

Sam has always had things going on in his head that no one else understands. And now his mum is dead, it's worse than ever.

With nothing but his skateboard and a few belongings in a garbage bag, Sam goes to live with the strangers his mum cut ties with seven years ago: Aunty Lorraine and his cousins Shane and Minty.

Despite the suspicion and hostility facing him in his new home, Sam reverts to his childhood habit of following Minty around. Soon he is surfing with Minty to cut through the static fuzz in his head, but the secrets of the past refuse to stay hidden and not even the ocean offers relief for long. What happened seven years ago that caused such a rift? Why won't anyone tell him who his father is? How can Sam feel any sense of belonging when he doesn't know who he is?

And if things weren't complicated enough, there's also this girl ...

'Zorn's writing is one of a kind. *One Would Think The Deep* is an extraordinary new work from a young adult genre star.'

University of Queensland Small Change

It seems that Claire Zorn can do no literary wrong ... *One Would Think The Deep* is deeply affecting and will be one of this year's must-read YA novels.'

Children's Books Daily

'*One Would Think The Deep* has a potent emotional heart, great characters and beautiful writing. Built around gorgeous evocations of surfing and the sea, it is driven by wonderfully evoked characters and an empathetic exploration of masculinity.'

State Library of New South Wales

'Zorn's greatest skill is her ability to create genuine, original characters, who feel fully developed and real ... It's an astonishing tour-de-force ... As a novel, it's brash, it's real, and it's alive. As an exploration of grief, it's harrowing and heart-breaking.'

Children's Books Daily

'Beautifully evoked against a 90s surfing background and culture, this exploration of a young male grappling with both loss and romantic attraction is heart-wrenching in its poignancy. Zorn creates a truly authentic teen voice in a work which is brilliantly realised.'

Queensland Literary Awards Judge's Comments

'... a slow burn, contemplative and emotionally nuanced, it is set apart by its almost reflective quality and temperate pace which provides plenty of space between the words on the page to consider how the scars of the past can shape the present, the importance of your heritage in determining who you are as a person as well as what it means to choose who you want to become and what paths you will take in life.'

allthewrittenworlds, amazon.com

'... a heavy story of secrets and the damage they can cause. Sam's pain is palpable, his issues enormous, and his future seemingly untenable.'

CBCA Reading Time

'... a story that surges with emotion, confrontation, and ultimately, hope. Each character is drawn with knife-edge sharpness. Each speaks with a clarity that never dulls. Every sense is heightened by the wrenching complexity of the lives of this very inconsequential, simple group of ordinary individuals. And it's not just Sam who is damaged and vulnerable. Each is noticeably flawed or at least weighed down by their own limitations to a point of exquisite confusion. I loved them all.'

Boomerang Books, Australia

Claire Zorn ... is an expert at navigating the complex relationships between teens and the adults that surround them ... *One Would Think The Deep* is perfectly placed in 1997, but the teenage voice resonates with contemporary authenticity.'

Books+Publishing

Winner, The Children's Book Council of Australia
Book of the Year: Older Readers 2017

Shortlisted for the 2017 Australian Prime Minister's
Literary Award for Young Adult Fiction

Shortlisted for the 2016 Queensland Literary Award –
Young Adult Literature.

Shortlisted for The 2017 Gold Inky Awards

ONE
WOULD
THINK
THE
DEEP

Also by Claire Zorn

The Protected
The Sky So Heavy

CLAIRE ZORN

ONE
WOULD
THINK
THE
DEEP

RAVEN



One Would Think the Deep
by Claire Zorn

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For my fellas: Nathan, Elijah and Ayrton.

*May those who curse days
curse that day,
Those who are ready
to rouse Leviathan ...
Behind him he leaves a glistening wake;
One would think the deep
Had white hair.*

— Job 3:8, 41:32

SUMMER 1997

1

Sam rang from the hospital. A social worker called Amanda gave him a dollar for the phone in the shop that sold teddy bears and balloons with declarations of love. Sam plugged his ear with a finger to drown out the chaos in the corridor behind him. He didn't know the voice of the guy who answered. He didn't know any of them anymore.

'Yeah?' said the voice. It took Sam a moment to respond.

'Hey. I'm looking for Lorraine Booner.'

'Yeah?'

'I'm her nephew, Sam Hudson. Rachel's son.'

'Yeah?'

'Yeah.'

'What d'you want?'

'I, um, I need to speak to Aunty Lorraine. Something ... something's happened.'

There was a pause while Sam was evaluated.

'Hang on ... MUM. PHONE.'

Sam waited. He watched his credit drop to eighty cents. Seventy.

'Yeah?' A new voice: female, scratched with nicotine.

'Hi Auntie Lorraine. It's Sam ... Rachel's Sam.'

'Oh.' Pause. Sixty cents. 'What's wrong? What does she want?'

'Nothing. She ...'

'Yeah?'

'She's ...' Sam tried to control the waver in his voice, only making it worse. 'She's dead.'

'What?'

Sam took a breath and repeated the words.

'What happened?'

'Brain aneurysm.'

'I didn't know she was sick. How long she had that?'

'You don't ... She wasn't sick. It was sudden, like a stroke.'

'God. When'd that happen?'

'Um.' Sam counted the days back in his head. Time had become fluid, no longer neatly partitioned into day and night.

'Two nights ago. Wednesday night.' He watched the credit drop to fifty cents.

'New Year's?'

'Yeah. She, um, she collapsed at home. Then she was in a coma ... but then ... I should have called you as soon as it happened ... I didn't ... I wasn't thinking straight.' He had to stop talking or he was going to lose it. He couldn't lose it. Not on his own.

Lorraine didn't say anything for some time. Sam waited. Forty cents. He heard her clear her throat. 'Right ... Thanks for letting us know.' Her voice was weak. 'Will you let me know 'bout the funeral?'

'Yeah. Hey, um. I'm not eighteen yet and the social worker wants to know if there's family I can stay with. She ... there's circumstances. Sometimes they let you live on your own when you're seventeen, but ... I'm not ... She thinks DOCS will want me to go into like a guardianship or something. She asked about family ... I didn't know what to do ...'

'Oh. What about Enid?'

'Enid?'

'Your nan.'

Sam paused. 'I don't know where she is.'

'Christ alive.' Lorraine seemed to be muttering to herself and Sam wasn't sure if he was expected to respond. He didn't. 'I thought your mum would have had contact with her.'

'No. I don't think so. She never said anything. There's no number in Mum's book. I found yours. The phone's running out of money.'

'You on your own?'

'Yeah.'

There was silence and Sam thought the call had been cut. Then: 'I'll come get you.'

'You don't have to come now. The social worker said they can get me care or a hotel room or something till we sort something out.'

'No. No bloody way. I'll come get you. Hang on. SHANE, THERE PETROL IN THE VAN?'

A muffled reply and then, 'Where are you?'

'The hospital. RPA, Royal Prince Alfred.'

'I'll come up. Give us a couple of hours. Where can I meet you?'

'Um. The cafe? Level two.'

'What d'you look like?'

'Um. I'm tall. Longish hair, it's dark. Haven't had a haircut in a while.' Sam didn't know why he was telling her this.

'Um, I'm wearing jeans. Black T-shirt.'

The phone went dead.

Sam felt the hurt shuddering through his chest. He wasn't expecting to feel it talking to Lorraine. He thought he was over all that. He took the phone from his ear and looked at it in his hand, his knuckles white with the grip – as if it was an object he didn't recognise. He could picture Lorraine, standing on the front porch of Nana and Pop's house, next to his mother, shandy in her hand, cigarette between her fingers. Eventually he set the receiver back on its cradle and rode the elevator up to intensive care where Amanda was waiting for him with her paperwork and her grim smile.

She'd been trying to teach him to slow dance. After three glasses of red wine she turned the music up. Jeff Buckley. It was his CD, but she loved it.

'Come on. Up,' she said.

'Mum. No.'

'Yeah, come on. It's my job to teach you important stuff and this is important.'

'No, it's not.'

'On your feet, Samuel. I'm not asking you, I'm telling you.'

He pushed his bowl away and stood up. He was a head taller than her.

'You can't be a gentleman if you don't know how to dance,' she said.

'No one actually dances anymore.'

'I'm teachin' you to dance.' His mum always dropped her 'g's when she'd had a couple of wines. She said it was the bogan in her coming out. She held out her hands and he took them. She had soft, small hands, delicate-looking like the rest of her. She was pale and slight, dark deep-set eyes like his own. She put his left hand on her hip, held his right at her shoulder.

'I can dance.'

'You bloody can't. You can stand with your arms folded or jump up and down on the spot like you're on a bloody pogo stick. Your generation is useless, Samuel. This is the basic foundation step: hold and sway. You need to keep loose. Drop your shoulders. Try not to look like you're in pain. Seriously, you're lovely. Lovely boys should know how to dance.'

Sam held her hand while she swayed from side to side.

'I'm not lovely.'

She looked him in the eye. 'Yes, you are.'

The fact that she still believed it made him feel sick.

'Now spin!' She pulled away, raised his left hand above her head and turned. Then her body dropped like a stone. He still had her hand. He caught her before she hit the floor and part of him thought she was kidding around but most of him knew she wasn't.

‘Mum? Mum!’

She was a nurse. The first person you’d ask for help in a situation like this. Sam lowered himself, and her with him, to the floor. He knelt down, her torso on his lap, askew. Her head lolled back and to one side. Sam cradled her skull in his hand; her thick dark hair was still damp from her shower.

‘Mum?’

Jeff Buckley’s falsetto danced and Sam tried to move his mother onto the carpet so he could get to the cordless phone. He wouldn’t have to use it. She would come around and then he’d have to explain to the ambulance guys that it was a false alarm. She would be embarrassed. ‘I’m fine,’ she would say. ‘Just got a bit lightheaded.’

He waited. The song finished.

She didn’t wake up.

Amanda gave him a bunch of forms and a business card.

‘I’ll tell all this to your aunt, but you need to get her to fill these in and then make an appointment with the Department of Community Services. I’ll come down and wait with you till she gets here.’

‘No. That’s okay. You can go, I’ll be cool.’

‘I have to see that you’re in someone’s care before I can leave you,’ she explained.

‘She’s gonna be a couple of hours.’

‘It’s fine. I can wait.’

*

Amanda bought him a sausage roll. They sat in the plastic chairs of Vibes Cafe. It was an ambitious name for a hospital cafeteria; the vibe was illness, fluorescent lights and disinfectant. Amanda had a novel in her bag. Sam figured she was used to the whole waiting-with-bereaved-relatives part of her job.

‘If you want to talk, I’m right here,’ she said. She gestured to his Discman on the table. ‘I don’t mind if you want to listen to music or whatever.’

He plugged his earphones into his ears and pressed play. Kurt Cobain screamed and it felt right. His whole being thrummed with fatigue and disbelief, and something else that was harder to define, some unseen restlessness, the urge to do something to change the situation, alter it, fix it.

Sam watched a woman in a tunic behind the bain-marie as she restocked the tomato sauce sachets. He felt the same way about her as he felt about all the hospital staff and Amanda. To them, this was another mundane, unremarkable day. Maybe they stitched up someone’s head, or they filled out forms and took a fifteen-minute break every four hours. They restocked the tomato sauce. They mopped the floor. They were nice to the kid whose mum had just died. But to them he was no different to anyone else there: patient, friend or relative. He was a segment in their day. Amanda and the nurses talked gently to him because that was their job. They would finish their shift and go home, decide what to have for dinner, turn on the TV, feed the cat. Sam couldn’t imagine ever thinking about dinner again. He had never felt envy the way he felt envy for these people who worked at the hospital.

*

Lorraine swiped the yellow parking fine off the windshield and dropped it in the gutter. The van was painted with a faded blue logo on the side: Booner Electrical. The letters, cursive and grandiose, curled at the edges. Inside, it smelled of cigarette smoke, pine-scented air freshener and a hostile, just-vacuumed smell. Sam hadn't expected her to be so familiar after seven years. She was completely different to his mother but you could find the thread of resemblance if you knew what to look for. Her dark hair was bleached yellow, but the roots were black and silver. It was a thick, undefined mass of waves and frizz, cut short to frame her face, long at the back. A lady-mullet. Mullet. She had the same small frame and high cheekbones as his mother, but she hadn't aged well.

'You wanna go home and get some stuff?' she asked. She kept glancing at him as she drove, like she was worried he might try to jump out of the moving vehicle.

'Alright.'

'Well, you better tell us where it is. It's been that long, I got no idea where I am.'

He guided her through the back of Camperdown, along the back streets of Newtown and into Enmore. Lorraine parked in a no-standing zone and followed him through the narrow door beside the 7-Eleven, up the manky stairs to the apartment above. It had been a feat getting his mum down those stairs on the gurney. The paramedic guys had jostled and twisted, tilted and grimaced. It was pointless in the end. Sam could have just tucked her into bed and let her die there.

Inside the flat, the bowls of dry spaghetti were still on the table, the glasses of wine half empty and stained.

'You haven't been here since?' asked Lorraine.

'No. Didn't want to leave her.'

Lorraine set her handbag down on the sideboard and started to clear the plates from the table. The cordless phone was lying on the floor, near the dining table, where he had sat with her and called the ambulance. 'Grab what you want. I won't be comin' back up here for a bit. Too far. So get everything you'll need. Where'd she keep all her documents and that? Birth certificates and bank stuff?'

'Bottom drawer in her room.'

Sam didn't want to go in there. He took a couple of garbage bags from the kitchen and went into his room. He stuffed them with random items of clothing. He wasn't thinking, just grabbing whatever. Everything felt other-worldly and off kilter. He had no template for this. Was he packing for a short stay or was he moving house? For a while he stood with a sweater in his hands, staring at it, trying to remember what the decision was that he should be making about it. It was too hard so he stuffed it into the bag. He grabbed his tape deck. He also emptied two shoeboxes and filled them with CDs. Back in the lounge he popped the lid of the boom box, placed the Jeff Buckley in its case and added it to a shoebox. His eye was caught by the bookshelf, the bright spine of the book his mum had bought him when he was eight, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Meteorology*. It was authoritative and reassuring in its cloth-bound hardcover, with little ribbons to mark various pages, so big he struggled to carry it when he was young. He would lie on the lounge room floor on his stomach and pore through the pages of an evening while his mum played records.

He looked at weather charts and the grainy photographs of towns flattened by cyclones. As a kid, from the cosy comfort of his lounge room, he was fascinated by the drama of natural disasters. The novelty of catastrophe.

Sam opened the little cabinet under the television. It was full of VHS tapes: shows taped off the TV. They were stacked on two flat boxes. One was a Monopoly box, the other a big biscuit tin. His mum had said that some parents taught their kids chess, but she thought Monopoly was more useful. The box, tattered and held together with yellowing sticky tape, was like a black star, a wormhole pulling him back in time. He used to play with the little silver pieces before he was old enough to know how to play the game. There was a sense that they were special and he knew that he had to be careful playing with them and always make sure they went back in the box. In the biscuit tin she kept mementos from his childhood: cards he'd made her, little notes where she'd jotted down funny things he said, school photos. The tin had always been around, she let him look through it, but it was hers. Seeing it gave him the distinct feeling of his past being distilled into one small but potent collection. A childhood sense of fun and carelessness, coupled with an uneasy wariness about the world.

*Down beneath the ocean waves, deep under the sea,
Swim some little fishes: one two three.
They swish their little tails, they turn and dance and splash.
Swimming bright and colourful,
'till away they dash.*

His mother used to sing it to him. It was her go-to song whenever he was upset in the night. He'd never told her how much it disturbed him: he would imagine himself out in the dark ocean, under the waves, no company except the little fish who swim away as soon as they are found. He knew the fish would swim away and there was nothing he could do to stop them because the song was always sung to the very end and the end was always the same.

The song was the first indicator that there were things going on in his head that no one else understood. Even his mum.

Lorraine was in his mum's room. He could hear her opening and closing drawers, riffling through. She was going through his mum's things but he couldn't make himself go in there. She came out holding a Grace Brothers bag. Whatever she'd filled it with was heavy. Sam wondered about a will. It seemed crass to think about it so soon, so he didn't ask if she'd come across it. He didn't care what Lorraine would have thought if he'd asked. He cared that he'd even had the thought.

'That all you need?' Lorraine eyed the garbage bags.

'Yeah. I'll just grab my skateboard.'

'You gonna bring those?' She was looking at the book and the biscuit tin.

'Yeah.'

'Here.' She held out her hand and took the memories from him.