蹲在蚂蚁窝边的四十分钟

周六下午没有作业，我下楼散步，在空地的水泥缝边发现了一个蚂蚁窝。洞口不大，周围的土堆成一个小斜坡，像给洞口修了个挡水的堤。我本来只想看一眼，结果蹲下来就没走。我看它们进进出出，发现一个怪现象：从洞里出来的蚂蚁大多空着身子，走得急；进去的蚂蚁大多嘴里叼着东西，走得慢。洞口像一扇门，门里门外是两种节奏。我掏出手机想看时间，怕爸妈喊我吃饭，结果一看已经蹲了半个多小时。腿麻了，我换了个姿势接着看。

看得最久的是两只蚂蚁碰触角。它们在洞口迎面碰上，停下来，头对头，触角搭在一起，停了大概两三秒，然后各走各的。我数过，四十分钟里这样的碰面发生了很多次。我猜它们是在交换信息，就像书里说的，蚂蚁靠气味和触角说话。可我忍不住想得更远：它们碰一下就知道对方要什么，不用吵，不用解释，不用发一大段消息再补一句你误会了。我们班搬书那次，四个人抬一摞，因为谁先走谁后走吵了半节课。蚂蚁碰一下触角就分好了，我觉得这比我们有办法。

回家前，我在窝边坐到了天擦黑。我想的事情有点跑远了：这个洞里的蚂蚁，没有谁给它们排班，没有谁检查卫生，可洞口没有堆垃圾，路线没有堵死，下雨前它们还会把家往高处搬。它们靠什么管着自己？我想了半天，觉得答案可能就在那些碰触角里——每个个体都把自己知道的一点点告诉别的个体，加在一起，就成了整个窝的本事。我们总说集体要听一个人的，可蚂蚁好像不是这样组织的。这个想法我不敢说一定对，先写进日记里。我在末尾写：明天把生物课本里社会行为那一章提前看了，再看看它们和我想的一样不一样。

Forty Minutes Squatting by the Ant Nest

On Saturday afternoon I had no homework, so I went downstairs for a walk and found an ant nest beside a crack in the concrete of the open ground. The opening was small, and the soil around it was piled into a little slope, like a levee built to keep rain out. I only meant to glance, but once I squatted down I could not leave. Watching them go in and out, I noticed a strange pattern: most ants coming out were empty-bodied and hurried; most going in carried something in their mouths and moved slowly. The opening was like a door, with two different rhythms on either side of it. I took out my phone to check the time, worried my parents would call me for dinner, and found I had been squatting there for over half an hour. My legs went numb; I changed position and kept watching.

What I watched longest was two ants touching antennae. They met head-on at the mouth of the nest, stopped, heads facing, antennae resting on each other, held still for two or three seconds, then each went its own way. I counted: in forty minutes these meetings happened many times. I guess they exchange information, the way books say ants speak through scent and antennae. But I could not help thinking further: one touch and they know what the other needs, no arguing, no explaining, no sending a long message and then adding you misunderstood. That time our class moved books, four of us carried one stack and spent half a period quarreling over who walks first and

who walks last. Ants split the job with one touch of antennae. I think they have a better way than we do.

Before going home I sat by the nest until dusk. My thoughts had wandered far: in this nest nobody makes the schedule, nobody inspects the cleaning, yet there is no garbage piled at the entrance, no blocked roads, and before rain they move their home uphill. What keeps them in order? I thought a long time and decided the answer may lie in those antenna touches. Every individual passes on the little it knows to other individuals, and added together it becomes the skill of the whole nest. We always say a group must listen to one person, but ants do not seem to organize that way. I dare not say this thought is certainly right, so I write it in my diary first. At the end I wrote: tomorrow I will read ahead the chapter on social behavior in the biology textbook, and see whether they match what I imagined.