Writing *The Rules of Seeing*

There were several inspirations for writing *The Rules of Seeing*, but one thing stands above them all. Halfway through work on the book, I became a father for the first time. Sam arrived in the early hours of a frosty February morning, and from the beginning it seemed that he was trying to take in everything around him.

Of course, I knew he could barely see a handspan beyond his face, not to mention the fact that everything would still be upside down. Nevertheless, he looked with a sense of urgency, watery-blue eyes wide to the world.

Through the months that followed, the highs and lows of sleepless nights and developmental milestones, I couldn't help but try to see the world as Sam was seeing it. In some ways it was frustrating – here I was, writing about a character learning to see for the first time, while living in the same room as someone who was doing it for real, who couldn't tell me anything.

But often his curiosity spoke for itself. Watching Sam track an aeroplane as it crossed the sky and disappeared into a cloud, I realised that he had no idea that some solid-looking things were not solid at all. Watching his fascination at his own legs through a few inches of soapy bathwater, I realised how confusing the concept of transparency must be to him. Why are some things see-through, some opaque, some reflective? I watched him as he saw fire for the first time, and the ocean, and falling snow.

There are several cases of people who have lived blind for much of their adult lives, only for an operation to restore some of their vision. They are

remarkable stories but, watching Sam, I was constantly reminded that this is a stage we all go through, at least once. It's just that very few of us remember what it was like.

*The Rules of Seeing* is, in part, a book about the things we take for granted, or fail to see through overfamiliarity. Sometimes life shocks us out of that trance, and we stand, looking with the same urgency as the day we were born, eyes wide to the world, and really *see*.