

Unbreakable 2131

Chapter 2131

After the rollercoaster of losing and regaining Raegan, Mitchel was eager to announce to everyone that Raegan was his wife.

Yet, bringing up a wedding so soon after the death of Davey, who was Raegans biological father, felt out of place to Mitchel.

Luciana, observing Raegan and knowing the couples reserved nature, realized that without a nudge, theyd remain silent. Eager to become an official grandmother, she decided to step in. Raegan, would you like to have a wedding? Its your call, she proposed gently.

Raegan turned to Mitchel, meeting his hopeful gaze, his mind transparent to her. She had considered it herself. Her previous wedding with Stefan in Aurora was merely a sham, having missed out on many traditional elements.

It was Raegan who had suggested skipping them, feeling that certain rites should be reserved for a heartfelt celebration with her true love.

Now, with no more upheavals, Raegan was ready to move forward without delay. As she was about to speak, Mitchel cut her off. Alright. Mom, take it easy. Well visit again soon.

Luciana paused, spotting Mitchels V sign behind his back, and murmured, Clever boy, youve got plans

Feeling reassured, Luciana relaxed, content to await her official title as a grandmother.

Raegan was abruptly pulled away by Mitchel. She hadnt answered yet when he hurriedly whisked her away.

Outside Lucianas ward, Janey and Annis were nowhere in sight. Raegan was just about to call them when Mitchel intervened and explained, Janey was getting sleepy, so I had Matteo take them back first.

Raegan simply responded, Oh. She then pocketed her phone and thought nothing more of it. However, as they drove, she began to wonder why Mitchel hadnt let her speak.

Suddenly, the car came to a stop.

Mitchel asked, Want a cup of coffee? Theres a coffee shop over there. Want to give it a shot?

Raegan glanced at the shop, advertising her once favorite, which she had avoided since she started breastfeeding. Hesitant, she turned to Mitchel and inquired, Can I have some?

Absolutely.

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Mitchel, leaning on his crutch, helped Raegan out of the car and into the shop. After taking their coffee, he led her to a bench in the park where they sat sipping their drinks.

Raegan was overwhelmed with joy in these moments.

As they finished their drinks, Mitchel turned to her. Want to take a stroll around the park?

Raegan gave a nod, and they held hands as they walked through the park.

Without realizing it, they wandered into a sea of flowers.

Thousands of red roses formed a heart-shaped arrangement in the middle of the park, with Raegan and Mitchel right at its center.

Raegan gasped in awe. These flowers are so beautiful, she remarked.

Mitchel, gazing at her with deep affection, smiled and replied, As long as they make you happy.

Before Raegan could respond, Mitchel suddenly let go of his crutch, slowly knelt down, and presented a ring box, opening it to reveal a sparkling diamond ring. Raegan, will you marry me?

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Raegan was lost for words.

Only then did Raegan realize why Mitchel had silenced her earlier. He had been orchestrating his proposal.

Tears filled Raegans eyes as she nodded and whispered, Yes.

Moved by the moment, tears welled up in Mitchels eyes. He had meticulously arranged this proposal. A team was chosen to set up the scene, just waiting for the right moment to execute the plan.

Once Mitchel learned about Raegans feelings at the hospital, he immediately directed the team to begin setting up. He then intentionally lingered at the coffee shop, granting him the time to check and ensure everything was set.

Thankfully, it all worked out beautifully.

As Mitchel slipped the ring onto Raegans finger, a flock of white doves soared into the sky.

Simultaneously, fireworks erupted, lighting up the evening. The sky was adorned with red balloons and white doves, creating a breathtaking spectacle.

Overwhelmed and at a loss for words, Raegan covered her mouth.

Mitchel, leaning on his crutch, stood up and then stooped to embrace Raegan.

By this time, a crowd had formed around them, their voices echoing with congratulations. The atmosphere was vibrant with bubbles of joy.

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Afterward, Mitchel began planning their wedding, eager for it to be flawless. Tons of details needed to be prepared well in advance, including ordering items and flowers from abroad for the venue.

Everything was coming together smoothly, with the wedding scheduled for Valentines Day.

Mitchel decided to have surgery before the wedding to fully heal his leg.

Raegan understood his reasons. He wanted to look his best and not feel impaired on their special day. Though he tried to hide it, he was quite self-conscious about his leg.

Raegan asked about the risks of surgery, learning that it had a 95 success rate. It was a reassuringly high figure. Nonetheless, she couldn't help but worry about the remaining 5 chance of complications.

As they lay together, Raegan whispered a reminder, Don't forget your promise. No matter what happens, you won't leave me.

She wanted to remind him that their being together, along with their children, was the most important thing.

Uneasy, Raegan began to reconsider their plans. Mitchel, what about skipping the wedding and going on a honeymoon? What do you think?

Deep down, she was tormented by fears of his impending surgery.

Mitchel, trying to soothe her fears, replied, Don't fret. The surgery is safe. I'll be right by your side, come what may.

With lingering anxiety, Raegan awaited the day of Mitchel's surgery.

Outside the operating room, Raegan, along with Janey, Westin, and Juan, awaited news.

Earlier, Janey had caught a glimpse of Mitchel, clad in hospital garb, which nearly brought her to tears.

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After some coaxing from Raegan, Janey's tears had dried, though she still yearned to speak with Mitchel.

Mitchel, stroking her hair, smiled and inquired, What's bothering you, Janey?

Daddy, why do you need surgery?

I want to be your superhero again, sprinting and playing without a hitch, Mitchel explained with a hopeful glint in his eyes.

Janey pondered silently. She no longer needed Mitchel to carry her.

Yet, Raegan had emphasized the crucial nature of the surgery.

Janey, looking down, murmured, Okay. Daddy, actually, not all my friends get piggyback rides from their dads, but they say as long as a family is together, that's all that matters for happiness.

Mitchel gently kissed Janey's forehead, reassuring her, Don't worry, my dear. Your mom and I will always be here for you.

After a while, the surgery had begun.

Raegan was anxious, but thankfully, everything went smoothly, and Mitchel emerged from the operating room awake soon after.

Over the ensuing days, Luis monitored the postoperative results and was overjoyed. Mitchel, we did it. You're a hero. This will change the lives of millions!

Raegan was puzzled. What had they succeeded in? Change the lives of millions?

Luis, catching her bewildered expression, cleared his throat and said, You two have quite a bit to discuss. He then hurried out of the room.

Raegan turned to Mitchel, who had shown remarkable improvement in the past few days. He

could now stand for over half an hour and walk roughly ten meters without any help. His health was getting better each day.

Feeling confident at last, Mitchel decided to reveal the full truth to Raegan. This operation. I was the first human to undergo it!

Raegan's jaw dropped. Didn't they claim it was 95% successful?

Mitchel clarified, It is 95% but that was from testing on animals. I was the first person

Before Mitchel could continue, Raegan punched him hard. Crying, she said, Mitchel, you lied to me again!

Tears streamed down her face uncontrollably as she struggled to catch her breath.

Raegan, Raegan. Seeing that just calling her name did nothing, Mitchel wrapped his arms around her, which slowly calmed her tears.

Listen to me, the structure of animals and humans is basically the same. I only tried it because it had a 95% chance of success, and I trust Luis, Mitchel explained.

You should've told me Raegan was overwhelmed, yet struggled to articulate her feelings.

She felt she should have realized how much his leg meant to him. He often stared at it when he thought he was alone, lost in his thoughts for what seemed like hours. He would also watch other dads playing with their kids in the park, longing in his eyes.

Raegan scolded herself for not being perceptive enough. How could she have failed to grasp what he was thinking during those moments?

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But even if she had, what could she have done? Could she really have stopped Mitchel from undergoing the surgery and deny him the chance to get better?

Fortunately, the results were positive. Now that the surgery proved to be a success, there was no point in dwelling on it.

Mitchel knew she was worried and fearful about the potential complication, but he had no regrets about undergoing the surgery. He wanted to offer her the best, including the best version of himself, because she deserved nothing less.

Mitchel's recovery was swift, and the surgery turned out to be a resounding success.

While he wasn't ready for intense activities, he could walk normally and stand for hours without any problems.

Soon, their wedding day arrived.

Raegan slipped into the beautiful wedding gown she had designed during her college days. It was a dream finally coming true. Today, she was donning her own creation, marrying the man she loved.

She waited in the dressing room, poised to make her entrance at the right moment.

Just then, the door creaked open.

Hearing light footsteps, Raegan called out, thinking it was Judd, her assistant, Is it time?

The figure didn't respond but continued moving toward her.

Alerted, Raegan spun around, confronting an unexpected guest.

The man wore a white tuxedo, looking both handsome and refined. He dressed as if he were the groom.

Henley? Raegan called out his name cautiously. How did you get in here?

After being arrested, Alexis had confessed everything in a bid to steer Henley clear of the mess. But was it ever possible for misdeeds to go undetected?

Henley's manipulative strategies to sneak onto the board of directors had been laid bare, the police uncovering irrefutable evidence and now hot on his heels.

Raegan had assumed he'd escaped abroad and was shocked to find him at her wedding.

With an icy grin, Henley remarked, It's your wedding. I might not be the groom, but I just had to be here.

Mr. Brooks, I don't think our past merits an invite to each other's weddings, Raegan replied.

Grinning, Henley replied, You're so cruel, Raegan. I'm not here to cause trouble.

Despite his seemingly innocuous look, Raegan remained on high alert.

His past filled with trickery and lies was not something she could easily forget.

Am I cruel? With a wry smile, Raegan responded, I thought it was clear that we're nothing more than strangers after our last encounter at the International Banquet Center.

Raegan made their relationship status clear.

Henleys exit from the center that day was a silent admission of defeat. He was always one to measure the pros and cons. Clearly, he felt Raegan wasnt worth the risk to his life.

At her words, Henley momentarily lost his composure before regaining it. Raegan, is risking ones life the only way to prove love?

Looking directly at her, he questioned, If I hadnt left that night, if Id been ready to face life and death alongside you, would you have fallen for me?

I wouldnt, Raegan stated firmly.

Henley scoffed. See, thats why I hesitated then.

And thats why I could never love you, Raegan retorted. Everything you do is calculated. Family, friendships, and love You use them all as pawns. Thats why you end up alone.

As she spoke, Henleys face grew darker. Raegans words were spot-on.

Those who had once supported him abandoned him upon seeing his true self. Alexis was behind bars, and his ex-fiance had lost her mind upon learning shed been manipulated.

Henley gave Raegan a mocking laugh. It seems youre quite concerned about me.

Raegan shook her head dismissively. I dont need to keep tabs. Everything about you is splashed across the legal news.

Indeed, it was a foregone conclusion that those who followed Henley would eventually depart. Their connections were mere conveniences, fragile and easily broken. The only person who might have truly cared for Henley, Alexis, found himself back behind bars.

It was uncertain if Alexis had acted out of a sense of duty as a father, or simply chose not to betray Henley for other reasons.

Certainly, Alexis actions were hardly driven by love. They seemed more like a last resort.

Knowing that both he and Henley facing prison would be disastrous, Alexis took the entire blame upon himself, allowing Henley to remain free with the chance to salvage his own situation.

Like Henley, Alexis had weighed the benefits and consequences before deciding to shoulder the burden alone. But to say he didnt love Henley at all would be incorrect. His love, however, was conditional, laden with terms and calculated moves.

Raegans deepest regret concerned Henleys former fiance, Matilda.

She was a 20-year-old heiress, manipulated by Henley with a doctored drink, and left vulnerable to a man over fifty who exploited her without restraint.

When Matilda awoke, Henley had crafted an alibi that not only cleared himself but also framed the older man, allowing him to seize the projects he had set eyes on.

Henley coldly informed Matilda that to be with him, she had to accept such accidents as part

of their relationship. This violation wasn't a one-time event but the start of many.

Despite everything, Matilda's love for Henley led her to tolerate this ordeal, choosing not to pursue the matter. Yet, hearing the man she loved speak so callously pushed her to the brink of madness. Her treasured first experience was tarnished, and her fiancé brazenly told her to expect more such brutal encounters.

Matilda descended into complete insanity, her speech fragmented and nonsensical. Her parents, though they despised Henley deeply, couldn't bring themselves to harm him. Left with no other options, they admitted their daughter to a sanatorium for treatment.

Henley scoffed with disdain. Do you think those secret service guys can actually take me down? Raegan, even if they lock me up now, I'll be out in twenty-four hours.

Raegan had no reason to doubt Henley's confidence. She and Mitchel had scrutinized the situation. The financial crimes Henley was implicated in were riddled with legal loopholes.

With a top-tier lawyer, escaping charges would be a piece of cake, and the hefty legal fees were trivial for Henley at this point.

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After all, Henley had funneled substantial amounts through financial gaps during his tenure at the Dixon Group, then under Alexis control.

Now, even if the Dixon Group possessed incriminating evidence, they couldn't touch Henley since Alexis had assumed full responsibility for all associated crimes.

While Henley's reputation was tarnished at home, overseas he was celebrated as a distinguished young entrepreneur.

Meanwhile, Alexis languished in prison, still hoping Henley would come to his aid. It was a futile hope, as even if he decayed behind bars, that callous Henley would never come to rescue him.

Raegan, exasperated by Henley's arrogance, confronted him. You mistreated a woman who truly loved you.

Henley paused, picturing Matilda's innocent expression. Of all the women he had encountered, she was indeed the most sincere and selfless. If not for Raegan, he might have genuinely cared for her.

He gave a wry smile. Raegan, I don't love her. I only love you.

Raegan recoiled, disgusted. Just because you don't love her, you think you can trample over her feelings? Mr. Brooks, your values are truly unacceptable! She pointed at the door and said firmly, Please leave now, or I'll call security.

While she spoke, she discreetly searched the desk for her phone to call the police.

However, Henley saw her movements reflected in the mirror and smirked slightly. Raegan, I didnt come here to hurt you. I just wanted to see you. Theres no need to be so tense.

Unconvinced, Raegan pointed sternly at the door, her expression icy.

Are you going to leave or not?

Since Henley had seen her reaching for the phone, she saw no point in concealing her actions. She picked up her phone and dialed the emergency number.

Before the call could connect, Henley rushed over, snatched the phone from her hand, and disconnected the call.

Ah! Help! Raegan screamed, dropped her phone, and took several steps back to create distance between herself and this menacing figure.

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Since Henley had entered so boldly and remained undisturbed for so long, it meant he had likely neutralized the security at the door.

Raegan realized that a direct confrontation was not the smartest approach at this moment. Lacking the physical strength to overpower a man, her wits were her only defense.

With a casual toss, Henley threw her phone into a cup of water on the desk. He looked at Raegan with a smirk and proposed, Raegan, cancel your wedding and leave with me.

A wave of panic washed over Raegan as she stared back at Henley.

Youre insane! If you try to take me hostage, you wont even make it out of this venue.

Henley laughed off her response. Raegan, we clearly love each other. Its quite understandable that you run away during a wedding you dont want, right?

His words sent a chill through Raegan. She knew he must have prepared everything. If she vanished, the media would likely report it as a romantic elopement. Such a narrative could severely affect the Dixon Groups stock prices.

Henleys ultimate aim was still to undermine the Dixon Group. Even if he couldnt destabilize the company, merely tarnishing its reputation was satisfactory for him.

Raegan responded with fierce determination, Your scheme wont succeed. Ive set a timed post on Twitter that will go live if the wedding doesnt proceed as planned. Everyone will know something happened to me, and Ive asked the people of Ambrosia to help spread the word.

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Henley stopped, taken aback by her shrewdness. He hadnt anticipated such a preemptive move on her part. If her claim was true, abducting her would indeed be fraught with complications. His lawyers had advised him that if he could avoid trouble for a month, they could manage any legal issues arising within Ambrosia.

Watching Henley mull over his choices, Raegan sensed he was evaluating the risks of proceeding. She sat down on a chair and suggested with a hint of challenge, Mr. Brooks, why not give it a try? I bet your plane wont even make it out of the city. Believe me?

Henley remained silent, pondering her words. After a lengthy silence, he stepped back, laughing coldly. Raegan, youre truly clever. Together, we could dominate the world.

Raegans heart steadied, realizing the immediate threat had passed.

Within moments, he had dismissed the idea of kidnapping her, primarily due to the significant complications she posed.

Mr. Brooks, I have no desire to conquer the world, but theres an old saying, Those who practice injustice will ultimately bring about their own downfall.' Raegan continued, I suggest you reflect on these words before you act in the future. Maybe gather some good deeds. It might save you from a few stints in boiling oil in hell.

Henley laughed heartily, his arrogance undiminished. Raegan, as long as I wish it, no one can catch me.

Henleys perfectionism had often been his salvation. Paired with a lawyer adept at navigating legal loopholes, his arrogant declarations carried no trace of guilt.

Raegan, weary of his bluster, scoffed dismissively. Well see. My only wish in life is to see you face justice for your wrongdoings.

Henley felt a flicker of regret. Since reaching adulthood, things had typically gone his way. Whenever they hadnt, hed manipulated circumstances to his favor. Although he might lose in the battle regarding taking over the Dixon Group, it was a minor setback. He had ample funds to start anew abroad. Yet, the one conquest that eluded him was Raegan. What a pity..

Suddenly, the door burst open with a loud Bang!

Mitchel stormed in and Landed a solid punch on Henleys face, sending Henley staggering back.

Mitchel moved to strike again, but Henley seized his wrist, his voice icy with menace. Mr. Dixon, I assume you wouldnt want to spend your wedding day at the police station?

Mitchel clenched his fist but held back from striking again, standing upright as he issued an ultimatum, Do you want to leave on your own, or should I have someone escort you out? The police will be here very soon!

Mitchel had already alerted the police after receiving a message from Raegan. However, given it was their wedding day, he preferred to avoid a scene. Ideally, Henley would leave quietly and be apprehended outside.

Henley straightened his disheveled suit and smirked. Since Im clearly not welcome here, Ill

take my leave. He paused before exiting, fixing Raegan with a profound look. Raegan, I will live my life without regrets.

Mitchel's hand clenched into a fist again, ready to strike, but Raegan quickly grasped his arm, whispering, Don't let him provoke you. Today is our wedding day. She was resolute in not allowing Henley to derail their ceremony.

Someone! Raegan's voice was low but firm. Please escort this gentleman out.

Bodyguards swiftly entered the room. Henley, maintaining his composure, shrugged off their hands. I can leave on my own. He then exited with his posture erect.

Mitchel watched Henley leave, feeling a mix of relief and suspicion, and promptly instructed his security team to keep a vigilant watch on Henley to prevent any further mischief.

Raegan, are you alright? Mitchel inquired, his voice laced with concern after issuing his commands.

Security at the wedding was stringent. Henley might have managed to infiltrate, but abducting Raegan was out of the question. Henley should be grateful he didn't escalate the situation. A hostage attempt could have forced Mitchel to respond defensively, leading to unpredictable outcomes.

Mitchel resolved to make Henley regret any disruptions, but on their wedding day, he desired no violence.

Raegan smiled reassuringly. Why would his threats scare me? I'm not so fragile.

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Mitchel drew her close and kissed her forehead tenderly. Good, as long as you're safe.

Just then, Erick entered the room and, spotting the couple's tender moment, turned away, clearly annoyed. The ceremony is about to start. Can't you two hold off just a bit longer?

Raegan chuckled at Erick's irritated response and quickly clarified for Mitchel, Erick, we aren't up to anything. Don't imagine things.

Erick felt a bit down by what he perceived as his sister's premature affection for another man. He seized Mitchel's arm in frustration and led Mitchel outside, querying sharply, Groom, are your vows ready?

After Mitchel was ushered out, the officiant approached Raegan to go over the ceremony details.

When Raegan, accompanied by Landen, made her entrance onto the stage, the lights intensified, illuminating her wedding dress magnificently.

The intense sparkle of the diamond lights gave Raegan an ethereal glow, reminiscent of a fairy from a classic painting. Mitchel, dressed impeccably in a black suit, appeared exceptionally distinguished on stage.

The couple, bathed in light, seemed perfectly matched, as if destined to be together.

Holding the microphone, the officiant posed the question to Mitchel, Mr. Mitchel Dixon, do you take Miss Raegan Foster to be your wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do you part?

With a loving gaze fixed on Raegan, Mitchel responded without hesitation, I do.

The officiant then directed the same vow toward Raegan, drawing the attention of all present.

Raegan surveyed the crowd, the sweeping lights capturing the assembly.

Landen and Erick were cooing her twin babies. Luciana was beside Janey while Hector was next to Casey. Nearby, Bryce, Annis, Elin, and Luis were seated together.

All the faces she knew and loved were there. Even though some were absent, their blessings

were felt. At this moment, everything was as perfect as it could be.

Raegan turned to face Mitchel and firmly declared, I do.

Thunderous applause followed from the audience. Everyone was showering the couple with blessings.

During a break in the wedding, Mitchels phone rang. It was the team keeping tabs on Henley. They reported that shortly after leaving the venue, Henley had been run over by Matilda, who had recently escaped from a sanatorium.

Although there was a chance to save Henley, Matilda interfered, preventing anyone from coming close enough to help. This delay ultimately led to Henleys demise. It was a case of poetic justice.

Mitchel murmured into the phone, Understood. With Henleys threat gone, he too allowed himself a sigh of relief.

Turning back, Mitchel saw Raegan smiling radiantly, her beauty striking him anew. He thought to himself that she should always have such a carefree smile.

The wedding day was lengthy and filled with joy.

In the evening, as the newly minted grandmother, Luciana naturally took Janey and the two babies to her villa to sleep. Her villa was conveniently next to Raegan and Mitchels bridal suite, close enough to easily watch over the kids, yet providing each family with their privacy.

Luciana was not alone in caring for the three children. Annis was with her, and they were assisted by two nannies.

Meanwhile, Mitchel carried Raegan upstairs to their suite.

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Raegan inquired, Isnt it tiring?

Mitchel raised an eyebrow in response. You underestimate your husband?

Raegan was momentarily speechless, her ears warming at his words.

After entering, he gently closed the door with his foot and whispered, Honey, are you tired?

Raegan, wrapping her arms around his neck, smiled and replied, Not really.

Should we start calling each other something different now? Mitchel suggested as he gently laid her down on the bed, hovering close above her.

His proximity caused Raegans cheeks to redden. Thank you, my love, she murmured.

As she spoke, he leaned in to embrace her. Darling, how would you like to thank me? he whispered.

Raegans blush deepened. How do you want to be thanked?

Mitchel paused, teasing her with a mischievous grin, With your body'

Were already married. Im already yours. How else do I offer myself Raegans words trailed off as her lips were met with his in a passionate kis. Mmm she gasped softly in surprise.

His hand gently wandered under her dress as he murmured in a husky voice, Lets seal that promise now.

Overcome with emotion, Raegan found herself speechless again. Her voice was tender, almost a whimper, Honey

As Mitchel carefully undid the last button, he reassured her, Easy, Ill be gentle

The room swelled with tender passion, marking the sweet beginning of their new life together.

At a small town nestled at the base of the mountains.

Nicole sat in the courtyard, cozily bundled in a big down jacket that could double as a blanket. She relaxed, enjoying the gentle warmth of the winter sun, her eyes closed in contentment.

Suddenly, the gate creaked open.

A small black dog in the yard excitedly wagged its tail, welcoming the newcomer first.

Roscoe entered, carrying two black fish and a basket filled with winter jujubes.

Nicole got up, removed the medical bag from his shoulder, and asked, Are these from Mr. Nixons family again?

Yes, he was quite insistent. He claimed these wild ones are very nutritious and asked me to bring them back for a nourishing soup for you, Roscoe answered.

After he placed the fish and jujubes down, Roscoe took a large chunk of meat and put it in the dogs bowl, announcing, Keith, you get an extra treat today.

Keith wagged his tail even harder and bent down to eat.

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While feeding Keith, Roscoe asked, Did you keep the house safe today? I wasnt here, so you had to look out for Nicole.

Hearing him speak to the dog, Nicole laughed and said, Its only a few months old, and you give it lectures every day like this.

Roscoe stood up, brushed off his hands, and explained, When I was young, an elder told me all-black dogs without white hair are extremely perceptive. Tell them something a few times, and theyll remember it.

Nicole was astonished that Roscoe, being so young and educated, still held onto these beliefs.

What Nicole didnt realize was that Roscoe only embraced these superstitions after her illness began. In desperate times, people often turned to higher powers, hoping for divine compassion.

Nicoles situation was critical, and every day Roscoe prayed that the heavens would show her a little more kindness, not asking for much, just some improvement. For him, her health and Austins well-being were all that mattered.

Nicole then asked, How is Mr. Nixons grandmother?

She caught a cold because of the weather. Ive given her some herbal remedies. She should recover soon, he replied.

Thats good to hear, Nicole responded.

They had been living in this remote mountain village for nearly half a year.

On the night of their escape, they decided on their car not to flee the country. They knew that crossing the border, no matter how carefully disguised, would inevitably leave traces. Often, the places that seemed the most dangerous were actually the safest.

They decided to remain within the country, changing cars at a junkyard during their journey, and continued driving west for a full week, day and night.

On their journey, they swapped vehicles at junkyards in every town they crossed.

By the time they arrived at their current Location, they were driving the fifth car of their journey.

When their car eventually broke down, an elderly man at the entrance to the village offered

them a place to rest.

The old man attempted to repair their car with tools he fetched, but since he had only ever worked on bicycles, he was unable to fix it.

Roscoe concluded it wasnt worth repairing, thinking it was almost ready for the junkyard and might not even be fixable at a regular garage. He handed the old man several hundred-dollar bills as a token of gratitude for his kindness.

But the old man declined and instead invited them to stay the night.

That evening, the old man built a bonfire. The village was tiny, and mostly inhabited by elderly people. His family and one other couple were the remaining couples. He explained that the village would disappear from the map because it lacked younger residents. Once everyone from their generation was gone, the village would be entirely empty.

That evening, all the villagers emerged, thrilled to see younger visitors after such a long time. They greeted Nicole and Roscoe warmly, not asking why they had come but eager to hear tales from beyond their village.

Nicole felt an unexpected warmth that night, with the elders affectionately calling her Sweetie, which reminded her of her late parents.

Assuming Nicole and Roscoe were a couple, the villagers offered them a room to themselves.

Nicole took the bed, while Roscoe settled on a mat on the floor.

As they listened to the cicadas and crickets, Nicole suddenly proposed, Roscoe, lets stay here.