# 光在液体里折了个腰

光从窗边出发，走了八分钟才到教室，又走了半米，才到那支试管。它本来笔直，穿过液体时折了一下腰——不是失礼，是液体用整个透明的身体向它问好。光在液体里放慢脚步，看清了这里正在发生的事：一串气泡正从杯底升起，安静得像一场倒着下的雪。光伸手碰了碰最前面那个气泡，气泡立刻镶上一圈银边，亮得让整杯液体都跟着微微一震。

气泡继续上升，光陪它们走这一段。它们经过的地方，光被举起，被弯折，被分成七种颜色又合拢——像一句话拆开是字母，合上还是那句话。气泡不知道光的心事，光也不解释。它们只是同行：一个向上，一个向下探看；一个负责圆，一个负责亮。到水面那一层，气泡停了一瞬，把光举到最高处，然后破裂，把光轻轻放回空气里。放回的声音很轻，像一页书翻过去。

我坐在最后一排，看这整个过程。原来美可以这样小：一杯液体，一串气泡，一束不肯绕路的光。原来辽阔也可以这样小：气泡里装着折射的窗、倒立的树和一小块走了八分钟的光。科学把这一切摆在桌上，不喊，不解释，只等你安静下来，看液体如何托举，气泡如何上升，光如何在最微小的圆里，把整个上午重新排列。

后来光收回它的腰，回到笔直的路上去。液体重新安静，气泡已经不在。可试管壁上还挂着几粒很小的圆，替他们记得：有一个上午，光在液体里折了个腰，气泡把光举到水面，而我坐在最后一排，替这场无人宣布的美，当了一回唯一的观众。

放学我留在教室擦黑板，粉笔灰在斜射的光里浮着，一粒一粒，慢得像气泡。我忽然分不清它们是灰还是气泡——原来上升的样子都差不多：不喊，不挤，不回头。我伸手在光柱里轻轻一挥，灰粒绕开我的手指，又合拢，像液体让开一串气泡。我站了一会儿，把黑板擦干净，把光留在原地。它还在折腰，为下一个愿意安静下来的人。

# Light Bends Its Waist Inside the Liquid

Light sets out from the window, walks eight minutes to reach the classroom, then half a meter more to reach the test tube. It used to travel straight; passing through the liquid it bends its waist once—not rudeness, but the liquid greeting it with its whole transparent body. Inside the liquid, light slows its steps and sees what is happening here: a string of bubbles rising from the bottom of the beaker, quiet as a snowfall falling upward. Light reaches out and touches the leading bubble, which at once gets a silver rim, shining so brightly that the entire cup of liquid trembles along with it.

The bubbles keep rising, and light keeps them company for this stretch. Where they pass, light is lifted, bent, split into seven colors and gathered back—as if a sentence taken apart is letters, and put together is still that sentence. The bubbles do not know light's thoughts, and light does not explain. They simply travel together: one going up, one leaning down to look; one in charge of roundness, one in charge of brightness. At the surface layer, a bubble pauses an instant, lifts light

to its highest point, then bursts, gently setting light back into the air. The sound of setting down is soft, like a page turning.

I sit in the last row, watching the whole process. So beauty can be this small: a cup of liquid, a string of bubbles, one beam of light that refuses to take a detour. So vastness can be this small too: inside a bubble are a refracted window, an upside-down tree, and a small piece of light that walked eight minutes. Science lays all this on the table without shouting, without explaining, only waiting for you to grow quiet and see how the liquid holds things up, how bubbles rise, and how light, inside the smallest of circles, rearranges the entire morning.

Later light straightens its waist and returns to its road. The liquid grows quiet again, and the bubbles are gone. But a few tiny round beads still hang on the inner wall of the tube, remembering for them: one morning, light bent its waist inside a liquid, bubbles lifted light to the surface, and I sat in the last row, serving as the only audience to this beauty that nobody announced.

After school I stay behind to erase the blackboard, and chalk dust floats in the slanting beam of light, grain by grain, slow as bubbles. For a moment I cannot tell whether they are dust or bubbles—so all rising looks much the same: no shouting, no pushing, no looking back. I wave my hand gently through the column of light; the dust grains steer around my fingers and close back together, like a liquid making way for a string of bubbles. I stand there a while, wipe the blackboard clean, and leave the light where it is. It is still bending its waist, waiting for the next person willing to grow quiet.