

'One broke my heart and mended it'
Cecelia Ahern

One



SARAH
CROSSAN

Shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal

BLOOMSBURY

Praise for
One

Shortlisted for the CILIP Carnegie Medal 2016
Shortlisted for the YA Book Prize
Shortlisted for the IBW Award 2016
Shortlisted for the Bord Gáis Energy Irish Book Awards 2015
Shortlisted for the Redbridge Children's Book Award
Shortlisted for the Leeds Book Award 2016
Shortlisted for Lancashire Book of the Year 2016
Shortlisted for the CBI Book of the Year Award

'Tremendously moving and there will be tears'
Toby Clements, Telegraph

'An inspiring and beautiful book'
Irish Examiner

'It will shake up preconceptions and move readers to tears'
Sunday Times, Children's Book of the Week

'Truly remarkable'
Irish Times

'The best book I've read in years. It's a spectacular testament to love.
It blows your head back'
Katherine Rundell

'Page after page resonates with exact observation and lyrical awareness.
So, how come it has space and light in it too? How does it manage to
be a page-turner and also leave room for the reader to imagine beyond
the story? Perhaps because it's written by a very good writer indeed.
I urge you to read this book. Seduction guaranteed'
Jenny Downham

'A heartbreaking and beautiful exploration of how closely one's
own identity is entwined with the lives of those we love'
Non Pratt

'In short: brilliant. It's truly amazing'
Brian Conaghan

‘I just can’t articulate the incredibleness of this book.
But it should win every prize there is’
Phil Earle

‘Quite simply an achingly sad and beautiful story about
what makes any of us human’
Telegraph

‘A beautiful and moving exploration of a sibling relationship like
no other; *One* will stay with you long after the final page’
Lisa Williamson

‘The real deal. Life-affirming, heartbreaking AND funny.
You must read it’
Cat Clarke

‘Both lyrical and accessible, this book will draw you in and break your
heart. Sarah Crossan’s writing is incredible, and *One* is simply stunning’
Robin Stevens

‘Beautiful, heartbreaking and memorable – Sarah Crossan’s *One*
is unsentimental and true’
Keren David

‘So perfect it hurt to read. A beautiful, lyrical love story for our time.
A definite future classic’
Nikki Sheehan

‘This is a strikingly brave, sensitive and unusual book that packs such a
powerful emotional punch, I defy anyone not to weep at the end’
Daily Mail

‘It is ambitious, innovative, lyrical and a bit like being sung a story’
Rhian Ivory

‘Such a beautiful book’
Sophia Bennett

‘A beautiful book in so many ways. I have enjoyed sharing
that journey with Tippi and Grace’
Lara Williamson

‘One of the most powerful as well as the
most unusual novels of the year’
Independent on Sunday

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BLOOMSBURY

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For Ben Fox (1988-2014)
— ride on

AUGUST

Sisters

Here

We Are.

And we are living.

Isn't that amazing?

How we manage

to be

at all.

The End of Summer

Summer's breath begins to cool.
The ink of night comes earlier and earlier.
And out of the blue
Mom announces that Tippi and I
will no longer be taught at home.
'In September
you'll join a class of juniors
and go to school
like everyone else,' she says.

I don't make any
ripples.

I listen
and nod
and pull at a loose thread in my shirt
until a button

falls away.

But Tippi doesn't stay silent.

She detonates:

‘Are you *kidding* me?
Have you lost your *minds*?’ she shouts,
then argues with Mom and Dad for hours.

I listen
and nod
and bite at the skin around my fingernails
until they start to

bleed.

Finally Mom rubs her temples, sighs, and gives it to
us straight.

‘Donations from well-wishers have dried up
and we simply can’t afford to homeschool you.
You know your dad hasn’t found a job yet
and Grammie’s pension
doesn’t even cover the cable bill.’

‘You girls aren’t cheap,’ Dad adds,
as though all the money spent on us
—the hospital bills and special clothes—
could be saved if we’d both
only
behave a little better.

You see,
Tippi and I are not what you'd call normal—
not what you see every day
or *any* day
for that matter.

Anyone with a jot of good manners
calls us 'conjoined',
though we've been dubbed other things, too:
freaks, fiends,
monsters, mutants,
and even a two-headed demon once,
which made me cry so hard
I had puffy eyes for a week.

But there's no denying our difference.

We are literally joined
at the hip—
united in blood and bone.

And
this
is why
we never went to school.

For years we've been cooking up chemistry potions
on the kitchen table
and using our yard for P.E.

But now
there's no getting out of it;
we *are* going to school.

Not that we'll be in a state school
like our sister Dragon,
with kids who pull knives on teachers
and drink Tipp-Ex for breakfast.

No, no, no.

The city won't fund our homeschooling but
they'll pay
for a place
at a private school
—Hornbeacon High—
and Hornbeacon is willing to have that one place
count for the two of us.

I guess we're supposed to feel lucky.

But lucky isn't really how
I would
ever
describe us.

Everyone

Dragon stretches out on the end of the double bed
I share with Tippi,
her bruised feet pointed while she
paints her toenails a deep metallic blue.
'I don't know,
you might like it,' she tells us.
'Not *everyone* in the world is an asshole.'
Tippi takes the polish, starts on my right hand and
blows my fingernails
dry.
'No, you're right,
not everyone's an asshole,'
Tippi says.
'But around *us*,
they all morph into them.'

A Freak Like Us

Dragon's real name is Nicola,
but Tippi and I changed it
when she was two,
when she was fierce and fire-breathing,
stomping around the apartment and
chomping on crayons and toy trains.

Now she's fourteen and a ballet dancer
she doesn't stomp anywhere—
she floats.

Lucky for her she's completely normal.

Although

I do wonder if being our sister
sucks sometimes,

if being our sister
makes her a freak
too.

Ischiopagus Tripus

Although scientists have come up with ways to
categorise conjoined twins,
each and every pair that ever existed
is unique—
the details of all our bodies remain a secret
unless we want to tell.

And people *always* want to know.

They want to know exactly what we share
down there,
so sometimes we tell them.

Not because it's their business
but to stop them wondering—it's all the
wondering
about our bodies that bothers us.

So:

Tippi and I are of the ischiopagus tripus
variety.

We have
two heads,
two hearts,

two sets of lungs and kidneys.
We have four arms as well,
and a pair of fully functioning legs
now that the vestigial leg has been
docked
like a show dog's tail.

Our intestines begin
apart
then merge.

And below that we are
one.

It probably sounds like a prison sentence,
but we have it better than others
who live with fused heads or hearts,
or only two arms between them.

It really isn't so bad.

It's how it's always been.

It's all we know.

And actually,
we're usually
quite happy
together.

Milk Trudge

‘We’re out of milk,’ Grammie says,
brandishing an empty milk carton and
a mug of steaming coffee.

‘Well, go and get some,’ Tippi says.

Grammie wrinkles her nose and pokes Tippi’s side.
‘You know I have a problem with my hip,’ she says,
and I laugh out loud;
Grammie is the
only person on the planet who ever pulls
The Disability Card
with us.

So Tippi and I trudge to the corner store
two blocks away,
which is how we get everywhere:
trudging
 and lumbering
 along,
my left arm around Tippi’s waist,
 my right slung over a crutch—
 Tippi mirroring me.

By the time we reach the store we are both
breathing hard
and neither of us wants to carry the milk home.
'She can run her own errands in future,' Tippi says,
stopping
for
a moment and
leaning on some rusty iron railings.

A woman pushing a stroller passes by,
her mouth
a gaping cavern.
Tippi smiles and says, 'Hey there!'
then snickers
when this woman with a perfectly formed body
almost topples over in surprise.

‘The harder the better,’ she tells us.
‘Otherwise, what’s the point?’

Tippi and I plop ourselves next to her
on an

extra-wide dining chair

as

Dad

shuffles

down

from his bedroom

bleary-eyed and smelling stale.

He watches us

rummaging to find the puzzle’s frame

—the edges

and corners—

then reaches over Dragon’s shoulder

and places in her palm

the top right-hand corner piece.

He sits at the table opposite us

and silently slides bits we’ve been looking for
into line.

‘Great teamwork,’ I say,
beaming at Dad.

He looks at me and winks.
'I learned from the best,' he says,
and gets up from the table to search in the
refrigerator for a
beer.

and tugs at the cuff of her cardigan.

‘Oh, come on, Mom,
don’t pretend like it’s going to be easy.’

‘Well, I’m leaving if I hate it,’ Tippi announces,

and Dragon says,

‘I hate school. Can *I* stay at home?’

Grammie is watching *Judge Judy*.

‘Why would anyone hate school?’ she caws.

‘Best days of your lives, girls.

You’ll meet your sweethearts there.’

Dad turns away,

Dragon blushes,

and Mom doesn’t speak

because

they all know

that finding love is

something

that will never

happen

for us.

Therapy

'Tell me what's going on,'
Dr Murphy says,
and as
so often happens
I sit in silence
for ten whole minutes,
worrying at a button in the brown leather sofa.

I've known Dr Murphy
all my life, sixteen and a half years,
which is a long time to know anyone
and to have to think of new things to say.
But the doctors insist we come for regular therapy
to support our mental health,
as though that's the bit of us that's broken.

Tippi is wearing headphones and listening to loud
music
so she can't hear what I'm saying,
so I can
spew all my suppressed feelings into
Dr Murphy's notebook
without hurting any of Tippi's.

And I used to rant a lot,
when I was seven or eight,
and Tippi had stolen my doll
or pulled my hair
or eaten my half of a cookie.

But now there's not much to say
Tippi doesn't already know,
and the talking seems
a waste of money we don't have
and of fifty perfectly good minutes.

I yawn.

'So?'
Dr Murphy says,
her forehead furrowed
as though my problems are her own.
Empathy, of course,
is all part of the service.

I shrug.

'We're starting school soon,' I say.

'Yes, I heard.

And how do you feel about that?' she asks.

'Not sure.'

I look up at the light shade,
at an unspoiled web and a spider gorging
on a fly bigger than itself.

I fold my hands in our lap.

'Well . . .' I say,

'I suppose I'm afraid the other students will pity
me.'

Dr Murphy nods.

She doesn't tell me
they won't

or

that it's going to be fantastic
because lies are not her style.

Instead she says, 'I'll be really interested
to hear how it goes, Grace,'

and looking at the wall clock
chirps,

'See you next time!'

Tippi Talks

We go next door
into Dr Netherhall's office
where it is my turn to wear the headphones
and Tippi's turn to tell all.

Which
I think
she actually does.

She talks quickly,
her expression serious,
her voice
sometimes loud enough for me to catch
a stray
word
or two.

I turn the music up,
force it to swallow the sound of her
and then I watch
as
she
crosses her foot over mine,
uncrosses it,
pushes her hair out of her face,

coughs,
bites her lips,
wiggles in our seat,
scratches her forearm,
rubs her nose,
stares at the ceiling,
stares at the door,
all the time
talking
until
finally she taps my knee
and mouths the word
'Done.'

The Check-up

Mom drives us all the way to the specialist
children's hospital
in Rhode Island
for our quarterly check-up,
to ensure our organs aren't making plans to
pack it in.

And today,
like every other time before,
Dr Derrick parades his
wide-eyed
medical students
and asks if we mind them
watching the exam.

We mind.

Of course we mind.

But Dr Derrick's stethoscope and white coat
do not permit disagreement
so we shrug
and allow ourselves to be
ogled
by a dozen trainee doctors
with tight mouths

and narrow eyes
who
 tilt forward,
 ever so slightly
 on their toes,
as we lift our shirts.
By the end we are blushing
and only want to
 leave.

‘They’re all good?’ Mom asks hopefully
when we’re back in Dr Derrick’s office.
He taps the top of his
desk.

‘Everything clear
as far as I can see,’
he says.

‘But as always,
they have to take it easy,
especially now they’ll
be at school.

Right?’

He points a playful warning finger at us.

‘Right,’ we say,
not planning to
change a thing
about how we live.

Influenza

Two days after our visit to
Dr Derrick
it knocks us down
flat on to our backs
without any warning.

I shiver and shake
and cling to the duvet
popping two white tabs of paracetamol
into my mouth every four hours,
hoping
to keep the chills away.

Tippi is lying next to me
shuddering,
sneezing, coughing,
and making her way through
a second box of Kleenex.

Our sheets are wet with sweat.

Mom delivers boiling
drinks
and tries to make us
eat a little toast.

But we are too sick
to move.

I Cannot Shake It Off

I cannot get these shivers to go away
and though Tippi seems way better
she has to stay in bed, too.

While I
fight the flu.

Worrying

Mom calls Dr Derrick
and gives him
 a list
 of our
 symptoms.

He isn't worried,
for now.
He tells her to keep us hydrated
and in bed for a few more days.

He tells her to watch us.

But Mom can't help watching.

She can't help worrying.
 And why wouldn't she
 when so few of us manage to make it to
 adulthood.

The older we get
 the more she frets.

As time ticks by
the chances of us
suddenly
ceasing
to be
get
quite
high.

That's just a fact
that will
never
go
away.

I Get Up

I don't want to.

My legs are wobbly.

My throat is coated in sand.

And my heart feels as though it's beating
extra hard

just to

get me from the bed

to the bathroom.

'You sure you don't want to lie down?'

Tippi asks.

I shake my head.

I can't confine her to bed

just because I can't get my
act together.

I shake my head

and suck it up.

