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.