

她鬓角的那几根白：讲台、光与时间的散文

我坐在第一排，正对着讲台。看老师，先看她的鬓角。这不是故意，第一排的角度就这样：她转身写字，脸侧过来，鬓角离我最近，比黑板上的字还近。

一年级那年，她鬓角只有一根白的。一根。我盯着看了半节课，同桌问我看什么，我说她头上有根白头发。同桌说，就一根，有什么好看。后来我常想，同桌说得对，就一根；可也正因为就一根，才看得清——白头发少的时候，每一根都有自己的位置。

粉笔灰落在她肩头，她拂掉。落在袖口，她拂掉。落在鬓角，她不拂——拂不掉，也分不清哪粒是灰、哪根是发。灰和白发挨在一起，灰比白发细，白发比灰长；风一吹，灰走了，白发不走。于是那几根白就一年一年地留了下来。

二年级是两根。三年级是一小片，藏在黑发里，光一照才显出来。她站在讲台上，清晨的光从窗口进来，落在她身上，黑发吃光，白发亮。坐在第一排的人看老师，其实看的是光在她头上的分配：哪一部分黑把光吞了，哪一部分白把光吐出来。

黑板上的白是新的，每天都是新的，擦了写，写了擦。她鬓角的白是旧的，一年比一年旧，拂不掉，也擦不掉。黑板的白是粉笔磨出来的，她鬓角的白是什么磨出来的，没有人问过。粉笔磨短了会换一支，没有人换她的黑发。

到高年级，那几根白已经不算什么了。全班都习惯了：讲台、黑板、粉笔、她、鬓角那几根白，像教室的固定陈设。有一回我走神，看那几根白出神，她忽然转过头来，我慌得低头。其实她不知道我看什么。她知道的只是粉笔又短了一截，明天该换一支新的。

毕业多年，同学聚会，有人说起老师还在教。有人问，她头发白了多少。大家想不起来。只有一起坐过第一排的人答得出：不是一下子白的，是一根一根白的；不是头发白的，是时间从讲台上走过去，每一步留下一个白脚印。

The White Hairs at Her Temples: A Prose of Podium, Light, and Time

I sat in the front row, facing the podium squarely. To look at the teacher, you saw her temples first. Not on purpose — the angle from the front row is simply this: when she turns to write on the board, her face turns sideways, and her temples are closer to me than the characters on the blackboard.

In first grade, she had exactly one white hair at the temple. One. I stared at it through half a class. My deskmate asked what I was looking at. I said she had a white hair. My deskmate said: just one, what is there to see. I often think back on that. My deskmate was right, just one; but precisely because it was only one, you could see it clearly — when white hairs are few, each one has its own place.

Chalk dust lands on her shoulder and she brushes it off. It lands on her cuff and

she brushes it off. It lands at her temples and she does not — you cannot brush it away, and you cannot tell which grain is dust and which strand is hair. Dust and white hair lie side by side: dust is finer than hair, hair is longer than dust; a breath of wind takes the dust away, but the white hair stays. So those few white strands stayed, year after year.

In second grade there were two. In third grade a small patch, hidden in the black hair, visible only when light struck it. She stood at the podium, morning light came in through the window and fell on her: black hair swallows light, white hair gives it back. People in the front row watching the teacher are really watching how the light is distributed across her head — which part of black drinks the light in, which part of white spits it back out.

The white on the blackboard is new, new every day: erased and rewritten, rewritten and erased. The white at her temples is old, older each year, impossible to brush off or erase. The board's white is ground out of chalk; what grinds out the white at her temples, no one asked. When chalk wears short, it is replaced with a new stick. No one replaces her black hair.

By the upper grades, those few white strands were nothing special. The whole class had grown used to them: the podium, the blackboard, the chalk, her, the few white hairs at her temples — fixed furnishings of the classroom. Once I drifted off and stared at those white strands, and she suddenly turned her head; I panicked and dropped my eyes. She did not know what I had been looking at. All she knew was that the chalk had gone another notch shorter, and tomorrow a new stick was due.

Years after graduation, at a class reunion, someone said the teacher was still teaching. Someone asked how white her hair had gone. No one could remember. Only those who had sat together in the front row could answer: it did not go white all at once, it went white strand by strand; it was not the hair turning white — it was time walking across the podium, leaving one white footprint with every step.