

The Book of Tomorrow

By Cecelia Ahern

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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 whisky 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.
4. 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 patronisingly covered by fake green grass as though trying to fool us it wasn't the maggoty soil he was being lowered into for the rest of eternity. Though I admire Mum for trying, her breakdown at the grave didn't bring him back.
5. Nor did the endless stories about my dad that were shared at the do afterwards during 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, and spilling tears and red wine on Mum's new Persian rug. 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.
6. Nor did it work when Mum discovered Dad's personal finances were about as healthy as he. He was bankrupt; the bank had already put in place the 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. He 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.
7. It was good thinking on his part not to stick around for it all. It was all as awful and as humiliating as I'm sure he feared.
8. If my parents had flowering buds, then maybe, just maybe, they could have avoided all that. But they didn't. There was no light at the end of that tunnel, and if ever there was, it was an oncoming train. There were no other possibilities, no other ways of doing things. They were practical, and there was no practical solution. 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.

9. 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. Dad wasn't a nice man. I loved him, of course, but I know he 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, snapped often, had a temper that flared easily, he forced his opinions on others and was rather arrogant. He made people feel uncomfortable, 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.
10. I didn't say any of this at his funeral or at the little party at our house afterwards. 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 ruined both of them all by himself.
11. I'm not just heaping all the hate on my dad here. I was a horrible person. I was the worst possible daughter. They 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 realise the best way to make me appreciate anything was probably not to have given me everything.
12. We lived in a seven thousand square foot, six-bedroom contemporary mansion with a swimming pool and tennis court and a private beach in Killiney, County Dublin, in Ireland. My room was on the opposite side of the house to my parents' and it had a balcony overlooking the beach that I don't think I ever looked out at. It had an en suite with a shower and Jacuzzi bath, with a plasma TV - TileVision, to be precise - in the wall above the bath. I'd a wardrobe full of designer handbags, a computer, a PlayStation and a four-poster bed. Lucky me.
13. Now another truth: I was a nightmare daughter: I was rude, I answered back, I expected everything and, even worse, I thought I deserved everything 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.

(This book is available in our school library. Borrow it and read on!!)