

Chapter Two - The Bond

It was Christmas Eve 2010. Outside, the world hummed with celebration—lights flickering across rooftops, music drifting from windows, the warmth of families drawing closer together.

But within our home, there was only silence. The kind of silence that follows deep loss. The kind that settles into the corners of a house like a shadow that will not lift.

We, my wife Roni and I, my granddaughter Alexis, and grandson Preston, were still mourning the loss of my robust companions. Still adjusting to the absence of my two close guardians, two beautiful black and tan Rottweilers, brother and sister by birth and by bond.

They had meant the world to me, and I was so blessed to have them in my life, but their health took a sudden turn that resulted in me losing them to cancer. Losing a Rottweiler leaves a hole that's hard to describe. Losing both of them emptied my heart out from pain.

They weren't just pets, they were a staple of daily life, a presence you could feel even in silence. Owning one was a point of pride, not because of their strength or stature, but because of the unwavering loyalty and deep, intelligent bond they offered.

There's a quiet respect that comes with living alongside such a powerful and dignified breed—one earned, not demanded.

When they're gone, it's not just their body you miss. It's their watchful eyes, their grounding presence, and the sense of purpose they brought to your world.

Their names do not need to be written here for their memory is etched deeper than words, and their loyalty knew no language. These were not mere animals. They were sentinels of my spirit, defenders of my heart, and reflections of my own courage in moments when I had none.

They had suffered quietly, with a grace I did not deserve. Bone cancer had robbed them slowly, stripping away strength but never their dignity. In the end, I made a decision no man should ever make lightly—a decision that should never be made in haste, or for convenience.

Euthanasia. The word itself sounds clinical, sterile. But what it really means is this: that I held them close as they left this world.

That I chose peace over pain, dignity over decline. It was the last act of service I could offer them after a lifetime of theirs.

The decision to end suffering is one of mercy, but it does not feel merciful.

I remember the weight of their bodies, once full of power and presence, now resting quietly against me as I whispered goodbye. The cancer had ravaged them both—first slowly, then all at once.

I had promised them dignity. I had promised not to let them linger in pain. And when that moment came, I held them as the light faded from their eyes.

People say you did the right thing. That it was humane. But those words don't reach the corners of your heart where guilt burrows in. I felt I had failed them

somehow, failed to protect, failed to save. There was a silence in the house that wasn't just quiet, it was accusing.

And then came Maya.

She didn't understand the grief or the weight I carried, but she felt it. Every time she jumped into my arms, every time she curled into the hollow of my chest as I wept, she reminded me that life still pulsed with meaning. That love could live on, not as a replacement, but as a healing.

In her eyes, I wasn't a man who had failed, I was someone worthy of a second chance.

Maya didn't fill the void left by those I lost. She softened its edges. She gave me something to care for again when I wasn't sure I deserved to.

And yet, even mercy leaves a scar.

No one tells you that this kind of decision lingers. That it lives in your bones. It is not simply letting go. It is bearing witness to the end of something sacred.



I hope this book gives you the comfort and confidence to know, you and your companion—whether it's Maya, your spirited 15-year-old mixed breed doodle with a heart full of energy, or any other cherished pet—are not facing life's challenges alone. There are many loyal and faithful pet owners—including cats, birds, snakes, and even turtles—that consider their pets to be family.

Then came Maya with Alexis

And though I have no regrets in choosing their peace, I carry the ache of it still—the silent weight of a final goodbye.

They were not just protectors of my home. They were guardians of my inner life. When the world was unkind or uncertain, they stood at the edge of my anxiety, reminding me that I was not alone.

With them, I walked the razor's edge and stayed whole. Without them, I was unsteady, searching for balance.

In the early days, I didn't know how to talk about the pain. The loss of my Rottweilers wasn't just the end of a chapter—it felt like the closing of a book I didn't want to finish. They had been with me through thick and thin, always together, a steady rhythm of protection and presence.

Without them, the air in the house felt thinner. The routine I once moved through effortlessly—feeding, walking, playing—now left me aimless. Even their bowls, still in the corner, looked like memorials.

That Christmas Eve, I sat in the quiet with that ache. And into that stillness, one week later, she came silently into that hollow, then came Maya. But she did not arrive to replace. She came to witness, to companion, and in her own way, to heal.

Grief, though heavy, leaves space for grace. It arrives in many forms, sometimes in silence, and sometimes in the quiet determination of a child's heart.

Alexis was only nine, but she understood more than words could say. She had watched me withdraw, hollowed by sorrow after losing two of my dearest friends in such a short time.

At the time, we had been living in California with our daughter Crystal—a nurse by profession, a caretaker by spirit, whose empathy carried us through that season of mourning.

Mourning is not just about loss; it's about giving ourselves permission to feel, and when we **consciously block pain**, we delay or distort that process. For

someone like me, who's lived through trauma, worn armor for survival, and leaned on silence for decades, mourning can be especially complicated.

Mourning is a ritual of release—of remembering, feeling, and letting go. But for many of us, especially those shaped by war, trauma, or long-standing grief, the instinct is to shut the door on pain before it fully enters. We become masters of control.

We block out memories to survive the moment, not realizing that in doing so, we suspend mourning—and with it, the chance to truly heal. I did that for years.

I buried grief under routines, distractions, and the unspoken belief that showing pain made me weak. But mourning demands something different. It asks for surrender. It asks us to feel all the sadness, anger, aches of absence, and not rush it away.

But it was Alexis who sensed what none of us dared to say aloud: I needed something to hold onto again. Something living.

She saw the puppies first, lively and unclaimed, full of energy and innocence, bouncing around a neighbor's home.

Then came Maya, the small healer, all bounce and breathless energy. She didn't tiptoe around my grief; she barreled straight through it. She didn't understand reverence or mourning.

She only knew how to live, and she brought that energy into every room like the wind through an open window.

I tried to hold back, to keep a distance. Loving again felt like betrayal. But Maya didn't ask for space; she asked for love. She nudged my hand when I was still.

She chased her own tail until I laughed. She curled beside me at night and reminded me of what was to be needed again.

With every jump, every bark, every stubborn tug on the leash, Maya was stitching something back together inside me. She was a different kind of guardian—not like the Rottweilers who watched the door, but one who stood watch over my spirit.

Long after they were gone, the choker chains still hung on the wall—two thick loops of steel, heavy with meaning. I kept them not out of habit, but out of reverence.

They had belonged to my guardians, my silent shadows, who walked beside me for years and gave everything without asking for anything in return.



Choker Chains for the Rottweilers

I couldn't bring myself to put them away. To box them up would've felt like sealing a part of my soul.

So, they stayed quiet, polished by time and memory. I'd run my fingers over them some days, the coldness of the metal grounding me when the grief felt too heavy.

Those chains were never just training tools; they were symbols of trust, of loyalty earned, not commanded. And now they're symbols of grief, yes, but also of the bridge between past and present.

I kept the choker chains not because I was stuck in the past, but because I needed to carry it forward with me. And Maya, my little healer, never asked me to put them away—only to keep walking, one paw print at a time.

Maya never touched them. Somehow, instinctively, she seemed to know they weren't hers. She'd glance at them now and then, curious maybe, but always respectful. She had claimed her space in the house, but not at the expense of what came before her.

Maya, in her lightness, in her absolute otherness, reminded me that love doesn't overwrite it, it adds to it. The past still hangs on the wall, and the present curls up at my feet, snoring softly.

And I loved her for that.

Healing doesn't happen all at once. It comes in moments, in motion, in twelve pounds of scrappy joy that refuses to let you sink. Maya became that joy. She was the chapter I didn't expect—and the one I now can't imagine the book without.



December 30, 2010

Without hesitation, without permission, but with a heart wide open, Alexis chose one. A tiny female with brown and tan fur, soft as whispering dusk. Eyes that, even in their newness, carried a kind of knowing. Furry paws and a spirit untouched by sorrow.

She placed her gently in a cardboard box, tucked with blankets and quiet resolve, and began the 390-mile journey to Arizona, back to where I had settled after California. She must have weighed all of 4 pounds at the time maybe less. As a companion, a stuffed animal was added to keep her company during the trip.

No complaints. No messes. The puppy—this small, bright ember of life—handled the long ride with a steadiness that defied her weeks-old frame. Not a whimper. Not a whine. Just eyes wide open, as if she understood her purpose.

She arrived intact, unshaken, and full of promise.

When I opened the box, I didn't see a puppy. I saw a miracle stitched in fur and breath. A messenger carried not by fate, but by the love of a granddaughter who knew her grandfather's heart had cracked—and who dared to help patch it with something alive.

In that moment, Maya's name had not yet been spoken. But her presence was already felt, reverberating through the stillness of our home, into the quiet places where loss had settled.

She was not sent to erase grief, but to walk beside it. And I, still carrying the weight of mercy, the memory of chains and final breaths, found myself holding something fragile and full of life once more.

I must be honest.

When that cardboard box opened and I saw those wide, curious eyes looking up at me, I felt something stir—but it wasn't joy. It was resistance. A gentle, aching refusal. I didn't want another puppy. I didn't want the responsibility. I didn't want to fall in love again, only to one day be forced to say goodbye.



Maya, a new arrival

Grief had hardened something in me. I had walked the last steps of my Rottweilers' lives, held their heads in my lap as the world slipped from them, and I had carried the weight of that choice—necessary, humane, but devastating. To love deeply is to risk deeply, and I wasn't ready to gamble with my heart again.

Let's just acknowledge the truth: losing them devastated me. At a time when I was already carrying more than most could see—grief, memories, the quiet weight of survival—their absence hit like a final blow. The Rottweilers weren't just dogs.

They were my steady ground, my protection, my pride. Their loss didn't just break my heart—it shook whatever strength I had left to hold everything else together.

So, I looked at her—small, blinking, defenseless—and I wanted to tell her she had come to the wrong man.

But she didn't turn away.

She didn't flinch or cry. She simply stared into me, quietly present, as if to say, "I'm here. That's all."

It wasn't love at first sight. It was something slower. Something earned.

The days that followed weren't easy. I kept my distance emotionally, going through the motions of care without offering too much of myself. I told myself this was temporary—that this pup would belong more to Alexis or Crystal than to me.

Maybe even Roni and she would take care of her in the same household as me, but not me, I don't want to be cruel, but not me.

But Maya didn't belong to anyone. She simply belonged with us.

She slept near my feet. She followed me from room to room, quietly mirroring my routines. And somewhere between those small footsteps and gentle eyes, a seed began to take root.

Not because I was ready to love again. But because she loved me first.

Maya was a bundle of joy—mischievous, alert, and endlessly friendly to anyone who took the time to stroke her finely woven fur or scratch behind those silky ears.

She thrived in human touch, sought it out like sunlight through a window. But while she shared her playfulness with many, she made one thing clear from the start:

I was hers.

It wasn't a question. It wasn't up for debate. She chose me.

I didn't choose her. At least not in the beginning. My heart was still cautious, my grief still close. But Maya had no patience for such hesitation. With every gentle nudge of her head, every nap curled beneath my chair, every moment of silent, stubborn loyalty, she planted her flag.

And in time, slowly, inevitably... I chose her back.