





I rolled my eyes and gave her a big apologetic hug. With everything going on I had been fighting quite a bit with her. In that moment, I felt horrible, as I could see all the hard work, she had done just for me. “I’m sorry, thank you for everything.”

I looked back at Alex urgently. “I have so much to tell you! How long will you be here?”

few people had asked me. I didn't know. His sentencing day finally came several months after my birthday. I hardly listened to the judge as my dad stood directly in front of us. I couldn't see his face. His hands were cuffed behind his back and his fingers were continually

“Happy birthday,” my dad said pointing at the bag. I could see dirt with some twigs sticking up out of the bags.

“What is it?” I asked forgetting that just a few days ago I had said I wanted roses to make a rose water spray. He said then that he knew where he could get some really rare and old rose bushes. He said he would grab them for me the next time he went through that town. I didn’t believe him.

“You said you wanted rose bushes, remember? You thought I would forget, didn’t you?”

“They don’t look too good right now but as long as you get them planted within a few days and water them every other day until the first frost, they will do great next year.” My grandma chimed in. She was an expert at plants and gardening.

“You’ll hav o

“How is your politics class going?” my dad asked.

“It’s actually better than I thought it would be,” I replied. He remembered that I was annoyed about having to take that class. But shortly into that conversation, he started talking about his case. He was out on bond and dragging it out just like he did when I was sixteen.

“I hired an attorney, and it looks like I could get only one year if we build the case right but if not, they want to slap me with five to ten years.”

“Okay, would you guys like to go inside to eat dinner?” I said, cutting him off. “It’s getting cold out here.”

This year was different from so many in the last twenty-eight years. He was present, sober, and almost enjoyable company to be around. Those are the complete opposite words I could ever use to describe him for all my past birthdays.

This year, he put me first.

In a few months, I will have to say goodbye again. I’ve learned so much from being the daughter of an addict. The pain of waiting for him to get sentenced will never suck any less, nor will the time he is gone.

Birthdays have always been hard for me, but now I know I get to choose how to remember him when he isn’t here. I could be mad that he will be leaving in a few months, or because the years of drug use is catching up to him in ways that effect his mind and body; They are a constant reminder of the past. It is rare that addicts can keep very many people in their lives. This is not the picture-perfect relationship -

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in his life at all. I am armed with boundaries of love; present for the moments I am more important to him than the drugs. My sixteenth birthday and many others have been like thorns in my heart, but now I choose to see the roses instead.