裂缝里的五天

自然笔记的第一页，老师要求连续观察一种东西，写满五天。我在练习本上写下的开头很丢人：墙缝里有蚂蚁，很小，很多，黑色。写完这十二个字，我盯着本子，觉得对不住老师。

第二天我逼自己多看一会儿。这一回我看的是触角。两只蚂蚁迎面碰上，触角碰一下就走，可有一对碰了很久，绕着对方转了半圈才分开。我还看见一只蚂蚁搬着一片比它大两倍的菜叶，走得很稳，下坡的时候先把菜叶放下来，自己滑下去，再回头把菜叶拖下来。

第三天，我在它们的路线上放了一颗小石子。蚂蚁走到石子跟前，没有爬，也没有推，整条队伍往左边让开，绕过石子，再合回原来的线。我在笔记里写：它们好像早就知道路可以弯。

第四天出了大事。那条走了几天的线不见了，我急得把地砖缝挨个看过去，最后在离原线半米远的另一条缝里找到了队伍。它们改道了，原因我猜是有人往那条缝里倒了半瓶汽水，缝边还黏着。新线上蚂蚁走得比原来快，谁也不绕弯。

第五天，我没再蹲在原地，把前四天的笔记摊在膝盖上重看了一遍，然后在本子最后一页写下攒下的疑问：触角碰很久的那一对，是不是在吵嘴？搬菜叶的蚂蚁为什么先下坡再拖菜叶？改道是谁决定的，没有谁下令，它们怎么都知道新线？写完我数了数，五个问题，一个也答不上来。

交笔记那天，老师把最后一页翻给我看，说问题比记录金贵，能提问的眼睛才算真的看过。同桌的本子上五天都写着蚂蚁很小很多，我的本子上五天没有一句重样。墙缝还是那道墙缝，蚂蚁还是那些蚂蚁，五天里我换了一双眼睛。

Five Days Inside the Crack

For the first page of our nature notebook, the teacher asked us to observe one thing for five days straight. My opening line was embarrassing: ants in the wall crack — small, many, black. After those twelve characters I stared at the notebook, feeling I had let the teacher down.

On day two I forced myself to look longer. This time I watched the antennae. When two ants met head-on, they tapped antennae and parted, but one pair touched for a long while and circled half around each other before splitting up. I also saw an ant carrying a vegetable leaf twice its size, walking steadily; at the slope it set the leaf down, slid down itself, then turned back and dragged the leaf after it.

On day three I placed a small pebble in their route. When the ants reached it, they neither climbed nor pushed. The whole column stepped to the left, flowed around the pebble, and closed back into the original line. I wrote in my notebook: they seem to have known all along that a road may bend.

On day four something big happened. The line they had walked for days was gone. In a panic I checked the cracks between the paving stones one by one, and finally

found the column half a meter away in another crack. They had changed routes. I guessed the cause was someone pouring half a bottle of soda into the old crack; its edge was still sticky. On the new line the ants walked faster than before, and nobody wandered.

On day five I did not squat in place. I spread the previous four days of notes across my knees, reread them, then wrote on the last page every question I had saved up: were that pair who touched antennae for so long quarreling? Why did the leaf-carrier slide down first and drag the leaf after? Who decided to change the route — with no one giving orders, how did they all know the new line? I counted five questions and could answer not one.

The day we handed in the notebooks, the teacher turned to my last page and said: questions are more precious than records; only eyes that can ask have truly seen. My deskmate's notebook said the same thing five days running — ants are small and many. Mine had no repeated sentence across five days. The crack was still the same crack, the ants still the same ants, but in five days I had swapped in a new pair of eyes.