鸭群记得他

我们是一群鸭子，白毛，红脚掌，住在油麻地的河边。我们的少年叫杜小康。从前他家有一扇红门，他开门出来，抓一把谷子喂我们，谷子从他指缝里落，像下小雨。

后来红门旧了，他带我们摇船走，走进芦苇荡。芦苇比我们还高，风一吹，沙沙沙。他睡在窝棚里，我们睡在棚外，他翻个身，我们就听见。他比从前瘦了，可半夜起来看我们的次数，比从前多了。

那一夜暴风雨真大。芦苇全跪下，我们吓疯了，四散跑进黑里。他喊：回来，回来！嗓子喊哑了还在喊。他摔在泥水里，爬起来，又摔，又爬。我们一只一只自己走回来，看见他坐在棚口，怀里搂着两只最小的，浑身是泥，一动不动。

天亮了他数我们，数了三遍，一只没少。他也让我们数他一遍：摔了几跤，没哭；嗓子哑了，没停；芦苇划破手，没喊。我们鸭子不会说话，我们用嘎嘎回答他：你是好样的。

芦荡的水涨过我们的脚背，也涨过他的膝盖。他趟水去寻走丢的蛋，一枚一枚摸回来，揣在怀里焐着，像焐着一小团太阳。我们认得他手上的味道，谷子味，泥味，后来还多了药寮门口飘来的苦味——他去给桑桑捎过东西，回来什么也没说。我们鸭子不懂人心，只懂一件事：肯半夜起来数鸭的人，心不会冷。

再后来，我们下蛋，蛋换了他的小摊。他在校门口摆摊，几本书，几个纸盒。我们排着队从摊前走过，他抬头看我们一眼，我们冲他叫一声。那一声的意思是：芦荡那一夜，我们记得。

来，跟我们鸭子一起念：嘎嘎嘎，嘎嘎嘎，杜小康，好娃娃。红门前，喂过咱，芦荡里，共过难。摔在泥里不丢鸭，站进风里不丢家。如今摆摊校门口，腰比芦苇挺得直。我们鸭群都作证：他是个站起来的人。

The Flock Remembers Him

We are a flock of ducks, white feathers, red webbed feet, living by the river of Youmadi. Our boy is called Du Xiaokang. In the old days his home had a red gate. He would open it, come out, and grab a handful of grain to feed us, the grain falling through his fingers like light rain.

Later the red gate grew old. He took us away on a boat, rowing into the reed marsh. The reeds grew taller than us, and when the wind blew they rustled, swish, swish. He slept in the hut; we slept outside. He turned over in his sleep, and we heard it. He had grown thinner than before, but he got up to check on us more often than before.

That night the storm was terrible. All the reeds knelt. We went mad with fright and scattered into the dark. He shouted: come back, come back! His voice went hoarse and he kept shouting. He fell into the muddy water, got up, fell again, got up again.

One by one we walked ourselves back and found him sitting at the hut's mouth, two of the smallest ducklings hugged in his arms, covered in mud, not moving.

At dawn he counted us, three times, not one missing. Let us count him once too: fell several times, did not cry; voice gone hoarse, did not stop; reeds cut his hands, did not cry out. We ducks cannot speak, so we answered him with our quacking: you are a fine one.

The water in the marsh rose over our webbed feet, and it rose over his knees too. He waded out to find the lost eggs, feeling them back one by one, tucking them inside his shirt to warm with his body, as if warming a small ball of sun. We know the smell of his hands: grain, mud, and later a bitterness drifting from the door of the medicine hut — he had gone to carry things for Sangsang and came back saying nothing. We ducks do not understand human hearts; we understand only one thing: a man who gets up in the night to count his ducks has a heart that will not go cold.

After that, we laid eggs, and the eggs became his little stall. He set up at the school gate, a few books, a few paper boxes. We marched past his stall in line, he looked up at us once, and we called to him once. That one call means: that night in the marsh — we remember.

Come, chant with us ducks: quack quack quack, quack quack quack, Du Xiaokang, a good lad. By the red gate he fed us; in the marsh he shared hardship with us. Fell in the mud without losing a duck, stood in the wind without losing his home. Now his stall stands at the school gate, his back straighter than the reeds. We ducks all testify: he is a man who stood up.