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The unspoken
A friend of mine is dying and I can't think of the right words to say in a card. The point is I love him; but I could never say that as ours was always ostensibly a merely affectionate relationship and I am frightened he would be embarrassed. So instead, I have ripped up three cards, in an attempt to calibrate the right mixture of joviality with concern, imagining him opening it, if he ever does, in the intensive care unit of a London hospital. What I want to say is: "I love your loud laugh; you have the most dazzling eyes; your shyness is terribly endearing; you are unnecessarily modest about your work and by the way, Don't Bloody Die!!." But what I have put instead is "I hope the nurses are bringing you lots of cups of tea." Sometimes I wish I lived in Italy or Ireland where feelings are not a matter for shame.
In the last year five people I know have died and I am only 45. During the three decades before that I lost only three. At dinner with vicar (again) last night, someone suggested that there are three points in your life when everyone you know, dies. The first is when you are 18 or 19 when they are driving, drunk too fast in cars. The second, is in your forties, when the stress of living takes its toll and cancer gets them, or suicide. And then, so the theory goes, there is a gap until your early eighties. Maybe it's just me, but I fear this gap is closing.