六十六次尝试

数学月考试卷发下来那天，我捏着不及格的卷子，坐在操场边的台阶上。台阶沿上有一条蚂蚁线，正搬着一段蚯蚓往前挪，挪到台阶的立沿前面，停住了。

一只大蚂蚁想把蚯蚓的前头抬上立沿。它抬起一次，蚯蚓滑下去；再抬一次，又滑下去。我低下头替它数。数到六十六次，前头终于搭上了台阶的边。

后面的蚂蚁一只接一只往前推，蚯蚓一寸一寸往台阶上爬。中间一阵风把一片枯叶吹到蚯蚓上，几只蚂蚁把枯叶抬开，又回到原来的位置，接着抬。整个过程没有一只蚂蚁停下来歇很久，也没有一只掉头走掉。

我一直捏着那张卷子。卷子上最后一道大题，我只看了两行就放弃了，在空白处写了太难两个字。蚂蚁不知道自己的活儿有多难，它只知道再试一次。六十六次这个数字，换在我身上，一道题都没试过。

台阶沿上的太阳晒得我脖子发烫，我换了个姿势接着蹲。旁边路过的同学喊我走，我摆摆手。那会儿我心里就一个念头，想看它到底能不能把蚯蚓搬上去。蚂蚁没让我失望，一次不行就换角度，角度不行就换位置，位置不行就再叫两只来。

蚯蚓段最后翻过最高一级台阶，消失在草丛里。我看了一眼手表，距离下课铃已经过去四十分钟，台阶沿上又排起了新的队伍，搬的是一粒米饭。

我回到座位，把卷子摊开，照着老师讲过的思路，在最后一道大题上画第一条辅助线。那天我明白，我缺的不是聪明，是六十六次尝试的勇气。蚂蚁不喊口号，它们只抬下一次。

后来我仔细想过，蚂蚁的坚持并不盲目。抬不动的时候，它们会改成咬住蚯蚓段的中部斜着拖，或者从另一边再试。坚持不是把同一个办法重复到底，而是绝不离开那件事本身。这大概就是小生命里的大道理。

Sixty-Six Tries

The day our math monthly test papers were handed back, I sat on the steps beside the playground, holding the failed paper in my hand. On the edge of the steps a line of ants was carrying a piece of earthworm forward, and it stopped in front of the vertical edge of the stairway.

One big ant tried to lift the front end of the earthworm piece onto the step edge. It lifted once, and the piece slid down. It lifted a second time, and it slid down again. I bent my head and counted for it. When I reached sixty-six, the front end finally caught the edge of the step.

The ants behind kept pushing one after another, and the piece climbed the step inch by inch. In the middle, a gust of wind blew a fallen leaf onto the earthworm. Several ants carried the leaf away together, then returned to their places and lifted

again. During the whole process no ant stopped to rest for long, and no ant turned around and left.

I had been holding the test paper the whole time. The last big problem on the paper, I had looked at two lines and given up, writing the words too hard in the blank space. The ant did not know how hard its task was. It only knew to try once more. The number sixty-six, applied to me, did not even appear once in a single problem.

At last the earthworm piece passed the highest step and disappeared into the grass. I glanced at my watch. Forty minutes had gone by since the bell, and a new line was forming on the step edge, carrying a grain of rice.

I went back to my seat, unfolded the paper, and drew the first auxiliary line of the last problem the way the teacher had explained. What I lacked, I understood that day, was not intelligence but the courage of sixty-six tries. The ants shouted no slogan. They only lifted the next time.

I thought it over carefully later. The persistence of the ants was not blind. When lifting failed again and again, they changed to biting the middle of the piece and dragging it sideways, or tried from the other side. Persistence is not repeating one method without end. It is never leaving the thing itself. That, I think, is the big lesson inside a small life.