

Alice and Bernie: By Death Bemused

A Brief Conversational Narrative

By David L. Haase

"Something's wrong here, Bernie. I just know it."

Alice's voice boomed through the dining room of the old Motel 6

It was as startling and as welcome as a gunshot at a funeral.

Recognizing the source of the sound, diners involuntarily clenched gut muscles and focused on their plates, whether they had any in front of them or not.

Bernie – short for Bernice, an offense she never forgave her parents – turned her myopic eyes from the steam table and peered into the face of her companion.

"Alice, what's not right?"

"Speak up, Bernie. I can see your lips flapping but I can't hear a thing."

"I said, what's not right?"

"Not so loud, for gosh sakes. Someone will hear you."

"Alice, if you don't want someone to hear us, take me outside, and we'll talk there."

The two old ladies, 80 if they were a day old, shuffled out the door of the Motel 6 on the edge of Fairfield, California.

Alice steered Bernie around the corner toward the parking lot.

"Alice, stop. I can't walk into town."

"I wasn't taking you into town, you blind old bat. I wanted us to be somewhere where I can see who might listening."

"Can you see anyone listening now?"

"No, there's no one out here."

"Well then, what's not right? You said something was wrong. Should we call the kids?"

"No, for gosh sakes, Bernie. I think they're part of it."

"Part of what?"

"Part of what's wrong."

"Well, what's wrong, Alice? You're not making sense again. Did you take your pills this morning?"

Alice gave the vacant parking lot a hostile glance.

"The conspiracy," she said.

"What conspiracy, Alice? Are you sure about this? This isn't one of your wild notions now, is it? Because I won't have anything ..."

"There's nothing wild about this. You see all these old people?"

"Well, no, of course not. We're in a parking lot."

"I mean all the geezers inside."

"Well, I suppose I heard them. You know I don't see too well."

"That was a rhetorical question, Bernie. And you're as blind as a bat."

"Alice, you needn't be harsh. You don't hear so well, you know. That's why we make a good pair."

"Bernie, I swear you could knock a conversation cock-eyed. I mean, did you notice all the geezers here at this gathering?"

"Well, of course I did. We all came on the same bus this afternoon from St. Gertrude's. That's the point of this weekend. It's to bring older people like you and me together with Asian children. Asians teach their children to honor old people like us. What's wrong with that?"

"What's wrong? I'll tell you what's wrong."

"You don't need to shout, Alice. I'm not the deaf one."

"I'm not deaf. I just don't hear as well as I used to."

"I'm sure you would hear just fine if you wore those hearing aids that Bobby bought for you."

"I'm not old enough to need hearing aids, Bernie, and neither are you."

"Alice, I don't need hearing aids. I hear just fine. I don't see well. It's the cataracts."

"You could have surgery for those, you know."

"No, I can't. I don't like anything touching my eyes. You know that."

"That's ridiculous, you old bat. They put you under when they fix the cataracts. You won't feel a thing."

"I know I won't feel a thing, because I won't do it. ... Now tell me what's wrong. I'm getting hungry and I want to eat supper."

"It's only 4:30."

"See? I'm late already. You know I like my meals regular. I like the four o'clock seating."

"You are such an old lady, Bernie."

"Alice, you're at least six months older than I am."

"That's right. Why can't you learn from me? I never set foot inside the food hall before five o'clock."

"Well, we're just different, Alice. Now what's wrong, or have you forgotten already? Sometimes I think your memory is going. It worries me. What if someday you take me out for a walk and you forget where we're going or how to get back? What will happen to us?"

"You old bat. That's not going to happen, because we're not going to live through this weekend. They plan to kill all of us."

#

Bernie shuddered at the mention of murder. Ever since she had learned that her father insisted on naming her after a dancer he had seen in Paris during World War I (Beranice du Quoit), Bernie had always thought of herself on the murdering side of the equation, not on the buried side.

"What!"

Bernie fairly screamed and gazed about in panic. Alice was often wrong in her notions, but she was right just often enough to make a person worry.

"Not so loud. You want someone to hear you?"

"Alice, you said there was no one around. How do you know they want to kill us? That's an awful thing to say. I think we should call the boys. Bobby or Camden can come and get us. I'll get my cell phone out and you can dial it."

"They won't be any help. They sent us here."

"Well, yes, but they didn't know the people here were going to kill us. How do you know they're going to kill us? Who told you?"

"No one told me. I figured it out myself."

"Oh, Alice, this is one of your wild notions. You're going to get us in trouble. I just know it."

"There won't be any trouble, because we'll be dead and nobody will care."

"Dead? How can you say such a horrible thing?"

"Figure it out, you blind old bat. Figure it out. What do they call this place?"

"Well, it's a Motel 6."

"No, not the building. The program. This weekend that Bobby and Camden signed us up for."

"Alice, you are forgetting things. It's Camp Youth in Asia-America."

"That's right. Youth in Asia."

"Yes. That's what I said. Camp Youth in Asia-America. It's where older people like us come together with young immigrants from Korea. Those Koreans are very organized. Don't you remember Father Bill telling us that? They help each other out and start businesses. That's why all the gas stations and dry cleaners are owned by Koreans. Do you remember any of this, Alice?"

"You old bat. You don't get it. Say it fast."

"Say what fast?"

"Say Camp Youth in Asia fast."

"CampYouthinAsia. I don't see what you're getting at, Alice."

"Youth in Asia. Youth in Asia. Euthanasia. You know, kill all the old people. They want to get rid of us."

"Oh. Ooh. Wait now, Alice. Is that all? You think the camp name sounds like euthanasia?"

"No, that's not all. Did you see the menu for the next three days?"

"Of course not, Alice. You know I can't see to read."

"Well, I can read, and the menu is exactly the same every day. For instance, meat loaf for dinner every day."

"Oh, I do like a good meat loaf. I wonder if they make it with catsup or gravy. I prefer gravy, but I'll eat catsup, too."

"You wingding. It doesn't matter. They're going to euthanize us."

"With the meat loaf?"

"No, you empty-headed bleached blonde. Not with the meatloaf. That's the tip-off. Nobody feeds old people like us the same thing day after day. That means they don't expect us to be here for dinner tomorrow night. It happens tomorrow."

"What happens tomorrow?"

"Euthanasia!"

"Alice, not so loud. They'll hear you inside the motel."

"That's another clue, Bernie."

"What? What's another clue?"

"The hotel. There's no kids there."

"Well, no, Alice. The kids are at the camp. We're staying at the motel because it's more comfortable for us than camping out. Weren't you listening at the orientation?"

"I was too busy looking for a way out of this place. They've got those counselors everywhere. You should have seen them rush us when we got off the bus."

"I think they were just trying to help us off the bus. I know I was glad to have someone give me a hand. They make those buses too high for older people like us."

Alice ignored Bernie, as she often did.

"There were two of them for every one of us. I tell you, they don't want any escapes."

"Alice, I think ..."

"Bernie, don't think. I'll do the thinking for the both of us. I've got the eyes and the brains for it."

She leaned into her friend.

"I've got a plan."

"Oh, dear," Bernie said. "Not a plan."

#

Bernie hated it when Alice had a plan. It always ended in the Administrator's office at St. Gertrude the Great's Residential Living for Seniors with Sister Maria Theresa looking over her glasses and saying things like, "Tsk. Tsk. Tsk. I can't believe you let Alice talk you into that."

So here it was, another invitation into Sister Maria Theresa's office.

"You see that gardener over there?" Alice asked. "No, don't look."

"Well, you asked, and I can't see if I don't look."

"There's a gardener over there. He's putting mulch around the bushes."

"I thought I smelled new mulch. I think mulch just tidies up a garden so nicely, don't you, Alice?"

"Bernie, this is not about the garden. It's about the gardener."

"What about the gardener?"

"He's an illegal alien."

"Really? How can you tell?"

"Bernie, sometimes I wonder about you. Eleven million Hispanics in America are illegal. Have you ever seen a legal one?"

"Well, Alice, I don't know how to tell a legal one from an illegal one. They all seem very nice to me."

"The illegal ones are shifty, Bernie, and this guy looks shifty."

"But, Alice, if people think all the Hispanics are illegal, wouldn't a legal Hispanic have reason to look shifty, too?"

"Bernice, I don't know how a dingbat like you ever got the vote."

"What does my vote have to do with your plan? And you know I don't like that name."

Bernie looked offended and disappointed at the same time.

"I'm sorry, Bernie, it just slipped out. Now here's my plan."

"Do I have to listen to your plan now? Couldn't we discuss it later, after dinner perhaps?"

"Well, I suppose we could. Is it five o'clock yet?"

"I don't know, but my stomach tells me it's past supper time."

Thanks goodness, Bernie thought. I can count on Alice being punctual about her meals. But what if they put the poison in the meatloaf tonight?

#

"Are you clear on the plan?"

"Well, yes, you've told me three times, but I don't know why we can't have breakfast first. And why do I have to approach the gardener? Why can't you do it, and I'll be the lookout?"

"For pity's sakes, Bernie, is that all you think about? Food?"

"Well, it's almost seven, and we usually have breakfast at 6:15 at St. Gertrude's."

"Well, we're not at St. Gertrude's, and we won't be anywhere but in that mortuary down the street if you don't follow the plan."

"Alice, did you say there's a mortuary down the street? You didn't mention that in the plan."

"It's not in the plan. I didn't want to worry you. Pretty convenient, don't you think. And it's Korean. The sign out front has two languages, and one of them has those flat circles and stick figures all over it."

"Oh, Alice. You may be right about all this."

"Of course, I'm right about this. Now you go get Pablo there. We have to get going before they miss us."

Bernie toddled off toward a shadowy figure at the edge of the parking lot and well beyond her normal line of vision. The outline grew sharper as she neared him, but never completely came into focus.

"Excuse me, young man."

Bernie's voice startled the Salvadoran, and he bolted upright and faced the voice. She was so close to him he stepped back into the bush he had been mulching and tumbled over backwards.

The old woman stepped around the bush and reached down to help the man up.

"Are you all right, young man?"

"Si. Si. Yes," he said.

"Oh, good. Come along then. My friend Alice wants to have a word with you."

"Que?" he said.

Bernie spoke no Spanish and knew it was pointless to converse with the man. If Alice was going to be the brains, she could do the talking.

She took the man by the arm. He looked back at his mulch as the crazy old woman dragged him away.

"Bernie, what are you doing?" Alice looked furtively about. "We're supposed to meet at the bus."

"He doesn't speak English. You need to talk to him," Bernie said.

"Oh, for gosh sakes, Bernie. ... Say, you. You speak English?"

Manuel Estaban Barca smiled, as his friends had counseled him to do when confronted with an Anglo who does not speak Spanish.

"English? English," Alice said, her voice rising above its normal shout.

"Do you speak English?" She enunciated slowly.

"Alice, he's not deaf. The whole motel will hear you."

"Bernie, back off. That's how you talk to these people. You have to talk slow and loud and let it sink in."

"I don't think he speaks English."

"You're probably right."

"You drive?" Alice faced Manuel and made turning motions with an invisible steering wheel.

"Si. Si. Yes," he said, nodding.

"Good. Come along." Alice grabbed Manuel and Bernie by their elbows and steered them toward the yellow school bus parked at the door to the motel.

"All right, Bernie. You first. And you, mister, you help her up. She doesn't see well."

Bernie held out her arm to the perplexed Salvadoran.

"Up, up." Alice said. "Help her up. ... You're as big a ninny as she is. We'll be lucky if all three of us don't end up in a hole six feet under by supper time."

"I heard that, Alice."

"Bernie, keep moving. ... You, up, up. Come on before someone notices."

Alice tried lifting her leg onto the first step of the bus. It was too high.

"Hey, senor, help me up."

"Can I help you, ma'am?" It was one of the fresh-faced volunteers coming out the hotel door. "It's very early to be boarding the bus. We won't leave for at least half an hour."

"Oh, that's all right. We want to get good seats." Alice lied.

"Well, if you insist, but the bus ride only takes about 10 minutes."

"That's all right. We want to get window seats. We don't get out much."

"Who's that in there with you?"

"That's just my friend. Now you go back in there and get a good breakfast. I imagine you have a busy day planned."

"Oh, yeah. It's going to be great. The kids are so excited. ... Can I help you up?"

"No, I can make it myself. You run along."

"All right. See you later."

The teen-ager wandered back into the motel, wondering what his mother had gotten him into.

"Dumb bunny," Alice said under her breath, which meant the teen heard her and looked back at the old lady hitching her knee up and down like she was trying to start a motor cycle.

She finally hauled herself into the bus with a helping hand from Manuel, who led her to the seat immediately behind the driver. He bowed to the ladies and started for the bus door, happy to have helped two old people.

"Hold on. Where do you think you're going?" Alice said.

She pointed at the driver's seat. "You drive."

Manuel Estaban Barca shook his head – "No. No. No." – and poured out a stream of Spanish, pointing to the bushes he had been mulching.

"You can do that later," Alice said, pointing fiercely toward the driver's seat. She reached past him and pulled the lever that closed the school bus door, trapping Manuel inside. "Drive."

He sat, staring fearfully at Alice. This was how you lose a job, he thought.

"Buckle up," she said, pointing to the seat belt.

He fastened the seat belt and looked to Alice.

"Drive. San Lorenzo. You know San Lorenzo?"

He pointed to the ignition lock and launched into an explanation Alice could not understand.

She reached into her purse and pulled out a key attached to a yellow tag shaped like a bus.

"Here. Now drive."

"Alice, where did you get that key?" Bernie asked.

"Front desk. I told one of those kids the director wanted me to get it for him. Kids these days will believe anything."

"Alice, that was wrong."

"Wrong? Wrong is getting sent to a euthanasia camp by your own children. That's wrong. ... Come on, you, drive."

She made steering motions again. Manuel tried to object, but Alice put a firm hand on his shoulder. "Drive."

Manuel started the engine and the bus jerked forward. Alice was prepared for the rough start. She held tight to the hand rail between Manuel and her. Even experts seemed to have trouble getting these yellow giants moving smoothly, and Manuel had the look of a person who did more mulching than driving.

"San Lorenzo. We go to San Lorenzo," she said, slowly and loudly.

"San Lorenzo, si. Si. Yes. San Lorenzo." Manuel jabbered on as he pulled out of the parking lot and onto the street, heading toward the

interstate. Behind him, young people poured out of the old motel, yelling and waving their hands.

He shifted into a higher gear, wondering why two old ladies were forcing him to take them to southern Mexico. It would take two or three days to reach, and he had no idea how they would get across the border. Maybe the Mexican authorities would seize him and free him from the old ladies.

"Alice, should we call Gracie now?"

"No. We'll wait till we get closer to San Lorenzo. I don't want her to alert her Dad."

"You said she would help us."

"She will, but she might be conflicted. If we just show up, she won't have time to think about it."

"Do you know the way to her house?"

"No, but I figure we can stop somewhere and have her come meet us. Then we can send Pablo here back, and we make our escape. When we're safe, we can call the cops. They can rescue the others."

"Alice, can we stop somewhere and get breakfast?"

"Bernie, all you think about is food. Here, I brought you some crackers. You can nibble on those until we get to Gracie's house. San Lorenzo is just north of here, only two or three hours away."

#

"Sarge, it looks like a kidnapping. Do we call in the FBI?"

Detective Phil Glans of the Fairfield Police Department started briefing his old partner, Charlie Reid, now a detective sergeant and mostly a desk squatter. Only a slow Saturday would get him out of the office.

"Fill me in," the sergeant said.

"This is some kind of church camp that mixes old people and young Asian kids. It gives the geezers a break from the old folk's home and it helps new Asian immigrants get used to the country. Win-win."

"Where do they get the geezers?"

"Local old folk's homes. The camp pays their expenses. The homes are glad reduce patient loads for a weekend. Like I said, win-win all around."

"And the Hispanic kidnapper?"

"Works for a local lawn service."

"Illegal?"

"No. He's got a work permit, but he doesn't speak any English."

"Why would he kidnap two old ladies?"

"No idea. Figuring out motives is above my pay grade."

Det. Glans was more than happy to speculate, but he thought it wouldn't hurt old Charlie to take a dig about his new exalted status now and then.

"Do we have a line on which way they're heading?"

"Bunch of high school kids, like escorts for the old folks, saw them leave and said he turned south toward the interstate. We've got an APB out. Shouldn't be that many school buses on the I-5 on a Saturday."

"All right. Stay on it. Who's in charge of the camp?"

"Worried looking Asian guy over there. A Mr. Hu."

"Who?"

"Come on, sarge. Not that old joke."

"No sense of humor. You used to have a sense of humor when you rode with me."

"No, I just put up with your dumb jokes."

"He does look worried, doesn't he?"

"Yeah. I would be, too, if I lost two old ladies. Media types are going to descend like vultures any minute. Missing school bus. Slow news day."

"Yeah. Why don't you call public affairs? Let them know what's shaking. I'll go see Mr. Hu. While you're at it, just run a check on Hu and this camp. Touch all the bases."

"What about FBI?"

"Let's work it a little before we call them. If it looks like it's going to get messy or end unhappily, we can let the glory hogs take over. But how hard can it be to find a school bus?"

"You're the boss," the detective said. Under his breath he added, "And it scares me to death."

#

"Alice, I think we're lost."

"What are you talking about, Bernie?"

"You said Gracie lives in San Lorenzo. That's north. We're going south."

"Since when do you read road signs?"

"Well, Alice, I might not be able to see the road signs, but I can tell which side of the bus the sun is shining in. It's shining in the left side of the bus. That means we're going south."

"I'll look for road signs. Pablo up there seems to know what he's doing."

"Maybe we could stop at a McDonald's and ask for directions. Someone in the restaurant is bound to know how to speak Spanish."

"Bernie, is your stomach the only thing you think about?"

"Alice, you listen to me. Crackers and water are not breakfast. We're lost and getting more lost. We need to let Gracie know that we're all right. If the police contact her before we do, she'll be worried sick. And she's not responsible for how you feel about her father."

"All right already. We'll get you some food and directions, and I'll let Gracie know what's going on. Will that satisfy you?"

"Of course. Thank you, Alice. I know you mean well, but I think you assume everyone is as hardy as you are."

Alice puffed up. Bernie smiled.

"Hey, Pablo, do you comprendez McDonald's?"

"McDonald's, si. Big Mac."

"No Big Mac. Egg McMuffin, you ninny. Of all the illegal Hispanics, we pick the one who can't even speak McDonald's."

#

"Sarge, we had them and we lost them."

"What do you mean, lost them?"

"Northbound state trooper on I-5 thinks he ID'd them, but had to go two miles up the road to a crossover. By the time he got to where they should have been, they weren't there. State Police figure they must have gotten off at the next exit."

"Are the local cops alerted?"

"Yeah, sarge, they are, but there's a problem."

"What's that?"

"The exit they must have used? There's a high school band competition going on right off the exit. There are literally hundreds of school buses parked all over. We don't have any identifying marks on the bus; it will take hours to search them all."

"That does it, Phil. Time to call in the Feds. Let them figure it out. I'll call the chief. You stay on the State Police."

#

"There, now, Alice. That wasn't so bad, was it?"

Bernie smiled happily, reinvigorated by her fast food breakfast.

"No, it wasn't, but we're losing time. Those other campers could be on the way to the ovens."

"Ovens? What ovens?"

"The mortuary ovens. After they euthanize them, they have to dispose of the bodies. They probably do it right down the street from that motel."

"Oh, Alice. Do you really think so?"

"I'll bet. I know I would. They're probably all part of that conspiracy."

"Well, do you think Manuel can drive faster?"

"He can't drive any slower."

"I think he's doing a wonderful job. You would never know he had never driven before."

"I wish we had known that before we started."

"Alice, you didn't give the man a chance to explain."

"Well, at least we're heading in the right direction now."

"How long do you think it will take to get to Gracie's?"

"If we were about three hours from San Lorenzo when we started and we went in the wrong direction for three hours and stopped for lunch, then we should be about six hours or so."

"We'll never get there in time to save those poor old people."

"For once, I think you've figured it out right. I'll bet they put something in their prune juice over lunch. Then they put them in tents for a nap and that's when they do it."

"How do you think they do it? Do they shoot them?"

"Shoot them? And attract attention? Bernie, sometimes I wonder about you. No, I'm sure they use some kind of drug. Just stick a needle in them."

"I just don't understand. Why would my Camden want to do me in? And your Bobby?"

"It's the money."

"We don't have any money. All we have is our Social Security and Medicare. It's not that much."

"Well, maybe they took out life insurance policies on us. It's always about the money."

Bernie knew Alice's Bobby and her Camden. Known them all their lives. Two nicer boys – sons – did not exist. They were paying for St. Gertrude's. There was no way it was about money.

"Alice, is this about Bosco?"

"You leave him out of this."

"It is about Bosco. What did he do this time?"

"He might have scratched Bobby."

"Oh. And Bobby is so allergic to cats."

"Yeah, he swelled up like a balloon. They had to take him to the emergency room. After he got out of the hospital, he said Bosco was no longer welcome in his home, and if I insisted on keeping him, I was no longer welcome either. He told me I had to decide between Bosco and him."

"Oh, Alice. You love that old cat."

"Bosco is not mangy."

"Alice, I didn't say he was. But now you mention it, he really doesn't have much hair, especially on his tail, and he hates everyone. He won't let me near him, I know that."

"How can a blind old bat like you tell if Bosco has hair on his tail or not?"

"I've got hands, and I can tell you that touching that cat is like touching ... Well, I don't know. But it's not furry or fluffy or ... normal."

"Well, I knew if Bobby was going to get rid of Bosco, it wouldn't be long before he got rid of me. The next thing you know, he's talked Camden into sending us both to this camp. And he says not to pack too much stuff. What do you think now?"

"I think we need to call Gracie again. Maybe she will be in this time. She should have gotten your message, don't you think? I confess I'm surprised she hasn't called back."

"I told her everything she needs to know. She doesn't need to call back. As a precaution, in case she breaks down and tells her dad, I turned your phone off."

"Oh, Alice, do you think that's wise? She might be trying to call us."

"I don't want your phone to give away our location, just in case."

"Just in case of what, Alice?"

“Bernie, you and your questions are almost as bad as you and your appetite. In case the cops are in cahoots with the killers, that’s what.”

“Oh, Alice you don’t think that, do you?”

“How long have we been gone? Four hours? Why haven’t the cops found us? We’re in a bright yellow school bus. How hard can it be to find us?”

#

"Hey, sarge. Thought you could use some coffee. Those feebees don't look too happy."

"They're not. All they can ask is why we didn't contact them first. Have they found them yet? Feds aren't sharing any information with me."

"Not yet, but the old ladies made contact with a granddaughter up in San Lorenzo."

“Oh, yeah? They OK? They got away from the Mexican?”

"Salvadoran. And no, not exactly."

"The Salvadoran made a ransom call."

"Not really."

"Well, what then?"

"It's complicated, and I'm sure it's contributing to the Feds' unhappiness."

"What?"

"The old ladies weren't kidnapped. They say they escaped from a euthanasia program their sons put them in."

The Fairfield, California, Police sergeant looked at his old partner, forming an O with his mouth.

"It gets worse."

"How?"

"They kidnapped the Salvadoran, not the other way around."

The sergeant chuckled.

"And the ladies are all right. The feebees found them?"

"Not yet. But that's not all."

"There's more?"

"Yeah, sarge. It turns out the camp operator may in fact be using the place to identify rich old people. He persuades them to leave a big bequest to the camp. Then they suddenly have a heart attack. The Feds think they've got two likely cases already. Looks like the old ladies were right."

"So, did they get the guy, Mr. Who, or whatever his name was?"

"Sort of. It's more like he got them. He was doing a runner and plowed right into an FBI crime scene van pulling into the Motel 6."

"And the Feds can't find the old ladies?"

"Nope. It's like they disappeared off the face of the earth – in a yellow school bus."

"Are they still looking?"

"Of course. They have to. The press is all over them wanting to know when they are going to find two old ladies and a Salvadoran driving up the 5. I mean, how hard can that be?"

Sarge honked and honked his laugh and tears rolled down his eyes. It was good to be a desk sergeant on a slow Saturday.

#

"Alice, it's after lunch. The sun is setting. I told you the sun should not be behind us. That means we're heading east, not north."

"Well, Miss Smarty Pants, if you think we're going in the wrong direction again, maybe you should navigate."

"Alice, I recognize this road."

"Bernie, you're blind as a bat. How can you recognize anything?"

"I can see colors just fine, thank you, Alice. We just passed a Wendy's, and I'm sure there's a McDonald's up on the right. This is the way we come back from bingo at Holy Rosary. We're not far from St. Gertrude's. I just know it."

“It does look a little familiar. Hey, Pablo, hang a right up here. A right. Right. This way I’m tapping your shoulder. There. There. ... Oh, you missed it, you ninny. Now listen to me, we ...”

Bernie sat back, contented to be almost home. Saturday was pot roast night. With luck, she thought, we can make the four o’clock seating.

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