

## **When Only One**

By Meg Gatland-Veness  
Publisher: Pantera Press / Bloomsbury  
ISBN 9780648987666 SCIS: 5405305  
\$19.99

**Secondary Book  
of the Month**

*Blurb:*

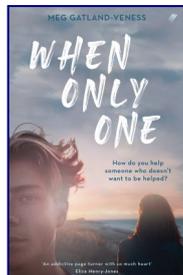
'There's someone in the school. They're holding something in their hands. Something terrifying.'

1984. Sam lives with his mum, dad and four brothers in a small farming town and life is pretty good. He works as a lifeguard at the local surf club, is saving to buy his first car, trains with his friends for the Ironman, and on Sunday afternoons he and his family take care packages to their less fortunate neighbours. Then, five years since they last spoke, Emily Burrow climbs through his bedroom window and back into Sam's life.

Emily's life couldn't be more different. She lives with her mother, who struggles with mental health, and sometimes her alcoholic father, but it's better when he's not there. There's no hope for Emily's future, and she seems to be the only one who both knows and accepts it. That's why, to Emily, help is just not necessary.

The new school year brings a heap of changes. Emily starts to hang out with Sam and his mates. A new girl arrives and Sam is smitten, but she brings with her unexpected adjustments. And Sam's friend Miles faces the biggest challenge of his life. When tragedy strikes one sunny afternoon, everything they thought they knew about growing up will change and they will be forced to face adulthood head on.

From the bestselling author of *I Had Such Friends* comes a gritty novel, full of heart, that shines a light on kids who are doing it tough in a rural Australian town.



*Lamont Review:*

Sam is a seventeen-year-old country kid and a keen Ironman participant. Born into a strict Catholic family, with four younger brothers, his life is good. But this is not the case for everybody in his town.

It's not easy for people like his primary school best friend, Emily, who has just turned up and is back in Sam's life. Her Mum struggles with her mental health, and her Dad is an alcoholic with bikie connections who never wanted her.

Sam has a good group of mates, who are fellow Ironman competitors. But one of his friends is facing the toughest challenge - he has been left to care for his one-year-old sister after his Mum's suicide, and his Dad is constantly disappearing. The boys try to help him out, but life during the drought is not easy for anyone.

Then Sam falls for the new girl Rei, who brings a breath of fresh air into the school.

The reader knows throughout the story that there has been a shooting at their school, but the pieces do not come together until the end.

This is a thrilling read, with a close look at tough times in rural Australian towns. With themes of gun violence, families and their differing values, love, friendship, drought and grief, it is a terrific novel for those 14 and older.

*Reviewed by Rob*