看蚂蚁的那半小时

暑假里老师布置了一篇观察作文，要求写身边的事物。我以前最怕这种作业，因为我看什么都一个样。这次我决定试试，就在我们楼下的水泥台阶那儿，蹲下来看蚂蚁。

那天傍晚，台阶边上有一只死蚂蚱，比蚂蚁大出十几倍。起先只有一两只蚂蚁绕着它转，触角碰了碰它的腿，又跑了。我数着，过了几分钟，来了一列队伍，黑黑的一条线，从墙缝里涌出来。它们有的咬住蚂蚱的须，有的钻到肚子底下，有的排在路边，像在给队伍让道。蚂蚱一动不动，队伍却越拉越长。最让我吃惊的是，它们遇到台阶的一道缝，竟然一个搭一个，搭成一座小桥，后面的蚂蚁从上面过。我看得入了迷，蚊子在耳朵边响也没顾上拍。半小时内我数出三拨蚂蚁换了位置，还看见一只大蚂蚁守着不动，像站岗的哨兵。整整半小时，我妈在楼上喊了三遍吃饭。

回家我把看到的写下来：先写一只，再写一列，再写搭桥过缝。我尽量写慢、写细，连触角碰腿那一下都写了。第二天把作文交给老师，她在那段搭桥的地方画了波浪线，批了两个字：细致。还在课堂上念了我那一段。

放学前我想了很久，为什么这次写得出、以前写不出。我想明白了：以前我是看一眼就走，脑子里只剩一个词，蚂蚁搬东西；这次我蹲了半小时，看见的是几十件小事，写都写不完。不是我不会写，是我以前根本没看。

现在我看东西会多停一会儿。看云我会看它慢慢挪，看楼下扫地的爷爷我会看他把落叶拢成一小堆。停下来的这半小时，是我这个暑假学到的最要紧的一件事。观察不是眼睛的事，是蹲下来的事。

The Half Hour I Spent Watching Ants

During the summer vacation the teacher assigned an observation composition, asking us to write about something close by. I used to fear this kind of homework most, because everything looked the same to me. This time I decided to try. Right at the concrete steps below our building, I squatted down to watch ants.

That evening, by the steps lay a dead grasshopper, more than ten times the size of an ant. At first only one or two ants circled it, touched its legs with their antennae, and ran off. I kept count, and after a few minutes a column arrived, a dark thin line pouring out of a crack in the wall. Some ants held the whiskers of the grasshopper, some crawled under its belly, some lined up along the road as if giving way to the column. The grasshopper did not move at all, while the column kept growing longer. What surprised me most: when the column met a crack in the steps, the ants climbed over one another and built a little bridge, and the ants behind crossed on top of it. I watched so absorbed that I did not even slap the mosquitoes buzzing at my ears. Within the half hour I counted three groups of ants changing positions, and I also saw one big ant staying still, guarding like a sentry on duty. For a full half

hour I stayed there, and my mother called me down from upstairs three times for dinner.

When I got home I wrote down what I saw: first one ant, then a column, then the bridge over the crack. I tried to write slowly and finely, and I even wrote the moment the antennae touched the legs. The next day I handed the composition to the teacher, and she drew a wavy line under the part about the bridge and wrote two words in the margin: detailed. She also read that paragraph aloud in class.

Before school let out I thought for a long time about why I could write this time and could not before. I figured it out: before, I glanced once and walked away, and only one phrase was left in my head, ants carrying things; this time I squatted for half an hour and saw dozens of small events, too many to finish writing. It was not that I could not write; it was that before, I had never really looked.

Now when I look at something I stay a little longer. I watch the clouds moving slowly, and I watch the old man sweeping downstairs gathering fallen leaves into a small pile. This half hour of staying is the most important thing I learned this summer. Observation is not a matter of the eyes; it is a matter of squatting down.