

DARRYNANE IN EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND THIRTY TWO AND OTHER POEMS

In abject misery, Junior lay waiting to go under the knife, more eager to be cut than he would have thought possible only a few hours before. The mere promise of this surgery thrilled him more than all the sex that he'd ever enjoyed between the age of thirteen and the Thursday just past. To the open casement window, into the men's room. Still seething with rage. Angrily cranking shut the twin panes while lazy tongues of fog licked through the narrowing gap. He was no longer in his scrubs, but wore gray wool slacks and a blue cashmere sweater over a white shirt. Face somber, he looked less like an obstetrician engaged in the business of life than like a professor of philosophy forever pondering the inevitability of death. The minister had finished. The service was over. No one came to Junior with condolences, because they would see him again shortly, at the Ford dealership buffet. The hall was deserted. Then a woman came out of one of the offices and walked toward the gallery, without glancing at him. The Worry Bear carries worries in his pockets. Under his Panama hat and in two gold lockets. Carries worries on his back and under his arms. Nevertheless, dear old Worry Bear has his charms. And now she didn't need him anymore. He gazed at her face, held her cooling hand; his anchor was slipping away from him, leaving him adrift. Chastened by these recent events, he vowed to stop meditating, to void all passive responses to the challenges of life. He must explore the unknown rather than flinch from it in fear. Besides, through his explorations, he would prove that the unknown was all just tapioca or applesauce, or whatever. "With this money, you won't have to cut back on the number of pies you give away--and all of that." The ghost cop was forty feet behind him, beyond ranks of other pedestrians, every one of whom might as well have been faceless now, smooth and featureless from brow to chin, because suddenly Junior could see no countenance other than that of the walking dead man. The haunting visage bobbed up and down as the grim spirit strode along, vanishing and reappearing and then vanishing again among all the bobbing and swaying heads of the intervening multitudes. Although Junior was free of the superstitions that Naomi, in her innocence and sentimentality, had embraced, he wept without pretense. After staring at the coins for a long moment, Kathleen said, "I don't think any mystery writer has ever done a series of novels about a priest detective who's also a magician." Alone with Agnes, the physician said, "I want you to take Barty to a specialist in Newport Beach. Franklin Chan. He's a wonderful ophthalmologist and ophthalmological surgeon, and right now we don't have anyone like that here in town." To the phone, the police. No dial tone. Pointless to rattle the disconnect switch. The line had been cut. On a street a half mile from the airport in Eugene, he sat in the parked Dodge long enough to gingerly unwind the bandages and use a tissue to wipe off the pungent but useless salve he'd purchased at a pharmacy. Although he pressed the Kleenex to his face so gently that the pressure might not have broken the surface tension on a pool of water, the agony of the touch was so great that he nearly passed out. The rearview mirror revealed clusters of hideous, large, red knobs with glistening yellow heads, and at the sight of himself, he actually did pass out for a minute or two, just long enough to dream that he was a grotesque but misunderstood creature being pursued through a stormy night by crowds of angry villagers with torches and pitchforks, but then the throbbing agony revived him. His mouth was dry when he said to Angel, "Well, it seems pretty magical to me--that flipped-coin trick." Upon arriving at the creche window, he had been in a buoyant mood. As he studied the quiet scene, however, he grew uneasy. He was in a mood to shoot her, but this weapon was not fitted with a sound-suppressor. He'd left that gun in Celestina's bedroom. This was the pistol that he had taken from Frieda Bliss's collection, and it was as full of sound as Frieda had been full of spew. In the glamorous cocktail lounge of this elegant hotel, Junior was necessarily forced to use other of Zedd's techniques--and more brandy--to liberate from his subconscious the name of the caller on the Ansaphone. Max. The caller had said, It's Max. Toward the front of the house, along a hallway suddenly as dark as a tunnel, toward a vague light in the seething gloom. And here a window at the end of the hall. A MOMENTOUS DAY for Celestina, a night of nights, and a new dawn in the forecast: Here began the life about which she'd dreamed since she was a young girl. Simon Magusson--capable of representing the devil himself for the proper fee, but also capable of genuine remorse--visited Vanadium in the hospital, soon after learning that the detective had awakened from a coma. The attorney shared the conviction that Cain was the guilty party, and that he'd also murdered his wife. Four blocks from his office, on a street more upscale than his own, Nolly came to the Tollman Building. Built in the 1930s, it had an Art Deco flair. The public areas featured travertine floors, and a WPA-ers mural extolling the machine age brightened a lobby wall. By ones and twos, the festive crowd eventually deconstructed, but for Celestina, an excitement lingered in the usual gallery hush that rebuilt in their wake. Agnes, who inherited the property, would have welcomed her brothers in the main house. Although both were willing to visit her for an occasional dinner or to sit in rocking chairs on the porch, on a summer night, neither could abide living in that ominous place. Vanadium's smile, in that tragically fractured face, might have alarmed most people, but Kathleen found it appealing because of the indestructible spirit it revealed. Caesar Zedd recommended not merely seizing the day but devouring it. Chew it up, feed on the day, swallow the day whole. Feast, said Zedd, feast, approach life as a gourmet and as a glutton, because he who practices restraint will have stored up no sustaining memories when famine inevitably comes. After a hesitation, she said, "You're the boogeyman, except when I saw you, I was hiding under the bed where you're supposed to be." His dry tongue, his parched mouth, his desiccated throat felt packed fall of sand, and his voice lay buried alive down there. Nevertheless, he stepped away from the wall, and with his hands extended to full arm's length, he turned, feeling the lightless world around him. Nothing. No one. Only a few theater goers attended the matinee. No one sat near, so Google and Junior openly swapped packages: a five-by-six manila envelope to Google, a nine-by-twelve to Junior. The air was spicy with incense and with the fragrance of the lemon oil polish used on the wooden pews. When he located the new grave,

approximately where he'd guessed that it would be, he was surprised to find a black granite headstone already set in place, instead of a temporary marker painted with the. Now he shuffled the first of the four decks precisely as he had shuffled the first deck on Friday evening, and he set it aside. Dr. Zedd's death, just last Thanksgiving, had been a blow to Junior, a loss to the nation, to the entire world. He considered it a tragedy equal to the Kennedy assassination one year previous. For a while, she couldn't get enough air. Felt suffocated. She drew great, raw, shuddering breaths, and thought that she would never be able to quiet herself but quiet came. She held his face in both hands and kissed each of his beautiful jewel eyes. "You ready?" "Why do they let a man like that keep his badge?" Junior asked. "He's outrageous, wholly unprofessional." From his motel room, he telephoned Hanna Rey in Bright Beach. She still looked after his house on a part-time basis, paid the bills from a special account while he traveled, and kept him informed about events in his hometown. From Hanna, he learned that Barty Lampion's eyes had been lost to cancer. A mere silhouette against the fluorescent glare, Vanadium stepped it the hall. The bright light seemed to enfold him. The detective shimmered and vanished the way that a mirage of a man, on a fiercely hot desert highway, will appear to walk out of this dimension into another, slipping between the tremulous curtains of heat as though they hang between realities. Then the old man taught it to him. But it wasn't much use, Otter thought, since he had to hide it. Junior jammed on the brakes, slammed the gearshift into park, threw open the door, and plunged from the car. He spun around to face the menace, loose gravel shifting treacherously underfoot. Not that he failed to perform well. As always, he was a bull, a stallion, an insatiable satyr. None of his lovers complained; none had the energy for complaint when he'd finished with them. From a distance and through a scattering of trees, Junior wasn't able to discern much about the other funeral, but he was pretty sure many if not most of that crowd were Negroes. He surmised, therefore, that the person being buried was a Negro, too. "Worlds," ventured Jacob, "in which that oil-tank truck never stopped on the railroad tracks in Bakersfield, back in '60. So the train never crashed into it and those seventeen people never died." Many nights, his sleep wasn't half as restful as he would have wished, for he often dreamed of walking in a wasteland. Sometimes, desert salt flats stretched in all directions, with here and there a monument of weather-gnarled rock, all baking under a merciless sun. Sometimes, the salt was snow, and the monuments of rock were ridges of ice, revealed in the hard glare of a cold sun. Regardless of the landscape, he walked slowly, though he had the desire and the energy to proceed faster. His frustration built until it was so intolerable that he woke, kicking in the tangled sheets, restless and edgy. "You'll need time to ... adjust to this," he said. "Perhaps you've got to call family. . . ." Ursula K. Le Guin. He almost opened the paper atop the quarter before seeing it. Shiny. Liberty curved across the top of the coin, above the head of the patriot, and under the patriot's chin were stamped the words In God We Trust. "Could you throw an Oreo someplace you weren't blind or maybe someplace Wally wasn't shot?" Like a disc fish with silvery scales, the coin lay in the cup of Junior's palm. Directly over his life line. "That discord sets up lots of other vibrations, some of which will return to you in ways you might expect-and some in ways you could never see coming. Of the things you couldn't have seen coming, I'm the worst." Paul watched as Barty hopped down from his chair and crossed the busy kitchen in a straight line to the wall phone, without one hesitant move. Captivated by catastrophe, so lost in his book that he might as well have stepped magically inside of it and closed the covers after himself, Uncle Jacob didn't answer. Junior knew that he looked as guilty as any man had ever looked this side of the first apple and the perfect garden. The sweating, the spasms of violent tremors, the defensive note that he could not keep out of his voice, the inability to look anyone directly in the eyes for more than a few seconds-all were telltales that none of these professionals would overlook. He desperately needed to get a grip on himself, but he couldn't find a handle. Junior assumed the dead girl had come from a family of stature in the Negro community, which would explain the stonemason's accelerated service. Vanadium, according to his own words, was a friend of the family; consequently, the father was most likely a police officer. Agnes wasn't able to interpret his expression, not because he was in the least difficult to read, but because her perceptions were skewed by sudden fear and a flood of adrenaline. Her heart seemed to spin like a flywheel in her breast. Junior put the money on the desk. "Then get into the records of Family Services." "You're all right, we've got you now." His soft yet reverberant voice was so unearthly that his words seemed to convey an assurance more profound and more comforting than their surface meaning. "That's correct," Parkhurst said. "Probably one or more small blood vessels ruptured from the extreme violence of the emesis." He knew the sermon, of course. The example of Bartholomew. The theme of chain-reaction in human lives. The observation that a small kindness can inspire greater and ever-greater kindnesses of which we never learn, in lives distant both in time and space. Agnes's suspicion that Barty would be a child prodigy had grown from seed to full fruit on the morning of the boy's first birthday, when he'd sat in his highchair, counting green-grape-and-apple pies. Through the following two years, ample proof of high intelligence and wondrous talents ripened Agnes's suspicion into conviction. Junior remembered the very words the detective had used: They say she died in a traffic accident. But first, in early July, he stopped taking French lessons. It was an impossible language. Difficult to pronounce. Ridiculous sentence constructions. Anyway, none of the good-looking women he met spoke French or cared whether he did. "That would be wrong. A diary's private." He supposed that to a detective nothing was sacred, but he was nonetheless a little shocked that Vanadium needed to ask that question. "Well, you see, that's the funny thing about all the important choices we make. If we make a really big wrong choice, if we do the really awful wrong thing, we're given another chance to continue on the right path. So the very moment I stupidly stepped off the curb without looking, I created another world where I did look both ways and saw the rhinoceros coming. And so-." "I'm captivated more by painting than I am by most dimensional work," Junior explained. "Really, the only sculpture I've acquired is Poriferan's." Friday night, mystified and troubled, he hadn't slept much, and each time that he dozed off, he had dreamed of being alone in a bosky woods, stalked by a sinister presence, unseen but

undeniable. This predator crept in silence through the underbrush, indistinguishable from the lowering trees among which it glided, as fluid and as cold as moonlight, but darker than the night, gaining on him relentlessly. Each time that he sensed it springing toward him for the kill, Jacob woke, once with Barty's name on his lips, calling out to the boy as though in warning, and once with two words: the knave. . . .Eleven days had passed since Wally stopped three bullets. He still had a little residual weakness in his arms, grew tired more easily than before he'd wound up on the wrong end of a pistol, complained of stiffness in his muscles, and used a cane to keep his full weight off his wounded leg. The rest of the medical care he required, as well as physical rehabilitation, could be had in Bright Beach as well as in San Francisco. By March, he should be back to normal, assuming that the definition of normal included massive scars and an internal hollow space where once his spleen had been. Thrusting the red rose at her again, insistently pressing it against her hand to distract her, Junior swung the Merlot, and just as Sinatra sang the word sugar with a bounce, the bottle smacked Victoria in the center of her forehead. Saturday and Sunday, between sessions with the directory, Junior cruised around the county on a series of pleasure drives-testing the theory that the maniac cop was no longer following him. Apparently, Simon Magusson was correct: The case had been closed. THE MORNING THAT it happened was bright and blue in March, two months after Barty took Angel for a dry walk in wet weather, seven weeks after Celestina married Wally, and five weeks after the happy newlyweds completed their purchase of the Galloway house next door to the Lampion place. Selma Galloway, retired from a professorship years earlier, had subsequently retired further, taking advantage of the equity in her long-owned home to buy a little condo on the beach in nearby Carlsbad. The thorns had not been stripped from the long stem of the white rose. Vanadium clutched it so tightly that the sharp points punctured his meaty palm. He seemed to be unaware of his wounds. She figured that she could stay home, devoting herself to Barty, for perhaps three years before she would be wise to find work. Although to Paul this was no more than childish chatter, Tom knew at once that the girl referred to his explanation for why he wasn't sad about his damaged face: the salt and pepper shakers representing two Toms, the hit-and-run rhinoceros, the different worlds all in one place. "Yes, Angel. That's something like what I was talking about." Another of Junior's self-improvement projects, since moving to California, was to become a knowledgeable gourmet, also a connoisseur of fine wines. San Francisco was the perfect university for this education, because it offered innumerable world-class restaurants in every imaginable ethnic variety. Edom marveled at Agnes's ability to rise above the past and to transcend so many years of torment. She was able to see the house as simple shelter, whereas to her brothers, it was-and always would be-the place in which their spirits had been shattered. Even living within sight of it would have been out of the question if they had been employed, with options. She remained fixated on the card that she had just dealt, and for a while she didn't speak, as though the eyes of the paper knave held her in thrall. Finally she said, "Monster. Human monster." "All right," Celestina conceded, and looked relieved. "Thank you, Paul. You're not only an exceptionally brave man but a gracious one, as well." He went directly to the kitchen and drew a glass of water at the sink faucet. He swallowed two antiemetic tablets that he had brought with him, to guard against vomiting. As the last of the flan was served and Maria's girls took their seats once more, Barty blinked at the candles and said, "Gone now," even though the tiny spectrums still shimmered in the cut crystal. He turned his full attention to the flan with such enthusiasm that his mother soon stopped puzzling over rainbows. He turned over the two most recent discards. Neither was a jack of spades, and both were what he expected them to be. Junior's body betrayed him as before, and also in new ways that terrified and humiliated him, involving every bodily fluid except cerebrospinal. For a while, inside that rocking ambulance, he wished that he were in a gondola upon the waters of the Styx, his misery at an end. Back in January, when he received the disappointing report from Nolly Wulfstan, Junior was not convinced that the private detective had exercised due diligence in his investigation. He suspected that Wulfstan's ugliness was matched by his laziness. Behind them, two shots roared, and Paul knew that the reverend was no longer of this world. "Yes?" the silver-haired eminence replied, wrinkling his nose as though he suspected that this customer would ask if the display pedestal was included in the price. Currently, the rental market was extremely tight. The first day of his search resulted only in the discovery that he was going to have to pay more than he expected even for modest quarters. He fiddled with the cylinder until it swung open. Five chambers, a gleaming cartridge in each. Over the final refrain of "I'll Be Seeing You" came a man's voice from the foyer, raised quizzically, with perhaps a note of surprise: "Victoria. The patches were held by the same two elastic strips, so Barty flipped up both at the same time. Surprisingly, he received a lot of gratification from voicing this insult, even though Vanadium was too dead to hear it. Routinely she dreamed of Joey. Not nightmares. No blood, no reliving of the horror. In her dreams, she was on a picnic with Joey or at a carnival with him. Walking a beach. Watching a movie. A warmth pervaded these scenes, an aura of companionship, love. Except eventually she always glanced away from Joey, and when she looked again, he was gone, and she knew that he was gone forever. Then Junior saw the blood on the right cuff of Vanadium's shirt. Blood dripping from his hand, too. Some information she'd withheld from him: that the cancer might already have spread, that he might still die even after his eyes were removed-and that if it hadn't yet spread, it might soon do so. Off the hard surfaces of cabinets, refrigerator, and ovens, the twin reports crashed and rattled. The windowpanes briefly thrummed. evening. She brought her daughters, seven-year-old Bonita and six year-old Francesca, who came with their newest Barbie dolls-Color Magic Barbie, the Barbie Beautiful Blues Gift Set, Barbie's friends. was trying her best to ensure the health of the baby while still remaining slim enough to avoid suspicion. Stopping at the door without opening it, Vanadium turned to stare at Junior, but said nothing. "I'm Sister Josephina." She slipped Celestina's purse off her shoulder--"You can trust this with me"--No scent of gasoline fouled the air. Apparently, the tank had not burst. Sudden immolation seemed unlikely-but only an hour ago so had Joey's untimely death. Lipscomb shifted his gaze from the street below to the

source of the rain. "Phimie was not gone long, perhaps a minute-a minute and ten seconds at most-and when she was with us again, it was clear from her condition that the cardiac arrest was most likely secondary to a massive cerebral incident. She was disoriented, paralysis on the right side ... with the distortion of the facial muscles that you saw. Her speech was slurred at first, but then something strange happened. . .The boy-wonder physician turned to Junior again and assumed an expression of compassion so inauthentic that if he'd been playing a doctor on even the cheesiest daytime soap opera, he'd have been stripped of his actor's-union card, fired, and possibly horsewhipped on a live television special. "We'll be doing the procedure this afternoon, so I wouldn't want to give you anything much for the pain just prior to anesthesia and sedation. But don't you worry, Mr. Pinchbeck. Once we've lanced these boils, when you wake up, ninety percent of the pain will be gone." He placed a hand on her shoulder. "Don't beat up on yourself She's come this far. And though I don't know the hospital in Oregon, I doubt the level of care would equal what she'll receive here." "Here we are," said the driver, braking to a stop at the curb in front of the gallery..Junior knew that he must remain vigilant. Vigilant and focused until January 12 had come and gone. Eight days to go..Maybe every accidental death was suspicious to Vanadium. His obsessive hounding of Junior might be his standard operating procedure.."Science. Quantum mechanics. Which is a theory ... of physics. But by theory, I don't mean just wild speculation. Quantum mechanics works. It underlies the invention of television. Before the end of this century, perhaps even by the '80s, quantum-based technology will give us powerful and cheap computers in our homes, computers as small as briefcases, as small as a wallet, a wristwatch, that can do more and far faster data processing than any of the giant lumbering computers we know today. Computers as tiny as a postage stamp. We'll have wireless telephones you can carry anywhere. Eventually, it will be possible to construct single-molecule computers of enormous power, and then technology-in fact, all human society-will change almost beyond comprehension, and for the better."..After Maria, Bonita, and Francesca had gone, when Agnes and her brothers joined forces to clear the table and wash the dishes, Barty kissed them good-night and retired to his room with The Star Beast..efficiency of a nurse, but as a courtesan might perform the task: smiling enticingly, a flirtatious glimmer in.The vending machines were designed to accept quarters, not to eject them. They didn't make change. Mechanically, this barrage wasn't possible..Maria Elena Gonzalez, where no one lived with fear like her brothers Edom and Jacob..Maria was hand-repairing some of Joey's clothes, which Agnes had meticulously damaged earlier in the day..The sensual memories of his torrid evening with Seraphim had left Junior aroused. Unfortunately, the only female nearby was Industrial Woman, and he wasn't that desperate..She kissed his cheek, and he pulled his arms out from under the covers to hug her. Such small arms, but such a fierce hug..The ninth piece was not art, certainly not a work by Griskin, and could disturb no one half as much as it rattled Junior. Upon a black pedestal stood a pewter candlestick identical to the one that had cracked the skull of Thomas Vanadium and had added dimension to the cop's previously pan-flat face..Find the father, kill the son. In just nine days, Junior bedded four beautiful women: one on Christmas Eve, the next on Christmas Night, the third on New Year's Eve, and the fourth on New Year's Day. For the first time in his life-and on all four occasions-his joy in the act was less than complete..The Selective Service physician quickly declared Junior to be maimed and unfit. Quietly but with passion, Junior pleaded for a chance to prove his value to the armed forces, but the examiner was unmoved by patriotism, interested only in keeping the cattle line of other potential draftees moving past him at a steady pace..Out of the car, along the sidewalk, up the steps, from Mercedes to mist to murder. Pistol in his right hand, lock-release gun in his left, three knives in sheaths strapped to his body..Maria looked stricken when she answered the doorbell, for she intuited that a visit, instead of a call, meant the worst..The verdant hills to the east lay like slumbering giants under blankets of winter grass, bright in the morning sun. But when the shadows of clouds sailed off the sea and gathered inland, the slopes darkened to a blackish green, as somber as shrouds, and a landscape that had appeared to be sleeping forms now looked dead and cold..Precisely what type of prodigy Barty might be was initially not easy to deduce. He revealed many talents rather than just one..Agnes knew now why this prognostication had dismayed rather charmed her: If you dared to believe in the good fortune predicted he cards, then you were obliged to believe in the bad, as well..HAVING COMPLETED HER English lesson, Maria Elena Gonzalez went home with a plastic shopping bag full of precisely damaged clothes and a smaller, paper bag containing cherry muffins for her two girls..Had he ever thought he could get away with this? He must have been delusional, temporarily mad..She didn't hide the diagnosis from the family, but she delayed telling them the prognosis, which was bleak. Already, her bones were tender, packed full of mutated immature white cells that hindered the production of normal white cells, red cells, and platelets.."It was... the only dream that mattered," Joey said. "You ... loving me. It was a good life because of you."..Maybes are for babies, Zedd tells us in Act Now, Think Later. Learning to Trust Your Instincts..Happy weekend. His attitude amazed her, and his strength in the face of darkness gave her courage..Missing windshield. Considering that the space was pinched by the crumpled roof, however, and in light of Agnes's pregnancy and imminent second-stage labor, the severe contortions involved in this extraction would be too dangerous..The strand was inclined toward the lake. He closed the door and got out of the way as the Studebaker rolled forward, gathering speed..Teasing out the card, Edom saw that it was an ace of diamonds-remarkable in light of Maria Gonzalezs fortune'-telling session last Friday evening. He was more astonished, however, by the name printed in black ink diagonally across the face of the card: BARTHOLOMEW..Instead, he imagined Vanadium's blunt fingers moving over the intravenous apparatus with surprising delicacy, reading the function of the equipment as a blind man would read Braille with swift, sure, gliding fingertips. He imagined the detective finding the injection port in the main drip line, pinching it between thumb and forefinger. Saw him produce a hypodermic needle as a magician would pluck a silk scarf from the ether. Nothing in the syringe except deadly air. The needle sliding into the portAlthough weak, he was no longer in danger of spewing bile and blood like a harpooned whale. The siege had

passed..Devil mountains, sacred islands, sacramental rivers and cities, Jesuits: These spiritual references at every turn made Junior uneasy. This was a haunted night, no doubt about that. He wouldn't have been greatly surprised if he had glanced at his rearview mirror and seen Thomas Vanadium's blue Studebaker Lark Regal closely tailing him, not the real car raised from Quarry Lake, but a ghostly version, with the filthy-scabby-monkey spirit of the cop at the wheel, an ectoplasmic Naomi at his side, Victoria Bressler and Ichabod and Bartholomew Prosser and Neddy Gnathic in the backseat: the Studebaker packed full of spirits like a bozo-stuffed clown car in a circus, though there would be nothing funny about these revenge-minded spooks when the doors flew open and they came tumbling out..Paul Damascus had gotten numerous invitations to dinner. No one thought that he should be alone on this difficult night..The muffling fog quieted the city as much as obscured it, and the alley was surprisingly still. Many of the businesses were closed for the night, and as far as Junior could discern, no delivery trucks or other vehicles were parked the length of the block..This claim wasn't true. His father, an unsuccessful artist and highly successful alcoholic, lived in Santa Monica, California. His mother, divorced when Junior was four, had been committed to an insane asylum twelve years ago. He rarely saw them. He hadn't told Naomi about them. Neither of his parents was a resume enhancer..Angel was lying on a towel on the convertible sofa, where Grace had just changed her diaper..The corroded casement-operating mechanism began to give way, as did the hinges, and the window sagged outward..Among Junior's many gifts, his ability to focus might have been the most important. Bob Chicane, his former instructor in matters meditative, had called him intense and even obsessive, following the painful incident involving meditation without seed, but intensity and obsession were false charges. Junior was simply focused

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