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ahern

The Year
I Met You



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Cecelia Ahern



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Dedication

For my friend Lucy Stack.
*Just when the caterpillar thought the world was over,
it became a butterfly ...*

Our greatest glory is not in never falling,
but in rising every time we fall.

Confucius

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Winter

The season between autumn and spring, comprising in the Northern Hemisphere the coldest months of the year: December, January and February.

A period of inactivity or decay.

I was five years old when I learned that I was going to die.

It hadn't occurred to me that I would not live for ever; why would it? The topic of my death hadn't been mentioned in passing.

My knowledge of death was not tenuous; goldfish died, I'd learned that first-hand. They died if you didn't feed them, and then they also died if you fed them too much. Dogs died when they ran in front of moving cars, mice died when they were tempted by chocolate HobNobs in the mousetrap in our cloakroom under the stairs, rabbits died when they escaped their hutches and fell prey to evil foxes. Discovering their deaths was not cause for any personal alarm; even as a five-year-old I knew that these were all furry animals who did foolish things, things that I had no intention of doing.

So it was a great disturbance to learn that death would find me too.

According to my source, if I was 'lucky' my death would occur in the very same way as my grandfather's had. Old. Smelling of pipe smoke and farts, with balls of tissue stuck to the stubble over his top lip from blowing his nose. Black lines of dirt beneath the tips of his fingernails from gardening; eyes yellowing at the corners, reminding me of the marble from my uncle's collection that my sister used to suck on and swallow, causing Dad to come running to wrap his arms around her stomach and squeeze till the marble popped back out again. Old. With brown trousers hiked up past his waist, stopping only for his flabby boob-like chest, revealing a soft paunch and balls that had been squished to one side of the seam of his trousers. Old. No, I did not want to die how my granddad had, but dying old, my source revealed, was the best-case scenario.

I learned of my impending death from my older cousin Kevin on the day of my granddad's funeral as we sat on the grass at the end of his long garden with plastic cups of red lemonade in our hands and as far away as possible from our mourning parents, who looked like dung beetles on what was the