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THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

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BY JOSEPHINE DASKAM BACON



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The Twilight of the Gods

SCENE I

A vast indefinite vault of blue, faintly studded with stars. On a lustrous cloud, firm about the edge, as in ancient pictures, sit the Three Persons of the Christian Trinity. God is represented as a severe, yet benignant man, on a throne of sapphire, elderly, with a snowy beard; Christ is a dreamy young Jew with a crown of thorns; the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove.

A vague, sweeping melody, as of harps, is always in the air; from time to time a white, swift shape, winged, shoots across the blue vault. From below, as from a distant pit, comes a confusion of sound, like the buzzing of bees. Sometimes a groan, sometimes a laugh, sometimes a high note, as of a trumpet, penetrates to the throne. Most often the wail of an in-

fant or a clear bell, as it is rung before the sacrament for the dying, mounts above the rest. At intervals the heavy boom of a cannon shakes through everything, followed by the screaming shriek of shells.

The chant of priests is heard: As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be!

A SHARP VOICE

Forward, march!

THE PRIESTS

World without end, amen!

THE SHARP VOICE

Fire!

[A crashing volley of heavy artillery obliterates all other sound for a moment, and a volume of smoke rolls up to the throne. The screams of horses and a thick odor of blood mount sluggishly together.]

CHILDREN'S VOICES

Jesus, tender shepherd, hear me,
Bless thy little lamb to-night,

Through the darkness be thou near me,
Keep me safe till morning light!

CHRIST [*advancing to the edge of the cloud and spreading out his hands with a gesture of infinite sweetness*]

It seems that I cannot hear them so well,
to-night.

[*There is a sudden odor of lilies, and a flock of tiny cherubim flutter like new birds across the blue vault. Behind them appears the Virgin, standing upon a cloud, the crescent moon under her feet. A sword is thrust through her heart, which drops blood over her blue robe. These drops turn to rubies as they fall to the earth. Tears continually roll from her eyes, and fall into the sea as pearls. She approaches the throne.*]

GOD

Who is that?

CHRIST

That is Mary, my Mother.

GOD

I suppose she is bringing the prayers?

CHRIST

Without doubt.

[Mary approaches and falls upon her knees before the throne. Immediately the sounds from below become louder and more distinct: words are plainly heard.]

A ROUGH, DRUNKEN VOICE

God damn your soul to hell!

A WOMAN'S VOICE

Take me—Oh, take me, God, and save the child!

A YOUNG MAN'S VOICE

I swear to God I never promised that to any other woman!

A CHILD'S VOICE

I never stole it—ask God, and he will tell you I never took the sugar! Please don't beat me, mother!

A YOUNG GIRL'S VOICE

O God, I beg and pray thee to let me die!
May I not die, God?

A BOY'S VOICE

Dear God, when I wake up, please let me find the knife with two blades by the bed! If I find it in the morning, I know I shall always be good!

A GENERAL'S VOICE

God bless you, my brave men, and bring to our impious foes the annihilation they so richly deserve. Animated by the pure and holy courage of those who righteously defend the Fatherland, I pray Almighty God that if we must die, it may be only over the dead bodies of our enemies. God be with us!

A PRIEST'S VOICE

From battle, murder and sudden death—

A CONGREGATION'S VOICE

Good Lord, deliver us!

GOD

Does the Queen of Heaven ask that all these prayers be answered?

MARY

Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word. If those that seemed best might be answered . . .

GOD

No one seems to me better or worse than another. The boy must have his knife, certainly . . .

[A terrific explosion is heard, shaking the earth. Mary shudders and the sword in her heart quivers.]

CHRIST

What was that, O my father?

GOD

Do you mean that sparrow which has just fallen to the ground, or that city which has been blown up and has dropped into the sea?

A MILITARY BAND

God save the King!

A MOTHER'S VOICE

I am the proudest woman in France to-day—
I have given five sons to my country!

A LAD'S VOICE

Slit the women's throats, comrades, burn the ricks, tie up the gold and come on!

CHILDREN'S VOICES

Jesus, tender shepherd, hear me,
Bless thy little lamb to-night!

CHRIST [*leaning over the cloud*]

I can hardly hear them, now . . .

[*There comes a sound as of metal striking on metal, and St. Peter appears before the throne, robed and with heavy keys. He crosses himself haughtily.*]

PETER

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost! [*Kneeling stiffly to the Virgin*] Hail Mary, full of Grace, the Lord is with thee!—Am I to let them all in at once?

GOD

All! Are there more than usual, then?

PETER

More than usual? There have not been so many at one time since that ship went down,

a little while back. There is no one who feels for them at sea as I do: poor souls, the waves are ill to walk on! I have never been easier with any . . . but this is very different. And mind you, they say they have all been blessed beforehand and should be excused any further waiting. One would think this was Valhalla, or whatever the heathen place was called. I locked the gate for a bit, to go inside, and when I get in, what do I find? A worse to-do than without, I give you my word! There's no holding them. Michael with his sword, forsooth! And of course it's no concern of mine, but you may remember what I said awhile back about making holy saints over night out of ignorant peasant girls! Well . . . I can tell you now that if she could get out she'd be down there in a minute! She says she hears her voices again and that France needs her!

CHRIST

Simon, Simon!

PETER

Of course, I am only Peter—I am only the

Rock on which God's church is built—who
forsook the nets more quickly than I?

CHRIST

Even as she forsook the sheep.

PETER [*sullenly*]

I deny that a woman can be called of God!

MARY

But I was called of God.

PETER

I deny that a woman is expected to bear a
sword!

MARY

But I have borne a sword—[*She touches her
heart*] here—ever since I bore my son.

PETER [*loudly*]

I deny . . .

[*A cock crows, and he goes out, weeping bit-
terly.*]

A REGIMENT'S VOICE

Bless our colors, Holy Father!

A DYING POPE'S VOICE

I bless peace.

A CATHEDRAL CHOIR'S VOICE [*faintly*]

Eternal rest give him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine on him. May he rest in peace, Amen.

[*Mary weeps.*]

CHRIST [*sternly*]

Woman, why weepest thou?

MARY [*meekly*]

Sir?

CHRIST [*taking her hand as a Son*]

O mystical rose, tower of ivory, mother undefiled, who hath given a new grief to the Queen of Heaven?

MARY [*sadly*]

I weep because the shepherd of the world dies, and he, whose foot the kings of the earth have kissed, may not have his dying prayer granted!

GOD [*wearily*]

But I could not hear his dying prayer! I would have been willing to grant it, undoubtedly, but just at that moment the cannon began. They should pray more loudly, or shoot more softly, down there.

MARY [*sobbing*]

If you could only see the faces of the poor when they think of him—ah, he never forgot my poor, my blessed poor!

GOD

If they fill the air with smoke, they cannot expect me to see. With the incense it was hard enough, sometimes, but I always supposed they had their reasons for that.

CHRIST [*in a low voice*]

That was to cover the smell of the blood—in the old days.

A NUN'S VOICE

O saving victim,
Slain for man—

A CAPTAIN'S VOICE

Pah! There's no standing up in it, it's all so slippery! Wipe out this trench, sergeant, and reach me that bayonet—wrench it out of his hand, then—he's dead enough for that! Has he a drink on him?—For his mother, he says? God! if I'm to remember all the messages to mothers I've had told me to-day, I'd have no room in my head for orders!

A YOUNG WOMAN'S VOICE [*through violins*]

It seems hardly right to be dancing here, when they're dying so fast across the ocean . . .

A TRAINED NURSE'S VOICE

Ether! Where's more ether? This is horrible!—I can't keep him under, doctor. . . . What is the matter with the Red Cross? What are they for?

THE VOICE OF A COMMON SOLDIER

Hey, comrade, can you give me a drop of that water?

THE VOICE OF ANOTHER COMMON SOLDIER

I am sorry, comrade, but my back is broken; it seems I can't move my arms. Help yourself.

THE VOICE OF THE FIRST

I'm bleeding too fast; I was shot through the stomach. Well, it's all as God wills. Wasn't I fighting against you, the last time, hey?

THE VOICE OF THE SECOND

I believe so. It was only a few years ago . . . and now we're comrades-at-arms, aren't we? It seems queer . . .

THE VOICE OF THE FIRST

What's the odds, now? It's all over with us. What was the trouble, anyhow?

THE VOICE OF THE SECOND

We never knew, in my country. One moment I was holding my wife, just as her first pains came, and then they hurried us into the ships. I don't mind dying for my Emperor, but it was a hard time to leave her.

The other children are so small and the winter's coming on . . . we're poor folk. They had nobody but me.

THE VOICE OF THE FIRST

That's bad. My old woman's past all that trouble, Christ be praised, but it makes me sick to think of the wheat—we left it full stand, and the chargers tore through the best of it. God pity the poor this winter—that's all I say!

THE VOICE OF THE SECOND

If the Gods ever pitied the poor, there would be no poor.

THE VOICE OF THE FIRST

The Gods? So you're a heathen, are you? Oh yes, I remember when we fought you, ten years back, they told us you worshipped your ancestors, or some such wickedness. I wonder at you—and as near death as you are, too!

THE VOICE OF THE SECOND

You are as near. . . .

THE VOICE OF THE FIRST

True, but I'm a Christian, you see. It's that makes all the difference. I took the Communion before we started.

THE VOICE OF THE SECOND [*feebly*]

Do you think, if I had been converted by that man in the black trousers, that urged me so, things would be easier now for the children . . . with the winter coming on . . . ?

THE VOICE OF THE FIRST

Surely. Without doubt. All heathen should be converted; it is their first duty.

THE VOICE OF THE SECOND

Then I wish I had done it.

THE VOICE OF THE FIRST

That's the way to feel! If only I could move my arms, I'd baptize you, myself, comrade, but I can't feel my fingers, now.

THE VOICE OF A BOY-CHOIR

To be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to guide their feet into the way of peace!

THE VOICE OF THE FIRST

What's that? Jesus Christ, it's the angels, singing! Then I'm really dying . . . it doesn't seem possible, with the wheat left that way!

THE VOICE OF THE SECOND

Oh, this pain! Oh! I'm torn to pieces inside! Water! water! They'll starve without me—patience, patience, it will soon be born, wife!—O-o-o-h!

THE VOICE OF THE FIRST .

He's gone, poor fellow. Well, there's no doubt as to *my* boys—the three of them went when the first shell burst this morning. God bless the Czar! God save Holy Russia!
[*He dies*]

CHILDREN'S VOICES [*faintly*]

Jesus, tender shepherd, hear——

CHRIST [*striding to the extreme edge of the cloud*]

Father! my father! I can barely hear them!
What does it mean?

MARY [*quietly*]

They have no food, and their voices are weak. Then, too, the noise is growing deafening.

[A bomb explodes, violently, high in the air. The airship that carried it is shattered and scatters to the winds. Broken fragments of human bodies fall into the sea. A vessel filled with corn and a huge man-of-war loaded with troops break amidships, and sink slowly under the waves.]

A CLERGYMAN'S VOICE

But I say unto you, love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.

COLLEGE STUDENTS' VOICES

Onward Christian soldiers,
Marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus—

CHRIST [*turning away weeping*]

My God, My God, why hast *thou* forsaken me?

[The smoke from the bomb grows so thick

as to obscure the vault gradually; the faces of the Trinity can be seen but dimly. They appear to flicker and grow pale. All is darkness.]

SCENE II

As the extreme darkness dissipates, a grey twilight takes its place, and when this has settled itself, it is seen that there are no longer any stars nor any light from the sapphire throne, which is so indistinct in its outline as to resemble a pillar of cloud. In the midst of this Jehovah is dimly seen. He is alone. There is a great silence. Then slowly, out of the shadowy depths, vague forms begin to be visible, shifting and changing like clouds in the windy sky. One of these emerges from the rest and moves toward Jehovah, more distinct than the others. It seems to be a man of great dignity with a long mantle and a patch over one eye. Another with a wound turban and a curved scimitar follows him. A majestic Woman of unearthly height, bearing a shield and draped in a classic tunic, stands like a statue. Far back behind the pillar a great Bull moves, rustling faintly, and

behind this again, the wavering outline of a human body with the face of a Ram. A winged Serpent, so dim as to be hardly seen, with a Fish's head, coils and uncoils like a mist wreath. The sound of the flowing of the River Nile is now heard, and beneath it one can distinguish, at intervals, the roar of the ocean, through miles of space.

JEHOVAH

I am that I am. Who are here besides Myself?

WOTAN

There are many of Us here—brother! Or rather, thou art here with the rest of Us.

JEHOVAH [*severely*]

I am the Lord thy God: thou shalt have no other gods before me.

WOTAN

Naturally. We have all felt that in our time. But since you are here . . .

JEHOVAH

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image—

PALLAS ATHENE [*in a voice like a distant bell*]

To this image, O Jove of the Hebrews, thousands of thousands have kneeled—and I am here.

JEHOVAH

—Or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above—

A VOICE [*from a barely distinguishable cloud, like a draped figure of darkness, with the crescent moon upon Its head*]

And yet to me, the violet, brooding Night of Egypt, more tears have been wept than the Nile holds drops!

WOTAN

Who art Thou, Darkness?

THE VOICE

I am Maut, the mother. Truly I was old before thou wast born, Jahveh—and I am here.

JEHOVAH

—Or that is in the earth beneath—

THE BULL [*in a mellow rumble*]

O brother, look upon Indra the mighty!
They who sacrificed to me in thousands were
dust ere yet thou madest thy first man from
dust—and I am here.

JEHOVAH

—Or that is in the water under the earth—

THE COILING SERPENT [*rustling and hissing
from his Fish's head*]

Surely, youngest of Us, maidens were led
down to Dagon in sacrifice, and were for-
gotten of Dagon, ere Eve was made a
mother! And I am here.

[*The air becomes thick with crowding, shad-
owy shapes: hideous, battered idols, rude and
savage symbols, phallic figures, hundred-
breasted, bird-headed monsters, outlines of
pagodas, Doric pillars, great stone crom-
lechs and Druid altars. Clouds of old and
withered incense rise faintly through the dim-*

ness, and the wails and coughs of slaughtered beasts are heard at irregular intervals through all that follows, mingled with the mutter of priests in all tongues, the chant of choirs, the tears and groans of women.]

JEHOVAH [*firmly*]

—For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God—

MOHAMMED [*boldly*]

—Without doubt You were all jealous, always. Even I was jealous for Allah, who will live longer than most of You, because there are no images of Him to defile and no pictures of Him to misunderstand. If they cannot see You, they will respect You longer.

A VOICE FROM THE GODS

But if they cannot see Us they will not love Us!

JEHOVAH

No man hath seen God at any time—

MOHAMMED [*scornfully*]

What! When Moses and Aaron, Nadab,

and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up into the mount!

JEHOVAH [*confusedly*]

Behold, it is a stiff-necked people . . .

MOHAMMED [*impatiently*]

You are always thinking of Your Israelites— You are Three now (may Allah forgive such foolishness!) not One. Do you not recall that You changed, a while ago? Since the Nazarene, things have been very different— I cracked many a skull in my day, to prove him wrong, that Nazarene! I could never understand how they could stomach all that meekness . . . The fellow would not even fight for his life.

WOTAN [*growling*]

It was no belief for a man. No wonder they left it to the women, at the last. It is only war that keeps the world sweet—they decay like ants when they cease to fight. Aye, they breed and bloat and stink like maggots, and eat each other. Faugh!

THE SINGING VOICE OF A MISSIONARY

The support of the audience is earnestly requested for our final tremendous effort: The World for Christ! Never before has the growth of Christianity been so enormous, so vital. Never before, since that Birth at Bethlehem, have such masses of human souls, spread over such stupendous areas of the earth's surface, confessed their Lord and Master Christ as Almighty God.

[There is a silence. The Gods look at one another, surprised. A spear clangs on a shield, and the majestic statue-woman moves.]

PALLAS ATHENE [*coldly*]

If these things are so, why are You here, Jahveh?

ALL THE GODS

Yes! Why is He here?

A VAST FIGURE [*draped in a lion skin, with an enormous club*]

Perhaps Jahveh means Us to understand

that He is only a tribal God, like Myself, and that the One they now call God—

JEHOVAH [*angrily*]

Not at all. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end—

A CONGREGATION'S VOICE

Neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost . . .

HERCULES

What! Then it is as I said—You are *not* that Son?

A CONGREGATION'S VOICE

And yet they are not three eternal, but one eternal . . .

HERCULES

Then You *are* the God of Battles?

THE VOICE OF ST. JOHN

God is love.

THE VOICE OF A WOMAN [*she is long-haired, upon a flying-horse, shooting like a star across the gloom*]

All-Father! Wotan! Wake, arise! They are crowding in so fast we cannot carry them! The old days are here again! The world makes war! See—they are trooping up from below and from below that, again! There are the old ones, with spears, and armor on the horses—look, the Kings! See the Red Cross they wear—

VOICES OF CRUSADERS

On to Jerusalem! Save the Holy Sepulchre!

JEHOVAH [*frowning*]

Jerusalem? Jerusalem? Forty years long have I suffered this generation—

MOHAMMED [*angrily*]

Always your Israelites! It is *Thy* sepulchre, *Thine!* Oh, the dogs! At them, at them, all true believers! There is but one God and Mohammed is His prophet! At them!

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

O Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets!
How often would I have gathered thy children together—

THE VALKYR

There is a woman, too, with a red cross—she tends them when they are wounded . . . is she also fighting, All-Father?

WOTAN [*puzzled*]

I cannot understand them nowadays. The same sign serves for killing and curing.

THE VALKYR [*peering through the dusk*]

There is the little man that fought thereabouts, before—he that died on the island. He cheers them on . . . there is the tall one that wore the wreath and was stabbed—he is hurrying his legions. There is the Maid that rode the white horse—she is weeping because the angels will not bring her armor. She says God wished her to wear the armor, before . . . why does He dislike it now, All-Father?

WOTAN [*with vexation*]

No one knows. He is very confusing. I believe myself that He cannot make up His mind . . .

MOHAMMED [*smoothly*]

He and His Son, perhaps, are not quite agreed.

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

Believest thou not that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I speak, I speak not of myself . . .

THE VALKYR

Ah! Fourscore slain at once! Truly, All-Father, we were but children, in those days! See, one little round ball of iron will travel five leagues and then go through four men! And the larger balls have fire in them—they burst and shatter a company of fighters! Their galleys fly through the air, even as we, and drop death upon whole towns!

AN ARCHBISHOP'S VOICE

George, defender of the Faith—

A NEWSBOY'S VOICE

The Emperor's son is dead!

A PRIEST'S VOICE

Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord!

THE VALKYR

Thousands—a score of thousands, All-Father, in one battle! Will there be any left upon the earth?

ALL THE GODS [*anxiously crowding together*].

Will there be any left?

WOTAN

I—I cannot tell.

MOHAMMED

We must ask Brahm.

JEHOVAH [*looking out from the pillar of cloud*]

Where is He?

MOHAMMED

He is nowhere and everywhere . . . He is the oldest—and the greatest. None has seen

Him, which makes Him greater than You, Jahveh; nor has He need of a prophet, which makes Him, I must suppose, greater than Allah. O Brahm, are men to vanish from this Thy earth?

THE VOICE OF BRAHM

There must always be men, in order that We may be.

WOTAN

But they change, Brahm, they change. We are afraid . . .

THE VOICE OF BRAHM [*wearily*]

They never change. It is We who change—they are ever the same.

WOTAN

But they die—

THE VOICE OF BRAHM

In order that We may be sure of living.

JEHOVAH

And We live—

THE VOICE OF BRAHM

In order that they may be sure of dying.

MOHAMMED [*muttering*]

Then we are living to some purpose, for they are dying very rapidly, it appears. And Brahm is right, when He says that they never change. But We understood that You, Jahveh, had agreed to change them—and You are here, like the rest of Us. Who, then, are We to understand, now rules the world?

[*A writing appears on the grey mist:*]

AND I, IF I BE LIFTED UP, WILL DRAW ALL MEN UNTO ME!

MOHAMMED

The Nazarene? Certainly, he was lifted up . . . But We know what he said—We all know what he said . . .

THE VOICE OF CHRIST [*from a mountain*]

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.

WOTAN [*solemnly*]

Enough of this folly, Jahveh; are they Yours,
below there, or your Son's?

JEHOVAH [*almost inaudibly*]

They are my Son's.

[*He enters the pillar of cloud and fades back
among the other Gods, who begin to grow
dim and shapeless.*]

MOHAMMED [*who is a little less shadowy than
the others*]

Then let the Nazarene appear! Let him join
Us, or explain to Us why he does not join
Us.

ALL THE GODS [*querulously*]

Let him appear!

MOHAMMED

Call him, Brahm. Call the Nazarene!

THE VOICE OF BRAHM

Carpenter, and Son of a Carpenter, appear!
[*There enters a Man crowned with thorns,
bent heavily beneath a great cross.*]

THE VOICE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST
Behold the Lamb of God!

THE VOICE OF PONTIUS PILATE
Thine own nation and the chief priests have
delivered thee unto me; what hast thou
done?

THE MAN
My kingdom is not of this world; if my king-
dom were of this world, then would my ser-
vants fight . . . but now is my kingdom not
from hence.

ALL THE GODS
Then, where is thy kingdom?

THE MAN [*with infinite sorrow*]
Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have
nests, but the Son of Man hath not where
to lay his head!

THE VOICE OF A CROWD
What need we any further witness? For we
ourselves have heard of his own mouth!

MOHAMMED [*impatiently*]

Then, you give them up, down there? You acknowledge that you are not their God?

THE VOICE OF THE CROWD

Crucify him! Crucify him!

THE VOICE OF BRAHM [*dreamily*]

This same . . . always the same . . . they never change . . .

WOTAN [*eagerly*]

Indeed that is so, Carpenter. They never change! Give them to Us! Give them back! Myself, I should be ashamed to be the God of a people that would not fight!

MOHAMMED

When I ceased to lead them in battle, Allah ceased to conquer the world. Give them to Me!

PALLAS ATHENE

I was never pictured without my helmet—when my children forgot the art of war, all their arts ceased with it. Give them to Me, O peasant whose body is not even beautiful!

SHIVA [*sadly*]

Mine were never strong enough for battle, and so, praying aloud to thee, with bloody swords, those soldiers of thine conquered and ruled My millions.

THE MAN [*gently*]

Greater is he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.

WOTAN [*with greater impatience than before*]

But they do not think so! They pretended to believe it, for a time, but when it comes to the point, look at them! Those were only words—in their hearts they have never changed, Carpenter! They move about more quickly, they are very clever, and they have more to eat, and they know how to talk to one another from great distances; but at heart they are the same as when they burned themselves on My funeral pyres!

MOLOCH

Or Mine!

THE VOICE OF BRAHM

The same . . . always the same . . .

ALL THE GODS

Give them to Us! Give them back!

[The man of sorrows sinks down under the Cross. The roar of the ocean becomes again the thunder of heavy cannon; the incense becomes acrid smoke; the cries of the sacrificial victims change to the groans and screams of the dying. Sharp flashes of lurid light leap across the clouds from the flying, falling bombs. In these flashes the faces of the Gods become brighter, their expression more violent and vivid. The rattle of drums and the shriek of fifes, the neighing of horses, the clash of swords, increase furiously.]

THE VOICES OF AN ARMY *[singing]*

A mighty fortress is our God!

WOTAN *[brandishing his spear]*

Come! Come! To me, my brave heroes!

THE VALKYR *[leaping on her horse, and shouting]*

Ho-yo-to-ho!

MOHAMMED [*wildly*]

Death! Death and Paradise!

THE VOICES OF THE CHILDREN [*dying faintly*]

Jesus, tender . . .

[*All is lost in the rolling smoke.*]

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