

粉笔灰落下来的声音：写给用粉笔的人

没有人听过粉笔灰落下来的声音。它不响。但用粉笔的人知道它响过——不是落的声音，是磨的声音。一支粉笔在黑板上走过，留下一道白，同时往空气里留下一层细雾。写一个字，就是把自己用掉一点。粉笔的寿命是十一厘米。会用的老师，一支粉笔写满一黑板字，最后剩一小截，指头捏不住了，就丢进粉笔盒。粉笔盒里攒着笔头。笔头是粉笔的遗骨。

粉笔灰落下来像雪。不是窗外那种雪，窗外的雪冷，落在手心里就化。粉笔灰是暖的，它从老师的指缝里出来，从写字的摩擦里出来，带着一点体温。冬天教室关窗，粉笔灰不动，慢慢地落，一层一层，落在粉笔槽里、桌沿上、搁在桌上的手背上。前排的学生看得见它落：老师深色衣服上，白点一粒一粒地出来，像雪落在山坡上。

用粉笔的人，手会变。指纹的沟里填满白，洗多少遍都洗不净。冬天手指裂口，裂口的缝里嵌着白，不是粉笔沾上去的，是粉笔长进皮里的。跟人握手，人家看你手干，问你做什么的。你说，写字的。人家看看你的指尖，不用再问。

粉笔盒会换。木头的用旧了，棱角让无数只手摸圆了。新盒放在粉笔槽原来的位置，装着同样的白棍子。旧盒让哪个老师带回家去，不知最后盛了什么。可盒里的粉笔总在用掉，总在续上。一支磨短了，下一支被拿起来。拿粉笔的那只手是同一只手，三十年同一只手，指纹里还是白，裂口里还是嵌着白。

后来有了白板笔，有了马克笔，有了屏幕。粉笔灰少了，终于没有了。有人说粉笔灰脏，呛人，早该淘汰。这话不错。可用了半辈子粉笔的人，偶尔会想它：想笃、笃、笃的声音，想清晨那束光把灰照出来的样子，想自己手指裂口里嵌着的那点白。想的不是灰，是一个人安安静静把自己磨成白、留在黑板上的那种方式。

粉笔灰落下来的声音，只有用粉笔的人听得见。那是把一个人的年月，一粒一粒磨细了，码成黑板上一座白字的山的动静。

The Sound Chalk Dust Makes as It Falls: To Those Who Use Chalk

No one has ever heard chalk dust fall. It makes no sound. But those who use chalk know it has been sounding — not the sound of falling, but the sound of wearing away. A piece of chalk travels across the board, leaves a line of white behind, and leaves a fine mist in the air. Writing one character is spending a little of itself. The life of a piece of chalk is eleven centimeters. A teacher who uses chalk well writes a whole board with one stick; at the end only a stub remains, too small for the fingers to hold, and it is dropped into the chalk box. The box fills with stubs. The stubs are the bones of chalk that finished its work.

Chalk dust falls like snow. Not the snow outside the window — that snow is cold and melts in the palm. Chalk dust is warm. It comes from the teacher's finger gaps,

from the friction of writing, carrying a little body heat. In winter, with the window shut, chalk dust drifts down slowly, layer on layer, onto the chalk trough, the edge of the desk, the back of a hand resting on the desk. Students in the front row can see it falling: on the teacher's dark clothes, white specks appear one after another, like snow falling on a mountainside.

The hands of those who use chalk change. The whorls of the fingerprints fill with white, and no matter how often you wash, they never come clean. In winter the fingers crack, and in the cracks white is lodged — not chalk stuck on, but chalk grown into the skin. When you shake hands, the other person notices your hands are dry and asks what you do. You say: I write characters. They look at your fingertips and need ask nothing further.

The chalk box gets replaced. Wooden boxes wear out, their corners rounded by countless hands passing over them. A new box sits in the same place in the chalk trough, holding the same white sticks. The old box is taken home by some teacher, and who knows what it ends up holding. But the chalk in the box is always being used up and always being refilled. One stick wears down; the next is picked up. The hand picking it up is the same hand, thirty years the same hand, the fingerprints still white, the cracks still holding white.

Later came the whiteboard pen, the marker, the screen. Chalk dust thinned, and at last disappeared. Some say chalk dust is dirty, bad for the lungs, good to be rid of. That is true. But those who used chalk half a lifetime sometimes miss it: the tap, tap, tap; the way morning light revealed the dust in a beam; the white lodged in the cracks of their own fingers. What they miss is not the dust, but the way a person quietly wore themselves into white and left it on the board.

The sound chalk dust makes as it falls is heard only by those who use chalk. It is the sound of a person's years being ground fine, grain by grain, and piled into a mountain of white characters on the blackboard.