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Introduction

Michael Ceraolo

It Didn't Happen Here

Neither THE event
of July 4, 1910,
which
happened about 2,000 miles away
in Reno, Nevada,
nor its aftermath,
which happened in many other places
around the country

The event was a heavyweight title fight,
but
it was much more in the minds of many,
rising
beyond the actual to the symbolic

Former champ Jim Jeffries,
who
had retired undefeated five years earlier,
heard the siren call of supremacists
and came out of retirement to fight
current champ Jack Johnson
in order to return the heavyweight crown
to its so-called rightful place
according to the stereotypes of the day
But

Johnson was having none of that,
dominating the fight from the fourth round on,
until

Jeffries' corner threw in the towel
after the fifteenth round to avoid
the disgrace of a knockout

Mitchell reached the nearest police precinct
and safety,
and *The Plain Dealer*
was none too happy about the turn of events
away from mob violence:

"Patrolmen Moore and Fiess
of the plain clothes squad
interfered to save Mitchell"

John Grey

A BOY OF SUMMER

a morning of such breadth, such yellow.
so much grass to flutter,
to flatter your ankles,
and a lake to wear on your skin

up the hill to make the houses shrink,
become dots, then invisible
through the host of trees,
and to unravel the highway on the other side,
that undulating tar sidewinder

you're ten years old,
a summer's day to fritter away
like your old man does on beer,
the trickle of a stream,
the rocks on the trail,
and maybe a wild turkey
or a rabbit to confuse you for a king

but then it's lunchtime
and even the lord of all
your bright blue eyes survey
must beat a stomach growl's retreat

so down into the valley you tumble,
on running feet,
bring the town back to life,
recreate home with each step:
the sagging fence,
the beat-up Ford,
Uncle Al on the verandah
whittling a flute

you're hungry,
so you eat in their life

but you're young
and the real feast is yours

DIFFERENCES AS I SEE THEM

Loved one,
I'm like a tale
as remote from you
as Boccaccio or Dumas;
sure, sometimes
I ruffle the adventures in my head,
my armies, my heroes,
bivouacked behind my eyes,
but you live in the age
of techno-reason,
computer, I-phone,
Kindle, tablet,
the internet's lover
as much as mine;
at night,
I stretch out on a bed
of knights and dragons
while your head hits the pillow
of all your sound reasoning,
parses your dreams
so they don't shake reality;
I wake to the sun god,
you to the day,
I grab my rapier,
you, your coffee,
I'm on the job
rescuing maidens,
you're commuting
to a cube, a hierarchy,
a structure;
years from now.
you're the grandmother
of the welcoming brood
and I'm that old man,
at pond's edge
picking my teeth,
cleaning out my ears.
with red chapped sword point.

FRIGID

Sky's blue but air's cold.
It's July parody in the middle of January.
You're in on the contradictions.
You wear a thick jacket
as if the ice floes aren't really you.
I stare into your eyes.
Nothing is capable of melting.
Warmth is an argument
you're just not ready to make.
And then you speak
and mercury falls ten-fold.
Dark arrives early
and you pretend
the light bulb and you
are one and the same.
But your hands are shadows.
Your love's like oozing tar
from the pit of your heart.
Colors abound
but the spotlight is losing them.
You're mid-winter.
The flesh is willing
but the calendar regrets.

Heather Sullivan

Dervish

Rolling end to end on the couch,
you are electrified with static,
hair dancing in circles around your head
like Sufis in unending spirals,
memories of playing skin the cat
on the playground
until nausea overtook me.
You scuff your socks on the rug,
akin to Ali in the ring,
touch your ungrounded siblings
over and over to watch the spark
leap from your finger.
In this time of matter and mass,
you dance across the pinhead,
immaterial spirit made visible.

Streaming

Hope is uncertain,
transitory and shifting,
the foundation built on a shake table,
tested daily by the earth's vibrations,
Park place skidding off into the ocean
taking the socialites down into the murk,
strands of pearls bobbing one by one
to the surface,
being carried on the gulf stream
where a little girl outside of Reykjavik
stands in the icy ankle deep water collecting
them in a knitted basket handed down
from generation to generation,
each strand then joined together into a broad net,
cast out at evening by the elders,
hoping to draw in enough promise
for one more dawn.

Canvas

I am painted in invisible ink, a bowl
of lemon juice always at the ready,
the proofing flame makes each pretty
picture visible from the inside, passion
plays showing in sepia every night
of the week with a matinee on Sundays.
The names of lovers inked in the creases
of my hips and ringing my waist, like a
low slung bandolier riding my thighs,
each casing holding an unanswered shot
across the bow between you and I.
Childhood plays behind my throat,
ancestry on the small of my back.
The children measure their height against
my spine, while our story plays out like
Koi chasing the moon on my arms. I
swallowed the brush, so she could mark
the interior, turn me to stone, the discovery
akin to Lascaux, but no mold to slow the
arrow as it breaks my heart.

Superstition

She promised on scout's honor,
even though she really didn't understand
what that meant,
only the knowing solemnity in
her father's eyes when he would
speak the words,
the sense of enormity.
When I was in elementary school,
we would cross our hearts and
hope to die,
stick a needle in our eye and
eat a frog alive.
Some would swear on their mother's graves,
an oath I refused,
fearing the words would hasten
my inevitable loss.
I avoided cracks with
halting tiptoe steps in a life or death
game of hopscotch.
My heart tossed ahead.

Jonathan Beale

By the elegant willows of childhood

The elegant willow by the rivers
Teasing the breeze and life itself
In an almost brazen act.
We'd sit up in one of them
Musing as if a baby Socrates'
And talking nonsense
As the uniform universe
Then, until the moon
Like a good mother watched with us
The stars that remained there
as they'd always done.
Only to be rediscovered:
The night grew into other worlds.
Here was a private place
Unbounded and not owned.
The hawk stayed around to take
The prey of what was there and would kill:

Growing out into this hot state.
Tomorrow must be missing
In its loneliness caught in every thorn
Tearing itself and so the strangeness of it.
We had to understand this alien place:
From here to the playground of the Gods and us,
The rocks – Hugh cubes of pure weighty mass.
Put there and just left there
We were to grow away

From this monument of childhoods.
Our cutting teeth & bruised knees
The moor is a hard mother.
As we were surrounded by
The wizen old woody fellows.

This vitriolic state.

This is no Eden (as you might perceive)

With the blackening brooding horizon

Every dawn. Strangely, it began here.

Among the unkempt bracken, gorse, weeds, and trees

There it is; primeval the only child could understand

This barren place within the sky and bleak horizon line

Just after leaving?

That space is left:
And so it begins to grow:
like a cancer:
The cells grow and lose
and change their form
and the air made whole.
then, once occupied
by another
falls and fills in. There
is *anew* the eye that cannot forget
the garden is now cut back
the brevity is for winter:
then the long nights
fall back to black.
Then the garden begins to grow
Back again.
The reason for sowing and selecting
is now gone.

So say goodbye

The words we had grown
To know and like – embracing us,
Joining us, giving us space.
We stood before the forest
Of experience and laughter.
The horizons we saw
separately razoring into the roofs
On different plains.

We had not crossed paths
For-some-time and the size of the
Sahara consumed us.
The last days
Of summer encased us in
The pyramid of my mind
And of yours.

By jokes, anecdotes, and the nights muse.
Of the vast universe - in this little
world, we were not an island
Just an archipelago of talking....
Threaded together
Spending a night in the bar

Just departing,

Watching those hulks go
Passing along somehow just
Blown along with all manor
Of colours shapes and sizes.

Places written across skylines
Me or you – our place or our city
Not marked on us
We were untied from there now.

How close to those places...
That steel breasted time
That had to be overcome
And strangely, everyone overcame.

Once they passed on and over
To their new day, and you and I.
The days departing as an arrow -
As the tide sweeps us on to tomorrow.

All the ships must leave

The ships formicary lines
Seen for a thousand thousand years
Seeing them go.
Knowing the times and tides
these monstrous themes
in their demonic dictionaries
drives currents minds
along the crooked, crooked beat
bringing back the ships.
Schooners cusp the winds
the Turks Head holds
sailors hopes and desires.
The yachts bob as dogs
wanting to walk
motion is necessary
to attend the Sargasso Sea
to these planetary beasts
driven along by the magic
of the mighty curvaceous moon.

Michael Goldman

Virgin Birth

My parents never did that.
My mother doesn't look like girls
On the covers of magazines
(who I think about sometimes
in the afternoon).
I came from her.
My father had nothing
to do with it. He
looks down on us.
I'm not good enough.
I hide my face in
my mother.
She will always be there.
And I came only from her.

Martyrdom

Lay into me
I don't mind
Every day or so
Keep me honest
So I don't get into the habit
Of thinking you're content
With things as they are
No, of course
Neither am I
There's so much more
We could get out of this
Life and everything
By all means
It's for the best
Let me have it

Survival

Each fall
You expect a harvest
at least as plentiful
as last year

In the spring you know
there may be some variation
a good year for some things
but not for others

Plant extra
if you can

Above all
dig in compost
and manure

What if you are asked
at heaven's gate:
How much topsoil
did you create?

Denial

Lord -

from your light

you made

my shadow. - Arne B.Larsen, trans. Michael Goldman

It is said that Adolph Hitler killed
only himself.

Ordinary workers,
playing Cerberus
for pay and benefits,
killed all the others.

By laying the blame
on one name
we deny our solidarity
with the failings of our race

We deny our latent strength hovering
in some other dimension, waiting
to join us
to guard
organize
and unite
so we may ever evolve, be better
than ourselves.

Diagnosis

None for this.
Guts tying
and untying themselves
for two days
skipping meals.

What is precious
about knowing precisely
why I am miserable?

A downed oak in my front woods
waits to be cut up
and moved to the woodpile.
Seeds arrived for my garden,
ready to unpack.
A friend is coming today
to plan a mosaic for the kitchen.
And I will spend the evening
in company of big-hearted translators.

Better to be happy
and not wonder why.

Donal Mahoney

Love and Slaughter

Sheep are by a goat while
cattle are like swine, prodded, yet
cattle go by hammer while
swine are by the hind leg hung
then swung about to spigot.
Quicker, infinitely cleaner, is
the hacksaw of sweet Susan's laughter.

Mop Woman

Near dwarf this woman.
Foreign born, Minsk,
perhaps. Her nose

a fist. Her hair
a whisk broom
only black. Her back

an Orthodox cupola.
Her arms braids of gym rope
lowered to the floor.

Orangutans could climb
those ropes, hand
over hand, no rose

no purple
doughnuts
on their hinds.

Near dwarf this woman.
Foreign born. Minsk,
perhaps.

Her hands, all gristle,
hang an inch, no more,
above her shining floor.

Special of the Day

It's Rocky's Diner
but it's Brenda's counter,
been that way for 10 years.
Brenda has her regulars
who want the Special of the Day.
They know the week is over

when it's perch on Friday.
Her drifters don't care about
the Special of the Day.
They want Brenda instead
but she's made it clear
she's not available.

Her regular customers tip well.
Long ago, they gave up
trying to see her after work.
After awhile her drifters go
to the diner down the street
to see if the waitress there

is any more hospitable.
Brenda's regulars don't know
she has three kids her mother
watched every day until Brenda
took a vacation out of town,
then came back and helped her

mother find a place of her own.
Now Brenda's back at the diner,
serving her regulars and
discouraging her drifters,
while Marsha, her bride,
watches the kids.

Country Doctor

A doctor for decades,
he provides services
not available nearby.

Clients drive miles
from farms and towns
seeking his care.

He is always busy,
assisted by two nurses
six days a week.

He loves animals
and feeds tramp dogs
and feral cats daily

in the open field
behind his office.
If he sees a bug

in his office
everything stops
while he carries it outside.

Only then does he return
and relieve another client
of her fetus.

In Certain Matters of the Heart

It's a matter of the heart,
the doctor says,
and he can fix it
with catheter ablation.
"It works miracles," he says,
"in certain matters of the heart."

He's been a cardiologist for years.
"Take my word for it," he says.
"You'll be sedated. Won't feel a thing."

No excavation in my chest, either.
Instead, he'll make little holes
in my groin and snake tiny wires
to the surface of my heart
and kill the current that makes

my heart race like a hare
at times and mope
like a turtle other times.
He's never lost a patient.
"You'll be fine," he says.
"Trust me."

Nine out of 10 ablations work.
I'll save hundreds a month, he says,
on medications. No more Multaq.
No more Cardizem. And I'll never
have to wear a heart monitor again.

"Shall we give it a try?" he asks.
"I've got an opening
two weeks from Monday.
It's an outpatient procedure.
You'll go home the same day,
rest for a week and then resume
your usual activities, even bowling.
Do you like bowling? My nurses do.
I prefer woodcarving."

"Okay, Doc," I tell him.
"I'll give it a try, but tell me,
where were you 40 years ago
when the kids were small
and I was young, like a bull,
and a different matter of the heart
dropped me like a bullet.
Are you sure my heart's still ticking?
Where's your stethoscope?
I haven't felt a thing in years."

John W. Sexton

These Lies Colour

sun sets in the jar ...
old uncle wasp
took the marmalade lanes

playing cakes and bladders
... the dice
seem oddly incontinent

mining an ethanol cloud ...
in the vastness of space
we'll still act small

an equation
that represents the universe
is a universe

copyright trespass ...
throughout the labyrinth a
labyrinth of string

love, Granny Wenceslas ...
a Christmas jumper made
of the driven snow

plagiarist bird, six letters
... the crossword puzzle
becomes self-aware

the sky nudges him
on the back ... Issa can handle drink;
but nature?

integrating
with local communities ...
Citizen Ebola

spectral reflectance
of a grey moon ...
we call these lies colour

A Wheelbarrow of Hearts

fat comet ...
the crown of starlings descended
to the elephant's brow

each passing bark an icy breath ...
sheen on sheen
snowman grows in anger

cooling tungsten tongues ...
semi-precious cones
and platinum ice-cream

movement infinitesimal ...
the stone lions guard
our far tomorrows

takes many tons of air
to make blue ... the weight
of colour weightless

gifts of mould,
circumstance and whirr ...
kings from the Far Least

sexray vision ...
his eyes constantly
steaming up

entity all transmission ...
an abstract message
rewrites us

chitin skin closed,
our membranous wings engaged ...
mensects into starlight

a wheelbarrow of hearts
for the Count's garden
of red chirroses

a bad batch ...
new natterboxes
with aphasia settings

another frightbulb blown
the rooms are on edge
in the gingerbread house

An Elsewhere

oh hexagons of purest right ...
creatures for whom shit
is a concept

wunst uppen atyme
shtarz shun brikt
uz kye herbuuvv

glowering in their glass
cabinets ... his collection
of clowns' frowns

the ogre's mile-wide
vinyl record ... cyclist two
sets out on track three

enough to ruffle feathers
... finding a space
on the pinhead carpark

the wasps unzipped
the attic room ... an elsewhere replaced
our memories

on my hands so snug ...
the pigskin gloves
traumatised by past slaughters

travels with tempera ...
Botticelli paints himself
into Christ's life

aunty's duck's beak
key-ring ... the sound of locking,
unlocking, a quack

with utmost subtlety
the kitchen chairs
digest us

Our Minds Are Held

dislocated
her best bone china
the stone onions

stunningly dressed
in a French actress ...
the tapeworm ambassador

sliced for a thousand ...
our portion of gateaux
is a smear on the knife

your death becomes
your name ... malaria malarkey
spread to her brain

removing
the hymnal's shadow ... he thumbs
through unpages

the radioactive soul
of the dying robot ...
grace melts our skin

the wallpaper squeals ...
the curtains fall into a thousand
thousand moths

the Alzheimer's telepath ...
our minds are held to ransom
by his

a foreboding of art ...
she bruises the pavement
with purple chalk

the maple woods
display their wounds ... grandma
is a sweet old lady

black death had the best hand ...
the witches take turns
on the ducking stool

Joseph Farley

Naked

Today, in the shower,
I caught myself thinking
if I had my life
to lead over again,
I'd spend it naked.
God knows why.

Perhaps it was the sense
of freedom that comes
from having no clothes on,
or perhaps I was
carried away by the relief
a cold shower brings
on a hot day.

God knows why
I'd want to spend
my life naked.
There aren't too many people
who like to see me
without clothes.

That includes friends,
lovers and family.
I burn easily.
The beach is
out of the question.

And I doubt many
would express joy
at seeing my fat figure
strolling, pink
across the horizon,
like a half hearted comet
sputtering across the sky,
(more like a balloon,
farting away
to nothingness.)

Death Of A Bachelor

Of course, it would be easy to say
that his cat ate him, or
the roaches carried him off,
but the facts are much less interesting.
A dull man with a dull job,
he conversed rarely.
Lacking eloquence, he read a lot.
Maybe more than he should. Yet,
despite the oddity of it,
he was no criminal.
The truth is there is little
anyone can say about him.
Even his sexuality is in doubt.
The dust on his bookshelves
might know better, but remains
silent, soon to be wiped away
by cleaning cloths as the lawyers
and relatives gather for the auction
like sharks scenting blood.

In Schuylkill County

Somewhere between
The empty whiskey bottles,
The river bank
And that stand of trees,
Words hung, invisible,
But still audible
In the autumn wind,
Faint music of a man
That once stood tall
Bellowing his spirit
Into his surroundings.

Now gone.
Each heart and object
So touched
Still resonates warm noise.

Write Something Happy

She says to me
"Your poetry is too dark
It frightens me,"
and I think
" you sit there,
conceited, wrapped
in self joy,
if you could share
just a little
of what you are
with me,
maybe I could sing
a happy tune."

Survivors

The world is what it is, chaos and jungle,
not fairy land, or novel, or jewel.
We must all make our way through the muck,
Fighting, and crying, and trying to fuck,
Satiating urges for pleasure and warmth,
Raising heads from decaying debris depth,
Gaze into dark eyes, search for something else,
A being more than flesh, maybe a soul,
Some spark of fire or hope in the long night
To make us feel one with the howling beasts,
Or prove we are not chance combinations
Of molecules brought together in time,
An accidental joining of bodies
in lives better sugar coated with lies.

For Hart Crane

You jump or slip from the rail of a ship
And fall forever down to a cold splash,
There met by merman eyes
That guide you to the depths,
Dark and removed from light,
To a city hidden in the sea.
There you are treated as an honored guest,
And spend the years listening
To the tunes of passing fish,
And plucking a harp of seaweed
All the while scrawling indecipherable figures
On the bulkheads of sunken ships,
Mystifying sharks and nautiluses
And octopi jetting by in swirls of black ink.

Don Mager

March Journal: Tuesday, March 26, 2013

The kitchen window imbibes coffee steam rising from the gurgling pot. Streaked with the black frieze of vertical trees, the sky imbibes solid ice-hard air. The dog dish is solid. Puddles on the patio stones are solid. Beyond the trees, horizontal cloud streaks glow. Like ivory wax in thick long burning candles, their opals are illusions. They drift apart. Truth unveils. The wide full-circle moon is their blazing cold white wick. No flicker unsteadies its large glow. No wind snuffs it. A second coffee watches its descent. It's gone.

March Journal: Wednesday, March 27, 2013

The moon in garish obesity
stares across the wide bleaching sky straight
into the torrid sun's outrageous
red surge. Dawn pirouettes on a stiff
toe in indecisive circles and
waits for a partner to step forward.

The moon rolls its orange rotundity
towards the western edge. As the sun's huge
blaze climbs higher, it melts toward whitish
yellow and sears eastbound eyes. Meanwhile
drivers headed west watch, right before
their eyes, tangerine transmogrify
into white. Day blushes, makes its choice
and floats to the sun's embrace: *I'm here.*

April Journal: Wednesday, April 24, 2013

The dawn sun scatters arabesques of
splotchy brightness across the pavement
and fresh lawns. For the time being the
air is too busy to heed the light.
It tosses cheeps, chuffs and ricochets
of wind chime bird chortles from cedars
to hollies and back. The tree tops glow
in Wisteria's lavender haze
above the high wire pair of Doves
who turn synchronous necks in precise
slow calligraphies, and precisely
turn by turn, coo their satin-soft coos.
Ears are busy with the commotion
in the air. Sunlight busies the earth.

August Journal: Friday, August 9, 2013

In dark Conch shell swirls of shadows,
a thousand twangling instruments sing.
Midnight bends its ruptured ear. Loops of
minimalist percussion entwine
the air from all ten sides. From tree bark
perches, Cicada castanets click and
clack their stereophonic calls to
calls from calls. The frogs' cabasa whirs
into the ear in ricocheting
flows and ebbs. The hoot-crack of an owl
slaps its drum skin with metronomic
clock-work. A weary dog's incisive
clave strokes, as if to rebuke the
owl, yelp from the stretched end of his chain.

September Journal: Saturday, September 28, 2013

All morning the breeze tugs the pants legs
of the Sweetgum tree with its child hand.
It tries to keep up but faltering
it often stops in its tracks to look
up in bewilderment, searching for
assurance, longing to be lifted
and cuddled. Fearful of scolding, its
tugs are timid. From time to time a
leaf is loosened and drifts like a lone
tear down across the breeze's shy face.
Morning is in no hurry to get
anywhere. Unruffled, its patience
is in no mood to scold. It coaxes
the breeze to follow. And the breeze does.

Holly Day

How I Identify You

I listen to your heart beating inside its cage of broken bones
the Braille graffiti of your chest, and even now I wonder
what things would have been like if you were whole when we met
if you weren't so damaged by your past, would you have come to me?

I run my fingertips over the old cigarette burns along your arms
testament to a drunk stepfather who never bothers calling anymore, wonder
if I could somehow put the pieces back together, fix this mangled child
how long it would take for you to decide you didn't need me anymore

that without your damaged past, there'd be no reason to seek solace
against me and my own broken heart.

Wife in Denial

I hear the screams from the bedroom
imagine her staring back at me with wide, blue eyes
but it doesn't do any good.
I tell him to pick up after himself when he's done
I'm not doing the laundry this time, either.

I hear the conversations coming from the room afterwards
and I know it's just him, it's him speaking in two separate voices
his and hers, and it is nothing I want to know about.
I walk above the corpses I know are in the yard lightly
careful with my garden spade, avoiding any fresh-turned dirt
sprinkle wildflower seeds over the suspicious berms instead.

Where We Meet

In bed, in the dark, your fingers brush the jagged “x”
that marks my damaged past.
I flinch out of habit, force myself
to be completely naked with you
tell you how you can make a happy face with a lighter
home-poke tattoos with a safety pin and India ink.

I trace the pattern of your own damaged flesh,
ribs shattered and warped, a mangled child

written in pages of skin half-crumbled to dust
ritualistic burnings—here, I defy you
to tell me I had it bad, we had it bad.
With you, I stand in defiance of the past

remake myself in images of celibacy
angelic visitations, with a heart as pure as ice.

With Careful Hands

her body a thin shadow
beside the pool the next morning
a whitewashed backdrop, too
thin ankles and smooth pale legs

small.
slashing and sewing with
careful, tiny stitches
she lies peacefully on white cotton sheets
no one would ever know.

The Flavor of the Sea

I bare only half of my history to you, spreads my hands wide
to hide the stories that should stay buried. There are screams
sandwiched between pages of sunlight, blood washed into wasted breath
parts of me that will always be stained with dirty fingerprints
will never wash clean.

I set my pleasant thoughts carefully on the quilt before you, delicate as china
let them unfold into bright, floppy paper flowers fancy enough
for displaying, half-opened, in jacket pockets at formal functions.
I can be good and pure for you, I can,
I will ignore the whispers like needles
the panicked dreams of escape.

Post Scriptum

Michael Ceraolo

An Unusual Blizzard

April blizzards are not
an every-year occurrence here,
and
those that do occur are rarely
intense enough to warrant commemoration,
if only
because the snow will be gone
in a matter of days
But
April 3, 1979
was a rainy day,
and
the blizzard was of something other than snow

Today
the only sign a house was ever there
is a lot much larger than the usual
on the rest of the street,
along
with the lesser height of some newer trees
planted where the house once stood
But
there was a house at 6304 Ellen Avenue
condemned to death by the city,
and
workers showed up on the above date
to carry out the execution

(back to the camera)
walking toward the lot carrying a pick and shovel
and wearing a coat with

CUYAHOGA
JAIL
COUNTY
[?]

on his back
(no word on whether he was a worker or an inmate)

Of course,
the Feds showed up,
but
after examining the money
and determining it wasn't counterfeit,
said,
that since no crime had been committed,
their presence was no longer required
(no word on whether they said
there was nothing to see here
and told people to move along,
or
whether they were taking names
to see if people claimed the money
on their taxes)

The children of Fletcher's sister,
the only known relatives,
disavowed
any interest in reclaiming the money,
estimated
to be about \$100,000
No word on whether they went
to the other three properties
to do some prospecting of their own

Postscript: Seven dump trucks
were needed to haul away the debris

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