天花板上的那颗气球

布置六一教室这件事，我从第一年教书干到今年，闭着眼都能干。气球吹多大、彩带挂多高、黑板上的花边往哪边弯，手上都有数。今年却有一处不在我的数里。

头天晚上我吹气球，班长在旁边搭手，帮我打结。他父母在南方打工，过年才回，他跟着爷爷奶奶住。这样的孩子我带过许多，通常闹得最凶的就是他们。今年这个不一样，话少，递气球的时候手指很轻，打结打得比我打的还紧。我吹到第八个头晕，靠在椅背上缓，他忽然问：老师，气球能粘到天花板上吗。我说能，怎么，你想粘。他说，我想粘一个最大的。

我没多想，把最大的一颗红气球递给他，又给他找了双面胶。他踩上凳子，踮着脚，把气球粘在天花板正中间，粘完下来，仰头看了很久，像在确认它不会掉。我问为什么粘中间。他想了想说，中间高，站哪儿都能看见。我说对，站哪儿都能看见。他没再说话，把剩下的气球一个个递给我，递得整整齐齐。

我挂彩带的时候他在下面扶着凳子。彩带从这面墙拉到那面墙，中间要垂一道弧，我比着高度，他忽然说老师再高一点。我说再高就贴到灯管上了。他说，就是要高一点，矮了我够不着没关系，我奶奶个子矮，她来看节目，也得看得见。

我愣了一下，把彩带往上挪了两指。挪完我看他，他蹲在地上收气球皮，碎纸屑，像什么都没说过。

第二天孩子们进门，欢呼照旧，彩带底下照旧转圈的、够气球的、比谁嗓门大的。节目排在下午，家长能来的都来了。他奶奶坐在最后一排，个子确实矮，脖子往前伸着。演出到一半，我注意到那孩子不演节目的时候就仰头看天花板，看那颗红气球。气球在天花板上纹丝不动，他也看得纹丝不动。

散场后人走空了，我收拾教室，抬头，那颗气球还在。双面胶的边缘翘起一小条，它悬着，没掉。我搬凳子把它摘下来，放到他桌上，压在一本语文书底下。第二天早上，气球不在桌上了，语文书里夹着一小片双面胶的白边。

我教了二十年书，布置过几十间教室。天花板正中间该粘什么，往年我从来没想过。今年我知道了：有的孩子要的不是节目，是抬头就能看见的一个位置。

The Balloon on the Ceiling

I have decorated classrooms for June First since my very first year of teaching, and this year marks another. Balloons to what size, streamers to what height, which way the chalk border on the blackboard should curve - my hands know it all by heart. This year, though, one detail fell outside what my hands knew.

The night before, while I blew up balloons, our class monitor helped by tying the knots. His parents work in the south and come home only for New Year; he lives with his grandparents. I have taught many children like him, and usually they are the

loudest rascals. This one was different - quiet, handing me balloons with careful fingers, tying knots tighter than mine. After the eighth balloon I leaned back dizzy, and he suddenly asked: Teacher, can a balloon be stuck to the ceiling? I said yes, why, do you want to stick one? He said, I want to stick the biggest one.

I didn't think much of it, handed him the biggest red balloon, and found him some double-sided tape. He climbed onto a stool, rose on his toes, and stuck the balloon dead center on the ceiling. Then he climbed down and looked up at it for a long time, as if making sure it wouldn't fall. I asked why the center. He thought and said: the center is high - you can see it from anywhere. I said right, visible from anywhere. He said nothing more and went on handing me the rest of the balloons, one by one, neatly.

While I hung the streamers, he steadied the stool below. The streamer ran from this wall to that one, sagging into an arc in the middle. I was sighting the height when he said: Teacher, a bit higher. I said higher and it's on the lamp tube. He said, Just a bit higher. If it's low I can't reach it, that's fine - but my grandmother is short, and when she comes to watch the show, she has to be able to see it too.

I froze for a beat, then moved the streamer up two finger-widths. When I looked back at him, he was crouched on the floor gathering balloon scraps and paper bits, as if he had said nothing at all.

The next day the children burst in, cheering as always; under the streamers the usual ones spun in circles, jumped for balloons, competed over who could shout loudest. The show was in the afternoon, and every parent who could come, came. His grandmother sat in the last row, indeed short, her neck craning forward. Halfway through the program, I noticed that whenever he wasn't performing, he tilted his head back to look at the red balloon on the ceiling. The balloon hung motionless; he watched it just as motionless.

After everyone left, I tidied the classroom and looked up - the balloon was still there. A sliver of its tape edge had curled, but it hung, unfallen. I fetched a stool, took it down, and placed it on his desk, pressed under his Chinese textbook. The next morning the balloon was gone from the desk, and inside the textbook was a small white edge of double-sided tape.

Twenty years of teaching, dozens of classrooms decorated. What belongs dead center on a ceiling had never occurred to me before this year. Now I know: for some children, what they want isn't the show - it's a spot they can see just by looking up.