

Yolanda



I live with my twenty-one year old daughter, Marita. There's just the two of us. Marita has a problem with heroin and prescription drugs.

She did a rapid detox one time. Even in the first week after the detox, I knew it hadn't completely fixed things because she was using a bit, but then she seemed to get better. I started to hope again, mainly because she didn't ask me for any money for awhile and she got a part time job in a café in the city. So I wasn't seeing much of her, which was a bit of a relief really.

One night, about two months after the detox, I asked a friend over for dinner. I don't usually ask people over here because Marita can be so unpredictable. Sometimes she'll come home looking shocking and full of all these stories that are unbelievable. She's always trying to explain everything away and she doesn't seem to realise how ridiculous she sounds. Sometimes she'll be stoned and drop her cigarette on the carpet or fall asleep at the table and yet she'll get really cranky if you try and tell her. Sometimes she's full of energy and she'll be into everything, trying to help but it's not actually helpful because there's this madness in it. It's awful to be around and it's not something you like your friends to see.

But things had been better since the detox, so I decided to take the risk because this friend of mine was only in town for a week and I thought, 'Why shouldn't I have a normal life?'

I spent the morning tidying things. It was summer so we hadn't used the fireplace for a few months and it had become really dusty and dirty. I went to clean the tiles and when I bent down I saw these torn up bits of paper tucked under the coals in the grill. They weren't burnt or anything. They were really clean and new.

I thought it was strange so I fished them out and pieced them together. It was a letter to me from my aunt - a birthday letter, which I'd never received, which my daughter had obviously taken. My aunt wished me many happy returns and said something about buying myself something nice with the money.

What money? Marita had obviously stolen my birthday gift.

My birthday had been a week before. Even if my aunt had sent the letter a little early, it still must have arrived and been stolen by my daughter after the detox. I was really upset. Marita wasn't answering her phone so I rang up the place where she worked. They said she didn't work there anymore, that she'd only lasted one day. Everything was falling apart again.

I finally got my daughter on her phone and confronted her. At first she denied everything, then she admitted taking the money that my aunt had sent, but tried to tell me that it was before she did the detox. She couldn't even remember how much money there'd been. When I asked her about her job she said that she hadn't liked it and that she'd been too scared to tell me.

I told Marita to stay away until after my friend had left. I told her that she was a thief.

I had a really hard time cooking the dinner for my friend. Everything kept playing over and over in my head. I just knew that Marita was lying to me about the letter, but somehow I believed her about the job. I didn't know whether it meant that we were back at the beginning again and I couldn't stop thinking about my poor old aunt, that she'd be wondering why she hadn't heard from me about her gift.

The dinner was awful. My friend talked about her children a lot. She's got three kids. Her eldest son runs his own computing business and is about to get married. She's got a daughter who's just about to finish her medical degree. Her other son is traveling overseas after working and saving up the money. I couldn't think of a single thing that I could say about Marita without ending up telling my friend everything. And I didn't really feel as though I could manage my feelings if I started talking.

Marita came home at about one in the morning. I pretended to be asleep. I felt really lonely lying there on my own. I felt as though she was a stranger to me, that I didn't know her anymore.

The next day I wrote to my aunt and thanked her for her gift. I never told her what really happened.

Looking back, I think that I might have been able to avoid some of the problems with my daughter by arranging life at home a bit differently. I want to keep Marita living at home, but I also want a social life. I'm going to tell my daughter that I need a couple of nights on my own each week. I might ask her to spend her weekends somewhere else. That way I can have time with my friends without worrying about what will happen.

There wasn't much I could do about the money that was stolen, since I don't want to involve the police. But I've decided to get a post office box because my daughter has done this sort of thing before and she might do it again.

As for my friend, I'm glad I didn't tell her about Marita. I've told my close friends, but I don't want to tell everyone. If I had the dinner over again, I'd try and steer the conversation away from children. Maybe I need to work out how to say something positive about my daughter that feels true. It won't be easy, but there might be something I could focus on.



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