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Eliza woke in the night and heard the dog was dying. He was whimpering and his breath came only in laboured lungfuls that must be costing him what little energy they gave.

‘I’m here,’ she called out, fumbling into a dressing gown. ‘Don’t worry. I’m coming.’

He was in the tiny room off her small one. She kept the door between the two ajar so that she could listen out for him and so that he would not wake in the dark and be frightened. He hated to be shut in, always had. She sat on the floor beside his bed. ‘Ssh,’ she said.

He was struggling to sit up, eyes wide with fear at what was happening to him, this final mutiny of heart and lungs. She placed a hand on his shoulder and gently pushed. He resisted only a second then sank back on his bed, teeth bared in his effort to suck in enough breath. She spread her palm and ran it back across his brow. His eyes shut a moment, breathing checked, then they opened, staring into space as his struggle continued. She slid her hand down to the hair on his chest, feeling the heat there and the wild knocking of his swollen heart.

‘Don’t fight,’ she murmured. ‘It’s okay. You can stop now, poor, old man. Let go. Let go now.’

But he fought on tenaciously for another hour, filling the room with fetid breath, held on, as people said, for grim death.

Dawn was revealing the unreachable grime on the window