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Worn Out

by Richard Lewis

I woke up feeling tired. The sleep thief must have been at work again. Nevertheless, I hurled myself into the day, determined to tackle that boundary hedge Mrs Applebee had been nagging me about.

I'd hardly started when she appeared in all her glory, her high-pitched tones drowning out the clatter of the hedge cutters.

"Don't do that, I can't have you being able to see into my garden," she pleaded, her shrunken face feigning hurt.

"But you said you wanted the height reduced, that it was shading your border," I responded, trying to conceal my irritation.

"Well, I've changed my mind," she cried.

"Fine, at least that saves me a job," I said, thinking, 'you're such a control freak'.

I wanted to shout it out but of course I didn't, telling myself, 'I'm worn out with civility'.

Rusty my wire-haired terrier needed a walk. Not that I felt like the job but it had to be done. As we set off up the trail to Wolstonbury Hill, it seemed the sky was pressing down on me. I felt the weight of the corrugated clouds, though across the other side of the hill, a few shy threads of golden light had found a gap and were pooling across the fields.

Rusty and I trudged on slowly up the hill but my legs were full of lead. I felt like a deep-sea diver exploring the ocean floor, leaden boots hugging the ground. The short exchange with Mrs Appleby hadn't helped, suppressed irritation had flattened me. I was like an old wreck with punctured tyres.

Continuing on where the land opens out to reveal the Weald and North Downs beyond, my mind drifted. I imagined we were exploring a sunken wreck and searching for treasure.

Rusty brought me back to reality with a yelp. He'd fallen behind, without me noticing and seemed rooted to the spot. Forgetting my tiredness, I ran back to see what was wrong. He had collapsed in a furry heap, unable to go on. I tried to get him up but he was drifting out of consciousness.

After a few minutes, I realised it was serious and reached into my pocket to phone for help, only to realise I'd left the mobile behind. I tried to pick him up but it was impossible, there was no choice but to leave him while I went for help.

The vet said to bring him to the surgery so I rushed back up the trail with a wheelbarrow and pillow. Rusty had not moved. I gathered him up into the barrow, resting his head on the pillow and we bounced our way back down again.

Finally, at the surgery, Rusty was starting to come round.

The vet asked, "has he eaten anything unusual?"

"No," I said, but then remembered we'd had those hash brownies. I'd wondered what had happened to the remaining two, left on the coffee table overnight.