给杜小康：芦苇荡认出了你

杜小康，我想跟你谈谈那条船。那条装着整个家的船，在油麻地的河上走过多少回，缆绳都磨出了毛边。船不是在水里沉的，杜小康，你知道。是在日子里沉的。沉船那天你没有哭，你只是把湿了的被子拧了又拧。

你还记得草房子吗。你退学前在它门口站了很久。那时你穿着皮夹克，油麻地只有你有。你把课本递给我——不，你把它留给学校，像留一盏没烧完的灯。草房子的茅草顶在风里动了一下，那是它在点头，它认下了你后来的路。

芦苇荡认你认得最狠。它不跟你讲道理，它直接放暴风雨进来。芦花白了，天黑了，鸭子四散，你喊，嗓子喊哑了，芦苇替你把声音吞下去，又吐出来，吐成一片沙沙的白。你摔在泥水里，爬起来，头发上挂着断苇。就是从那天起，你不再是谁的儿子，你是你自己。

你也去过药寮门口。桑桑生病那些天，你路过，站一站。药寮的苦味漫出来，你闻得懂。你吃过苦的人，闻得懂别人的苦。你没有进去说漂亮话，你只是把摊子上的东西摆得更整齐些，像替谁把日子理顺。

后来你在草房子门口摆摊。一根绳，几本书，几个纸盒。桑桑来看你，你们谁也没提从前。你把冰棍让给他，他把鸽子让给你。苦难从你们中间走过，没有带走什么，倒留下什么。留下的东西没有名字，非要找一个，就叫它骨气。

杜小康，芦苇荡里那一夜，风问你：还要不要站起来。你没答，你站起来了。这就是全部的回答。草房子替你记着，药寮替你记着，那条河一直替你记着。

如今我们坐在明亮的教室里，读你的故事。读到芦苇荡，我们把腰挺直一点；读到药寮，我们把声音放轻一点；读到草房子，我们互相看一眼。看一眼就够了。我们都认得那种苦，也都想守住那种暖。

To Du Xiaokang: The Reed Marsh Knows You

Du Xiaokang, I want to talk with you about that boat. The boat that carried a whole home, how many times it passed on the river of Youmadi, the rope worn to frayed edges. The boat did not sink in water, Du Xiaokang, you know. It sank in the days of life. That day you did not cry. You only wrung the wet quilt out, again and again.

Do you still remember the grass house. You stood a long time at its door before leaving school. You wore a leather jacket then, the only one in Youmadi. You handed the textbook to me — no, you left it to the school, like leaving a lamp not yet burned out. The thatch roof of the grass house stirred once in the wind. That was it nodding. It had accepted the road you would take after.

The reed marsh knew you the hardest way. It did not reason with you. It let the storm in directly. The reed flowers whitened, the sky blackened, the ducks scattered.

You shouted until your voice went hoarse. The reeds swallowed your voice for you, then spat it back, spat it into a rustling white. You fell into the muddy water, got up, broken reeds hanging in your hair. From that day on, you were no longer anyone's son. You were yourself.

You also passed by the medicine hut. In those days of Sangsang's illness, you passed and stood a moment. The bitterness of the hut spread out, and you could smell it through. A man who has eaten bitterness can smell other people's. You did not go in with fine words. You only arranged the things on your stall a little neater, as if straightening days for someone.

Later you set your stall at the gate of the grass house. One rope, a few books, a few paper boxes. Sangsang came to see you. Neither of you mentioned the past. You gave him your popsicle; he gave you his doves. Suffering walked through the space between you and took nothing away — it left something instead. The thing it left has no name. If you must find one, call it backbone.

Du Xiaokang, on that night in the reed marsh, the wind asked you: will you still stand up. You did not answer. You stood up. That is the whole answer. The grass house keeps it for you, the medicine hut keeps it for you, that river has kept it for you all along.

Now we sit in bright classrooms, reading your story. When we reach the reed marsh, we straighten our backs a little; when we reach the medicine hut, we lower our voices a little; when we reach the grass house, we glance at each other. One glance is enough. We all know that bitterness, and we all mean to keep that warmth.