

## THE HYPOCHONDRIAC.

A TALE.

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BY AN EYE-WITNESS.

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TOM WUNDERLICH was the son of Jacob Wunderlich, an honest sugar-baker, on Fish-Street Hill, who, having acquired an ample fortune in trade, was anxious to elevate his descendants, above the humble German stock from which he sprung, by marrying into some patrician family of his adopted country, to whom his wealth and interest in the city would make him acceptable. He fixed his choice upon the eldest daughter of Sir Roger Penny, a Baronet, of an ancient family, with much pride, two sons, eleven daughters, and twelve hundred a-year; but the match was not concluded without the stipulation that he would get himself previously knighted, a matter which, although at variance with his sugar-baking ideas, yet, he was

convinced, was consistent with the object of his marriage; and, having accomplished it, he quickly transformed Miss Penny into Lady Wunderlich.

My lady gained some long-anticipated points by her marriage. She had acquired the same title as her mother, and, although the rank of her husband was inferior to that of her father, yet, his fortune turned the scale greatly in her favour. She had much at her command; and by her power of occasionally obliging the old lady in pecuniary matters, she obtained an ascendancy over her mamma which consoled her for deficiency of rank. Poor Wunderlich, on the contrary, found that he had spread his bed with nettles. His sugar-baking concern he willingly relinquished, as his fortune was ample; but to quit Lloyd's; his old cronies and city habits; to be forced to enter into the beau-monde; to pay and receive forenoon calls with my lady; attend evening parties, give at homes, balls, and suppers; and, to use his own expressions, "to have his house turned inside out," without daring to exclaim, "My Got, meine ladic! this will not do"—was too much for the

worthy knight; whose chagrin, having brought on an attack of confirmed jaundice, terminated his disappointment and his life, a few months after the birth of our hero. Previous to his death, however, Sir Jacob had made a will, leaving a very moderate jointure only to Lady Wunderlich; and the reversion of his property to his son; failing whom it was to devolve upon a nephew who had succeeded him in the sugar-baking concern. This deed blasted the hopes of any second alliance, in the mind of Lady Wunderlich, and obliged her to devote her life to the superintendence of the health and education of her son, on whom all her expectations now rested.

“I recollect Tom” (says the writer of this narrative,) “at school; a fine spirited boy; a little wilful, perhaps, and too timid in the playground, if a shower threatened, or the wind blew from the north-east. But then, although all the boys quizzed him, yet, they pitied him; for his mamma sent every morning to inquire after his health. Mr. Bolus, the apothecary, saw him regularly twice a week, when he was well, and



twice a day if labouring under the slightest symptoms of indisposition; and, frequently, when the boys, on a half-holyday, were at cricket on the common, a servant would ride over from the Pavilion, to see whether Tom had cast his jacket; or, if the air happened to be chilly, whether his neck were encompassed with one of the numerous bandanas her ladyship had sent for that purpose in his trunk. Tom was not devoid of ability, but Doctor Bumpem was ordered not to overstrain his mind; for being a delicate boy, an only child, and the heir to a large fortune, learning was quite a secondary concern; health was every thing, and to secure that all other considerations were to yield. Tom was, nevertheless, a mild, good-natured, friendly boy; and, although he was frequently laughed at, as much on account of his mother's weaknesses as his own, yet, he was universally liked. But, as he did little in the way of classical literature, he quitted Bumpem's with the character of being a good-natured, idle, soft-headed boy; whom the doctor said it would be useless to send to Eton or to Harrow; and, therefore, in order to fit him for Oxford, in

which university his fortune, in her ladyship's opinion, rendered it necessary he should sojourn, he was placed under the care of a clergyman, near Cheltenham. This arrangement was formed by Lady Wunderlich, in order that Tom, whilst his head was stored with classics by his tutor, should have the health of his body confirmed by the constant use of the waters; to superintend which, her ladyship took a house in that modern Sinope.

From this time I lost sight of Tom for nearly ten years, during three of which I have been informed he had lived in Exeter College, Oxford, where he kept a couple of horses and a servant; that, four years after leaving the University, he had travelled to Italy, attended by Dr. Bolus; for the quondam apothecary had procured an Aberdeen diploma, at her ladyship's request, in order to confer dignity on himself, and to add to that of his patron, in the eyes of foreigners. The doctor was chosen for this important office, because he had been acquainted with Tom's constitution from his infancy; and not less on account of his knowledge of that of her ladyship, who was to be the

companion of her son and the doctor; for the latter of whom, it was scandalously reported, she had a more than ordinary attachment. How Tom passed through this journey, and what harvest of knowledge he reaped from travel, I could never learn; although I have heard him declaim against the continent generally for its want of comfort and of medical talent; and once descant feelingly on the insupportable heat of Naples and the infernal scorching sirocco which he felt at Nice. Tom, however, having become of age when on his travels, her ladyship and the doctor contrived to wheedle him out of twenty thousand pounds; and, having united their destinies, Mr. and Mrs. Bolus remained behind at Naples; whilst their son returned to England with a young Scotch physician, who was glad of an opportunity of being franked home. Tom had arrived ten days only, when I happened to meet him in Hyde Park.

It was towards the middle of May: the wind was blowing rather sharply from the north-east, when looking in at the window of a chariot, which formed one of the line of vehicles that moved



slowly along on each side of me as I walked my horse up the drive, I perceived a gentleman, whom I thought I ought to recognise, seated in the corner of the carriage, muffled up in a fur cloak. He seemed also to be actuated by the same feeling, for, as if by a simultaneous impulse, his fingers were tapping at the glass at the moment I was turning my horse's head to beckon him to let down the window. I soon perceived he was my old schoolfellow, and waited for a minute expecting the carriage-window to be opened; but finding that, from the shake of his head and his signs, he wished me to go round to the leeward side of the carriage; which, with some difficulty, I was enabled to effect; in a few minutes I was convinced, from the shake of his hand, that my friend Wunderlich carried in his bosom the same heart, as a man, which had beaten so warmly in it as a boy. "Hah! Dick, my worthy fellow!" said he, "how happy I am to meet you. Let me see! it is ten years since we parted at old Bumpem's:—how is the old boy?—Ten years! i'faith time has altered both of us, Dick; I have been over half of Europe since we parted, and it is only ten days since

I arrived from Italy. But," continued he, holding a handkerchief to his mouth, "this cursed, variable climate will kill me. Indeed, my dear friend! you must excuse me from talking more at present: but come to me this evening. I have lodgings at the bookseller's, in Holles Street:—went there to be near my doctor:—good bye, Dick! don't fail to come, good bye! adieu!" and drawing up the window, he beckoned to the coachman to drive on. I had returned my friend's salutation with all the warmth in my nature; but after the first "how d'ye"—could not wedge in a single sentence; and remained, as it were, rivetted to the spot, for a few minutes after his carriage drove on, uncertain whether the whole was not a delusion. "If it be not so," thought I, "the poor fellow must be either on the verge of insanity, if not already insane: but I will determine the point this evening, by calling at his lodgings:" and, turning my horse, I rode home to dinner, revolving in my mind the oddness of our meeting, after so long an absence.

It was nine o'clock in the evening, when I entered Tom's lodgings. He was seated before a



large fire, in an elbow-chair, rolled in a chintz dressing-gown, with his night-cap on, and his feet pushed into a pair of red-morocco slippers lined with fur. On a small table near him, lay his watch, six apothecary's phials, full of medicine, one of which, by the label, was to be taken every fourth hour, and a pill-box containing half a dozen pills. On the same table, also, was a pair of scales, in which I perceived he had been weighing two ounces of biscuit; and a graduated pint measure, which contained one ounce and a half of distilled water. Tom rose and shook me warmly by the hand as I entered the room; but his eye had lost the animation it displayed when we first recognised one another in the park; and he was more emaciated than I had anticipated I should find him. "I am truly grieved to see you in this plight, my dear friend!" said I, glancing my eye upon the garniture of the little table; "what are your complaints?" "Ah!" replied he, forcing a faint smile, "there's the rub!—Were my complaints but known, there would be no difficulty in curing them. At least, so says Dr. Frogsfoot, who, however, assures me that it is a gastric affection;

and that the uneasy state of my head is merely symptomatic, depending on the connexion between the par vagrum, the symptomatic nerve, and the great semilunar ganglion." I saw I had hit upon a wrong key. "My learning, my dear Tom!" said I, "does not enable me to follow you into the depths of physic which these terms imply."—"I know nothing of them either," replied he, "I only give you the doctor's words." He, however, with the greatest politeness changed the matter of our discourse, which gradually became extremely animated; and taking me kindly by the hand, as I rose to depart, he acknowledged that my visit had done him an essential service; that the pain in his eye, which he was apprehensive was an incipient cataract, had completely left him; and he earnestly begged that I would repeat my visits every evening, whilst I remained in town. My hand was upon the handle of the room-door, and he had rung the bell for his servant to attend me to the street-door, when I turned round, recollecting that I had not inquired after his mother; and merely asked "how and where she was?" He started up and approached

me—"You must," said he, "sit down, only for ten minutes, to hear that part of my story." I sat down accordingly. "You know that d——d fellow Bolus?—but, I am forgetting," looking at his watch, "it is time to take my pill and draught." He instantly placed one of the pills upon his tongue, and washed it down with a draught, which he emptied into his mouth from the phial, without evincing the least reluctance to it, in any feature of his face; and, having sat down, again began his narrative.

"You know that fellow Bolus? He became a physician and attended me on my travels, in which my mother also formed a party. He quite mistook my case, and treated me improperly from the beginning; but, at length, he formed a design upon my poor mother; and, as his suit advanced with her, he became more and more negligent of his patient, until he had the impudence to tell me, that my complaints were all imaginary; although the rascal knew that my liver was in the most torpid state, and the secretions consequently vitiated; that my stomach had lost its digestive functions; that



the bowels were in such a sluggish condition as to require the constant aid of art; all which had so shaken my nerves that life was a burden to me, and I would have given a thousand pounds to any wretched bravo, to have blown my brains out." Here my poor friend sunk back in his chair, and seemed almost affected to tears with the recollection of what he regarded as the height of inhumanity in Dr. Bolus. It was in vain for me to interfere. I said nothing, and he soon recovered his self-possession. "I really believe," continued he, "that the fellow would have poisoned me if I had remained longer his patient." I soon convinced him, that the Doctor could have no interest in his death, as his fortune would pass to his cousin, and not to his mother, with the detail of whose marriage with Bolus he had concluded his story. He appeared struck that he should have forgotten this fact; and then, as if he thought I also doubted the validity of his complaints, beseeched me to meet Dr. Frogsfoot on the following day; and concluded by assuring me, that he believed he had water on his brain, for that, "this morning, two drops of as clear fluid as ever distilled from a rock,

dropped from his nose whilst he was at breakfast." I promised to be present at Dr. Frogsfoot's next visit, and hurried out of the house, happy again to get into the world of reality; fearful that my own imagination might become infected, were I to remain long in the imaginary atmosphere of evils which surrounded my unhappy friend.

I entered Tom's apartment, on the following day, at one o'clock, and in less than two minutes the Doctor was announced. He was a tall, spare man, of much gravity of demeanor, rather advanced in years, with a thin sharp visage, an ample forehead, deeply sunk eyes, hollow cheeks, and a hanging of the nether lip, as Shakspeare would express himself, which gave a marked peculiarity of expression to his countenance. He made a slight inclination with his head as he entered the room, and, having seated himself close to my friend, inquired, in a soft undertone of voice, how he felt himself; whilst, at the same time, he took out his watch, and placed his fingers upon the pulse of his patient. Tom said nothing until this ceremony was over, after which he put out his

tongue, then drew a deep inspiration, and immediately commenced a voluble detail of all his symptoms and feelings since the doctor's last visit, not forgetting an exact account of the ingesta, and the quality and aspect, to the nicest shade of colour, of the egesta. He had had pains in his legs, arms, head, and heart; he was certain his complaint was retrocedent Gout; he was alarmed this morning with straitness in the swallow, indicative of *Dysphagia*; his perspirations were sometimes so great, that he conceived he must be the first victim to a return of the *Sudor Anglicus*; and concluded by seriously inquiring, whether *Phlegmasia dolens* ever attacked the arm, as his right arm was so much swelled in the morning, that he was certain it could not have entered the sleeve of his coat, if the swelling had not greatly fallen. I heard, with amazement, Tom's knowledge of diseases, and their names; the doctor listened to him with patience; and, at the end of each sentence, ejaculated the word—"Aye!" He then made a few remarks; told him that he must be galvanized again, on the following day; wrote on a sheet of paper, "*Pergat in usu medicamentorum*," took his fee, said, "Good



day," in his soft, low voice, with a gentle smile on his features; and, again gently inclining his head, left the room.

"This is really too much," said Tom as the door closed upon Frogsfoot; "that is the tenth fee which I have given the Doctor, without receiving any more satisfaction than you have heard to-day, or one new prescription. As for his galvanism—my skin is excoriated with the heat of it where the brushes are placed; and I am certain, that if that hot stream is passed through my spine and liver much longer, I shall be burnt to a cinder. I will write him, this instant, to discontinue his attendance; and procure some other advice. Do you know any good physician? my dear Dick?" As I was convinced that this hasty determination of poor Wunderlich afforded me an excellent opportunity to try the effects of change of air, scene, and social intercourse, in diverting his mind from his corporeal ailments, in which I could not help thinking that fancy had a considerable share, I told him that I knew an excellent physician, who lived near me in the country, and who I was satis-

fied could cure him. He caught at the information. "But," continued I, "you must go with me into Worcestershire; the air of the Malvern hills, the pure water, the skill of the doctor, and my own good nursing, will do wonders for you. I shall be here, to-morrow, with my travelling-carriage, at twelve: so have every thing in readiness—I will take no refusal." He looked seriously at me, for a few seconds; and then said, "I thank you greatly; but I cannot stand the fatigue of such a journey."—"Nonsense, Tom! trust that to me. Be ready at twelve:" and I abruptly left the house before he had time to utter a negative. "A pretty scrape I have got into," thought I, as I walked down Regent Street: "to volunteer myself as the keeper of an hypochondriac on the verge of insanity!—yet—he is my friend; and I am rescuing a drowning man, which is the duty of every passenger who sees his danger, be he friend or foe."

I had ordered the carriage to be in Holles Street at twelve precisely; and, anxious to secure my friend, walked to his lodging immediately after

breakfast. I was surprised to find the knocker of the door muffled; but only supposing from it that his landlady was in the straw, I inquired hastily of his servant if his master was packing? "Lord, Sir!" said John, "he is in bed." The look of John told me something was wrong, but I was not willing to take the hint; and, stepping into the drawing-room, said, carelessly, "Tell your master I am here." Whilst I waited the return of the servant, I took up several books, which were all upon medical subjects: for instance, the Gazette and the Oracle of Health:—Paris on Diet and Digestion:—Abernethy's Works:—Thomson's London Dispensatory:—and Good's Study of Medicine.—"Alas! poor Tom! if this be your course of reading, my efforts to wean you from your malady will prove fruitless," said I, soliloquizing aloud, as John entered the room to conduct me to his master.

I found my friend in bed, in a deplorable state. He informed me that he had been attacked with spasms in the night, and could not have survived but for the skilful aid of Doctor Palm, whom he



had sent for, and who he, momentarily, expected would repeat his visit. He had scarcely uttered his name, when the bed-room door opened, and the doctor was announced. I had no time to make my physiognomical observations, before the learned gentleman was at the bed-side, which he approached with a light, springy step, on tiptoe; and seizing my friend's hand between both of his hands, and leaning forwards, inquired with all the apparent warmth and anxiety of an old associate, into the state of his present feelings. "I trust, my dear Sir!" said he, "that the medicines which I prescribed speedily relieved those frightful spasms?" And, without waiting for a reply, turning to me, with the sweetest smile, voice, and manner imaginable, "I found Mr. Wunderlich in a very critical state." He then seated himself, still holding the hand of his patient, and recommenced his professional queries. I had now an opportunity of observing the doctor. He was below the ordinary stature, and of a meagre form; plainly, I should almost say shabbily, attired; but his head might have been selected by an artist as the finest model for that of a philosopher. It

was partly bald; the forehead beautiful, broad, and elevated; the eyes small and shaded; the cheek bones rather high; the nose straight and projecting, and the mouth large and compressed. The forehead was, indeed, the finest I had ever seen; and although he could not be called good-looking, yet his countenance bore the impression of superior intellect, great gentleness, and an anxious desire to please. When he had finished his inquiries and written his prescription, he politely addressed himself to me;—spoke of the news of the town; inquired if I had read the last Edinburgh Review, made many just and critical remarks upon its merits, and those of its rival, the Quarterly; and entering a little into the characters of some of the leading members of both parties in Parliament, displayed powers for conversation truly enviable. As he rose to take his leave, he again pressed his patient's hand between both of his hands; promised to see him in the evening, and left the room with the same light springy step, with which he had entered it.

“ Ah! my dear Dick!” said Tom, looking after

the doctor, "if I had met with that worthy man two years ago, how much misery I should have escaped. Would you believe it, I had, besides Bolus, three different physicians at Naples, five at Rome, two at Geneva, three at Paris, my young Scotch travelling companion and Dr. Frogsfoot since my return, and not one of them understood my case. Now I feel that I shall get well; and be able to visit you, in comfort, in Worcestershire. Did you not admire the tact with which Dr. Palm conducted his inquiries? He is the man." I nodded an assent; and, telling my poor friend that I expected, on my return to town, in eight or ten days, to find him quite recovered, I took my leave, pondering on the delusions which tyrannize over reason, in certain states of our habit; and raising a thousand metaphysical conjectures on the nature of the connexion between body and mind.

Having been detained longer in the country than I expected, twelve days had elapsed before I had an opportunity of again calling in Holles Street. On answering my knock, John received



me with a significant smile as he made his usual bow. "We are still here," said he; "and master in the old way. The doctor is with him just now; but you,—I am sure *you* may walk up. My master is in the drawing-room." I followed John; and was kindly received by my poor friend. I expected to have seen, also, my late acquaintance, Dr. Palm; but the individual who now supplied his place, was the antipode, both in form and manner, of that fascinating disciple of Hippocrates. He was a little, portly figure, with a round, fresh-coloured, pleasant face; and his head, which was rather large, covered with a profusion of white hair, dressed in the fashion of the close of the last century. Indeed, his entire figure and dress were those of a substantial citizen of 1790. He did not rise when I entered; but merely made a slight inclination of his head, and waved his left hand, which held his hat, raising it from his knee on which it rested. He then fixed his eyes steadfastly upon me, whilst I addressed my friend. After a few minutes, turning suddenly round to his patient, he abruptly inquired, "Have you any thing more to say?" Tom assured him

that he had not; that he fully understood his orders; "But the pain"—"Stop!"—ejaculated the little man,—"I know what you are going to say: it is all fudge. If you know my orders, follow them." Notwithstanding this specimen of his abrupt manner, I ventured to address the doctor; and stated, as my opinion, that my friend would benefit greatly by a change of air and scene. He again eyed me, for a few seconds, and demanded, "Are you a physician, Sir?"—"No."—"Are you a surgeon?"—"No."—"Then, Sir, what right have you to form an opinion on the subject?"—and, without waiting for a reply, rose from his seat and left the room.

"Your new doctor is the pink of politeness, my dear Wunderlich;" said I, as he shut the room door with a bang. "He is a character;" replied my friend. "You must have heard of him: Mr. Mybook, the eminent surgeon; a man of great learning, consummate skill in his profession; and although apparently rough and abrupt in his manners, yet, I am informed, possessed of the kindest and most benevolent disposition." He, at this

moment, again opened the door; and having peeped in and said "Friday;" shut it, this time, in a more gentle manner. "What a pity," said I, "that the diamond has not passed through the hand of the lapidary! But what has become of my favourite, Doctor Palm?" Here Tom informed me, that he and the doctor had gone on very well together for a week; but at length, coming to a stand still, he thought he would try Mr. Mybook, whose work he had perused, and under whom, although he had been only four days, he really thought he was improved. "He relies little upon medicine," said Tom, "of which, he says, I have taken too much, but greatly upon diet and regimen. I ride out twice a day, dine at an early hour, and eat a certain quantity only of food at each meal; after which I lie down on the carpet for an hour, and then crawl, on my belly, to the corner of the room for my tumbler of water, which is all the liquid he allows me.—You smile, Dick! but, trust me, all this is done upon principles, which experience has verified." I smiled at the gravity with which my friend had gone through these details: telling him, at the same time, that I ap-



proved much of that part of his plan which referred to horse exercise; on which account the country was the best place for him; and that I had come, on purpose, to take him into Worcestershire. He thanked me, but said he could not accept my offer: that he was in the search of health, and must be near advice. I perceived it was a hopeless case; and shaking my poor friend by the hand, with a melancholy foreboding departed.

It was not until the end of August, whilst I was busied in preparing for the shooting season, that I again heard of Tom Wunderlich. I was thinking, one morning at breakfast, how much I was to blame for having neglected so long to inquire after him, and wondering whether he was now well enough to bring down a partridge, when a letter from the poor fellow was put into my hands. It entreated me, earnestly, to come to see him, in the vicinity of Dorking, where he had taken a cottage; and, as his health was worse than ever, he hoped nothing would prevent me from forthwith seeing him. The epistle, indeed, was written in a strain which left me one mode only of decision:

and, therefore, ordering my tilbury, I drove over to Gloucester; threw myself into the mail; and on the afternoon of the following day, found myself seated in the little parlour of my friend's cottage. He could not at that moment be disturbed; but John informed me, that he feared his master was now ill in good earnest; that he had retained nothing on his stomach for four days; was delirious, and reduced to "an atomy." I inquired what he had been doing. "Ah! Sir!" said John, "you know how fond he is of new doctors: he has had twenty since you saw him; and has taken a waggon-load of physic. Lord, Sir! I have turned many a good penny on the empty phials; but it wont do. I really fear that the poor gentleman is dying." In a few minutes my friend was ready to see me, and I entered his bedroom.

Alas! what a change! a young man, not twenty-six, metamorphosed to an old, infirm invalid of seventy; his skin yellow and shrivelled, his cheeks sunk, and his wan eyes almost lost within their bony sockets. He could not rise to welcome me;

but stretched out his skinny hand, and with a hoarse yet scarcely audible voice, said: "God bless you, my dear Dick! This is indeed a visit of true friendship." I took hold of his hand and sat down by him, for my heart was too full to speak. He perceived the state of my feelings; and as he feebly returned the pressure of my hand, a hectic smile passed over his countenance, to check a tear which stood in the corner of his eye. "Ah! Dick!" said he, "this is a severe trial. After finding that all the regular faculty had mistaken my case, and having at length found a remedy for it, to be unable to avail myself of the blessing." Here he paused to fetch his breath, for the least effort exhausted him; and although he was up, yet he had scarcely strength to support himself in the chair. I ventured to inquire of what remedy he spoke. "It is," said he, shuddering as he uttered the words, "a live spider; and I have the most implicit faith in the prescription: but I cannot overcome my aversion to the insect. I see a spider in every article of food I swallow; and it, consequently, does not remain a moment on my stomach. Two nights ago I



dreamt that I saw a spider, with a body the size and exact resemblance of a human skull, and legs like those of a skeleton. It crawled up to my mouth, which it was about to enter; and—" Here he was again forced to pause to draw breath: a cold sweat stood upon his forehead, and his fleshless hand was bedewed with an icy moisture. He heaved a deep sigh, and looked me full in the face; and, then, as if recollecting himself, he continued his detail. "This spider haunts me day and night, so constantly, that I have a perfect consciousness of its existence; and I am also aware that it is the identical one which I must swallow." At this idea he became so much convulsed, that I called aloud for John, and ordered him instantly to fetch a doctor. My poor friend seemed insensible to the sound of my voice and the order I had given. I felt that he was making an ineffectual effort to push back his chair, and I saw that his eye was following, as it were, something on the ground. "Do you not see there," said he, pointing with the finger of his right hand, which he could scarcely raise from his knee—"there!" "I see nothing, my dear Wunderlich!—it is your

imagination which is thus distorted by your disease." He drew himself up with horror: "No! no!" he feebly exclaimed, "it is not fancy:—see, it has crawled up my leg: there—there—it is on my heart—I feel it;" and he sunk into his chair. I thought he had fainted; but in a few seconds, he gave a convulsive sob; which was succeeded by another at an equal distance of time: these were then followed by a hissing, expiratory sound; his limbs became powerless, and he would have fallen on the floor, if I had not supported him in the chair. The doctor entered the room: but it was only to confirm my apprehensions. The force of the delusion had overwhelmed his nervous system; and, *in this doing*, Death, in his triumph over mortality, had demonstrated that life may be expelled from her fortress by a phantom of the imagination.

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