

THE MOONLIT PAGE

Where the Bench Had Been



For years, Hugh had rested on the same bench after his evening turn around the allotments. Since retiring, he sometimes arrived early enough to watch the leaves above it change from green to silver in the wind.

On Monday the bench was gone. A small notice said it had been taken away for repairs.

He stood beside the bare patch of ground, holding his folded newspaper.

His neighbour Sima came through the gate carrying two canvas chairs. She had seen the workmen that morning.

“They're lighter than they look,” she said. “Take this one.”

They opened the chairs beneath the beech. Hugh put his newspaper on his knees without unfolding it.

For a moment, the old bench's shadow lay between them: its curved back, the narrow gaps between its slats. There was no bench to cast it.

A cloud passed over. When the light returned, there were only the two chair shadows on the grass.

Sima pointed upwards. The leaves had turned their pale undersides towards the wind.

Hugh leaned back. The chairs faced the tree rather than the path. A small patch of sky opened between the moving branches.

When they were ready to leave, he helped Sima fold both chairs. They carried one each to her shed and set them just inside the door.

To remember

1. Hugh finds his usual allotment bench away for repairs
2. Sima brings two folding chairs
3. The absent bench briefly casts a shadow before the cloud passes
4. They watch the silver leaves, then fold and carry the chairs together.