把书合上之前，我先去接了一盆水

《一次有趣的实验》里，有一章写声音能不能在水里传播。书里的做法简单得让人意外：找一个能在水里响的小铃铛，先在水面上摇，听；再把铃铛按进水里，贴着盆边再听。就这么两步，书里的人做了七八遍，换了瓷盆、铁桶和玻璃缸，最后才写下一句结论：声音不但能在水里传播，还比在空气里更清楚。我读到这里的时候，书是合不上的，因为我想去接一盆水。

我真的去了。厨房水池里接了半盆温水，把我那串带小铃铛的钥匙放进去摇。声音闷闷的，可是把耳朵贴近盆沿，铃铛的动静一下变得又近又亮，像有人在盆里小声说话。我妈在门口看我趴在盆边，问我干嘛，我说做实验。她说这有什么好做的，书上不是写了吗。我一时答不上来。是啊，书上写了。可书上写的那一行字，和我耳朵贴着瓷盆听到的那一声，是两样东西。

这本书也让我重新想起我失败过一次的东西：盐结晶。科学书上说，浓盐水慢慢蒸发能长出方方的盐晶体。我用热水冲了半杯盐，倒进碟子放在窗台。两周以后去看，碟子里是一层灰白的、湿漉漉的泥状物，一个亮晶晶的角都没长出来。我那时认定自己不适合做实验。现在回头看，我用的盐是粗盐，里面有杂质，水也没过滤，蒸发太快，长出来的当然是一摊糊涂。失败的原因藏在书没写全的地方，只有做过的人才看得见。

所以这本书给我的打算，不是考科学试多少分，而是很实在的一件：我要在窗台上腾出一格，叫厨房实验角。以后每星期挑一件书上说的事，亲手做一遍，做成了拍照贴在格子边上，做砸了把砸的原因写在纸条上也贴上去。声音在水里怎么响，盐怎么长角，这些事从今往后我不但要背，还要在我的窗台上发生过。

合上这本书之前，我在那一页折了个角。不是折给结论的，是折给书里那个把铃铛按进水盆的人。他让我知道，读书读到一半跑去接水，不是分心，是读书读到了最认真的地方。

Before I Closed the Book, I Went to Fetch a Basin of Water

In One Fun Experiment there is a chapter asking whether sound can travel through water. What the author does is surprisingly simple: find a small bell that can ring underwater, shake it above the water first and listen, then hold it under the water close to the rim of the basin and listen again. Just these two steps, and he repeats them seven or eight times, switching from a porcelain basin to a metal bucket to a glass tank, before he finally writes down the conclusion: sound travels through water, and even more clearly than through air. When I reached that page, I could not close the book, because I wanted to go fetch a basin of water.

I really went. I filled the kitchen sink halfway with warm water and shook my key ring with its little bell under the surface. The sound came out muffled, but when I pressed my ear against the rim of the basin, the ringing suddenly grew near and bright, as if someone were whispering inside the basin. My mother asked from the

doorway what I was doing. I said running an experiment. She said what is the point, it is already written in the book. I had no answer. Yes, the book says it. But the line in the book and the sound my ear heard against the porcelain are two different things.

This book also made me revisit my other failure: salt crystals. The science book says a strong salt solution, left to evaporate slowly, grows into square crystals. I dissolved half a cup of salt in hot water, poured it into a dish, and set it on the windowsill. Two weeks later there was a gray, damp paste in the dish, not one shining corner anywhere. I decided then that experiments were not for me. Looking back now, I had used coarse salt full of impurities, never filtered the water, and let it evaporate too fast. Of course what grew out was a muddy mess. The reasons for a failure hide in the parts the book does not spell out, and only someone who actually did it can see them.

So the plan this book left me with is not about scoring higher on a science test. It is plain and real: I will clear one shelf on the windowsill and call it the kitchen lab. Every week I will pick one thing a book claims and do it with my own hands. If it works, I tape a photo to the edge of the shelf; if it fails, I tape a note about why it failed. How sound travels in water, how salt grows its corners: from now on these things must happen on my windowsill, not only in my memory.

Before I closed the book, I folded down one corner of a page. Not for the conclusion, but for the man who pushed a bell into a basin of water. He taught me that running off to fetch water in the middle of reading is not a distraction. It is reading at its most serious.