The Gray Balloon



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The Gray Balloon lived on a mountain.

Not near the top.

At the top.

Tied to a tall pine tree where the wind was colder, the air was cleaner, and the

view stretched so far it almost looked fake.

The Gray Balloon did not care.

Every morning, the sky turned gold.

Every evening, the clouds rolled purple and orange across the horizon.

On clear days, you could see the lake.

On very clear days, you could see the town.

On rare days, you could even see the highway.

The Gray Balloon had seen all of it.

None of it impressed him.

"Too far away," he would mutter.

Hikers came up the mountain all the time.

They climbed for hours.

Sweating.

Complaining.

Stopping every ten minutes to drink water and say things like, "We're almost

there."

They were almost never almost there.

Then they reached the top.

And every single time, they did the same thing.

They gasped.

They smiled.

They pulled out their phones.

One woman stood near the edge and whispered, "Wow."

The Gray Balloon looked at her.

"What?"

She did not answer.

She was busy taking seventeen pictures of the exact same view.

The Gray Balloon looked out across the mountains.

Pine trees.

Clouds.

Sunlight.

A hawk drifting through the air.

"Bit repetitive," he said.

A little boy hiked up one afternoon with his dad.

When they reached the top, the boy pointed at the Gray Balloon.

"Cool."

The Gray Balloon looked down at him.

"I've been better."

The boy laughed.

His dad took a picture.

That happened a lot.

People liked the Gray Balloon much more than he liked them.

Some tourists waved.

The Gray Balloon rarely waved back.

Mostly because he was a balloon.

One morning, a couple reached the top carrying sandwiches.

They sat under the pine tree.

The woman looked up at the Gray Balloon.

"Best lunch view ever."

The Gray Balloon looked at the sandwich.

"Bread's a little dry."

The woman laughed so hard she almost dropped it.

Later that week, a man climbed all the way to the top just to watch the sunset.

He sat on a rock.

Crossed his legs.

Took a deep breath.

And said, "This is perfect."

The Gray Balloon looked at the sunset.

Orange sky.

Pink clouds.

Golden light across the lake.

"Too colorful," he said.

The man looked up.

"What?"

The Gray Balloon turned slightly in the wind.

"Nothing."

A little girl reached the top with her family.

She pointed at the Gray Balloon.

"He's cute."

The Gray Balloon did not move.

"I'm not cute."

The little girl smiled.

"He's grumpy."

The Gray Balloon floated a little lower.

"I'm gray."

By afternoon, more hikers reached the top.

They took pictures.

They pointed at the lake.

They said things like, "You can see everything from up here."

The Gray Balloon looked out at everything.

Mountains.
Trees.
Clouds.
Blue sky.
A lake shining so bright it looked like someone had spilled sunlight.
"Needs work," he said.
Then the weather changed.
A cold wind moved through the pine trees.
The blue sky faded.
The sunlight disappeared.
Clouds rolled over the mountain.
Thick.
Heavy.
Gray.
The hikers groaned.
"Oh no," someone said. "The view is gone."
The Gray Balloon looked around slowly.
The mountains softened.
The lake vanished.
The trees turned quiet.
The whole world became gray.
For the first time all day, the Gray Balloon looked interested.
A hiker pulled his jacket tighter.
"Well," the hiker said, "this is disappointing."
The Gray Balloon looked at the fog.
The soft gray clouds.
The quiet trees.
The mountain disappearing into itself.
Finally, he nodded.

"This is nice."

The hikers stared at him.

The Gray Balloon floated calmly in the cold wind.

Nobody took pictures.

Nobody gasped.

Nobody said the view was perfect.

The whole mountain was quiet.

Gray.

Still.

Exactly right.

Then a bird landed on the branch beside him.

The Gray Balloon looked at it.

The bird looked at the Gray Balloon.

The bird chirped once.

The Gray Balloon frowned.

"Too loud."

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THANK YOU FOR READING.

Some balloons see the best view in the world. Some still complain about the bird.

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