

# miniMAG

*issue102*  
*healer*







## Grant Park

Daniel Andrée

A lakeside breeze, that is reminiscent of summer, sweeps across the street.  
The warm winter day is a good impostor.  
The guise of days gone-by brings a warmth in my soul.  
Chicago, you lie so well, or maybe I am the naive one that wants to believe.



## Cohen As Conceived During The Early Summertime

Kushal Poddar

Sun dives, rises, repeats; this,  
not the dark hues trees  
herd together, makes me afraid.  
They say you cannot unsee  
sun emerging, naked, water beads,  
prismatic, following the contours.

A cloud shrouds the sight.  
Water looks high, unstable and living  
the stars' overture. The dance shapes  
my lips; they frame Cohen,  
"The smokey life is practiced everywhere"

The crickets and fireflies applaud  
in a mind drinking itself. The wind if eyes  
could perceive without light  
and other distortions would look  
pollen coloured and exploding.





# An Unhappy Retirement

Huina Zheng

I was assisting my 7-year-old daughter, Ting, with her homework when my father's call jolted me. His voice was trembling and faint, "Your mother is at People's Hospital. She took sleeping pills and cut her wrist. They're taking care of her."

I instinctively covered my mouth with my hand, rendered speechless, my mind a blank slate. I requested leave from my supervisor that night, packed my bags, and briefly informed my husband, Xuan, about the situation before embarking on the drive to the hospital.

My parents reside in another city. It took me three hours to reach the hospital, and I hurried to the ward. My father sat on the edge of the bed, and my mother, beneath the white sheets, appeared pallid as she gazed at the ceiling. Her wrist was swathed in a thick white bandage. Tears welled up in my eyes.

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My mother had always been optimistic. Six years ago, the state-owned enterprise where she worked was facing a recession and undergoing



mergers and reforms, which led to a group of older employees, including my mother, being considered for dismissal.

Many of her colleagues were furious, believing the company wanted to get rid of them. They protested against this decision. However, my mother had a different perspective. She was only 50 years old, having started working at the age of 20. With 30 years of working experience and having paid her fair share of social security, the company offered her the option to leave with a compensation package of 120,000 yuan and retire early. She saw this as an opportunity to take a break. Throughout those 30 years, she had juggled work, household chores, and caring for me, keeping herself busy all the time. Now, she could retire five years earlier than expected.

Her retirement plans were full of dreams. She envisioned traveling to different parts of the country each year, exploring the magnificent landscapes of our homeland. She wanted to shed her work uniforms and don beautiful skirts, capturing the moments with her camera. She also had plans to take drawing classes and dance with her friends in the neighborhood square during the evenings, enjoying a vibrant social life. Her eyes sparkled with enthusiasm as she described her exciting retirement plans.

But when did things start to go awry? Was it when she received her first month's pension? My mother discovered that while her former colleagues who had retired a few years earlier were receiving pensions of over 3,000 yuan, she was only getting 2,600 yuan. When she inquired with the company's HR department, she was informed that her pension was lower because she had retired earlier than the official retirement age of 55 for female cadres in China.

She felt disappointed but accepted this reality without complaint. However, what had really gone wrong? Could it be that she sacrificed her own dreams to help me care for my daughter, Ting?

My husband and I both had jobs, and my mother-in-law assisted in taking care of Ting. However, just a month after my mother's retirement, my father-in-law, who lived alone, fell and broke his thigh. My mother-in-law had to return to care for him. I asked my mother to help with Ting for two years until she was old enough to attend kindergarten.

My mother had been eagerly planning a trip to Inner Mongolia with her friends, but my father said, "Our daughter needs help. How can you, her mother, travel and have fun alone without lending her a hand?" Reluctantly, my mother gave up her travel plans and moved in with me.

Understanding how exhausting it was to care for a young child, I wanted to ease the burden on my mother. However, as a salesperson, I

often worked late, returning home around 9 p.m. I frequently had to go on business trips during the weekends.

During those two years, my mother's life revolved around taking care of Ting and managing all the household chores, leaving her with little social interaction. My husband, Xuan, often complained about the greasy and salty dishes she prepared. Could the conflicts between them have caused frustration for my mother? Despite her unhappiness, she never voiced any complaints, selflessly sacrificing herself for my sake.

Finally, after two years, my mother was free from these responsibilities. But shortly after, my grandmother suffered a cerebral infarction, leaving her unable to move her body except for her mouth, eyes, and right hand. She required round-the-clock care, involving tasks like handling excrement and urine, feeding, turning her over, and providing massages.

My mother's siblings, who hadn't yet retired, believed that my mother should care for my grandmother, as they thought a hired caregiver would not be as attentive as a daughter. They provided my mother with 4,000 yuan per month as caregiving fees, and the three siblings split the living expenses and medical bills equally. Once again, my mother had to put her travel plans on hold.

During this period, I had a weekly video call with my mother, and it was evident that she was becoming increasingly exhausted. She grew thinner each day, her once-rosy complexion fading. During a visit over the National Day holiday, I noticed that my mother's hands had become rough, marked with thick calluses. She explained it was due to massaging Grandma daily. Moreover, she developed high blood pressure and frequently experienced back pain. I suggested hiring a caregiver for Grandma, but Grandma feared abandonment, and my mother had no choice but to remain by her side.

After my grandmother's passing last year, I assumed my mother would finally embark on her long-awaited travel adventures. However, whenever I asked, she replied with, "We'll discuss it later." It was then that I realized just how far things had veered off course, and I was regretfully late in comprehending it all.

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The doctor provided some relief when he assured us that my mother hadn't damaged any nerves or tendons and should recover within two weeks. He emphasized the importance of spending more time with her to prevent any recurrence of depression or collapse.

I decided to take a 3-month unpaid leave from my job and stay with my mother. If her condition didn't improve, I planned to invite her



to live with me in my city so I could provide better care.

I asked my father about what my mother did during the day. He shook his head and said, “I don’t know. I go to work every day.” When I inquired about the weekends, he added, “She did the housework slowly. It took her about an hour to mop the floor and more time to cook and wash dishes.” I was taken aback and reminded him that he was responsible for washing dishes and taking out the trash. He blushed and said, “I still have to work, but your mother is retired. Shouldn’t she do all the housework?” This response surprised me, as my father used to respect my mother and share household chores. When had he changed?

I further questioned him, “Did you ever lose your temper with Mom over housework?” He clenched his fists. “Nonsense. I didn’t yell



at her when she cooked too late. I just told her not to do it again. After all, she was at home all day.” Hearing this response left me feeling suffocated.

In the days that followed, I engaged in daily conversations with my mother, although she remained mostly silent. Despite my strong objections, she insisted on doing housework. During the first few times, I observed her closely while we worked together.

She carefully washed the bowls and dishes, tackling all the dirty and messy areas around the house with her uninjured left hand. She diligently cleaned every piece of furniture, utensil, and cutlery. Her face retained a calm and focused expression, almost like that of a meticulously operating machine.

Standing by her side during these moments, time seemed to stand still, and I could keenly sense her loneliness. She had transformed from a cheerful person into a mechanical being devoid of feelings and emotions. Over the past six years of her retirement, she must have endured grief, waves of anger, and frustration, all while feeling

neglected by those around her. Her commitment to housework seemed to serve as her defense against loneliness.

I felt a deep sense of shame, realizing that we had all taken her dedication for granted. I began to join her in doing chores, regularly asking her how she was feeling. Gradually, she started responding with, “I’m alright” or “I’m fine.”

I remembered the time we had visited a hot spring resort during the first year she looked after Ting. She wore a bathing suit, soaking in the hot spring, and I took a photo of her. She flashed me a two-fingered peace sign, and in the photo, her smile captured the innocence of a young girl. It convinced me that my mother was still that lovely “girl.” I began to recognize the disappointments she had encountered during her retirement, slowly wearing away her vitality.

I wrapped my arms around my mother’s shoulders as she crouched, wiping down the sofa, and suggested, “Mom, let’s go dance at the square tonight.”

Helping my mother rediscover her enthusiasm and energy was a challenge, but I was committed to being there for her. Whether it was through painting, dancing, or simply sharing conversations, I was determined to support her. I would also ensure she got to and from her therapy sessions. As my mother’s therapist had advised, “The key is your unwavering presence.”

My father, too, realized his mistake and began washing the dishes every night and taking out the trash each morning. Although he struggled to express his remorse in words, his actions conveyed his desire for my mother’s well-being.

Next month, I would travel to Inner Mongolia with my mother; the travel plan that had been put on hold for a long time was finally about to start.



# Redemption

Alan Watkins

John was watching TV when he heard his cell phone going off. It was Jen. They had been fighting earlier, and Jen had said some really hurtful things. He paused his TV show and looked at the phone. He wasn't ready to talk to her, so he threw the phone on the couch and went into the kitchen to get a drink so he wouldn't have to hear it buzzing at him until it went to voicemail. When he got back, he set his full drink on the end table beside him and settled back in to finish the movie he was watching. He must have fallen asleep because he was awakened by a knock at the door. Sleepily, he checked his watch. It was 1am. The knocking continued. As he moved closer to the door, he said, "Who is it?" A voice from outside responded, "Raleigh PD, Mr. Williams." John peered through the keyhole, and sure enough it was the police, so he opened the door. They explained that they had found Jen's car totaled less than a mile from his house. Not knowing who to contact, they found that he was the last person she called and wanted him to come down the next day to identify the body. The rest of their conversation was a blur. John closed the door and sat back down on the couch. He hated that their last conversation had ended with her storming out. He opened his phone to find a picture of her, and noticed he had a message. He was sure it was from Jen and was probably her wanting to get in a few more insults that she'd forgotten to tell him when she was there. A tear ran down his cheek as he clicked the button to hear the message, knowing the words he was about to hear would be his eternal memory of her.

"Hey...it's me. I'm sorry for what I said. I'm just so insecure because I've been hurt before, and being in love with you scares me. Yes, I said it, I love you, John! Please let's just forget all this. Call me in the morning. I love you."

More tears, different than the first, were running down John's face as he ended his voicemail call. "I love you too," he said.



## Something's Rotten in the State of Oz

J Kramer Hare

A field of drowsy flowers, far  
from any emerald citadel,  
where travelers, waylaid by dreams,  
recline their heads on pillows pink;  
where stagnant air, of saccharine smell,  
holds firm against the would-be breeze,  
allowing flecks of white to fall  
with vertical trajectories—

this efflorescent field gives rest  
to heroes most implausible:  
a fool, a wimp, and heartless man,  
appointed by capricious fate  
to seek the genius conjurer  
who would redeem their weary flight—  
how could they know that, in this field,  
it snows *asbestos* every night?



## hmv

Alex Prestia

it's 2:40pm, the walls have quit moving in. i'm not watching hmv anymore, there's enough; there's nothing anyone needs from me. as beautiful as the countryside is, as much as i like to see deer run into the street, i miss you and i would trade it all for perpetual midnight and a convenience store just down the street with baozi behind the counter, and you, buying Pocari Sweat.

Hummingbirds are notorious busybodies and are at their absolute worst in the summer. i'm listless. summer listless is the worst because the birds, and bees, and trees all move and dance while i do nothing. i supervise from under the shaded patio. it's better to be unemployed in the winter, you won't miss anything.

i've swallowed all of the clouds. The Sun must shine.

i've swallowed all of the clouds. Day turns to night.

being bored is one's own fault, i remember clearly, crystal clearly, being told that. huff on a potion, or work retail, or organize all your little poems in a cute format. collect, collect. can't call you anymore, can't speak to you. can't can't won't.

empty lamentations from the older generations wash over me as the wind rustles – cliched, sorry to stop you mid sentence but it was mid. lol. lol. i'm not Frank O'hara; i'm not the me i was with you. tinker, gooner, soldier, cock.

it's all love and reciprocity and elimination of all worldly desires and all-you-can-bowl wednesdays. pure and simple. twink on the table with diminishing returns. every partner with diminishing returns. he wants more and more; you feel less and less. i hold her hair and smell her hand and it's very Regency Era in its purity.



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