纸片扣住的那杯水

科学课上，老师把一只玻璃杯灌满水，盖上一张纸片，手指按住纸片，把杯子倒过来。然后她松开手。纸片没有掉，水没有落。纸片被杯里的水坠得微微向下鼓，鼓成一小片绷紧的帆。

教室里安静了两秒，然后有人小声说：大气压。老师点点头，又问，那你们再看看，杯底那儿是什么。我们凑近看，杯底的水里浮着几粒气泡，小得像撒进去的盐粒，一颗，两颗，有三颗慢慢挪了位置。老师说不急着讲，让你们想一周。

那一周我总想起那杯水。晚上写作业渴了，我去倒水，对着杯子看。水看上去什么也没有，可它其实一直被空气托着、压着。我们住在空气的海底，就像鱼住在水底，只是我们忘了。那几张纸片之所以掉不下来，是杯子外面的空气从下往上托着它，托的力气比一杯水的分量还大。

至于杯底那几粒气泡，我后来自己想明白了一半。水灌进杯子的时候，杯壁上本来就挂着细小的空气，水满出来，那些空气被关在杯底，成了几粒泡。它们过一会儿挪一下位置，是因为纸片在极轻微地晃，杯里的水在极轻微地动。一个看起来纹丝不动的杯子，里面其实没有一样东西是真正静止的。

那之后我看家里的水杯换了眼光。灶上坐着的水壶，鱼缸里往上蹿的气泡，雨天窗玻璃上淌的水痕，全都和课堂上那杯水平平常常的水是同一族。它们不声不响，遵守着同一套规矩，把力藏在最不起眼的地方。连洗手时指尖那一层亮晶晶的水膜，也是同一族里的成员，只是它太小，平时没人把它当回事。

那天放学我回家，给自己倒了一杯水，看了一会儿才喝。一杯水的秘密不在杯子里，在你肯不肯多看它一眼。

The Cup of Water Held by a Piece of Paper

In science class, the teacher filled a glass cup to the brim with water, covered it with a piece of paper, pressed her palm on the paper, and turned the cup upside down. Then she let go. The paper did not fall. The water did not fall. The paper sagged slightly under the weight of the water, bulging into a small, taut sail.

The room went quiet for two seconds. Then someone whispered: air pressure. The teacher nodded, then asked: now look again, what is at the bottom of the cup? We leaned in. Floating in the water near the base were a few tiny bubbles, small as grains of salt scattered in. One, two; three of them slowly changed places. She said she would not explain yet; we had one week to think.

All week I kept thinking of that cup. At night, thirsty over my homework, I went to pour water and looked at the cup. The water seemed to contain nothing, yet it was being held and pressed by air all along. We live at the bottom of an ocean of air,

the way fish live at the bottom of water, only we forget. The paper did not fall because the air outside the cup pushed up against it from below, and that push was stronger than the weight of the whole cup of water.

As for the bubbles at the base, I later figured out half of it myself. When water is poured in, tiny pockets of air cling to the glass wall; when the cup overflows, those pockets get trapped at the top, which becomes the bottom when the cup is inverted. They shift now and then because the paper is trembling almost imperceptibly, and the water inside is moving almost imperceptibly. In a cup that looks perfectly still, nothing is truly still.

After that I looked at the cups in my house differently. The kettle on the stove, bubbles climbing in the fish tank, water trails running down the window on rainy days, all belong to the same quiet family as that ordinary cup in class. They make no sound, obey the same set of rules, and hide their forces in the least noticeable places. Even the glittering film of water on your fingertips while washing hands belongs to that family; it is simply too small for anyone to take seriously.

That day after school I went home, poured myself a glass of water, and watched it a while before drinking. The secret of a cup of water is not inside the cup. It is in whether you are willing to look at it one more time.

儿子把一杯水扣在了我头顶上

周六中午的饭还没撤，儿子把他那只玻璃杯灌满水，说要做个表演。他从作业本上撕下一张纸，按在杯口上，手掌压平，然后当着全家人的面，把杯子倒扣过来，再松开手。纸片贴着杯口，水悬在里面，一滴没落。他举着杯子绕餐桌走了一圈，像举着一件奖杯。

他说要扣到我头顶上试试。他爸说别胡闹。他说纸掉不下来。他说着就把杯子举到我头顶上方三寸的地方停住，非要我亲眼看着。我坐在那里，看着那只倒扣的杯子悬在我头发上面，杯里的水安安静静，纸片向下鼓着一小片，绷得很紧。杯底缀着几粒小气泡，一动不动，像谁在杯底钉了几颗透明的图钉。

纸片当然没有掉。他得意极了，宣布这是大气压压住的。他爸问他大气压是多少，他答不上来，但他说得出一件事：杯子外面那层看不见的空气，比这杯水有劲。这话说得比数字好。

收拾碗筷的时候，我留了那只杯子，重新灌满，自己又做了一遍。纸片盖上去，倒过来，手松开。水还是没落。我站在洗碗池上方，举着这只杯子，忽然有一点不好意思。这张纸片托水的把戏，我小学自然课就见过，可我从没有像刚才那样认真看过它：看纸片绷紧的弧度，看杯底那几粒气泡慢慢挪了位置，看水在纸片后面安安静静待着，像被一只看不见的手从下面接住。

大人不是不懂科学，是把一切都看旧了。孩子不是懂得多，是他还没把任何东西看旧。

晚上我把那只杯子洗干净放回碗柜。第二天早上，儿子已经用它装好了牛奶。杯子站在桌上，里面立着一杯平平常常的牛奶，谁也不知道它昨天扣过来过。我知道。

My Son Turned a Cup of Water Over My Head

Lunch on Saturday was not yet cleared when my son filled his glass cup with water and announced a performance. He tore a sheet from his homework notebook, laid it over the mouth of the cup, flattened his palm on it, and in front of the whole family turned the cup upside down and let go. The paper stayed against the rim, the water hung inside, not a drop fallen. He carried the cup around the dining table like a trophy.

He said he wanted to try holding it over my head. His father said don't be ridiculous. He said the paper would not fall. Talking, he stopped the inverted cup three inches above my head and insisted I watch with my own eyes. I sat there, looking at the upturned cup hovering over my hair, the water inside perfectly calm, the paper bulging downward in a small taut sheet. At the base of the cup sat a few tiny bubbles, motionless, like transparent thumbtacks someone had driven into the bottom.

Of course the paper did not fall. He was radiant and declared it was air pressure holding it. His father asked how much air pressure was. He could not answer that, but he could say one thing: the invisible air outside the cup is stronger than this cup of water. That sentence was better than the number.

While clearing the bowls, I kept the cup, refilled it, and did it again myself. Paper on, cup inverted, hand released. The water still did not fall. I stood over the sink holding the cup and felt suddenly embarrassed. I had seen this paper-and-water trick in elementary school science, yet I had never really looked at it the way I just did: at the taut curve of the paper, at the few bubbles at the base slowly changing places, at the water resting quietly behind the paper, caught from below by a hand nobody could see.

It is not that grown-ups do not understand science; it is that they have seen everything too many times. It is not that children know more; it is that they have not yet seen anything too many times.

At night I washed the cup and put it back in the cupboard. The next morning my son had already filled it with milk. The cup stood on the table holding an utterly ordinary cup of milk, and no one would know it had been turned upside down yesterday. I knew.

一杯水的自述

我是一杯水，装在一只直筒的玻璃杯里。今天下午，一只小孩的手把我灌满，灌得很满，我的头顶鼓出一小圈，比杯口还高。然后一张纸片盖住了我。纸片带着铅笔字，还有一股作业本的味道。

接着，世界翻了过来。我的头顶朝下，杯底朝天。按常理我该落下去，浇在那个小孩的手上。可我没有。我压着那张纸片，纸片向下鼓，绷成一小片帆，它就是不掉。我后来才明白，托住它的不是我头顶上的空气，是空气整个儿的海。我们就住在海底，是纸片下面那整片空气的海，把我顶在了这里。

倒过来之后，我发现了我身体里的几粒气泡。它们贴在我新的头顶，就是杯底的位置，透明的，比盐粒还小。那是灌水的时候被关进来的空气，一直躲在我的壁上，现在全浮到了最高处。其中三粒过了很久挪了一次位置。别以为我安静，我在纸片后面一直轻轻地动，动得极慢，慢得像睡着的人的呼吸。

那个小孩举着我走了几步，又把我扣到他妈妈头顶上去。他妈妈坐着没动，眼睛一直看着我。大人很少这样看我。他们倒我，喝我，把我烧开，把我冻成冰，从没有谁举着我认真看上一刻钟。她看了。她看见纸片绷紧的边，看见那三粒气泡挪了位置，看见我悬在她头发上方，安安稳稳，没有落。

后来她自己也做了一次。我看见她的手有点抖，纸片盖上去的时候盖歪了半次，重新盖。倒过来的那一瞬她屏住了气。水没落。她笑了一下，那种笑我见过，是小孩第一次看见我身上藏着的东西时才会有的笑。她小声说了一句：原来你一直有劲。

现在我被放回桌上，正过来，站在那盏台灯下面。纸片揭掉了，我重新平着，看起来和下午之前一模一样。只有我自己知道，我托过一张纸，被一整片空气的海托过，还被一个大人认认真真看过一刻钟。一杯水平平常常的水，其实从来没有平平常常过。

Confessions of a Cup of Water

I am a cup of water, living in a straight-sided glass. This afternoon a child's hand filled me to the top, too full, so that my head bulged into a small dome above the rim. Then a piece of paper covered me. The paper carried pencil marks and the smell of a homework notebook.

Then the world turned over. My head faced down, the bottom of the cup faced up. By ordinary logic I should have fallen and drenched the child's hand. But I did not. I pressed on the paper; the paper sagged and tightened into a small sail, and it would not fall. Only later did I understand: what held it up was not the air above my head but the whole sea of air. We live at the bottom of that sea, and it is the sea of air beneath the paper that propped me here.

After the turn, I discovered the bubbles inside me. They clung to my new head, at the bottom of the cup, transparent, smaller than grains of salt. They were air trapped when I was poured, hiding on my walls all along, now floated to the highest point. Three of them changed places after a long while. Do not think I am still. Behind the paper I keep moving gently, moving so slowly it is like the breathing of a sleeping person.

The child carried me a few steps and held me over his mother's head. She sat still and kept her eyes on me. Grown-ups rarely look at me like that. They pour me, drink me, boil me, freeze me into ice; nobody has ever held me up and studied me for a quarter of an hour. She did. She saw the taut edge of the paper, saw the three bubbles change places, saw me hanging above her hair, steady, not falling.

Later she tried it herself. I felt her hand tremble a little; she covered the cup crookedly the first time and covered it again. In the instant the cup inverted, she held her breath. The water did not fall. She smiled a small smile, the kind I have only seen on children the first time they notice what is hidden inside me. She whispered: so you have had strength all along.

Now I am back on the table, turned upright, standing under the desk lamp. The paper is gone, I lie flat again, looking exactly as I did that morning. Only I know that I held up a piece of paper, was held up by an entire sea of air, and was looked at seriously for a quarter of an hour by a grown-up. An ordinary cup of water has never once been ordinary.