2011

Vol. 62, No. 4, December 7, 2011

University of Michigan Law School

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Final Exams: Tips and Strategies

By Sage Vanden Heuvel

At some point in our law school careers, we've all had pressing questions about exams that we were too embarrassed to ask. In the hopes of helping at least one stressed 1L, I have decided to address five of the most common law school exam worries.

STRICT WORD LIMITS. We know them; we hate them. Strict word limits cut into your intellectual flow, particularly for those verbose types who enjoy ruminating on the finer points of law. If you feel like you are going to go over the limit, there is an easy solution: FORGET THE SPACE BAR. You don't need spaces between your words. Your professor wants to limit you to 2500 words? 5000 words? Send him ONE WORD. Skip those spaces and EBB will keep you well under the word limit. Don't worry, this will not upset professors. In fact they will probably appreciate your ingenuity and attention to detail. If your professors wanted to define what a “word” was, they could have done so in the exam instructions. A careful and clever reading of exam instructions will just demonstrate your natural talent for careful statute reading in the future. The professor will be impressed and might even give you extra points. ADDED BONUS: No time spent hitting the space bar means more time to type your actual (one-word) answer.

PROPER BLUEBOOKING. Some people think they don't have to Bluebook the citations in their exam answers. THEY ARE WRONG. If you haven't purchased the 20th Edition of the Bluebook, you better get to your nearest bookstore ASAP. Under Rules 2.3-2.6, you will see the proper citation format for law school exams. Be warned - your professor WILL mark you down if you don't cite properly. For example, if you want to cite a hypothetical the professor discussed in class, the proper format would be something like this: William Adder, Grave Robber Hypothetical Property, Mich. Law Sch. (Oct 19, 2011 3:15 PM) (stenographic recording on file).

CLOSED BOOK EXAMS. Ah yes, closed book exams. The bane of those of us with bad short-term memory, bad long-term memory, and those of us who just aren't that smart. It might seem an insurmountable barrier, but before you consider actually memorizing case names, let me ask you one question: you have palms don't you? Yes? Well then grab a Sharpie and start writing your outline on them. There's a reason they call it “black-letter law.” Put those letters on your skin and you'll be good to go. A good lawyer knows how to read things very closely. Do the exam instructions say you can't transcribe your entire casebook or supplement onto your arms? I didn't think so.

COMPUTER PROBLEMS. So it's a take-home exam and Word just ate your file. Here is my advice: DON'T PANIC. WOULD SCALIA PANIC? Of course not. Just consider the lost file a rough draft, and now you have the opportunity to get it right. Oh, your exam is due in 30 minutes, you say? Well it's a good thing you can type 120 wpm. Plenty of time! Top lawyers do their best work under pressure, and the same goes for law students. Your panicked stream-of-consciousness answers will probably contain the exact off-the-wall, original insights that separate great exam answers from the rest of the pack. At least you'd better hope so.

THE GRADING CURVE. Don't you hate it when your professor says, “don't worry, you'll all be fine” or “you guys will do great”? What kind of cruel joke are they trying to play? They know as well as you do that half the class is NOT going to do great. Students are up against the curve, and the curve is a cruel,

See Final on page 10

Finals Issue

- Mailbag, p. 2
- LLMs, p. 3
- When You Were Cooler, p. 4
- Sudoku, p.7
- Zack Letter Law, p. 8
- A Ding Letter, p.6
- Crossword, p.12
The Res Gestae Mailbag

By Sage Vanden Heuvel

As I sit here in the Commons, sipping a delicious mocha latte from the Kirkland & Ellis Café, a thought strikes me: law school goes by too fast. It seems like only yesterday I was at ASW, face-deep in a Rick’s shark bowl, a hundred drunk students hopping to “Party in the USA” while visions of the deans dancing on a table were still fresh in my head. It was March, 2010: such an innocent time. Back then there was no Commons, just a big tarp-covered ditch surrounded by construction equipment.

Little did I realize how much law school would change me over the next eighteen months. Constant reading has given me glaucoma. Heavy books have given me scoliosis. Constant typing has given me carpal tunnel. Cold calls have given me a host of nervous disorders...and Michigan winters have given me enough frostbite to require three amputations. I used to be debt-free. I used to have all my toes. I never used to make dumb law jokes. What happened?

But alas, this column isn’t about my problems. It’s about yours. Reading these letters, it appears law school students have quite a few. Let’s get to them.

Argggghhh, there are undergrads in the Reading Room again. I saw one at my table this afternoon. What can we do to get rid of them?

I know it has become a tradition to treat the undergrads as lepers or vermin, but take a look at your fellow law students crouched over their laptops and casebooks. Hell, have you looked in the mirror lately? Law students are wretched creatures: stress-filled, anxious, neurotic, and loathsome. We should be GRATEFUL the undergrads are there to chill things out with their carefree ways. Have you been to the Reading Room during those weeks when it is closed off to undergrads, with only law students studying there? I’m not sure what circle of hell it is (they can’t all be the Ninth Circle, can they?), but it’s definitely one of them. I ventured into the undergrad-free Reading Room last semester and within five minutes witnessed two panic attacks, one cardiac arrest, and a fairly accurate reenactment of the head explosion scene from Scanners. If that sounds like an ideal study environment, then perhaps you have bigger problems than the gum-smacking Tri-Delt down the table from you.

I lost my coat at Rick’s! It was fairly expensive and it’s really cold outside. Let me know if you see it!

That really sucks. I have friends who lost their coats at Rick’s last year and...wait, why am I being sympathetic? You were at RICK’S! They have a COAT CHECK! WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?

Please, people, let’s not continue the tradition of tossing your nice coat into the corner of the sleaziest bar in Ann Arbor, then wondering why it’s missing two hours later as you prepare to venture out into the cold. Guess what—the other drunk people know it’s cold too, and what better way to fight the cold than a free coat lying on the floor?

Now, I may sound rather hypocritical considering I too have tossed my coat onto a random Rick’s table before. Luckily I’ve never had it stolen, though whether it’s because I wear a raggedy five dollar thrift store coat or because I rub it down with skunk oil I can’t say. Somehow it’s always there waiting for me.

Mailbag continued on next page
LLM Side Part II: Extra Jitters

By Savera Qazi

Time flies in Ann Arbor. It is hard to believe that less than one month is left before the end of the fall semester, which in turn means that exams are less than one month away! Yikes! As a LL.M. student, I feel our experience has been like that of both a 1L and a 3L student. In our first semester at UMich, we were busy adjusting to the whole American law school culture — making outlines (none of us ever did that in our law schools!), doing never-ending readings, getting over the fear of cold calls (as one LL.M. put it, back home we were supposed to ask professors questions and not the other way round), etc. On the other hand, as the duration of our program is only one year, this is also our ‘last year.’ Hence, many of us are busy trying to find a job, filling out applications, registering for career fairs, attending job-related talks, etc. In the midst of all this craziness (which of course includes attending the Halloween party and the Culture Show) is the pressure of the upcoming exams. Professors have started posting sample exams and answer keys on CTools, making all of us dread what is in store for us.

It makes me wonder, why do we have exam jitters? Is the American legal system difficult to comprehend? Or is it only the fear of the unknown? We all have sat through numerous law exams, and I know for one, law school back home was not easy! I had to make sense of our complicated tax law statutes and understand Derrida’s deconstruction theory, and even though terms like ‘epistemological heterogeneity of legal networks’ went over my head, I managed to do pretty well. (Hopefully I’ll do well here as well, but what fun is it to write an article without a little exaggeration?) Anyways, the point of this article is — why are LL.M. students nervous about the upcoming exams?

First, I would like to blame the fear of the unknown. Even though professors have been kind enough to provide us with past exams and sample answers, there is still an uneasiness about taking the exams here. It is hard to explain this feeling (I tried explaining to my parents and failed.) One of the reasons behind this uneasiness is the different manner in which many of us were trained back home. Many of us come from a background where we were tested on ‘what the law is’ rather than ‘how the law is to be applied.’ Hence, at times we cannot relate to this emphasis on the application of law. Moreover, with English being a second language for the majority of the LL.M. students, things can get pretty difficult.

Some of us are back in a classroom after ten or more years of work. For such students adjusting to the classroom dynamic has been an experience in itself. As one student said, ‘I am learning to learn again.’

Hey, I’m a 3L and was wondering —

Haha, nice try, but we all know 3Ls don’t really exist. Good one though.

I was told 1L was hard, but it’s actually not bad at all. I killed a cold call yesterday and my legal practice memo got the highest grade in the class. Am I missing something?

Yes, in fact, you are missing something. The fact that you did well with a cold call and a legal practice assignment — NEITHER OF WHICH AFFECT YOUR GPA AT ALL — means nothing. Actually, it might mean you are focusing on exactly the wrong things. I don’t think I’ve taken a single class where the Cold Call Champion (if there was such a designation) had the highest grade. More often than not, the highest grades went to the quiet types who spent most of class g-chatting and playing Angry Birds. Who would you rather be, the gunner who charges in guns a’blazing and depletes his ammo by finals week, or the sniper who saves his bullets for the decisive moment? And please save me the smug pride in your Tunkl Test memo. I don’t care if you got a perfect score — you will look back at that memo a year from now and wonder how your legal practice prof kept himself from writing LM-FAO at the top.

Now, I don’t want to scare 1Ls about what finals are like. They say ignorance is bliss, and I’ve been advised by my editors that it is best to avoid pulling back the curtain on what you are about to go through. And yet...I can’t help myself. Have you ever had a nightmare where you were forced to go to some horrible soul-crushing job, and instead of being able to clock out after 8 hours you had to stay there all day, all night, all month? Finals is like that. You occasionally get to sleep, yes, but even then you dream about torts and contracts and motherfucking Iqbal. You can’t eat, you can’t breathe, you forget how to laugh, and your old friends don’t even recognize you anymore. You definitely lose a little piece of yourself during finals; I can’t say for sure that you ever really get it back. But hey — too late to turn back now, huh? Good luck, Godspeed, and we’ll see you on the other side.

Well, that’s it for this edition of the Mailbag. Keep the letters coming!

Mailbag continued from previous

Send more incisive emails to Sage at rg@umich.edu.
When You Were Cooler

A Marine Goes to Law School

By Sally Larsen

Kat Ryzewska, a 1L at Michigan, used to be cool. How cool? She did 20-mile mountain runs, wore flak in Iraq, and failed the sit-up test — all after being a Wiccan in high school. Peep her experience as a Marine.

Kat Ryzewska: I entered the Marine Corps right after high school. It was senior year and I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. I had done a lot of art-related stuff in high school — I was president of the Art Club and vice-president of Rembrandt Society. We hung up artwork in particular ways around the school — it was like being a museum curator except much less glamorous and cool. And I was weird and goth and at one point freshman year I was Wiccan.

And then I realized art would never really get me a solid sort of job, and I could always do it on the side. And I said, “Oh, well I’ll just join the military.” So I went in [to the recruitment center] and I thought, “Which branch should I join? Well, I might as well join the hardest branch, if I’m going to do it.” So I joined the Marine Corps.

I have no idea why. Like, looking back I have no clue. We didn’t really have a military background in my family or anything. I don’t know, now and then I sign up for things that are going to be really difficult but I can’t back out of, and it’s usually a good idea. I certainly don’t have any regrets. So I had the summer after high school, and then two weeks after my 18th birthday I went to boot camp.

RG: How long is boot camp?

KR: It’s normally three months. I was there for four months because I failed the sit-up test at the beginning. I was off by just a few, and this girl could have lied about it, just let me go... I had to stay and do this remedial section.

An interesting thing about boot camp is, you know how they have the prison experiment, where if you get taken hostage you get the Stockholm Syndrome? Where you kind of lose sight of yourself? That kind of happens in boot camp. It’s like its own little world, that creates different priorities in your mind, and you have a completely different perspective while you’re there, because all of the sudden you care about things that are completely not worth caring about, and you care about them deeply. “Oh, we have to win this, like, marching competition.”

And you have this strange relationship with your drill instructor as well, because they mess with you psychologically all the time. Like you have your senior drill instructor, who’s the nice one, and then you have the other ones who torture you whenever they get a chance. They pit you against the senior, and then the senior will come back and be like, “I’m so disappointed in you.” And you’re thinking, “Oh no, we’ve disappointed our senior, by not doing this thing or another.” On Christmas it came back that we had gotten the worst scores at the rifle range, so they took this Christmas tree that our senior got us, took it out in the sand pit, and made us come out and sing Silent Night to it while they kicked it and buried it in the sand. [Laughing.]

RG: Was that funny at the time?

KR: No, we were like crying, and everyone was really depressed. Like I said, you take things so seriously, because you’re in such a confined environment. Looking back, I think it’s hilarious, like they probably had a great time doing it, but we were all bawling at the time.

RG: What was the physical training like?

KR: Well, it depended on who was in charge of you at the time. If they didn’t care that much a lot of times we’d go to the gym, and we’d have short runs. But every now and then we’d get officers in our company who’d be really, really into running and doing excessive amounts of physical training all the time. We had one period where every week we’d go on a hump, and it started off with three miles, which sounds short, but it’s through the mountains and it’s really fast-paced and you’re wearing gear. And we worked up to like 15 to 20 miles.

Anyone can do it. Physically, I honestly believe anyone can do it. Although I did have problems on the hump, because I was short, and everyone who’s short has like problems keeping up a little bit. But, you know, you do it... and then you’re in pain for the entire weekend afterwards. And they always did it Friday morning, so that we couldn’t do anything for the rest of the weekend.

I was only in California [at Camp Pendleton] for a few months before I got shipped out to Iraq. I definitely didn’t want to go, and I complained about it for at least a month while I was there. We all hated Iraq for a while so we would all get together at breakfast and bitch about being there. But really we didn’t have it that bad.

RG: Did you know you were going to go there when you joined?

KR: No actually, the recruiters are like...I don’t know what [image]

Continued on Next Page
they have in their minds of what the military is like for women, but it was certainly not what they imagined. They were like, “Oh yeah, you’ll be wearing Charlies everyday, with a skirt, and doing easy stuff. And, I mean, I didn’t really know what to expect. They told me that I was never going to deploy, and this and that. They straight up lied to me. But I should have known better, I guess.

RG: Were you scared?

KR: I don’t know. I didn’t really know what to think of it. I didn’t really do this consciously, but I gave away a lot of my stuff. You know how people do that when they, like, expect something bad to happen? And I wasn’t really thinking about it, but I gave away a bunch of my clothes, my shoes, all these personal belongings. And later on I came back and I was like, I need that stuff...

I was there for a while, but I never felt scared for a long time until I started to like, think about it. We got mortared all the time. But most of the time when a mortar hits it doesn’t hit anything. The first weekend I was there, they managed to hit the armory, while nobody was there, somehow, and the entire armory blew up. And we were outside at the time, and we had to get a head count on everybody after every attack. And you could see it – it was across the lake – and when it blew up it was like daylight for a while. Most of the time, you know, you’d be out playing soccer, and then you’d leave the field, and that’s when the mortar would hit.

RG: That’s very convenient.

KR: Well there’s no real aim with mortars. They hit whenever and wherever. We only had, I think, either 1 or 3 killed in action on our base. It’s a sad story too. They went to the PX (the base’s equivalent of a big box store), they bought themselves a TV with three guys, to take back to their barracks room, and the mortar landed right in front of them. I guess after that I kind of started to think about it, you know. There’s no predictability about it. So you’d be walking to take a shower and there’d be a mortar. And your flak jacket will cover you to a certain extent, but it only covers your torso.

RG: What was your day-to-day experience like?

KR: At Camp Pendleton you kind of have a 9-to-5 job. It’s 7-to-4 and then we have physical training every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. I worked in Supply. [The Marines] have a lot of different units and there’s a central unit that takes care of everybody else, so that’s where I worked. I did a lot of database administration type stuff, data entry, incredibly boring. In Iraq I worked kind of in a similar office – General Accounts.

The percentage of women in the Marine Corps is really small, [but] it’s pretty high in Supply. So I saw more women, but I think other people very rarely saw Marine Corps women. In Iraq, I was the only girl in my particular platoon, so I only worked with guys while I was there. You’re in guy culture all the time, so you sort of have to adapt. But it was fine. It’s like being around bros all the time.

At Camp Pendleton, when you’re in the barracks you share [a room]. I shared with two other girls for a while. In Iraq we had a really big room, so there isn’t much privacy there. I think that’s probably one of the reasons people get married really early, because you get paid to move off base. The marriage thing is really weird in the military because a lot of people settle down really early, I think too fast. But that also keeps them in the military, because until the 9/11 GI bill, the GI bill would only pay for your school and that was it. So you definitely didn’t have enough money to support your family.

So people would get married, and have a few kids and stuff, and it was easier on base – you know the military takes care of you to a certain extent. As you pick up rank you realize you’re not going to be able to go out in the civilian world and use your GI bill and go to school and get a better job... if you don’t have something lined up you’re kind of stuck. So I think that’s one reason [why people in the military get married early], [plus] the barracks suck. They’re just terrible, so people would want to get out of there as soon as possible.

RG: Did you know that the Marine Corps was going to be temporary for you?

KR: Yeah, I didn’t want to do it for more than four years. It’s funny though, they do try to scare you into staying when you leave. They’ll have someone come by and tell you this really sad story like, yeah this man was a gunny sergeant and he was doing great, and he decided to get out [of the military] and then his wife left him, and he lost his job, and then he lost his home, and his kids hate him, and he was homeless, and then we called him, and we took him back in, and now he’s happy again.

To their credit, now we have the 9/11 GI bill, so we get paid to live and to go to school, which gives people an opportunity to do things they wouldn’t have had an opportunity to do. They do give you some transitional training, like on how to interview. And the [Department of Veterans Affairs] is fantastic, they have all kinds of services for vets.

I [left the Marines] in October of 2008, so I came back and I worked as a bartender for a while, and then I started school (at the University of Illinois at Chicago). I rushed through undergrad, took classes all...
Ding Letter Redux

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Bruce D. Manning
3019 Lakehaven Court
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48105

Dear Bruce,

We enjoyed the opportunity to meet with you on our firm's visit to the University of Michigan Law School last week. So that's where I know you from. I thought it was from that letter last Tuesday...

Unfortunately, we have just completed the difficult process of choosing between many well qualified candidates for relatively few positions, and we are unable to invite you back to the firm for further interviews. Our decision does not reflect in any way upon yourself or your record, and we are confident that you will find a most satisfactory position in the law profession.

Thank you for your interest in Goldberg, Adler & Mandelbaum LLP, and please accept our best wishes for the remainder of the academic year.

Very truly yours,

Trevor A. Roth

P.S. Obviously legibility doesn't matter in the legal world. They must have rejected me for my neat handwriting.
Working at a law firm is no joke, but that is a different kind of hard work. Here, doing solitary study for a stretch of 5 to 6 hours with full concentration is a stark contrast to the office work where the telephone would ring every now and then, someone would come to your room, you would be checking emails every 15 minutes, etc.

On top of all this is the American law school grading system that few of us are familiar with. What is this ‘curve’? If the exam is easy, one should not be happy because even if you score 80 percent you could still end up with a B-minus? How weird is that! As one LL.M student put it, the grade would be given in comparison with the JD students, so even if in absolute terms I did well, maybe in relative terms I wouldn’t.

The unfamiliarity with the technical rules governing the exams - the office of the registrar, the proctor, the software, etc., all adds to our anxiety. As one student pointed out, the risk of making a mistake represents an additional element of anxiety for people who had a completely different exam system back home.

Since the Center for International & Comparative Law is aware of these problems, they have been holding useful sessions to familiarize us with the law school exams. Those sessions have indeed proved helpful. We all know that we have Virginia Gordon to rely on if anything goes wrong, and that is a reassuring feeling. However, many of us feel (as I’m sure JD students will agree) that if we had a longer exam prep break, things would be easier to manage, as preparing for exams and attending classes simultaneously can be stressful. Also, the fact that exams are concentrated over a small number of days tends to make it worse.

From my personal experience, I wish more professors would give short assignments during the semester, as they are helpful in assessing what the professor expects from you in the exam. For example, in my Environmental Alternative Dispute Resolution course, Professor Kantor made us submit so many negotiation memos that now when I have to submit the final negotiation memo, I am much more confident about it.

I’m sure we will all do well in the end, but what fun are exams without the freaking out part?

Having less fun than expected freaking out? Tell Savera at rg@umich.edu.

When You Were Cooler from page 4

has a lot of deficiencies, but in terms of the kind of people they turn out, I think it’s pretty good. People are usually better afterwards, if they put in a lot while they’re there.

Email your questions/comments to rg@umich.edu. It’s not like anyone else does.
Justices Icing Justices
by Zach Dembo and Andrew Park

"You're a BFD now, So-bro-mayor – we got something for you."

Judge Richard Posner's (7th Circuit) infamous 2003 attempted icing of Judge Jed Rakoff (S.D.N.Y.). In a hotly contested 5-4 bropinion, the Supreme Court de-iced on the grounds that Rakoff had properly ice blocked prior to the statute of limitations.

Appalled at the brazen alcoholism on display in today's periodicals? Tell Zach and Andrew about it at rg@umich.edu
The Cheaters’ Page

BY ALAN DISHWORM

WHICH WAY?

Cruel beast indeed. Your class could be full of genius gunners, yet half of them will still be crying themselves to sleep once grades are posted. It’s not always the case that half the class doesn’t know this shit as well as the other half—usually they do. The honest truth is that law school grading is arbitrary. Your professor doesn’t want to grade a hundred exams that say the exact same thing about a hypo he took five minutes to make up. He would much rather flip a coin to decide your grade.

But guess what: YOU CAN BEAT THE SYSTEM. Captain Kirk conquered the Kobayashi Maru, and you can conquer the law school grading curve. The key? You must convince your professors to take time away from their winter vacations to actually read your answers. How is this possible? WRITE YOUR ANSWERS AS POETRY. Choose your style: sonnet, limerick, haiku, freestyle rap-battle, couplet, free verse, or, perhaps, a ballad. You think I’m joking, but this really works. In fact here is a sample from my Con Law exam:

"Twould be fair to say, if Kennedy does not mutiny,
That the doctrine in play, is clearly strict scrutiny.

In the realm of due process, ‘tis nothing so true,
As the right to love freely, and to wed the one you do."

Professor Primus wrote me afterwards to say it brought him to tears. To tears! So take some time, dear classmates, to read a little Keats, a little Plath, a little T.S. Eliot. The key to reaching a whole new level of excellence is well within your grasp.

I really hope this advice helps. Happy studying:)

Want more awesome advice? Email Sage at rg@umich.edu
WANTED

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ACROSS
1 Plantive sounds
6 Pops the question
10 Computer measure
14 Fort Knox slab
15 Iota
16 Symbol of craziness
17 Bart of football
18 Actor Rob
19 Beaked pods
20 Arranged by color
22 Oaters' milieu
24 Range rovers
26 Famous canine
27 Ex-orphan
30 Middle Brady girl
31 Prom transport
32 Actor Ray
34 Make usable
39 Nearly round
40 Opposite of edge
42 Seth's son
43 Type of seal
45 Soothsayer
46 Sicilian volcano
47 Addams' family cousin
49 More spirited
51 Vacillate
55 Flightless birds
56 Section of Manhattan
58 Is obviously asleep
62 This, señora
63 Files litigation
65 One of the Allman Brothers
66 Rounded part of a hammer
67 Hardy heroine
68 Open courtyards
69 Rosebud, for one
70 Proofreader's save
71 Loses leaves or hair

DOWN
1 Not a hit
2 Clued in regarding
3 Culture medium
4 Top of the world
5 Address part
6 Hole-punching tool
7 Finishes third
8 Bird or fruit
9 Cry in "A Streetcar Named Desire"
10 Puts out the candles
11 Symbols of bondage
12 Trunks
13 Related via one's mother
14 Fort Knox slab
15 Iota
16 Symbol of craziness
17 Bart of football
18 Actor Rob
19 Beaked pods
20 Arranged by color
22 Oaters' milieu
24 Range rovers
26 Famous canine
27 Ex-orphan
30 Middle Brady girl
31 Prom transport
32 Actor Ray
34 Make usable
39 Nearly round
40 Opposite of edge
42 Seth's son
43 Type of seal
45 Soothsayer
46 Sicilian volcano
47 Addams' family cousin
49 More spirited
51 Vacillate
55 Flightless birds
56 Section of Manhattan
58 Is obviously asleep
62 This, señora
63 Files litigation
65 One of the Allman Brothers
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69 Rosebud, for one
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71 Loses leaves or hair