sure,' she whispered. 'He could have been.'

Yes, it was possible. I knew that.

I started the car to melt frost from its windscreen. Charlie was nowhere in sight. I thumped the steering wheel with my fist. A small patch of ice slid from the window and I could see him in front of me.

'Charlie, what are you doing?' I shouted. He lifted his dark floppy hair up and looked at me seriously. 'There's a snail on the driveway,' he said. 'I need to move it so it doesn't get ran over.'

He came and stood by the car door. 'Get in, or you'll get left behind,' I told him. To underscore my message, I inched the car forward.

He started screaming. 'My foot,' he cried, pointing down.

Trying not to panic, I jammed into reverse and slowly backed up a short distance. His howls increased.

'Owwhh! You done it again.'

At the medical centre, I carried Charlie into the waiting room and approached reception.

'Ah, I'm here with Charlie,' I said. 'I've, ah, run over his foot. By mistake.'

'Okay,' the receptionist said without blinking. 'That will be an ACC form. And you are?'

'His dad,' I told her. I looked at the sweet, stoic little boy in my arms. My eyes started to water. 'Yes,' I told her, sure. 'His Dad.'