银幕亮起的时候，黑暗变得柔软

我已经很久没有进影院了。买票、检票、摸黑找到座位，这一套动作生疏得像重新学一门手艺。灯一暗，整个厅沉下去，黑暗并不吓人，它只是把白天那些事一件一件从人身上卸下来：没回的消息、没谈完的价钱、早上和谁拌的那句嘴。邻座调整了一下坐姿，纸杯里的冰块响了一声，然后所有人都安静下来，等同一束光。

银幕亮起来的时候，我听见自己呼吸慢了下去。光从背后的大窗口推过来，漫过一排排椅背，落在前排人的脸上，明明灭灭。那个故事讲的是一座即将拆迁的老影院，看门的老头每晚把最后一场放给空座位看。银幕的光照着他的脸，也照着他手边那只磨得发亮的票夹。我坐在二十几排之外，眼泪却毫无预备地下来了。黑暗里没有人看见谁，大家各自亮着，又各自暗下去，像一片被同一阵风吹动的灯。

灯突然全亮，散场的音乐响起来。我跟着人流往外走，眼睛被正午的太阳刺得眯起来。街道还是那条街道，车还是那些车，可我心里有一块地方钝钝地疼，像刚从一个很远很远的地方回来，身体到了，心还在路上，要再走一阵才能跟上。卖奶茶的姑娘喊号，我愣了两秒才反应过来那是我叫的号。

后来我常想，人为什么需要影院。大概是因为那种黑暗是暂时的、安全的，它允许一个大人像个孩子一样，为素不相识的人掉眼泪。我想起小时候搬着小板凳跟父亲去看露天电影，银幕挂在两棵树之间，风一吹，上面的人的脸就跟着晃。那时我也会哭。原来这种能力并没有丢，它只是被日子压在了箱底，银幕的光一照，它就又站起来了。

那天我没有赶回办公室。我沿着街慢慢走，让那份钝钝的疼多留了一会儿。能被一个陌生老头的故事打动，说明心里还有没被磨平的地方。这就够了。散场的人各自回到各自的生活里，可每个人走路的速度，都比平时慢了一点。

When the Screen Lights Up, the Darkness Turns Soft

It had been years since I last went to a cinema. Buying the ticket, showing it at the gate, finding my seat in the dark - every step felt like relearning an old craft. When the lights dimmed and the hall sank into darkness, I was not afraid. The darkness simply unbuckled one daytime worry after another: the message I had not answered, the price I had not finished bargaining, the sharp words I traded that morning. The person next to me shifted, ice clinked in a paper cup, and then everyone fell silent, waiting for the same beam of light.

When the screen lit up, I heard my own breathing slow. The light rolled in from the great window behind us, washing over row after row of seat backs, falling on the faces in front, bright and dim by turns. The story was about an old cinema facing demolition, where the caretaker screened the last show of every night to empty seats. The screen light played over his face and over the worn ticket case beside his hand. I sat in the twenty-something row, and my tears fell without any warning. In the dark

no one saw anyone else. Each of us glowed alone, then dimmed again, like a field of lamps stirred by one wind.

The lights snapped on all at once, and the exit music began. I drifted out with the crowd, eyes squinting against the noon sun. The street was the same street, the cars the same cars, yet one place inside me ached dully, as if I had just returned from somewhere very far away - my body had arrived, but my heart was still on the road, needing a while longer to catch up. A girl at the milk tea stand called a number, and it took me two seconds to realize it was mine.

I have wondered since why people need cinemas. Perhaps because that darkness is temporary and safe - it lets a grown-up cry for total strangers the way a child does. I remembered being small, carrying a little stool to an open-air movie with my father, the screen hung between two trees, faces on it swaying whenever the wind blew. I used to cry then too. It turns out that ability was never lost; life had only pressed it into the bottom of a trunk. One touch of screen light, and it stood up again.

That day I did not hurry back to the office. I walked slowly down the street, letting that dull ache stay a little longer. Being moved by the story of an unknown old man meant there were places in me the years had not worn smooth. That is enough. The people leaving the show each returned to their own lives, yet every one of them walked a little slower than usual.