爸爸没说出口的那半句

散场那一下，影厅的灯唰地亮了。儿子捧着空爆米花桶，我媳妇把最后一粒塞进嘴里。谁都没急着走，好像都还坐在那只小鸭子身边。

片子讲一只走丢的小鸭子想看海，一路被雨冲、被狗追，到底走到了。海很普通，漂着货船，小鸭子在沙滩上坐了很久。出了影院门，儿子先说：这鸭子真傻。我几乎是抢着回答的：不傻，想看海不算错。话出口我自己都愣了下。这话不像说给鸭子的，倒像说给三十年前那个蹲在河滩上不敢回家的我。

我爹是拎着柳条在村口等我的。那年我偷偷下河游泳，回来撞见他黑着的脸。柳条抽在腿肚子上，我没哭；他转身进屋，我看见他肩膀一耸一耸，我反倒哭了。后来我长大、进城、当爸爸，从没跟我爹说过一句软话。他走的那年冬天我在工地上，没赶上。

我媳妇忽然开口，说她八岁去车站接人走丢过两个钟头，谁也没告诉。儿子瞪着眼问她怕不怕。她说怕得腿肚子转筋，可看见姥姥的自行车，她没哭，跑过去抓住后座。儿子哦了一声，半天没说话。我听见自己的心跳，咚咚的，像替我爹疼了一遍。

走到小区门口才发现坐过了一站。往回走的路上，儿子仰头问我：爸，你想看海吗。我张了张嘴，那半句到了嗓子眼：想，我到现在都没看过海。话到嘴边，我咽了回去，换成另一句：你想看海，爸爸陪你走。儿子说好，说得干脆，像答应一件顶大的事。

上楼时儿子先进门，回头按着电梯等我们。我媳妇小声说：你今天替鸭子说话那下，真帅。我嘿嘿一笑。其实我知道，那半句我早晚要说。等哪天带儿子真站到海边，我就说给他听，也说给我爹听，虽然他听不见了。

夜里我翻出手机，给妈打了个电话，没别的事，就听她唠叨了十分钟。挂电话前我说：妈，改天我领你去看场电影。电话那头静了一下，然后说好，好。

The Half Sentence Dad Never Said

The moment the show ended the lights of the hall swept on. My son held the empty popcorn bucket, and my wife popped the last kernel into her mouth. Nobody hurried to leave, as if we were all still sitting there beside the little duckling.

The film told of a lost duckling that wanted to see the sea: swept by rain, chased by dogs, yet it arrived. The sea was ordinary, with cargo ships floating on it, and the duckling sat long on the beach. Outside the cinema my son spoke first: this duckling is stupid. I answered almost before he finished: not stupid, wanting to see the sea is not a mistake. The words surprised even me. They did not sound like words about a duck. They sounded like words spoken to myself thirty years ago, the boy crouching on the riverbank afraid to go home.

My father waited for me at the village entrance with a willow switch. That year I

had swum secretly in the river and came home to his dark face. The switch stung my calves and I did not cry; when he turned and went inside, I saw his shoulders shaking, and then I cried. I grew up, moved to the city, became a father, and never once said a soft word to him. The winter he died I was on a construction site, and I did not make it in time.

My wife suddenly spoke, saying she had been lost for two hours at eight on her way to meet someone at the station, and told no one. My son stared and asked if she had been afraid. She said afraid until her legs turned to water, but when she saw the bicycle of her mother she did not cry, she ran and grabbed the back seat. My son said oh, and was quiet for a long while. I heard my own heartbeat, thud thud, as if aching once in place of my father.

Walking to the gate of our compound we noticed we had ridden one stop too far. On the way back my son looked up and asked: Dad, do you want to see the sea. I opened my mouth, and that half sentence rose to my throat: yes, I have never seen the sea to this day. At the edge of my lips I swallowed it and said another sentence instead: if you want to see the sea, Dad will walk with you. He said good, crisp and clean, as if promising something enormous.

Going upstairs my son entered first and turned to hold the elevator for us. My wife said quietly: that moment today when you spoke up for the duckling, that was truly handsome. I chuckled. In truth I know I will say that half sentence sooner or later. The day I stand with my son at the shore, I will tell it to him, and tell it to my father too, though he can no longer hear.

At night I picked up my phone and called my mother, for nothing in particular, just to listen to her chatter for ten minutes. Before hanging up I said: Mom, one day I will take you to a film. There was a pause on the line, then she said: good, good.