侦察蚁回来了，带着一整支队伍

放学那阵子，我每天都故意走同一条路回家，因为三号楼的墙角有一个蚂蚁洞口。不知道它们是什么时候搬来的，洞口那堆细土很新，颗粒分明，像刚被人用手掌拍实过。

那天放学，我只看见一只蚂蚁。它走得很乱，几步一停，触角贴着地面碰来碰去。我把半块饼干放在它前面。它凑近，碰了碰，退开，又凑近，围着饼干转了一整圈。我以为它要开始吃了，它却转身，径直朝洞口回去。

后来我在书上看到，这样的蚂蚁叫侦察蚁，不负责搬东西，只负责探消息。可那天我不知道这些，只以为它看不上那块饼干，有点失望地准备走。

十分钟左右，它回来了，身后跟着一条黑线。黑线排得很整齐，像有人沿着地砖缝弹过一条墨斗线。队伍里的蚂蚁和它迎面相遇时用触角碰一下，谁也不停，全都朝饼干的方向赶。

搬运队伍分成两拨。到了饼干边的，围着饼干站开，有的抬前角，有的撬后边，饼干真的挪动了一点。搬着碎屑回洞的走队伍左边，空着身子赶去帮忙的走右边，两个方向互不挡路。我蹲着看了将近四十分钟，腿麻了也不想挪。

障碍出现在有人把电动车停在路线前头的时候。最前面的蚂蚁停下来，触角乱晃。我以为它们会掉头，它们没有。几只顺着轮胎边缘往上爬，试了一下，滑下来，再试。很快整支队伍绕过后轮，绕出半米多远，又在地砖的另一条缝上接上了原来的路线。新路线弯弯的，但没有一只蚂蚁撞到一起。

等我回家，饼干只剩下几粒碎渣。我一路想着那条线。没有人下命令，也没有人记本子，可每只蚂蚁都清楚自己该干什么，撞上障碍就改道，改完照样走得整齐。我们小组做课题，十来个人常常拧不成一件事。蚂蚁的脑子只有芝麻大，却做到了我们没做到的事。墙角那里没有老师，可每天都在上课。

The Scout Ant Came Back with a Whole Column

For a stretch of afternoons, I deliberately took the same road home from school, because at the corner of Building Three there was the entrance to an ant nest. I did not know when they had moved in, but the pile of fine soil at the mouth was fresh, its grains sharp and clear, as if a hand had just patted it firm.

That day I saw only one ant. It walked in a crooked, hesitant way, stopping every few steps, its antennae brushing the ground. I set half a biscuit in front of it. It came close, touched it, backed off, came close again, and walked one full circle around the biscuit. I thought it would start eating. Instead it turned around and headed straight back to the nest.

Later I read in a book that such an ant is called a scout. It carries nothing; its job is news. But that day I knew none of this. I assumed the biscuit had been

rejected, and I was about to leave, a little disappointed.

Some ten minutes later the scout came back, and behind it came a black line. The line was laid out neatly, as though someone had snapped an ink line along the crack between the paving stones. Each ant in the column touched antennae with the scout as they passed, none of them stopping, all hurrying toward the biscuit.

The carrying column split into two groups. Those who reached the biscuit formed a ring around it; some lifted the front corner, some pried at the back edge, and the biscuit really moved a little. Ants returning to the nest with crumbs kept to the left side of the line, while empty-handed reinforcements kept to the right, and the two directions never blocked each other. I squatted there watching for nearly forty minutes, my legs going numb, and I did not want to move.

The obstacle appeared when someone parked an electric bike right in front of the route. The ants at the front stopped, their antennae swinging wildly. I expected them to turn back. They did not. Several climbed along the edge of the tire, slipped down, tried again. Before long the whole column swung around the rear wheel, detoured more than half a meter, and rejoined the old route at another crack in the paving stones. The new path was crooked, yet not one ant bumped into another.

By the time I went home, the biscuit had shrunk to a few crumbs. I thought about that line the whole way. No one gave orders, no one kept notes, yet every ant knew exactly what to do, and when blocked they simply changed course and kept walking in perfect order. Our study group has a dozen people, and we often cannot pull together over a single task. An ant brain is the size of a sesame seed, yet they managed what we could not. There is no teacher at that street corner, but a lesson goes on there every day.