

Jules Ingram
—or—
A Race Down the St. Lawrence Rapids
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A Thrilling Adventure
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I was sitting in the office of my journal one evening, when Detective Ballagan came in. He had promised to notify me of the first good “case” of which he might have charge, and at present he was on the track of a notorious offender, by name Jules Ingram, a native of Martinique. This man had been chief clerk in the largest produce-house of the West India Islands, where he had swindled to the amount of fifty thousand dollars, and had escaped to New York. He brought with him blank bill-heads and drafts of every business firm in the tropics, and had deposited these at a hotel on the quay. After a year of prodigious success, he was caught in Missouri, and sentenced to five years’ imprisonment. His discharge marks a singular adjustment of time to come. Within twelve hours after the forger recovered his documents, the place of deposit was in ashes. He renewed his guilty career immediately, obtained five thousand dollars within a week, and escaping to Canada, threatened to plunder every American banker from Portland to Galveston. He was an accomplished penman, scholar, and bookkeeper, thoroughly conversant with business details, and had so mastered the secrets of the postal system, that he could operate by proxy, and ubiquitously. He was believed now to be dwelling on the frontier; and the bankers of all the Atlantic cities had subscribed funds for his apprehension and conviction at whatever cost. A woman to whom Ingram was much attached had been seen at Albany, going westward. It was probable that she and the forger were not far apart, and Ballagan wished me to proceed northward with him the same afternoon, that he might keep closely upon their trail.

We followed by rail the windings of the palisaded Hudson, threaded the rich valley of the Mohawk, and at Rome, an ambitious settlement of Northwestern New York, heard by telegraph of a new feat of Ingram at Watertown, on the falls of Black River, near the head of Lake Ontario. He undoubtedly meant to dwell without federal jurisdiction, appear periodically in the states, and after each offence, escape across the St. Lawrence. There was, I believe, an extraordinary treaty, embracing the crime of forgery; but the formalities of law, and the jealousies of Canadian and state officials, practically annulled it. Ballagan was shrewd and bold; he determined to entrap Ingram, if possible; but, in the failure of intrigue, to seize and kidnap him anywhere upon foreign soil. The reward would be large; and the detective had taken me with him that I might give the capture a newspaper notoriety, and so challenge the generosity of the bankers. We were armed with fowling-pieces, and meant to hunt and fish along the lake-border, Ballagan to watch the telegraph stations, and I to play the guileless young sportsman among the frontier girls and gossips. Neither of us had seen Ingram, but we carried his photograph. It represented a small, thoughtful, grizzle-haired man, addicted to cigars and an eye-glass. I thought I could recognize the original if I saw him, but had qualms as to the repute to be derived from thief-catching.

The detective’s first precaution was to forward a description of the felon to every revenue officer upon the American bank of the St. Lawrence. The functions of these did not embrace state crimes, of which forgery was one, and they were therefore charged to detain Ingram for debasing the currency—a national offence.

After three days of provoking ill-success, we traced the forger's female accomplice to Cape Vincent, a paltry American village at the junction of the lake and river. Here she had mysteriously disappeared; neither the return rail nor the Canada ferry, nor any of the border steamers, had taken her aboard; the conclusion of Ballagan was prompt and sagacious—she had met the forger himself, and he had spirited her away. The river was here seven or ten miles broad, and divided by many islands. Ingram may have located himself upon one of these, and by means of a row boat made his passage to either mainland. We acted upon the surmise at once, hired oarsmen and a bateau, and beat up and down the channel for many leagues. It was rare sport to take the silvery pickerel and musculong, and I would gladly have relinquished the human prey for these offensive creatures. The skies were cool and clear; the river ran steadily seaward without a tide, leaving fantastic bluffs, fringed with a strip of beach, and plumed with black-bough cedars. The panther and the Indian were around us, as in colonial days; now and then the red fisherman and his squaw drank from our canteens stolidly; and we brought down many a wild goose from his dream in the clouds. This was America as we knew it in the ideal—wild, solitary, boundless—yet here were we on the proud St. Lawrence, with the prosaic purpose of capturing a jail-bird. For a week our efforts were futile; there were few farm-houses upon the frontier Islands, but we were satisfied that Ingram harbored in none of them, and the configuration of the coast was such that the exploration promised to be interminable. In the meantime the rogue attempted a third forgery at Ogdensburg, fifty miles distant, and the press teemed with complaints of the police system and of Ballagan.

It was on the twelfth day of our adventure that the detective, sick of care and exposure, made over to me the boat and outfit. The waterman rowed me at dawn to a cove with-in Wolf Island, the largest of the group; it was a lonely place, removed from either channel of the river, visible from neither mainland, and out of sight of every sail and habitation. I made fast my line at 300 yards; the burnished bait skimmed the surface like a star; the rower never tired or slackened, and before nine o'clock, I had taken a score of pickeral, not one of which weighed less than six pounds. I was now reminded of breakfast; the island was near at hand, and as we pulled along the border to find a landing, a turn in the coast revealed a comfortable frame-dwelling, set against a ridge of thick timber, and flanked by a smooth beach. Smoke curled from its chimney, a boat bordered the strand, and a dog rose up and howled as our oars awakened him. Directly, a man and a woman appeared at the door; the former walked down to the skiff, and leaping into it, sculled rapidly away without saying a word. The woman received us shyly, but hospitably. She gave my man the use of fire and kettle; and while he cleaned and prepared the fish I strolled into the yard to regard the establishment.

The wood grew tall and tangled close to the premises; there seemed no approach but by the cove; the dwelling was almost without furniture; neither cattle, nor sheep, nor poultry inhabited the barn; and the only sounds to break the general hush were those of wild birds careening overhead, or the waters plashing upon the sands. A turn in the edge of the cedars brought me to a path which I pursued curiously, till it stopped at the brink of a pool or inlet, where a raft lay moored to the shore. As similar channels environed the dwelling, I concluded that it stood upon a small, separate island, and had for this reason escaped our previous notice. The woman was watching me from a window as I returned. She was handsome, but not pre-possessing—a fine animal face, a little dissolute perhaps, and strangely out of place in this bleak, secluded country. She was indisposed to converse, admitted that she had lived here but a little while, and at length weary

with ennui, took a yellow-covered novel from a shelf and read in uneasy silence, eyeing me at intervals. The scene was oddly composed; a painting of it would have been unpardonable—the bare floors and walls, the wild pines and cedars, the desolate lawn and water, and this fine, fashionable, sensual woman, reading a loose novel shelf; Hunt's Merchant's Magazine, a pile of shipping lists, a manual of book-keeping, a lot of business directories, a treatise on commercial law—an odd library, surely for the wilderness. Revolving these things in my mind as I ate, I made a second abortive attempt to engage madame's attention, and at last bade her good-bye.

“Row me to the Canada shore,” I said to the waterman; “we will spend a night with the British Lion.”

I landed at a hamlet near the city of Kingston, and proceeding to a tidy tavern, stretched myself beneath a window, and essayed to read a newspaper. Dullness and fatigue induced drowsiness. I was half-way into a dream, when the entrance of somebody disturbed me. A person in a gray coat had taken up the journal, and was perusing it by aid of an eye-glass. His side and back were turned toward me, but I thought I recognized him as the surly occupant of the dwelling upon the cove. He was small, lithe, and gentlemanly; and after awhile he took a billet from his pocket, folded it, and lighted a cigar, threw away the remnant of the paper. A commotion of some description now attracted him to the exterior, and before I could compose myself to sleep again the noise in front grew fierce and boisterous.

I found the stranger wrangling with a knot of boors who had lately lost some horses, and were disposed to regard all unknown folks as thieves. He was calm and polite, and having abashed them somewhat, withdrew to his vessel, and pushed into the stream. As he stood up in the bateau, and faced me for the first time, the conviction rushed upon me that this man and Jules Ingram were one. The photograph in the possession of Ballagan could have been taken from no other face. The same, small, thoughtful grizzle-haired man regarded me; there was the eye-glass and the cigar; and as, with a quick heart, I recalled each shade and feature, the fine lady on the lonely island came to memory; she was the creature of Jules Ingram; the dwelling was his retreat; the mercantile books were his aids to felony; the man before me was the forger!

Another clue at once suggested itself—the billet with which he had lighted his cigar. I entered the bar-room tremulously, and took the remnant from the floor; the blood gushed to my face at the first word;

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The paper was a blank bill of exchange, one of many with which the culprit had operated! I waited no longer, but summoned my waterman, and relieving each other at the cars, we reached Cape Vincent at dusk. It was not without remorse that I confided my discoveries to Ballagan. I regretted that it had been my destiny to make them. The law had its paid agents, of whom I was not one. My meditations might not be soothed on bleak nights to come by the thought of a miserable man whom my officiousness had consigned to a cold prison cell. But now it that the

facts were in my possession, it was criminal to withhold them. I laid them before the detective as he lay in bed, leaning his powerful head and neck upon a muscular arm, and his small secretive eyes grew blank and expressional way of denoting satisfaction.

“You must take the ferry to Kingston immediately,” he said; “I will dictate a telegram and a placard; the one must be dispatched and the other printed at once upon your arrival. Write!”

I took up pen and paper, and he outlined he as follows:

“To all British officials and residents on the St. Lawrence: I, Pepin Petit, of Fort Erie, Canada West, have lost eight fine horses. The thief is known to be a small, a grizzle-haired, intelligent person, near sighted, and wearing a grey coat; was last seen near Kingston, and is believed to dwell on or near Wolf Island. I will pay a thousand dollars for his detention; he will doubtless attempt to land between Kingston and Montreal.”

I dropped the pen indignantly.

“This is a lie, Ballagan!” I said, “a trick in of your craft; I will have nothing to do with j it.”

“I place you under arrest!” thundered the giant dashing away his coverlets. “I have noticed your squeamishness; the law will hold you as an accomplice of the forger; it is in your power to serve justice; you refuse? —how will public opinion brand you?”

I saw my mistake, and confessed it. My companion was remorseless as a tiger. They paint justice blind; her ministers are all too keen; but this man has no heart; he could not comprehend a scruple; he despised a sentiment or a fear; if his newborn babe had stood between himself and Jules Ingram, he would have trampled it down. I compared him only to a bloodhound at the end of the scent; half dead with fatigue he was, his jaws were quivering now; the tracks of the game were fresh, the smell of blood was in his nostrils, he was up and alert!

That night the trains on the Grand Trunk Railway carried handbills to every riverside village; the Canada shore was close against the forger as securely as the American side had been. Horse thieving was not less heinous than murder, where live stock constituted the sole riches of a people; they would watch for Jules Ingram like savages nourishing a vendetta. He would have but three alternatives: to take to the forests, at the peril of being devoured by panthers; to drift upon the broad Ontario, and perish by storm or hunger; or to follow the current of the river among the thousand renowned isles, daring the passage of the rapids, until over-taking some European bound vessel in the gulf, he might bid farewell to the New World.

I slept little during the night, and sought the quay one hour before daybreak, that I might take the first ferry for Cape Vincent. The steamer had not come in; and as the air was very cool, I resorted to the furnace of a tow-boat just firing up alongside the wharf; the deck-hands were all gathered at the windows, peering in the darkness toward the American shore.

“What are you expecting, boys?” I asked.

The ahoshiashum fur the petektion of property in hosses," said a grimy engineer, "has gone off to the island to burn out a hoss-thief. They been a susceptin' him for a week; to-night a fellow from Fort Erie brought positive proof. We are a lookin' out for the blaze."

In a few [moments the sky in mid-horizon lighted up; the woody outlines of the island were revealed flickeringly; the shadows of the flames were reflected across the broad, dark current, and soon we made out a black object advancing in the glare; it was the ferry-boat, and the first man to step ashore was Ballagan.

"Our friend has escaped," he said; "he left me a curious paper by his lady, who, unfortunately, has no dwelling at present, and I have given her shelter in the jail."

I took the note in my hands: the writing was clear and beautiful, as if engraved—"To the detective stopping at Cape Vincent. I would respectfully suggest that you are doing yourself and me wrong, not to say injustice. If you capture me you make, say, three thousand dollars; give me fair play one week, and I will give myself a hundred thousand dollars, and you twenty thousand. This is an honest proposition; consider it. I know that Canada and the States are alike shut to me, but I still live, and I will never be taken alive.—INGRAM."

My first contributions to the Canadian journals were suggested by Ballagan, and appeared next morning. They were intended to inflame public sentiment, and related certain fables of Ingram's feats at running stock out of the colony. On the same night every fireside, from Toronto to Quebec, was made acquainted with the fugitive's personnel. Vengeance was sworn against him wherever two boors met together. The farmer in the field kept one eye upon the river; each canoe, barge, smack and steamer were subjected to espionage; the whole frontier was hunting down one man. We knew that he was adrift in his bateau, for now and then somebody would espy him for an instant gliding along the edges of bluffs, or sculling through fields of marine grass, or hiding behind a woody cape or island.

Thrice he attempted to land, but the country folks drove him back with execrations.—The dairymaid would not give him a cup of milk; the Indian refused him bread and fire; once some little children turned his boat adrift; but he swam a stream, and recovered it. Thus friendless, hungry, and at bay, he moved forever northward toward the cold gulf, till having entered the romantic territory of the "Thousand Isles," we lost all traces of him. Our voyage through this most picturesque of archipelagoes was rendered thrice entrancing by the adventure which had developed it. There are said to be literally a thousand islands clustering in the broad neck or estuary of the St. Lawrence.

Many of them can scarcely afford foothold to a bird; others support a single miniature tree; sustain huge masses of rock, piled in fantastic forms, and holding in their crevices the palms of climbing vines; a few are large and heavy with turf and woodland, and all are verdant as spring. A voyage among them is like the reading of a poem or the passing of a dream; one seems to be far aloft in a balloon, gazing at the diminished land and sea; for were there but little folks to inhabit these pigmy continents, we should have a Lilliputia indeed.

Here, in winter, the drift-ice heaps up crags and monuments, and the floes and fields crush up in summer, as if they would bear the Thousand Isles away to their Arctic home; the wild birds bring forth their young upon the surface; the cold spawn of the fisher grows warm and vital beneath; the striped and spotted snake lies among their debris, charming the sparrow and the blue jay; and the wolf passing from land to land, halts here in the dead midnight to howl. Not a human being tenants the Thousand Isles; they are sprinkled here and there with wondrous irregularity; the deep river winds in and out among them as if lost or tarrying; and the tourist passing by is reminded of some tableau in the melodrama, too beautiful and unexpected to be real.

In pursuit of Ingram, we explored every islet of this region. We found a hundred traces of him, for he was for ever flitting to and fro—now the embers of his fire, now the echo of his rifle, now the report of some alarmed fisherman, whom the fugitive had passed like an apparition. One day at sunset we saw him—a ragged, haggard, hateless being, standing upon a rock scarcely larger than a man's hand, with the waters churning in around him, and his bateau at his feet. He was sharply outlined against the red sky, and he stood in an attitude of despair, [leaning] wearily upon his rifle. I thought of the Wandering Jew, or the last Indian of his race, halting on the brink of the Pacific. Suddenly he beheld us; gnashing his teeth and lifting his clenched hand, he leaped into his vessel, and sculled away like the wind; we lost him in the darkness, and saw him no more for many days.

Two weeks had now been consumed in this singular pursuit. At last, Ballagan became troubled and doubtful. It was possible for Ingram, changing his position every night, to lead us upon a wild chase for a year. He could plunder barns and river-craft for nourishment, and fish and game were plentiful. Desperate, in view of the penalty of his offence, we knew that roving among these green islands was consonant with his adventurous nature. Fresh from five years' entombment in the jail, and hopeful of guilty gain, he would leave no artifice untried to retain his liberty; and Ballagan feared that he would surrender himself to the Canadian authorities, when the device of Mr. Pepin Petit might be manifest. One day, at Alexandria Bay, we received a dispatch from a station far down the river; Jules Ingram had been seen near the head of the First Rapid; he had followed us, and, with a long start, was making his way vigorously toward the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Every stroke of the oars was a new hope to him; in ten hours, he would pass the American boundary-line, and then our difficulties would be multiplied ten-fold.

Ballagan acted with his usual decision; we took the first express steamer, and pushed on with all the energy of current and steam. It was midnight when we reached the head of the rapids, and as it was forbidden to descend them in the darkness, the vessel halted at a quay, and waited for the morning. It was a grand steamer—"a floating palace"—and having walked with Ballagan up and down the promenade-deck, listening to the roar of the waters, I wearied of his impatience, and retired to my sumptuous state-room. I was soundly dreaming; my heart was back among the Thousand Isles, and our wild search was all forgotten, when raps upon my chamber-door brought me to my feet. It was Ballagan, and I knew by his blank, sphinx-like countenance that something was to ensue.

"Come out at once," he said, in deep, unimpassioned monotone. " Help me to launch the boat; you are to go on the water with me. No flinching or, by the Great American Eagle, your life isn't worth a rushlight."

A premonition of danger crept coldly upon me; I knew that he saw me falter, but I did not speak. I marked in the gray dawn from the windy deck the awful surging of the rapids, tossing their foamy hairs into the sky, blending their sprays in white cataracts of mist, and dashing upon black rocks, imperfectly revealed, as if meaning to wrest them from their everlasting bases. The whole St. Lawrence was a fierce, tumultuous torrent, boiling, and churning, and clamoring. The boles of some huge trees were passing down the current, and I marveled to mark them tossed aloft like reeds, the waters catching them as they fell again, and hurling them high into the air, till, passing from cascade to cascade, they emerged at last a mile below, bruised, and scarred, and broken. Of what advantage would be a man's strength struggling with such an element? Pharaoh and his host, with all Egypt at their back, might have gone down in a twinkling there. Traditions existed of Indian hunters whose skilled hands had guided the canoe through this same flood, but no living man had dared the experiment. Huge steamers went down shivering, and some had been torn into splinters, while sailing craft of all descriptions made the detour by canal.

“Do you see something stealing along the margin yonder?” said Ballagan to me. “I have remarked it for an hour.”

I took his proffered glass, and recognized, distinctly an approaching bateau, and a wild figure in a gray coat sculling in the stern. It was Jules Ingram. He was making energetically for the Canada shore, for he seemed to have an intuition of his proximity to the rapids; and ever and anon, as he advanced, his face was turned to regard the steamer distrustfully. “Crouch here by the gunwale,” said Ballagan; “when I give the word, run out the lines of the bateau. I shall have the oars; take you my rifle in the bow. Be cool and steady, and obey my orders.”

No soul was astir upon the vessel; we watched the guilty man with our hearts in our eyes. It required no effort of his to drive the bateau towards us, for the velocity of the current impelled it at racing-pace. At each instant, the dawn grew brighter; at each instant, the victim drew near. We marked him with the naked eye at last—a face like that of a wild beast, half fugitive, half ferocious, and gaunt with hunger and anxiety; his grizzled hairs, uncovered, [shaded] his savage beard, and his inflamed eyes glared cavernously from their dark, deep sockets; his clothes were rent and stained; his feet were scarred and bare; yet with all this wretchedness, the attitude of the man was that of pride and defiance; it was the consciousness of deserved misery, for which he could not apologise, and which he had determined to endure.

The wharf to which we were moored kept him out of view of the rapids till he had drifted directly beneath us, and then the danger broke suddenly upon him. He seemed stricken dumb, and the oar quivered in his fingers. At the same moment Ballagan called out to me to loosen my line. The boat dropped like a bolt; we clambered down as hastily. The detective seized the scull, while I crouched with the rifle at the bow, and pushing away in a trice, we had almost collided with Ingram's vessel before he was well aware of our presence.

It was a pause of a second. The wretch gave one fierce glance at the shore, at the steamer, and the cataract, and then, with the impulse of despair, struck out boldly for the rapids.

He had not the strength of Ballagan, but he was a better hand with the oar. His hairs blazed in the wind; his rags fluttered, and his eyes distended till their pupils grew small and glittering. Both

men worked with the energy of death; the one to overtake and capture before the sluice had pulled them in; the other to intimidate, perhaps, by a semblance of engulfing both, or failing, to make that semblance a terrible reality.

My senses were marvellously acute; there he was no tiny moving thing in nature which I did not observe; the twitter of a passing swallow; a chip moving on the waves; little fish fluttering at the surface; a distant hawk, swooping like a speck in the sky; the rocking of the boat, and the crack of a splay in the oar; each carved device upon the stock of the rifle; the first sunbeam; the cry of an alarmed man upon the steamer, and the passengers, hurrying upon deck. It was the awakening of every energy—prelude to a violent death —admonishing man of the glory of that organism which a moment is to shatter forever.

I had still hope, for we glided yet smoothly upon the current. It must be that we were gaining upon Ingram; he dared not perish with his crimes upon his head; he meant to turn and submit; there was still time to escape the cataract. Should I stop his career with the rifle? I lifted the bright barrel, with murder half way in my heart; my nerves were taut as wires; I could have dropped him dead at his helm as readily as one wings a crow. He saw me glance down the groove, and his face froze my blood: it was mine reflected—all the agonies of man's nature pleading for life, life, life!

“Do not fire, boy!” cried Ballagan between his teeth; “I will take him alive or die with him!”

On, and on, and on we galloped—the two oarsmen with black faces wrenching the waters apart, and I could hear the hard breathing of both till the roar of the river absorbed all sound. So quickly ran my thought, that I likened the noise of the waters to human speech; they seemed to be shrieking: “Drowned, drowned, drowned!” and the cry rang out so sonorously thrilling that I thought myself repeating it. I wonder if each drop of water had not identity, and the waves a community of intelligence, and every cataract a like ambition, and that ambition now—my death. Still, I saw everything. There was a rocky land covered with trees, just in the edge of the rapids; that was our last salvation; if the boat passed it by, there was nothing left for hope. Already the spray was lapping us; the waters were hoarse and thirsty; I looked at Ballagan with dry, mute eyes; but saw no mercy there.

“Pray, boy,” he said—“pray for us both; and hold fast! I am going down the flood.”

The island passed us at a wink. I felt the boat lifted bodily, and the earth seemed to leap up and crush it as we fell. Again we vaulted aloft, so far that in the terror of the end I had time to note on the crowded decks of the steamer one woman praying with clasped hands, and another who had swooned; the planks of the bateau were bent like withs of straw, the waves gushed from stem to stern; I was lifted from my feet, and hurled against Ballagan, but he stood at the oar like a rock; I saw through my drenched eyes the forger as rigidly fixed; his vessel moved like a winged thing, rather of the air than of the element; and even in this time of despair, his face was dark and haughty. Something stood amidstream as I gazed —black, jagged rocks, and we were hurled upon them. The craft seemed crunching to atoms as we struck; it rose vertically, and the foam gushed into the bow. I knew that this was all. Once more I marked the white waste of the waves, the vanishing islands, the flitting banks and trees and dwellings; and as a soft vision of home

blinded my wet eyes, I called upon the name of One mighty to save, and clutched the cold planks, and knew no more.

A thunderbolt apparently awakened me, and a terrible weight was pressing upon my chest. I was lying in the bottom of the boat, now half-full of water, and Ballagan was holding me fast with his foot. I could scarcely see his face for smoke, but a moment revealed him, standing grimly erect with the rifle at his shoulder.

“Rise!” he said releasing me, “we are fast sinking. Bear a hand with the oar, and give me place in the bow.”

I staggered up trembling; we had passed the rapids; they were churning behind us; the felon glided on before; but I marked that the scull had splintered in his fingers, and he was wringing his hands in pain; the bullet of the detective had broken his oar at the junction of shaft and paddle, and his arms were palsied by the shock. In a twinkling he leaped for the second oar, but ere he could employ it the bateau collided, and he met Ballagan at the gunwale, knife in hand. The detective, clubbing the rifle, struck him a powerful blow, which stretched him prostrate like a dead man.

The hunt was over; the felon was captive at last, and as we headed his launch for the shore, our own went down in ten fathoms of water.

We landed upon the southern bank of the St. Lawrence; and Ballagan with his usual promptness, decided to undertake the wild passage of the adjacent forest, in preference to returning by steamer, with the prospect of trouble from provincial officials. I have not the space to describe the many exciting incidents of this journey. We kept southwards for three weeks, traveling on foot, and came to habitations at the foot of the Adirondack Mountains, in the State of New York. Jules Ingram was duly indicted upon four bills of forgery; but the hardships of his frontier exile had been too great for his feeble constitution. He died in the dock, cool and self-reliant to the last.

Ballagan earned money enough to retire from the police body; he has found his quietus in the present civil war; but in the interim we had frequent laughs over the fate of Pepin Petis Esq., the eminent stock-dealer, who perished in the Cedar Rapids, accompanied by two unknown persons.

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