Broken

By: Victoria Gurganus

I am sitting here, in an almost sterile hospital bed, looking like a broken doll, lifeless. I only have three options in this room since I’m sitting up: look in the mirror above the desk across the room, lay down to sleep, or watch tv. It’s too loud in the hospital to sleep with nurses constantly coming in and out of the room and alarms going off. I can’t seem to keep my attention on the tv. Doctors have told me that I’m lucky to be alive. Judging by the image in the mirror, I’d say they’re right. I don’t recognize the girl in the mirror as my reflection. The bruises under her eyes are only minor in comparison to the dark purple, almost black, color spiderwebbing from the solid band of bruising around her neck.

As the light fades from the sky, an officer walks in. She’s in uniform, but the top is loose, and her hair is down; almost as though she’s about to get off work or is afraid she’ll frighten someone. Moving to my bedside, she says, “Darlene, I’m Officer Sanderson, do you know why you’re here?”

I have gone by Doll so long that it takes me a minute to remember that Darlene is my name. “Yes,” I reply quietly with a small, painful nod because of the bruising around my neck.

“Can you tell me who did this and why you are here? I’m afraid your mom painted a rather negative picture, but I’d like to hear the story from you.” Officer Sanderson says.

I take a breath and think back. There is so much she needs to know to understand that *I’m* the one at fault for this. “I met my master in high school. He went by Robert then. He was couple years older than me. I was a freshman when he was a senior. We weren’t really friends at first, but some of my friends started dating older guys and we became friends at a party. We all ended up hanging out together a few times over weekends and breaks.”

Officer Sanderson cuts in to ask “Why do you call him your master?”

“I am… was his submissive partner. It’s how he asked me to address him.” I answered. “He recognized me as a submissive shortly after we started hanging out, meaning that I wanted someone who would care about me and give me direction in life. I had always been indecisive and emotionally needy. Some people said that I was ‘high maintenance’ but I didn’t get a lot of attention at home. Mom worked almost 24/7 and dad left when I was two, I have no clue why. I’m not just a sub, I’m a pet, which means that want to be taken care of, played with, and cuddled. My dynamic doesn’t include sexual contact. I don’t want it to either. I might later on but as a pet affection is platonic, connected to a specific person, but platonic. I don’t want to be hurt- and I don’t want to be humiliated. I know some people like those things, but not me.”

“How and when did your relationship begin if he’s so much older than you are?” Officer Sanderson asks.

“Our relationship started as normal dating the summer after my graduation. He’d pick me up and we’d go out to eat, see a movie, or walk hand in hand in the moonlight. It was innocent enough and he seemed to understand my needs/dynamic. We were together over a year before our relationship began to include aspects of BDSM. Bondage was ok but didn’t really affect me. It didn’t send me into the mindset of Master being the only thing that mattered. Master liked it though. We only ever really spoke about BDSM in general terms, never any specifics before I was given my collar, but I had done a lot of reading since in the 4 years that I knew Master.”

“What is a collar and when was it given to you?”

“A collar is in BDSM what an engagement ring is outside of it. It’s a promise that you belong to someone and that they want you in their life. It isn’t legally binding, but it is very important in the BDSM community. He gave me the collar a week before Christmas after BDSM was introduced into our relationship.”

My thoughts stray back to that night. We went out to Olive Garden and after sharing a tiramisu, we went home, and Master ran a peppermint scented bubble bath for me. He gave me a laminated copy of my favorite book, *A Rose for Melinda* that I could read in the bath. When I got out, wrapped in a fluffy burgundy towel, he turned on the Hallmark movie channel and had a peppermint hot chocolate waiting for me.

He said, ‘I hope you know, how I feel about you. You are my missing piece. I’d love to claim you as mine *officially*. Will you accept my collar and follow my rules?”

I immediately said, “yes” ecstatic that he had asked. I wasn’t worried about his rules or anything else.

“What was it like? Did you talk about what would happen?” Officer Sanderson’s question brings me back to the present.

“Getting my collar was amazing and we eventually did talk about limits and rules; things that we liked, disliked, would not want to try. The rules didn’t seem too restricting at the time but seemed worse as time went on.”

Officer Sanderson didn’t have to ask for me to know that she wanted to know what some of the rules were. The interested look on her face when I mentioned them was enough for me to give her a few.

“I wasn’t allowed to contact my friends -not that I had been in regular contact with them anyway. They had all gone to college after high school and I, being extremely indecisive, didn’t know what I wanted to do and even if I had, then I wouldn’t have gotten the applications done in time to go. Mom wanted me to go, but she was struggling to keep the house without me going to school without direction.”

 “I wasn’t allowed contact with my family. He said that he didn’t like seeing me hurt and the distance between my mom and I was obvious. He didn’t want her to hurt me anymore.”

“Had your mom hurt you? If he was worried about her doing it again?” Officer Sanderson asks. It’s a question I should have seen coming but didn’t.

“No!” I answer shocked. “Mom never did anything directly, but she was never home. And the small amount of time she was, she slept. I would ask her to come to a school function, and always get a no. We really didn’t have a relationship and that in itself hurt.”

 “The rest of the rules were that I was not allowed to lie, I had to make sure the house was clean, dinner was ready by 6pm, and I was not allowed to eat dinner without him. Breakfast and lunch were fine, but not dinner. I had to make sure to follow every order Master gave me immediately, without question and if Master ever went too far, then I was to say ‘penguin’ and everything would end.”

“I tried to follow the rules, but often failed to finish in time. I got away with being late a few times, but also missed dinner those nights when Master didn’t come home. I knew his dynamic was different and that he would go to a BDSM club, to find someone to play with there occasionally. I’d often clean the house and start reading and lose track of time, so dinner was late.”

“What happened when you were late for something?” Officer Sanderson askes.

“I was punished. Punishments were agreed to begin as a time out and a spanking, but escalation was never discussed. I was locked in a crate for a limited amount of time if Master felt like the timeout and spanking weren’t enough, but that just seemed like a more extreme time out. The problem was that they got worse and worse with every mistake and I was even punished for not getting things done while I was being punished. I think Master may have forgotten that he was at home and not at the club. Some of his subs are more like slaves there. He came home from work around noon one day and found me doing the dishes. Since he was home, and the house wasn’t clean, I was locked in the crate. I was let out around 5:30 but dinner wasn’t ready by 6. I should have just made grilled cheese or something rather than try to make the lasagna I had planned.”

My mind flashes back to that day. Master was livid. He grabbed my arm, leaving bruises, and almost carried me into the spare room that he stored toys in. He chained me to the wall, forgoing the velcro cuffs we normally used for metal ones. This alone scared me.

“You failed again, Doll. First, the house wasn’t clean, and now dinner is late -*again*!”

My head jerked up and I tried to look at him. I was confused. I had already been punished for not having the house clean and after punishments were given, the incident had never been brought up again, it was always dismissed with the punishment. He just sneered at me and went to get one of his whips, I’m not familiar enough with them to know what kind it was. When the first strike landed I was shocked. We had spoken of his toys, but whips were beyond a hard limit for me. They were only supposed to be used at the club.

“Penguin,” I said. When Master didn’t react I screamed, “PENGUIN!” Master just ignored my safe word. I was lashed another eight times screaming with each blow and crying in between. I passed out on the last strike. The last few drew blood and got infected afterward, but master tended to them while I was delirious.

“What happened, Darlene?” The officer askes softly, drawing my attention from inside my own head.

“Master was angry, He tied me up and used one of his whips. That’s where the scars came from. I knew he had whips but he had promised not to use them on me.” Tears begin to fall. “He ignored my safe word.” My voice muffled.

I take a breath to fight the tears back again and continue. She said she wanted the whole story from me. Who knows what mom told her. She always assumed the worst when I asked her to sign papers for school.

“Most of the rules were suspended on the weekends, at first. Master said that this was for a check-in, he was trying to mesh our dynamics without overwhelming mine. The check-in was to make sure that I was still comfortable with the rules and that I didn’t need anything that Master wasn’t giving me. Master was home from the office he worked in on weekends as well. These check-ins ended after about six months. Master said that he knew what I needed now and that my behavior was better when I stayed in my role. I needed the security of the rules and would struggle more at the beginning of the week than I did at the end of the week.

“Master slowly stopped giving me the attention and affection I craved. He also wasn’t comforting me like he used to but would still take me down into subspace, that place in my head where only Master matters and I don’t have to make decisions. I needed affection and cuddles, that was the basis of my dynamic. I needed to know someone cared. My punishments slowly stripped me of these things and I never got them back, because without them, I no longer had that safety net and felt off. I couldn’t relax into my routine to behave well enough to earn a reward. My bed- the big fluffy pillow I napped on, was one of the first things to go. I did sleep curled up with Master in his bed, but when we watched movies or I read while he played video games, then I curled up on my fluffy pillow.”

“This sounds almost like you were treated like a combination between a maid and a dog.” Officer Sanderson says almost as though it is an observation she is making.

“My dynamic could be taken that way. I want to have options, but I don’t want to have a lot of them. I also enjoy doing chores. If I do them, then Master has more time to spend with me and I said before that I want to play and cuddle. I need the affection, but there is no sexual aspect to my dynamic.” I can hear how defensive I sound.

“How did you end up in the hospital, Darlene?” It almost seems like she’s asking to change the subject, but why not.

“Eventually the only sign of Master’s affection I had left was my collar. That was finally taken away too. I made too many mistakes for Master to keep me. He told me that I was too much trouble.” I sit there quietly for a moment, head down to avoid my reflection.

Officer asks, “What happened to make him take your collar away?”

Startled at her asking another question so soon, I look up at her. “I don’t know,” I say hesitantly.

“Tell me about when or how it happened,” She says gently.

“Okay,” I said, I doubt it will actually give her anymore of an idea than I have. “It was midafternoon, and the house had been cleaned. Dinner was in the oven. A delicious looking pot roast that had been cooking for hours. Master came into the living room where I had curled up in the corner of the couch. Anger was radiating off him when he came into the room. I immediately went to my knees at his feet, a sign of deference that I had adopted when startled by him. I was almost asleep though and missed his order.”

“He lost his temper and said, “If you can’t follow orders, then what good are you?” Apparently, he wanted an answer, but I had none to give. He waited only a moment before he grabbed the clasp of my collar and yanked. I had no choice but to follow as he yanked on it. He yanked on it again and the clasp gave way as I fell to the floor.

Master then grabbed my throat and, as I managed to whisper “Penguin” began to squeeze. He ignored me and squeezed so hard that I blacked out. I was shocked, I must have sat there for ten minutes after I came to before I realized what had happened. During that time, Master left again. I burst into tears, realizing that I was completely alone, before calling 9-1-1 for help. I was having trouble breathing. I had to have passed out again before the ambulance arrived, because I woke up in the hospital with a tube down my throat and my mom by my side.”

I realize as I finished speaking that Master went too far. He didn’t listen to my safe word and now I’m paying the price. Breath play, constriction of the airway for the headrush, has always been one of my hard limits, something I never wanted to try, and it’s usually used in sexual situations anyway. It was too risky, turns out that I would have been right except that this wasn’t for that. I don’t know why he decided to try strangling me. I never wanted to be hurt or humiliated. Unfortunately, that’s exactly what Robert did. He was no longer my Master and has no hold on me anymore. Thinking of him will likely hurt for a while, though.

“Thank you, Darlene.” Officer Sanderson says. “That was very good. I’ll see you later.”