台阶上的浅花盆

雨停的早上，周小满下楼买酱油，走到单元门口，忽然蹲下来不动了。酱油瓶搁在脚边，他盯着门口那块洼地看。洼地积了一汪水，水里有蚂蚁抱着白色的卵打转，一个塌了半边的洞口正往里灌水。

他端着酱油瓶跑回家，跟奶奶说，蚂蚁窝淹了。奶奶说，蚂蚁自己会想办法。周小满说，它们抱着卵呢。他放下瓶子，翻出一个浅花盆、一把小铲，又捡了一截树枝，往楼下跑。

奶奶跟出来，站在台阶上看他。周小满在洼地边的高处选地方，那里的土干，晒得到太阳。他把花盆倒空，用小铲从旧洞旁边铲起一小铲土，连土带蚂蚁放进花盆，屏着气，放得很轻。

第一铲下去，蚂蚁四散，他停住，等它们爬回铲子上才抬起来。奶奶在台阶上说，别把台阶弄太脏。周小满说，我垫着报纸。奶奶下去看了一眼水里的卵，回来时手里多了一张旧报纸，铺在台阶上，让他把花盆稳稳放上去。

他把树枝架在洼地和花盆之间，一头搭旧窝旁边，一头搭花盆。蚂蚁爬上树枝，一只接一只往花盆走。有几只蚂蚁下到水里托着卵，周小满就把树枝伸过去，等它们把卵放上去，再轻轻抬。

酱油还没买。奶奶自己去买了，回来把瓶子放在台阶上，没催他。周小满铲到第九铲，手上有泥，膝盖上也蹭了泥。奶奶伸手替他拍了拍，没有说台阶的事。

傍晚，周小满下楼看，新洞口排着一条细细的黑线，蚂蚁进进出出，有的顶米粒，有的叼白卵。他蹲在花盆边看了很久，数到三十几只就乱了，干脆不数了。

后来那个浅花盆一直留在台阶上。奶奶擦台阶时会把花盆端起来，擦完再放回去，放的位置和原来一样。周小满放学回来，先到台阶上看一眼，看见蚂蚁进进出出，才上楼写作业。

The Shallow Flowerpot on the Steps

On the morning after the rain stopped, Zhou Xiaoman went downstairs to buy soy sauce. Reaching the building entrance, he suddenly squatted down and stopped moving. The soy sauce bottle stood by his feet while he stared at the low patch by the door. A pool of water had gathered there, with ants in it clinging to white eggs and spinning, and a half-collapsed hole letting water pour in.

He ran home with the bottle and told his grandmother: the ant nest is flooding. His grandmother said ants will find a way themselves. Zhou Xiaoman said they are holding their eggs. He put down the bottle, found a shallow flowerpot, a small trowel, and a stick, and ran back downstairs.

His grandmother followed and stood on the steps watching him. Zhou Xiaoman chose a spot on the high ground by the low patch, where the soil was dry and the sun reached. He emptied the pot and scooped small portions of soil from beside the old hole, putting soil and ants into the pot, holding his breath, setting it down gently.

With the first scoop the ants scattered. He stopped and waited until they climbed back onto the trowel before lifting it. His grandmother said from the steps: do not make the steps too dirty. Zhou Xiaoman said: I will lay down newspaper. His grandmother went down, looked at the eggs in the water, and came back with an old sheet of newspaper, spreading it on the steps so he could set the pot firmly on it.

He set the stick between the low patch and the pot, one end by the old nest, the other on the pot. The ants climbed onto the stick, one after another, heading for the pot. Several ants went into the water holding eggs, and Zhou Xiaoman stretched the stick over, waited for them to place the eggs on it, then lifted it carefully.

The soy sauce was still not bought. His grandmother went and bought it herself, set the bottle on the steps, and did not hurry him. By the ninth scoop, Zhou Xiaoman had mud on his hands and on his knees. His grandmother reached over and patted it off, saying nothing about the steps.

That evening, Zhou Xiaoman went downstairs to look. A thin black line lined up at the new hole, ants coming and going, some carrying grains of rice, some holding white eggs. He squatted by the pot and watched for a long time, lost count past thirty, and simply stopped counting.

The shallow flowerpot stayed on the steps after that. When his grandmother cleaned the steps, she lifted the pot, wiped, and put it back in exactly the same place. When Zhou Xiaoman came home from school, he first checked the steps, and only after seeing the ants coming and going did he go upstairs to do his homework.