水洼上的桥

暴雨放学那天傍晚，操场角的排水沟涨起一层水，把一条蚂蚁线拦腰截断。水和沟沿之间留着一道窄窄的水洼，宽不过两指。线这头的蚂蚁背着米粒、背着虫腿，急得原地转圈。

先是一两只蚂蚁爬到水洼边上，站住不动。接着更多的蚂蚁爬过去，一只挨一只，把身子搭在一起。我们几个没带伞的男生蹲在沟沿看，谁也没有说话。那道水洼上，慢慢出现了一条细细的、会动的桥。

背米粒的蚂蚁从桥上过去了。背虫腿的几只走不稳，桥就停一停，等它们挪过去。水从沟里漫上来，最外边的一只被水冲得打了个转，旁边的蚂蚁立刻补上它的位置，桥没有断。

桥上有蚂蚁停下来，掉头往回走，原来是桥这头一只背米粒的蚂蚁走岔了，和回来的那只顶在一起，两只触角碰了碰，各让半步，又都继续走。水洼里的倒影被风吹碎，桥就在水面上晃，看着随时要塌，可它就是没塌。

我看得手心出汗，想伸手拿片树叶搭过去，被周志远一把拉住。他说，别碰，它们自己会弄好。果然，水洼不深，桥撑了十几分钟，线那头最后一只空着身的蚂蚁也爬了过去。

后来水退了，桥散开，蚂蚁们抖抖身子，重新排成一条线，往坡上去。整个过程没有谁指挥，也没有谁站在旁边不动。每一只都往前一步，桥就搭起来了。

我想起上周的小组合唱，我们五个人唱不齐，互相埋怨，谁也不肯先跟着对方的调子改。蚂蚁搭桥的时候，没有谁抱怨水洼太宽。它们只是看见缺口，就把自己放上去。

那天在排水沟边，我把协作这两个字重新认识了一遍。它不是写在黑板上的口号，是缺口出现时，有人往前迈的那一步。回去的路上我一直在想，下次小组排练，我先去唱第二声部，把别人的空补上。

The Bridge Over the Puddle

On the evening of the day the storm let school out early, the drain ditch at the corner of the playground filled with water and cut a line of ants clean in half. Between the water and the ditch edge lay a narrow puddle, no wider than two fingers. On this side of the line, ants carrying rice grains and insect legs ran in small anxious circles.

First one or two ants climbed to the edge of the puddle and stood still. Then more ants crawled over and pressed against one another, joining their bodies together. A few of us boys without umbrellas squatted on the ditch edge and watched, nobody speaking. Over that puddle, a thin moving bridge slowly appeared.

The ants carrying rice grains crossed on the bridge. The few carrying insect legs walked unsteadily, so the bridge paused and waited for them to shuffle through. Water welled up from the ditch, and the outermost ant was spun around by the current; the

ant beside it at once took its place, and the bridge did not break.

On the bridge some ants stopped and turned back. An ant carrying a rice grain on this side had gone off course and bumped head-on into one coming back. They touched antennae, each gave half a step, and both went on. The reflection in the puddle broke apart in the wind, and the bridge swayed over the water, looking as if it would collapse any second, yet it simply did not.

My palms were sweating from watching. I wanted to reach for a leaf to lay across the puddle, and Zhou Zhiyuan grabbed my hand. He said, do not touch, they will fix it themselves. Sure enough, the puddle was not deep. The bridge held for more than ten minutes, and at the end even the last empty-handed ant on the far side crawled across.

Later the water receded, the bridge came apart, and the ants shook themselves and formed a single line again, heading up the slope. Nobody commanded the whole process, and nobody stood aside. Every one of them stepped forward once, and the bridge was built.

It reminded me of our small-group choir rehearsal the week before. The five of us could not sing together, blamed each other, and none of us would be the first to follow the pitch of the others. When the ants built their bridge, nobody complained that the puddle was too wide. They saw a gap, and they put themselves into it.

That evening by the drain ditch, I got to know the word cooperation all over again. It is not a slogan written on the blackboard. It is the step someone takes forward when a gap appears. On the way home I kept thinking that at the next rehearsal, I would sing the second voice part first and fill the space the others left.