

THE LOUD QUIET



LOVE, LAUGHTER, AND LIFE
IN THE EMPTY NEST

RICK AND CLANCY DENTON

"The Loud Quiet is a must-read for anyone navigating the empty-nest stage and adjusting to a new chapter of life. Clancy and Rick Denton have hit a home run. Their personal and poignant take on this universal midlife experience had me nodding yes to everything they shared. Their reflections on love, identity, and rediscovery deeply resonated with me. The title itself, *The Loud Quiet*, perfectly captures what happens when a home once filled with energy and noise suddenly becomes still. The Dentons explore that 'what now?' moment with honesty, humor, and heart."

—Tammy J Cohen,
Author of *Text Messages to My Sons*

"The Loud Quiet podcast got me through my first months as an empty nester, and it continues to inspire me today. Rick and Clancy have brought their highly practical guidance and fantastic personalities together to create a heartwarming, life-affirming book for those seeking to thrive in this dynamic season. This honest, candid, funny, totally human, and incredibly valuable book is a must-read for those wanting to enjoy life and flourish after raising kids. It's a much-needed masterpiece to help you navigate your empty nest journey!"

—Courtney Lynch, Attorney, CEO, and
Author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Spark*

“Watching Rick and Clancy grow *The Loud Quiet* from a podcast experiment into this beautiful book has been such a privilege. They’ve turned real conversations about marriage, identity, and rediscovery into something that feels both deeply personal and universally relatable. From the bittersweet tears of move-in day to the humor of realizing you can eat dinner at 5:30 just because you can, their storytelling captures it all. *The Loud Quiet* reminds us that this season of life isn’t empty at all; it’s wide open.”

—Marc Ronick,
Podcast Producer and Coach at iRonick Media

“The empty nest can feel like such a strange and transformative phase in life, and this book offers an incredibly honest and relatable look at one family’s journey through it. It dives deep into the challenges parents face as their grown children leave home, navigating shifts in family dynamics, rediscovering their relationship as a couple, and adjusting to a new chapter in their lives. It’s a truly authentic, heartfelt exploration of a pivotal time in life.”

—JP and Aeryn Shiffer, Frequent Guests on
The Loud Quiet - Empty Nest Living Podcast

**THE
LOUD
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**LOVE, LAUGHTER, AND LIFE
IN THE EMPTY NEST**

RICK AND CLANCY DENTON

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To our children, Tanner and Teagan,

Our reasons for this book.

*You've left our nest, and we love
watching you thrive in life.*

SAMPLE

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Author's Note

We wrote this book in 2025, but the stories inside it began in 2023. Back then, we hit record on a little podcast experiment called *The Loud Quiet*, thinking it would be a way to process our first year as empty nesters. What we didn't realize was that those conversations, sometimes funny, sometimes tender, sometimes awkward, would become the backbone of this book.

So here's where we stand now. By the time these words reach you, Tanner is in law school, and Teagan is nearing the end of her undergrad years. Clancy has retired from one career and stepped into something new. Rick exited the consulting world and has gone 100 percent into the podcasting business together with Clancy. And together is really the point. We're in this season as partners, figuring it out in real time.

This book isn't a manual. It's not a three-step program. It's a snapshot, a collection of conversations, memories, and reflections from the messy, beautiful, sometimes hilarious in-between. We hope you'll find

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pieces of your story here. And maybe, as you read, you'll feel like you've pulled up a chair at our table, poured yourself a glass of whatever fits the hour, and joined the conversation.



Foreword

by Tanner and Teagan Denton

Our parents have taken on many roles throughout their lives. Flight attendant, consultant, fitness instructor, podcaster, to name a few. “Published book author” was not a role we ever would have anticipated our parents to take on! And we are so excited that they are sharing this dream with the world.

Growing up, our parents gave us everything we needed to find our paths. They cheered at games, stayed up for late-night talks, and endured the chaos of teenage years. What we didn’t realize then was that, in preparing us to go, they were also preparing themselves to let go.

Watching them now, as empty nesters, is sometimes still a bit strange. Sure, there were a few quiet dinners and “we miss you” texts at first, but before long, they were discovering what life would look like when it was just the two of them again. It’s been

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amazing to see them undertake all sorts of new experiences and hobbies together.

Mom and Dad, we're so proud of you. You've shown us that life keeps unfolding, that change can be beautiful, and that the bonds we built will always hold. The nest might be empty, but the love that built it never leaves.



Family vacation to Iceland

A Beginning, Sort Of

It was spring, just before our daughter's high school graduation. Our son was already off at college, and we were deep in the rituals of her senior year: awards nights, final performances, late-night group texts about party invitations, and cap-and-gown pickups. The kind of busy that feels suspended in nostalgia, half in the moment, half already missing it.

One night, we went out for dinner, just the two of us. We ordered martinis, made small talk about the week ahead, and joked about the end of an era.

And then, somewhere between the second round and the trip home, Clancy turned to Rick and said, "What if I don't like *us* when she leaves?"

The silence was immediate and deafening.

Rick: By the time we pulled into the driveway, I had that sick-in-your-stomach, head-in-your-hands kind of feeling. I sat on the edge of the bathtub while Clancy got ready for bed, trying to make sense of the panic curling in my chest. I've lost things before: my dad, who passed when I was a young adult, jobs,

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and a sense of certainty. But our marriage had always been the constant. And suddenly, it felt like even that was up for grabs.

Clancy: I wasn't trying to start a crisis. I was trying to tell the truth, that I was scared. That fear had been circling for months before I found the words to express it.

Asking the question cracked something open. Eventually, by naming it, we turned "what if" into "how can we..."

How can we stay connected without the kids?

How can we rediscover who we are, not just as parents but as partners?

How can we remember that we don't just love each other but still *like* being together, too?

• • •

We didn't set out to make a podcast or write a book. This whole thing started as a way for us to reconnect as a couple. To talk about the weirdness, the quiet, the sudden abundance of time. About the grief that sneaks up between the granola bars and the cereal aisle.

We didn't have any answers, but we knew that by asking the questions, we'd at the very least find something interesting to talk about.

What happens when the school drop-offs stop?

When the Friday night football games are no longer on the calendar, but your brain still saves space for them?

A Beginning, Sort Of

When your social life has been built around sideline chats and concession stand hot dogs, and suddenly, it's Friday, and there's nothing scheduled?

That's where we were.

And maybe where you are, too.

So much of our life—our routines, our conversations, even our friendships—had been orbiting around the kids. And now, the center of gravity had shifted. We were still spinning, but in a different sky.

We weren't the only ones. That's part of what sparked this whole thing. We have friends ahead of us in the empty nest phase. Friends behind us. Friends in the checkout line at Target, deciding which brand of twin XL sheets makes it easier to say goodbye. And all of us are asking some version of the same thing:

Who are we now?

Who are *we* when it's just Tuesday night and there's no homework, no drill team, no curfew?

Who am *I* when the kids I've poured myself into are out there living lives of their own?

Let's be clear: this isn't a "poor us" story. We're thrilled for them. Seriously. Seeing their excitement, their growth... it's what we hoped for. But it's also weird. Because the house *is* quieter, and sometimes that quiet feels so loud, it echoes.

Hence the name: *The Loud Quiet*.

It's that ache when you pass their empty bedroom.

The strange elation of realizing you don't have to plan dinner around anyone else's schedule.

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The laugh you share with your partner about finally finding a happy hour spot and then realizing you don't have to rush home.

It's messy. It's beautiful. It's deeply human.

And we wanted to talk about it.

Not from a stage. Not from a place of expertise. Just from a couple of chairs, with the cat occasionally wandering by, and the mic between us. A little podcast that turned into this book.

So if you're here, you might be somewhere on the same road.

Maybe your house just got quieter.

Maybe you're staring down the countdown calendar to college move-in.

Maybe you've already repainted the bedroom and replaced the posters with tasteful throw pillows. (Or maybe not. No judgment either way.)

Wherever you are, we're glad you're here.

This book is our conversation. Sometimes it's Rick reflecting on old memories. Sometimes it's Clancy with a practical insight or a heart-on-her-sleeve moment. Sometimes it's both of us, arguing gently over dinner plans and processing this next chapter together.

We're not here to give you a step-by-step plan. We don't have one.

We're figuring it out, too.

But what we *can* offer is a hand to hold, a story to share, a laugh when you need it, and a tissue when you don't know why you're crying in the parking lot of At Home.

A Beginning, Sort Of

We started this whole thing with a lot of questions.
And honestly, we still have them.

But if there's one thing we *do* know, it's this:

Empty nest is a terrible name. Because this life stage is the opposite of empty. It is full of memory and meaning. Full of space for rediscovery, for reconnection. For late-night takeout and mid-morning walks. For grief and joy and awkward transitions and unexpected laughter.

It's not the absence of something.

It's the beginning of something else.



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PART I

Fall

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Ramen, Rugs, and Reality

We joked that we were just on a weekend trip. Two small carry-ons. Some snacks. A few too many Target runs.

It didn't feel like a final chapter... not at first.

We had done this once before with Tanner, so we told ourselves this would be easier. Familiar, even. We knew the drill: Pack up the IKEA bags (big blue miracles of modern engineering), fly to Arizona, help her settle in, grab a margarita somewhere, and try not to cry at the airport. That was the plan.

And yet, somewhere between Walmart #3 and the plastic horse in her car, it started to unravel.

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It's funny, the things that tip you over.

For Clancy, it was a packet of ramen left in the pantry—forgotten, crinkled, and somehow devastating. For Rick, it was the sight of little plastic animals tumbling around the floor of Teagan's car. "The horse fell off," he said, half-laughing, half-swallowing something bigger.

We both knew it then: The emotions weren't waiting for the big goodbye. They were already here, hiding in the crumbs and corners.



The whole weekend felt like one long moving sidewalk, one of those airport ones where you can't quite get off. Every step pulled us closer to *the moment*.

Check into hotel.

Find a burger place.

Hit three Targets and four Walmarts.

Shop for rugs (always the rugs).

Meet the roommate. Smile for pictures. Try not to think about the Last Night.

We stayed busy on purpose. Busy makes it easier. Busy gives your brain something to do besides scream, *This is happening*. Busy meant we could still pretend it was just a trip.

But in the quiet moments, the drive to the dorm, the silence in the car while she rode with her brother,

Ramen, Rugs, and Reality

the sad 80s song on the radio, we could feel it creeping in.



Move-in day was chaos.

Not emotional chaos. Literal, logistical chaos. We had 30 minutes to unload before the parking gods issued a ticket, so it was a sprint. (Note to future empty nesters: Bring a bin, set an alarm, and make peace with forgetting at least one extension cord.)

Tanner was a hero that day, helping us carry boxes and keep pace. Thank God he was there. Not just for the muscles but for the energy. For the presence.

There was an explosion of stuff in the hallway. Not literal. (Rick insists we clarify.) But rugs and shelves and plastic drawers and whatever mystical combination of twinkle lights and succulents count as “dorm cozy” now.

We didn't stop. Not really. Not until she turned around, tears silently falling, and said, “I miss my cat.”

Not us.

The cat.

We cried anyway.



That night, we dropped her off and watched her walk up to her dorm. Just as we were pulling away, we saw her pause and help another girl figure out the door code.

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They walked in together.

And that—that was the moment.

It wasn't a speech. It wasn't a hug. It wasn't even from her to us. But it was what we needed: the tiniest spark of her making her own way.

A moment of grace. Of *okayness*.



The next day, we were invited to what was labeled a “parent information session.” We almost skipped it. We'd been to enough orientations and info dumps over the years to fill a binder.

But we stayed. And when they handed us envelopes and blank paper, we realized that this wasn't paperwork.

It was a letter.

To her.

To be delivered at the end of her freshman welcome week.

Cue the tears.

Rick cried openly at the table. (Four other dads hid in the bathroom.) Clancy had already written one and snuck it into Teagan's suitcase, of course. But this felt different: raw, immediate, still vibrating from the day before.

Trying to put into words the whole messy, magical, heart-bursting truth of parenting in a few paragraphs was impossible. But we tried.

Because that's what this whole phase is: trying. Letting go. Crying. Writing. Praying. Hoping.

Ramen, Rugs, and Reality

Buying the right surge protector. And walking away from your child down a dorm hallway, heart in your throat, wondering if they'll be okay.

And then seeing that they already are.

• • •

Later that night, we drove to see Tanner.

The buffer we didn't know we needed.

He's a senior now. Thriving. Making his own Target lists. (Okay, we still pay. Some things never change.) But watching him, we remembered that this transition isn't the end.

It's the beginning of something else.

Something beautiful. Weird. Quiet. And loud.

• • •

On the flight home, Clancy cried over a mushy good-bye text. Rick ordered one last lounge drink and sent a group message that turned into a collective puddle of feelings.

Then Tanner texted: "Hey, can I get your Gmail password for YouTube TV?"

Reality. Restored.

• • •

When we got home, the house was too quiet. Even the cat was confused.

But there was something else underneath the silence.

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Space.

Not empty space—*open* space.

And maybe, just maybe, that's where the next version of us begins.

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Routine(ish)

We thought we'd crave the quiet, or at least appreciate it. We'd talked about it enough, how nice it would be to just come home, sit down, not have to coordinate three dinner schedules and a carpool. But when it actually showed up, the silence didn't whisper. It thudded.

That first week post-drop-off, we tried to slide back into normal. Rick went to the gym. Clancy went to the grocery store. Only this time, the grocery cart looked like it belonged to a sad single person who lives on Greek yogurt and denial. One bag. No bulk snacks. No five-pack of chicken thighs. Just enough food for two adults who suddenly realized they had

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no idea how much they'd been eating in solidarity with a college kid.

The house started playing tricks on us. The trash can felt suspiciously light, like, wait, did something break? Is it trash day? Are we just... clean now? Then there was that same weird silence that makes you second-guess whether the dishwasher ran or if your hearing is just going.

We kept bumping into ghosts of our routines. The first day of school pictures still happened. Tanner and Teagan, sweet as they are, sent them in from their campuses. (Clancy may have cried. Rick may have pretended not to notice.) There was no one standing by the front door, but the tradition lived on. Sort of. Routine-ish.

And that became the theme of our week. We still woke up early. Still went to the gym. Still made it to work. But there was something off kilter. Like someone had picked up our house, given it a little shake, and then set it back down slightly askew. Things were familiar but different. Normal but eerie.

Even little things, like walking past the table and only setting two places. Or realizing we could eat whenever we wanted. (The AARP early bird special has never looked so good. We're not saying we've given in, but we've noticed the 5:30 dinner crowd is surprisingly chill.)

We started getting texts. "Where's my rain jacket?" "Did I bring my jewelry box?" It was like being haunted by logistical poltergeists. But we loved

it. Because it meant they still needed us. A little. Enough.

By Saturday, we were crawling out of our skins. The weekend calendar was blank for the first time in forever. So we did what any two rational grown-ups rediscovering freedom would do: We drove to Fort Worth.

The Kimbell Art Museum gave us air conditioning and culture, both top-tier empty-nest coping mechanisms. We wandered through the galleries, argued gently over which paintings were the creepiest, and remembered what it's like to just be in each other's company, not in transit, not in task-mode. Just together.

We had a cocktail at a speakeasy that used to be a bookstore (of course), and Clancy ordered a Kir Royale. When the bartender didn't know what that was, she explained it. Champagne and cassis. Simple. Delicious. The bartender tasted it, smiled, and named it "The Clancy."

There's something about that. Reclaiming a name. Reclaiming a rhythm. Reclaiming a Saturday.

The next day, we hit a wall. Sunday came, and with it, the loud quiet. The kids were gone. The chores were done. There was no game to drive to. No load of laundry to fold. Just... nothing. Clancy said it first, "I'm bored." Like her soul didn't know where to sit.

That silence was so thick it became a presence. Rick tried to read a magazine. Clancy paced. We were both waiting for the house to return to its regularly

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scheduled programming. But this is the new show now. And it doesn't have a laugh track.

We'll figure it out. We're already starting to. With two placemats. With impromptu art dates, early dinners, and FaceTimes that make the cat meow. With reminders that being needed doesn't always mean being near. And with the knowledge that, for better or weirder, this new routine is ours.



The Gift in the Crappy Box

You think you know what empty nesting will look like.

We thought we did, anyway.

We pictured the quiet. The clean kitchen. The unstacked laundry baskets. Maybe some travel. More date nights. Fewer football games. That sense of freedom that sneaks in after years of juggling kids, calendars, and carpools.

But here's the plot twist nobody tells you about: Sometimes, when your kids leave, your parents need you more than ever.

And just like that, the roles reverse.

Rick

My mom used to be one of the brightest people in any room. Truly. Sharp as hell. A nurse turned office manager back when medical practices were independent beasts. She basically kept my dad's entire operation running without ever needing the title. She got her MBA from the University of Texas when I was in high school. And I don't mean that symbolically. I mean, we graduated at the same time. I had more hair then. She probably did, too.

She became a travel agent later in life, but not in the "package deal to Cancun" sense. She planned international adventures: India, China, and Germany in December for the Christmas markets (where Clancy was technically pregnant with Teagan, which means Teagan was there too, sort of). She took our son to England for a soccer pilgrimage: Chelsea FC at Stamford Bridge. She froze through a match with the diehard supporters, probably hating every minute, but beaming the whole time because she got to do it with her grandson.

That's who my mom was.

Clancy

And then, a few short years later, she wasn't.

Rick

She took a trip to Africa in 2019. When she got back, we got a phone call from one of the women she had traveled with, someone with healthcare experience. She told my sister, “I think something’s wrong. I think you need to look into this.”

At first, we brushed it off. My mom was busy. She forgot things because she was always juggling so much. Right?

But then we heard she had gotten disoriented at the Amsterdam airport. Couldn’t find the restroom. Couldn’t find her gate. This wasn’t rural Mongolia; this was Schiphol. Well-lit. Well-signed. Something wasn’t right.

In 2020, during the thick of COVID, we got the diagnosis: Alzheimer’s.

Clancy

She was still conversational for a while. We’d do weekly Zoom calls. She’d ask about the kids, though she might forget who went to which college. But she was still herself, mostly. Still wanted to talk, to connect, to plan a future that didn’t exist.

Rick

By 2022, we had to make the decision to move her into memory care.

And if you've ever had to do that, you know what kind of hell that is.

It was easier once we got her settled because she seemed to like it, so much so that she talked about buying property nearby so she and my dad could settle down there (never mind that he'd been gone for over a decade). In her mind, he was still very much a part of the plan. She told us she was thinking about schools for the grandkids, too. She thought Teagan might want to attend the one she was currently living in, the care facility, because it just seemed like such a lovely place.

It was sweet, and sad, and surreal. This version of reality she was living in was real to her. And in those moments, we just had to meet her there.

Clancy

It's not just the logistics; it's the heartbreak. It's the knowing that this fiercely independent, worldly, brilliant woman now needs help eating lunch.

But it was the right place. And we are incredibly thankful for the care team. For the aides who have developed deep, real relationships with her. For her husband, Jerry, who shows up twice a day, every day. He's our hero in all of this.

Rick

We don't live in Austin. So my role as caregiver looks different. I can't be there every day. I can't brush her

The Gift in the Crappy Box

hair or help her walk. But I can manage her rental home. I can make sure the bills get paid, the taxes get filed, and the little things stay afloat so Jerry doesn't have to carry it all.

I go down as often as I can. Clancy and I now take early-morning flights, do the visit, have a martini at Roaring Fork, and fly home that night. It's weird how those trips have become something we look forward to. Even in the sadness. Especially in the sadness.

Clancy

Because here's the thing: Empty nesting gave us the space to show up in this way.

We couldn't have done this a few years ago, not with cheer practice, carpool, and high school football games. But now? Now we can be there. We *get* to be there.

That's the gift in the crappy box.

The wrapping sucks. The box is beat up. But inside is this tiny, shimmering sliver of connection, of rediscovery. With each other. With your family. With the people you thought you'd always have time with.

Rick

I hate what this disease has done to my mom. Hate it. And sometimes, all I can do is laugh because the grief is so big it swallows everything. Like when we

played our podcast for her and she yawned. A huge, slow-motion yawn. I think that was her soul's way of telling me, "Wrap it up, Rick. You're rambling again."

Clancy

And if we hadn't prepared? If we didn't have powers of attorney, legal documents, and bank accounts squared away?

Oh, it would've been a nightmare.

But we did. And now we're helping Nana (Rick's grandmother) do the same. We're trying to make the hard stuff a little less hard so we can focus on what matters most: being present, being kind, and loving the people in front of us, even when they don't remember who we are.

Rick

There's a line I jotted down somewhere; I wish I had it in front of me. But the gist is this: *Don't wait to access the wisdom of the generation before you. Because one day, that wisdom will be gone.*

We don't get to choose when the conversations end. But we do get to show up for them while they're still possible. And that, maybe more than anything, is what this season of life is asking us to do.

Do We Still Like Each Other?

We were catching up with friends the other night, a couple we adore, and they shared something that's been echoing in our heads ever since.

It was right after they dropped their only child off at college. They'd done all the prep: the dorm shopping, the Target runs, the graduation chaos, and the packing. The whole conveyor belt of parenting a kid out the door. But after the goodbye hug (the kind that hits you in the chest five seconds after it's over), they got in the car, sat in silence, and then she started crying.

Not just a tear or two. Full-on, "ugly cry" meltdown, as she put it.

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And somewhere between mile 3 and mile 30 of that drive home, she asked the question, “What if we don’t even like each other anymore?”

That landed hard. Because yeah, we’ve asked that question, too.

And that’s the moment no one really wants to talk about.

Oh sure, people *warn* you about the empty nest. They say the house will feel quiet. That it’ll hit you when you walk past their empty room or set one too many plates at dinner.

But what they don’t say, or maybe what we just don’t want to hear, is this: One day, you’ll look across the table at the person you’ve spent decades raising children with and realize you’re not entirely sure who they are without the kids in the room.

There’s no manual for that. (And if there is, we didn’t read it... which checks out.)

Our friends were brave enough to tell us what happened next.

They didn’t have a slow ramp into the empty nest. Their son was an only child, which meant it wasn’t a series of soft goodbyes. It was a cliff drop. One minute, everything revolved around their kid—the routines, the school calendars, the summer job schedules, the Taco Tuesdays—and the next minute, silence.

No practice run. No buffer sibling still under the roof. Just a hard stop and a long drive home.

Well, silence plus a minor identity crisis.

Do We Still Like Each Other?

They did what a lot of us might do: They got busy. First came the redecorating. She tackled his bedroom with the energy of someone trying to exorcise a ghost. Furniture out. Walls repainted. Childhood posters pulled down like they'd started mocking her. It wasn't about erasing him; it was about trying to *anchor* herself in a room that suddenly felt like an ache.

They already had one dog. But after their son left, they got a second, so they "could each have one," they said with a laugh.

(And because emotional chaos loves company, we suppose.)

But even with the noise and the fur and the endless trips to Home Depot, the house still felt different. They still felt different. Because underneath all that motion, beneath the paint samples and vet appointments, was a quieter question starting to surface.

The one so many couples face but rarely say out loud: "What are we now if we're not parenting together?"

Here's the thing. Parenting is a beautiful and distracting kind of glue. You can stick with someone for years, decades, because there's always something urgent to do. A game to get to. A permission slip to sign. A meltdown to navigate. You can build a whole life in tandem without actually checking in to see how the *we* is doing.

And then one day, you're alone. The permission slips are gone. The lunchboxes are gone. You're not standing on the same sideline anymore. And you

think, *Do we even like each other when we're not talking about the kid?*

Our friends didn't find answers overnight. But slowly, they started to move again.

He continued to play volleyball. She turned to books and Bravo to fill the quiet hours. And together, they signed up for something that felt both playful and slightly terrifying: dance lessons. Just the two of them, standing across from each other, trying to remember how to move in sync without stepping on each other's toes.

Which kind of felt like a metaphor for this whole phase of life.

We didn't talk much while they told us about it. We just listened. And thought about our story.

About how Rick started making solo grocery runs just to get out of the house. About how Clancy couldn't figure out if Teagan *knew* she had it in her (college, adulthood, all of it), even when we knew she did. About the stretch of evenings that suddenly felt both free and a little hollow.

There's this weird limbo between being co-parents and being a couple again. We still catch ourselves defaulting to kid talk: *Have you heard from her today? Did he send you that text, too?* Before remembering, oh right, this isn't a team huddle anymore. This is us.

Just us.

And that realization can feel disorienting. Even a little lonely. But also, and this is where our friends gave us some hope, it can be surprisingly tender. Like

Do We Still Like Each Other?

a second chance at something you forgot you used to be good at.

We're still figuring it out ourselves. Still stumbling over the new rhythm.

Some days we sync up easily. We finish each other's sentences, laugh at the same half-formed joke, and feel like a team.

Other days, well, other days we drift. We get quiet. Irritated. Disconnected in that vague, hard-to-name way. Like we forgot how to be a couple and started acting like co-managers of an overly quiet household.

But then there's a walk. Or a dance lesson. Or just two people on the couch, watching *Friends* reruns and remembering that kindness is brave, and belief is a muscle.

It's not always dramatic. Sometimes, rediscovery looks like a real conversation. Sometimes, it looks like folding laundry while your person talks about nothing in particular.

So, do we still like each other?

Most days, yes.

Some days, we feel it right away. Some days, we have to go looking for it. But so far, we're finding it.

And in this strange, tender season, that might not just be enough.

It might be the whole point.