

A DAUGHTER OF THE SIERRA

BY CHRISTIAN REID

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CHAPTER XII.—CONTINUED

"I have seen engineers before who sketched well from nature," she said at length; "but yours isn't work of that kind. It is the work of an artist—a real artist. They were right who said so."

"Oh, no!" Lloyd responded quietly. "It's only the work of one who possesses a little more facility than is common. I am inclined to think it is a fatal gift, that facility," he went on after a moment.

"You do many things well, but you do not do any one thing superlatively well. It is the narrow, concentrated man who succeeds in life. I am not sure of that. The power to do many things well must tell in the one thing upon which a man concentrates himself."

"Such men rarely do concentrate themselves. They diffuse their power over too many things, and there's temptation in all of them. Now, I—there's no need to point the moral by being inquisitorial. That I am prospecting in the Sierra, points it sufficiently, as far as I am concerned."

A short silence, during which the sketch grew in a most satisfactory manner; and then Isabel said:

"I can understand the temptation of being able to do too many things, and the pleasure of doing them all. But I am confident that if such a man once finds a sufficient incentive to concentrate his powers, he will accomplish more than the man to whom nature has given the capability of doing only one thing."

"Experience is against you," Lloyd replied. "And—where is the incentive to be found?"

"Isabel lifted her glance from the slender, nervous, sunburnt hands she had been watching in their work, to the clear-cut face with its impress of thought and feeling and its shadow of hopelessness."

"There are many incentives," she answered; "and different incentives appeal to different natures. But there is one which, like a master-key that opens all locks, should appeal to all."

"And that is—?"

"Duty."

"I'm afraid you see very old-fashioned, Miss Rivers. Duty, like a good many other things we need to be told to admire, has been laid on the shelf,—hasn't it? And doesn't it strike you that we've been led rather far afield by my slight facility in sketching?"

"Perhaps so," said Miss Rivers, and then was silent again for a moment. An instinct told her that this man, with the face of a thinker and the hands of an artist, had drifted somewhere from his moorings; that he had lost faith in many things beside duty; and also that, unlike most people, he was not at all anxious to talk of himself. She had too much tact to pursue the subject on which they had accidentally fallen; and, moreover, it now occurred to her that she had brought him here for quite another purpose, and that it was impossible to count upon being left very long without interruption.

"Do you remember," she said suddenly, under the spur of the last thought, "that when we talked of the claim which Mr. Armistead is pressing for the possession of the Santa Cruz Mine, I told you that I would find out if possible what steps he was going to take against the present owners? I believe you were doubtful of my success—?"

"Was I?" Lloyd asked, smiling. "If so, I apologise for lack of faith. I am now thoroughly convinced that you would succeed in whatever you undertook."

"That's very good of you. But, as a matter of fact, I have succeeded and failed. I have found out all that he intends to do, but I can't use the knowledge because it was imparted 'confidentially.' Isn't that a hard situation?"

"It's inconvenient certainly, if you want to help Dona Victoria."

"I do want to help her,—indeed, I am determined that I will help her; yet I don't see how I can without violating confidence. Can't you assist me, Mr. Lloyd? That is what I have brought you here to ask."

"I shall be delighted to assist you in any way," Lloyd replied, "if you will tell me what you want me to do."

"I want you to do something so difficult that I am afraid you will never be able to accomplish it," she answered half laughing. "I want you to find out what I can't tell you."

"Find out from whom?"

"Why, from me, since I am the only person at present, except Mr. Armistead, who knows. Suppose you were a diplomatist or a detective and I was a person holding important information which you were very anxious to obtain, how would you set about making me betray it?"

Lloyd shook his head.

"I can't possibly imagine myself either a diplomatist or a detective," he said; "and I am perfectly sure that even if I were both I could not make you betray any secret you wanted to keep."

"But if I didn't want to keep it—only, of course, that won't do. I must keep it just as resolutely as if I were not anxious to betray it; mustn't I?"

"I—suppose so."

"The fact that I should be serving a good cause by betraying it would

be no excuse," she proceeded dejectedly. "I never could have imagined that I should feel sympathy for an 'informer,' but I do. I am simply dying to tell you all I know; and yet how can I when Mr. Armistead asked me to consider it confidential, and when I said I would?"

"Then of course you can't tell it," Lloyd agreed.

"No, of course I can't," she repeated. She clasped her hands around her knees and gazed meditatively into the depths of the quebrada. "You are not much help, Mr. Lloyd," she added after a moment.

"Not the least, I'm afraid," Lloyd agreed again.

"Now, if you were Mr. Armistead, Miss Rivers went on, "you would set your wits to work to find out all that I can't tell you; you would cross question and try to entrap me, and end by guessing the whole thing."

"I think it is very likely Armistead would do all that," Lloyd answered. "But you see I am no more Armistead than I am a diplomatist or a detective."

"Is there no way, then, that my knowledge can be made of use?" she asked despairingly.

"Let me see," said Lloyd, meditatively. He shaded his sketch absently while he reflected, and Miss Rivers watched him with an expression of mingled doubt and hope on her face.

"Suppose we look at it in this way," he went on at length, glancing up at her. "As a friend of Dona Victoria, you wish to warn her against a danger which threatens her; and you have—at least in my opinion—a right to do as much as this, although you can not tell her the exact form of the danger. Now, is it a danger against which she is prepared?"

Miss Rivers shook her head emphatically.

"At least we have no reason to suppose so," she added.

"Then it does not take a legal form; for she is undoubtedly prepared for anything in that line."

Isabel felt that the gray eyes reading her face grew suddenly very keen.

"It must take the form of force. Ah, I see!—the mine is to be surprised, of course. You needn't make such a desperate effort not to assent, Miss Rivers. I know I am right, even if your eyes didn't tell me so. It is just what Trafford and Armistead would do."

"But I haven't told you really!" she cried, smitten with remorse now that her purpose was accomplished.

"You have done nothing except put my slow wits to work," he assured her.

"They were not very slow when they once got to work," she answered. "And now, supposing your guess to be right, what will you do?"

"That requires some consideration. There is a young fellow from Las Joyas who might be of service if one could give him a hint. But he is, unfortunately, quite impossible; he is suspicious, distrustful; also, as a triding matter of detail, insulting,—in brief, a young fool."

"Couldn't I do anything with him?"

"Certainly. You could turn his head so completely that he would not know whether he was walking on it or on his feet. But that wouldn't help matters much, since you couldn't yourself give him any warning, you know."

"Still," she was beginning, with a laugh, when he started her by dropping his drawing and springing to his feet.

Far up the mountain-side above them there was a dull, crashing sound. As Lloyd seized the girl, raised and drew her swiftly to one side, the sound became a roar: a great boulder dislodged from its place several hundred feet higher, came crashing down the steep declivity, bringing shrubs, stones, earth with it; falling upon the spot where they had been seated an instant before, effacing everything there, and then continuing on its way of destruction into the depths of the quebrada far below.

They looked at each other—the two whom Death had passed so closely that they had felt his wind stirring their garments. Both were pale, but entirely composed. Isabel spoke first:

"Thank you for being so quick! In another moment—"

"The rock would have been on us," Lloyd said, a little hoarsely. "That must be my excuse for dragging you away so roughly."

"As if an excuse were needed for saving my life!" She glanced up at the mountain above them. "What on earth do you suppose sent that boulder down just then?"

"Impossible to say. The disintegrating forces of nature are at work all the time, you know. The quebrada is strewn from end to end with such boulders."

"I remember." Her gaze fell into the shadow-filled depths of the great chasm below, and she shuddered a little. "But I didn't imagine the mountains were still sending them down like this. It is most—inconceivable." Her glance suddenly returned to him. "Your sketch, Mr. Lloyd,—what has become of it?"

"I have gone, together with several hundred tons of rock, to assist in filling up the channel of the Tamezuela River."

"Oh, how dreadful!"

"I fancy your friends who are coming your way would think it still more dreadful if I had saved the sketch and let you go."

In fact the crashing descent of the rock had brought the entire picnic party streaming out from the patio of the mine to the narrow shell like road. Although reassured by the

sight of the two figures, they came to examine the trail of the boulder's descent, and exclaim over the narrow escape of those who had been so directly in its path.

"Mr. Lloyd pulled me aside just in time, papa," Isabel said. "I did not hear the noise, and but for him I should have been crushed; for you see there is no vestige left of the stone on which I was sitting."

Mr. Rivers looked at the spot and then at Lloyd.

"Good thing you had your wits about you," he said to the latter, "else we might search for the remains of both of you down in the quebrada."

"We were just about to summon you to the *tamale*, senorita, when the fearful noise startled us," said a pretty girl, passing her arm through Isabel's. "Oh, what a fearful shock for you! I would you not like a little *aguardiente*?"

"Oh, no, thanks! I don't feel the least need of *aguardiente*," Isabel answered, smiling.

"But you must take something to sustain you. A cup of chocolate, then?"

Isabel agreed that a cup of chocolate might possibly do her good, so she was led to where the collection was arranged under the shed of the patio. Here a cup of sweet, foaming chocolate and a plate of *tamale*s were brought to her. Here also Thornton fetched his refreshments and set down by her side.

"My nerves haven't yet recovered from the shock they had," he said. "We heard the crash, and some one screamed, 'Oh, the Senorita!' For one horrible instant I thought the rock had taken you. My heart has not recovered its normal action yet."

Isabel was ungrateful enough to laugh.

"As long as the appetite is normal, the heart doesn't greatly matter," she said. "I am very glad not to have been taken by the rock, but I am inconceivable about Mr. Lloyd's sketch. It was so good—and he lost it in saving me."

It was a pity certainly; but since he couldn't save both the sketch and yourself, you'll allow us to think that he made a wise choice."

"My dear Miss Rivers!—it was Armistead's voice on the other side—'what a fearfully narrow escape you had! I've just been examining the track of that boulder. It couldn't have come more straight down the mountain to where you were sitting if it had been aimed at you.'"

"Matter does seem to be curiously endowed with malignity sometimes," Isabel answered. "But fortunately Mr. Lloyd was very quick."

"Lloyd ought to have known better than to keep you on that narrow shelf, overhanging by rocks and overlooking a precipice, while he made sketches."

"But you see it was I who kept Mr. Lloyd there." Miss Rivers' voice had a very perceptible accent of coyness. "He was making the sketch by my request; for how was I to know that unwary strangers were likely to be bombarded with rocks by your inebriable mountains?" she added, looking at a young Mexican.

"Not strangers alone, senorita," the latter hastened to answer. "My horse the other day had an escape from a falling rock as narrow as yours. I left him tied near the mouth of a mine, and he only saved himself by jumping the full length of his *vata*."

"Evidently boulders are no respecters of persons," Thornton commented.

"But the horse didn't lose a beautiful sketch," Isabel added sadly.

"Are you still lamenting that sketch?" Lloyd laughingly asked at her shoulder. "I will make another for you to-morrow, and the morning light on the quebrada will be better than the light we had on it this afternoon."

"Oh, but I would rather have it just as we had it this afternoon," she said quickly, turning toward him. "I want those gathering shadows in the depths that seem to accent all the grandeur and to give a touch of mysteriousness and awe to the scene. And I also want it as a souvenir of the occasion. Whenever I look at it I want to remember that instant when we stood—"

"So close together and so close to death," he could have added, as she paused; but he only said: "I understand. You shall have it just as it was today."

"Thank you!" she replied gratefully. And then, before she could add anything else, some one struck the strings of a guitar and began to sing. And what was it but "La Golondrina"—the same air but different words from those which Victoria had sung at Gasimillas:

"Aben-Hamed al partir de Granada Su corazon traspasado sintio. Alla en la vega, al perderla de vista Con dol por su tormento expreso, Mansion de amor, celestial Paraiso, Naci en tu seno y mil dichas goce. Voy a partir a lejanas regiones. Do nunca mas, nunca mas volvere!"

"Si vera en Abril, en la costa africana, La golondrina que de aqui se va A donde ira tan alegre y ufana, Tal vez su nido a mi casa a labrar. Oh! cuando envio al mirar que te alejas. Ave feliz de dicha y do placer Mia ecos lleva a mi patria felice Que nunca mas, nunca mas volvere!"

Dusky shades were by this time gathering around them, so that they could not see one another's faces very well as the voice rang out its pathetic refrain. Isabel had always thought it pathetic, but something

in the time and place seemed to cause a sudden tension of her heart-strings—

Never more, never more return!

How the words echoed!—and how much the falling strain was like the sob of a hopeless sorrow! There are so many *Granadas* in life to which we shall never return; places where the sun shines, the flowers bloom, the fountains play, but where our steps will never enter again. She felt this as she was sure Lloyd was feeling it; for she heard him suddenly sigh in the silence which followed when the music ceased. Then he rose to his feet with a quick movement. What he was thinking was that surely he was mad to linger here—he of all men! For what exile is so hopeless as that which a man has wrought and ordered for himself? And having wrought, having ordered it, what folly to turn a vain gaze of longing toward the fair city of lost opportunity, where he had left forever youth and joy, love, hope and ambition!

Silently as a shadow he turned and went away. But as he passed alone down the mountain path where twilight had fallen, while over the giant crests of the encompassing heights stars were gleaming here and there in the sky, the sound of voices and laughter followed him. The merry-makers had left the mine and were also winding their way homeward. Through the still, clear air their gay words and jests reached him distinctly. And then some one began to sing, and now the whole party seemed to join; for again it was the familiar strains of "La Golondrina." The hills gave back the sounds. Nature herself seemed saying:

"Nunca mas, nunca mas volvere!"

TO BE CONTINUED

A MOTHER'S PRAYER

"Please, Father Roch, mother would like you to call sometime this morning to see Jimmy. He's pretty bad, and she's afraid he's going to die."

"All right, my boy; tell her I'll call on my way back from the hospital."

"But, Father, mother says please not let on you were called, 'cause Jimmy'll—"

"Understand, Johnny; just leave it to me," said the priest kindly, and as the boy left the room, Father Roch turned to his desk with a deep sigh. "My God, my God!" he murmured, "that Jimmy should ever have come to this!"

Twelve years before, there was hardly a more promising boy in St. Bernardine's school than Jimmy Maguire. Full of life and fun he was a favorite with his playmates, while his diligence and good deportment endeared him no less to his pastor and to his teachers.

"To be sure, Father Roch, 'tisn't much I've got of this world's goods," the Widow Maguire used to say, "but thin me darlin' gossoms, Jimmy and Johnny are me jewels and worth more to me than all the money in the bank of England."

And may the good Lord preserve them to you mother, for many a year to be your joy and support," the priest was wont to reply.

How their hopes had been blasted! After graduating from the parochial school and taking a business course, Jimmy, the elder of the two boys, secured a position as stenographer in a prominent lawyer's office, under whose direction he also began to read law. Gifted by nature with no mean oratorical ability and endowed with a handsome figure and ready wit, he soon attracted attention by his political speeches delivered in support of his patron, Mr. Braddock, when the latter was running for congress; and within a few years Jimmy had become one of the foremost politicians of his ward. While proud of his success, Mrs. Maguire often shook her head dubiously when of an evening Jimmy with undisguised pleasure gave an account of his latest triumphs.

"Jimmy, my boy, 'tis afraid I am that all this will turn out from the right path. These politicians are a bad lot, an' it's sorry I am that you ever got in with them."

"Now, mother, they're not so bad as you make them. Why, I'm a politician and ain't I your own darlin' gossom and as decent a Christian gentleman as iver trod the green sod of old Ireland, as you say daddy was," he said, throwing his arms affectionately about her neck and kissing her wrinkled cheek.

"Bad cess to you, Jimmy, for poking fun at your gray-haired old mother," she replied laughing.

"Sure, I know you're all right and there may be many a politician who is a decent Christian; but it's me mother's hearts afraid you'll be after meetin' too many of the other sort—the devil's own—an'—"

"Trust me, mother, to know the devil when I see him, and to be mighty careful not to get too intimate with him," and the boy laughed so heartily and good-naturedly over the possibility of his ever meeting his Satanic Majesty among his political friends, that his mother's fears were somewhat allayed.

A few days after this conversation, Jimmy was invited by Mr. Braddock to attend a series of lectures by the anti-Christian lawyer, "Bob" Ingersoll.

He had heard much about this notorious atheist, and curiously caused him to accept Braddock's invitation. The infidel lecturer had been well advertised, and the audience that greeted him in the large

theatre as he stepped onto the stage the first night, was well suited to draw out his splendid oratorical powers. Fascinated though he was by the speaker's charm and eloquence, Jimmy was shocked at the strange doctrines enunciated and at the frightful blasphemies uttered. But as the apostle of infidelity warmed in his subject, becoming bolder in his assertions as he proceeded, Jimmy found himself eagerly following the trend of the argument, and before long he felt as if the ground were slipping from under his feet. Strange, he had never discovered how weak the foundations are on which Christianity rests! He had always been taught that to deny the existence of a personal God, the divine authority of the Bible and of the Church was equivalent to confessing oneself an ignoramus or a fool or both. But surely, this man with his wealth of learning, his depth of intellect, his marvellous action in detecting the weak points in his opponents' arguments, his clear and forcible exposition of his own theses, his wonderful gospel of rationalism that seemed to harmonize so well with the demands of human reason, his evident sincerity—surely this Ingersoll was neither an ignoramus nor a fool.

As Jimmy was thus busily weighing Christianity and atheism in the balance, Ingersoll concluded his lecture with a most dramatic and audacious challenge. With watch in hand, he flippantly gave the Jehovah of the Jews and the God of the Christians five minutes to strike him dead on the spot in proof of His existence and of His power. Jimmy sat breathless as with a sarcastic smile, the impudent infidel triumphantly counted off the minutes, and finally put the watch into his pocket with the remark:

"Gentlemen, if this is not a conclusive proof that there is no God, then I have none to offer. Or, can you imagine for a moment that a supreme and all-powerful being could permit one of his supposed creatures to challenge him thus with impunity?"

In spite of the fact that Jimmy was still skeptical regarding the new-fangled doctrines, this closing incident affected him deeply. He had entered the theatre believing a Christian; without realizing it, he left it a new-born atheist. In the lobby of the theatre Ingersoll's works, as well as those of Paine, Voltaire, Rousseau and of other notorious infidels were for sale. Jimmy purchased several of these, and the early rays of the next morning's sun found him still devouring their ungodly contents.

Notwithstanding his excellent religious education and the many means of grace that had been his from earliest childhood, he had often secretly rebelled against the restraint placed on his passions by the law of God and the dictates of conscience, and at times he had striven to justify on the plea of innate weakness, his youthful transgressions. Now, for the first time he learned that these thoughts of his inmost soul were not only shared by others—but by men of eminent learning and were openly advocated and defended by them. Yes, they went even farther than he, in his wildest dreams of untrammeled liberty, had considered it possible to go; and they did this with such a multitude of specious arguments and supported their sophistries with such a formidable array of testimonies from the most famous athletes of all times, that Jimmy suffered a complete revolution in his soul on the matter of religion. He eagerly attended the whole series of lectures, drinking in with greedy avidity the insidious poison of infidelity and swallowing with gusto the sweet morsel of complete emancipation from moral restraint. "He did not dare, however, to avow his unbelief at once. He began by neglecting the Sacraments, then the Sunday service, and one day, when his mother and Father Roch urged him to fulfil his duty, he told them with wholly unexpected impudence that he did not intend to have himself dictated to by an ignorant old woman and a meddling monk."

That was the last time Father Roch had spoken to Jimmy. He tried several times to meet him and have a heart-to-heart talk, but the boy always managed to prevent this. Jimmy now was all estranged and not only strove to impair his convictions to others but also began to put his teachings into practice. Soon his name became a synonym in the city for libertine, and the unhappy youth plunged without the least sense of shame into every form of excess.

A great change, too, came over his poor widowed mother. Her sweet face grew pale and haggard; her bright eyes lost their luster; her hands trembled; her step was feeble and slow. She had tried to reason in her simple way with the proud, headstrong boy, but soon she perceived the utter futility of her efforts, and from that time contented herself with praying for his conversion. Thus she spent three long, weary years of untold sorrow, when, what seemed almost impossible, a still heavier cross was placed on her shoulders. Jimmy was hardly 25, when, as a result of his profligate life, his health gave way and he was forced to take to his bed. Father Roch no sooner heard of this than he decided to pay the young man a visit; but he was met at the threshold of the sick room with such a volley of abuse that he deemed it prudent to retire. When he had gone, Jimmy scolded his mother; he scolded the priest and gave strict orders that he should never under any circumstances be

sent for. Mrs. Maguire said nothing but in her grief she offered this additional grief to the Father of mercies, hoping against hope that her cup of sorrow might soon be filled, and that then he would turn a pitying ear to her pleadings.

In spite of the tender care she lavished on him, Jimmy grew worse from day to day and suffered exceedingly. Mrs. Maguire seldom left his side, except for a hurried visit to the church each morning, where before the tabernacle she sought and found strength to bear up under the crushing weight of her daily cross. Instead of trying to lighten her burden, the ungrateful boy, in whom sin had destroyed all that was manly and noble, while accepting her loving ministrations, heaped curses on her devoted head for her inability to free him from his frightful torments; and one day, when she gently suggested to have him removed to a hospital, where he could receive better treatment, he flew into a towering rage, saying that she merely wished to get rid of him and that he absolutely refused to be moved. From that day he became so crab that no one but his mother and Dr. Woodbury could approach him, and they received little thanks for their charity. It was with some misgiving, therefore, that Father Roch hastened to answer the widow's summons, in a last effort to recall the young prodigal from his erring way.

"Thank God, Father Roch, you've come at last!" exclaimed the frail little woman under her breath, as she opened the door to admit the priest. "May the angels and saints preserve you and tell ye what to say to me darlin' boy."

"Thank you, mother. Now let me go in to Jimmy while you say a prayer for us both."

As the priest entered the room where the sick boy lay, he was struck at the sight of the loathsome spectacle that met his eyes. On the bed, the spotless whiteness of which only served to make the contrast more pronounced, lay the bloated victim of self-delusion. Sin and disease had wrought their worst on him, and the scowl of aversion that overpread the boy's livid features as he recognized his visitor only made his appearance more repellent.

"Well, how's Jimmy this fine morning?" said the priest in his cheeriest tones, stepping lightly to the bed and holding out his hand in friendly greeting.

"With a curse the boy demanded to know what business the priest had to intrude where he was not wanted."

"Oh, I just heard from Dr. Woodbury at the hospital that you are in a pretty bad shape, and I thought I'd drop in just for the sake of an' lang syne, and pay you a visit," answered Father Roch imperturbed.

"Well for the sake of auld lang syne you can beat it again," retorted the young man sarcastically, turning his head to the wall.

"Now, look here, Jimmy Maguire," Father Roch continued with a good-natured little laugh, as he leisurely placed a chair beside the bed and sat down, "you're not going to get rid of me so easily this time. You're a very sick boy—sick unto death, and you know it; and I'm not the man to sit idly by while you send your precious, sin-laden soul to hell."

"Who wants you to sit here? Didn't I tell you to clear out! Jimmy fumed, quite beside himself with rage over his inability to throw his unwelcome visitor bodily out of the room."

"I'll not leave this room, Jimmy, until I've had my say, and you'll have to listen whether you will or not," replied the priest with determination that knew no quavering. Seeing there was no escape, the young man drew the coverlet over his face, thinking that this insult would induce Father Roch to desist. But the priest gently drew the quilt aside. The boy then put his fingers into his ears, but Father Roch had little difficulty, owing to Jimmy's extreme weakness, in removing them. Finally, Jimmy pretended to sleep; but this did not discourage the zealous priest from continuing his fatherly admonitions. He spoke long and earnestly, exposing the utter absurdity of atheism and its dire results; dwelling on the infinite love and mercy of God and His inexorable justice. Then he pictured in glowing terms the endless joy and beauty of heaven and painted in lurid colors the never-ending frightfulness and torments of hell. He paused.

"Are you through at last with your fire and brimstone stuff?" snarled the young man, with an expression of extreme disgust on his features.

"The priest's heart sank within him. Had all his arguments, his pleadings, his prayers been in vain! Had they made no impression at all on this heart hardened in the earliest years of his life?"

"Jimmy," he said, rising and leaning tenderly over the sick boy, "is this all you have to say to your old friend, Father Roch?"

"Yes the sooner you get out of here the better, you old—" The rest of the sentence was cut short by a sudden fit of coughing.

With a sigh, Father Roch left the room. He found the little mother on her knees in the kitchen telling her beads with the devotion of a saint. She turned as he entered and her eyes read at once in the drawn lines of his face that nothing had been accomplished.

"God knows, mother," he said, replying to her mute question, "I've done all I could—"

"Ochone, ochone!" she moaned piteously, clutching her string of beads. "No, no, Father, it can't be, it can't be! God and St. Francis must hear our prayers. I know they will! I'll kneel down here and say an' other rosary and you go in to

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