墙角的小生命

老屋的墙角有一窝蚂蚁。墙皮剥落的地方，砖和泥之间裂开一道细缝，那就是它们的家。我小时候在那道缝前蹲过无数个夏天午后的时光，如今回去，缝还在，蚂蚁还在。它们的世界以毫米计算：一粒米是粮仓，一滴水是湖泊，一道门槛是翻不过的山。可就是这样一个以毫米计算的世界，它们活得比谁都认真。我见过它们搬一只死掉的飞蛾，十几只蚂蚁从各个方向下口，把翅膀、把身子拆成小块，一小块一小块往缝里运，从午后运到黄昏，没有一只停下来歇凉。

搬家的队伍是一条会动的线。线从墙根出发，越过砖缝，绕过落叶，一直伸到台阶那边的高处。队伍里每一只都叼着东西，白色的卵、虫子的残肢、不知从哪儿捡来的种子壳。它们不排成笔直的一列，却也不乱，前面的慢了，后面的自己绕开，绕开之后再归队。我蹲在旁边看久了，心里生出一种奇怪的敬意：没有谁发号施令，这条线却比许多队伍走得整齐。风把一片槐叶吹进队伍，队伍停了一小会儿，几只蚂蚁合力把叶子拖出去，线又接上了。

要下雨之前，它们搬家。天还晴着，空气里只有一点潮气，人毫无察觉，可墙角的蚂蚁已经全巢出动了。卵被一只只叼出来，排着队往高处走，墙根的旧洞口渐渐冷清，台阶的缝隙里新洞口热闹起来。等雨真的落下来，墙根积了一指深的水，台阶上的新洞口却滴水未进。我站在屋檐下看雨，想起它们提前一天就收拾好了家。人靠天气预报，蚂蚁靠空气里一丝潮的味道。雨停以后，我去看那个旧洞口，一只蚂蚁站在洞口试探，触角朝着天，像在确认雨真的走了。那个小小的剪影，我到现在都记得。

The Small Life by the Wall Corner

There is a nest of ants at the corner of the old house. Where the wall plaster has peeled away, a thin crack runs between brick and mud, and that is their home. As a child I squatted in front of that crack through countless summer afternoons, and going back now, the crack is still there, and so are the ants. Their world is measured in millimeters: a grain of rice is a granary, a drop of water a lake, a doorstep a mountain they cannot cross. Yet in a world measured in millimeters, they live more earnestly than anyone. I once watched them carry a dead moth. A dozen ants took hold from every direction, dismantling wings and body into small pieces, hauling one piece after one piece into the crack from afternoon until dusk, and not one stopped to rest in the shade.

The moving column is a line that moves. It starts at the wall corner, crosses the brick seam, skirts the fallen leaves, and reaches all the way to the higher ground by the steps. Every ant in the line carries something: white eggs, bits of insect limbs, seed shells picked up from who knows where. They do not march in a perfectly straight file, yet they are not chaotic; if the one ahead slows, the ones behind go around on their own and rejoin afterward. Watching for a long time, I felt a strange respect: no one gives orders, yet this line moves in better order than many a procession. Wind blew a locust leaf into the column. The line paused briefly, a few ants dragged the

leaf out together, and the line joined up again.

They move house before the rain. The sky is still clear, the air holds only a trace of damp, and people notice nothing, but the ants at the wall corner are already out in force. Eggs are carried out one by one and filed up toward high ground; the old opening at the wall grows quiet while a new opening in the crack of the steps grows busy. When the rain truly falls, water a finger deep gathers at the wall, yet not a drop enters the new opening on the steps. I stand under the eaves watching the rain and think of how they packed up their home a day ahead. People rely on weather forecasts; ants rely on a hint of damp in the air. After the rain stopped, I went to look at the old opening. One ant stood at the mouth testing, antennae raised toward the sky, as if confirming the rain had really gone. I still remember that small silhouette.