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### Goddamn Tidewater

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Dr. Clemens

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### Goddamn Tidewater

I couldn't pick a color because I didn't know what his favorite color was, so it wouldn't feel right to just choose one. Therefore, I went with black and gray just to be on the safe side. The detailing is very intricate; there are many petals that are curved inwards, almost like the flower hasn't fully bloomed yet. Chrysanthemums are known as one of the prettiest perennial plants that start to bloom in early autumn. It's known as the favorite flower, and the birth flower for the month of November. There are many different meanings and symbols for chrysanthemums depending on where you are across the globe; they are looked at as flowers of respect and honor in the U.S. *This* is my tattoo.

My dad and I weren't very close before everything happened. My mom and him broke up before I was born, and I never really figured out why, but I think it was because he had a drug addiction to crack cocaine. He tried to come clean as soon as he heard my mom was pregnant, but that didn't last very long. He didn't really have a stable life after I was born, always bouncing around between his friends' houses sleeping on their couches because he didn't have his own house. Nonetheless, he always came around to visit me at least twice a month. My mom knew that he never stopped doing drugs, and so she told him that he wasn't allowed near me if he was high. When he wasn't getting high with his friends, and made the effort to come see me, he had to take the DART bus for a while, a bus transportation system in the state of Delaware, to a

shopping center near my house, and then walk a mile to my neighborhood. After a few years, he got a pre-owned car that he would use to come visit me, and sometimes he would use it to take me to the store to get a new pack of Pokemon cards to fulfill my obsession.

“Do you want to go with me to the store?” my dad said.

“Sure!” I said.

Once we got to the store, we headed straight to the cashier lines where they had all of their card games like Pokemon. They put them in the lines hoping a kid will be like me and convince their parent to grab a pack before they check out. With how the cards are packaged, you can't tell which ones are inside. It's a mystery every time.

“Let's see what you got this time!” he said.

“Okay!” I said.

I had no clue how to play the game of Pokemon, even though that was supposed to be the purpose of the card packs. I liked the pictures of the creatures on the cards, and I thought they were cute. That's why I collected them. I had about 750 cards by the time he passed away, and I never got rid of them because they now have sentimental value to me, as funny as it may sound.

He would take me out of the house on “dates”, but little did I know he was showing me how women should be treated and respected.

“Do you want to go out with me tonight? We can go to dinner. On a little date.” He said.

“A date?” I said while giggling.

“That's not what fathers and daughters do” I said.

“Why not?” he said.

“It's weird” I said.

He taught me a lot of different life lessons that I took for granted or that I didn't understand then, but I am so thankful for now. He really tried to get his life together, so that he could put in the effort to do the best he could to raise me. He may not have lived with us or was there the whole time when I was growing up, but he did a damn good job of helping my mom with raising me and I will forever be grateful that I am the way I am because of that. I will forever be grateful that he didn't just up and leave with the drugs like most addicts do when he found out about me.

My dad had a few tattoos himself. He had my name written in cursive on the side of his neck along with a few others that had sentimental value to him. My tattoo helps me feel as if my dad is still with me acting as the angel on my shoulder and watching me everywhere I go. Before I was able to convince my mom to let me get my tattoo, it felt like a piece of me was missing. Convincing her to let me get the tattoo I wanted took me 2 years.

"When can I get the tattoo that I want for my dad?" I said.

"When you move out of my house and start paying your own bills." My mom said.

I never quit at asking her about it though because it was so important to me. It's only fair if I got a tattoo for him like he got one for me. It changed at least 10 times before her and I settled on something we both liked and thought was appropriate for the occasion.

"When can I get my tattoo?" I said.

"What do you want to get done? You know it's permanent right?" she said.

"Yes mom. I really want something that reminds me of my dad, something I will never lose." I said.

"Show me a picture of it." She said.

\*pulls up a picture\*

"No. Writing is tacky. I'm not letting you get that." She said.

“Ok.” I said.

Later that night she sent me a picture of a chrysanthemum and said

“What about something like this? It’s simple and there is no writing.”

“I really like that. Can we make an appointment to get it done before I leave for college? I don’t want to worry about having to come back here on a weekend to get it done.” I said.

“Sure.” She said.

The day of my tattoo appointment finally came, and I drove a friend and I to the shop. I brought one of my friends with me for moral support because I was nervous since I wasn’t sure how dreadful the pain was going to be. Getting a tattoo is a pretty intense pain that is hard to describe. If I had to describe to someone what getting a tattoo was like, I would tell them that the outline feels like a carpet sample with a needle through it. Rugburn with the stabbing pain from a needle on top of that. The shading on the other hand, is more of a dull sensation. That was way more tolerable because it just felt like pinching. My back was totally numb after the tattoo was done, and my feet felt like they were going to lose their circulation during the process, but it was definitely worth it. People describe the pain in different ways, but the pain also depends on where it gets done on the body. I got mine done pretty close to my spinal cord, so that likely contributed to my body’s reaction. The pain also depends on the person’s pain tolerance, if someone doesn’t have a high pain tolerance or they don’t like needles, it’s quite obvious that they should not get a tattoo. After asking around for some suggestions as to where to get my tattoo done, I went with the Tidewater Tattoo Studio in Elkton, MD and trusted Wendy to take a needle to my back. She has done some amazing work on other people, and she has great hospitality skills. It only took an hour to finish, but that felt like so much longer since I was sitting in the same position the entire time.

Many people, including my mom, say or used to say that tattoos are just a phase or that I will regret them later, and although that might be true for some, it will never be true for me. I have also gotten a lot of comments about how I picked the wrong tattoo to get for in memory of him, or how I am too young to make such a big life decision, or how it's stupid to get something so permanent done to my body. That was the point. I wanted to have something permanent to remember and celebrate my dad's life. I love my tattoo with all my heart, and I hope that my dad can see it and that he loves it just as much as I do. I have been through leaps and bounds to get this put on my back, and now that I finally have, it feels like the puzzle pieces are all in place. Getting this tattoo definitely helped me feel complete. *This* one is for you dad.

