

One Breath from Drowning

Kent Quaney

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In Kent Quaney's captivating novel *One Breath from Drowning*, pursuits of love and self-fulfillment are complicated by family, religion, finances, and addiction.

Sydney is the setting for this detailed story about a thorny romance between two young men, Ryan and Sam, who are both working to be their best selves in a challenging world. Ryan, a young Mormon, hoped to leave his old self behind him when he fled Utah for Australia to pursue a master's degree in acting. Sam is an Australian college dropout who works as a real estate agent, though he spends more time partying and surfing than working. When their relationship hits the rocks, both men face dark truths from their pasts; they have to do so if they have any hope of building satisfying futures, either together or apart.

The book's point of view alternates between chapters, which move between detailed scenes, laboring to present both men as endearing but complicated, and deserving of love despite their limitations. The supporting cast, too, is drawn with care. The novel brings out the beauty and flaws of all involved.

In the course of characters' conversations, rich descriptions of Sydney's history, culture, and diverse neighborhoods are shared, including observations about gentrification. Such scene setting backdrops Sam and Ryan's intriguing tale of love and self-growth, which is heartwarming and vibrant as they confront religion, economic struggles, visa worries, and family drama and addiction, all of which threaten to impede their search for acceptance.

The novel *One Breath from Drowning* is unflinching in its depiction of a modern romance whose obstacles are both fresh and familiar.

KARIN KILLIAN (May / June 2022)

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