蹲下来那十分钟，我把速度还给了蚂蚁

月考最后一科交卷铃响的时候，我脑子里全是排名。走出教学楼，我走得飞快，书包带子勒得肩膀疼，脑子里过着一道道没把握的选择题。路过小区花坛，我本来不会停的，是鞋带松了，才蹲下去。鞋带系好，我抬头，正好看见一只蚂蚁在我鞋尖前面转圈。

它转了三圈，像是找不到方向。我本来可以抬脚走掉，可那天我不赶了，排名的事再急也急不出结果，我就把手撑在膝盖上，接着看。它终于认准了一条缝，钻进去了。过了不到一分钟，它带出来三只蚂蚁，排成一列，往同一个方向走。我跟过去，蹲到花坛边上，脸凑得很近，近到能看清它们腿上的小钩子。

那条路并不顺。一粒米饭挡在中间，领头的蚂蚁爬上去又滑下来，绕了半圈，从侧面顶。后面两只接力，一只推一只抬，米饭挪了一寸。它们也歇，停下来不动，触角晃几下，再继续。我蹲在那里，数它们歇了几次，数到第四次的时候，我发现自己已经十分钟没动过了，脖子酸，腿麻，可脑子从来没这么静过。那些选择题一道都想不起来了。

天擦黑，蚂蚁把米饭推进了洞。我站起来，腿麻得踉跄了一下。奇怪的是我心里不慌了。排名还在那儿，没变好也没变坏，可我好像不那么怕它了。蚂蚁搬一粒米都要歇四次，我一次考砸，凭什么不许自己歇一歇。

后来我常去那个花坛蹲一会儿，有时五分钟，有时一刻钟。写作业写烦了也去，不看书，不看手机，就看它们走路、绕路、碰触角。我妈说我最近走路都慢了，我说慢点好，我看见的东西多了。花坛边那十分钟里，我不排名，不赶时间，蚂蚁也不嫌我碍事。是我蹲下来观察蚂蚁，可教我慢下来的，是蚂蚁。

Ten Minutes Squatting, Giving Speed Back to the Ants

When the bell rang at the end of the last exam of the month, my head was full of rankings. I walked out of the teaching building at a fast pace, my bag strap digging into my shoulder, going over one uncertain multiple-choice question after another in my head. Passing the flower bed in our residential compound I would not have stopped, but my shoelace came loose and I squatted to tie it. When I looked up, an ant was circling right in front of my shoe.

It circled three times, as if it had lost its way. I could have walked off, but that day I was no longer in a hurry. No amount of hurry would change the ranking, so I rested my hands on my knees and kept watching. It finally found a crack and disappeared into it. Less than a minute later it brought out three ants, walking in a line in the same direction. I followed and squatted at the edge of the flower bed, my face close enough to see the tiny hooks on their legs.

The road was not smooth. A grain of rice blocked the way. The leading ant climbed

on and slid off, went around halfway, and pushed from the side. The two behind took over, one pushing one lifting, and the rice moved an inch. They also rested, stopping still, waving their antennae a few times, then continuing. I squatted there counting how many times they rested. By the fourth time I realized I had not moved for ten minutes. My neck ached and my legs went numb, yet my mind had never been so still. I could not remember a single exam question.

As dusk fell, the ants pushed the rice into their nest. I stood up and nearly stumbled on my numb legs. Strangely, my heart was calm. The ranking was still there, neither better nor worse, but I was no longer so afraid of it. The ants rested four times to carry one grain of rice. I had failed one test. Why should I not be allowed to rest for a while.

After that I often squatted by that flower bed for a while, sometimes five minutes, sometimes a quarter of an hour. I went whenever homework wearied me, no books, no phone, just watching them walk, detour, and touch antennae. My mother said I had been walking slower lately. I said slower is good, I see more things now. In those ten minutes by the flower bed I was not a ranking, not in a hurry, and the ants did not mind me in the way. I was the one squatting down to observe the ants, but it was the ants who taught me to slow down.

女儿看蚂蚁的那些傍晚，我也慢了下来

我是那种在文具店门口催孩子的家长。挑橡皮要催，系鞋带要催，走在路上看见什么也想停下来看的东西，我一拉她的手就往前走。女儿不反抗，只是把想说的话咽回去，次数多了，她连指都不指了。

转折是个周三傍晚。接她放学，她在校门外的路沿边蹲下，喊妈妈你来看蚂蚁。我看了眼手表，说看两分钟。她就自己蹲着，安安静静地看，不催我也不说话。我站在旁边等，站了一分钟，鬼使神差也蹲了下去。她立刻往边上挪了挪，给我让出位置，眼睛没离开地面。

路沿的缝里有一列蚂蚁。女儿小声说，你看这只，它背上的白白的，是它的宝宝吗。我说不知道。她说那咱们看它去哪。我们就看。那只蚂蚁走到墙根，钻进一个洞，出来时背上空了，又往回走。女儿数着它来回几趟，数到第七趟，它碰了碰另一只蚂蚁的触角，两只一起走了。女儿抬头看我，眼神里有种我很久没见过的东西，像发现了什么了不得的秘密，急着找人分享。

那天我们蹲了多久我记不清了，只记得手表上的指针转了大半圈，我一次都没抬手看时间。回家路上她一直在说蚂蚁，说绕路的蚂蚁，说碰触角的蚂蚁，说它们走的路比我们的楼道还绕。我一路嗯嗯地应着，心里有点发凉：以前她也有这么多话要说，是我走得太快，把它们都甩在了后面。

从那以后，接她放学的傍晚，我们常蹲在路边看几分钟。我学会了不看手表，学会了把我想说的话咽回去，等她先说。有同事说我性子慢下来了，开会都不抢话了。我说不是性子的问题，是我发现快有快的用处，慢有慢的看见。那几分钟里我不当催的人，她也不当被催的人，我们俩一起看着一小片路沿，谁也不赶谁。说是我陪她观察蚂蚁，其实是她领着我，把丢了多年的专注一点点捡回来。

Those Evenings Watching Ants with My Daughter, I Slowed Down Too

I am the kind of parent who hurries children outside the stationery shop. I hurry them choosing erasers, hurry them tying shoelaces, and if they spot something on the road worth stopping for, one pull on their hand drags them forward. My daughter never argued. She just swallowed what she wanted to say, and after many times, she stopped pointing at things altogether.

The turning point came on a Wednesday evening. Picking her up from school, she squatted by the curb outside the gate and called me to look at ants. I checked my watch and said two minutes. She squatted there on her own, watching quietly, not hurrying me, not speaking. I stood beside her waiting, and after a minute, for no reason I know of, I squatted down too. She immediately shifted aside to make room for me, her eyes never leaving the ground.

In the crack of the curb ran a line of ants. My daughter whispered: look at this one, the white thing on its back, is it its baby. I said I did not know. She said then let us see where it goes. So we watched. The ant reached the foot of the wall, vanished into a hole, came out with an empty back, and walked home again. My daughter counted its trips. On the seventh trip it touched the antennae of another ant and the two walked off together. She looked up at me with something I had not seen in her eyes for a long time, like a child who had found an enormous secret and needed someone to share it with.

I do not remember how long we squatted that day, only that the hands on my watch moved more than half a circle and I never once raised my wrist to check. On the way home she talked about ants the whole time, the ant that took a detour, the ants that touched antennae, how their road wound more than our stairwell. I kept answering mm-hm, with a chill in my heart: she used to have this much to say too, and I walked so fast that I left it all behind.

Since then, on evenings when I pick her up, we often squat by the road for a few minutes. I have learned not to check my watch, learned to swallow my own words and let her speak first. Colleagues say I have become slower, that I no longer interrupt

in meetings. I tell them it is not about temperament. I found that fast has its uses and slow has its sights. In those minutes I am not the one hurrying and she is not the one hurried. We watch a small stretch of curb together, neither chasing the other. People say I accompany her to observe ants, but really she is leading me, picking up my lost concentration piece by piece.

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.