

The Love That Remained

By Dr. Matan Bochner



**Dedicated with great love to all
those who walk on four legs,
swim in the water, crawl, and
those with wings, who fill our
lives with unconditional love.**

Tom couldn't remember the day Charlie came home.

Mom said he had been so tiny back then that Charlie managed to lick his entire face before he even understood what was happening.

From that moment on, they were simply always together.



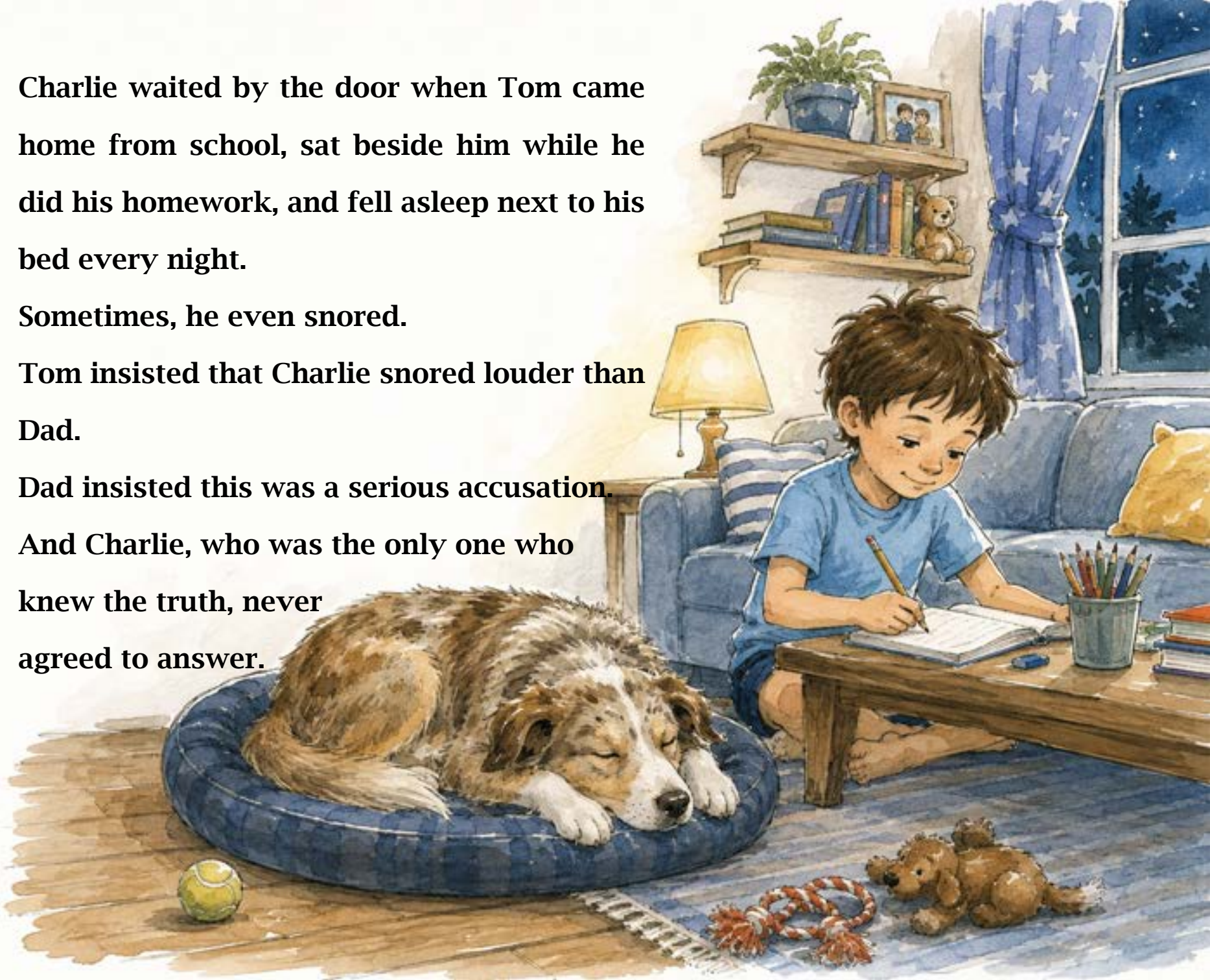
Charlie waited by the door when Tom came home from school, sat beside him while he did his homework, and fell asleep next to his bed every night.

Sometimes, he even snored.

Tom insisted that Charlie snored louder than Dad.

Dad insisted this was a serious accusation.

And Charlie, who was the only one who knew the truth, never agreed to answer.



Charlie had a few strange habits.

He loved socks, but only one sock from each pair.

He was afraid of the vacuum cleaner, even though he was at least three times bigger than it.



And whenever someone opened the refrigerator, he would appear in the kitchen at a speed no one could explain.

“You were asleep!” Tom would say.

Charlie would sit down beside the refrigerator and stare at him.

Somehow, that look always managed to earn him a piece of cheese.



They grew up together.

When Tom learned to ride a bike, Charlie ran alongside him.

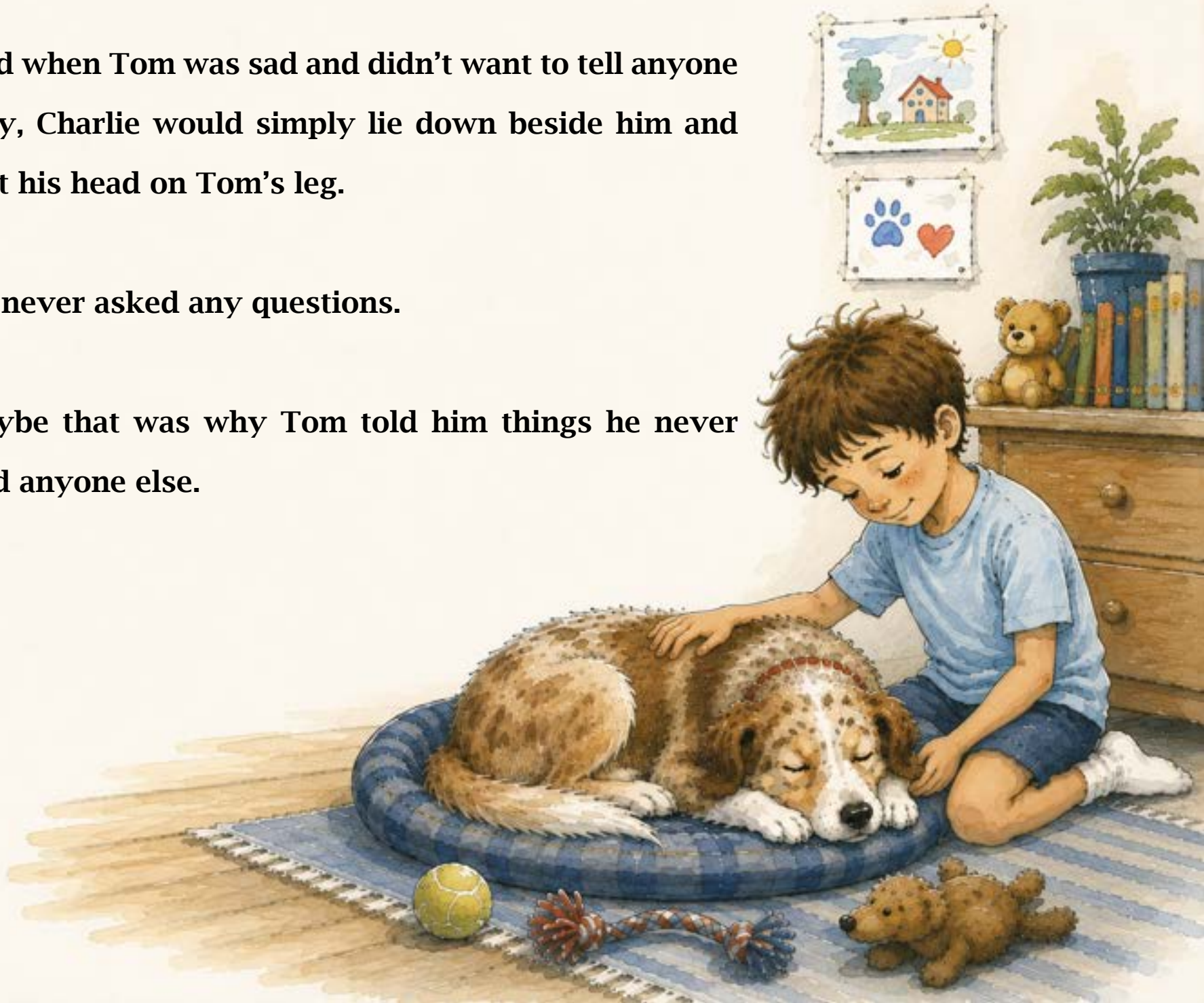
When Tom came home with a scraped knee, Charlie was the first to come and see what had happened.



And when Tom was sad and didn't want to tell anyone why, Charlie would simply lie down beside him and rest his head on Tom's leg.

He never asked any questions.

Maybe that was why Tom told him things he never told anyone else.



But the years went by,
even if Tom didn't
really notice.

The fur around
Charlie's nose grew
whiter.

On their walks, he
began to move a little
more slowly, and
sometimes he would
stop halfway up the
stairs to rest.

Charlie used to wait
for Tom.



Now Tom had started waiting for
Charlie.

He didn't mind.

"We have time," he would say,
gently stroking Charlie's head.

And Charlie would keep walking.

Slowly, but still by his side.



One day, Charlie didn't want to go for a walk.

Even when Tom took the leash down from its hook, Charlie only lifted his head and looked at him.

Mom and Dad exchanged a glance.

Tom knew that look. It was the look grown-ups had when they knew something but still didn't know how to tell a child.



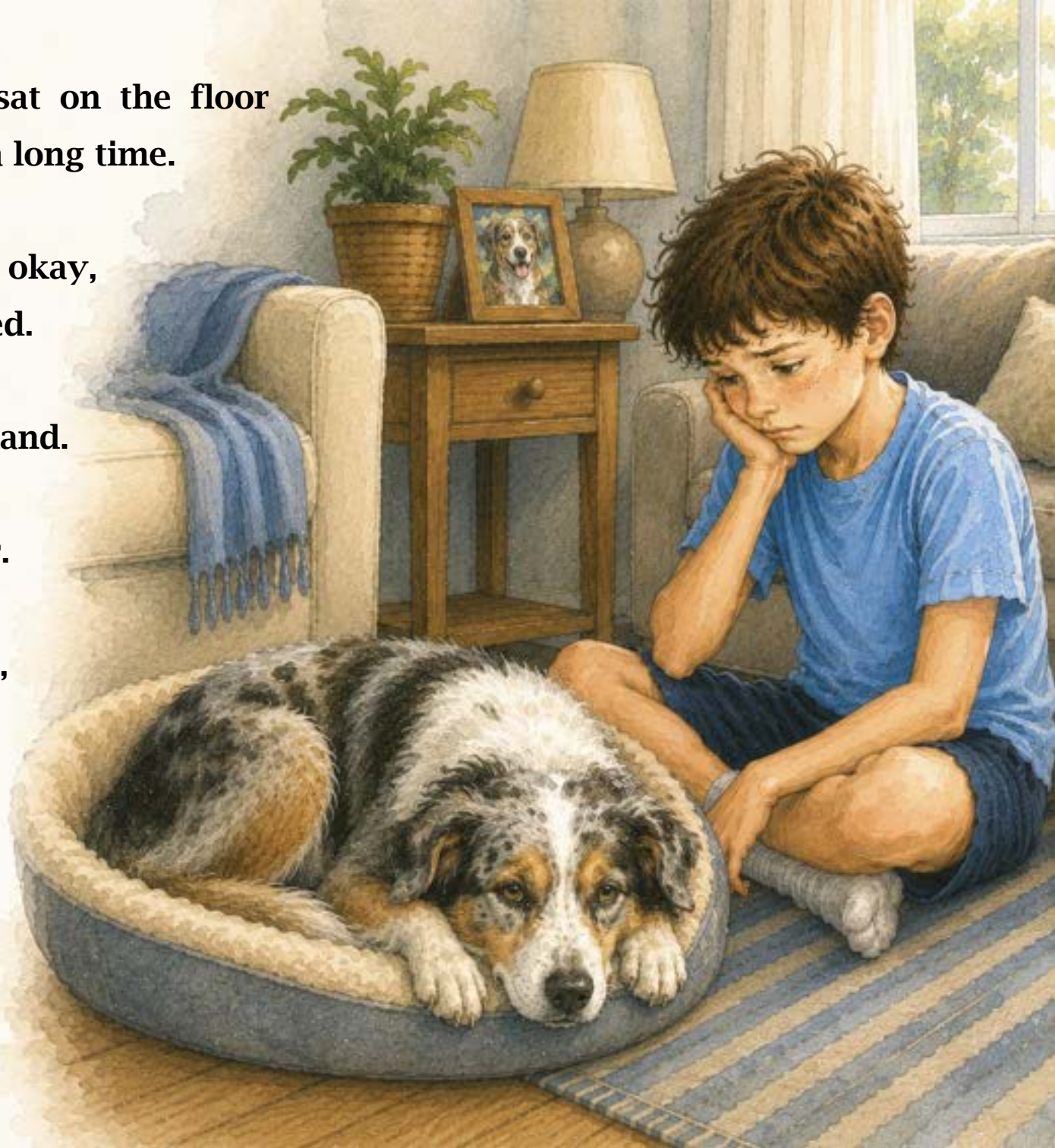
That evening, he sat on the floor
beside Charlie for a long time.

“You’re going to be okay,
right?” he whispered.

Charlie licked his hand.

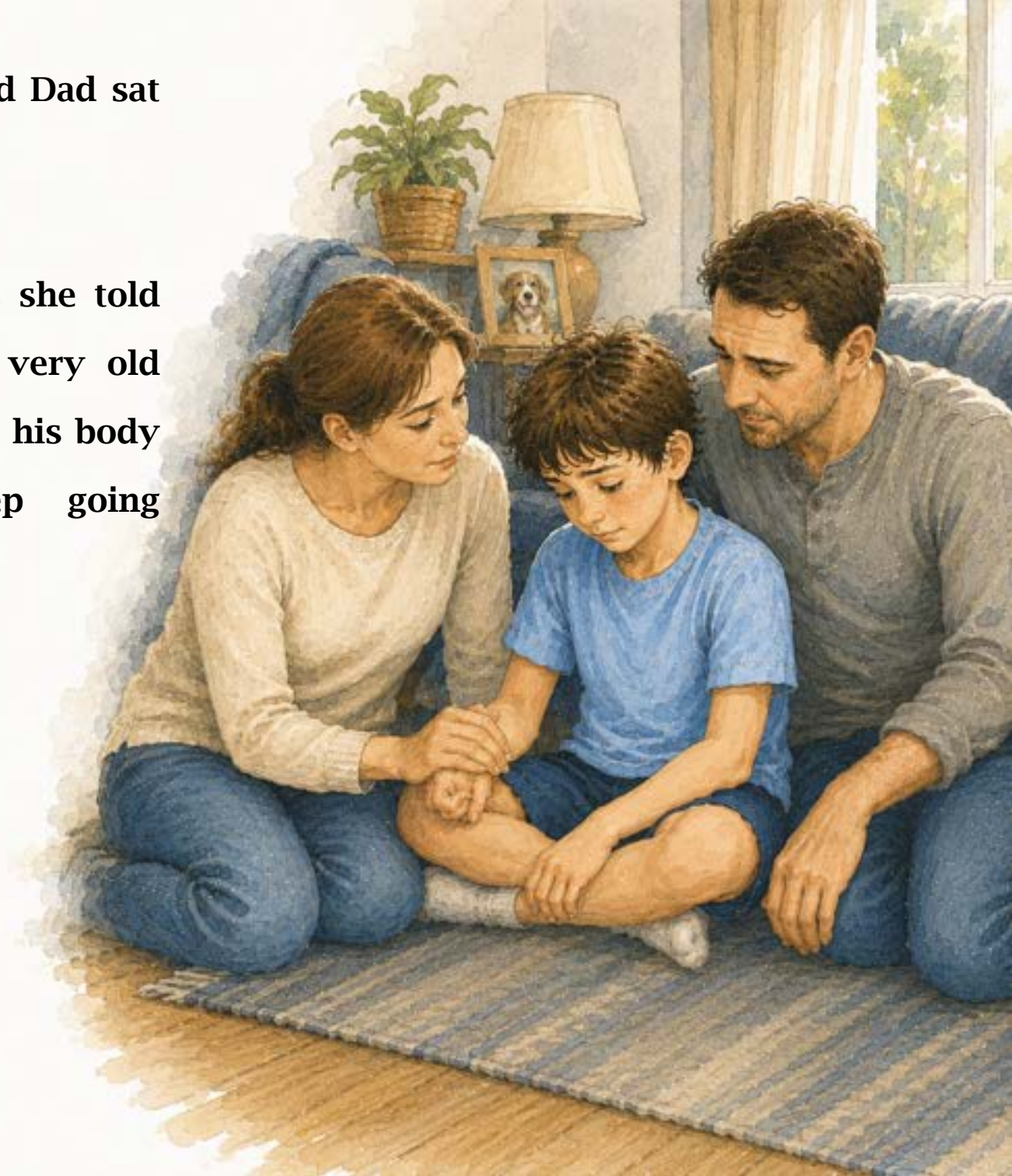
It wasn’t an answer.

But in that moment,
it was enough.



The next day, Mom and Dad sat down beside Tom.

Mom held his hand as she told him that Charlie was very old and very sick, and that his body simply couldn't keep going anymore.



Tom listened.

He understood every word.

But he couldn't understand how those words could possibly be true.

Because Charlie had always been there.

How could someone who had always been there suddenly be gone?

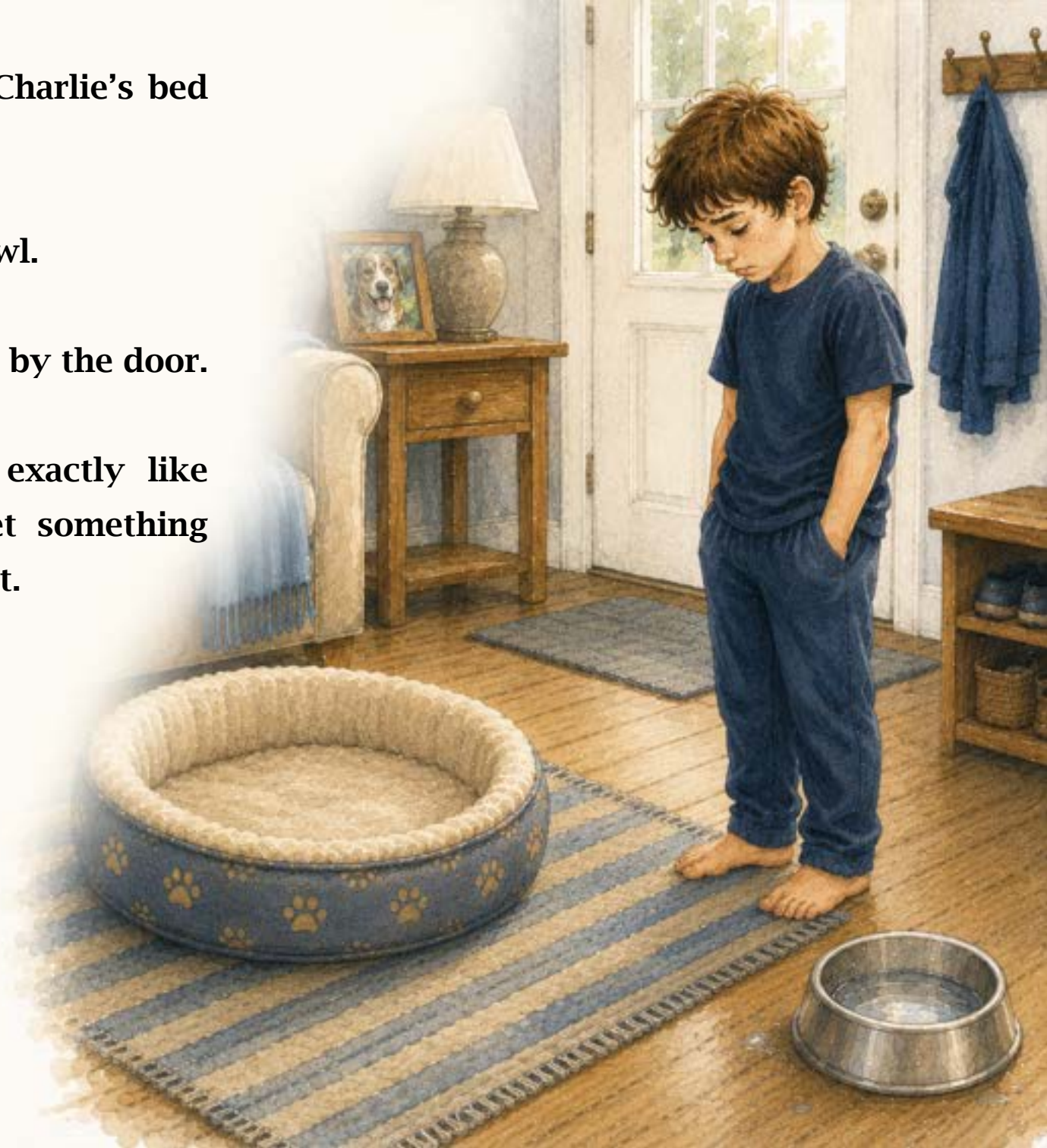


The next morning, Charlie's bed
was empty.

So was his water bowl.

And so was the spot by the door.

The house looked exactly like
their home, and yet something
about it felt different.



Tom came downstairs for breakfast, and a small piece of toast fell to the floor.

For a moment, he waited.

Charlie was always the first to come running whenever something fell from the table.

But this time, no one came.

Tom looked at the piece of toast.

And suddenly, he wasn't hungry anymore.



In the days that followed, strange things happened.

Tom came home from school and almost called out, “Charlie!” as he opened the door.





At night, without thinking, he reached out from his bed toward the spot where he was used to finding warm fur.

Once, he was even sure he heard the sound of Charlie's collar in the hallway.

He ran to check.

There was no one there.

He knew Charlie was gone.

But maybe habits take a little longer to understand that.