

MOVIEHOUSE POEMS (2)

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REAR WINDOW

The screen is a 30-foot skein of skin.
It feels me sitting here, even in back, the 26th row.
A scratchy soundtrack scrolls for early comers, ads for
local businesses, slightly unfocused.
The feature starts, a classic Hitchcock, the opening
shots slapping me in the forehead.
I'm with Karen at the Princess on Beech Street in Oxford.
The screen zooms out, tiny as a postage stamp.
A latecomer jingles down the aisle.
I put my logolepsy on hold
because my eyes are working overtime.
"Give it here, I'll eat it" from the talker in the next row.
The probing lights of dimness drop from the ceiling.
Raymond Burr's onscreen now, his voice thin
as a vein of ore. He dips his pen in the well of evil.
Little man squirming in his velvet seat
will hear the heart of the film for days
and watch the spying blues of Jimmy Stewart,
the Tom Hanks of the 1950s, who breaks
both legs in order to heal himself.
"Que haces en tu tiempo libre?"
--your free time that triggers itches in your scalp
and turns the camera of your gaze
back upon yourself, yourself.



MOVIE CLASSICS

Murals on the walls of this old
art theater show coeds in convertibles,
crew cuts and poodle skirts,
the aisles carpeted in dark flowers
scented with mildew.

After a cartoon the first picture starts,
rows of velvet seats turning invisible
before light blooms from the back wall,
the beam gray on the screen but then
turquoise like the deep ends of pools.

Horns chase the credits before violins
 settle the frame gracefully, Myrna Loy
 and Clifton Webb smiling at their children,
 or Charles Boyer gaslighting Ingrid Bergman,
 or Spencer Tracy chopping up Ernie Borgnine.

I think of how many houses we've lived in
 for two hours—the Columbia Inn, the Victorian
 in *Yours, Mine, and Ours*, the Blandings' *Dream House*.
 At intermission the Wurlitzer hits
 the high notes of my heart.

When the features end, I make up a song
 in Nelson Eddy's voice, a piece of pure corn
 and sentiment, a reprise played
 on a painted cardboard set:
 "Every time I glance at you I fall in love again."



RETURNING TO THE MOVIES

We wait in the parking lot
 20 minutes past starting time.
 Ticket seller's mask is drab
 and fits her face like a frown.
 I won't venture to the restroom,
 fending off thirst and sitting up
 straight through the final preview.
 The film moves fast enough,
 fight scenes and stunts I've never seen,
 and actual good acting around a script
 that demands suspended disbelief—
 but by the end I've lifted my elbows
 off the arm rests, and wondered
 what's living under my feet.



LIFE AND THE MOVIES

We join a long line opening day
 at the multiplex. Movie's half through
 when the sound dies, and the screen goes gray.

From the projection room all that plays
is the ushers' gossip: they're without a clue.
Sorry we joined a long line opening day

we sit in half-dark thinking of a way
to notify the teenage crew
the sound's dead and the screen's gone gray.

Unabashed by what we've heard them say
they fix the platter and apologize too.
Joining a long line opening day

was a mistake, as chaos holds sway
and the flicker and burn begin anew,
the sound dying, the screen going gray

in the manner your best plans sometimes do.
You join a long line opening day
but before the villain's made to pay
the sound dies first, and then the screen goes gray.



SINGER OUTSIDE THE MOVIEHOUSE

Listen to the singer on the corner,
sending out long and languorous phrases
blending her tones together like colors.

Her trill is the voice of a mourner
until its range rises and amazes
all listeners to this singer on her corner.

No instruments here: she would sooner
not sing than let guitars or horns rephrase
how her tones blend together like colors.

Her intake's quick, like she's a foreigner
to breathing. Her output's clear and dazes
listeners as she sings on the corner.

You'll remember her voice like your daughter's
first words or laughter, your mind ablaze
with love's blending of tones like colors.

Should I move on? you almost say—armor
myself against the chores of the day?
No. Listen to the singer on the corner
blending her tones together like colors.

FIRST MOVIE

Don't know its name
my ear on mom's heartbeat
I eat dad's popcorn
listen to grandma yell

at kids for talking
startled by the sudden dark
grandma scolding kids
blowing smoke in her hair

I turn toward the light
as though it's nourishment
the beam that carries people
and puts them on the screen