坐不住的那学期，我在窗台养了一窝蚂蚁

那学期我上课坐不住，椅子像有电，笔杆转十圈都不够，老师的声音像隔着一层水。班主任没批评我，只在我交上来的一张空白检讨纸上写了一行字：去科学室要个玻璃缸，养一窝蚂蚁，养满两个月再说。我以为是什么惩罚，其实也不是，她只说了一句，养着养着你自己会知道。

我从花坛边挖了一小窝，连土带蚁装进玻璃缸，搁在教室窗台上。头几天我三分钟热度，看两眼就跑去和同学闹。蚂蚁也不配合我，白天大多躲在土里，偶尔出来一只，转两圈就回去了。我有点烦，又想起班主任的话，就逼自己每天自习课看十分钟。看满一周，我发现它们不是躲，是按自己的时候出门，傍晚最热闹，我就把观察挪到放学前。

变化是从什么时候开始的我说不上来。只知道后来我能看四十分钟不动。它们让我看到了我这种人是看不到的东西：搬不动的东西会回去叫人，路不通会绕，绕不通就换一条，从来不急，也从来不扔下东西跑。我转笔的手看它们的时候是停的，我上课走神的心，在那四十分钟里也是停的。

两个月期满，我把蚂蚁放回花坛。班主任问我知道了什么，我想了半天，说：我坐不住，是因为我总想快点看到结果。蚂蚁搬一粒米要半天，它不看结果，只看下一步。她笑了笑，让我把这话写进周记。期末我的成绩没有奇迹，数学还是中等，可老师评语里多了一句：本学期能坐住了，课堂专注明显变好。我自己知道，那个会转十圈笔的我没消失，只是学会了在窗台前不动。耐心这东西不是被训出来的，是被一窝蚂蚁，一天十分钟，一点点喂大的。

The Term I Could Not Sit Still, I Kept a Colony on the Windowsill

That term I could not sit still in class. My chair felt electric, spinning my pen ten times was never enough, and the voice of the teacher sounded as if it came through a layer of water. My homeroom teacher did not scold me. She only wrote one line on the blank apology note I handed in: get a glass jar from the science room, keep a colony of ants for two full months, then we will talk. I thought it was some punishment. It was not, really. She just said one thing: keep them long enough and you will find out yourself.

I dug up a small colony from the flower bed, soil and all, into the glass jar, and set it on the classroom windowsill. For the first few days my enthusiasm lasted three minutes. I glanced twice and ran off to fool around with classmates. The ants did not cooperate either. Most of the day they hid in the soil; now and then one came out, circled twice, and went back. I got annoyed, remembered her words, and forced myself to watch for ten minutes during self-study each day. After a full week I noticed they were not hiding. They went out on their own schedule, busiest at dusk, so I moved my watching to before school ended.

I cannot say when the change began. I only know that later I could watch for forty minutes without moving. They showed me things a restless person like me never used to see: what they cannot carry, they go back for help; a blocked road gets a detour; a failed detour gets another road, never in a hurry, never dropping the load and running. My pen-spinning hand was still while I watched them, and my wandering mind was still during those forty minutes.

When the two months were up, I returned the ants to the flower bed. My homeroom teacher asked what I had learned. I thought a long time and said: I could not sit still because I always wanted to see the result quickly. An ant spends half a day carrying one grain of rice. It does not look at the result, only at the next step. She smiled and told me to write that sentence into my weekly journal. My grades worked no miracle at the end of the term. Math was still middling, but a new line appeared in the comments: this term he can sit still, and his focus in class improved clearly. I know it myself. The boy who spun his pen ten times did not disappear. He just learned to stay still by the windowsill. Patience is not trained out of a person by scolding. It was fed up little by little, ten minutes a day, by a colony of ants.