掌声落下来之前

掌声是在我唱完最后一个音、退后半步的时候落下来的，哗啦啦，从礼堂四面八方盖过来。我站在台上，胸口还在剧烈起伏，手心湿得像刚洗过手没擦。没有人知道，就在半分钟前，我差点把整个合唱队晾在台上。

事情要从候场说起。合唱队二十几个人在侧幕后面站成一排，老师挨个检查领结。我站在最前面，立式话筒就立在幕布边上，我离它三步远。前一个节目下台，掌声把幕布拍得咚咚响，我的胃里像有东西在翻。带队老师拍拍我的肩：就一段领唱，你练了两个月。

我练了两个月。放学留在音乐教室，钢琴弹前奏，我对着二十几个空椅子唱。领唱那段是：山上的雪化了，河就醒了。我唱给空椅子听，唱给钢琴听，唱给窗外做操的初一学生听。闭着眼睛都能唱出来，这是我自己给这句话下的保证。

幕布开了。灯光白晃晃的，我走到立式话筒前，听见自己的布鞋踩在地板上，一步，两步。指挥的手抬起来，前奏从钢琴里流出来，一个音一个音往前走。全队跟着拍子轻轻晃。前奏过去，指挥的手落向我。

我张嘴。词没了。旋律还在，我哼得出每一个音高，可是那一句词，像被人从脑子里整条抽走了。我张着嘴，喉咙里只出来一点气声。一拍，两拍。指挥的手没有停，稳稳地打着拍子，眼睛在灯光外面看着我。台下开始有细碎的动静。

第三拍上，我顺着旋律先哼了半句，把调子搭起来，词就跟在调子后头回来了——山上的雪化了。声音从话筒里传出去，又轻又稳。河就醒了。我唱出来了，全唱出来了。声音一句比一句站直，最后一段全队接上去，二十几个声部叠在一起，礼堂里嗡嗡地震。

最后一个音收住，指挥的手停在半空。一秒，两秒。然后掌声落下来，从四面八方盖过来。我退后半步，胸口起伏，手心全是汗。

回后台，带队老师什么都没说，只把我的领结正了正。音乐老师站在幕布后面，眼睛有点红。那两拍的空场，后来我再没跟别人提过。可每次路过音乐教室，听见钢琴弹那句前奏，我的脚还是会不由自主地停在门口——三步远，就是立式话筒的位置。

Before the Applause Fell

The applause fell the moment I finished the last note and stepped back half a pace. It came roaring at me from every side of the auditorium. I stood on stage, my chest still heaving, my palms wet as if I had just washed them and not dried them. Nobody knew that half a minute earlier, I had nearly left the whole choir stranded on stage.

It starts with the wait backstage. The choir of twenty-some stood in a row behind the side curtain, and the teacher checked our bow ties one by one. I stood at the front, the upright microphone planted at the curtain's edge, three steps from me. The

previous act came off, and applause beat the curtain thump thump. Something was turning over inside my stomach. The teacher in charge patted my shoulder: Just one solo section. You have practiced for two months.

I had practiced for two months. I stayed in the music room after school, the piano playing the prelude, me singing to twenty empty chairs. The solo line was: When the snow on the mountain melts, the river wakes up. I sang it to the empty chairs, to the piano, to the seventh-graders exercising outside the window. I could sing it with my eyes closed - that was the promise I had made to that line.

The curtain opened. The lights were blinding white. I walked to the upright microphone and heard my cloth shoes on the floor, one step, two. The conductor's hand rose; the prelude flowed out of the piano, note by note moving forward. The whole choir swayed gently on the beat. The prelude ended, and the conductor's hand came down toward me.

I opened my mouth. The words were gone. The melody was still there - I could hum every pitch - but that one line of lyrics had been pulled out of my head whole, as if by hand. My mouth stayed open, and only a breath escaped my throat. One beat. Two. The conductor's hand did not stop; it beat the time steadily, eyes watching me from outside the light. Faint rustlings began downstairs.

On the third beat, I hummed half a line along the melody, building the tune up, and the words came trailing behind it - When the snow on the mountain melts. The sound went out through the microphone, light and steady. The river wakes up. I sang it. I sang all of it. Voice by voice it straightened up, and in the last section the whole choir joined in, two dozen parts stacked together, the auditorium humming and trembling.

The last note closed. The conductor's hand hung in midair. One second. Two. Then the applause fell, covering me from every side. I stepped back half a pace, chest heaving, palms all sweat.

Backstage, the teacher in charge said nothing and only straightened my bow tie. The music teacher stood behind the side curtain, eyes a little red. I never told anyone about those two beats of silence afterward. But every time I pass the music room and hear the piano play that prelude, my feet still stop by the door on their own - three steps away, exactly where the upright microphone stands.