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## Response To Grief – The Story Of Tom Brennan

The Story of Tom Brennan investigates the journey of self-growth and the second chance at happiness of the protagonist, Tom. Tom was an ordinary teenager from Mumbilli, his life consisted of rugby matches, parties and homework, he was a popular guy with typical teenage problems, until the accident. The choice to drink drive, made by Tom's brother Daniel, not only left two friends dead and his cousin Fin a quadriplegic; it also left Tom feeling depressed, empty and grief stricken. Tom felt guilt by association for what had happened, and Tom always had thought his family were so perfect, he truly thought "Nothing or no one could take that away from us". Unfortunately for Tom, his belief of a perfect life was destroyed. There were many of different ways the characters involved in grieving coped with the tragedy, for Tom, he kept his emotions to himself, hiding them away, which would prove to be a recipe for disaster. However, Tom's mother, Theresa, was lost to her emotions and to Tom and other she was barely recognizable as the woman she was before the accident. In the novel, the prologue the last line is "My name is Tom Brennan, and this is my story" and is a literal invitation by the protagonist to visually witness his life story, centered around the events following the tragedy.

"I banged my head on the mirror". Tom was frustrated and feeling sorry for himself. Tom required a path to overcome his frustration. Tom's struggles throughout the novel, through his ongoing recovery from the traumatic accident he witnessed. Tom feels the need to have everything exactly how it once was, and Coghill cannot replace the joy that afternoon football games with Daniel, his father and the local community of Mumbilli brought him. His ascension hill symbolizes Tom's struggle and his journey, and through running. Tom's progress of transition maturity through running, "Start running tomorrow, I've never seen you so... stationary." Being stationary is a symbol of Tom's lack of courage and avoiding the truth, "Faster, faster, faster... like trying to find the gap to break through." Tom finds his position in the new world.

Tom believes his life is over after the accident, he loses his sense of identity and he does not know who he trusts anymore, including his family. Moving from Mumbilli to Coghill meant Tom would be leaving his friends and life behind, except the grief and guilt that came with him, a burden on his new life. However, Tom would not expect to meet Chrissy, and this would change his world again. When Tom meets Chrissy, they become closer and more entwined in each other's personal lives. Chrissy became the person Tom would talk to about his feelings towards the accident. Through Chrissy, Tom slowly became himself again. Tom begins to move on with his life, he is becoming stronger than the rest of his family. rather the dwelling on the past. Tom began to let go of his anxiety and trust someone again, this symbolizes great maturity. When Tom loses his virginity to Chrissy, they simply "loved each other and that was the morning Tom Brennan came back forever." That experience allowed Tom to finally take back his life and he

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became his own person again.

Theresa is undoubtedly the most heartbroken character represented in the novel; as a result of her son's crime, her own child is sentenced to five years in jail, and Tess struggles to come to terms with the repercussions of his actions. Each of the Brennans' reaction to the tragedy was individual, the effects all range from different forms of grief: Anger, denial, depression, guilt, acceptance and growth. Tess' strong determination that the accident wasn't Daniel's responsibility, by refusing to discuss and acknowledge the accident with the family. Tess questioned Tom whether he was sure "it was Daniel who was driving," or Daniel who started the fight (p. 105-106). Tess even tried to blame Daniel's ex-girlfriend Claire for provoking it all. For Tess, accepting Daniel was at fault for the accident, would mean having to say goodbye of her belief Daniel was innocent. Tess as a character is portrayed, before the tragedy as a loving and caring mother, after the accident occurs, she moves into a dark, deep depression.

Tom's mother Theresa is described by the author as skinny, undernourished and not in a good way. Tess does not eat and shows signs of depression. Tom wanted to spend time with her, but it was difficult when she was so down. She had shut down as if she has lost a child forever. Daniel had been Tess' purpose in life, she always felt her role in his life had been to protect him, with Daniel gone, Tess felt her main role as a mother was gone, she fell apart. Tess stayed home, she didn't take care of her family, absolving herself of her mothering, she left it to Gran. "Give him my love... Tell him I'm always thinking of him." (p. 132). The only thing she would get up was for her Saturday visits to Daniel. To her family, she was a shell of who she once was. Time was the healer for Tess and many months after the accident, Tess finally began to eat, bathe and care for her family. She had finally accepted the price Daniel had to pay for his actions. Although Tess did eventually recover from the trauma, there was always a part of her that would keep Daniel on a pedestal whilst neglecting the rest of her family and their accomplishments.

The Story of Tom Brennan explores diverse ways individuals develop when they are taken out of their comfort zones and undertake into new experiences. The Story of Tom Brennan follows the lives of the Brennan family after the events of a disastrous car accident, it shows how Tom, the protagonist struggles to cope with his past, after moving to Coghill. The Brennan family were refusing to acknowledge the events and their new situation in Coghill.

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