

CLOCK

radio

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#3

A R E N A
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Furniture

When I tell Crazy Joe that I won't go and live in his big house in Rosemead with him, he offers to get me some furniture for my apartment instead. Robert puts his arm around me and starts glaring at Crazy Joe. Crazy Joe is Robert's grandfather and he thinks it's hilarious but Robert is only fourteen and he's not laughing. Crazy Joe shrugs, winks at me again, and goes into Delia's apartment. Inside, Carlos stops playing his guitar. Robert and I stay out on the stoop. We're keeping an eye on Fato and Skinnyo, Delia and Carlos' two year old twins. They're floating beer can pull tabs in the gutter. Frankie is still in the alley with his friends. Robert and I can smell the joint that Carlos and Crazy Joe are smoking in the living room. Through the window of the other front apartment, we can hear Jerome and Fred making up. Robert and I look at each other and start laughing. Jerome and Fred always end their fights and make up before dinner because we always eat in their apartment. Delia's apartment is too crowded.

I live upstairs. We never eat in my apartment because there's no table in it. There's no furniture in my apartment except a mattress. The mattress was Sonia's. She's Delia's daughter from the same father as Robert and Frankie but she ran away from home before I moved into the building. Jerome and Fred gave me some sheets from the Bonaventure Hotel. They also gave me some towels from the Bonaventure Hotel. Jerome and Fred managed to carry home a lot of stuff from the Bonaventure Hotel before they got fired from their security jobs there. Jerome says they got fired because he's black and Fred's white. Fred says they got fired for being gay. Anyway, they never got caught for all the stuff they brought home. Now they just sell drugs for their food money. Their rent is free since they manage the building. Maybe they get some money from unemployment.

MIRA-LANI PERLMAN

Carlos and Delia live on welfare money that Delia gets for the kids and Carlos sometimes goes out with another guy and steals batteries. He got caught for that but that was before I moved into the building. I work at the movie theatre. Robert usually walks over to the theatre at eleven so he can walk me home. He thinks he's protecting me from the neighborhood.

Carlos walks out to tell us that dinner's ready. He goes over to where the twins are playing. He takes one up in each arm. Fato is only a little bigger than Skinnyo and they're both pretty small. He says, "They shouldn't be playing with that stuff. It's dangerous." Robert says, "We were watching."

I go inside to help Fred set the table. Robert goes to get Frankie.

Robert comes to the theatre a half-hour early. I give him a quarter from the cash register so he can play the pinball machine in the lobby while I finish cleaning the popcorn bin and counting the candy. He's good. The quarter lasts him the whole half-hour.

When we're walking, Robert puts his arm around me. I let him. Then he reaches around further. I push his hand away. I say, "That's enough Robert. It's not funny." He stops walking and shoves his hands in his pockets. He's looking down at the sidewalk. I say, "Come on, you're only fourteen." He says, "So? You're only nineteen. Five years difference. My age is closer than Crazy Joe's." I say, "Fine. I don't let Crazy Joe do that either."

When Robert and I get back to the building, everyone is in Jerome and Fred's apartment. Delia is rocking back and forth on the sofa. The fat on her arms is shaking. Carlos is sitting next to her. Holding her hand. He's sort of crying too. Crazy Joe is standing behind the sofa. He's rubbing Delia's shoulder with one hand and drinking a beer with the other. Fred is rolling a joint and Jerome

MIRA-LANI PERLMAN

is yelling at someone on the phone. When Delia sees Robert, she kind of groans and reaches for him. Robert goes over and she grabs him to her. I say, "What happened?" Fred finishes licking the joint closed and says, "Frankie and the babies are gone. They came and took them." Robert is stroking Delia's forehead and saying, "It's okay." I say, "What are you talking about? Who took them? Where?" Fred passes the joint to Carlos and tells me to shut up. I'm yelling and everyone wants to hear what Jerome's doing on the phone.

"Look man. Little Miss Sonia is full of shit. You pick her up tricking, naturally she gives you some shit about mamma's boyfriend. He was in jail at the time man. How's he supposed to mess with her when he's in jail? And what about the kids man? It's our constitutional right to be informed as to the whereabouts of the kids man. Shit."

Jerome hangs up the phone. "He hung up. The mother fucker hung up." Crazy Joe walks across the room and hands Jerome the joint. I say, "What happened?"

Crazy Joe hands me the new joint. I say, "Why didn't they just take Carlos if he was supposed to be the problem?" Fred says, "He was in jail!" I say, "Did they have any papers? Delia, did they show you any papers?" Fred says, "They didn't show her any papers! They just walked into the apartment and Delia turned over Frankie and the babies!" Jerome puts his hand on Fred's thigh. "Don't be like that, man. She couldn't help it. They had the guns." Fred says, "Be like what! What did I do now! Be like what!" I say, "Let me call."

Jerome says the guy told me because of the whiteness in my voice. Fred says the guy told me because I was flirting with him on the phone. Anyway, he told me that they're holding the kids

at MacLaren Hall. Ten year old Frankie and the two year old babies are spending the night at Juvenile Hall. We can't do anything until tomorrow.

Delia is still hugging Robert and rocking back and forth on the sofa. Robert is still stroking her forehead and saying, "It's okay. It's okay." Carlos picks up his guitar and smashes it against the coffee table. Fred finishes rolling another joint and hands it to Jerome. I say, "I can't believe this. I just can't believe this." Crazy Joe says, "Come on everybody. Let's go get something to eat."

When we get back from Denny's, Delia wants Robert to stay up in my apartment. She's afraid they're going to come back for him. I say, "Fine." Crazy Joe wants to know if he can stay up in my apartment too. Everyone starts laughing except Robert.

Robert is only fourteen years old and there's only the one mattress. Sonia's. We get under the sheets from the Bonaventure Hotel and I turn towards the wall so my back's towards him. Robert reaches around and puts his hand on my stomach. I let him. Then he reaches down further. I say, "Robert don't. Robert. Don't." He's stroking me and saying, "It's okay. They only took the kids. It's okay." I'm rocking back and forth, under him, on the mattress. Robert is still saying, "It's okay. They only took the kids. It's okay."

I let him.

CHARLES BUKOWSKI

a gentle, alcoholic night

I told Linda I was going to come up here and
write
but I've stared at this machine
15 minutes while
drinking wine and smoking.

but there is a very fine symphony on the
radio
and I don't feel too badly about not
producing.
this could be a good time to answer those
letters from those people who tell me of their
agonies
but I did that several nights ago,
I got 5 or 6 of them with
one shot.

there is a writer I know, he's a very
good one but all he writes about is
writing, he writes about writing
poems.
well, he will write, I have written ten
poems today.
or he will write, I haven't written a
poem in 3 months.
or he will write that all his poems are
coming back
or he will write that all his poems have
been accepted.

this poem is something like his: talking
about it.
it's relaxing, you can just go on and say things
like—
I went for a walk with a poem
today.
or—

I went to the track today with a poem
and we had some arguments over our selections
but anyhow we
both lost.

or—

I drank today but my poem(s) smoked
pot.

anyhow, Linda now hears the typer going
and probably thinks that I am
hammering out great stuff.
actually, I came up here to drink
great stuff.

right, poem?

BRIAN C. CLARK

This One's Masterpiece: Notification Of

after reading that some poet
has published and copyrighted
a work consisting of a ream
of unwrapped typing paper

I thought:

what is there left to prove
except your own idiocy?

so will publish reams
of unwrapped nothingness*
and give over to public domain.
enjoy: is masterpiece.

*available everywhere

Banana Politics

It was during the air war against sigatoka, over the lush jungles of Central America, that I first learned about the intrigues of banana politics.

I was flying low and alone in my unarmed, twin-casket, swing-wing Messerschmitt, spraying lethal chemicals and dodging phalanxes of hostile grasshoppers, when suddenly a giant banana appeared on the horizon, its green skin like a brush stroke against the clear sky, and a deep, male voice boomed: "Help! We are all brothers under the skin. Save me!"

The tropical sun can play strange tricks on a man, so I quickly elevated, invoked a spell I had learned from a United Fruit Co. guru, made a 360 degree turn, and swooped down again from a different angle to see if the experience would repeat itself.

This time a great tarantula appeared on the horizon, its furry legs hanging down like streamers from the sun, and a high-pitched, unmistakably feminine voice said: "Yanqui, go home. Take your money and run."

The fact was that I had been internationally recruited to defend a friendly authoritarian government against subversion by an Asian communist regime that was trying to destroy the banana production of Central America in order to prevent people from getting high on smoking banana skins. Bananas were becoming competitive with poppies, it seemed.

I was being paid well, but I did not consider myself a mercenary since I was completely apolitical, as well as asexual. As a perennial existential bombardier in search of new targets, I had been having difficulty feeding my fantasies, shedding identities, and keeping up with installment payments on my underground shelter. Thus, when an IMP representative (International Monetary Predators) approached me and asked if I would like to earn some quick cash fighting sigatoka, I

felt it was my patriotic duty to accept. I thought he was speaking about a rebel Marxist political movement.

Actually, sigatoka is a soil disease capable of destroying an entire banana crop. The name comes from an 11th-century Oriental despot who had a liking for bananas, and once tried to cross the Pacific in a canoe made of banana skins. More recently, the term became a code name for a Vietnamese guerilla leader in the war against rice substitutes.

When I returned to the airport that day and tried to tell the natives about my experience, they became very frightened. They referred me to my flight kit, which contained a manual translated from the Quechuan, entitled Fear of Flying. But the manual was filled with obscenities, and I was too embarrassed to read it.

Then, an Indian boy with 12 toes gave me an amulet in the shape of a phallus to guard against evil spirits, and the local parish priest gave me an immaculate deodorant spray used to prevent tropical hallucinations and to neutralize sacriligious olfactories.

The air traffic controller, who was on strike, advised me to visit a masseuse in Quito who treated sexual dysfunctions. Unfortunately, none of those remedies worked. I was still confused about whether to continue.

And so, as during other critical periods in my life, I crawled into my orgone energy box and emerged with these verisimilitudes:

1. Hallucinations are like vaccinations: they protect you from mortality.
2. Once you start a job, you should finish it, more or less.
3. To understand banana politics, you must solve the following riddle, which drove Nietzsche mad: Warum ist die Banana krumm?

Suddenly the chime on my digital wrist watch went off, and I knew I had to act.

I reloaded my twin-casket, swing-wing, Dionysian air buggy with lethal chemicals and filled my pock-

PHILLIP CORWIN

ets with sugar-coated gumdrops. This time I took a co-pilot with me, named Mother's Day. She was a beautiful young mestizo who had won international recognition by devising extreme goals for which children could compete in order to satisfy their parents' ambitions.

We climbed into the sky as though it were ours and swept down over the diseased soil and sprayed mercilessly. Once again, an enormous green banana swelled on the horizon and beamed messages in our direction. But we ignored him. And, once again, a gigantic tarantula spread her furry legs in all directions, virtually swallowing the sun and emitting warning signals, but we ignored her too.

I popped a gumdrop.

Mother's Day was wild with excitement.

"What are we doing here?" she asked, wild with excitement.

"Do you mean, why are we doing what we are doing here, or, why are we here at all?" I asked. I am very particular about language, especially when it is used for communication.

"Exactly," she said. Her hand groped instinctively for the joystick.

"We are doing what has to be done and what we have been paid to do," I said.

"Then why are you so frightened?"

"Because I am not a banana," I said.

"Nor am I a tarantula," she said, caressing the joystick.

"You don't understand. One should not risk one's life for what one is not," I said.

She laughed and laughed and laughed. She was having a wonderful time. A swarm of locusts arrayed itself playfully off to the left.

Mother's Day continued to play with the joystick. I sprayed again and again. I felt like a killer, but I was enjoying it tremendously. I began to compose verses about dealing death to sigatoka. ("No soil will foil what toil has grown.

Die, sigatoka! The yellow skin will do you in, say-eth the djinn. Die, sigatoka!")

We cruised above the tree tops and the outstretched arms of the banana bushes. I knew my mission was either important or irrelevant. If the banana crop could be saved, the Government would remain in power. But if sigatoka were victorious, then foreign trade with foreigners would suffer, inflation would inflate, blood would run in the cowpaths, and the Government would fall.

I sprayed and sprayed. Mother's Day manipulated the joystick vigorously. I swore an oath to do something historical one day. Legions of locusts fell before my mighty sweeps.

The soil rose up in tribute. Mother's Day said she loved me. I could taste success, and it was sweeter than I had ever imagined it could be, once it was peeled.

I flew several missions that day. And each time I landed for refueling and a new supply of gumdrops, the banana growers shouted encouragement and offered sacrifices—goats and pigs and political critics. As a special tribute, the President of the Republic presented me with a key to the Amazon jungle.

Once it was clear that I had won the battle and conquered sigatoka, my old friend the air traffic controller—who was still on strike and had retrained himself as a religious architect—templed a glorious erection in my honor, thereby consecrating my victory.

Ernest Hemingway dedicated a posthumous bullfighter to me.

Months later, when a new banana crop burst forth and soil tests showed no sign of sigatoka, the ruling military junta got high on banana skins and named a cocaine field after me.

Today, the Republic's economy is stable once more, torture has regained its prominence in internal affairs, censorship of the press has been restored, and women have been ordered to cover their heads, eyes, ears, torsos, legs, and fingernails. Banana

PHILLIP CORWIN

poachers are hanged by the toes until bitten by a tarantula, or they are quartered and buried under whipped cream and crushed nuts.

As for my own fortunes, of course I did not work for nothing, and with the money I earned I built myself a comfortable, 8-bedroom tree house in southern California, with a private jungle, a meditation plantation, and an orgone energy box for each third day of the lunar cycle.

I have retired from mercenary activity completely, and am considering a career in politics. As I told Mother's Day recently—she lives with me now—I know what I know what I know, and what I know is bananas.

"Exactly," she said.

IVAN ARGÜELLES

woodrow wilson preaching from the bible

in the vague hills of justice
I see the lights go suddenly out
history is made of windows walls and patches of sky
women are at the source of all ruin
their little deaths concern me
their nostalgia for the preterite sea
their inability to dress without making men violent
their need for radiophonic communication
in their hair I see the lights go suddenly out
in their faces I perceive suspicion
the darkening distance which in the end
is merely statistical
america land of divorce
we must learn to float at a level
five thousand metres higher than sentiment
the law is an animal whose sleep

it is for us to decipher
I see our children going forth
with metaphysical confusions
sounding the remote prairie for a short circuit
to the east
I see that mooses who invented music
and the cold practice of reason
has gone astray with bell-jars of alcohol
his life wasted in a tenement that
has no protection from gas and ice
I see that other nations have earned their
servitude
but that ours galvanized by the substances
of an electronic apothecary
has only grown blind
guided by tight admirals and
lobotomized generals whose government
is sewage treatment and coca cola
in the vague hills of justice
I see the demeaned wives of senators
turning to automobiles for help
I see the landscape shaved into vast golf-courses
upon which knickered gangsters grovel
I see the industry of money
grown so out of hand that even death
whose white munitions consume the air
has lost its distinction beside it
I hear words like therapy and beauty
resonate like cannons
levelling the precipitous variations of my mind
until the opposite horizons are joined
I see women automatically receiving pleasure
in a thousand simultaneous mirrors
patches of sky in their eyes
windows where their breasts should be
walls in place of their dreams
america land of divorce
I am a loaded revolver
an advertisement for mammon
a warning to the angels that even
the kingdom of heaven is not exempt
from the gradual corruption of matter

Census

She coils the ringing telephone around her legs like a boa constrictor, her new husband out in the garage power lifting, can't pronounce her name, calls her toots and babe, she takes him to tea parties and guests think it's charming how he picks her up suddenly and carries her out the door. He carries her like an envelope to stamp with his cock, telling her to deep throat it, but that was a movie she'd missed, she remembers she was carbon-dating at the time.

"Who are you? The U.S. Census Bureau? We're all Americans here and we speak English in our home."

She tries to imagine how she'd feel if she spent her life counting people instead of molecules, names she doesn't always remember though she's reminded again and again. It's not her memory failing her, so many different people come in and pretend to be her daughter, her sister, her friends, but her husband is unmistakable, she knows him from his height, so tall she had carpenters alter the doorways. His name? He calls himself Rusty but if he really were she'd be dead from tetanus by now. His given name? Maybe Russell, Clyde, Chester, or Roland, how can she remember such things? Rusty's real name is the naked body he hides in his raincoat, and it doesn't thrill him to expose himself to her. She realizes that exhibitionists are often sexually passive, but Rusty is exceptional in that he gave up exhibitionism early in life, learned to speak English but is not understood.

Linda? Louise? Lydia? Lynn? What did she name her daughter? She calls a whole string of names, makes up a few, some of the names are of vegetables. Now what does her daughter have to do with vegetables? Comatose, she's lying prone, eating from tubes in her arm, vegetarian, she's stir-frying watercress, turnips, or cauliflower. She hates

the smell of kitchens and hospitals. Rusty eats a ten egg omelette for dinner, she looked for weeks finding a pan big enough to cook it in. She won't cook dinner till she irons her dresses. She no longer trusts the hired help, tags the hot iron with a damp finger, the steam hisses the way she does when Rusty's taken her for the fifth time in one night and she can't scream any more. Years ago, it was her hair she ironed and sent her blouses to Imperial Laundry, returning so starchy they could talk. She puts on a record, hears the singer sing "good morning heartache" and wonders why someone would be so polite to a heartache. Better to get an EKG than try to be polite. Heartache, she rolls the word over her tongue and remembers how Rusty takes her standing against the wall, her breasts not large enough to protect her heart and she feels the pounding from her throat to her fingertips, but she gasps too much to say good morning.

The Census Taker on the telephone is tired of waiting, but it takes time to remember a name. She mostly remembers names while she showers in bed, bringing the garden hose to the bedroom. It saves time, sleeping and showering at the same time, she wants to write an article for Good Housekeeping, worried about the people who still stumble around in the morning looking for the bathroom and never think of showering in bed.

"Call me Meredith. My occupation, inventor."

Inventing always suited her, she has the scientific background, lies awake watching atoms split up like couples, mushroom clouds above her head, losing her hair to radiation is a frightening thought. No, it was a dream, or else she's sitting here about to find test patterns on the television, all the programmers dead.

Head of household? She knows she has the money, but can't count it. In England and Canada where the money is full of colors, she picks the sums according to how they match her dress. But someone else

picks her dresses now, she doesn't know the names of the designers, dress styles keep changing but she's had the same skin for fifty-two years. She thinks it's remarkable that her skin still clings to her, fits her contours better than Rusty does, and doesn't carry her out the door when she wants to sip tea.

"Rusty's occupation? He occupies the Northwest corner of my kitchen table at 8:00 a.m., the Southeast corner of my dining room table at 1:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m., my garage between the hours of 8:30 p.m. and 10:00 p.m., the space in front of my television set all day Saturday and Sunday, and my cunt for most of the hours between meals and at night. In that sense, he most certainly is the head of the household."

She's becoming impatient, her daughter is good at chasing these people away, but she can't find her. She could drive to the hospital or the natural foods restaurant looking for her, but she doesn't drive and there's been no chauffeur for years. She doesn't know how long she's stayed in the house, she loses track of her social calendar, Rusty drags her along to football games, she's lost several pairs of shoes in stadiums, he carries her to the car, as she refuses to walk in her bare feet. She enjoys being carried away, but feels that horseless carriages are unsightly and require too much steel for their manufacture and the quality of the steel isn't what it was years ago. When she sleeps on the roof of the car, she leaves her indentation, for a new paragraph, hoping Rusty won't steal her pen while she's writing. He doesn't read so she writes down numerous complaints about him. He does skim the sports pages of the newspaper, but it's like skimming skim milk, nothing left to churn and make butter with.

"Married? To Rusty, a year, maybe two. Before that I married at twenty-eight, a mistake, but I

kept busy teaching and the years rolled on by, my daughter born a few years before my twin sons who died at birth."

She keeps the sons' ashes on the coffee table, thinking they might be reconstituted, she opens the urns and adds distilled water, stirs them like cake batter, talks to them. She can't reconstitute their bodies yet, but discovers that in nineteen years they've grown more sophisticated and refuse to answer most of her questions, she respects their silence, that they don't want to tell their mother everything, the water evaporates and they cling to the edges of the urns. She can't talk to her first husband, his will instructed that he be buried, she doesn't want to go to the cemetery and speak to a mausoleum, she would have to speak loudly for the sound to carry through the stone, causing nodes to form on her vocal cords.

"You can subtract my first husband from your list, one less citizen in the U.S."

And now Rusty lives here, she met him at a fund raising dinner for the semi-professional football team he coached, she was feeling generous that night, but Rusty wanted to repay her by marrying her and showing her the only generosity he knows, in bed, on the floor, against the wall, in the car, in the garden, in her great grandmother's rosewood rocking chair, on the kitchen counters, and sometimes in other people's houses. When he finds cocktail parties unstimulating he drags her to a patio or a guest room, she always brings an extra dress, discarding the wrinkled one when Rusty finishes with her, she screams constantly what with Rusty rock hard inside her for an hour or more, she returns and notices the guests don't talk to her and when she tries to say their names, she realizes she's lost her voice from screaming. Rusty sometimes intervenes for her, telling them about her many inventions, how finally after years

of teaching, she has time for these pursuits. She nods and smiles but all the guests move away from her and only her shadow on the wall sees her, it leans back, afraid. She's never fully understood the properties of light, but does believe that light behaves according to the particle theories and that waves pertain only to oceans, hairstyles, and relationships, as Rusty makes waves when she's not ready to go when he is, she starts to feel like she's floating when he carries her, but it's her shadow anchoring her to the ground, she tries to convert herself to oxygen or helium. Rusty's sometimes mistaken for a servant but she proudly introduces him as her new husband, he bows as he was taught in grade school and she remembers she had to curtsy in school, fight with the boys who tried to copy off her homework and tests but it was she who lived on scholarships for years, marriage one of them.

"His age? I think he lies about it, maybe around thirty. He knows how old I am and doesn't seem to mind. Says my face has character but I know he's heard that line somewhere."

She prefers that he not talk at all, otherwise he loses track of time and the weight of him on top of her becomes unbearable after several hours. Unbearable as the luncheons with the ladies of the golf club where Rusty piles four plates full of shrimp salad and the ladies suggest that perhaps Rusty is not getting an adequate breakfast. He says, yes, he is, he's usually slurping from Meredith's cunt in the morning, but he calls her toots instead of Meredith. She waits for the ladies to gasp and faint, but they laugh and say that those tropical fruits are never very filling anyway. That's why she serves meat, she's been cooking a roast for six days without turning on the oven. A relatively low amount of heat is generated by the oven light, but with the passing of several days, she hopes it will pro-

duce changes in the molecular structure of the meat. Even Rusty doesn't ask questions as long as she prepares his ten egg omelette. He likes to watch her cooking, he gets on the floor and looks up her dress, sometimes reaching for a taste as if swiping frosting from a cake. She's stepping on him in her spike heels and he pours a pot of spinach over her. Fortunately, it's another one of her experiments and isn't hot enough to scald her, the green covering the grey in her hair, making her too heavy to lift herself from the floor, she lies there for days, Rusty with her most of the time, afraid she might be dying, holding her hand, trying to pronounce her name.

LYN LIFSHIN

Men and Taxes

when you think
of what they
make, drive you
to do, it
makes you
wish you
had no
interest

The Burden

A woman gives birth to a pineapple...

"Let's eat the succulent little thing as soon as we get home from the hospital," says the husband to his wife.

"How dare you even think of such a thing," says the wife. "Just because our pineapple is a bit different than a regular baby does not mean that we can take advantage of it. We must learn to love and care for it just as any other parents learn to love and care for their child!"

"Yes, but in less than a week from now our child will begin to go rotten, and then we will never know any of the fruits of our labor!" says the husband emphatically.

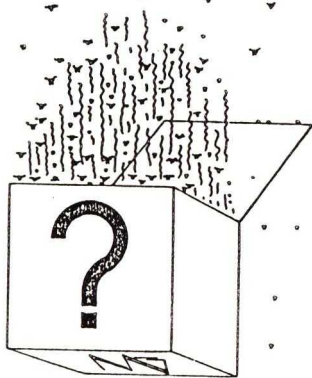
The wife slowly turns away from her husband and little pineapple as she thinks about what she must do.

Immediately, the husband picks up the pineapple and runs out the door.

In their kitchen at home, he has already devoured half of it when his wife comes staggering into the room. She pulls out a gun, and before he has a chance to defend himself, she fires three shots, killing him instantly.

With only half of the pineapple still left on the table, she gently picks it up and caresses it in her arms, as she wonders what the future will bring.

TEN
MILLION
FLIES
CAN'T BE WRONG



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