



Now He Understood

Huina Zheng

Sen never understood why Lan found tutoring their son, Ming, so exhausting. She often lost her patience, raising her voice or slamming the desk. He thought she was simply being impatient.

One Saturday afternoon, Lan had a meeting and asked Sen to tutor Ming. Confidently, Sen agreed, thinking how hard could second grade be?

When they sat at the desk in the living room, Ming's grandmother was knitting a sweater on the sofa nearby. "Can I please get some ice cream?" Ming asked.

"No," Sen said.

"Can I play a game for just a little bit?"

"Have you lost your senses? Your mother clearly stated no cold drinks or games for you. If you want to change that, you'll have to wait and ask her when she returns."

Ming looked at his grandmother sitting not far away. "Can I? Please?"

"No. Just write your composition," Grandma said.

Ming stared at his father again, pouting, "Aren't you in charge?"

Why can't you say yes?"

Sen waved his hand, "Enough of this silliness, focus on your essay and start writing now."

Ming began writing a story based on the pictures as his father read the newspaper. After a considerable amount of time, Ming announced, "Done."

Sen looked over Ming's work, describing the sequence in the pictures: In the first picture, a man was selling frogs in a net while a woman pointed at the frogs and a boy with a schoolbag looked on. In the second picture, the boy waved his hands, appearing to say something. In the third picture, he poured coins from a piggy bank. Finally, in the fourth picture, the boy released the frogs from the net into the river.

"Read it to me," Sen said.

Ming began, "Lin is on his way home from school and sees—"

"Read it slowly," Sen said, still looking at the newspaper.

Ming slowed down. "He sees a man and a woman catching lots of frogs. Lin asks, 'Can you give me a frog?' The man says, 'No!' Lin returns home. He pours out all his money, buys a net, and catches frogs. After playing, he puts the frogs back into the river."

Sen put down the newspaper. "Observe the first picture carefully. Here, you see a man engaged in selling frogs, and there's a woman inquiring about the price of a frog. Now, when Lin, the boy in the picture, witnesses this he firmly states, 'You can't sell frogs.' This is an important moment that sets the tone for the rest of the story."

Ming scratched his head. Sen continued, "Pay attention to the man's demeanor in this scene. His expression is one of anger, marked by a fierce look. This indicates his refusal to heed Lin's words. Consequently, Lin takes a significant action: he returns home, gathers all his savings, and presumably purchases every frog from the man. This act of buying all the frogs is pivotal and leads to the final act of liberation, where Lin releases the frogs, demonstrating a critical lesson about compassion and determination."

"That's not right," Ming said.

"That's how it is!" Sen said.

"In picture two, the man and lady both look really mean, like they're together. Lin can't buy all those frogs from them!" Ming said, pointing to the third picture and counting coins. "See, he's only got 15 yuan from his piggy bank. Frogs cost more than that!"

Sen reached up to the pictures and said, "I'm telling you—"

Ming shielded his father's hand with his arm. "Hold on, let me

finish! One frog is like 15 yuan, at least. Lin can't buy that many frogs with just a little bit of money."

Sen almost shouted, "Lin must've bought all the frogs, he just had to, he wouldn't just—" his voice rose in frustration; he stopped to draw breath.

And just like that, Sen's eyes were opened. Tutoring Ming, he realized, was indeed a task full of surprises and challenges. With a small, knowing smile, he thought to himself, "So this is what she's been talking about all along."





Storiette

Salvatore Difalco

Tell a story everybody wants to tell one.
Everybody imagines they have a story.
They want to tell that story to someone.
Not everyone wants to hear their story.
So we double back and start from zero.
Count to ten and start blowing again.
Everyone can count to ten, even you.
Tell a story everyone will tell someone.
Count to ten and start again, same ole.

Rereading, Rewatching, Relistening

Hibah Shabkhez

I know the how, I know the why, I know
You, the way I know the taste of the fog
At dawn in my own city. You still glow
Within me, like the golden star I got
In class two. You anchor me. Like an old
Friend called up after years, you match me thought
For thought, silence for silence, yet lead me
Me on to the discovery of new
Facets of your world and of mine, to see
Something different, deeper, and so tell
Me to return in another ten years.



Veronika being slightly overweight
had confessed me in Moscow
one afternoon last September
when the weather was still normal

I've been getting quite good at shoplifting

it came to me as a surprise
that she could say that suddenly
to an almost complete stranger
and being slightly overweight

she was still only 22 but already had a four years old daughter named Ania
with dark eyes not overweight herself but looking more like twisted dwarf
than child a wicked piece of bones and flesh

the second time that we met she then asked me something odd again (as a
way to confess her sin I guess)
it was this time in January
and she was slightly overweight

have you ever cheated at your exams?

no... I answered not quite understanding *that* she expected me to share her
guilt unfortunately in my youth I almost never attended them which had
made it in the end all this issue much more simple

she asked me then in a café
sitting right next to my wife
being slightly overweight
how old I precisely was

fifty five soon

I told her and saw that she was quite surprised of course
then telling me (as speaking to herself)

it's the same age as my father...

the last time we met last week
before leaving the Russian soil
she was somehow a bit ashamed
as she had failed to pass her last examination in Russian
the day after attending one of my stupid lectures (I felt slightly guilty of this)

with then a small notebook popping out of her bag
in which were written all her grades

just to prove me that up to that day
she only had had but good grades

could she had been taking me for her foster father of some sort ?
being slightly overweight

and I could not quite believe it

The
Alpha-numeric-rupentinol

He had been caught in the daisies
but even so, the codex sequences
had been incorrect. The marble-
spined contraption would surely
never open now. He had tried all
999,999 combinations (his birthday
excluded) and had found not one
click, earlobe ran raw. He needed
a stethoscope, a costume, to be
someone else.



Empty

Kushal Poddar

I have come to empty my head.
The guru has been a carpenter's
apprentice, garbage guy, drunkard, dead.
He opens his tool box.

I ask him with whom I should
leave my luggage.
He smiles. The flame of the magnolia
flares up the breeze.

I know, I should not know what his trick is,
albeit I do, and I tell him so,
walk away from the portico toward the dark,
find a pub with its palms open
for the thieves and the saints.

Join our Club

J Kramer Hare

Our prohibition of spilled-milk-lachrymosity has served us very well. We've never been so skylarking-in-the-meadow free as we are now. Never so swell.

Our days are always Fridays and our nights—*oh*—our nights overflow: roses, wine, cool jazz, hot bandmates, snug on wee stages or tucked in below bridges or backs of bars.

We owe it all to attitude. Ours have been adjusted: fully, finally, irrevocably, for better or worse (but trust us—trust us when we tell you better).

We carry calling cards—buttons, patches, hats, pins, grins, violins. We dress in velveteen tracksuits. We dress as cowboys or as nuns or as Nixon or Hugh Hefner.

We cruise around in rented cars
so fast you'll think we're buckled up
aboard the headlight beams themselves.
We jet to tropical winters—
we are the hurricane itself.

We carve out lemniscates in swift
lepidopteran swoops. We swell
like high-tide and we get so big
our shirt-studs burst and off they go
to glint their nacre in the night.

Yes: we'd give the shirts off our backs
for things to stay this way. What comes
must go but we all know the truth:
the show goes on! It's coming to
a joint near you, so very soon.





url: minimag.space
subs: minimagsubmissions@gmail.com
substack: minimag.substack.com
twitter: @minimag_lit
insta: @minimag_write

Art by Irina Tall Novikova
Insta: @irina369tall
Insta: @irinanov4155

“Now He Understood”
by Huina Zheng

“Storiette” by Salvatore Difalco
Book: The Mountie at Niagara Falls (Anvil Press, 2010)

“Rereading, Rewatching, Relistening” by Hibah Shabkhez
Twitter: @hibahshabkhez
Insta: @shabkhez_hibah
Website: <https://linktr.ee/HibahShabkhez>

“Veronika being slightly overweight...” by Ivan De Monbrison
Insta: @ivandemonbrison

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Twitter: @Kushalpoe
Insta: @kushalthe poet
Book: https://www.amazon.in/Kushal-Poddar/e/B07V8KCZ9P/ref=dp_byline_cont_book_1

“The Alpha-numeric-rupentinol” by Trevor Hormel
Insta: @hormeltrevor
Website: trevorhormel.com

“Join our Club” by J Kramer Hare
Website: kramerpoetry.com

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