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.