红门、鸭群和小摊

油麻地有一扇红门，红得最亮，漆得最匀。门里走出一个少年，叫杜小康，白衬衫，皮夹克，课本散发油墨的香。红门是他家的脸面，开门关门，都带一阵风。

后来风翻了。家里的船沉在日子里，红门的漆裂了纹，皮夹克收进箱底。杜小康没哭，他把袖子挽起来，跟着父亲摇船，摇进芦苇荡，去放一群鸭子。

鸭子认得他。嘎嘎嘎，一排白，跟着他走。暴风雨来了，芦苇跪下，鸭子跑散。他喊，嗓子喊哑，他追，摔进泥里，爬起来，头发上挂着断苇。那一夜，鸭子数了又数，一只没少。杜小康也数了自己一遍：还在，站着的还是我。

红门开合的声响，油麻地的人都听得懂。从前开门，是皮夹克的袖口一闪；后来开门，是杜小康扛着鸭圈出门，裤腿卷到膝盖。门还是那扇门，响声还是那个响声，只是开门的人，把苦日子扛出了脚步声。不慌，不乱，一步是一步。芦苇荡里那一夜，鸭子记得，门也记得。风过红门，门不响的时候，是人在使劲。

鸭群回家了，下了一筐筐蛋。杜小康在草房子门口摆起小摊：一根绳，几本书，几个纸盒，一把冰棍。放学铃一响，孩子们围过来。他递课本的手冻得发红，笑得比从前还稳。

桑桑来买东西，两个人谁也没提从前。你把冰棍让给我，我把鸽子让给你。红门还立在老地方，漆旧了，门还是那扇门。它现在明白了一件事：红门不是漆红的，是站起来的人给它重新漆红的。

来，跟我念：杜小康，杜小康，红门里走出好儿郎。赶鸭群，过芦荡，暴风雨里敢担当。摆小摊，在校门口，腰杆挺得比门亮。油麻地的孩子都记住：穷不丢人，趴下才丢人；站起来，红门就还红。

The Red Gate, the Ducks, and the Little Stall

In Youmadi there is a red gate, the reddest, the smoothest with lacquer. Out of the gate walks a boy named Du Xiaokang, white shirt, leather jacket, his textbooks smelling of fresh ink. The red gate is his family's face. Every time it opens and shuts, it brings a gust of wind.

Later the wind turned. The family's boat sank in the days of life. The lacquer on the red gate cracked, and the leather jacket went to the bottom of a trunk. Du Xiaokang did not cry. He rolled up his sleeves and followed his father rowing a boat, rowing into the reed marsh, to mind a flock of ducks.

The ducks know him. Quack, quack, quack, a line of white following him. The storm came. The reeds knelt. The ducks scattered. He shouted until his voice went hoarse. He chased, fell into the mud, got up, broken reeds hanging in his hair. That night he counted the ducks again and again — not one missing. Du Xiaokang counted himself

too: still here, still the one standing.

The flock went home and laid basketfuls of eggs. Du Xiaokang set a little stall at the gate of the grass house: one rope, a few books, a few paper boxes, a handful of popsicles. When the school bell rang, the children gathered round. The hand that handed him the textbook was red with cold, and he smiled steadier than before.

Sangsang came to buy something. Neither of them mentioned the past. You offer me your popsicle, I offer you my doves. The red gate still stands in its old place, the lacquer grown old, but still the same door. It understands one thing now: the gate is not red from lacquer. It is painted red again by the man who stood back up.

The sound of the red gate opening and shutting, everyone in Youmadi understands it. In the old days, when it opened, a leather jacket's cuff flashed past; later, when it opened, it was Du Xiaokang carrying a duck pen out the door, trouser legs rolled to the knee. Still the same door, still the same sound — only the man opening it now carries hard days in his footsteps. Not flustered, not in disorder — one step is one step. That night in the reed marsh, the ducks remember, and the door remembers too. When the wind passes the red gate and the gate makes no sound, it is the person inside bracing with all their strength.

Come, say it with me: Du Xiaokang, Du Xiaokang, a fine lad out of the red gate. Herding ducks through the marsh, daring to bear the storm. Setting his stall at the school gate, back straighter than the gate shines. All the children of Youmadi remember: being poor is no shame; staying down is. Stand up, and the red gate is red again.