我的脑子里有一间放映室

初一下学期，作文从四百字涨到八百字，我反而更不会写了。题目发下来，别人低头就写，我盯着题目，脑子里一片白。我妈说我读书少，让我背好词好句。我背了一个星期的精彩开头，第二周的作文还是交了白架，因为那些开头都不是我的。

转机是一次很偶然的重看。周末重看那部讲棋的片子，棋手输了比赛，坐在空场馆里，把棋子一颗一颗捡回盒子，捡到最后有一颗滚到墙角，他蹲下去捡，蹲在那儿很久没起来。我按了暂停，忽然想起我爷爷。爷爷下了一辈子棋，他的棋盒也是这样的木盒，边角磨得发亮。我翻出手机备忘录，把这两个画面并排记在一起：空场馆里的棋手，和我家客厅里的爷爷。

从那以后我养成了一个习惯，看电影随手记两行：一个画面，加一个我想起的人或事。半年下来，备忘录攒了一百多条。讲登山的片子里那句，山不会为难谁，是人在为难自己，旁边我记了物理第一次不及格那晚，我把错题本撕了两页。讲父亲的片子里，父亲在车站把橘子放在长椅上就走，旁边我记了我爸每次送我到校门就掉头、从不往里走的那截路。

月考作文的题目是《那些沉默的陪伴》。我坐在考场里，照旧慌了几秒，然后我做了一件以前没做过的事：闭上眼，让脑子里的电影放一遍。放映室真的开了。那个把橘子放在长椅上的父亲走出来了，那个捡棋子的棋手走出来了，最后走出来的是我爸，校门口那截从不调头的路。我从我爸那截路写起，写到棋手，写到山，八百字写完，手是热的。

发下来，老师批了一句：素材是你自己的，读得出。晚自习我盯着那行红字想了很久。以前我以为作文的素材在好词好句本里，在作文选里，得背，得借。现在我知道它们在我看过的每一部电影里，在我被碰到的每一下里。电影没有替我写过一个字，它只是把画面存进我脑子里，等题目来取。

这个学期我的作文分数确实上来了，从下中游到了上游。但我不想只说分数。分数只是最后那一小截，前面那一长截是：我脑子里有一间放映室，它全天开着，不要门票。电影帮我打开的不是某一篇作文的思路，是我看日子的眼睛。我爸那截从不调头的路，我以前居然没看见过。

A Screening Room Inside My Head

In the second term of Junior One, compositions jumped from four hundred to eight hundred characters, and I actually became worse at them. When a topic was handed out, others bent their heads and wrote; I stared at the topic with a blank inside. My mother said I read too little and made me memorize fine phrases. I memorized brilliant openings for a week, and the next composition still collapsed, because none of those openings were mine.

The turning point was an accidental rewatch. Over the weekend I watched that film about chess again. The player, having lost the match, sat in an empty hall picking chess pieces back into the box one by one, until one rolled to the corner. He

squatted to fetch it and stayed squatting a long time. I paused, and suddenly thought of my grandfather. He played chess all his life, and his piece box was a wooden one just like that, its corners polished bright. I opened the notes app and set the two images side by side: the player in the empty hall, and my grandfather in our living room.

After that I formed a habit: while watching a film, jot two lines, one image plus one person or event it reminds me of. In half a year the notes collected over a hundred entries. Beside the line from the climbing film, the mountain troubles no one; it is people troubling themselves, I noted the night I failed physics the first time and tore two pages out of my mistake notebook. Beside the father in the family film who places oranges on the station bench and walks away, I noted the stretch of road where my own father turns around at the school gate and never walks in.

The monthly exam topic was Silent Company. Sitting in the exam room I panicked for a few seconds as usual, then did something I had never done: I closed my eyes and let the films in my head run. The screening room really opened. The father who left oranges on the bench walked out, the player picking up pieces walked out, and last came my father and that stretch of road that never turns around. I started from the road of my father, wrote on to the player, wrote on to the mountain, and when eight hundred characters were done my hands were hot.

When it came back, the teacher had written one line: the material is your own, and it reads that way. All evening study hall I stared at that red line. I used to think composition material lived in phrase notebooks and essay anthologies, to be memorized or borrowed. Now I know it lives in every film I have watched, in every moment that touched me. Films never wrote a single word for me; they only stored images in my head, waiting for a topic to come and collect.

My composition scores did rise this term, from lower-middle to upper. But I do not want to talk only about scores. The score is the last small inch; the long stretch before it is this: inside my head there is a screening room, open all day, admitting anyone free. What films opened for me was not the train of thought for one composition but my eyes for looking at daily life. That stretch of road where my father never turns around, I had somehow never seen it before.

同桌的素材本

阿哲坐我右边，初二开学第一堂作文课，他借我的开头抄。他的开头和我的开头一样，我的开头是我妈给我买的作文选上的。那段时间我们俩的作文像双胞胎，分数也双胞胎，都卡在四十

二分上下。语文老师念过一句评语，我们俩共用：内容似曾相识。

十月，阿哲生日，他爸送他一台旧平板。他开始在午休看片子，二十分钟一部的那种短片，也有长的，他攒到周末看。奇怪的是他看完不聊剧情，他掏出一个绿皮本子写两行。我以为他在抄台词，凑过去看过一次，他写的不是台词，是画面：雨夜里车灯扫过水洼，水洼里的路灯碎了一下又圆回来。后面还有一行：像我把妈的搪瓷缸碰掉桌那回，她先捡缸，先没看我。

我问他写这个干什么。他说存着。他说他爸开货车，常年不在，他以前最怕写家人，别人写妈妈织毛衣，他连这个都没得写。后来他看了一部讲司机的片子，片子里司机把女儿学校的门牌号写在方向盘边上。他说那天他把他爸方向盘边上的门牌号记进了本子，记完他坐在那儿半天没说话。从那以后他的本子越写越厚，电影那一栏和他自家那一栏并排，像两列小火车。

十一月那次大作文，题目是《背影》。交上去，第二天语文课老师把阿哲的作文当堂念了。念到他爸卸货，把篷布一角掖进绳缝，掖了三回，第三回用手掌拍了拍篷布，像拍一个睡着的人。全班安静。老师念完说，这一拍，没在课本里，也没在作文选里。阿哲耳朵红了，趴在桌上假装找橡皮。我瞥见他绿皮本摊开在桌肚里，那一页旁边写着新的一条：老师念我作文的时候，我右边这位在偷看我。

十二月月考，他的作文分我瞄到了卷首，五十一。他拿本子换我的物理笔记，换的时候说，其实电影没教我什么，它只是让我知道，原来一个拍篷布的动作值得记。记熟了，考场上自己会走出来。我想了想，也买了个本子，绿的没有，买了个蓝的。第一页我写了我看过的一部片子，讲邮差的，邮差把信塞进门缝，门缝里伸出一只手按住了信。我在那行后面加了自己的：像我把成绩单递给我爸，他按住没说话的那三秒。

现在我和阿哲的素材本都攒了小半本。我们有个约定，互相不许看，考场上见。上回交换物理笔记，他在我本子扉页写了一行：你的电影存货快赶上我了。我回了一行：你的方向盘门牌号，我到现在还记得。作文这件事，我们俩都不再抄了。四十二分的双胞胎，各自走散了。

The Material Notebook Beside Me

Azhe sits to my right. In the first composition class of Junior Two he borrowed my opening to copy. His opening was mine, and mine came from the anthology my mother bought. For a while our compositions were twins, and so were our scores, both stuck around forty-two. Our Chinese teacher once read one comment that we shared: the content looks vaguely familiar.

In October, on the birthday of Azhe, his father gave him an old tablet. He started watching films at lunch break, the twenty-minute shorts, and saving the long ones for weekends. Strangely, he never discussed the plot afterward. He took out a green-covered notebook and wrote two lines. I thought he was copying dialogue. I leaned over once and saw he was writing images: headlights sweeping a puddle on a rainy night, the streetlamp in the puddle shattering once and rounding back whole.

Below it another line: like the time I knocked the enamel mug of my mother off the table, and she picked up the mug first, and did not look at me first.

I asked him what he wrote it for. He said, saving. His father drives a long-haul truck and is gone for months, and he used to dread writing about family. Others wrote about mothers knitting sweaters; he did not even have that. Then he watched a film about a truck driver who wrote the school number of his daughter on the edge of his steering wheel. He said that day he copied the number of his own father on the steering wheel into the notebook, and after writing it sat there a long time without a word. His notebook grew thicker, the film column and the home column side by side like two lines of little trains.

For the big November exam composition, the topic was The Back View. It was handed in, and the next Chinese class the teacher read the essay of Azhe aloud. He wrote how his father unloaded cargo and tucked a corner of the tarp into the rope groove, tucked it three times, and on the third time patted the tarp with his palm, like patting someone asleep. The class went silent. The teacher finished and said: that pat is not in any textbook or anthology. The ears of Azhe went red; he bent over pretending to hunt for an eraser. I glimpsed his green notebook open in the desk cubby, and on that page a new line: while the teacher read my essay, the one on my right was stealing looks at me.

December monthly exam, I caught his composition score at the top of the paper: fifty-one. He traded his notebook for my physics notes, saying, films never really taught me anything. They only showed me that a single pat on a tarp is worth writing down. Write enough of them, and on exam day they walk out by themselves. I thought about it and bought a notebook too. They were out of green, so I bought blue. On the first page I wrote a film about a postman who slides a letter under a door and a hand reaches out from the crack to hold the letter down. After that line I added my own: like the three seconds my father held my report card without speaking.

Now Azhe and I each have nearly full material notebooks. We have a pact: no peeking at each other, meet on the exam paper. Last time we swapped physics notes, he wrote a line on my title page: your film stock is catching up with mine. I wrote back: your number on the steering wheel, I still remember it to this day. Neither of us copies compositions anymore. The twins of forty-two points have each walked off in their own direction.

那部片子，我在考场上又看了一遍

先说结果：那篇作文我写了两页半，收卷铃响时刚好写完最后一句。但如果倒回考场前十分钟，我坐在座位上，手心全是汗。题目是《路》。一个字，我盯着它，脑子里先响起的是平时背的名言，条条都对，条条都不像我要写的。

慌到第七分钟，我闭上眼，做了件大胆的事：把去年看过的那部老片子在脑子里从头放。片子讲一个修鞋匠，守着一个巷口的摊子，摊子上一只收音机坏了三十年，他也没修收音机，只修鞋。片子里有人劝他搬去临街铺面，他摇头。有一场戏，一个姑娘来粘断了的鞋带，粘完在摊子前站了一会儿，说，师傅，你这条摊子支在这儿，我们这巷子的人出门都得先跟你点个头。

放到这一句，我脑子里咔哒响了一声。我想起了我们巷口。修自行车的刘叔，摊子支了十几年，车链子断了喊一声他就递工具，不收钱。上学放学，巷子窄，骑车的人见了他都按铃，两声短铃，像打招呼。我以前从没觉得这算什么，电影里那句点头的台词一照，巷子里这些两声短铃全亮了起来。

我从刘叔写起。写他补胎时把内胎在水里挤出一串泡，写他给放学的孩子打气从不收钱，写巷子拆了一半那年，他的摊子还在剩下半截墙根底下，铃声响过，他就抬头看一眼。写到最后我接了电影里那句：这条摊子支在这儿，巷子的人出门都得先点个头。我把点头换成了短铃。收卷铃响，我写完最后一句：路不一定通向远方，有的路是有人守在原地，让别人的路好走一点。

发卷子那天，老师在讲评里念了我的作文，说这篇的路不是马路，是人。我没说是电影给的。不是不敢说，是知道不全是。电影给的是那一句台词，巷子是刘叔十几年自己在那儿。电影像一把钥匙，捅开了我自己存着的那扇门，门里的东西一直在我眼前，只是我以前没低头看。

成绩的事，我放在最后说。那学期期末我的语文进了班里前列，作文单项分是我上初中以来最高的一次。我妈高兴，问我是不是偷偷补课了。我说没有，我只是在考场上，把一部老电影又看了一遍。她以为我开玩笑。我没解释。有些路要自己走一遍才懂，比如从银幕到巷口那一段，两千里远，也就一步。

I Watched That Film Again in the Exam Room

Let me start with the result: that composition ran two and a half pages, and the last sentence landed exactly as the collecting bell rang. But rewind ten minutes, and there I sat sweating through my palms. The topic was one character: Road. I stared at it while famous quotations rang in my head, every one correct, every one unlike what I wanted to write.

At the seventh minute of panic I closed my eyes and did something bold: I replayed from the beginning, in my head, that old film I watched last year. It is about a cobbler keeping a stall at an alley mouth, with a radio broken for thirty years on the stall, which he never fixes, because he only mends shoes. Someone in the

film urges him to move to a storefront on the main street, and he shakes his head. In one scene a girl comes to glue a broken shoe strap, then stands a moment by the stall and says: master, with your stall set here, everyone in this alley has to nod to you before going out.

On that line something clicked in my skull. I thought of our alley. Uncle Liu, the bicycle repairman, kept his stall for over a decade; when a chain snapped, one shout and he passed over his tools, taking no money. The alley is narrow, and cyclists on their way to and from school ring twice when they see him, two short rings, like a greeting. I had never thought that counted as anything. The line about nodding in the film lit up every pair of short rings in that alley.

I started from Uncle Liu. I wrote how he squeezed a string of bubbles from the inner tube in water when patching flats, how he never charged schoolchildren for pumping, how the year half the alley was demolished his stall still stood under the remaining half of wall, and when a ring sounded he looked up for a glance. At the end I took that line from the film: with your stall set here, everyone in the alley nods before going out. I changed the nod to short rings. As the bell rang I finished my last sentence: a road does not have to lead far away; sometimes a road is a person standing still so that the roads of others go easier.

On the day papers came back, the teacher read my composition in the review class and said: the road in this piece is not a street, it is a person. I did not say a film gave it to me. Not out of shyness, but because I know it was not all the film. The film gave one line; the alley was Uncle Liu, standing there for over ten years on his own. A film is like a key that pries open the door you have been keeping yourself. Everything behind that door had been under my eyes all along; I had simply never looked down.

I save the grade for last. That term my Chinese ranked near the top of the class, and my composition sub-score was the highest since I started junior high. My mother, delighted, asked whether I had been secretly taking tutoring classes. I said no, I just watched an old film once more, inside the exam room. She thought I was joking. I did not explain. Some roads must be walked once to be understood, like the stretch from the screen to the alley mouth: two thousand li away, and only one step.