

What Goes on Tour

The Texan Quartet #1

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First published by Momentum in 2014
This edition published in 2017 by Bantilly Publishing

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What Goes on Tour: The Texan Quartet 1

EPUB format: 9780995391871

Mobi format: 9780995391888

Print format: 9780995391895

Cover design by XO Creative

Edited by Elizabeth Cowell

Proofread by Laurie Ormond

DEDICATION

To Mum and Dad for teaching me I can do anything I set my mind to, and to my husband, Luke for his support and encouragement - I love you

Chapter 1

Breathe.

Libby Myles' heart was doing its best rock concert impression, thudding hard enough against her ribs that she thought it was going to break through.

She was going on television, not to face a firing squad.

Hurrying alongside the keep-up-or-be-left-behind production assistant, Libby figured it amounted to the same thing.

If she messed this up it was the death of her fledgling career. One wrong word, one misinterpreted sentence, and she'd be *that* sound bite on tomorrow morning's radio. The one that was played over and over again while the DJs asked each other, "What *was* she thinking?"

Suddenly the blond-haired assistant stopped and directed her into a room. Libby braked, wobbled on her four-inch heels, and took a couple of quiet, slow breaths to stop herself panting. God, she was unfit.

"This is the Green Room. You can wait here with the other guests and I'll be back to get you when it's your turn." The woman turned and strode away before Libby could ask for introductions. Libby cursed the fact she had missed the earlier rehearsal due to her book signing and snail-like traffic.

Who had her publicist said would be on tonight's show? An English comedian, Tony someone, and American rock god,

Kent Downer.

Stepping into the room, she noticed there wasn't any green in sight, rather the walls were painted a pale beige reminiscent of a doctor's waiting room. Two men sat on a retro red couch, turned toward each other, deep in conversation, perhaps mid-forties in age. Manager and comedian, Libby decided as she heard their English accents. No point trying to get a seat there.

The other red couch had a single occupant. Not the kind of person you wanted to meet in a dark alley, late at night.

Kent Downer stared straight at Libby, one hand in his lap, the other over the top of the couch, his long, rangy legs crossed at the ankles. She smiled, but he didn't respond, staring but not seeing, his attention somewhere far more interesting than these four walls. She took the opportunity to study him. Short, spikey black faux-hawk, pale skin and the thickest black eyeliner she'd ever seen on a man. His clothes were black too. Skinny-leg jeans, plain, fitted T-shirt and a waistcoat that hung unbuttoned at the sides. Stereotypical rock star. She'd never be able to use him in one of her books – she'd have to make him different in some way. Otherwise she'd get the comment from her editor – “Don't make him a cardboard cut-out.”

Libby moved across the room and sat on the couch next to the rock star. He must have felt her movement, as he blinked and looked at her briefly before returning his gaze to the spot he'd been staring at.

Obviously a charm school dropout.

But then again, a rock star of his reputation wouldn't be interested in talking to an author. She pushed aside the twinge of self-doubt. It was his loss.

Libby had a moment of regret for insisting her publicist have the night off – and then shook her head. She didn't need to be babysat.

She poured a glass of water, grabbed a handful of chocolate from the bowl on the glass coffee table and scooted back on the couch to relax.

It didn't happen. The couch was as comfortable as its color was subtle.

Shoving the chocolate into her mouth, she took her notebook and pen out of her bag and opened to a blank page.

She was about to be interviewed in front of a live studio audience and broadcast all over Australia.

Libby's skin grew clammy and she shook her fingers briefly to release some of the stress.

This was a huge opportunity. Struggling writers didn't get this kind of thing. Someone must have owed her publicist a favor. Big-time.

Libby knew if the viewers liked what they saw, they'd mention her to friends, maybe go out and buy her books. If enough people bought them, she'd finally be able to give up her day job and write full time. And prove to her parents she could make it as an author.

Right now, though, she'd settle for a decent royalty check. The repairs on her car had used up every last cent of her savings, and if she didn't get a new temp job when she finished her tour, she'd have to survive on whatever she could harvest from her veggie patch.

There was no way she would ask her parents for help. She couldn't face the 'I told you so' she'd get.

She couldn't stuff this up.

"Tony, you're up." The efficient assistant was back, motioning the comedian toward the door. The two Englishmen rose and followed her out of the room.

Nerves clenched in a death grip in Libby's stomach. She ignored them, taking some more chocolate, then shifted her weight, lifting her knee so she was sitting sideways on the couch.

All the better to observe the rock star.

She needed the distraction.

He was attractive, if you went for the bad boy type, with his designer stubble and dark brooding eyes. Libby imagined some women would get a thrill to have those eyes focused on them, even for a moment.

The man was so still, so absorbed, he almost looked like a wax dummy. Then his fingers twitched, a minute movement, almost indiscernible, the tiniest drum of his fingertips against the back of the couch. A pause. Then the drum again.

Nerves?

From the television in the corner came the sound of applause as the comedian was introduced.

She was next.

Libby swallowed hard.

Making a note in her journal, she heard laughter from the set and stifled her urge to fidget. She was a writer, not a performer. She wasn't used to being the center of attention.

At least the producers had got it right – start the show off with a laugh, end it with a rock star and allow the young adult writer to sag in the middle.

Her stomach danced a tango with her nerves.

No.

She knew how to fix a sagging middle. It was all about being friendly, chatty and enthusiastic about her new book. That was the easy part. She straightened her spine.

“Didn't your mama ever teach you not to stare?” The deep Texan drawl took her by surprise. The rock star had come out of his trance and was now watching her with intense brown eyes. His whole body was rigid, as if waiting to pounce if she said the wrong word. She was the baby antelope coming face to face with the cheetah. Adrenaline zinged through her veins.

“I, ah, no.” She stopped babbling, took a deep breath and smiled. “Sorry, I was visiting my muse. I wasn't really staring at you.” She held out a hand. “I'm Libby Myles.”

He looked at her hand as if she had something contagious.

“Libby, it's your turn.”

Saved by the efficient assistant.

Libby dropped her hand, stuffed her notebook and pen in her bag and tucked it next to the couch, hoping her face would return to its normal color quickly. Then she jumped up and hurried after the woman.

She didn't need rock stars and their egos.

They reached the edge of the set. She was about to be on television.

Dread smashed into Libby like a wrecking ball and her breath came faster. Oh, God. She hadn't checked a mirror.

She could have chocolate all over her teeth. She ran her tongue across them, prodding at the spaces in between, then gently patted her hair to make sure it was in place and smoothed down her knee-length skirt. The television make-up that had been caked on earlier was thick, but the make-up artist had

assured her it would be fine on screen. She breathed deeply, once, twice, willing the dread away.

She forced herself to stand still as someone attached the microphone to her.

“You look fine.” The efficient assistant gave Libby a smile. “This is your intro.”

The chat show host’s voice rang out. “Our next guest is the author of much-loved young adult series, the Jessop Chronicles. The latest book, *On Winter’s Edge*, is out now. Please welcome Libby Myles.”

The assistant led Libby toward the set and gave her a gentle push in the direction of the stairs.

Stairs.

She hadn’t thought about stairs when her publicist convinced her to wear the highly impractical four-inch heels.

Libby’s legs threatened to turn to jelly, but she couldn’t let them. The crowd was clapping and she had to make her entrance. Placing her hand firmly on the bannister, she slowly descended, ensuring one foot was firmly planted before moving the next one, smiling at the first couple of rows of audience members.

At the bottom she gave herself a mental pat on the back and walked toward the host, Brian Lowry. His infectious grin made her smile back. He wore a dark, pin-striped business suit buttoned over a white shirt and his short, brown hair was gelled into position. She clasped his outstretched hand and kissed his cheek before turning and greeting Tony, who had moved down a chair. Finally she sat down, crossing her legs and placing her hands in her lap.

The applause died down and her hands shook.

“Welcome to the show, Libby. Your latest book in the Jessop Chronicles series has just been released and you’ve become an overnight sensation. Why do you think that is?”

Libby smothered a smile. Her success had hardly come overnight and she didn’t think her sales really counted as a sensation, but she’d go with it.

She took a breath. “The series has been out for a while now. Word of mouth has been building slowly.” Her voice quavered and she swallowed down the nerves. “*On Winter’s Edge* is the

fourth book in the Jessop Chronicles, and readers are keen to find out what's going to happen next to Shannon, Melissa and Jill."

"So what is going to happen to them?" Brian asked.

Libby laughed. "You'll have to read the book to find out!"

The audience tittered.

Libby's hands stopped trembling as Brian said, "It's on my bedside table." He grinned at her. "I'm sure many people are wondering where you get your ideas from. Some of the creatures in your world are weird and wonderful."

Libby leaned forward slightly. "Ideas are all around. They're everywhere." The brick in her stomach dissolved. This was what she knew. She could talk about her writing until the cows came home. "It's a matter of recognizing how they can be used."

Ten minutes later Brian wrapped up the interview. "Everyone is going to rush out and buy a copy of *On Winter's Edge* now." He turned to the audience. "Please thank Libby Myles."

Libby smiled out at the audience as they applauded. It was over.

She barely remembered what she'd said but she was pretty sure it had gone well.

"My final guest tonight is the devil of rock himself, Kent Downer."

A section of the small studio audience went mad, screaming and shouting. Libby stood and moved down a chair to make way for Kent, who sauntered down the stairs, acknowledging the screaming girls with a salute and shaking Brian's hand with gusto.

Obviously Brian's hands weren't contagious. Libby smirked.

The girls finally calmed down and Brian was able to speak. "Sounds like your fans are pleased you've finally decided to tour Australia. What can they expect at your concert?"

"The best time of their lives," Kent drawled.

Someone in the audience shrieked, "I love you, Kent."

"Love y'all," Kent called back, blowing a kiss.

Was this guy for real? Libby forced herself not to roll her eyes. His arrogance reminded her of her ex. Her heart twinged and she pushed the thought away.

Kent launched into the details of his show.
Then everything went dark.
Blackout.

Kent's breath hitched as darkness filled every space. He struggled to hold back the fear surging up and his pulse raced.

"There's no light," he whispered to remind himself that he was still there.

The crowd murmured and Brian's voice called out, "Don't panic, folks. Just a little power outage. Our technicians will have it fixed in a jiffy."

Kent gripped the arms of the chair he was sitting in. He had to fight it. He couldn't give in to the hysteria building inside him. He wasn't trapped, he wasn't alone, he wasn't afraid of the dark.

"Let's play eye spy," Tony called and the audience tittered, a nervous response.

Kent's chest was tight, his breaths short and sharp as his windpipe closed over. He couldn't go to pieces. He had to focus on something. He had to remember his tricks for fighting the fear, but his brain wouldn't cooperate.

Something warm and soft covered his hand. He flinched, and then, recognizing it as the writer's hand, he clutched on to it, holding it tight. He wasn't alone, she was next to him, grounding him to the now.

Her other hand covered his and she stroked it, trying to soothe him.

Kent forced back tears. Forward stroke, breathe in, backward stroke, breathe out.

"Why don't we all sing a song?" the writer asked loudly.

"What about 'Waltzing Matilda?'" Brian suggested. "Everyone should know it. On the count of three – one, two, three."

The audience started a very noisy, very off-key rendition of the Australian folk song. Kent didn't know the words, but some of the fear drained out of him as he listened to the raucous voices.

The writer ran her hand up and down his forearm, stroking

it gently. Kent closed his eyes and focused on the sensation, visualizing her face; her emerald green eyes, her small nose, her hesitant smile and the straight, chocolate brown hair that fell past her shoulders. She was attractive, in an unassuming way, and he concentrated on that hum of attraction he'd felt when he'd first noticed her in the green room.

His hand trembled but little by little the fear receded.

He took a deep breath in and opened his eyes as the song was ending. Off set a light appeared, bobbing up and down, and a crew member walked out carrying a torch.

He was safe.

Kent snatched away his hand and shielded his eyes from the light, resisting the urge to jump up and hug the man.

He turned to the writer, hoping to thank her, but she was looking down at her hands in her lap.

She'd saved his sanity.

He couldn't thank her now, couldn't cause a fuss in front of an audience full of smart phones. He took a deep breath in and then out, his body weak with relief.

He would thank her afterward.

Libby ran a thumb over her aching hand. Kent had a strong grip. She checked for signs of bruising and flexed her fingers, trying not to wince. She needed a bag of ice.

She turned toward Kent to see if he was all right. He lounged in the armchair as if he didn't have a care in the world, but one hand clutched the armrest tightly while the other was fisted. He was still recovering. She tried to catch his eye to give him a reassuring smile, but Kent didn't acknowledge her. Not even a glance, a nod or a smile of thanks.

Disappointment flashed through her and she was annoyed with herself. What had she expected, a rush of gratitude? It was typical of a man not to admit to any weakness. In her experience, men had little time for women. It would probably ruin Kent's image if he was seen talking to a writer.

The crew member gave Brian the torch and left. Brian raised his voice. "It's going to be dark for a few more minutes, folks. They've found the problem and are working to fix it. Now we

have some light, why don't we have some questions from the audience?"

"Will you marry me, Kent?" a woman yelled.

The crowd laughed.

"I'd hate to put Kent on the spot," Brian said and shone the torch over the audience. "Any *other* questions?"

Hands sprung up, and they spent the next half an hour answering audience questions. To Libby's surprise, there were a number of questions for her as well. Kent had completely recovered and he flirted with the crowd, showing no trace of his anxiety.

Finally the lights came back on and the audience cheered.

"Where were we?" Brian put a hand to his ear and then turned to Kent. "I'll repeat my last question to you before the lights went out and we'll go from there."

The interview began and Libby cradled her bruised hand in her lap. It was throbbing and she desperately wanted to ice it so it would be fine for her book signing tomorrow. She should have said she'd knocked it in the dark and got the efficient assistant to bring her something.

Brian wound up the interview. "Now, folks, we've got a treat to close the show. Kent is going to sing something from his latest album." He motioned Kent to the stage and Kent rose and strode to where a microphone was set up.

"Ladies and gentlemen, all the way from Houston, Texas, here is Kent Downer with his latest song, 'To Be Hurt.'"

The applause was thunderous and then died down. Libby was expecting a loud, thrashing tune, but instead it was low and melodic. A ballad.

Kent's voice was soft and wistful. Libby listened to the words.

"If only it stung,
If only I hurt,
Then I would know
What it is to love."

Kent barely moved. There were no theatrics, no gestures, he just clutched the microphone as if it was the only real thing in the room and sang.

Libby was mesmerized. His voice flowed over her and

resonated with the part of her that knew what it was to hurt. The part of her that had known love and had it thrown back in her face. Kent didn't know what he was asking for. That kind of hurt shouldn't be longed for, it should be shied away from.

The words and melody entwined around her.

Maybe Kent wouldn't treat a woman as she'd been treated. Maybe he would be gentle and kind. Her heart reached out to him.

What the hell was she thinking? Men like Kent weren't interested in women like her.

Libby ripped her gaze away to see how the audience was reacting. They were equally entranced. No one shifted in their seat, no one murmured to the person next to them – they all sat still and silent as this magician weaved them into his world.

The song ended and for a moment all was quiet before the audience came back to life and applauded, shouting and whistling their approval.

Kent blinked, took a small step backward and smiled, saluting to the frenzied listeners.

“And that's all for tonight, folks,” Brian shouted above the noise. “Please thank all of my guests – Tony Giuseppe, Libby Myles and the amazing Kent Downer. I'll see you again the same time next week. Goodnight.”

None of the audience heard him.

“I've got to hand it to him, the man has presence,” Tony said to Libby and stood up. “I'm off.” He strode off stage as she rose from her seat.

“Thanks for coming on, Libby.” Brian was all smiles, holding out his hand.

She took it and then winced as he shook it. Her hand had already begun to bruise.

“What's wrong?”

“It's my hand. I bumped it on something when the lights went out,” Libby said, removing it from his grasp. “It's a little sore.”

“Let me get someone to check it for you.” He motioned behind her and the efficient assistant strode out. “Can you get some ice for Libby?”

The woman's eyes widened as she saw the hand. “Come with

me.”

Libby glanced to where Kent was surrounded by the crowd before following the woman off the set and back into the maze of beige corridors. They passed the green room and Libby ducked in to grab her bag on the way to a first-aid station.

The first-aid attendant pushed her into a chair and gave her a cold pack. “How’d you manage to do that?” he asked.

Libby shrugged. “Hit it against something when the lights went out.”

“Against what?”

“No idea. I couldn’t see a thing.” She looked down at the cold pack as she spoke. She didn’t know why she was covering for Kent. He’d not acknowledged her help in any way. But somehow it didn’t seem right to mention it to anyone.

“Sit there for a minute with the pack on.” The attendant turned to fill out some paperwork.

To Libby’s surprise the assistant was still hovering. “Do you think you could have broken something?” she asked, her eyes fluttering back and forth.

She wasn’t worried about Libby – she was worried Libby might hold the station accountable.

“No, I’m fine. Really, I’m sure it will be all right by tomorrow. I can be a bit clumsy at times.”

The efficient assistant let out a breath. “Good. Have a nice evening.” She was out of the room before Libby could reply.

Ten minutes later Libby was climbing into the taxi the attendant had called for her. She couldn’t afford to stay for the after-show drinks. She had work to do.

Kent’s song kept playing over and over in her head. There had been such longing in his voice and it tugged at her.

She was being ridiculous. She wasn’t lonely. Besides, it was better to be alone than with someone who didn’t love her. Her ex had taught her that. Not that she’d ever thank him for it.

Kent was good at what he did, making his audience believe he was singing just to them.

Besides, someone probably wrote his songs for him.

The taxi pulled in to her hotel. She quickly paid the driver with the cab voucher her publicist had given her and got out. She didn’t have time to dwell on Kent or his song. The deadline

for her next book was creeping closer and she needed to get some words written before she called it a night.

She covered her yawn with her hand. One day she'd be able to quit her day job and write full time, but in the meantime she had to write whenever she could.

Which meant now.

Adrian shut the hotel door behind him and leaned back against it. This wasn't home but it was his safe space for the moment. The entrance light was on and down the corridor there was more light and the flicker of a television screen. He bathed in the security of the glow.

"Is that you, Uncle Adrian?" Kate's voice called.

Adrian pushed away from the door, letting out a breath. "Sure is, kiddo," he called. "I'll get rid of Kent and be in." He moved into the bathroom.

Christ, what a night.

He reached for the make-up remover, squirted some on cotton wool and began to scrub at the mascara under his eyes. Normally the routine of removing the traces of rock star Kent Downer was soothing, but not tonight.

He hadn't had a panic attack like that in years and his throat closed over again now thinking about it. He hadn't been prepared for total darkness, and if it hadn't been for the writer, he would have gone to pieces in front of everyone. His tough, rock star persona would have been obliterated. He would have lost everything he'd worked so hard for, everything Daniel and George had helped him to achieve, and let everyone down.

But the writer had sensed something was wrong, or perhaps she had been scared herself and had reached out and touched his hand. It had grounded him, proved to him he wasn't alone in the abyss. Afterward, it had taken him so long to extricate himself from his fans that she'd left before he could thank her.

Damn it. Grown men weren't supposed to be afraid of the dark.

Adrian took some more cotton wool, squirted on the liquid and worked on his other eye.

He'd thought he had it beaten. Every night at every concert

he stood in the darkness before the lights came up and the music began. Every night he fought the hysteria. Every night he won the battle against the demon. But one unexpected blackout and he was right back to a quivering mass of Jell-O.

Turning on the taps, he waited until the water ran warm and washed the remnants of his alter ego away. Patting his face dry, he looked in the mirror.

Hi, I'm Adrian Hart and I'm scared of the dark.

He grimaced and threw the handtowel on the sink. There was no time to dwell now. His ten-year-old niece was waiting for him and her nanny was ready to go home.

He walked into the sitting area of his hotel suite. Kate and her nanny, Emily-but-you-can-call-me-Em, sat on the couch watching an animated movie.

Emily hit the pause button. "How did it go?"

Adrian shrugged. "Fine." He wasn't about to confide in her.

Kate turned around and knelt on the couch, resting her arms on the back and pushing her long, curly red hair out of her way. She grinned. "So who'd you meet?"

Some of the tension in Adrian's shoulders melted. He always had to give her details about which celebrity he'd met and what they were like. But after what had happened tonight, he completely blanked on the names. "There was a comedian who'd just starred in a movie." He paused. "The something Games."

Kate rolled her eyes. "*The Final Games*. That's Tony Giuseppe. Honestly, Uncle Ade, sometimes I wonder if you care at all." She smiled. They both knew he didn't care about celebrities. "So who else?"

Libby's face appeared before him with vivid, alpine clarity. "There was an author, Libby someone."

Kate's mouth dropped open. "Not Libby Myles?"

Adrian looked up at the ceiling, trying to remember. "She writes adventure stories. The latest has just come out."

Kate turned and swiped a book from the table, hurrying around the couch to show him the author picture on the back. "This Libby?"

Adrian took the book from her and stared at the picture. It was a good photo – it made her seem approachable and kind.

“Yes.”

Kate slapped him on the arm. “Get out!” She sounded disgruntled.

Adrian took a step back. “What’s wrong?”

“You were on a show with *the* Libby Myles and you didn’t invite me to come backstage with you? I can’t believe you!”

“You’re a fan, I take it?”

Kate had both hands on her hips. “Duh. She writes the Jessop Chronicles, my *absolutely* favorite books.”

Adrian flipped over the book he held and checked the cover. He’d bought Kate the book last week when it was first released, but he hadn’t paid any attention to who the author was.

“Argh. I can’t believe I missed my chance to meet her!” Kate stared at him, her face full of the anguish only a pre-teen could pull off. “Thanks a lot.” She snatched the book from his hand and stormed toward her room.

“Where are you going?”

“To bed.” She didn’t turn around and slammed the bedroom door behind her.

Adrian rubbed at the ache in the back of his neck. He’d let Kate down. He’d been too busy battling his own anxieties to strike up a conversation with the woman. If he had, he might have remembered buying Kate the book. It wasn’t a mistake Kate’s father would have made.

The pang of sorrow was as strong as the stab of guilt. Kate had been so good on this tour, not complaining about the constant travelling and the hectic schedule. He’d had a fabulous opportunity to do something nice for her and he’d blown it.

Maybe he’d made a mistake bringing her on tour with him. What did he know about being a parent? He was making it up as he went along.

Perhaps Kate should have gone to summer camp like Kate’s aunt Susan had suggested.

Emily switched off the television and stood. “Don’t worry about it. She’ll get over it.”

That wasn’t the point. Emily didn’t understand. He strode over to the dining table where his laptop sat and switched it on. He had to fix this. If Libby was promoting her book, she might be doing a book signing somewhere around Melbourne

tomorrow. He sat down, already focused on his task, when he realized Emily was standing next to him. “Why don’t you go to bed?”

He needed a nanny to care for Kate while he was performing or doing publicity, but he didn’t like having a stranger in his space. Emily was nice enough and definitely competent, otherwise he wouldn’t have let her near his niece, but she wasn’t family, or a friend, and he wanted to be alone.

Emily came around behind him and massaged his shoulders. “You look tense.”

He shrugged her off and half-turned in his chair. “I’m fine. I’m sure you’re tired. I’ll see you in the morning.”

“You know, I could help you release some of your worries.”

She wasn’t referring to a massage. Christ, he didn’t need this now.

He should have gone for the older woman he’d interviewed, but she’d seemed too spacey, so he’d chosen the younger, highly organized and far more attractive Emily, who came recommended by one of Susan’s friends.

“That’s not necessary. I’m going to see if Libby Myles has a book signing tomorrow and then go to sleep myself.” He kept his tone polite but distant. He wasn’t interested.

She didn’t take the hint. She leaned forward, her scent wafting toward him thick and cloying. It was like being ambushed by a rose bush and just as thorny.

“Come on, Kent. We both know it’s inevitable. I’ve seen the way you look at me. Why don’t we stop denying this attraction?” She glanced over her shoulder at Kate’s bedroom. “Kate will be asleep by now, and if we go to my room we won’t disturb her.”

Her first mistake was using his stage name. Anyone close to him, anyone who knew him, called him Adrian. Her biggest mistake, though, was the suggestion he leave his niece alone in a strange hotel room. He stood slowly, keeping his eyes on hers. She must have seen the anger in them, as she stepped back.

“I’m not interested, ma’am.” His tone suggested she was anything but a lady. “I suggest you leave now.”

Emily pouted. “Don’t play games with me, Kent. It’s not nice.”

“I’m sure as heck not playing any games.”

She stepped back, her face flushed – with embarrassment or anger, he didn’t know which. “You’ve been leading me on all this time. I don’t have to put up with this treatment.” She turned and stalked to the door. “I quit.”

Just like Kate, Emily slammed the door behind her.

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