



## Gone but Still Here

### Jennifer Dance

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Jennifer Dance's based-in-truth novel *Gone but Still Here* follows a tragedy-scarred multiracial family as one of its members is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.

Mary feels herself slipping. Despite her career as a published author, her words don't come to her the way that they used to, she has forgotten how to use a can opener, and time passes without her noticing. To preserve her memories before they completely disappear, she begins to write a book about her husband, Keith, who died when their children were very young.

Meanwhile, Kayla, Mary's daughter, is worried about her mother, who sometimes believes that Kayla's teenage son, Jesse, is still a baby, that Keith is still alive, and that Kayla, a jazz singer, is in the military. When Mary is diagnosed with Alzheimer's, Kayla decides to have her move in. Now living with Jesse, Kayla, and Sage, the family's aging Golden Retriever, Mary is the impetus for her English-Trinidadian family to grapple with a new reality.

Told from Mary, Kayla, and Sage's points of view, as well as using multiple storytelling elements, from text messages to prose, the novel does a beautiful job of portraying the joys and sorrows that follow from a life-altering diagnosis. Sage's perspective is a unique addition: she lives to make the humans in her life happy, but she can still tell that something is wrong. Kayla has stopped shining, and Jesse isn't telegraphing his feelings, either by scent or sense. Though she at first feels helpless, Sage finds new purpose with Mary by her side.

*Gone but Still Here* is an emotional novel about a family faced with the challenges of caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's disease.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (May / June 2022)

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