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IAS 302R
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International Cinema: *Tiny Lights and the Silence Children Live Inside*
Parkanová, Beata, dir. *Tiny Lights (Světýlka)*. Czech Republic and Slovakia, 2024. Film.

I saw *Tiny Lights* at BYU's International Cinema, and it did not feel like the kind of film a person watches and leaves behind. It affected me while I was still sitting there watching it. The film is quiet, but not peaceful. From the beginning, that quiet carried tension, and I could feel that something in the family was off before the story ever explained why. Directed by Beata Parkanová, *Tiny Lights* follows six-year-old Amálka through a single summer day as the adults around her speak in fragments, avoid each other, and move through the house with the kind of distance a child notices immediately. What made the film so powerful for me was how clearly it showed that children do not need full explanations to know when something is wrong. They feel it long before adults are willing to say it out loud.

What made the film so intense was the way it locked the audience inside a child's world. The camera stays low, close to Amálka's height, so adults are often only partly visible, cut off by doorframes, bodies, or distance. Bits of conversation drift in from other rooms and raised voices are heard only in fragments rather than complete explanations. That visual choice did not just make the film interesting to look at. It made it emotionally sharp. It recreated the confusion of childhood with painful accuracy. A child may not have words for betrayal, separation, or emotional instability, but a child knows when the air in a house has changed. Watching it, I could feel that the film trusted that truth enough not to soften it.

That was the part that hit me hardest. The film captured the ache of sensing that something inside a family is shifting while having no power to stop it and no language to

confront it. Adults often tell themselves that silence protects children. They assume a child is too young to understand, too distracted to notice, or too innocent to carry the weight of adult conflict. *Tiny Lights* quietly tears through that excuse. Amálka watches, listens, and tries to piece things together from half-heard words, tense pauses, and emotional distance. That is why the film hurt. It was not loud or dramatic. It was intimate. It showed how confusion settles into a child when the people she depends on refuse to speak plainly.

The setting made that feeling even heavier. The story takes place in the early 1990s, just after the fall of socialism in Czechoslovakia, in a world already marked by change and instability. The tension inside the family does not exist in isolation. It unfolds in a society that is changing quickly and pulling people in different directions. The mother's desire to leave, move to Prague, and live as an artist reflects those larger pressures and possibilities. The setting added a deeper sadness to the film. The grandparents, the parents, and the child all seemed to be living in different emotional worlds, even while sharing the same rooms. The film stayed focused on one family and one day, but it still felt much larger because it showed how children often absorb the emotional cost of changes that begin far outside their control.

What stayed with me after the film ended was its restraint. *Tiny Lights* does not rush to explain motives, assign blame, or hand the audience an easy emotional release. It stays with the glances, the silences, the fragments, and the sense that something fragile is breaking while everyone tries to act as if nothing is happening. That honesty gives the film its weight. It understands that childhood is not a protected state of ignorance. It is exposure without explanation. That is what made the film feel so true to me. The silences adults keep do not disappear. They settle into the child who has to live inside them, and *Tiny Lights* refuses to look away from that fact.