



The Bonegatherer

Garin Cycholl

nty Hospital

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Garin Cycholl

moria

chicago

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*Passages from The Bongatherer previously
appeared with Stockyard and Mississippi Valley
Voices.*

The Bonegatherer

for my parents and Sterling Plumpp

The Bonegatherer

*I
came from death and
afterthoughts*

(the polis in perpetual repair

I can't walk without
speaking

aloud to myself

here

“comes winter
in the bone we've

set it loose
on the
land”

(how a body crosses a vacant lot

the foottrails
and prairie returning
hard-

scrabble greens I
got no name
for

*the interns of the 1960's were the product
of profound social changes; it was a con-
fused and unhappy period, even those who
were actively involved, did not understand*

*or Chicago's West Side,
the county's bonegatherer*

Cook County Hospital rising and train's
movement against the ear; prairie cut and bladed
by human movement—the Chicago land drive,
“the migration to Austin”

underworld rewrapped in metal and gauze
and turned above ground

“a magnificent
engineering achievement unjustified on
any reasonable economic grounds” *no one
gives you a menu; you get what's brought*

its map: “no single avenue developed”
as a main street axis, instead a
series of surface car lines”

(how much radiance can you stand?)

anatomy is subversion

where does “West Side” begin?

at the Circle
at Racine
at Western
at Central
in County’s waiting room

*the apt house is on the near SW Side.
a slum? not from a car*

train running thru on time, a blue line
to the north—

Austin,

Garfield and

Humboldt Parks

to the south—

Gage Park,

Berwyn and

Cicero

land out
there
waiting; “a
dumping
ground
for re-
located
families”

terminus of dis-
placement, suburb
of Mississippi

historically, the
spaces defining “West
Side”

County Hospital and
“the riots”

but why not prairie?

grass/wet-
lands moving
toward... or
the space of

transition

(place is not; place is to be

rail thru it

“this is a Blue
Line train to Forest
Park”

my father, ears locked
into landscape, purposeful move-
ment, anatomy textbook, Illinois
College of Medicine and a 1966
crossing of West Side—what
distracted his eye in drift?
what chance meeting and
wandering?

“the next stop
is Cicero”

*I
don't know
the story from*

here

“what we need
is a black
neurology”

a way of
crossing west
side

*I come back to the geography of it—
the width or the means no
accurate measure of boundary (if a
boundary is ever really measured)*

if a boundary
if a river
if a boulevard
if a bloodline

Poverty Point priests directed the men
as they hauled a million bucketfuls of soil,
constructing the Great Bird Mound (later,
the plantation cut among its furrows); it
would carry them to other worlds—the holy
rhetoric always promising some other place

there—

but between us, *here*

the burned out grocery

the fenced school

the abandoned car

the child's broken toy

“ceaselessly modern”

*in the US, the basic fact
of life is fear—fear of
illness, of getting laid off—
afraid to go outdoors, holes
gaping in the lace over the
machinery of greed and
brutality—the circus minus
its glitter, its seamy side up*

(a “prairie fire”

you roll your bones;
gather them against waters

not memory,
but constant,
immediate
nostalgia “I’ve
been crossing West
Side for forty
years now” a
long, slow
mutter
a long
song

(how a space resists memory)

the juices,
the waters gone,
boundaries turned down
for the night “you’re
in my territory now”

some kind of elegy

Cicero to Chicago Ave.
Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church
and OK Used Cars
the Temple of Spiritual Healing

2550 Paragon Leasing (all makes)
Phil's Ribs
Walk-In, Walk-Out Furniture
and Cut-Rate

Glass-o-net or the
Green Line to Ashland/63rd
Fire Dept.
New Drift Liquors

and County, "that old whore on Harrison"
Babbitting
the Church of Spiritual Awareness
Brach's Candy—split open and gutted

(have you seen the latest ruins?)

in media res

in gunshots' echo

(the West Side punch in the mouth,

never accidental

“trauma is a disease...penetrating trauma
or what is called intentional injury: gunshot
wounds, stabbings, personal assaults”

1982—2500 traumas, 500 gunshot
wounds, 5% struck by more than
one bullet;

a decade later—
4500 traumas, 1000 gunshot wounds,
25% struck by more than one bullet—
not .22 slugs, but 9mm bullets and

*which cavity to open? he's
shot in the chest, he's shot in the
belly—where first?*

“we've lost an entire generation here”

or the riot as a public space

virus moving through West Side

“details a form of contamination”

the summer '66 riots began
when Donald Henry reopened
a fire hydrant on Roosevelt
Ave. (although to say that
the riots *began* there is a lie)
12 July and 95 degrees, open
hydrants across the West Side;
Fire Chief Quinn sending out
city crews with police escort
to close down the waters

“you
are not going to let these
policemen arrest me?” sd
Henry

not a question of dis-
order but displacement—
a handful of young men
beaten and the slow shatter
of glass—rocks & looting on
Racine, the Liberty Shopping
Center left windowless; sniping,
two dead in the Henry Horner
Homes

politicians blamed
the waters—“suddenly they
were thinking wet”—public
pools trucked from Canada
and suburban water men; the
Mayor blamed, “certain ele-
ments” training violence—
King warned of the city’s
“impending social disaster”

“cutting things
out was and
is kind of
medieval—

increasingly,

where surgery
came from—the
followers of
armies—
where it
's headed”

the corpse is a hard
business; we scalpel
America

 life lived on
anatomy lab stools and
cold coffee
 sandwiches
eaten in the sweet stink
of decaying bodies

*madness, all
kinds of
madness*

“among other things, we
live off advanced
pathology—almost
parasitical”

*piling
bones against memory*

“there were people
here who
wanted
to know
how the
body and
the body
politic
was
put together and”

“here”
disappeared
across
all
that
geography,

(ex: “the healthful
cornfield is now housed
permanently in this gallery”)

triaged and
micropoliticked;

set up a research
structure or open
the
waters

Epitaph #1—

not Sunday morning traffic
but a horn scratches antiquity
into the ear (applause is
hesitant)—the modern
is not a freeway but a road
from Jackson or Memphis; not
politicians in whirlybirds over
head, but a Wednesday morning
full of trouble

transit never
measures soil or
time

(cross a gulley or a rise

“what grand
failed music did
Mingus hear?” *here*,
the bass as a
measure of
a moment’s
anarchy

(how a space resists memory

unlike the lab or
soil, the
music
exercises no
virtual citi-
zenship in the
Kingdom of
God
triaged
and mapped

THE TUNNEL BEGINS.
ONLY WITH U.S. CELLULAR

There were other people who would actually pay the admitting clerk for an admission even though they didn't get one. Every tenth admission would be yours: no matter who it was, you would get it. It was very cruel in those days, because some people would try and find ways of getting good cases. They'd sneak down to the admitting area and try to scope out somebody who wasn't very sick or had an interesting illness—

“this was, in
more ways
than
 one, *their*
hospital—they
these, those
that...they’ve
seen surgeons
come and go and
 they
let you
know
that—I
was here
before
 you, and
I’ll be
here after
you, so...”

 not the ad-
verbs, but the
prepositions of
space

*the time of year depressed him deeply—
overcast skies and cutting wind, leaves
falling, dark too soon and locusts—it's a
terror of the soul; he hears nuns rustle—
some folk magic he can use to ease this
fear—feels in the landscape and sky, we've
set it loose, opened up the ground and
here it is—a dread in the soft filling of
his bones, the suckable part; only a
ritual could save him from succumbing*

*January and the cop had a baby
in his arms who had nothing but a
wet paper diaper on; the baby was
a bag of bones—it'd fallen out a
window, and the cop was in shock:
he clutched the baby and wouldn't
let go and they had to pry his fingers
off it and the baby was very, very
dead; the instructor sent us all home*

and your own place in
the anatomy lab; not a
nest or shrine but rent by
the university the corpse
as a series of surfaces—
your hand at first clumsy
and shaking against it

you slept with the Iliad
under your pillow, the
Old Testament under
your feet “the road in
is not always the road
back”

the
university wants its
microscope back, but
it’s fallen to me now

(the bone is a memory space—

looking through bone,
looking through glass

*a lot of what we take for granted as
what's been known for centuries was
actually learned in this very short period
of time—and a lot of that was learned at
County—this huge morass of people that
you could try stuff out on; you were in
the trenches—and no political will to
maintain the building itself, dripping
sort of like this Soviet bureaucracy*

that chili stand
across Harrison or
the Monkey Room,
the Greeks' bar—
dark, the booths
secluded, natural spots
for trysting; a direct
phone line to County's
switchboard—the bar-
tender would yell
a doctor's name—
a double martini cost
only fifty cents, “the
best bargain in town,
even if it was a bit oily”

People saw this as their hospital—and I think most of us respected that. Those were our patients—a lot of insomnia, hostility, feeling demoralized—As a society, we are really bathed in the idea that there should be preventive medicine, but nobody is doing it—it doesn't pay. Sickness pays. This violence is going to continue for another twenty years—to the point we look back and say, They were crazy. They used to go around shooting people, and they would beat each other with baseball bats over simple disagreements

“the first
surveyor is
gonna
get it in the
head with a
crowbar”¹

¹ threat by anonymous West Side resident as the new campus of the University of Illinois-Chicago Circle was contemplated in March 1961

memory with or without
space)

fearing the Black
Panthers, Chicago's police
and the FBI in open ex-
change (CPD's intelligence
unit, aka the "Red Squad")—
"the police have a perfect
right to spy on private citi-
zens," the Mayor sd "how
else are they gonna to detect
possible trouble before it
happens?" memory of
the riots hard in his head,
28 blocks of West Madison
left charred to Roosevelt—for
the city, it'd always been a
matter of "outside instigators,
a question of lawlessness and
hooliganism" and of finding
an informant—*this nation
which never lets anyone
come to shore*

but the West
Side's geography was never
drawn as such, but an "internal
colony" and three decades prior
to the city's blue light beehives
& the vacated lot measured by
a pair of Converse hightops
pointed southwest

perhaps
Orlando Jones could explain
it all (dead on a Michigan beach)

or Fred Hampton's FBI file,
thick with the accusations of con-
spiracy against order and ice
cream felonies

12 December
1969, 2337 W. Monroe—
Hampton in a West Side apt,
(what defines flight's space?)
sleeping, breath against his
pregnant fiancée's back;
some weapons, books on
birthing and cellular biology
and what fitful dreams?

order looks for a killing
space—empire, itinerant
healers, exit wounds, and
“the anodized faces of state
terror”— heavy footsteps out-
side, a knock and how “light
opened like a door”

West
Side as the space that's given,
not some point of transit or a
“less heavenly city,” but space
rung in gunshots' echo; and
disappeared across all that
geography

*he knew it wouldn't change anything;
for her and himself, he was ancient history,
a surrender to the present—long before any
sorrow, the pure terror of space, outside
time, future, or nostalgia, the devouring
space always comes; the ghosts there,
that feed on the gouged-out eyes of men*

against Hanrahan,
the press room's
grim humor:

“the Panthers were
shooting in the wrong
direction—namely,
at themselves”

Epitaph #2—

half-hearted Pentecost gone
to seed in a horn player's
mouth—breath in perfect
chaos; cool against it, snares
tinker and clop, spill into
endless West Side

The Town Hall Concert was quickly classified as a particularly low point in the Mingus mythology, and an abject failure, two engravers continuing to work on the scores as the curtain was raised. Approaching midnight the bassist apologized to the audience. But while a few musicians were already packing their instruments, others were not content to let the show die so easily. Though their riffs were finally shut down by two stagehands, who, with the audience rising to boo, pulled the curtains quickly closed.

but Dolphy's sax
continued, stretched
against the curtain,
the microscope
turned on
itself

the engravers' work?

—a different kind of blues
against bone,
against glass

(on *or* against space

the myth of
the emptied polis,
the emptying a
myth it-
self

We did our autopsy course, our pathology course, at the County morgue. That was one of my first exposures to the almost brutal aspects of medicine. A couple of my classmates from medical school hated medicine once they got into it; whenever these guys would get a John Doe who couldn't be made conscious, they would cut all the identifying bands off, take off the hospital gown, wrap them in a sheet, and take them to the back door. Then those patients would be found by security and they'd get readmitted to someone else.

(on *or* against
anonymity)

Fred Hampton sd, “I
may be a
pretty big
mother, but I can’t
eat no seven
hundred and ten
ice cream bars”

*behind the tracks, you can hear
the songbirds that he demanded be
kept in the studio throughout the
recording process, though the sound
of running water is accidental—*

and the same with melody
as shrine; “he used
such ghosts himself,”
nested them in
transitory song (the
only place *worth*
being;

or breath *against* space

Bill sd,

“rather than just
one guy blowing,
followed by another, I
want my work to sing—

but make a sound, not a chord”

horn played into a corner,
and the reed's texture the only
real thing moving across that
silence

(how breath takes space

(concerning Lucille Clifton)

*or short poems in open forms by a
minority poet—the temptation strong
to read her for political themes, sub-
ordinating the resonance of her voice
and the broad poetic heritage she draws
upon—there’s anger here, and grief
and pride and stoic affirmations of
life—but these poems also show wit
and outbreaks of lightheartedness here
and there a touch of mystical insight
that suggest other than western sources*

“jazz history of a
different sort,
studied
at close quarters”

the microscope
turned on “the biggest,
most intense, brutal and
complicated game in the
world” (how it
gets fed and clothed and
wounds) *the method
of control, its economics
and waste*

(or “your soil’s a lie”

not memory, but con-
stant, immediate nostalgia;
not the polis “but these poems...”

“the blood
of books
as well as
their readers—
that fierce
nest a
shrine, that
blood lifted
its meanness
and anonymity”²

² from Richard Stern’s “The Books in Fred Hampton’s Apt.”
(New York: Dutton, 1973; pp. 70-2).

(again, the microscope turned on itself

to me, it must've been summer—
if I could remember “sultry” (my
grandma always said “sultry” like
it was some place)—my parents’
fear palpable against that space, the
screens in our Forest Park apt.

a new war (although to say that
the war “began”
is a lie) it resists memory—Ohio,
the Chinook landing on the other
side of the orchard, the war

as close as the fires burning
on Madison (my first geography, a
series of closed doors, voices behind
them)

medics hopping down, bearing
stretchers into a vibrating Ohio; neighbor
woman, another intern’s wife, their
son in her arms, apples underfoot

(geography as a line drawn thru memory

(Jane Addams on “West Side”)

*between Halsted and the
river live about 10,000
Italians and one man—
still living in his farm-
house with his goat*

history in place, at County: candy-coated medicines and in 1937, Cook County's first blood bank; its AIDS ward five decades later—George Miller, custodian in the anatomy labs at the Illinois College of Medicine, lived his life on baloney sandwiches, then left a small fortune to the medical school—and Dr. Bruno Epstein, stabbed to death by a patient in 1956—

DIED WHILE SERVING
THE SICK ON WARD 24

“America remains an
undiscovered country—
moments of confrontation
where we meet as
absolute strangers, a
tradition of forgetfulness,
of denying the past, not
knowing marvelous from
mundane and banal,
nor who we are”

“and Algonquins kept adolescent boys
stoned to the gills on Datura for twenty-plus
days until they were said to forget all of
their past lives and were now ready for a
new beginning as a man”

Goodbye, Pork Pie Hat—

not an “indigo mood,” but
reed enveloped by the lip,
breath tight against the
sound, homage to swing
and all that goes with it; *is*
the sax a man’s or woman’s
voice? the phrasing not
tentative, but controlled—
not mournful, but full of
the spit of memory; it
flutters in gloria
for sounds displaced,
plucked and recalled

a proposed set of journeys—
Mississippi, Memphis, points
between; dog ridden from
Clarksdale or Delta train (*to
make farewells that vanish
with us*) not a space
of wandering or religion
in short pants, but howling
against a century of displace-
ment—Central, a border with
rumors standing along it;
glimpsed thru green, town-
homes at Garfield ridiculous
against their vacancies

no

“war-torn block” or easy
checkpoint—a space between,
distanced from memory or
of its moment in your east-
bound transit, eyed from the
train—no space between
the fires set and the waters
opened

my song is glass

red block
blue block
white block against
snow

three-year old
feet in patient
ascent of steps to
a two-bedroom apt
over Harlem Ave

anatomy textbook
red Bic pen and
Ed Sullivan the
black and white
explosion of a
used RCA tele-
vision

metacarpals
and humerus become
children's playthings

or was it a pathology
textbook? my red ink
working hard against
it—*can you read thru*
the page's slick surface?
the scalpel is not a time
signature; music's flight
from any *here*

(the Mayor moving over
all this in a helicopter)

but why as elegy and not
a phenomenology of
riot?

is violence ever
transitory?—

the traumaed body dropped
from the car, the battered
child (you saw this, but
never spoke of it)—healing
never a surface repair in
your terms (treating not
the symptoms, but the
“disease itself”)

“you’ve
bought the land, but
you’ll have trouble to
settle it”

Mingus’ journey,
trombone in hand, across
Watts

thru Bellevue
thru West Side itself—

trade him the microscope;
you take the horn awhile

on the question of whether
“Goodbye, Pork Pie Hat” is
pastoral—it’s all elegy in
America, though what tired
goodbye we’re saying is
unknown; Mingus sd, “oh,
don’t play that shit in my
band, man!” improvisation
on the last breath, *all things
alive*, even the metal taste of
water at glass’ bottom or

your eye against concrete-
scape, the Harlem KISS ‘N RIDE,
Blue Line into West Side—
city reimagined as a cadaver,
all that anatomy in your head,
eye following the nerve strands
and tendons to the crooners
played overnight on WGN—
or Decatur’s Fri. aft. biology
labs (ADM pumping across
town) that dimwit Gage,
hand cocked to his ear (no
way of hearing West Side);
not your city, but point of the
eye’s transit, succession of
histories taken, open wounds

(beneath, George Miller in his patient work

a question of anatomy or
pathology in the end? *you*
are longitude & latitude and
the eye is now the problem

“didn’t I see you at church?”
or “didn’t I hear you at the
riot?” *nothing develops,*
but things arrive late or
early, a blues running
thru it, trains more or less
on time

and Mingus’ fingers
on the strings; “the musician
is in the best position to say:
I hate the faculty of memory”

a floating music

not a
difference between the
temporal & ephemeral, but
“the polis dissolving in two
modes of temporality” your
eye against it, an observed
grief; your mother come
across the face of an old
enemy in the funny papers

no vector for grief, but
memory’s locale the eye’s
music and occasion; your
ear pressed against the three
A.M. transistor, city dissolving
within it

we warehouse our grief,
attempt to displace it; not
waters, but lake-bottom
light—white buttons
clicking brass—and
breath

forget the transit,
nor is it a matter of trans-
lating space—it's where
we put our grief—it takes
breath to grasp loss it
displaces us; the dead
call it for what it is—
do we remember how
to be in place? memory
on *or against* space? I
gather words—

you measure the town
not in miles but decades;
geography thru microscope,
Damen to Ogden—not a

cool, red modern
but a blue drag—
bass walloping,
voice against
it

(can you read West Side time?)

borrowed, a re-
possessed micro-
scope, a dead
man's strings

goodbye, Lester Young
goodbye, all our parents—
which ones real? the ones
blessing the beach or the
itinerant healers working
out of their car trunks?

goodbye, Kansas City
goodbye, all-night drives
and “stopping only for
coffee”

goodbye to that
America (“all cyber-
geography, now”) good-
bye to the roads and maps
of roads and greasy spoons
along roads, deadpanned
colors against frozen sunset,
time against the speedometer

but not a monolithic West
Side lit by a hospital façade

America defined as much
by Satchel's highway as
Huck's raft or Lindy's
beater, its dust stung with
forgetting

and Robert

*Oppenheimer always
favored a pork pie hat
on his walks of Trinity—*

the territory never quite
dissolves in the Saturday
night lights and Jordan
taking Isiah to the hoop

never memory
without crossing

never space
without breath

it's hard to imagine your voice
now against the "indifferent space
of the surveyor"—

the bone-
gatherer in his patient work;
cigarette breaks, fifteen minutes
for lunch (not measured in time,
but in students' shouts across
that chili parlor lunchroom)
or a classmate met along the
train platform

your quiet,
nervous passage of

West Side
(never in time)

or the body rethought
not as a traumaed space,
but time itself

(Mingus counts it off

Fred Hampton's body as a
series of violent percus-
sions;

“clandestine in
motionless flight,” the
Panthers inhabiting that
grief space: one-way
bullet notches, voice-
less shouts under
night, and sleep dis-
integrating

(West Side
as an old man's last laugh,
as territory worth blood—
the memory spoken again-
st it

NOTES ON “THE BONEGATHERER’S” COLLECTIVE VOICES

“The Bonegatherer” includes the voices in the oral histories of Cook County Hospital collected by Sydney Lewis in *Hospital* (New York: New Press, 1994) and John Raffensperger’s *The Old Lady on Harrison Street* (New York: Lang, 1997). Passages from “Prairie Fire,” taken from *Sing a Battle Song: The Revolutionary Poetry, Statements, and Communiqués of the Weather Underground 1970-1974* edited by Bernadine Dohrn, Bill Ayers, and Jeff Jones (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2006) also appear in the poem.

Other voices who drift into the narrative are drawn from Sterling Plump’s *Blues Narratives* (Chicago: Tia Chucha, 1999), Ralph Ellison’s “Twentieth Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity” from *Shadow and Act* (1953; New York: Vintage, 1995), Michel Houellebecq’s *The Possibility of an Island* (Gavin Bowd trans.; New York: Vintage, 2007), Richard Stern’s “The Books in Fred Hampton’s Apartment” (New York: Dutton, 1973), and Martin Williams’ *The Jazz Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). Also hear Brian Priestly’s liner notes to *Charles Mingus: The Complete Town Hall Concert* (Blue Note, 1962).

On the Chicago history, see Adam Cohen and Elizabeth Taylor’s *An American Pharaoh* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2000) and Mike Royko’s *Boss* (New York: Dutton, 1971).

Author Bio:

Garin Cycholl's other books include *Blue Mound to 161*, *Nightbirds*, *Rafetown Georgics*, and *Hostile Witness*. Since 2002, he has been a member of the Jimmy Wynn Fiction Collaborative.

Again returning to the Illinois geographies "where the map becomes a bent poem," *The Bonegatherer* explores Chicago's West Side and Cook County Hospital, where his father worked as a medical student during the middle 1960's.

Books/E-Books Available from Moria Books

- Jordan Stempleman's *Their Fields* (2005)
Donna Kuhn's *Not Having an Idea* (2005)
Eileen R. Tabios's *Post Bling Bling* (2005)
William Allegrezza's *Covering Over* (2005)
Anny Ballardini's *Opening and Closing Numbers* (2005)
Garin Cycholl's *Nightbirds* (2006)
Lars Palm's *Mindfulness* (2006)
Mark Young's *from Series Magritte* (2006)
Francis Raven's *Cooking with Organizational Structures* (2006)
Raymond Bianchi's *American Master* (2006)
Clayton Couch's *Letters of Resignation* (2006)
Thomas Fink's *No Appointment Necessary* (2006)
Catherine Daly's *Paper Craft* (2006)
Amy Trussell's *Meteorite Dealers* (2007)
Charles A. Perrone's *Six Seven* (2008)
Charles Freeland's *Furiant, Not Polka* (2008)
Mark Young's *More from Series Magritte* (2009)
Ed Baker's *Goodnight* (2009)
David Huntsperger's *Postindustrial Folktales* (2010)
rob mclennan's *Kate Street* (2011)
Garin Cycholl's *The Bonegatherer* (2011)
Gautam Verma's *The Opacity Of Frosted Glass* (2011)

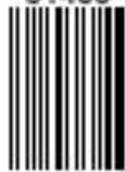
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The Bonegatherer offers an eye on the history of Chicago's West Side, one told through the voices of the Cook County Hospital Emergency Room. Among these voices is the experience of the author's father, who as a medical student in the mid-1960's, worked at the "Old Lady on Harrison." Joining Cycholl's previous work in *Blue Mound to 161* and *Hostile Witness*, this poem is a displaced America, "SPACE writ large."

Praise for The Bonegatherer

An inimitable drive westward—from both the hub of the continent and Blue Line of the "L"—infuses Garin Cycholl's lyrical ethnographies. This isn't Sandburg's map of Chi-town, but a brand new GPS where the Cook County Hospital, WGN, and OK Used Cars transform into post-industrial transit stops that piercingly articulate "the myth of/the emptied polis."

—Mark Nowak

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