没人踩那条线

那节体育课，全班在塑胶跑道跑八百米，老师在直道尽头掐表。操场旧，跑道边靠树坑的地方有一道裂缝，蚂蚁把高速公路修在了那里。

搬运队伍在上课铃之前就出发了。一队蚂蚁排成线，把白色的幼蛹一只一只举着，从树坑往台阶下的高处搬。搬家的原因后来才弄清楚——早上园丁给树坑周围浇了水，水渗进了洞里。

侦察蚁前一天就露过面。它在跑道边来回跑，碰这里的缝，碰那里的土。看到的男生踢土玩，谁也没当回事。等到全家都动起来，大家才明白蚂蚁早就做好了决定。

第一个跑的男生差点踩上那条线。运动鞋落下去之前，他看见脚边那条黑线，硬是把脚踝一拧，踉跄着扑到草皮边上。他后面的人全都绕开了。有人踩上草皮，有人跳过裂缝。没有人喊过一句，可没有一个人踩上那条线。

真正的障碍是喷水器留下的一小滩水。搬运线被水洼截断，最前面的蚂蚁停住，互相碰触角。队伍顺着跑道沿绕出去两米多，在一块干的裂缝上重新接上。举着幼蛹的没有一只放下怀里的东西，迎面来帮忙的蚂蚁和它们碰一下触角就继续往前。绕行的路线被课间几十双脚踩得模糊，可下一回蚂蚁出来，还是沿着那条绕远的线走。

老师后来发现了，他没有让我们把裂缝填平，只说了一句别踩，让人家搬完。队伍闹腾了一阵，很快安静下来。到最后一节课，裂缝空了。蚂蚁把全家搬到了台阶下的干土里，洞口重新堆起了新土。

后来我总想起八百米跑道上的那一幕。四十多个人都在跑，全都躲开了同一条线。蚂蚁的分工写在触角里，我们的默契写在同班三年里。两条线不一样，却落在同一个地方——没有人下命令的时候，每个人都知道该往哪里落脚。

Nobody Stepped on That Line

In that P.E. class, our whole grade was running eight hundred meters on the plastic track while the teacher timed us at the far end of the straight. The sports field is old, and along the track edge near the tree pit there is a crack; the ants had built their highway right there.

The moving column had set off before the bell. One line of ants carried white pupae, one at a time held high, from the tree pit toward the higher ground under the steps. The reason only became clear later: that morning the gardener had watered around the tree pit, and the water had seeped into the nest.

The scout ant had shown up the day before. It ran back and forth along the track edge, touching this crack, then that patch of soil. The boys who saw it kicked dirt at it, and nobody paid attention. Only when the whole family started moving did we understand that the ants had made their decision long ago.

The first runner almost stepped on the line. Just before his sneaker came down, he spotted the black thread at his feet, twisted his ankle hard, and stumbled out onto the grass. Everyone behind him swerved. Some stepped onto the grass, some jumped over the crack. Nobody shouted a word, yet not one person stepped on that line.

The real obstacle was a shallow puddle left by the sprinkler. The route was cut clean in half. The ants at the front stopped and touched antennae with each other. The column swung along the track edge for more than two meters and rejoined at a dry crack. Not one ant carrying a pupa set it down, and each reinforcement coming the other way touched antennae and kept going. Dozens of feet during the break wore the detour path faint, but the next time the ants came out, they still followed the long way around.

The teacher noticed in the end. He did not let us fill the crack in. He only said: do not step on it, let them finish moving. The class buzzed for a moment, then went quiet. By the last period the crack was empty. The ants had moved the entire family into the dry soil under the steps, and a fresh mound of earth stood at the new entrance.

I keep returning to that scene on the eight-hundred-meter track. More than forty people running, and every one of them avoided the same line. The ants' division of labor is written into their antennae; our understanding is written into three years in the same class. The two lines are different, but they meet in the same place — when nobody gives orders, everyone knows exactly where to put a foot.

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