

# THE SILK ENIGMA

BY  
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"ZORA, THE INVISIBLE,"  
"DEATH IN THE STALLS," &c.

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NIKOLAS NOLESCUE a departmental silk manager at Oxtons, a big London silk emporium, is discovered by PHYLLIS VARLEY, first assistant in the Chinese Silk Department, lying dead, his body wrapped in a roll of Chinese silk beneath her counter.

SUPERINTENDENT JAMES BECK, of Scotland Yard finds that Nolescue has been strangled, and later discovers that Nolescue was particularly interested in Suchow silk.

PROFESSOR KARMEN, at the British Museum, tells Beck that he had met Nolescue in Suchow, and says that he was seeking the whereabouts of a silk weaver named TAO LI. It is known that Tao Li has been tortured to death because it is believed that he knew where a valuable Chinese jewel, "The Five Eyes of Medichus," which has been pillaged from a temple in the mountains, is hidden. It is believed that the silk weaver imparted the secret to the silk he was weaving at the time he discovered that members of a Chinese secret society were on his trail.

Beck believes that Nolescue came to London to discover this consignment of silk. The Assistant Commissioner does not hold with the superintendent's theory, but Beck is determined to put it to the test, and alone with INSPECTOR GRAVES, his assistant goes down to PETER OXTON'S house to ask a few more questions.

(Now Read On)

### CHAPTER VII MR. SEN YAT SOH

Mr. Sen Yat Soh was an adaptable Oriental despite the fact that his lineage, so he liked to think, was so remote that it had long been lost in the "moving sands" of the Gobi desert. He was intimately acquainted with London, although he found many changes when he stepped from the train at Victoria Station wearing his immaculate tailored European dress with a nonchalance that would have done credit to a member of the Stock Exchange on a formal occasion.

His Eastern cast of countenance was less pronounced than it would have been had he been attired in more flamboyant clothing. He might have been a prosperous diplomat from any of the Chancelleries. His passport was in perfect order. Sen Yat Soh was a Chinese merchant with business in London. With the solitary exception of Ming, his aide, he travelled alone. Ming was more typically Oriental than his master, but then Ming's caste was less honourable than his despite the famous association of his name.

Outside the station a large black saloon car awaited. At the wheel an inscrutable Chinaman who looked considerably less like a Chinaman than he would have done without his livery and his deep-peaked cap. It was four-thirty in the afternoon and growing dusk leisurely. The chauffeur seeming to sense the approach of Sen Yat Soh descended from his seat and opened the door of the rear compartment. He saluted smartly as the elderly Chinaman entered and Ming, having disposed of the luggage, climbed up beside the driver.

Pedestrians gave but a casual glance at the occurrence for London is the most cosmopolitan city in the world. The car moved away from the kerb with silky smoothness.

The car took a southerly direction through Lewisham and past Kennington Oval. It turned off at Eltham to strike the main road to Sevenoaks. Between Sevenoaks and Tonbridge the car slackened speed and turned west along a by-road. By now the night was as dark as a raven's wing, and the driver switched on the headlights. The white ribbon revealed the snake-like curls in the narrow road. As they mounted a hump-back bridge over a culvert the twin beams soared into

the air like searchlights.

For a mile or more they proceeded and then, with a gentle pressure of the brakes, the car swerved to the right and entered tall iron gates that had been left standing open. Almost immediately the car had entered, the tires grinding the gravel beneath their treads, the gates closed unostentatiously behind them.

Though Sen Yat Soh had travelled several thousand miles he showed no signs of fatigue as he entered the pleasantly lighted hall of the house, followed once more by the indispensable Ming carrying the hand luggage.

"They were greeted by another Chinaman whose obsequious bow indicated the measure of his respect.

"You would take food and drink Excellency?"

Sen Yat Soh waved the suggestion aside.

"Is this a time for eating and drinking?" he demanded. "Have I come on the wings of the dragon for such banalities? Ming will doubtless be glad, but for me, I will exchange these uninspiring clothes for others. How can a man express himself in such a uniform? It is little wonder that the Western mind is so hidebound when the Western body is cramped and suffocated in worsted."

With this philosophy Sen Yat Soh ascended to his apartment. Half an hour later, having suitably bathed according to the custom of his ancestors and anointed himself after the manner of his ancestors and made his peace with the Great Buddha, he seated himself and touched an electric bell—a convenience which he descended to credit to the account of Western civilization.

Ling Foo, the man who had met his arrival, entered the apartment. "Tell me, Ling Foo, just how matters stand at present?" There was a firmness about Sen Yat Soh's mouth that gave him a grim expression as he sat there gowned in his yellow silken robes, the high arch of his head and the receding hair giving him a singularly distinguished appearance.

"I fear all is not well, Excellency. Nolescue is dead." The man's clipped tones proclaimed his apprehension.

"How so?"

"It happened last night, Excellency. Wu Ti had been watching Nolescue for a long time as you know. It was Wu Ti who followed him to England—to London—and discovered that Nolescue had obtained employment at Oxtons, where the bulk of Suchow silk comes. It seems that last night Wu Ti noticing that Nolescue did not leave the shop at his usual hour sought the reason for it. He found Nolescue examining silks. Unfortunately Wu Ti had, apparently, not taken the necessary precautions. He was observed, and with Wu Ti observed he says there was only one thing, Excellency. As I have said, Nolescue is no more."

The calm, impassive Oriental features of Sen Yat Soh were set like wax.

"That is an error," he intimated. "It was wrong for Wu Ti to kill unless," his black eyes stared steadily at the man before him, "unless he found that which he sought. Is that what Ling Foo means?"

Ling Foo shook his head with a gesture of sadness and regret. "It is not so, Wu Ti found nothing."

"This is a complication I do not like. Does not Ling Foo know that what can be done elsewhere cannot be done in London without bringing danger to the entire organization? I have the utmost contempt for the West, Ling Foo, but experience has taught me to respect that able institution called by the name of Scotland Yard. It would so appear that unless I am personally in charge of you all someone blunders. This is a serious blunder. Had Wu Ti discovered the secret of the silk we could have been on our way to China at this instant. You could have sent me word at Paris this morning. What are the police doing? Do they suspect?"

Ling Foo appeared to be regaining some of his departed confidence.

"Excellency I have to report that Wu Ti has but lately telephoned to say that the Scotland Yard officers who are conducting inquiries have left by motor car and that they are smiling. I warned him."

"He does not know where they have gone?"

"They have not returned to the store, Excellency. That we do know."

"Wu Ti is a fool," commented Sen Yat Soh, without emotion. "It was foolish of you to employ him. How does he stand with you?"

"He has taken the oath on the tomb of his ancestors," intimated Ling Foo, in a way that suggested his belief in Wu Ti's unquestioned fidelity.

"Then Wu Ti comes from an ances-

try of fools. May the carrion pick their bones."

"As you please, Excellency."

"I suppose you realize that Wu Ti is in danger, Ling Foo?"

"I am not unaware of that, Excellency. But Wu Ti wishes to atone for his mistake."

"It is a comfort to my stomach that Wu Ti appreciates his error. You say that Wu Ti is not known—officially—here?"

"That is so, Excellency."

"Then perhaps there is much wisdom in Wu Ti not hiding. It would be unwise for Wu Ti to withdraw himself. Only the guilty take to the burrows. We will let Wu Ti continue the work he has begun. But I want it known, Ling Foo, that there must be no more killing unless such a killing is necessary to accomplish our work. When do we expect the next silk from the Suchow warehouse?"

"It has been on its way many days, Excellency. It may already be waiting in the dockside warehouses."

"There is no way of discovering whether there is truth behind your statement, Ling Foo?" There was a challenge behind Sen Yat Soh's words.

Ling Foo knew that he was beaten. "There is none, now, Excellency. Two days ago, yes, but to-day—" he made an eloquently expressive gesture with his long, slim hands.

"Two days ago," chanted Sen Yat Soh in tones condemnatory, "Wu Ti would not have been suspected on the dockside. To-day—and who knows for how many days—the police will suspect any Chinaman inquiring about silks." He nodded his head understandingly. "Yes, Ling Foo, Wu Ti has definitely erred. We are in difficulty, but it is when we are in difficulty that our brains produce their best. I like difficulties, Ling Foo, for just that reason. I will withdraw within myself for an hour."

Ling Foo bowed his way out of the apartment.

But it was less than an hour before he was summoned again into the presence of Sen Yat Soh.

"It is written, Ling Foo, that we succeed. My arrival has been fortunate. Since the Suchow silk must as far as we know be consigned to Oxtons—and our information is good—we must make arrangements for the police to be withdrawn from the shop to enable yourself, Ling Foo, to proceed to Oxtons and make your own inquiries. Mr. Peter Oxtan must be informed that the police activities are hampering his business. We must have freedom, Ling Foo."

Ling Foo's hand clutched spasmodically.

"But Excellency, may I hope that it has not escaped your august consideration that were I to present myself at the shop, I might be detained for police interrogation?"

"The ox with the white liver, Ling Foo, is not fit food for any man. It shall be as I say." Sen Yat Soh was about to wave the man from him when he seemed to relent. "Of course, Ling Foo, I leave the method of gaining the information we require to your audacious ingenuity. I see no occasion to suppose that the police could prove anything against a man who went into the shop to buy Suchow silk."

But Ling Foo had other notions on that particular point. He had been in London sufficiently long to regard the police with no small amount of awe. Danger was piling itself upon danger, and the more he considered the matter the less he liked it.

When he had left Sen Yat Soh's apartment he went below and gave a further instruction, but this time to a slim, sulky Tartar known as Kublai. The man nodded without speaking. An hour later Kublai had slipped away from the house like a thin shadow.

### CHAPTER VIII DOUBTS ABOUT NOLESCUE

Just as Superintendent Beck and his henchman, Inspector Graves, had anticipated Peter Oxtan's table was, if anything, beyond expectations.

They dined well and they drank well, and Beck knew good wine when he rolled it around his palate.

In addition to Oxtan and the two Scotland Yard officers, there had been Mrs. Oxtan, a gracious and utterly charming middle-aged woman with a pleasant plump demeanor and a mass of soft flaxen hair that time was just beginning to tarnish. Beside her sat Brenda Oxtan, as fine a specimen of young British womanhood as Beck ever remembered having seen, and since he formed this conclusion before the butler had begun to dispense the wine in generous measure, it has to be admitted that the Superintendent's judgment was infallible.

Brenda Oxtan, at twenty-six, had not acquired so much sophistication that

she had failed to be thrilled at last night's events at the store. Her father had given her first-hand information, and this had been colourfully supplemented by the accounts she had read in the evening newspapers. The newspapers had accorded the affair more prominence than they might have been willing to give to the resignation of a Cabinet Minister.

The presence of the Superintendent and his Inspector at the dinner-table had crowned a day of pleasant thrills, and she listened to the discussion with wrapt attention.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

## If You Like Books

(By A. H.)

People often say that one's character may be discovered through the type of books he reads. In many cases this is true, but there are those people who buy books because someone else has told them that the book is a "best seller" or because they like the cover of a book. The cover, alone, should never influence your choice. It is the entertainment and knowledge of the book which matter.

I have two books by Jane Austen. One is an old and battered copy of "Pride and Prejudice;" the other a lovely new leather-bound copy of "Mansfield Park." Of the two I prefer "Pride and Prejudice," which is a very amusing tale of "snobbery." Perhaps, if more people read it, and dwelt on the thought, there would be less "snobbery" and more genuine happiness for all concerned.

A "best-seller" may not be the type of book you enjoy. Of course, if you have enough money to throw away on books you will not enjoy, all well and good. However, the ordinary person must carefully consider before he chooses. Every book usually has a very short précis of the story, either on the cover or in the first pages of the book.

And you can, practically speaking, always be guided by the author. If you have read his works before and enjoyed them, the book will probably please you. If you have not, then find out what you can about him before you purchase the book. If you wish to rely on the advice of a friend, consider, first, if his taste is at all similar to yours. Often a friend will tell you "That book is perfect!" You read it, and to your sorrow, find that not only are you disappointed in the book, but you have lost what entertainment it provided in your disillusion at its not being "perfect."

Benjamin Franklin says: "If you would have a faithful servant and one you like, serve yourself;" and that is the best advice in choosing a book.

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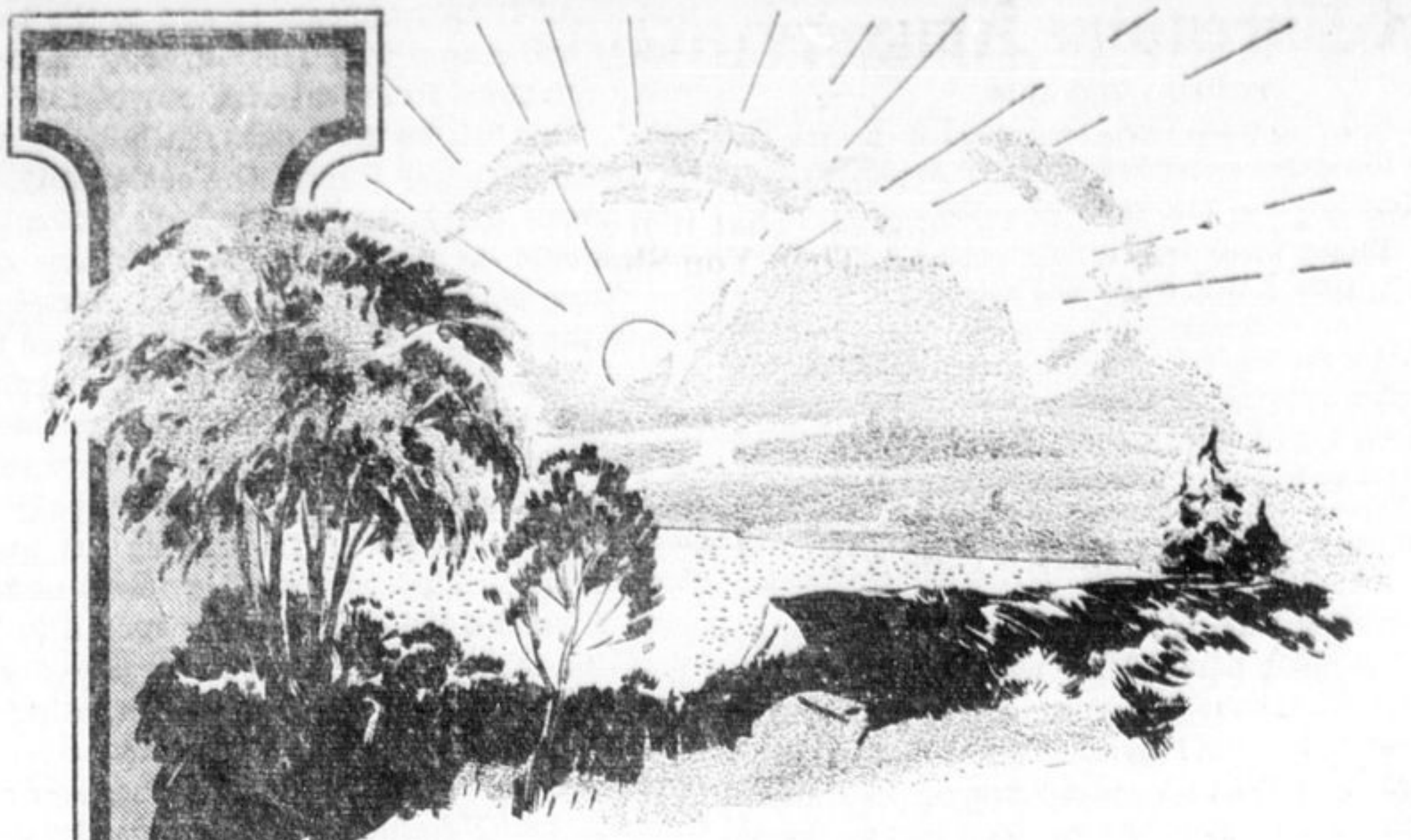
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## Cockroaches Menace to the Public Health

According to the Dominion Department of Agriculture.

From the Dept. of Agriculture at Ottawa this week there comes the following article on "Cockroaches as a Menace to Public Health":—

The common cockroach is the potential carrier of numerous disease organisms. Investigators have shown that many germs can pass through the digestive tract of the cockroach unharmed, and may be present in a virulent condition in the insect's excreta. Among these, to name only a few, are included the bacteria that cause tuberculosis and typhoid; also pathogenic streptococci, and the protozoa that cause dysentery. As cockroaches will feed on human excrement, it is not surprising that tuberculosis might be spread in this way, particularly in public eating places. In addition it is known that cockroaches serve as the secondary or intermediate hosts of parasitic nematodes or round-worms, one species of which causes a form of cancer in rats and mice. In view of their menace as disease carriers, and also because they contaminate human food with a persistent fetid odor which comes from secretions of certain of their glands, the control of cockroaches is of general public interest. These insects have flattened, horny bodies and large spiny legs, which enable them to move quickly and take refuge in cracks and other small crevices in walls, floors, etc., where they usually remain hidden during the day and emerge at night to crawl about in search of food. They are practically omnivorous, but particularly favour human foodstuffs, and on this account are usually most numerous about kitchens and pantries and similar situations. Infestations may often be detected by the presence of the cast skins and empty egg capsules, even when the living roaches have escaped notice.

The most widespread species in Canada is the small, so-called German cockroach, "Blattella germanica" L., which is very prevalent in apartment and dwelling houses, hotels, restaurants, stores, etc., where warm moist conditions and plentiful food supply are to be found. Sometimes, during the summer months, they live and multiply in garbage dumps, and, in a number of cities and towns, they have been reported causing a great deal of annoyance by migrating from such places into nearby dwellings. The common cockroach is a small species measuring about five-eighths of an inch long when mature. It is light-brown in colour and

bears two distinct dark brown stripes on the thorax. It is troublesome all the year round in heated dwellings.

The control of cockroaches may be effected with sodium fluoride. The powder should be dusted lightly in places frequented by the insects, and blown by means of a dust gun or insecticide puffer into cracks and crevices which shelter them. The sodium fluoride adheres to the bodies and appendages of the roaches, which in cleaning themselves are poisoned by it. Owing to the somewhat poisonous character of this insecticide reasonable precautions should be taken to prevent children or domestic pets from gaining access to it. Two other materials often recommended are pyrethrum and borax. Pyrethrum insect powder is less effective than sodium fluoride, it loses its effectiveness quickly on exposure to air, and has to be used in larger quantities. Borax, also, is less satisfactory than sodium fluoride, but it is easily obtainable, and mixed with equal parts of powdered sweet chocolate is a fairly effective remedy. Fly sprays containing pyrethrum extract are commonly used, but these kill only by direct contact. All the preparations referred to may be obtained from any drug store.

A pamphlet dealing with cockroaches may be secured by writing to the Publicity and Extension Branch, Dominion Department of Agriculture, Ottawa.

London (Eng.) Punch:—Strike Techno-United is spreading in the United States. There are now rumours of a stand-up strike of sedentary workers.

## Member Refers to Plans for Hospital at Monteith

The Ontario government has granted northern mining companies permission to convert the Monteith Academy into a hospital for the treatment of silicosis, John Rowlandson, M.L.A. for South Cochrane announced while in North Bay Saturday.

Mr. Rowlandson produced a letter from Harry Nixon, provincial treasurer and minister of game and fisheries, containing this information. The mines will be required to pay the government \$1.00 per year rental for the building.

Monteith Academy until recently was used as an agricultural school, where some academic work, also was taught. When it was closed a drive was immediately started to have the government allow the mining companies to transform it into a silicosis hospital which is said to be badly needed in the North.

Mr. Rowlandson, who played the leading role in inducing the government to take such action, said that mine managers are now making arrangements with directors for the establishment of the hospital.

Indianapolis News:—Lamb prices are the highest in seven years and no wonder. The supply is never equal to the demand in Wall Street.

Guelph Mercury:—Many a man who longs for things like his mother used to make forgets that his wife may long for cheques like her father used to make.



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