



# *The Story of Cooper*



*A life, and the love that stayed*



For Cooper. In memory of a life that was good.

— With love, Margaret & Ellie

*Thank you for fourteen years of walks and warm  
mornings.*



This was Cooper.

Cooper was a golden retriever with a deep honey-gold coat, a feathered tail, and white gone soft around the muzzle, and for a while he was one of the best parts of my life.

He wasn't a thing that happened to me. He was part of how my days were shaped — the first sound in the morning, the weight against the couch in the evening, the reason I looked up from whatever I was doing.

I want to say it plainly, the way I always meant to: you were one of the best things in my life.



Here is the truth about us: most of it was small.

the last quiet half hour before bed, you with your chin on my foot while I read. the long loop around the lake every morning, nose to the wind the whole way. The same loop, the same hours, the shape of an ordinary day with you in it.

I used to think the big days were the ones that counted — the trips, the firsts, the photographs. But it's the ordinary days I'd keep, if I could only keep some. The four o'clock light. Your breathing in the next room. The way the day had a shape because you were in it.

There was one ordinary day I keep coming back to. we drove out to the river and you swam until you were too tired to swim, then slept the whole way home Nothing about it was remarkable. That's exactly why I keep it.



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No one else in the world did the things you did.

the way you brought me a single shoe every time I came home,  
never the pair, just the one

I notice their absence now – the small, specific, ridiculous,  
entirely-yours things. I used to let them pass without looking. I'd  
give a great deal to see them one more time. I was paying  
attention, in the end. I'm glad I was.

And then it was time to say goodbye. Cooper grew older, and his body grew tired, and one day — gently, and held, and loved — he died.

*I'm not going to use a softer word for it. You died, and it was the hardest day, and I would not have let you go through it without me.*

*I stayed. I would stay again.*



Here is the most important thing in this whole book.

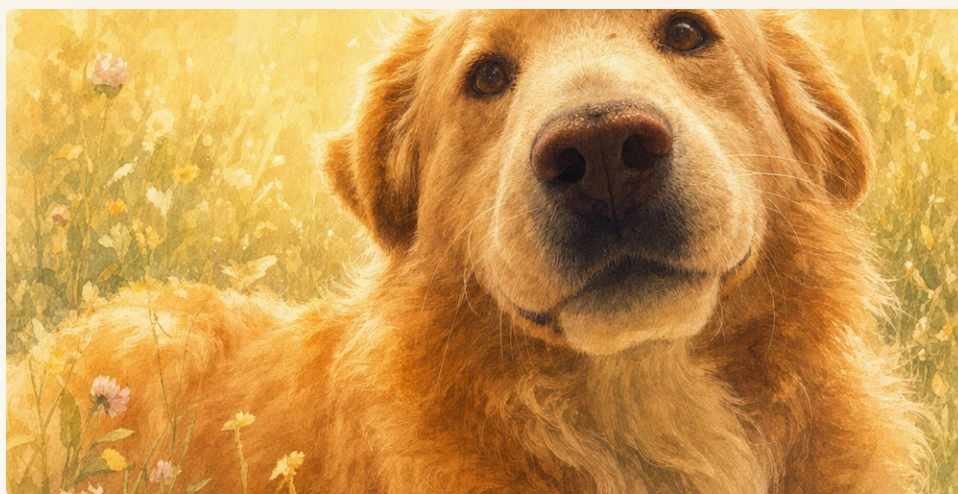
*The love between us did not stop when Cooper died. Love doesn't work that way. It stays. It always stays.*

*I still have your worn leather collar, still on the hook by the back door. Some days I can't look at it.*

*Most days I'm glad it's there.*

*And somewhere — in a sunlit field where bodies don't get tired and the afternoon never ends — I like to think you're the long loop around the lake every morning, nose to the wind the whole way, free, and waiting, the way you always waited at the door.*

*You were a good dog. You were my dog. And I will carry you the rest of the way.*



*A place to write the things about Cooper I don't want to forget*

What Cooper loved most: \_\_\_\_\_

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The sound I'd know anywhere: \_\_\_\_\_

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A small thing he always did: \_\_\_\_\_

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What I want to remember: \_\_\_\_\_

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