

Author of the *New York Times* Bestseller *P.S. I LOVE YOU*

Cecelia Ahern

The Book of
Tomorrow

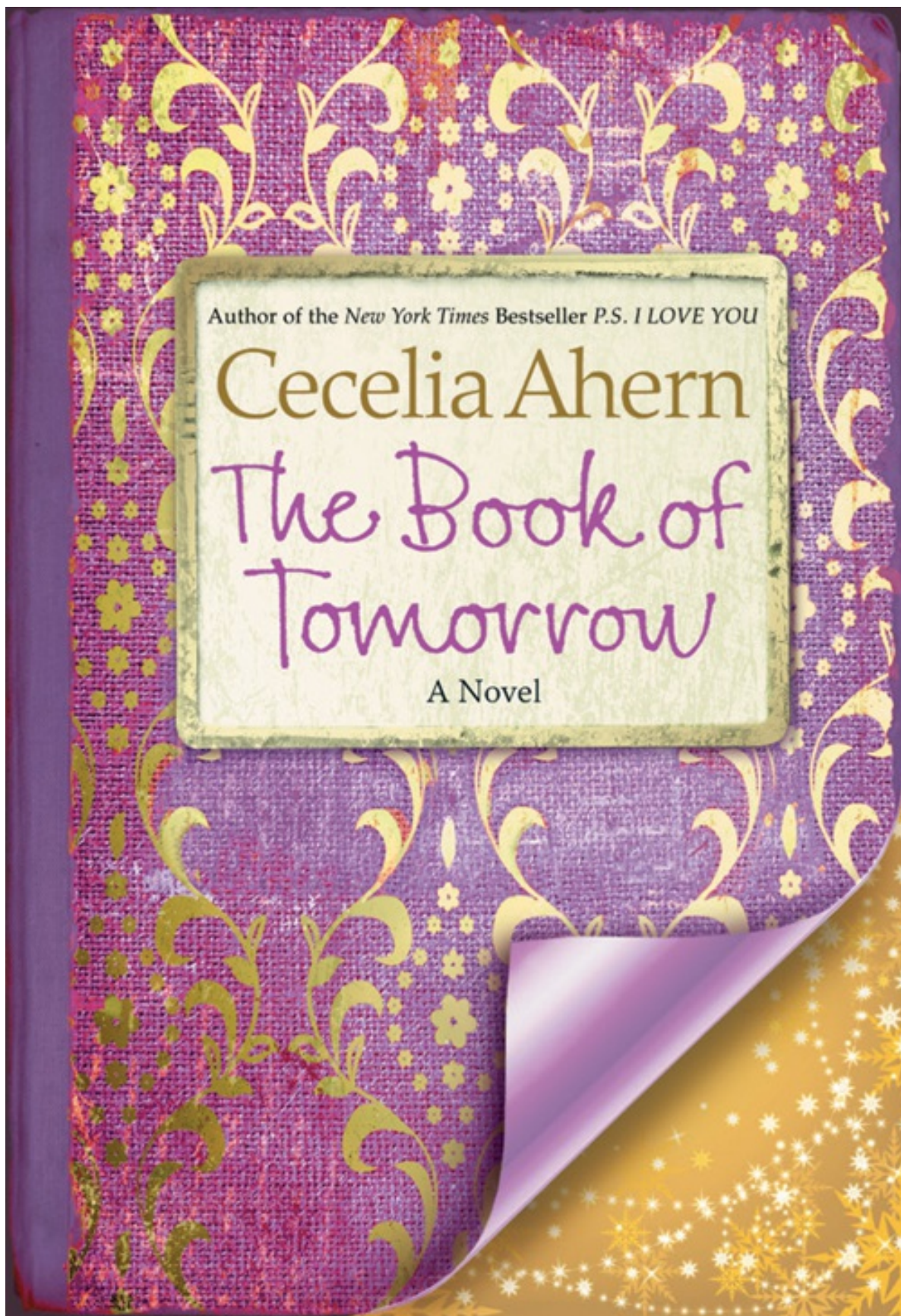
A Novel

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 HarperCollins e-books

Dedication

*For Marianne,
who moves so silently but causes a right clatter*

*For my readers,
thank you for trusting me*

Contents

[Dedication](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Chapter Fourteen](#)

[Chapter Fifteen](#)

[Chapter Sixteen](#)

[Chapter Seventeen](#)

[Chapter Eighteen](#)

[Chapter Nineteen](#)

[Chapter Twenty](#)

[Chapter Twenty-one](#)

[Chapter Twenty-two](#)

[Chapter Twenty-three](#)

[Chapter Twenty-four](#)

[Chapter Twenty-five](#)

[Chapter Twenty-six](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Also by Cecelia Ahern](#)

[Copyright](#)

[About the Publisher](#)

Chapter One

Field of Buds

They say a story loses something with each telling. If that is the case, this story has lost nothing, for it's the first time it's been told.

This story is one for which some people will have to suspend their disbelief. And, if it didn't happen to me, I would be one of those people.

Many won't struggle to believe it though, for their minds have been opened; unlocked by whatever kind of key causes people to believe. They're either born that way or, as babies, their little budlike minds are nurtured until their petals slowly open and prepare for the very nature of life to feed them. As the rain falls and the sun shines, they grow, grow, grow; minds so open they go through life aware and accepting, seeing light where there's dark, seeing possibility in dead ends, tasting victory as others spit out failure, questioning when others accept. Just a little less jaded, a little less cynical. A little less likely to throw in the towel. Some people's minds open later in life, through tragedy or triumph, either thing acting as the key to unlatch and lift the lid on that know-it-all box, to accept the unknown, to say good-bye to pragmatism and straight lines.

But then there are those whose minds are merely a bouquet of stalks that bud as they learn new information—a new bud for each new fact—but yet they never open, never flourish. They are the people of capital letters and full stops but never of question marks and ellipses . . .

My parents were these latter kinds of people. The know-it-all kind. The if-it's-not-in-a-book-or-I-haven't-heard-it-anywhere-before-then-don't-be-ridiculous kind. Straight thinkers with heads filled with the most beautifully colored buds, so neatly manicured and so sweetly scented, but which never opened, were never light or dainty enough to dance in the breeze; upright and rigid, so matter-of-fact, they were buds till the day they died.

Well, my mother isn't dead.

Not yet. Not medically, but if she is not dead, she is certainly not living. She's like a walking corpse that hums every once in a while as though testing herself to see if she's still alive. From far away you'd think she's fine. Up close you can see that the bright pink lipstick is a touch uneven, her eyes are tired and soulless, her body like one of those TV show houses on studio lots—all façade, nothing of substance behind. She moves around the house, drifting from room to room in a dressing gown with loosely flapping bell sleeves, as though she's a Southern belle on a mansion ranch in *Gone with the Wind*, worrying about worrying about it all tomorrow. Despite her graceful, swanlike room-to-room drifts, she's kicking furiously beneath the surface, thrashing around trying to keep her head up, flashing us the occasional panicked smile to let us know she's still here, though it does nothing to convince us.

Oh, I don't blame her. What a luxury it must be to disappear as she has, leaving everyone else to sweep up the mess and salvage whatever fragments of life are left.

I haven't told you a thing yet; you must be very confused.

My name is Tamara Goodwin. Goodwin. One of those awful phrases I despise. It's either a win or it's not. Like "bad loss," "hot sun," or "very dead." Two words that come together unnecessarily to say whatever could be said solely by the second. Sometimes when telling people my name I drop a syllable: Tamara Good, which is ironic as I've never been anything of the sort, or Tamara Win, which mockingly suggests good luck that just isn't so.

I'm sixteen years old, or so they tell me. I question my age now because I feel twice it. At fourteen, I felt fourteen. I acted eleven and wanted to be eighteen. But in the past few months I've aged a few years. Is that possible? Closed buds would shake their heads no, opened minds would say possibly. Anything is possible, they would say. Well, it's not. *Anything* is not.

It is not possible to bring my dad back to life. I tried, when I found him lying dead on the floor of his office—very dead, in fact—blue in the face with an empty pill container by his side and an empty bottle of whiskey on the desk. I didn't know what I was doing but I pressed my lips to his regardless, and pumped up and down on his chest furiously. That didn't work.

Nor did it work when my mother dived on his coffin at the graveyard during his burial and started howling and clawing at the varnished wood as he was lowered into the ground—which, by the way, was rather patronizingly covered by fake green grass as though it wasn't the maggotty soil he was being lowered into for the rest of eternity. Though I admire Mum for trying.

Nor did the endless stories about my dad that were shared afterward at the "Who Knows George Best" storytelling competition, where friends and family had their fingers on the buzzers, ready to jump in with "You think that's funny, wait till you hear this . . ."; "One time George and I . . ."; "I'll never forget the time George said . . ." All were so eager, they ended up talking over one another, spilling tears and red wine on Mum's new Persian rug in the process. They tried their best, you could tell, and in a way he was *almost* in the room, but their stories didn't bring him back.

Nor did it work when Mum discovered Dad's personal finances were about as healthy as he. He was bankrupt; the bank had already started repossession of our house and all the other properties he owned, which left Mum to sell everything—*everything*—that we owned to pay back the debts. Dad didn't come back to help us then either. So I knew then that he was gone. He was really gone. I figured if he was going to let us go through all of that on our own, let me blow air into his dead body, let Mum scratch at his coffin in front of everybody, and then watch us be stripped of everything we'd ever owned, I was pretty sure he was gone for good.

It was good thinking on his part not to stick around for it all. It was all about as awful and as humiliating as I'm sure he feared.

If my parents had flowering buds, then maybe, just maybe, they could have avoided all that. But there were no other possibilities, no other ways of doing things for them. They considered themselves practical people, but there was no practical solution for the situation. Only faith and hope and some sort of belief could have seen my father through it. But he didn't have any of that, and so when he did what he did, he effectively pulled us all into that grave with him.

It intrigues me how death, so dark and final, can shine a light on the character of a person. The lovely stories I heard about Dad during those weeks were endless and touching. They were comforting and I liked getting lost in those tales, but to be perfectly honest, I doubted if they were true. I loved him, of course, but I know my dad wasn't a good man. He and I rarely spoke and when we did, it was to argue over something, or he was giving me money to get rid of me. He was prickly, he snapped often, and he had a temper that flared easily. He forced his opinions on others and was rather arrogant. He made people feel uncomfortable, and inferior, and he enjoyed that. He would send his steak back three or four times in a restaurant just to watch the waiter sweat. He would order the most expensive bottle of wine and then claim it was corked just to annoy the restaurateur. He would complain to the police about noise levels of house parties on our street that we couldn't even hear, and he'd have them shut down just because we weren't invited.

I didn't say any of this at his funeral or at the little party at our house afterward. In fact, I didn't say anything at all. I drank a bottle of red wine all by myself and ended up vomiting on the floor by Dad's desk where he'd died. Mum found me there and slapped me across the face. She said I'd ruined it. I wasn't sure if she meant the rug or Dad's memory, but either way I was pretty sure that he'd fucked up both of them all by himself.

I'm not just heaping all the hate on my dad here. I too wasn't the best daughter. My parents gave me everything and I rarely said thank you. Or if I said it, I don't think I

ever meant it. I don't actually think that I knew what it meant. "Thank you" is a sign of appreciation. Mum and Dad continually told me about the starving babies in Africa, as if that was a way to make me appreciate anything. Looking back on it, I realize the best way to make me appreciate anything was probably not to have given me everything.

We lived in a seven-thousand-square-foot, six-bedroom contemporary mansion with a swimming pool, tennis court, and private beach in Killiney, County Dublin, Ireland. My room was on the opposite side of the house to my parents' and it had a balcony overlooking the beach that I hardly looked out at. It had a private bathroom with a shower and Jacuzzi bath, with a plasma TV—TileVision, to be precise—in the wall above the bath. I also had a wardrobe full of designer clothes and handbags, a top-of-the-line computer, a PlayStation, and a four-poster bed. Lucky me.

In truth, I wasn't just ungrateful; I was a nightmare daughter. I was rude, I answered back, I expected everything, and even worse, I thought I deserved all these things just because everybody else I knew had them. It didn't occur to me for one moment that they didn't particularly deserve them either.

I figured out a way to escape my bedroom at night and sneak outside to meet with my friends; a climb from my bedroom balcony and down the piping, onto the roof of the swimming pool, then a few easy steps to the ground. There was an area on our private beach where my friends and I went drinking. The girls mostly drank Dolly Mixtures: the contents of our parents' drinks cabinets all in one plastic bottle. We took just a couple inches from each bottle so they wouldn't suspect anything. The guys preferred to drink whatever hard cider they could get their hands on. They also had whichever girl they could get their hands on. That person was mostly me. There was a boy, Johnny, who I stole from my best friend, Zoey, whose dad was a famous actor and so—I'll be honest—just because of that I used to let him put his hand up my skirt for about a half hour every night. I figured that one day I'd get to meet his dad. But I never did.

My parents felt it was important for me to know how fortunate I was to be living in my big house by the sea. So to help me appreciate the world, and to see how other people live, we spent our summers in our villa in Marbella, Christmas in our Verbier chalet, and Easter at the New York Ritz. There was a pink convertible MINI Cooper with my name on it waiting for me for my seventeenth birthday, and a friend of my dad's, who had a recording studio, was waiting to hear me sing and possibly sign me up. Though after I felt his hand on my arse, I never wanted to spend a moment alone in a room with him. Not even to be famous.

Mum and Dad attended charity functions throughout the year. Mum would spend more money on her dresses than the actual cost of the tables, and twice a year she'd hand down the impulse buys she never wore to her sister-in-law, Rosaleen, who lived down in the country—in case Rosaleen ever felt the need to milk cows in a Pucci sundress.

I know now—now that we're out of the world we once lived in—that the three of us weren't very nice people. I think somewhere beneath the current nonresponsive surface of my mother she knows it too. We weren't evil people, we just weren't *nice*. We didn't offer anything to anybody in the world but we took an awful lot.

But. We didn't deserve this.

Before, I never thought of tomorrow. I lived in the now. I wanted this now, I wanted that now. The last time I saw my father I shouted at him and told him I hated him and then I slammed the door in his face. I never took a step back or a step outside of my little world to think about what on earth I was doing or saying, and how it was hurting anybody else. I told Dad I never wanted to see him again, and I never did. I never thought about the possibility that those would be my final words to him and that *that* would be my final moment with him. That's a lot to have to deal with. I have a lot to forgive myself for. It's going to take time.

But now, because of Dad's death and because of the story I have yet to share with you, I have no choice but to think of tomorrow and all the people that tomorrow affects. Now I'm glad when I wake up in the morning that there is a tomorrow.

I lost my dad. He lost his tomorrows and I lost all my tomorrows with him. You could say that now I appreciate them when they come. Now I want to make them the best they can possibly be.

Chapter Two

Two Bluebottles

In order for ants to find the safest route to food, one goes out on its own. When that lone ant has found the path, it leaves a chemical trail for the others to follow. When you stamp on a line of ants or, less psychotically, if you interfere in their chemical trail in any way, it drives them crazy. The ones that have been left behind crawl around frantically in a panic, trying to regain the trail. I like watching them totally disoriented at first, running around bumping into one another while trying to figure out which way to go, then regrouping, reorganizing, and eventually crossing the pathway back in their straight line as if nothing had ever happened.

Their panic reminds me of Mum and me. Somebody broke our line, took out our leader, ruined our trail, and our lives descended into utter chaos. I think—I *hope*—that with time, we'll find the right way to go again. It takes one to lead the rest. I think, seeing as Mum is sitting this one out, that it's up to me to go out front alone.

I was watching a bluebottle fly yesterday. In an effort to escape the living room, he kept flying against the window, hitting his head against the glass over and over. Then he stopped launching himself at it like a missile and stuck to one little windowpane, buzzing about like he was having a panic attack. It was frustrating to watch, especially because if he'd just flown up a little bit higher toward the top of the window, which was open, he'd have been free. But he just kept doing the same thing over and over again. I could imagine his frustration of being able to see the trees, the flowers, the sky, just on the other side of the glass, yet not being able to get to them. I tried to help him a few times, to guide him toward the open window, but he flew away from me and continued his manic flying around the room. He'd eventually come back to the same window and I could almost hear him: "Well, this is the way I came in . . ."

I wondered if my watching him from the armchair is what it's like to be God, if there is a God. He sits back and sees the big picture, just as I could see that if the bluebottle just moved up a few inches, he'd be free. He wasn't really trapped at all, he was just looking in the wrong place. I wondered if God could see a way out for me and Mum. If I can see the open window for the bluebottle, maybe God can see the tomorrows for me and Mum. That idea brings me comfort. Well, it *did*, until I left the room and returned a few hours later to see a dead bluebottle on the windowsill. Then to show you where my mind is right now, I started crying . . . Then I got mad at God because in my head the death of that bluebottle meant Mum and I might never find our way out of this mess. What good is it being so far back you can see everything and yet not do anything to help?

Then I realized this: I had tried to help the bluebottle, but it wouldn't let me. And then I felt sorry for God because I understood how it must be frustrating for him. He offers people a helping hand, but it often gets pushed away. People always want to help themselves first.

I never used to think about these things before; God, bluebottles, ants. I'd rather have been caught dead than be seen sitting in an armchair with a book in my hand and staring at a dirty fly tapping against a window on a Saturday. Maybe that's what Dad had thought in his final moments: *I'd rather be caught dead here in my study than go through the humiliation of having everything taken from me.* My Saturdays used to be spent at Topshop with my friends, trying on absolutely everything and laughing nervously while Zoey stuffed as many accessories down her pants as she could manage before leaving the store. If we weren't at Topshop we'd spend the day sitting in Starbucks having grande gingersnap lattes and banana honey muffins. I'm sure that's what they're all doing now.

I haven't heard from anyone since the first week I got here, except a text from Laura before my phone was cut off, filling me in on all the gossip, the biggest of all being that Zoey and Johnny got back together and did it in Zoey's house when her parents were away in Monte Carlo for the weekend. Her dad has a gambling problem, which Zoey and the rest of us loved because it meant when we all stayed over at her house, her parents would come home much later than everybody else's. Anyway, apparently Zoey said that sex with Johnny hurt worse than the time the lesbian from the Sutton hockey team hit her between the legs with the stick, which was really bad, believe me—I *saw*—and she isn't in a rush to do it again. Meanwhile Laura told me not to tell anyone but she herself was meeting Johnny this weekend to do it. She hopes I don't mind and please don't tell Zoey. As if I could tell anyone if I wanted to, where I am.

Where I am. I haven't told you that yet, have I? I've mentioned my mum's sister-in-law, Rosaleen, already. She's the one my mum used to empty her wardrobe of all her unworn impulse buys for, sending them down in black sacks with the tags still on. Rosaleen's married to my uncle Arthur, who is my mum's brother. They live in a gatehouse in the country in a place called Meath in the middle of nowhere with hardly anybody else around. We visited them only a few times in my life and I was always bored to death. It took us an hour and fifteen minutes to get there and the buildup was always a letdown. I thought they were hicks in the middle of the sticks. I used to call them the Deliverance Duo. That's the only time I remember Dad laughing at one of my jokes. He never came with us when we visited Rosaleen and Arthur. I don't think they ever had an argument or anything, but like penguins and polar bears, they were just too far apart to be able to spend any time near one another. Anyway, that's where my mum and I live now. In the gatehouse with the Deliverance Duo.

It's a sweet house, a quarter of the size of our old one, which is no bad thing, and it reminds me of the one in "Hansel and Gretel." It's built from limestone and the wood around the windows and roof is painted olive green. There are three bedrooms upstairs and a kitchen and a living room downstairs. Mum has a private bathroom but Rosaleen, Arthur, and I all share a bathroom on the second floor. Used to having my own bathroom, I think this is gross, particularly when I have to go in there after my uncle Arthur and his daily newspaper-reading session. Rosaleen is a neat freak, obsessively tidy; she never ever sits down. She's always moving things, cleaning things, spraying chemicals in the air, and saying stuff about God and his will. I said to her once that I hoped God's will was better than the one Dad left behind for us. She looked at me, horrified, and scuttled off to dust somewhere else.

Rosaleen has the depth of a shot glass. Everything she talks about is totally irrelevant, unnecessary. The weather. The sad news about a poor person on the other side of the world. Her friend down the road who has broken her arm, or who has a father with two months to live, or somebody's daughter who married a dick who is leaving her with two children. Everything is doom and gloom and followed by some sort of utterance about God, like "God love them," or "God is gracious," or "Let God be good to them." Not that I talk about anything important, but if I ever try to discuss any of these things in more detail, to get to the root of the problem, Rosaleen is totally incapable of carrying on. She only wants to talk about the sad problem, and she's not interested in talking about why it happened, nor in the solution. She shushes me with her God phrases, makes me feel like I'm speaking out of turn or as though I'm so young I couldn't possibly take the reality. I think it's the other way around. I think she brings things up so that she doesn't feel like she's avoiding them, and once they're out of the way, she doesn't talk about them ever again.

Before we came to live here, I think I'd heard my uncle Arthur speak about five words total. It's as though Mum had gone through her life speaking for both of them—not that he would have shared her views on anything she said. These days Arthur speaks more than Mum. He has an entire language of his own, which I've slowly but surely learned to decipher. He speaks in grunts, nods, and snot-snorts; a kind of mucous inhale, which is something he does when he disagrees with something. A mere "Ah," and a throw back of the head means he's not bothered by something. For example, here is how a typical breakfast conversation would go.

Arthur and I are sitting at the kitchen table and Rosaleen as usual is buzzing about the place with crockery piled with toast and little dishes of homemade jam, honey, and marmalade. The radio is blaring so loudly I could hear every word the newscaster was saying from my bedroom before coming to the table; some annoying miserable man

talking in monotone about the terrible things happening in the world. And so Rosaleen comes to the table with the teapot.

“Tea, Arthur.”

Arthur throws back his head like a horse trying to rid his mane of a fly. He wants tea.

And the man on the radio talks about how another factory in Ireland has closed and one hundred people are losing their jobs.

Arthur inhales and a load of mucus is sucked up through his nose and then down his throat. He doesn't like this.

Rosaleen appears at the table with another plate of toast piled high. “Oh, isn't that terrible, God love their families. And the little ones now with their daddies out of work.”

“Their mothers too, you know,” I say, taking a slice of toast.

Rosaleen watches me bite into the toast and her green eyes widen as I chew. She always watches me eat and it freaks me out. It's as though she is the witch from “Hansel and Gretel,” watching for me to become plump enough so that she can throw me into the stove with my hands tied behind my back and an apple stuffed in my gob. I wouldn't mind an apple. It would have the fewest calories of anything she'd ever fed me.

I swallow what's in my mouth and put the rest of my toast down on my plate.

She leaves the table again, disappointed.

On the news they talk about some new government tax increase and Arthur inhales more mucus. If he hears any more bad news, he'll have no room for his breakfast with all that mucus. He's only in his forties but he looks and acts older. From the shoulders up he reminds me of a king prawn, always bent over something, whether it's his food or his work.

Rosaleen returns with a plate of Irish breakfast enough to feed all the children of the one hundred factory workers who have just lost their jobs.

Arthur throws his head back again. He's happy about this.

Rosaleen stands beside me and pours me tea. I'd love nothing more than a gingersnap latte but I tip the milk into the strong tea and sip it all the same. Her eyes watch me and don't look away till I swallow.

I don't know how old Rosaleen is exactly but I'm guessing somewhere in her early to mid-forties, and if this makes sense, I'm sure whatever age she really is, she looks ten years older. She looks like she's from the 1940s in her floral tea dresses buttoned down the middle, with a slip underneath. My mum never wore slippers; she barely wore underwear. Rosaleen has mouse-brown hair, always worn down, parted sharply in the center of her head, revealing gray roots, and it's short, to her chin. She always tucks her hair behind both ears, pink little mouse ears peeping out. She never wears earrings. Or makeup. She wears a gold crucifix on a thin gold chain around her neck. She's the kind of woman that my friend Zoey would say looks like she's never had an orgasm in her life, and I wonder, while cutting the fat off the bacon and as Rosaleen's eyes widen at me doing this, if Zoey had an orgasm when she did it with Johnny. Then I visualized the damage the hockey stick did to her and I instantly doubted it.

Across the road from the gatehouse is a bungalow. I have no idea who lives in it—I haven't bothered to ask—but Rosaleen pops back and forth every day with little parcels of food. Two miles down the road is a post office, which is operated from somebody's house, and across the road from that is the smallest school I've ever seen, which, unlike my school at home which has activities every hour throughout the year, is completely empty during the summer. I asked if they offered any yoga classes or anything and Rosaleen told me she'd show me how to make yogurt herself. She seemed so happy by her offer that I couldn't correct her. In the first week I watched her make strawberry yogurt. In the second week, I was still eating it.

The gatehouse that is Arthur and Rosaleen's house once protected the side entrance to Kilsaney Castle in the 1700s. The castle's main entrance has a disused scary-looking gothic entrance—I imagine I see severed heads hanging out of it every time we pass. The castle was built as a towered fortification of the Norman Pale—that was the area with Norman and English control in the East of Ireland established after Strongbow invaded—sometime between 1100 and 1200, which, when you think about it, is a bit vague. It's the difference between me or my half-human, half-robot great-great-great-great-great grandchildren building something. Anyway, it was built for a Norman warlord, so that's why I think of the severed heads, because they did that, didn't they?

The area it's in is called County Meath. It used to be East Meath and, along with Westmeath—surprise surprise—it made up a separate and fifth province in Ireland, which was the territory of the High King. The former seat of the High Kings, the Hill of Tara, is only a few kilometers away. I know all of this because the castle's in the news all the time now because they're building a motorway nearby. We had to debate the issue at school a few months ago. I was “for” the motorway being built because I thought the King would have liked to have one in his day, as it would have made it easier for him to get to his office instead of having to go through the shitty fields. Imagine the filth of his sandals. I also said it would be more accessible for tourists. They could drive right up to it or take photographs from open-top buses going one hundred and twenty kilometers on the motorway. I was only joking, but our substitute teacher went crazy, thinking I actually meant it. I found out later that she was on a committee to try and prevent the motorway from being built. It's so easy to give substitute teachers nervous breakdowns. Especially the ones who believe they can do some good for the students. I told you I was nasty.

After the Norman psycho, various lords and ladies lived in the castle. They built stables and outhouses around the place. Controversially one lord even converted to Catholicism after marrying a Catholic, and built a chapel there as a treat for the family. Me and Mum got a swimming pool as our treat, but to each his own. The demesne is surrounded by a famine wall, which was a project to provide work for the starving during the potato famine. It runs right along Arthur and Rosaleen's garden and house, and creeps me out every time I see it. If Rosaleen had ever visited our house for dinner she'd probably have started building a wall around us, because none of us eats carbs. At least we never used to eat carbs, now I'm eating so much I could fuel all the factories they're closing down.

Kilsaney descendants continued to live in the castle until the 1920s, when some arsonists didn't get the memo that the inhabitants were Catholic and they burned them out. After that they could only live in a small section of the castle because they couldn't afford to fix it up and heat it, and then they eventually moved out in the nineties. I don't know who owns it now but it's fallen into disrepair: no roof, fallen down walls, no stairs, you get the idea. There's loads of stuff growing inside it and whatever else that scuttles around. I once had to do a project on the castle and Mum suggested I stay with Rosaleen and Arthur for the weekend and do some research. She and Dad had the biggest fight I'd ever seen or heard over that. The atmosphere was so bad that I was happy to leave them. But as soon as I got there, I wasn't really interested in snooping around and finding out the history of the place. I just about managed to stay with Rosaleen and Arthur for lunch, and then went to the toilet to call my nanny, Mae—who we've since had to send back home—and made her pick me up and bring me home. I told Rosaleen I had stomach cramps and tried not to laugh when she asked me if I thought it was the apple pie.

I ended up copying an essay about the castle from the Internet. Then I was called to the principal's office and she failed me for plagiarism, which was ridiculous because Zoey did her project on Malahide Castle, stole everything from the Internet, changed a few words and dates around, got the words and dates *wrong* to make it look like she didn't copy it, and she still got a higher score than me. Where's the justice in that?

Surrounding the castle is one hundred acres of land. Arthur is the groundskeeper and, with one hundred acres to look after, he's out first thing in the morning and back at five-thirty on the button, as dirty as a coal miner. He never complains, he never groans about the weather, he just gets up, eats his breakfast while deafening himself with the radio, and then goes out to work. Rosaleen gives him a flask of tea and a few sandwiches to keep him going and he rarely comes back during the day, except to get something from the garage that he forgot, or to go to the toilet. He seems like a simple man, only I don't really believe that. Nobody who says as little as he does is as simple as you'd think. It takes a lot to not say a lot, because when you're not talking, you're thinking, and he thinks *a lot*. My mum and dad talked all the time. Talkers don't think much; their words drown out any possibility of hearing their subconscious asking, *Why did you say that? What do you really think?*

I used to stay in bed for as long as possible on school mornings and on weekends until Mae dragged me out kicking and screaming. But here I wake up early. Surrounded by so many gigantic trees, the place is swarming with birds. They're so loud they wake me up. I'm always up by seven, which is nothing short of miraculous for me. Mae would be so proud. But it's not easy keeping myself busy during the daylight. That's an awful lot of hours for an awful lot of nothing to do.

Dad decided to end his life in May, right before my Junior Certificate exams, which was a little unfair as, up until then, I thought I was the one who was supposed to want

to off myself. I did my exams anyway. I probably failed them but I don't really care and I don't think anybody else does either. I'll find out those results in September. My entire class came to Dad's funeral, which I'm sure they loved because they got a day off school. Can you believe I was actually embarrassed about crying in front of them? I did it anyway, which started off Zoey and then Laura. A girl in my class called Fiona, who nobody ever talked to, hugged me really tight and gave me a card from her family saying that they were all thinking of me. Fiona gave me her mobile number and her favorite book, and said she'd be there for me if I ever needed somebody to talk to. At the time I thought it was a bit lame, her trying to get in with me at my dad's funeral, but thinking about it after—which is something I do now—it was the kindest thing anybody did or said to me that day.

I started reading the book in the first week I moved to Meath. It was kind of a ghost story about a girl who was invisible to everybody in the world, including her family and friends, even though they knew she existed. She was just born invisible. I won't give away the rest but she eventually becomes friends with someone who does see her. I liked the idea and thought Fiona was trying to send me some kind of message, but when I stayed overnight at Zoey's house and told her and Laura, they thought it was the weirdest thing they'd ever heard and that Fiona was even more of a freak. So I dropped it. You know what, I'm finding it increasingly hard to understand Zoey and Laura lately.

After the first week we moved here Arthur drove me to Dublin so that I could stay overnight at Zoey's house. The car ride was over an hour and we never spoke once. The only thing he said was, "Radio?" and then when I nodded he turned it on to one of those channels that just talk about the problems in the country and don't play music and he snot-snorted his way through it. But at least it was better than silence. Then, after spending the night with Zoey and Laura—and bitching about him all night—I was feeling confident. Back to my old self. We all agreed that he and Rosaleen definitely lived up to being called the Deliverance Duo and that I shouldn't allow them to pull me into their weirdo existence. That meant that I should be able to listen to whatever the hell I wanted in the car. But the next day, when he picked me up in his filthy dirty Land Rover, which Zoey and Laura so obviously couldn't stop laughing at, I felt bad for Arthur. I felt really bad.

Having to go back to a house that wasn't mine, in a car that wasn't mine, to sleep in a room that wasn't mine, to try to talk to a mother that didn't feel like mine, made me want to hold on to at least one thing that was familiar. Who I used to be. Maybe it wasn't necessarily the right thing to hold on to, but it was something. So I kicked up a fuss in the car and told Arthur that I wanted to listen to something else. He put my favorite radio station on for one song and then he got so frustrated listening to the Pussycat Dolls singing about wanting boobies, he grumbled and changed it back to the talk channel. I stared out the window in a huff, hating him and hating myself both at the same time. For half an hour we listened to a woman crying on the phone to the show's host about how her husband had lost his job in a computer factory, couldn't find another, and they had four children to look after. My hair was down across my face and all I could do was hope that Arthur didn't see me crying. Sad stuff really gets to me now. I heard this kind of stuff before but I was kind of numb to it. Before, it just didn't happen to me.

I don't know how long we're going to live here. Nobody will answer that question for me. Arthur simply doesn't talk, my mum isn't communicating, and Rosaleen isn't able to cope with a question of that magnitude.

Needless to say, my life right now is not going as I planned. I'm sixteen and by now I should have had sex with Johnny, I should be in our villa in Marbella swimming every day, eating barbecued dinners, clubbing every night at Angels & Demons, and finding guy number two to fancy and sleep with. If the first person I sleep with ends up being the man I marry, I think I'll die. Instead I'm living in hicksville, in a gatehouse with three crazy people, the nearest things to us being a bungalow housing people who knows who, a post office that's practically in somebody's living room, an empty school, and a ruined castle. I have absolutely nothing to do here.

Or so I thought.

Let me start the story from when I arrived here . . .