Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

Finding Audrey

Written by

Sophie Kinsella

Published by

Doubleday Children's Books an imprint of Random House Children's Publishers UK

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

OMG, Mum's gone insane.

Not normal Mum-insane. Serious insane.

Normal Mum-insane: Mum says, 'Let's all do this great gluten-free diet I read about in the *Daily Mail*!' Mum buys three loaves of gluten-free bread. It's so disgusting our mouths curl up. The family goes on strike and Mum hides her sandwich in the flowerbed and next week we're not gluten free any more.

That's normal Mum-insane. But this is serious insane.

She's standing at her bedroom window which overlooks Rosewood Close, where we live. No, *standing* sounds too normal. Mum does not look normal. She's teetering, leaning over the edge, a wild look in her eye. And she's holding my brother Frank's computer. It's balanced precariously on the window ledge. Any minute, it'll crash down to the ground. That's £700 worth of computer.

Does she realize this? £700. She's always telling us *we* don't know the value of money. She's always saying stuff like, 'Do you have any idea how hard it is to earn ten pounds?' and, 'You wouldn't waste that electricity if you'd had to pay for it.'

Well, how about earning £700 and then deliberately smashing it on the ground?

Below us, on the front lawn, Frank is scampering about in his *Big Bang Theory* T-shirt, clutching his head and gibbering with panic.

'Mum.' His voice has gone all high-pitched with terror. 'Mum, that's my *computer*.'

'I know it's your computer!' Mum cries hysterically. 'Don't you think I know that?'

'Mum, please, can we talk about this?'

'I've tried talking!' Mum lashes back. 'I've tried cajoling, arguing, pleading, reasoning, bribing . . . I've tried everything! EVERYTHING, Frank!'

'But I need my computer!'

'*You do not need your computer*!' Mum yells, so furiously that I flinch.

'Mummy is going to *throw the computer*!' says Felix, running onto the grass and looking up in disbelieving joy. Felix is our little brother. He's four. He greets most life events with disbelieving joy. A lorry in the street! Ketchup! An extra-long chip! Mum throwing a computer out of the window is just another one on the list of daily miracles.

'Yes, and then the computer will break,' says Frank fiercely. 'And you won't be able to play *Star Wars* ever again, ever.'

Felix's face crumples in dismay and Mum flinches with fresh anger.

'Frank!' she yells. 'Do not upset your brother!'

Now our neighbours across the close, the McDuggans, have come out to watch. Their twelve-year-old son, Ollie, actually yells, 'Noooo!' when he sees what Mum's about to do.

'Mrs Turner!' He hurries across the street to our lawn and gazes up pleadingly, along with Frank.

Ollie sometimes plays *Land of Conquerors* online with Frank if Frank's in a kind mood and doesn't have anyone else to play with. Now Ollie looks even more freaked out than Frank.

'Please don't break the computer, Mrs Turner,' he says, trembling. 'It has all Frank's backed-up game commentaries on it. They're so funny.' He turns to Frank. 'They're really funny.'

'Thanks,' mutters Frank.

'Your mum's really like . . .' Ollie blinks nervously. 'She's like Goddess Warrior Enhanced Level Seven.'

'I'm what?' demands Mum.

'It's a *compliment*,' snaps Frank, rolling his eyes. 'Which you'd know if you played. Level Eight,' he corrects Ollie.

'Right,' Ollie hastily agrees. 'Eight.'

'You can't even communicate in English!' Mum flips. 'Real life is not a series of levels!'

'Mum, please,' Frank chimes in. 'I'll do anything. I'll stack the dishwasher. I'll phone Grandma every night. I'll . . .' He casts about wildly. 'I'll read to deaf people.'

Read to deaf people? Can he actually hear what he's saying?

'Deaf people?' Mum explodes. '*Deaf people*? I don't need you to read to deaf people! You're the bloody deaf one around here! You never hear anything I say – you always have those wretched earphones in—'

'Anne!'

I turn to see Dad joining the fray, and a couple of neighbours are stepping out of their front doors. This is officially a Neighbourhood Incident.

'Anne!' Dad calls again.

'Let me do this, Chris,' says Mum warningly, and I can see

Dad gulp. My dad is tall and handsome in a car advert way, and he *looks* like the boss, but inside, he isn't really an alpha male.

No, that sounds bad. He's alpha in a lot of ways, I suppose. Only Mum is *even more alpha*. She's strong and bossy and pretty and bossy.

I said bossy twice, didn't I?

Well. Draw your own conclusions from that.

'I know you're angry, sweetheart,' Dad's saying soothingly. 'But isn't this a little extreme?'

'Extreme? *He's* extreme! He's addicted, Chris!'

'I'm not addicted!' Frank yells.

'I'm just saying—'

'What?' Mum finally turns her head to look at Dad properly. 'What are you saying?'

'If you drop it there, you'll damage the car.' Dad winces. 'Maybe shift to the left a little?'

'I don't care about the car! This is tough love!' She tilts the computer more precariously on the window ledge and we all gasp, including the watching neighbours.

'*Love*?' Frank is shouting up at Mum. 'If you loved me you wouldn't break my computer!'

'Well, if you loved me, Frank, you wouldn't get up at two a.m. behind my back, to play online with people in Korea!'

'You got up at two a.m.?' says Ollie to Frank, wide-eyed.

'Practising.' Frank shrugs. 'I was *practising*,' he repeats to Mum with emphasis. 'I have a tournament coming up! You've always said I should have a goal in life! Well, I have!'

'Playing *Land of Conquerors* is not a goal! Oh God, oh God . . .' She bangs her head on the computer. 'Where did I go wrong?'

'Oh, Audrey,' says Ollie suddenly, spotting me. 'Hi, how are you?'

I shrink back from my bedroom window in fright. My window is tucked away on a corner and no one was meant to notice me. Least of all Ollie, who I'm pretty sure has a tiny crush on me, even though he's two years younger and barely reaches up to my chest.

'Look, it's the celebrity!' quips Ollie's dad, Rob. He's been calling me 'the celebrity' for the last four weeks, even though Mum and Dad have separately been over to ask him to stop. He thinks it's funny and that my parents have no sense of humour. (I've often noticed that people equate 'having a sense of humour' with 'being an insensitive moron'.)

This time, though, I don't think Mum or Dad have even heard Rob's oh-so-witty joke. Mum is still moaning, 'Where did I go wroooong?' and Dad is peering at her anxiously.

'You didn't go wrong!' he calls up. 'Nothing's wrong! Darling, come down and have a drink. Put the computer down . . . for now,' he adds hastily at her expression. 'You can throw it out of the window later.'

Mum doesn't move an inch. The computer is rocking still more precariously on the windowsill and Dad flinches. 'Sweetheart, I'm just thinking about the car . . . We've only just paid it off . . .' He moves towards the car and holds out his hands, as though to shield it from plummeting hardware.

'Get a blanket!' says Ollie, springing into life. 'Save the computer! We need a blanket. We'll form a circle . . .'

Mum doesn't even seem to hear him. 'I breastfed you!' she shrieks at Frank. 'I read you *Winnie-the-Pooh*! All I wanted was a well-rounded son who would be interested in books and art and the outdoors and museums and maybe a competitive sport—'

'*LOC* is a competitive sport!' yells Frank. 'You don't know anything about it! It's a serious thing! You know, the prize pot in the international *LOC* competition in Toronto this year is six million dollars!'

'So you keep telling us!' Mum erupts. 'So, what, you're going to win that, are you? Make your fortune?'

'Maybe.' He gives her a dark look. 'If I get enough *practice*.'

'Frank, get real!' Her voice echoes around the close, shrill and almost scary. 'You're *not* entering the international *LOC* competition, you're *not* going to win the bloody six-million-dollar prize pot, and you're *not* going to make your living from gaming! IT'S NOT GOING TO HAPPEN!'

A month earlier

It all begins with the *Daily Mail*. Quite a lot of things in our house begin with the *Daily Mail*.

Mum starts twitching in that way she does. We've had supper and cleared away and she's been reading the paper with a glass of wine – 'Me time', she calls it – and she's paused at an article. I can see the headline over her shoulder:

THE EIGHT SIGNS YOUR CHILD IS ADDICTED TO COMPUTER GAMES.

'Oh my God,' I hear her murmur. 'Oh my *God*.' Her finger is moving down the list and she's breathing fast. As I squint over, I catch a sub-heading:

7. Irritability and moodiness.

Ha. Ha ha.

That's my hollow laugh, in case you didn't get that.

I mean, seriously, *moodiness*? Like, James Dean was a moody

teenager in *Rebel Without a Cause* (I have the poster – best film poster ever, best movie ever, sexiest movie star ever – why, why, why did he have to die?). So James Dean must therefore have been addicted to video games? Oh, wait.

Exactly.

But there's no point saying any of this to my mum, because it's logical and my mum doesn't believe in logic, she believes in horoscopes and green tea. Oh, and of course the *Daily Mail*.

THE EIGHT SIGNS MY MUM IS ADDICTED TO THE *DAILY MAIL*:

1. She reads it every day.
2. She believes everything it says.
3. If you try to take it out of her grasp, she pulls it back sharply and says 'Leave it!' like you're trying to kidnap her precious young.
4. When it runs a scare story about Vitamin D she makes us all take our shirts off and 'sunbathe'. (Freeze-bathe more like.)
5. When it runs a scare story about melanoma she makes us all put on sunscreen.
6. When it runs a story about 'The face cream that really DOES work', she orders it that moment. Like, she gets out her iPad then and there.
7. If she can't get it on holiday, she gets major withdrawal symptoms. I mean, talk about irritability and moodiness.
8. She once tried to give it up for Lent. She lasted half a morning.

Anyway. There's nothing I can do about my mum's tragic dependency except hope that she doesn't do *too* much damage to her life. (She's already done major damage to our living room, after reading an 'Interiors' piece – 'Why not handpaint all your furniture?')

So then Frank ambles into the kitchen, wearing his black I MOD, THEREFORE I AM T-shirt, his earphones in and his phone in his hand. Mum lowers the *Daily Mail* and stares at him as though the scales have fallen from her eyes.

(I've never understood that. Scales?

Anyway. Whatever.)

'Frank,' she says. 'How many hours have you played your computer games this week?'

'Define computer games,' Frank says, without looking up from his phone.

'What?' Mum looks at me uncertainly, and I shrug. 'You know. Computer games. How many hours? FRANK!' she yells as he makes no move to respond. 'How many hours? Take those things out of your ears!'

'What?' says Frank, taking his earphones out. He blinks at her as though he didn't hear the question. 'Is this important?'

'Yes, this is important!' Mum spits. 'I want you to tell me how many hours you're spending per week playing computer games. Right now. Add it up.'

'I can't,' says Frank calmly.

'You can't? What do you mean, you *can't*?'

'I don't know what you're referring to,' says Frank, with elaborate patience. 'Do you mean literally computer games? Or do you mean all screen games, including Xbox and PlayStation? Do you include games on my phone? Define your terms.'

Frank is such a moron. Couldn't he *see* Mum was in one of her pre-rant build-ups?

'I mean anything that warps your mind!' says Mum, brandishing the *Daily Mail*. 'Do you realize the dangers of these games? Do you realize your brain isn't developing properly? Your BRAIN, Frank! Your most precious organ.'

Frank gives a dirty snigger, which I can't help giggling at. Frank is actually pretty funny.

'I'll ignore that,' says Mum stonily. 'It only goes to prove what I was saying.'

'No it doesn't,' says Frank, and opens the fridge. He takes out a carton of chocolate milk and drains it, straight from the carton, which is gross.

'Don't do that!' I say furiously.

'There's another carton. Relax.'

'I'm putting a limit on your playing, young man.' Mum bats the *Daily Mail* for emphasis. 'I've just about had enough of this.'

Young man. That means she's going to drag Dad into it. Any time she starts using *Young man* or *Young woman*, sure enough, the next day there's some ghastly family meeting, where Dad tries to back up everything Mum says, even though he can't follow half of it.

Anyway, not my problem.

◆ ◆ ◆