我以前只说蚂蚁很小很多

《观察蚂蚁》里最让我停住的一段，不是搬米粒，是过水沟。作者写前一天下了雨，蚂蚁队伍抬着食物走到一道浅浅的水沟前，前面的蚂蚁停下来，后面的挤上来，谁也不掉头。几只蚂蚁先爬进浅水，把身子横在水里，后面的踩着它们的背过去。等队伍过完，水里的蚂蚁才爬上来，抖抖身子，接着走。

作者说：小蚂蚁有大力量，大的不是力气，是肯把身子借给别人。我读到这里忽然脸热，因为我想起自己上学期那篇观察作文，通篇一句话改出来的：蚂蚁很小，很多，黑黑的，排着队。老师批了四个字：观察呢？我当时还不服气，觉得蚂蚁本来就没什么可看。

这周周末，我揣着书下楼，专门去找蚂蚁，非要看出一篇作文以外的东西不可。花坛边果然有一队蚂蚁，抬着一小块水果糖的糖纸。它们走到一块积水的洼地前停住了，跟书里写的一模一样：前面的停，后面的挤上来，没有一只掉头。

我屏住呼吸看。没有蚂蚁跳水搭桥——它们换了办法，抬糖纸的松开手，队伍沿着洼地边缘散开，找一条窄的地方。两只蚂蚁先过去，在对岸站住，剩下的把糖纸递过去，一只一只像传球。糖纸太轻，风一吹翻了个面，对岸那只爬回来，重新按住。它按住糖纸，另外两只从边上爬上来，三个角重新各站一个，才把糖纸拖过最窄那一段砖缝。

整个过程不到两分钟，可我在洼地边蹲得腿都麻了。书里的水沟和我眼前的水洼不一样，蚂蚁用的办法也不一样，可有一样是相同的：没有谁说算了，没有谁先走。我以前说蚂蚁很小很多，是因为我只看了它们一眼；力量这个词，要看够久才看得见。

这周的作文本发下来，我写的是糖纸过水洼。老师批了四个字：这就对了。我把那本语文读本从书架上抽出来，夹了一张书签在过水沟那一页。有些书要等自己配得上它的时候，才读得懂。

I Used to Say Only That Ants Are Small and Many

The passage in Watching Ants that stopped me was not about carrying rice but about crossing a ditch. The author describes rain the night before; the ant column, carrying food, halts at a shallow ditch. The ants in front stop, those behind press up, and none turns around. Several ants crawl into the shallow water first and lay their bodies across it, and the rest walk over their backs. Only after the whole column is across do the ants in the water climb out, shake themselves off, and go on.

The author says: the great strength of small ants is not muscle but the willingness to lend one body to another. I felt my face burn right there, because I remembered my observation essay from last term, built entirely from one sentence: ants are small, many, black, and walk in lines. The teacher wrote four characters in the margin: where is the observation? I had resented it then, insisting there was nothing to see in ants.

This weekend I took the book downstairs and went looking for ants on purpose,

determined to find something beyond an essay assignment. By the flower bed there was indeed a column, carrying the wrapper of a fruit candy. They reached a sunken patch of standing water and stopped, exactly as the book described: the front halted, the rear pressed up, none turned back.

I held my breath and watched. No ant dove in to build a bridge — they found another way. The carriers released the wrapper, and the column spread along the edge of the puddle, hunting for a narrow crossing. Two ants got across first and stood on the far bank; the others passed the wrapper over, one to the next, like a relay of passes. The wrapper was so light that a gust flipped it, and the ant on the far bank crawled back to pin it down again.

The whole thing took less than two minutes, yet my legs went numb from squatting there. The ditch in the book and the puddle before my eyes were different, and the methods of the ants were different too, but one thing was the same: nobody said forget it, and nobody left first. I used to say ants are small and many because I only ever glanced at them once; the word strength can only be seen after looking long enough.

This week my essay came back. I had written about the candy wrapper crossing the puddle. The teacher wrote four characters: that is the way. I took the Chinese reader off the shelf and slipped a bookmark into the page about the ditch. Some books can only be understood once you become worthy of them.