



While You're Still Here, Hazel



A book for the time we have



For Hazel, who is here.

— Diane

Thank you for sixteen years of quiet company.



◆

This is Hazel.

Hazel is a brown tabby gone grizzled and silver around the muzzle, with a white chest and chin and pale green eyes, and she is sixteen now, slower but still the boss of the house.

She is part of how my days are shaped – the quiet that says you know I'm in the room, the weight that arrives on the bed at exactly the wrong hour and is forgiven every time, the reason I look up from what I'm doing.

I want to say it plainly, while I can say it to your face: you are one of the best things in my life.

You have been with me a long time. Long enough that I can't quite remember the shape of the house before you. I don't want to.



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

the saucer of warm milk I set down while the kettle boils. still
climbs into the window box every morning to watch the birds.
the slow patrol of the garden fence we still take at dusk —
slower now than it used to be, and somehow better for 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 has a shape
because you're in it.



No one else in the world does the things you do.

the way you knead the blanket three times before you finally settle

I notice them more now. The small, specific, ridiculous, entirely-yours things. I used to let them pass without looking. I look now. I am paying attention, on purpose, to exactly who you are.

The others in this house know you too. They feel the shape of you in the room, the same way I do. We are all paying attention.

You're in the gentle part of a long life now. sixteen now, slower but still the boss of the house, and slower, and softer at the edges. I'm not going to pretend I don't notice.

*But I'm not going to spend the time we have being
afraid of the time we don't.*

*So this is what I'm choosing instead: to be glad. Glad it was you. Glad it's still you. Glad of every
ordinary afternoon that we get to have, for as long as we get to have them.*



Here is the most important thing in this whole book.

You are here. Right now, as I write this and as you read it, Hazel is in this house, in this life, in this exact afternoon.

That's not a small thing. That's the whole thing.

And I am right here with you.



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

What Hazel still loves most: _____

The sound I'd know anywhere: _____

A small thing she did today: _____

What I want to remember about this season:

