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My Pretty Girl

I am sitting on my carpeted bedroom floor, clutching my dog Daisy's collar tightly. Tears are streaming down my face uncontrollably. Is this real? Please tell me this is a dream. It's more like a nightmare, but sadly it is my soul crushing reality. My pretty girl is gone.

"Honey, are you okay?" My mom stands at the entrance of my room, face full of concern.

"I just need to be alone for a while," I choke through my tears.

The collar, which I cannot seem to let go of, is just a short, black, woven piece of material. There are plastic designs sewn onto it that were once silver, but have now faded to white. The plastic designs have rhinestones embedded into them, though some of them are now missing. The black threads are coming undone from all the wear and tear over the years, and the material feels dingy from age. I even notice strands of long white fur still clinging onto it, lifeless. Two tags dangle from the collar: one is round and silver, from the vet, and the other is a small, purple heart with the name Daisy inscribed on it.

I lift the collar to my chest, causing the dangling tags to jingle. Suddenly, I am thrown back ten years in time. I had always longed for a puppy, and my parents were finally going to make my wish come true. We went to the pound to rescue one, but unfortunately, it did not work out. The day we were supposed to pick my puppy up from the shelter, my dad received an unnerving phone call. The puppy I had chosen didn't make it due to her having a disease. I was devastated because I had already chosen a name for her and everything: Daisy.

In that moment, a light bulb flickered on in my dad's head. To relieve my pain, he decided we were going to a pet shop to pick out another puppy. I was wary at first, but when we arrived, all my pain seemed to disappear as I locked eyes with my new companion, a two-month-old little black and white puffball. She was in a tank with two other puppies, and they were using her as a pillow! It was the most adorable thing, and the moment I looked in her eyes I knew she was the one. I smiled and named her on the spot: Daisy.

Abruptly, I am brought back to the present. I hear the clicking sound of nails hitting the wood floor of the hallway. My dog Chico enters my room slowly with his head down and his stubby tail tucked in. He sits down next to me and his sad little eyes rise to meet mine. He sniffs the collar I am still clutching and lets out a small whimper. My heart breaking all over again; I pull Chico close and kiss him on the top of the head.

"It's going to be okay, Bubby; I miss her too." Chico licks my face in response and sits on top of my lap. We sit there together, staring at the collar, and not knowing what else to do. I finally decide to stand up, causing the tags to jingle again.

Now, I am only a few days back in time. I'm standing outside, bundled up in my black, puffy jacket. The crisp February wind is attacking my face and ears, and I want to go inside already. I'm attempting to enjoy my cigarette while waiting for Daisy to go outside – use the restroom. She is sniffing around in the grass, wrapped up in her pink dog sweater with white snowflakes on it.

"Go outside Daisy." I tell her, beginning to grow impatient.

Just then, she squats for what seems like minutes and at last we retreat inside. I remove my jacket, as well as Daisy's, and we go sit on the couch together. I get lost in whatever

television show I'm watching and don't even notice that Daisy has left the couch. As I look around for her, I spot a small puddle of pee on the wood floor.

"Dammit. Daisy, did you pee?" I exclaim as I get up to search for paper towels to clean it.

After I clean up the mess, I finally spot Daisy sitting behind the couch with a cowardly look on her face. Poor her, she knows she did wrong and she cannot even help it. She has become incontinent – she can no longer hold her pee. I sigh and cock my head at her. "It's okay pretty girl, c'mon." Daisy leaps up, wagging her curly tail with the broken tip, and comes back to sit with me.

As I am going to bed, I stop and stare at Daisy a minute, who is still lying on the couch. There is a strange, almost empty look in her eyes. "Are you okay, pretty girl?" I ask her as I pet her on the head. She licks my hand and then closes her eyes. I feel a little uneasy, but I go to bed anyway.

Knock! Knock! I awaken to my dad pounding on my bedroom door.

"Karen, get up!" he yells with anxiety. I clamber out of my bed and run to the door to open it.

"What is it Dad?" I ask him.

"It's Daisy honey. . ." he says as a single tear rolls down his cheek.

Daisy had been my faithful and loving dog for ten years. During that time, we created many memories together that will stick with me for the rest of my life. She never left my side through good times or bad. She traveled with me and my family across the country on road trips; she liked to sit on the center console of the car. I remember one time we stopped to eat while driving through Phoenix, Arizona, and it was 118 degrees outside! We could not leave Daisy in

the car, so the owners of the restaurant were nice enough to allow her to come inside with us. Daisy even made it all the way to Disneyland! Of course, she was not allowed to go inside the park, but she was pampered in the kennel they have there. We went to Florida together and had a blast on the beach. I can still see her running through the sand and riding waves with me and my brother on a boogie board. Daisy was also very smart. I remember, when we were still in the process of potty-training her, we left her at the house alone for a few hours. We were worried we would return to pee on the floor, but what we found was a huge surprise. Daisy had climbed onto the toilet to jump onto the counter by the sink in the bathroom. There was pee halfway on the counter spilling over into the sink. It was so cute, I still wonder how she would know to do something like that.

Daisy always wanted to be number one in my life. One day, I brought home a Build-a-Bear with a bunch of accessories. One of the accessories was a pink satin dog bed with fluffy white fur surrounding the top. Daisy was so jealous that I was paying attention to my new toy, and she kept removing the Build-a-Bear from the bed so she could lay in it. It was so hilarious, I eventually let Daisy keep the bed. Her being so jealous, it was a bit difficult at first when I brought my dog Chico home. She would fight for my attention, but I also had to give plenty of attention to Chico because he had anxiety. Eventually, they grew to love each other and would never leave each other's side.

Daisy will live on in my heart forever. She was my first dog, and having her led to the huge love and appreciation I now have for animals. Since I got Daisy, I have taken in four strays whom I love with all my heart. I have two dogs: Chico, whom I rescued from the street, and Cezar, whom I rescued about a year ago. Cezar was in horrible condition; he had scabies and was practically bald. The two other strays are cats: Q, I saved him from going to the shelter on

Christmas, and Milky Way, a starving kitten that I picked up off the streets in Juarez, Mexico. I love them all so much and wouldn't trade them for the world.

The collar, of course, symbolizes the love I will always have for Daisy and all the times we shared, but also the place in my heart that is now wide open for other animals. They are my children, and I know I will be an animal mother for years to come.