乒乓球浮起来的那一天

游园会的方案是班主任放权给班委的，班委又把游戏摊位分到了小组。我们组四个人分摊位，剩下的吹乒乓球过水杯归我，因为我说我家有乒乓球，我组里其他人家里没有。说完我就后悔了，球是有了，玩法还没有。

玩法是我晚上在家定的。方案是现成的：一排纸杯装水，球放第一个杯子里，用嘴吹着让球跳到下一个杯子，全过算通关。我妈说这游戏简单，我说简单就没人玩了。我在桌上摆了八个杯子，倒水，把球搁上去，深吸一口气吹——水没吹走，球没走，八个杯子的水晃成一排小浪，最边上一杯直接溢出来，流到卷子上，我妈从厨房冲出来，我拿着乒乓球站在桌边，罚站一样。

第二天我改了方案。水只装半杯，杯子间距拉大，第一个杯子前立两支铅笔当起吹线，吹之前必须在线后。晚上再试，球从第一个杯跳到第二个，水溅出来一点，能接受。跳到第五个杯子我卡住了，球卡在杯沿上，怎么吹都在原地转圈。我拿尺子把第五个杯子往下压了压，让两个杯口的边搭在一起，球一吹就滚过去了。我对着那排杯子又试了三遍，三遍全过，才敢写进策划表。策划表上我在玩法那一栏写：半杯水，八杯，线后起吹，全过兑一等奖。我妈扫了一眼说，你这写得跟说明书似的。我说，就是要说明书，不然当天说不清。

活动那天中午，教室后排的课桌拼成我的摊位。八个杯子排成一列，水装到杯身那道花纹的下沿，起吹线的铅笔用胶带粘在桌上，胶带是我早上剪的，剪得歪歪扭扭但粘得牢。排队的人比我想的多。来的大部分是三年级以上，也有低年级的，个子矮，够不着桌子，我就把桌子这头的杯子往下挪了挪，挪到他能趴着吹的高度。

有个一年级的小男孩，排到我前面的时候我注意到他，他手里攥着游园券，攥出了褶子。他趴在线后，第一口气吹得太猛，球直接飞出去落在桌上，我捡回来放回第一个杯子，跟他说再来，规则里没写不能重来，我就自己定一条：飞出去算停，放回原位接着吹。他第二口气轻了，球跳过第二个杯，第三个，第四个，越跳越快，到第五个杯——我压过边的那个——球顺顺当当滚过去。第七个杯他停了一下，球在杯沿上转圈，围观的人开始喊，往左吹往左吹，他往左吹了，球进了。第八个杯，球落进去，水花溅起来一点，全班呼一声炸开，那小孩跳起来，他旁边的姐姐比他叫得还响。

兑奖的时候他抽了一等奖，是一盒十二色水彩笔。他举着水彩笔跑走，游园券还攥在手里，褶子更皱了。我守在自己设计的摊后面，手心的汗在桌沿上蹭了两道。下午收摊，八个杯子的水剩下一半，铅笔上的胶带卷了边。我把策划表从摊位上揭下来，玩法那一栏的墨被水洇了一点，半杯水三个字还清楚。

The Day the Ping-Pong Ball Floated Up

The party plan was handed by our homeroom teacher to the class committee, and the committee assigned game stalls to each group. Our group of four split the stalls, and the ping-pong-ball-over-cups game landed on me because I said I had a ping-pong ball at home and the others didn't. The moment I said it I regretted it - the ball was sorted, but the rules weren't.

I worked out the rules at home that evening. The plan was standard: a row of paper cups filled with water, the ball in the first cup, blow it from cup to cup, clear them all to win. My mom said it was a simple game. I said if it's simple nobody will play it. I set eight cups on the table, poured water, placed the ball, took a deep breath and blew - the water stayed, the ball stayed, and the water in all eight cups sloshed into a row of little waves; the end cup overflowed straight onto my workbook. My mom came rushing out of the kitchen while I stood by the table holding the ping-pong ball like a kid in time-out.

The next day I revised the plan. Cups only half full, wider gaps between them, two pencils standing before the first cup as a blow-from-here line - you must blow from behind it. Testing that night, the ball hopped from cup one to cup two with a small splash, acceptable. I got stuck at the fifth cup: the ball jammed on the rim, spinning in place no matter how I blew. I used a ruler to press the fifth cup down a bit so the two rims touched, and the ball rolled across with one puff. I ran the whole row three more times, cleared all three, and only then wrote it into the plan sheet. In the rules column I wrote: half a cup of water, eight cups, blow from behind the line, clear all for first prize. My mom glanced at it and said you wrote it like an instruction manual. I said that's exactly what it needs to be, or we can't explain it on the day.

At noon on activity day, back-row desks were pushed together into my stall. Eight cups in a line, water filled just below the pattern band on each cup, the line pencils taped to the desk with tape I cut that morning - crooked, but it stuck. The queue was longer than I expected. Most players were third grade and up, with some little ones who couldn't reach the desk, so I slid the near cups down to a height where they could lean over and blow.

I noticed a first-grade boy when he joined my line - he was clutching his game ticket so hard it wrinkled. He leaned behind the line; his first puff was too fierce and the ball flew out onto the desk. I put it back in the first cup and told him to go again - the rules said nothing about retries, so I made one up: if it flies out you stop, put it back, and keep blowing. His second puff was gentle. The ball cleared cup two, three, four, faster and faster, then the fifth cup - the one I had pressed down - and it rolled across smoothly. At cup seven he paused, the ball circling the rim, and the crowd started shouting: blow left, blow left! He blew left; it dropped in. Cup eight: the ball fell in with a small splash, and the classroom erupted. The boy jumped; the sister beside him shouted louder than he did.

At the prize exchange he drew first prize - a box of twelve watercolor pens. He ran off holding them up, game ticket still in his fist, wrinkles deeper now. I stood behind my own stall, wiping two wet streaks off the desk edge with my palms. When we closed up in the afternoon, half the water remained in the eight cups, and the tape

on the pencils had curled. I peeled the plan sheet off the stall; the ink in the rules column had bled a little from the splashes, but the three words for half a cup of water were still clear.