等妈妈的四十分钟

那天妈妈加班，让我在校门口大杨树下等她。她打电话说可能要晚一点。我靠着树干坐下，书包垫在身下，一开始不停看表：三点二十，三点二十五，三点三十一。等待是最难熬的事，一分钟被拉成一分钟十秒那么长。

看到第三遍表的时候，我放弃了，把头低下来。就这一低头，我看见了地上的蚂蚁队伍。

队伍从树根的缝里出来，沿着马路牙子走，一直走到对面的花坛。黑黑的一条，走得极稳。有一小段路被阳光照着，蚂蚁进了光里会稍微顿一下，出了光又加快步子。抬东西的蚂蚁走得更慢，背上一片枯叶的碎块，举得高高的，像举一面旗。

我数它们。数到一百三十几就乱了，乱了就重新从树根那儿数。数着数着，我不数了，只是看。看一只蚂蚁给另一只让路，看队伍绕过一颗纽扣，看纽扣旁边停着两只，大概打算把纽扣也搬走，可是试了几次没推动。

头顶的杨树叶子一直在响，风来了哗啦啦，风走了又安静。树荫的边缘从我的鞋尖退到膝盖，又退到腰。一只蚂蚁爬过我的鞋带，停了停，大概发现鞋带不是食物，转身走了。我一动没动，怕惊动这一整条线。

后来我听见自行车铃，一抬头，妈妈的车已经到门口了。她连声说晚了晚了，问我是不是等急了。我想了想，说，没有。

她大概以为我在客气。其实我是真没觉得熬。四十分钟，我一次也没有再抬手看表。平时等待像一段必须忍过去的空白，忍完才算数；可那天下午，等待本身是满的，满得像那条蚂蚁线，每一只每一秒都有事做。

回家的路上我在想，时间其实从来没有被藏起来。它一直在树荫的移动里，在蚂蚁的步子里，在杨树叶子响一阵停一阵里。是我们太急，抓不住它。下次再等谁，我还坐到树荫底下去，低下头，让一条蚂蚁队伍把我领进那个慢的、安静的下午里去。

Forty Minutes Waiting for Mom

That day my mother had to work overtime and told me to wait for her under the big poplar tree at the school gate. She called to say she might be late. I leaned against the trunk and sat down, my schoolbag padded under me, and kept checking my watch: three twenty, three twenty-five, three thirty-one. Waiting is the hardest thing; one minute stretches into a minute and ten seconds.

By the third time I checked my watch, I gave up and lowered my head. And in that lowering, I saw the column of ants on the ground.

The line came out of the crack at the tree root, walked along the curb, and went all the way to the flower bed across the street. A thin black thread, moving with great steadiness. One short stretch lay in the sunlight; when ants entered the light

they paused slightly, and once out of it they hurried up again. The ants carrying loads moved slower still, with fragments of dry leaves raised high on their backs, like flags held aloft.

I counted them. Past one hundred and thirty I lost count, and when I lost it I started again from the tree root. Counting, then not counting, just watching. I watched one ant step aside to let another pass, watched the line go around a button, watched two ants stopped beside the button — they probably meant to carry the button away too, but after several tries they could not push it.

The poplar leaves above rustled the whole time: a roar when the wind came, quiet when it left. The edge of the shade retreated from my toes to my knees, then to my waist. An ant climbed over my shoelace, paused, decided a shoelace was not food, and turned back. I did not move at all, afraid of disturbing the entire line.

Then I heard a bicycle bell, and when I looked up, my mother had already arrived at the gate. She kept apologizing for being late and asked if I had waited anxiously. I thought for a moment and said, no.

She probably took it for politeness. But truly, I had not felt it drag. Forty minutes, and I never raised my wrist to check the watch again. Usually waiting is a blank you must endure, and only the enduring counts; that afternoon, the waiting itself was full — as full as that line of ants, every ant, every second, busy with something.

On the way home I thought: time was never hidden. It has always been in the moving shade, in the steps of ants, in the poplar leaves that roar a while and rest a while. Next time I wait for someone, I will sit down under the shade again, lower my head, and let a column of ants lead me into that slow, quiet afternoon.

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