The Gold Balloon

A short story



The Gold Balloon lived on the Great Wall of China.

Not near it.

On it.

A little kid had tied him to a stone post one windy afternoon.

Then the kid walked away with a juice box and no long-term plan.

That had been weeks ago.

Maybe months.

The Gold Balloon was not counting.

He had a better system.

He counted tourists.

And there were a lot of them.

Every morning, they came climbing up the long stone path.

Cameras.

Hats.

Water bottles.

Snacks.

That very specific look people get when they are about to see something famous.

The Gold Balloon noticed this immediately.

And, to his credit, understood the situation perfectly wrong.

They had come to see him.

Obviously.

Why else would they keep stopping every few feet and lifting their phones?

The Great Wall stretched over the hills in both directions.

Stone.

Watchtowers.

Mountains.

Clouds.

History.

The Gold Balloon had seen all of it.

It was fine.

But he was gold.

That felt more important.

The first time a tourist took a picture with him in the corner, the Gold Balloon

became very still.

Professional still.

The kind of stillness that said, yes, take your time.

I know what I bring to this location.

More tourists came.

More pictures.

Some smiled.

Some posed.

Some turned sideways for no clear reason.

The Gold Balloon admired their dedication.

One man stood with his family and held up two fingers.

The Gold Balloon floated proudly beside him.

A woman pointed at the mountains.

The Gold Balloon assumed she was telling someone where the best angle was for

his shine.

A little girl saw him tied to the post and laughed.

The Gold Balloon loved that.

He had always connected well with his younger fans.

By noon, the wall was crowded.

Tour groups moved through like schools of fish.

Hats everywhere.

Sneakers everywhere.

One guide held up a flag and started explaining the history of the wall.

The Gold Balloon listened politely.

But he was pretty sure the group had already figured out the main attraction.

A man with a large camera crouched down low for a better shot.

The Gold Balloon turned slightly in the wind.

Showtime.

The camera clicked.

Then clicked again.

Then again.

The Gold Balloon felt wonderful.

Some balloons might have been overwhelmed by that kind of attention.

The Gold Balloon felt it was only fair.

Later that afternoon, a woman sat on the stone ledge and took a slow panoramic

video.

The Gold Balloon appeared in it for almost three full seconds.

He considered that generous.

A child reached toward him.

The father pulled out his phone.

Another picture.

Another memory.

Another life improved by good taste.

The wind picked up near sunset.

The mountains softened.

The sky turned warm.

Orange.

Pink.

Gold.

For a moment, even the stones of the wall seemed to glow.
The tourists stopped walking so fast.
More phones came out.
More smiles.
More pictures.
The Gold Balloon floated higher and tried not to act surprised.
This had become a very successful evening.
A woman looked at the sunset and whispered, "Beautiful."
The Gold Balloon looked around.
There was nobody else nearby shiny enough to assume she meant them.
A final group stopped before heading back down the wall.
One of them turned and held up a phone.
The Gold Balloon made sure he was in the shot.
That was the cover photo.
He could feel it.
By the end of the day, the sun started to fall behind the mountains.
The tourists adjusted their hats.
Checked their bags.
Took their last pictures.
Then started heading back down the path.
The Great Wall grew quiet again.
The stones cooled.
The wind softened.
The Gold Balloon floated above his little post, watching the last group disappear
around the bend.
He felt tired.
But in a good way.
It had been a big day.

A lot of people had come to see him.
Some had traveled very far.
Some had brought cameras.
Some had brought snacks.
One man had brought a tripod.
That felt serious.
The Gold Balloon looked out across the empty wall.
Then across the mountains.
Then up at the fading sky.
He nodded to himself.
"I can't wait to see who shows up to see me
tomorrow."

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THANK YOU FOR READING.

Some balloons visit famous places. Some believe they are the famous place.

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