

# Squirrels with Knives



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# They've got knives

Fat squirrels lined up  
on the edge of the deck  
like vultures on a fence  
They've all got knives  
and they are looking  
at  
the  
door  
~~

# Slow Flood

The slow flood  
of our basement  
probably started today  
as we pushed the snow  
off the drive  
and onto the lawns

~~

# Christmas, Toward Midnight

It is wandering toward midnight  
and yet, I am still awake

The presents have been opened  
The small piles put into bags  
and taken off to hidden troves  
The house is quiet  
and yet, I will not sleep

As if staying awake  
is an act of protection  
as if I am watching over  
those I love  
as they sleep

~~

# Running Hot and Cold

It is a warm period  
I throw my sweater  
carefully  
onto another chair

Knowing that soon  
the hot flash will end  
and I will be cold  
again  
~~

# Pandemic Christmas

We did the family zoom thing  
and laughed at the toddlers  
Tried to catch up  
drank too much coffee  
And signed off  
for the lunch  
we might have had  
Together  
~~

# What Do I Know

I know what I know  
but what do I know  
and what do I not

This is a good question  
and as I sit and think  
I believe I know very little  
I can read, write  
take photographs  
grind wood  
and a bit of budo

But for all that  
I find many who know more  
Perhaps that's it  
I can see

~~

# Fat Grey Squirrel

Fat grey squirrel  
peeks from the shed  
Doesn't fool me  
I see footprints  
in the snow  
~~

# The Main Stream

My son, my daughter  
the times you feel outside  
out of touch  
with the mainstream  
Rejoice  
Consider that the mainstream  
sweeps from beginning  
to end of the river  
Carrying all with it  
unconsidered, powerless  
Those you feel apart from  
are without thought,  
tranquilized  
Because they know  
They have been instructed  
and there is no need  
just move down that channel  
down that main stream  
and forget striking out  
for the bank

Strike out, my babies  
keep your head above the water  
move to the bank  
move to the streams  
away from the Main  
away from what "we know"  
and see  
See what others don't  
what others can't  
with their heads down  
Swept along heedless  
As if headless

Be the outsider  
do not wish  
to be blind  
to follow the river  
with your eyes shut  
Only those few  
who leave the mainstream  
can see the river

~~

# There Was Never Privacy

For 10,000 years  
the grannies have watched  
From over the fence  
and around the hut  
From down the street  
and up the hill

Today  
there are too many  
and not enough grannies  
today  
the grannies don't know us  
So we are watched  
by a thousand cameras  
~~

# The Waiting

I look out the front door  
but there are only bird tracks  
No Amazon packages

~~

# Fifteen Minutes

A few more years  
that's all I have  
to become famous  
a superstar  
to get my face  
on the cover of a magazine  
Just a few more years  
for that accident  
to happen

~~

# Some Bread

Some bread  
to feed the squirrels  
I love to see their footprints  
in the new snow  
on the deck  
I wonder where they think  
the bread comes from  
Do they know  
we put it there  
~~

## Popular With The Kids

I gotta rhyme fool and cool  
learn some signs  
I dunno, like wiggle my fingers  
or slap my own chest  
~~

# With It

How many cultural references  
are going to be garbage  
in twenty years  
Howdy Doody do  
who wore a coon skin hat  
and had a tiger in his tank  
~~

# She Wanted What?

I wasn't very bright  
as a youngster  
I wonder how many cues  
I missed  
How much  
I didn't get  
~~

# Winter Squirrels

Looking out the window  
to watch the squirrels  
eat the bread

Nobody there  
The lazy little cobs  
they're still asleep  
~~

## Richard Farina Wrote

Richard Farina wrote  
"this one is for Mimi"  
His wife asked him  
"who is the next one for"

Two days  
after the book was published  
he was dead  
I'm sure  
there is a deep life lesson  
somewhere in there  
~~

# Short Stories

Man, I hate short stories  
even more  
than I hate long poems

~~

# This Book

This book  
was owned by Tony Harris  
it says so  
inside the back cover  
And it's on my shelf  
because someone borrowed my book  
and lost it  
and gave me this one  
which is not the book  
he borrowed  
and his name was not  
Tony Harris

I have no idea  
who Tony Harris is  
or why he used  
a tiny green-blue  
blank customs slip  
for a bookmark

~~

# The Golden Age

Was there ever a time  
when poets did not look back  
to the golden age

Real poets that is  
the ones who write  
about the golden age

The past is where  
the fields are golden  
and the sheep are slow

So we wait a generation  
and this will be  
the golden age  
Made misty by memory

The age when we were young  
and the girls were pretty  
and the boys were strong  
and we could live forever

~~

# Christmas is Over

The tree is coming down  
and my little space heater  
isn't being very heaty  
and I don't have cookies  
or a box of chocolates  
to eat while I write

But I'm out of the way  
being non-irritating  
by being out of sight  
I have a coffee  
and a bit of quiet  
~~

# Mrs Moore's Fridge

The old lady is dead  
Mrs Moore  
who babysat us  
and had a fridge  
on her front porch  
Back in the days  
when you lost your house key  
and didn't notice  
for a month

She died when I was a kid  
And years later  
I asked my mother  
if I remembered a fridge  
on a front porch  
Yes, that was Mrs Moore  
next door  
She used to babysit you  
She died a long time ago  
~~

# Was Your Great Grandmother Nice?

Are you going to live forever my child?  
If so, behave yourself  
look to your reputation  
But, brief mortal  
if you are going to die  
then live

Hitch across the country  
get drunk in small town bars  
and fight out back  
because the locals  
think you were flirting  
with one of theirs

Work to eat  
and give that money away  
to someone who needs it more  
than you do

Go to school  
and stay there  
for as long as you can  
convince me to support you  
It will be longer than you think

Get your heart broken  
A lot  
Tell your stories  
they will keep you warm,  
better than a good reputation  
and money in the bank  
~~

# She Could Cut Me

She could cut me down  
with a word  
but she usually didn't bother  
She'd wait  
until I wasn't looking  
and throw me on my ass

~~

# Ready

It snowed today  
and I shovelled the drive  
just in case  
you dropped in

I made sure  
your space was clear  
and there was no ice  
on the walk

~~

# Nudes

My camera is ten years gone  
but my eyes  
still hold the longing  
to watch light  
cascade over flesh  
~~

## 3 Crore on Frontline

The memes I don't expect to understand  
but the news

"3 crore on frontline to get free vaccine"

I fear that my mind is going,  
if not already gone

This is not the first time  
But I remain hopeful that  
it's a cultural thing  
and I'm simply old  
rather than old and senile

~~

# They Revealed It

I blame the Catholic Church  
they dropped the latin mass  
I don't care if they had nobody  
who was interested in the church  
and latin  
It was a mistake

When the common folk  
lost the mystery  
but gained the words  
they could not help  
but to interpret those words  
~~

# Old Deaf Kitty

Old deaf kitty  
comes meowing  
around the corner  
Yes, there is someone  
here

Want to go out  
Yes, go keep the squirrels  
off the deck  
lazy fat things  
getting all up on your deck  
~~

# This Mirror

Here is a mirror  
it has returned you  
to yourself  
I pick it up  
and gaze deep  
hoping  
that it will return you  
to me

~~

# Pizza and Pop

Pizza and pop  
in a school lunchroom  
plastic chairs  
linoleum squares  
Another seminar  
but where?

~~

# It's Too Cold

It's too cold  
for the little fat furries  
and the apple cores  
and the bread crusts  
are piling up  
on the deck

Stay bundled  
in your nests  
you grey squirrels  
and you solitary reds  
get that nose  
tucked into that tail  
The food will be here  
when it warms up

~~

# Tear Me Up

Around her  
I always felt  
like a big sheet  
of wet paper

And she had such  
Big  
Boots  
~~

# Strip Me Down

Strip down to the moan  
she said  
because we've only got  
a few minutes

~~

# Hello?

Once more I reach for you  
I call  
expecting you to answer  
You must be upstairs  
or maybe outside

But thoughts of the door  
remind me  
that you are not here

~~

## In Bed

Lying on my back  
looking at the cracks  
in the ceiling  
I can see them all  
at once

There is nothing  
to block my view  
No lemon hair  
No gentle eyes  
or seeking lips  
~~

# Old Hickory

Hoist onto my shoulders  
your thighs around my ears  
I walk you to the door  
where you grasp the sill  
and for the first time  
you notice the knife I keep there

When I felt the blade  
against my eyebrow  
I wondered  
if you were thinking  
of taking my ear  
or cutting your thigh

~~

# So Much

So much  
I want to avoid this  
but rising from the swamp  
like last year's dead moose  
comes the hole  
in my life  
that was left  
when I said goodbye  
~~

# From Here to Was

Returning to you  
I saw  
that I had been away  
for too long  
I had moved from here  
to was

You smiled and hugged me  
like you would hug a friend  
and I saw  
that we would drift  
apart  
~~

## So It Goes

So it goes  
I thought  
and we move on  
And I did  
move on  
and now, a lifetime on  
I find  
that I have carried you  
with me

~~

# Oh, Hello

When you're gone  
I nap more often  
it moves the hands  
on the clock  
and sometimes  
lovely, lovely times  
you wake me up  
~~

# Liam And The Big Truck

When you were little  
my little boy  
you would run to the window  
to watch the garbage truck

Now that you're older  
you don't bother  
thinking instead  
"Now I've got to go get the bins"

~~

# Thoughts that Follow

Thoughts that follow:

I'm a little hungry

I can make lunch early

Oh, no I have to wait

She doesn't like to eat early

I can make lunch early

~~

# Port Stanley

How can it be  
that I can't lie on the hot sand  
and stare up at the sky  
so impossibly, deeply blue  
Sweat on my back  
gathering grains  
my legs, my arms  
hot grains of sand  
that I will stomp away  
brush away  
as I walk home

It is yesterday  
and I'm sixteen  
all stumble  
all bumble  
and yet  
You are beside me  
and it is hours from supper  
and, even through the sand  
I can feel you breathe  
~~

# Tillsonburg

You scared the hell out of me  
You asked me to the movies  
said you would pay

It seemed like you liked me  
but how could that be  
Not me, you were looking  
at someone else  
You must have been

It was impossible  
Nobody could like me  
want me  
I said no thank you

~~

# Guelph

Picture a bed  
and a half dressed girl  
lying with her face to the wall  
and a boy, dressed  
sitting on the edge  
He's thinking about his life  
and what it all means  
Sad isn't it?

~~

# Waiting To Begin

When are you coming home  
Because my life  
is on hold  
My heart  
has stopped  
and things that fall  
just hang in the air  
like a bad movie trope  
So baby I hope  
that you're coming home soon  
So I can breathe again

~~

# Inventory

Two years of cancer  
waiting for the clever little cells  
to get around  
the expensive pills that I swallow  
every evening  
two hours after supper

Two years without fear  
"It simply is"  
But this plague  
that could kill me  
in a week  
And those who don't care

Today, again  
I was too frightened  
to go into the grocery store  
So I came home instead  
Another week of coffee  
two days of decaf  
I'm OK until then  
~~

# Huggy Old Man

I seem to be  
a huggy kind of guy  
I wasn't much for touching  
as a boy  
And crappy at kissing  
as a teen  
But as an old man  
I'm a whiz  
at the hug  
(just not too long, OK)  
~~

# Youngest Inaugural Poet

All in the news  
is a sweet young  
national poet  
Perfect  
Hopeful  
Thoughtful  
A poet of change

Good  
I am too old for such things  
but someone must

I have tried, worked  
in my small way  
to change the world  
to change the lives  
around me  
But now I leave that  
to others

Content that my life  
wasn't important  
Content to be a poet  
of squirrels on the back deck  
and sunshine glimpses  
and tales of misspent youth

Go  
Be the poet laureate  
of your own life  
I'm retired

~~

# Photographer Sometimes

Ten years  
of developing film  
and prints  
and I'd had it  
I put my camera away

Twenty years later  
the digital colours had me  
the saturation  
the sharpness

But slowly  
I looked for ways  
to destroy  
what was never meant to be

The sharpness went first  
Where was the grain?  
And now the colours

The world I see  
is not vivid  
Not sharp  
It never was

Another ten years  
and I put the cameras  
Away

~~

# Clever Fellows

The Japanese  
have figured out  
how to make the scent  
of a cat's head

Clever fellows

~~

# The Middle Class

I see that it is impossible now  
to live like the Simpsons  
(that's a cartoon family,  
single income)

Fuck me, when was it ever?  
I was born in the fifties  
Time of single incomes  
Sure  
Maybe for the union guys  
in the car plant  
But not for us

Not for me and my family  
Two of us, and our three degrees  
and the Union  
managed a house  
and two kids  
barely

It's a choice, you know  
and somewhere  
around Reagan and Thatcher  
you, yes you Joe Voter  
bought into Trickle-Down  
Give rich people  
more money  
and they will give it  
to you.

You bought that  
instead of a house  
Now you own that  
Good thing  
you don't have to pay  
those union dues,  
that extra pack of smokes  
is nice

And that pension?  
Nope, you have bills now  
Fuck the future  
~~

# Never Drank It

When my grandmother  
gave me a bottle of liqueur  
from a trip she took  
I said I would drink it  
at my wedding

I knotted it into a macramé  
which also held a plant  
and hung in my college apartment

Later  
it was thrown onto the basement floor  
and soaked in floods  
for several years.  
The booze leaked or evaporated  
and the jute stank

But it's OK  
I never got married

~~

# Reading Poetry

You don't read poetry  
to learn how to live  
you read it  
to learn how another  
struggles to live  
~~

# Beatnik

Beatnik  
Beat Nik  
Sput Nik  
Pic Nik

Jack says no  
Says you listen  
to his own confusion  
There is no lesson  
Except Luc Bresson  
Mul Ti Pass

Snap your fingers  
the moment lingers  
~~

# Zen

You think it's confusion  
it's all illusion  
it's all collusion  
with the great delusion

~~

# Out The Back Door

I look out the back door  
to check on the world  
No squirrels on the deck  
but my little grey cat  
is checking too  
We both look  
We both look at each other  
He looks at me  
I look at him  
Then I wiggle my fingers  
and he meows  
But, smart kitty  
that he is  
he doesn't move  
until the door opens  
In he comes  
flipping his tail at me  
You're welcome I say  
to his upturned nose  
~~

# McLaughlin

Tucked away  
in the University library  
not hidden  
not forbidden  
just not visited  
Four floors up  
and at the back  
were a few books on  
Tantric Sex

How perfect was that?  
A girl I knew  
was into the East  
and what a perfect  
ummm opportunity  
to combine two  
ummm interests  
But it never worked out  
Before we were enlightened  
we always ended up  
having non-Tantric Sex

~~

# Bill Burroughs

Did Bill Burroughs  
make a living  
charging \$5  
to take his picture  
and \$10 to stand  
beside him  
like a third world urchin?

Seriously  
is there a celebrity alive  
who didn't find Bill  
and say "big fan, can I?"  
~~

## Still Angry

Damnit, why are you hiding?  
I had my morning nap  
and I'm sure I dreamed of you  
but I can't remember  
you must have hidden

You're still angry aren't you?  
It's been thirty years  
and you're still angry.

~~

# His Manhood

"He pulled me  
onto his manhood"

His manhood?  
Is that what you think,  
that a prick is a man?  
All that's important  
is the cock between his legs?  
His meat and two veg?

Honestly, grow up a bit  
and stop with the Victorian cuteness  
His prick is not his manhood  
any more than your cunt  
is your womanhood.

Your womanhood is also your tits  
and his manhood is also his tongue  
And you've both got an ass  
Get it right.

~~

# Ninja Squirrels

The squirrels have come and gone  
taking the stale bagels  
while I sat, head down  
writing

I feel that ought to make me sad  
but really  
they're only squirrels  
how much did I miss?

~~

# That's You

The footsteps  
in fresh snow  
leading to the shovel

The packed snow  
that later turns  
to small patches of ice  
left to jolt your shoulder  
as you clear  
a new fall

That's you  
~~

# Preparations

Fix the coffee  
turn on the lights  
and the music  
Fix the heater  
Pour the coffee  
put on a sweater  
Find glasses and pen

All this  
before even thinking  
of the first few words  
~~

# What's Wrong Now

Scratching my head  
I feel a tickle  
further down  
as if a hair  
is being moved  
But I'm bald  
Oh dear  
What's going wrong now  
~~

# Direction is Never Destiny

Three steps forward  
two steps back  
We all know this  
We all know  
things will improve  
We have faith  
that it will get better

But why two steps  
why not six steps back  
for three forward

Some facing the other way  
will say three steps back  
and six steps forward

Direction is never destiny  
Pick one  
and walk  
~~

# Didn't Happen

You would think  
with all their pushiness  
their feed-me looks  
that squirrels would be shameless

But that fat black squirrel  
just fell  
out of a snow covered bush  
hit the ground  
looked around  
just like a cat  
and walked off  
pretending it didn't happen  
~~

# Restful Woman

She was never more  
than 30 seconds  
from coming  
So restful  
~~

# Shorelines

The shorelines are all the same  
The water  
the rocks  
or the sand  
If you long for difference  
say one's water is sweet  
and one salty

But surely  
this is the same  
as the girl in your arms  
Her lips are sweet  
Her lips are salty

I have stood on the rocks  
in the Southern Pacific  
the Northern Atlantic  
and on the Great Lakes  
The girl is the same  
sometimes sweet  
sometimes salty

~~

# Magical Thinking

A clear sky  
no bird in sight  
but a feather drifts  
rocking down the air  
as I watch

Yes I checked  
no birds  
yet a feather

Surely, I told myself  
it was dislodged  
from a tree  
by the wind  
No omen this  
no glimpse  
into magical realm

And I walked on  
diminished  
~~

# Cost

Six poems for a coffee  
is that too high a price?

~~

# I Look Up

And the sun  
how did I miss it  
I must sit  
for a while longer  
and enjoy it  
I write this  
in exchange  
for five minutes

~~

## Tubby Black Squirrel

Tubby black squirrel  
waddles away from the deck  
"You ate it all yesterday" I yell  
He flicks his tail  
and rolls under a bush  
~~

# The Idea of Bread

There's something about  
making a coffee  
while she is out  
getting fresh bread  
for breakfast

The white warmth  
of a croissant  
making my insides warm  
as I look out the window  
onto fresh snow

~~

# My Old Man Was Not There

My old man  
did not make an appearance  
But I spent the weekend  
in Port Stanley  
On Friday  
I traded his car  
a blue Pontiac Parisienne  
with the 327 engine  
off lonely in the corner  
under the hood  
for some white car

I must have been  
up to no good  
for a couple of days  
that I don't remember  
Therefore, drinking  
But on Sunday  
I was parked close  
to the old man's place

I talked with two old guys  
(the two who convinced me  
to swap cars)  
and said "I'm 65  
and my old man  
is going to give me shit"

I drove off to return the white thing  
but the new road, the subdivision  
and the new construction  
on the old man's place  
confused me  
I was there already

Funny though  
his house was on a clay hill  
No room for roads or houses  
~~

## White Roses

I sent white roses  
from Alberta  
and when I got to Alaska  
and phoned you  
\$7 a minute on the payphone  
in the bar  
You said we should re-evaluate  
our relationship

I sat down at the bar  
and the rest  
as they say  
is fuzzy

~~

# Lost My Religion

Give us back  
the age of the Patriarchs  
who spoke to God  
who would kill their sons  
to prove their obedience  
Give us that firm hand  
and a future after death  
with virgins

And take away our need  
to think our way  
through this godless age  
No more  
of this existential angst

Daddy oh Daddy  
why did you leave us  
alone and bereft  
of your firm hand  
and that love  
I'm sure  
must have  
been  
~~

# Listening

I hunch over my notebook  
listening to Classic Prog  
on CBC Listen

My neck getting stiff  
my back getting sore  
I grit my teeth  
and vow, just one more  
~~

# Days of Blood

On the days of blood  
She would try to think  
before she spoke  
Not really believing me  
about the change  
that chased the moon  
But out of love for me  
she made an effort  
not to rip my throat out  
~~

## To Work

A white-sun morning  
clouds on the horizon  
and a clear-cold sky  
as I drove Brenda to work

On the way back  
the sun burst free  
painting the old town  
and the lone jogger  
moving up the hill  
a rosy-orange

~~

# Squirrels, Not Birds

Was it our turn  
I don't know  
about such things  
but yesterday  
after months of silence  
our place erupted  
with bird calls

And today, nothing  
Sorry, we have fat squirrels  
not lovely birds

~~

# Belief

Look at it  
two eyes  
nose  
mouth  
four limbs  
a spine

What delusion  
what fantasy  
could make you claim  
that you are separate  
apart from a frog  
a dog

Only man  
whose brain  
has the ability to ignore  
his eyes  
Could invent nonsense  
and claim it true  
"Because I believe it"  
~~

# There Havet

There havet oberu les-  
ot herwi secha os-  
Man theme asure  
maker ofrul es-  
cre atoro fcate gorie s-  
subm itsfr omfea r-  
Butr ulesc hange  
soher eism ine-  
al lword saref ive-  
Li mbsan dhead  
wordb ingt orso-  
n eatne ssand mores o  
~~

# Close the Curtains

If you open the curtains  
and let the light in  
the sun will reveal  
streaks on the glass  
and the dust  
drifting through the air  
The table  
which once pride-gleamed  
is revealed  
as the scratch-and-dent thing it is

Best close the curtains  
and go back to sleep  
Dream of that shining city  
(citadel, fortress)  
on the hill  
Remember, remember the spires  
with pennants flying  
and never look down  
to where the blood  
has worn away  
the mud upon which  
it was built

~~

# Acolyte

I sat for hours  
on her floor  
resting my head  
on the edge  
of her bed  
I listened to her talk  
and nodded  
in the right places  
But not once  
did she invite me up  
and into that bed

~~

# Lessons of Budo

I sit  
chin on hand  
eyes closed and burning  
trying to rearrange  
my thoughts  
so I can teach  
how to kill imaginary people  
with a Japanese sword

There is no part  
of my mind  
that stumbles over that  
I long ago understood  
that in order to live  
I must accept that I am dead  
and in order to die  
I must have been alive  
~~

# Sensei

I know what I want to teach  
but once again  
I will ask what I need to teach  
This is the dance  
I have danced  
for forty years.  
The only question  
is where, in the dance,  
we step in

~~

# Lost Cause

It was a lost cause  
and I knew it from the start  
but there she was  
on the mini-putt course  
and there was I  
on my bicycle  
heading to the beach

I stopped, got off the road  
and unslung my camera  
She was right there  
all I had to do was speak out  
or raise the camera to my eye  
But I knew it was a lost cause  
I just knew it

~~

## A Nice Balcony

She lived in the fourth building from the left  
three rows in  
count down 15 floors  
and look to the far left  
then count in two apartments.  
It was nice, with a balcony  
that looked over another balcony  
under a balcony  
beside two balconies.

She liked to lean on the railing  
and chat to me  
as I sat inside  
with a beer  
waiting for bed-time.

~~

# Jackson Pollock Was Not a Russian Spy

A cultural war  
that has gone on  
since the second world war  
Jackson Pollock, a Russian spy  
putting plans for secret military bases  
in his paintings

But the war  
has been going on  
since Ogg and Ook  
that stone spear point  
could be better  
but  
"we've always done it that way  
you communist"

Those who believe in progress  
are absolutely deluded  
each change is to be resisted

If it was good enough for Grandpa  
it's good enough for us  
Progress is the enemy  
of the tribe

It is a false god  
You don't believe in progress  
you fight to keep what you have  
and more fiercely  
for more of it

~~

# Touque

Winter  
and at the intersection  
is a girl  
or I assume

long blond hair  
under a touque  
Big winter coat  
and boots

A lot left  
to the imagination  
~~

# How It's Done Now

Of course  
on a day when my back spasms  
seem to be settling down  
I will get out of the car  
and knock the Mag Light  
from the door  
where it will hit the ground  
and roll under Pam's car

Carefully, slowly  
the old-man-crouch  
lowering a knee  
then the other  
to the ice  
and that tentative bend  
to put a hand on the ground

Now the twist  
to look underneath  
and the even more risky  
reach for the flash

An even more tentative  
rise, rather not like  
a porpoise breaching  
and a slow walk to the house

~~

# A Simple Equation

I sit with my coffee  
reading, writing  
and I feel my lower back  
against my chair

I feel it spasm  
in slow motion  
More and more tight

Each sip of coffee  
or sniff of freeze-running nose  
hurts just a bit more

I should not complain  
I will not  
While my old grey cat  
lies whimpering, leaking shit

Both of us will recover  
or we will die  
Life is a simple equation  
~~

## Just John

Catching movement on the deck  
I think "squirrels"  
but no  
it's my neighbour  
putting garbage  
into our bin

No fat furballs  
eating an apple core  
Just John  
puttering around again  
~~

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