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BURFORD DELANNOY

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THE MARGATE MYSTERY

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THE MARGATE MYSTERY

BY

BURFORD DELANNOY

Author of "The Garden Court Mystery," "The Missing Cyclist," etc., etc.

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PART I

TWO MEN AND A WOMAN

I

THEY were of the bourgeois—the little trinity whose doings are, *inter alia*, chronicled herein —two men and a woman. As the foundation of a story, that composition seems to lack novelty, still it is one which necessarily entails complications, and the old French proverb applies. If you would seek elucidation of the mystery, search for the woman—or, rather, in this instance, the women, for as this story grows, the trinity merges into a quartette, and the feminine element plays a strong hand.

There is a saying that people who live in Brixton smell of it. The trinity this story starts with was particularly redolent of that southern or south-eastern suburb.

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She was employed in the mantle department at the local Bon Marché, elevated to that position from the sales-counter by reason of her excellent figure, and the way she carried herself. The Bon Marché mantles looked well on her shoulders, Bon Marché customers thought they would look equally well on their own—of that thought was born profit to the proprietors of the Bon Marché.

After eight o'clock in the evening she took the fresh air—such of it as finds its way into the Brixton Road. So it was that she met William—and Charles, his friend.

These two gentlemen were clerks in the city, and they shared a sitting-room and bedroom in a street off the main road—a street in which "Lodgings for Single Gentlemen" cards were as common as dirty doorsteps. Their joint income was three pounds per week. The description, bourgeois, was perhaps of a flattering nature.

Lucy, of the Bon Marché mantle department aforesaid, whilst enjoying one of her nightly promenades, slipped on a piece of orange-peel, and it chanced that two gentlemen walking behind her were sufficiently near to save her falling.

There were grateful thanks and glances on the one hand; raised hats and expressions of pleasure

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at being of service, on the other—all in the good old stereotype fashion which makes the pages of "The Family Herald" so dear to its readers' hearts.

Then—she was walking that way; so were they. That was the beginning of it. They met again and again. Both the men declared themselves admirers of the girl, and she—nothing better chancing in the way—was divided in her opinion about them; but she decided that they would do to go on with.

She became a regular Sunday afternoon visitor to their rooms. Their landlady's scruples needed some over-riding as to this, but that was eventually accomplished—most landladies' scruples are like that.

Great were these Sabbath banquets. The toothsome shrimp, the succulent winkle, the well-margarined crumpet all found a place on the table, flanked by a plate of what the landlady called "creases," with a salt cellar centred therein. The thing was done in absolute style—Brixton style.

Not a word was said about marriage. They knew that—despite the correspondence columns of "The Daily Telegraph"—marriage was a failure when embarked on on an income of seventy-five pounds a year; and they knew that a Bon Marché assistant's marriage was equivalent to a week's notice to leave that emporium. The sea of marriage is a

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troublous one to embark on at the best of times, but on a limited income it is impossible to avoid the rocks ahead. Wreckage is certain.

The men's admiration of the girl increased, yet they remained friends. The friendship was secure because its foundation could not be disturbed, because each knew the weakness of the other—financially.

The girl preferred William to Charles. Preferred him, after the manner of women, because there was a little more trace of the devil in his composition. Charles, though, made her more expensive presents. He rarely aspired to the daredevildom of cigars and whiskey—cigarettes and a glass of bitter beer came more in his way; hence the ability at odd times to buy a present of a bottle of scent, or a pair of gloves—an ability the other man lacked. Hence Charles was out of favor.

But that spice of the devil made William bolder, and when Charles was out of the room on the occasion of one of the Sunday visits, the bold, bad William drew Lucy's head back as she sat in the one large chair the room boasted (and which for some unaccountable reason was called an "easy" one), and fixed his lips on her own bright red ones before she could prevent him.

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She did not scream, but with a flushed face said—
"How can you?"

He, emboldened by this, showed her how he could by repeating the act. Then she rose, and, with a deeper flush on her face and a heaving bosom, would have spoken, but that Charles just then re-entered the room.

Nothing was said about that embrace. The two men, as was usual, saw her home, and parted from her at the Bon Marché private entrance with the customary "good-night," except that the parting pressure of William's hand pained her somewhat—a pain which somehow she did not mind.

Being a saleswoman in the mantle department, and out of the ranks, as it were, Lucy had the privilege of a bedroom to herself. It was considered a great privilege by those who enjoyed it; those who did not were apt to speak contemptuously of cupboards and the swinging of cats. When she had removed her street attire Lucy looked at herself in the mirror. It was not a mirror which reflected all of her—it was not large enough. It was the kind that some tea companies give away to purchasers of two pounds of their syrupy souchong. But she saw enough to know that she was good to look upon—much too good to throw her-

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self away on a minimum thirty and a maximum forty shillings a week. She knew something of city clerks' salaries—city clerks are rather freely discussed by counter young ladies; they form the body from which husbands sometimes drop.

All the same, she sighed. Then she did a foolish thing: she slowly advanced her face to the glass till she touched it, and then kissed her own lips as it were. She blushed at the act; perhaps she did not find it so pleasant as the touch of William's lips. It is scarcely to be expected. Imagination is an excellent thing—but it has its limits.

Besides—quaint as it may sound of a mantle-room saleswoman, to say nothing of her previous sojourn behind the counter—William's kiss was the first moustached one she had ever experienced. She had pecked at other girls, as girls will, but this was the first time she had felt the pressure of a man's lips—and the feeling which that pressure usually excites in a woman—and she hankered after more of it. She tried to conjure up a repetition of it with her mirror, but that was a ghastly failure, and she disrobed, sighing discontentedly.

William met her one evening when Charles was delayed in the city till late. They mounted a tram-car in the Brixton Road, and journeyed

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where there were grass and trees. Most of the time they spent amidst those very-dusty-but-pass-for-sylvan surroundings, his arm was round her waist, more than once their lips met. Then he saw her home.

How would it all have ended but for the death of Charles's aunt? God knows! How do these things usually end? But Charles's aunt died, and Charles nearly had his own breath taken away when he was told that, under her will, he was to receive three thousand pounds.

That night, before they went to bed, the two men talked. William was by no means a fool. In the stations of life into which it had pleased God to call them, three thousand pounds was colossal wealth. William was particularly alive to the blessings wealth brings in its train, because he more often needed money than his companion—he spent it more quickly. Decidedly, therefore, Charles was a man to keep in with.

"Bill, old chap, this money of mine must necessarily make a difference. And I think it will make most difference in us about Lucy."

William started. Charles went on—

"And I want, first of all, for us to clearly understand the position. If we are in the scales, you and

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I, the balance must be held fairly—my money must not weigh things down."

William looked curiously at his friend. He saw things—from a worldly point of view—clearer.

Charles continued.

"That's why I am speaking now, Bill, old man, as I am. I don't for the life of me know whether she prefers one of us to the other——"

Bill did.

"—and I don't think we ought to let her know about this money till she makes up her mind. What do you say? I have to go down into the country about the sale of the furniture at my aunt's place, but I shall be back in time for Sunday tea. Now, I want you to promise me that between this and then, if you should see her, you won't say a word about this money."

Bill promised silence—faithfully.

"And then let her decide for herself, uninfluenced by the pounds, shillings, and pence."

"But, Charley, my dear old chap, you've got hold of the wrong end of the stick altogether. There's some one else to consult besides Lucy."

"Whom?"

"Yours truly. You may love the girl well enough to marry her—I don't. Besides, I know

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exactly how much she thinks of me. I am quite convinced," and he was quite correct in saying so, "that if I proposed to-morrow to marry her, she'd give me the mitten."

"Do you think so?" inquired Charles, elate.

"Sure of it. I think you are right about the money. Don't let her know. Pop the question on Sunday, and see whether she—as the story-books say—'loves you for yourself alone.' I'll clear out after tea to give you a chance."

"You're a brick, Bill! But are you sure? I mean, you have no latent idea of ever asking her to marry you?"

"My dear old chap, you ought to know me better. I have a difficulty in scraping along as it is. This frock coat is not paid for, and I want another. Where should I be with a wife? No—bachelordom for me, old son."

Charles went into the country to see about the sale of the goods and chattels left by his aunt, but not before he had had an interview with his employer. The said employer had knowledge of Charles's ability and industry, and offered, if he liked to put two thousand pounds into the concern, to take him into the business as a junior partner. That meant an immediate drawing of

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five pounds a week, and a near possibility of much more.

William met Lucy whilst Charles was away, and they took the tram-car again to the more quiet and rural district. As they were journeying, he said—

"Lucy, I am going to show you how much I love you."

"Not here," she answered; "wait."

She imagined he was going to evidence his affection in the usual way. He laughed.

"No, old lady, not that. I am going to put you on to a good thing. You have heard of Charley's aunt?"

"That piece Penley made such a hit in?"

William roared laughing.

"No," he said, "I mean our Charley's aunt. She's dead, and has left him three thousand pounds."

"Never!"

It almost took her breath away. The mere idea of inheritance of three thousand pounds is enough to asphyxiate most young women in the mantle department of a drapery establishment.

"Now, where my magnanimity comes in, is not only in giving you up—because I shall never be worth three thousand shillings—but in showing

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you firm ice to skate on, for there are thin spots laid out for you to fall through."

She looked her inquiry.

"Next Sunday," he went on, "Charley will pop the question. He does not mean to say a word about the money, but thinks to find out whether you love him for himself."

"What a beastly mean trick!" she said, indignantly.

"So I thought," he made answer—he was an excellent liar.

"Does he think——"

"It is not what he thinks, Lucy; it is what you think. Not that you will need to think before Sunday. His governor—you know he is in the silk line—has offered to take him into a junior partnership. That means his drawing a fiver a week—possibly more."

"His money——"

"Goes into the business, of course. He will keep a thousand out of it for furniture and reserve fund if you accept him. I can picture you as Mrs. Charley—semi-detached villa and a cap-and-aproned girl to open the door when your old friend Bill drops in to tea."

"Don't be a fool," she said shortly.

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"Don't you, Lucy—that's what you have to mind just now. A fiver a week don't walk up and down the Brixton Road every evening, you know. Pick the fruit whilst it's ripe; gather the roses whilst ye may. He's going to pop on Sunday—you accept."

They were sitting beneath the shadow of a tree on one of the seats provided by a thoughtful local board for just such couples. Probably to save her from being hurt by the hardness of the back of the seat, his arm was around her waist. That may have been the reason; men are very thoughtful—sometimes.

Woman-like, she did not reconcile the position of his arm with the position he took up. There was no fear of her—after the manner of the maiden in the poem—saying: Why don't you speak for yourself, Bill? All the same, she resented the impersonality of his talk.

"You advise me to marry him?" she inquired.

"Rather. You'll be a bigger fool than I take you for if you don't."

She put her hand behind her, and drew his arm away. He was quite surprised—aggrieved, in fact.

"Hullo!" he said; "that's all the thanks a fellow gets for putting you on to a good thing."

She did not answer; her face was turned away.

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If it had not been he would have seen tears in her eyes. Very foolish of her—she admitted that to herself—but then Bill was so much nicer.

"Let's go home," she said suddenly, as she rose to her feet.

"Certainly," he replied shortly—he considered himself the injured party.

They both stood in the darkness under the shadow of the tree. Suddenly she flung her arms round his neck and said—

"Kiss me."

Their lips met. Then she said in a tremulous voice—

"That must be the last—the very last time."

And meant it when she said it. He said—

"So it shall."

They went home on the tram-car. When they parted at the Bon Marché, and shook hands, he pressed hers just as painfully as he had done before. He was a gentleman with some experience of drapers' young ladies; he knew they liked a spice of pain in the affection of their admirers. It seemed to give them something to remember.

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II

SUNDAY came. The banquet over, William suddenly remembered that he had to send a telegram, and that he had better send it at once, as on the Sabbath the telegraph office was only open for a limited time.

They did not mind his going out for ten minutes or so?—No, not at all.

He went, first offering Charles a meaning wink, and then from the other side of the room favoring Lucy with one equally pregnant.

" Lucy," said Charles when they were alone, " I have something I want to say to you."

" Oh," she said, in quite a surprised tone, as if the mere idea of his wanting to say something to her was phenomenal.

" I won't beat about the bush, Lucy. I want to ask you if you care for me well enough to marry me? "

She did not say " This is so sudden ! " She knew much better. The building of suburban theatres and the weekly visits of touring dramatic companies have educated present-day young women; when a situation of this sort comes along, she is not at a loss.

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Lucy felt she was quite able to play the heroine in the little comedy upon which Charley had raised the curtain, and as she "knew her part," she counted on a flourish of music and the limelight when the curtain fell.

"Charley," she said, "are you in earnest?"

"Was never more so in my life."

"But—but——" —Pretty little hesitation copied from the previous week's drama at the local theatre.

"There is no 'but,' Lucy; answer me, 'yes' or 'no.'"

She answered him—still with the Thespian recollection in her mind—by slowly lifting her eyes to his and saying—

"Charley, you know—oh, you must know—how I love you!"

He left his chair, and was on his knees by her side. Her hand in his, he inquired—

"You will marry me, Lucy?"

"No—no, do not ask me that."

"Why not?"

He asked, but in no despairing tone. He felt that any objection she might raise, he would be able, if necessary, to wipe away. Money acts that way. It is easy to call "Nap" with a handful of trumps.

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" We are—oh, Charley—we must not think of it —for your—for your sake."

She had her handkerchief to her eye as she spoke —dramatically. She continued—after the manner of the preceding week's heroine—

" It would not be fair to you, dear; marriage with you means—you must not blast your prospects in life. There is nothing would make me happier than to be your wife, to know that you belonged to me; but I will not be selfish; I will not consent to anything which will hurt you."

She had dropped her handkerchief by this time— and the lachrymose attitude. She was stroking his hair, and could not help thinking how much harder his hair was than William's.

" Suppose I tell you, darling, that my prospects are assured; that I am a well-to-do man?"

" You do not deceive me?" she answered—sad smile *à la* Maud Jeffreys as " Mercia." " I have told you that nothing on earth would please me more than to be your wife. Were I a rich woman, I would marry you to-morrow. As it is—no. I will be no brake on your progress."

" Lucy!" he cried, putting his arms around her, drawing her to him and kissing her, " I can wipe away all your objections. My aunt has died and

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left me a heap of money, and I am going to be a partner in the firm."

She held him away at arm's length with both hands, and looked at him with surprise in her eyes —*ingenue* style, effect very telling.

"Is—it—possible?" she inquired, with Irvingesque pauses between each word.

"Yes, darling, quite. And now, you will marry me, will you not?"

For answer she drew him to her and held him so. An eloquent silence—*à la* Mrs. Patrick Campbell.

There was heard a man's voice humming as the owner ascended the stairs; the door opened, and William entered, enveloped in cigar smoke. The odor preceded him and reminded one of Whitechapel—where the cheap Manila cheroot comes from.

"Bill, old boy!" Charley burst out, "congratulate me. Lucy has promised to be my wife."

Of course William said the needful, and when later on Lucy retired, Charles alone accompanied her home.

The course of this particular love ran smooth. Charles and Lucy hunted in couples after a residence, and at last secured one. Then they began

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filling it with furniture, and at last all was ready for their marriage.

The last night of their joint residence, the last night of Charley's celibacy, the two men sat talking.

"Bill, is there anything I can do for you"—he laid his hand on his companion's shoulder affectionately—"before we part? Don't hesitate to say if there is. We have been together so long, and such good friends."

"Well, there is something, Charley, you might do, but 'pon my soul, I have no right to suggest it to you."

"Do . . . What is it?"

"You know Arkwright, man we have met in the saloon at the 'Arms'?"

"Yes—bookmaker."

"That's the man. I have known him a long time. He has made money in pubs. the last few years. Has got a street of houses to my knowledge. He is getting tired of working so hard. I'll tell you what he has offered me—a sixth share of the profits if I go into partnership with him, and bring in two hundred pounds."

"A bookmaker's is a sort of funny business, Bill——"

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"Tell me one that makes money quicker or easier?"

"I know——"

"Well, there it is, Charley. I would not have mentioned it if you had not asked me how you could help. You can that way. I know what a sixth share is under his indolent management—six pounds a week."

"As much as that?"

"It is, and I reckon I could largely increase it. I could pay back three pounds a week till the two hundred was wiped off."

"I wish it had been any other business——"

"There isn't any other, old chap, where two hundred pounds would be a shadow of good. If you can let me have that, you'll put me on my feet."

For answer, Charles drew a check book from his pocket. He kept it there after the manner of a man who has a bank balance for the first time in his life. He filled one in to his friend's order, the amount—two hundred pounds—and then handed it over.

"You're a brick, Charley, and you shan't lose a cent of this. On the first of each month, without fail, I shall send you twelve pounds. Now let me

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make you out an acknowledgment of the money owing."

He did so, and with renewed thanks the incident closed.

The next day Charles was married—William being his best man. In that capacity he drank to the joint happiness of the married couple, and ultimately saw them into the train at Charing Cross on the departure for their honeymoon.

The honeymoon lasted a fortnight, and then Charles put his nose to the grindstone of his business. He was surprised to find that, the business having a branch in Marseilles, he would be expected to spend a month of his time there each summer. The other partner spent a winter month there, so that there was nothing to grumble about.

III

William prospered. Regularly the instalments of the loan were repaid. He was doing well; the racing season was in full swing.

William dined at Charles's place, and saw how much marriage had improved Mrs. Charles. He prefixed the Mrs.

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Charles laughed with the pride of possession. Mrs. Charles looked at him strangely.

For long after he had gone home, Mrs. Charles's fingers pained her where a ring had been pressed into her flesh—when William had shaken hands with her.

He was a frequent visitor after that dinner.

The end of July loomed—the time for Charles's trip abroad. The end of July and the beginning of August he would be in Marseilles. But for the fever raging there, he would have taken his wife with him—as it was, she would be left at home alone for a month.

Not that she minded much. She had got very tired of her husband in the few months they had been married. Charles saw no flaw in her, but he did not quite know her.

Many items in the grocer's bill, which were "carried forward," were from the wine and spirit department. Mrs. Charles had contracted a habit of whiskey and soda drinking. It is a habit of rapid growth. She got her whiskey that way, and her busy little husband was none the wiser.

Her home would have disgusted a careful housewife, but loving Charles, so long used to a third-rate lodging-house, saw nothing wrong in it. If he

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could occasionally write his name on the dust on the piano, that was no new experience to him.

Besides, was not his wife unwell? He thought so. He was confirmed in the belief by the fact that she was unable to rise in the morning and sit down to breakfast with him. She had to have her breakfast in bed, and usually arose about noon.

She had developed into a thoroughly lazy woman. She had, she told herself, worked hard enough at the Bon Marché to last a lifetime. She kept one servant—perhaps that is wrong, she did not keep them, they would not stand her temper. The servant she had for the time being, she left to do all the work. As she remarked, what was the use of keeping a dog and barking yourself? The servants barked, though, pretty freely—generally when they were leaving, or talking to other people about her. They were very fluent then. If there is any truth in the saying, Mrs. Charles's ears must have burned.

The day her husband went away she felt very dull. She would have laughed at the suggestion that it was because of his going. But one gets dull without always being able to assign a reason for it. Moreover, the whiskey did not seem to "pull her round." Perhaps—as she had no fear of her hus-

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band's return—she exceeded her usual allowance. It is possible to have too much of a good thing.

She told herself that she was leading a deadly dull life, and that it was not endurable, and asked herself why should she? Whiskey gives rise to thoughts like those.

Then she sat down to her writing-table and wrote on a sheet of note-paper:—

"DEAR BILL,—I am alone and dull. Come round.

"Yours,
"LUCY."

This she took to the post-office, and to ensure its immediate delivery, invested in threepennyworth of express messenger. The post-office Mercury is frequently despatched by Venus—the telegraph-boy goes a long way.

There had been times when William's eyes had sparkled, his pulse had throbbed, and his hands had trembled when he received a note asking him so to call. But times change, and people with them. As has been indicated, this was not the first note of the kind he had received, and if he accepted the invitation it would be by no means the first time he had been to see Mrs. Charles when she had been

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" alone and dull." Why, then, did he use a swear word? Well—yes; he was getting rather tired of her—men do. Somehow she did not appeal to him —as she had done. He liked whiskey well enough, but he did not like a woman to smell of it. Also, there was some one else. Perhaps that was the serious reason. It generally is.

The head barmaid at the " Arms," where he and his partner did most of their business, had cast an eye of—shall we call it love, for lack of a better word?—an eye of " love " on him. She knew that as Tom Arkwright's partner he must be doing well, and she had an ambition to do well herself—an ambition which may safely be labelled laudable.

Not that she was doing badly. There were no troublesome check tills in the saloon bar, and, being a far-seeing young lady, she did not spend what she was able to " make " on herself—she carefully put it aside. She had been so putting it aside till it ran into over two hundred pounds. Which shows what, even in the humble station of barmaid, can be done by perseverance.

Her idea was to take a smaller public-house, a few minutes' walk away from the " Arms," which she knew was coming into the market shortly. It was doing badly, but that did not frighten her—it would

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be a reason for its going cheap. Moreover, she knew that she could herself draw away an appreciable number of the "Arms" customers, and if she could only get the Arkwright following, success was assured.

Arkwright was a married man. William, she knew, was free, hence her favoring the latter gentleman. William fell into line readily. He liked Polly, the barmaid—to use his own description, she was "rippin'." The assured position of a licensed victualler appealed to him. They shook hands on the idea.

The house did come into the market. It was a tied or brewers' house. The brewery agent knew Polly, and knew how she would be likely to work up the trade. If she could find four hundred pounds she could have the place. Polly had two. Could William find the other moiety? So she asked him, and he said, "Yes, he could."

And that promise, or rather the difficulty in fulfilling it, was troubling William. He did not dare ask Charles, practically the only friend who knew little enough of him to lend him money, for two reasons. More than half of the original loan of two hundred pounds remained unpaid, and he knew that his friend had not any such sum as he required

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at his banker's. After buying the furniture, settling five hundred pounds on Lucy, and lending him two hundred pounds, there was not much left out of the thousand.

He had ideas of going to Lucy and asking her to lend it him. He was an unmitigated cad, but even he drew the line at that. Under the guise of friendship, he had robbed his friend of his wife's honor, and now he was thinking of—no, he could not, he told himself, do that.

That afternoon Polly said to him—

" There's a fortnight gone, Bill. You don't seem to hurry up with that two hundred. Can't you rake it in? Remember, there is only another fourteen days, and then some one else will get the place."

He was annoyed at that—at his inability to get the money, and her reminder. So, when he went home, and found Lucy's letter, he gave vent to his feelings in one—and a generally considered expressive—word.

Then he thought. Why should not he borrow the money of Lucy? It could be repaid. No one would ever be the wiser. Trust her to keep it from Charley's ears—as she did everything else.

But when she came to know he was married?

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Phew! . . . Well, he would face that. She married another man professing to love him.

That evening he went to her. She opened the door to him.

" I've given the girl a night out," she said, as he entered the hall, and she closed the door; " if you are going to take me out, I can take the latch-key. Kiss me. . . . I used not to have to ask you to do so."

" I'm a bit worried, old girl, that's all. Don't ask me to take you out to-night. It's a big mistake. If any one who knows us saw us together, what possible acceptable explanation could we give Charley? "

" Explanation! " she said, blending a whiskey and soda; " it is rather late in the day for you to talk of giving him an explanation, isn't it? "

He shifted in his chair uneasily and affected to laugh.

" And now, what is worrying you, Bill? " she said, sitting on his knee, with one arm round his neck, and the other hand holding her glass.

" What worries a man most times? " he answered evasively, thinking how he could best broach the subject of the loan he needed.

" Woman," she answered promptly. " You don't

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suggest I worry you? . . . Who's the other woman, then?"

She drew her arm from him as she spoke.

"Don't be a fool, Lucy."

"I don't mean to let you make me one."

"You know very well there is no other woman."

The excellence of his lying was commented on earlier in these pages. He practised the art successfully. She believed him; her arm went back.

"What's the trouble, then?" she said, affectionately. "Tell me."

"I am hard up."

"You are! I am surprised. I have heard Charley say that you are making more money than he is."

"So I am; it's quite true. But you see the racing business is a funny one. There is a season when it is on, and a season when it is off. Arkwright has quaint notions. He is as straight as a die, but he has his ideas, and won't depart from them. We each draw enough to carry us on, a few pounds a week, and not until the end of the year will he divide up the profit. There it lies, over two hundred pounds to my credit, and I can't touch a penny of it till December."

"I see."

"I have an immediate need for two hundred

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pounds. If I could get that in a week, it means a big thing for me. I have asked Arkwright, and he won't let me draw a shilling beyond our agreed sum. 'Business is business,' he says. Of course he is right, but it's rough on me, when I want two hundred now, to know that I can't get it, although I am sure to handle it in December."

"I suppose there is no doubt about your being in possession of it then—in December?"

"Of course not. I have told you it is there to my credit now. There will be much more in December."

"Supposing I lent you the money—till December, Bill?"

"You!"

"Yes. I have got it, you know. About two hundred, not much more. Don't you remember Charley gave me as a marriage portion five hundred pounds?"

"Yes," he answered, "of course. Now I come to think of it, I do."

"Well, I haven't got five hundred now," she said. "I have spent a lot lately; but I can manage the two you want if I am sure you will repay me at the end of the year. I must have it then."

"Of course." He paused, wondering what she

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could possibly have done with the other part of the money. "Then you will lend it to me?"

"Well, yes—on conditions."

"Conditions?"

"Yes," she answered thoughtfully, as she twirled the end of his moustache with her fingers, "most people make conditions when they lend money, don't they?"

He was surprised. He wondered if she meant to charge him interest! He inwardly laughed at the idea, and then—with his arm round her waist—inquired what the "conditions" were. He thought that a good way in which to ensure easy ones. She told him—

"I want you to myself. There's the condition. It can be easily arranged. To-morrow is Wednesday. Next Monday is Bank Holiday. Take me down to Margate for a few days."

He started. He had not expected to pay such a price as that.

"The risk—" he commenced.

"Pah! There's risk about everything. Let us have a holiday if we are never to have another."

"If any one should see us?"

"Who should see us?"

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"Margate is thick at holiday time; it is an awful risk."

"Baby!"

"No, I am not, Lucy. I am thinking of you."

Which was not true: he was thinking of himself, and what Polly would say if she should hear that he was at Margate with another woman. It was an unpleasant kind of thought.

"Don't mind me," she answered. "I can look after myself."

"Well, we will arrange it, but we will not go down together——"

"What——"

"Listen. I'll wire down to Rochester's Hotel—prepaid reply—for numbers of rooms they have. Book one in your own name openly, and the adjoining room from another address in another name."

"M'yes. If you must be so careful."

"It is best."

"Very well. When shall we go?"

"To-morrow afternoon. I can't get away earlier and I am bound to be back in London on Tuesday."

"If you must, you must."

The pout was one of dissatisfaction—she had foreseen and counted on a week.

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"I'll wire for rooms and let you know which train I can get away by. I'll send a wire off to-morrow morning about eleven o'clock in your name and arrange the telegraphic replies. Do the whole thing openly in your own name as if there was not anything to conceal."

"Do you do the thing openly—in your own name?" she inquired sneeringly.

"No," he answered shortly. "There is nothing strange in a bookie taking another name. Besides, I can't be called to account—you can. You can explain to Charley that you were weary of being alone, and so went down to the sea for a day or two for a blow."

He thought, as he said that, what a blow it would be to the husband if he should ever learn the truth.

"How about your servant?"

"Oh," she answered, "she has given me notice, and I shall pack her off in the morning. I shall leave the door so that I can use my latch-key when I get back."

"Good. And now—now touching this two hundred pounds."

"You said you did not want it for a week."

"Y—yes."

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" Well, you shall touch it inside the week. I'll give it to you the day you return to London."

" I can rely on that? "

" Of course. Do you doubt me? "

" No, dear old girl; no, of course not. But if I can be sure of it, it will be such a relief to me."

It was, too, a relief to him. It enabled him, when he left her, to go to the other woman and say over the bar—

" It's all right, Polly, old girl—the two hundred."

She brightened; she had somewhat begun to lose faith in him. She inquired—

" Got it? "

" As good as. Shall have it on Tuesday morning."

" Certain? "

" Sure. Old aunt is going to lend it me. Old woman is selling out Consols, and will have the money by Tuesday morning. I have got to do the dutiful, go down there to-morrow, and stay with her. You bet I shall not come back without the pieces."

" I can tell Bass's man it will be all right? "

" Rather. I shan't see you, though, till Tuesday, Polly."

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"Oh, I'll try to survive—without you."

"You don't mind my going?"

"If you are coming back two hundred pounds heavier, I prefer it."

IV

NEXT morning Mrs. Charles discharged her servant and packed her dress basket. About one o'clock a messenger came with a letter. It read:—

"Have arranged everything at Rochester's. Booked rooms No. 23 and No. 24. The Margate express leaves Victoria at five. Don't fail to be there by then. Have your luggage put in the train. I'll join you at the barrier with the tickets.

"Lovingly yours,

"BILL."

So at five o'clock they left Victoria, journeyed to Margate, went by separate flys to Rochester's Hotel, with an interval of some minutes between each, and—and so on.

Somehow it was not a pleasant time for either of them. For a man to have to make love to a woman he dislikes—and his feeling for her had reached

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that stage—there is scarcely anything more unpleasant. He is not himself when he is thinking of the other woman.

Lucy's vanity would not allow her to guess at the real state of things—that he was tired of her; but she resented his coldness, and sought to raise her spirits with spirits of another kind. That led to more trouble, as the incipient intoxication she gave signs of only disgusted him the more. One word led to another—it usually does.

On Monday he managed to get her into a good temper—or she allowed herself to be cajoled into one. She wanted him to stop on after the morrow. The subject of the two hundred pounds came up, and she said—

"Oh, if it will make you any easier, have it now."

They were in the little sitting-room adjoining her bedroom, and she drew her check-book from her dressing-bag and dipped pen in ink.

"Shall I make it payable to Mr. Warner?" she sneered.

"No," he said, "scratch out 'order' and make it payable to 'bearer.'"

She did so, and filled in the morrow's date, and after signing, blotted and handed him the check.

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"There," she said, "now perhaps you are happy."

"I'll never be able to thank you sufficiently for this, old girl."

"I'm sure of that—because you'll never try. What's the matter with you, Bill? What's made you so queer lately? Getting tired?"

"Silly little woman! What on earth will you be thinking next?"

"Well, I'm thinking now that you don't love me half as much, or a quarter as much, as I love you."

"Rot! I have been worried; that is all."

"Prove you love me, Bill—by doing what I ask."

"What's that?"

"I'm going to stop on till the end of the week—stop on with me."

"My dear girl! did I not tell you that I must be in town to-morrow morning? Wasn't that part of our——"

"You refuse, then?"

"I must. I tell you I must be in town."

They quarrelled again.

Next morning, the day after the Bank Holiday, he went to her room early to bid her good-bye. She was as savage as a bear at what she called his desertion of her, and spoke her mind freely; and

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he was really angry because of the entrance of a servant with Lucy's breakfast on a tray. Lucy was just then saying—

"I believe you are doing your best to kill me—you want to see me dead."

It was one of those absurd, inconsequent utterances a woman will give vent to at times, but he was annoyed that she should say it before one of the hotel people.

After a time she simmered down; he said good-bye, paid his bill, and caught the express up to town.

His first act on reaching London was to drive to the bank and cash the check. When asked "How he would have it," he had replied "All gold," and so left the bank with two hundred sovereigns neatly done up in brown paper bags.

Then he went to the "Arms." His look was enough for Polly. She did not ask him the question—she read that he had the money.

They shook hands across the bar, and she said—

"We had such a day here yesterday: never been so busy before. I have an afternoon and evening off to-day through it. Will you take me out?"

She rented a little room of her own close by, and it was arranged that he should call for her there

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about two o'clock, that they should get down to Greenwich Park on the tram-car, and come back in time for an evening at the South London Music Hall. This was their idea of an enjoyable time—the palate of the Surrey-sider is not a difficult one to tickle.

At two o'clock he called at her place, and handed her the two hundred pounds. Then they went out.

In Greenwich Park they sat planning their future. They would be married next week at the Registrar's Office—William had given the necessary notices—and so enter into possession of a new business as man and wife.

As the shades of night fell they sought the roads again, and, entering a restaurant, ordered a meal. Whilst it was being prepared, William picked up a copy of "The Star," and the caption of one of the columns caused him to start. As he read, his face took on the color of the cloth on the table, and when he had reached the end he murmured, in a tone of agony—

"Oh, my God!"

Polly had seen him start when he looked at the paper, but the act of reading had hidden his face. Now, as he spoke, she said sharply—

"What is the matter?"

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Fortunately, they were the only people seated in that particular compartment. He was unable to answer her. He sat as one turned to stone.

She snatched the paper from his nerveless fingers, and her eyes were attracted by the big type. She read:—

"MURDER

AT A MARGATE HOTEL.

Woman Found Dead in Bed.

FLIGHT OF THE MURDERER.

POLICE HAVE A CLUE.

"This morning much excitement prevailed in Margate by reason of a rumor which quickly spread that a murder had been committed. Unlike many rumors, there was a foundation of fact, and our special correspondent learned on inquiry of the police that a murder had undoubtedly been committed. At this stage of the affair the police are very reticent, but the facts appear to be as follows: A lady named Mantock, whether an assumed name or not is not known, booked a room at Rochester's Hotel on Wednesday last. She either knew, or made the acquaintance of, a man named Warner, who occupied the adjoining room. A chambermaid

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reports that Warner was seen in the deceased's room this morning. The woman was crying, and said to Warner, 'You are trying to kill me; you want to see me dead,' or words to that effect. Shortly after that Warner paid his bill and left the hotel. Some time after, the same chambermaid entered the woman's room, and was horrified to find the occupant lying on the bed black in the face. There had evidently been a struggle, and the woman was quite dead. Police and medical men were hastily summoned—the latter arriving too late to be of any service. The police searched for verification of the woman's name, and, if possible, her address, but so far have found nothing. Her room was taken by telegraph, but the telegram itself had been destroyed. The police will, of course, inquire through the postal authorities, and will no doubt get at the real name and address through the deceased's bankers, a check-book being found in her dressing-bag. Curiously enough, according to the counterfoil, the last check drawn was dated to-day, and was for exactly two hundred pounds. The police are said to have a clue to the murderer's movements."

"Are you Warner?"

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Polly was speaking. She was a shrewd little woman, and usually touched the spot. A barmaid's life tends to bring out this trait.

He nodded.

"This woman was your aunt?"

He started at the suggestion, but, as the drowning man clutches at straws, nodded again.

"You killed her?"

"No, no—oh, my God! no—don't think that."

Polly was a woman quick of thought. She did not believe him guilty, although from his admission it looked like it; yet, she argued, he would never have told her as much if he were. Her mind was quickly made up.

"Your description by this time will be circulated at every police station. Take off that light coat you are wearing. That's it. Here's dinner; eat, or pretend to eat."

They played with the food. Unseen by the restaurateur, Polly swept part of the meal into a newspaper and bunched it up. After an interval, she rapped for the waiter, and the bill was paid.

Whilst the man went for the change, she said to her companion—

"Pull yourself together. We passed a hat shop a few doors down. What size hat do you wear?

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. . . Good. I'll go in and buy you a soft brown felt."

The waiter returned with the change, and they left the restaurant, William carrying his light coat and Polly the bundle of food.

"Walk on to the corner," she said, when they reached the hatter's, "and turn up the street; it leads to the Park."

In a few minutes she joined him.

"Come," she said, "it is dark here. Roll the coat up, and leave it on that seat. . . . Some one will find it and take it away. . . . Stamp on that bowler hat, make it flat; we will take that with us."

They went back to the main road, and, hailing a cab, were driven to the Old Kent Road. Here they alighted, discharged the cabman, and, walking a little way, hailed another. In that they were driven close to Polly's room. *En route* she flung the crushed bowler from the cab window.

It was dark, and the street in which Polly rented her room was quiet. She had a key, and let herself in. Being holiday time, her landlady was out; not a soul noticed their entrance.

"Swear to me," she said, "so help you God, that you did not murder this woman."

"Oh, Polly, Polly! don't think it! I—do I look

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like a murderer? Good God! that you should think me capable of it! No, no, no; a thousand times no."

"Yet you were under another name."

"Yes, I know that, but——"

"Don't tell me anything. Somehow, I don't think you murdered your aunt——"

He started.

"But I don't want to hear any details. They would make me feel sick. You must keep close. Until the guilty man turns up you won't be safe in any public place. I'll sleep at my sister's to-night; you sleep here. To-morrow early I will bring you a razor and scissors. You must cut off that moustache and beard. It will change you a lot."

"Oh, my God——"

"Keep quiet. Excitement won't do any good. One other question, though, before I go. Your aunt gave you this money voluntarily; it is not"—she shuddered—"blood money?"

"Oh, no, she—she—gave it to me last night."

"M'well, I believe you. She could not have signed a check very well if— Well, there, I believe you, Bill. I don't think you would be fool enough to try to deceive me. Perhaps the murderer will be arrested before morning. Let's hope so. Good-

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night, and keep up your heart till I come in the morning."

She kissed and left him.

His thoughts all that never-seeming-to-end night it is impossible to depict.

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PART II

Polly's Reason for What She Did

The Barmaid's Story

I AM Mary Ann Drew—and I am not ashamed of my name either, or anything I did in connection with the Margate Murder. Mr. Lanward, the author, is poking his nose into the matter—with a view, he says, of letting the public know the truth—but for my part I think sleeping dogs should be allowed to lie. Besides, no good can come of raking things up now.

I think myself that there ought to be some law to prevent authors making capital out of real incidents, disturbing and worrying and distressing people by dragging into the light of day things which would be the better for being left in the dark. If an author hasn't sense enough to invent a plot, then it is time he took to bricklaying, or some—anyway—useful sort of business.

Mr. Lanward came to me, and told me what he intended doing. I informed him that I absolutely

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declined to tell him anything about it, and he twiddled his moustache and replied that he was very sorry, that it would trouble him to tell the story for me. I hate sarcastic men.

Just as he was leaving my bar parlor, into which, as he looked like a gentleman and had asked to see me privately, he had been shown—I am in business for myself now—I called him back, and said—

"I am to be held up to ridicule and contempt in this account of yours, I suppose?"

"My dear madam," he replied, with a suavity which made me hate him, "a moment ago you told me you had done nothing to be ashamed of. Surely if light is shed on what you did, you will see no contempt in it?"

"That's just it," I answered. "I know what you writing men are. The staff of the 'Brixton Porcupine,' the 'Surrey Starlette,' and other papers used to come to the 'Arms' when I was barmaid there, and some of them use this house. I know what writing men are."

He bowed and said he was flattered that I should include him in so excellent a literary circle—that I did him an undeserved honor. I went on—

"Knowing you boys as I do, I know how in your hands you will twist and torture the truth——"

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"Permit me to interpose," he said. "Believe me that the truth so rarely passes through my hands that when it does I handle it with singular care. I look upon truth," he continued, fixing his eye on a cobweb in a corner of the ceiling (I spoke to my girl about it pretty sharply when he'd gone) "as a sort of butterfly. Handle it, and you ruin it. The feathers come off on your fingers, and the beauty of the truth—the butterfly—is injured. Truth is to be looked at, seen and loved; never touched. As the poet hath it: 'For truth has such a face and such a mien, as to be lov'd needs only to be seen.'"

"I've no time to listen to poetry-spouting," I said. "If your time is of no value to you, mine is to me. I've got thirty dinners to get ready by one o'clock."

"Then," he said, picking up his hat, "I must crave your pardon for the portion of your time I have wasted; and in saying farewell, beg you will permit me to send you a copy of the book when published, containing my account of your account of the affair."

"When you were gassing about truth just now," I said, "did I understand you to mean that you wouldn't touch or alter or cut out or put in the

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account I should give you of my part in the affair?"

"Madam," he said, with one of those irritating little bows of his, "you have gauged my intentions with an exactness which excites my wonder and admiration."

"Supposing," I said, "that I sat down and wrote it all out. Do you promise me that every word of what I write you will print?"

"I pledge you my word of honor to that effect."

"Words of honor amongst you writing men," I retorted, "don't go far with me. I have a slateful of them at the back of my bar. They were generally given me when the pledger had left his purse at home on the piano. Yes," I continued reflectively, "I used to have a lot of pledged words of honor, but I've got over taking them now. I just point to a card I have hanging up in the bar. It has a pithy sentence printed on it. It reads: 'Poor Trust is dead; Bad Pay killed him.'"

"There is a delicacy—a subtlety I may say—about your utterances, madame, which convinces me that you are destined to shine in the particular sphere——"

"Shut it," I interposed. "I don't want any soft soap. I'll do it—I'll write out all my part of it. It

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will be better than telling it you, because you are certain to twist it up and make me look like an idiot."

"Impossible, dear madam," he answered. "No pen I wield could ever portray you different from what you are."

I suppose he meant something sarcastic by that. But I allow no man to sit on me. I said—

"I shall do it in writing. You accept it on condition that you don't alter a word of it. If you do, I shall have the law on you—breach of copyright, or something of that sort. I am not a fool."

"I acquiesce in that opinion of you, madam," he answered. "The fool"—he had his eye fixed on the cobweb again—"is far removed from the fair hostess of this excellent tavern."

"Besides," I went on, "I can get my law at low rates. Two or three lawyers use this house, and I can get a case taken up on the cheap. I'll send you my account, and you print it just as I send it. None of your satirical remarks on it. I don't want to see them in type. I don't care for your sarcasms here —verbally they don't hurt."

"Satire," he murmured, "should like a polished razor keen, wound with a touch that's scarcely felt or seen."

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"That's more poetry," I said with the contempt I felt. "Useful on a greengrocer's or a flour bag, but on a man's lips—pah! you make me tired."

He seemed to shiver a little in his fur coat at that. I had evidently hit him where the pain was, touched the spot, as it were.

"And now I've got to look after my cook," I said; "will you have a drink? . . . No? . . . Well, you're the first writing man I ever knew refuse a glass of beer when it was offered him!"

He seemed to shiver again, and opened the door as if he'd be glad to get away.

"I have the honor," he said, "of wishing you a very good day."

"Pleasure," I said, "pleasure. You've got more pleased feeling than honor about you. So long."

He went. I noticed that he did not offer to shake hands as he left. He was a bit sick, I expect. Thought to ride it over me easily, and found his mistake out. I haven't met a man who's been a match for me yet. I haven't been behind a bar for seven years for nothing—not me. As to Mr. Lanward, I reckon I gave him quite as good as he gave me. I hate a man who puts on side and

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waxes his moustache—I don't know which I object to most.

And now I'll sit down and write out fair and square—relying on nothing being altered—my connection with the matter.

Before I was landlady here I was barmaid at the "Arms." I got pretty well known there to the customers, and was a bit of a favorite with them —which, partly, accounts for my doing so well here.

I knew William Bankes when he was a city clerk. He used to come in and smoke and have a drink or two in the evenings. He was sharp with his tongue, and as I like a bit of repartee, I was always glad to see him.

There was one gent—one of our customers—who was not so glad to see him—Tom Arkwright, the bookie. Bankes used somehow to be able to spot the winners, and he put his little bit on the four-legged 'uns with Arkwright. Arkwright had more often to pay over than to receive, and that made him mad. Bookies don't feel too full of gladness when they have to pay out—it isn't their nature.

What first drew my attention to Bankes's so fre-

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quently winning was the regularity of his bets—he never went beyond a dollar on any one gee-gee.

"No," I've heard him say, "I'm not going to lose my head because a six to one chance romps in with a length to spare. I'm in luck, that's all. But I'm not going to tempt it. If I lose a dollar or two it won't break me, but if I lose quids it might. No big bet for me, however often I win. I'm not having any."

You see why I was attracted? It was such an unusual trait in a young man's character. Most of them, if they win a bit, plunge, "follow their luck," as they call it, and either end up at the Old Bailey, or with their arms round their mothers' necks, and her few valuables in the pawnshop—put there to keep her son out of a mess.

It was so unusual that I thought—got to think—what an excellent husband (from the point of view of carefulness) Bankes would make.

One night when Arkwright was paying over to Bankes the latter's week's winnings, he said to him—

"It would be cheaper for me, Bill, to take you in as a partner."

"Right you are," replied Bankes, smart with his tongue as usual, "I'm on. Why not? I'm looking

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