

THE MOONLIT PAGE

The Large Plant on the Wall



At half past five, Frances's plant was almost a tree.

It stood on the kitchen wall, broad-leaved and impressive, although the actual plant in the cracked mug was shorter than her thumbnail.

She had brought the reading lamp over to see whether the shoot had opened a second leaf. By accident she had placed the light close behind it.

There it was: two leaves. The large shadow made the smaller one easy to see.

Frances moved the lamp closer. Her plant grew several inches without requiring anything from the seed packet.

She moved it away. The tree became a seedling again.

“Very economical,” she said.

She gardened on a narrow balcony and had a habit of drawing plans for spaces she did not own. A greenhouse had once occupied an entire page of her electricity bill. In reality, she had four pots, a folding chair and a watering can that had to live in the bathroom.

The cracked mug was only a temporary nursery. A proper small pot waited beside the sink for when the seedling was ready to move.

Frances carried the lamp back towards her book, then stopped.

The shadow had crossed the wall as she moved. For a moment it had stood beside the outline of the chair, large enough for someone to sit underneath.

She set the lamp down again, farther to one side, and pulled the chair into the beam.

Now there was a garden.

She tried sitting in it. Her own shadow covered most of the tree.

“No,” she said, and shifted the chair until the leaves appeared beside her shoulder.

There was nothing else to arrange. No path, no shed, no room for the greenhouse. She sat with her book on her knees while the little plant made a large garden on the wall.

By the time the first bus went past, daylight was filling the window. The shadow softened, then disappeared.

Frances finished her paragraph and stood up. She put the lamp back beside the sofa and folded the chair away.

At the window, the seedling still had two leaves.

She looked at it closely without lifting the mug.
The smaller leaf was open all the way now. It had
been doing that while she was sitting in the
garden.

To remember

1. Before dawn Frances uses a reading lamp to check a second leaf on the tiny shoot in her cracked mug; its enlarged shadow looks like a tree.
2. Moving the lamp grows and shrinks the shadow, unlike the limited real balcony gardens she plans.
3. She positions her chair so its shadow sits beside the leaf shadow, then reads in her temporary wall garden.
4. Daylight dissolves the shadow; she puts things away and sees that the actual second leaf has finished opening.