奶奶也蹲了下来

周末带七岁的儿子回乡下看父母。村口的水泥路两边是田，他一路走一路看，看得极慢。走到老槐树底下，他忽然蹲在路边不走了，喊：妈妈快看，蚂蚁排着队搬东西！

我张口就是城里那句：别蹲了，地上脏，奶奶在家等着呢。话没说完，我妈——一个七十岁、腰不太好的老太太——竟然也慢慢蹲了下去，一边蹲一边说：哎哟，真的嘞，这是要搬家了。我在旁边站着，倒成了多余的人。

我妈蹲在那儿看，看得比儿子还认真。儿子问：奶奶，蚂蚁搬的是不是它们的蛋？我妈说：是嘞，白白的就是蛋，它们怕下雨淹了家，往高处搬。儿子又问：那它们累不累呀？我妈愣了一下，回头问我：这你咋答？我张了张嘴，没答上来。我妈转回去认真地跟孙子说：蚂蚁不晓得累不累，反正它一直没停过。人也不晓得自己累不累，想做的事就一直做，跟蚂蚁一样。

我在旁边听着，忽然有点脸热。这句不像答案的答案，比我搜肠刮肚想说的任何一句都稳。

回家以后，我妈翻出一个旧日历，背面是空的，说给娃记账。记什么账？记蚂蚁的账。儿子口述，我妈用铅笔写，字歪歪扭扭：周六，老槐树底下，蚂蚁搬家，搬白色的蛋，往北边高处去，天阴。儿子在旁边画蚂蚁，画得满页都是。我妈还在日历边上写了一句：明日若下雨，再看一次。

第二天果然落了雨。雨停以后，我妈自己先去看了一眼，回来报告：蚂蚁搬到高处了，洞口的土是新堆的。儿子高兴得跳，好像这消息是专门说给他一个人的。

晚上我妈跟我说，她放了一辈子牛，看蚂蚁搬家看了几十年，不觉得有啥好看。我说妈，你今天蹲下来那一下，比我在城里给他报十个兴趣班都强。她摆手说扯啥哟，是娃喊我看的。

我听着没再说话。守护好奇心这件事，原来不需要学问，只需要肯蹲下来。我妈不识字几个，可她知道娃喊她看的时候要看，知道娃问的时候认真答，知道把看到的记在日历背面。这三样，恰恰是我这个当老师的妈妈，平时最容易忘的。

Grandma Squatted Down Too

On the weekend I took my seven-year-old son to the village to see my parents. The concrete road into the village has fields on both sides, and he walked and watched, very slowly. Under the old scholar tree he suddenly squatted by the road and refused to move, calling out: Mom, look quick, the ants are in line carrying things!

My mouth opened with that city sentence: stop squatting, the ground is dirty, grandma is waiting at home. Before I finished, my mother — a seventy-year-old woman with a bad back — slowly squatted down too, saying as she went down: oh my, it is true, they are moving house. I stood there beside them, suddenly the odd one out.

My mother watched, more absorbed than my son. My son asked: Grandma, are the ants carrying their eggs? My mother said: yes, the white ones are eggs; they fear the rain will flood their home, so they move to higher ground. My son asked again: are they

tired? My mother froze for a moment and turned to me: how do you answer that? I opened my mouth and had nothing. She turned back and told her grandson earnestly: ants do not know whether they are tired; they just never stop. People do not know whether they are tired either; what you want to do, you just keep doing, like the ants.

Standing there listening, my face grew warm. This answer that was not quite an answer was steadier than anything I could have searched my head for.

After we got home, my mother dug out an old calendar with a blank back page and said: let us keep accounts for the boy. What accounts? The accounts of the ants. My son dictated, my mother wrote in pencil, her characters crooked: Saturday, under the old scholar tree, ants moving house, carrying white eggs, heading north to higher ground, sky overcast. My son drew ants beside her, filling the page. My mother also wrote a line in the margin of the calendar: if it rains tomorrow, watch once more.

Rain did fall the next day. When it stopped, my mother went out first to look, then came back with a report: the ants have moved to high ground, and the soil at the mouth of the hole is freshly piled. My son jumped for joy, as if the news had been delivered for him alone.

That evening my mother told me she had herded cattle all her life and watched ants move house for decades without ever thinking it worth watching. I said: Mom, that moment you squatted down today beats ten enrichment classes I sign him up for in the city. She waved her hand: nonsense, the boy called me to look.

I heard that and said no more. Protecting curiosity, it turns out, asks for no learning — only the willingness to squat down. My mother knows only a few characters, yet she knows that when a child calls you to look, you look; when a child asks, you answer in earnest; and that what you saw deserves writing on the back of a calendar. Those three things are exactly what I, a teacher and a mother, forget most easily.