考试那天，一条队列从他眼前走过

考试那天的最后一声铃响过，所有人都往教室外冲。他走得很慢，手里捏着一张不想看的答卷，在墙根停住了。那里有一条队列，从墙缝一直排到树的脚下。

他蹲下来。队列很窄，比试卷上的横线还窄，却比横线整齐。蚂蚁一个跟着一个，触角碰着触角，传着大地教给它们的语言。大地平平地躺在它们身下，托着这支小小的队伍，像托住一座山那样稳。

一只蚂蚁在半个瓜子壳旁边停下，绕了两圈，回头用触角碰了碰后面的那只。两只一起往前推，瓜子壳挪动了一点。他屏住呼吸，怕自己的出气惊动了它们的计划。

队列走过一片阳光。光落在它们背上，整条队列像一行会发光的字，被一笔一画抄在大地的皮肤上。他忽然觉得眼睛有点热。他从来不知道，这样小的东西可以这样认真。

有同学在远处喊他的名字。他没有应。他想看到最后。队列绕过一颗石子，跨过一条裂缝，钻进草里不见了。大地重新安静下来，像什么都没有发生过。风把草吹直，阳光挪了半尺，墙根底下空空的，只有他自己蹲过的两个印子。

他站起来，又看了一眼手里的答卷。红笔的钩还在，可是没有那么大。一条蚂蚁的队列可以走那么远，走得那么稳。他把纸折好，放进书包，往家走，脚步比刚才轻。

从那以后，每次经过墙根，他都要停一停，看一眼。队列有时在，有时不在。可大地一直在，托着它们所有的来路和归路，也托着一个初中生刚刚懂事的秘密。

许多年以后，他也许会忘记那场考试，忘记分数，忘记红笔的钩。可他会记得墙根，记得碰在一起的触角，记得大地托起一条小小的队列，记得那个蹲下来就明白了什么的下午。

On Exam Day, a Column Passed Before His Eyes

The last bell of the exam day rang, and everyone rushed out of the classroom. He walked out slowly, holding an answer sheet he did not want to look at, and stopped at the corner of the wall. A column was lined up there, reaching from a crack in the wall to the foot of a tree.

He squatted down. The column was narrow, narrower than the lines on his exam paper, yet neater than any line. The ants walked one after another, their antennae touching, passing along a language the earth had taught them. The earth lay flat beneath them, holding up this tiny procession as steadily as it would hold up a mountain.

One ant stopped beside the shell of a sunflower seed, circled it twice, then touched the one behind with its antennae. Together the two of them pushed, and the shell moved a little. He held his breath, afraid that his own breathing would disturb their plan.

The column passed through a patch of sunlight. The light fell on their backs, and the whole column looked like a line of glowing characters being copied stroke by stroke onto the skin of the earth. He felt his eyes sting. He had never known that something so small could be so serious.

A classmate called his name from far away. He did not answer. He wanted to watch it to the end. The column went around a pebble, crossed a crack, and disappeared into the grass. The earth became quiet again, as if nothing had happened. The wind straightened the grass, the sunlight shifted half a foot, and the corner of the wall was empty, with nothing left but the two prints where he had squatted.

He stood up and looked at the answer sheet once more. The red marks were still there, but they no longer seemed so large. A line of ants could walk so far and so steadily. He folded the paper, put it in his bag, and walked home with lighter steps than before.

After that, every time he passed the corner of the wall, he would stop and look. The column was there on some days and gone on others. But the earth was always there, holding all their comings and goings, holding a secret a middle school student had only just begun to understand.

Years later he may forget that exam, forget the score and the red marks. But he will remember the corner of the wall, the touching antennae, the earth lifting a tiny column, and the afternoon when he squatted down and understood something no one had to teach him.